

# Magnificat

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News from  
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O Cave, prepare yourself to receive the mother  
who bears Christ within her womb.

O Manger, receive the Word  
Who destroyed the sins of all.

O Shepherds keep watch and then bear witness  
to the awesome wonder.

O Magi, come from Persia and bring the King your gifts  
of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

For the Lord has appeared from a virgin mother;  
yet she bowed to Him as a servant  
and spoke to Him within her bosom:

How were You conceived in me?

How did you grow in me,  
my God and Savior?

From Vespers  
Feast of St. Nicholas

We are a Catholic Monastery of the Byzantine Rite, under the jurisdiction of the Eparchy of Chicago, and belonging to the Ukrainian Metropolis in the United States of America, which is in union with the Pope of Rome, supreme pastor of the universal Church. We embrace Evangelical poverty, chastity, obedience, and stability of life, according to the Rule of Saint Benedict and the traditions of the Christian East. In our skete at Jacob's Falls, on the shore of Lake Superior in Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula, we devote ourselves to a common life of prayer and work for the praise, love, and service of God and for the upbuilding of His Kingdom through the arts.

# Christmas Preparations

Preaching to his flock in Antioch in the late Fourth Century and exhorting them to a worthy celebration, St. John Chrysostom described Christmas as “the mother of all feasts,” for “from the Nativity of Christ, all the other feasts flow like different streams from the same source. This feast justly occupies first place not only because of this, but also because the event which this day commemorates is, of all events, the most worthy of wonder.”

The Eastern Church contemplates this wonder throughout the course of the year, particularly in her reflections on the Virgin Mary. Perhaps because of this already profoundly incarnational aspect of her worship, the Byzantine liturgical tradition has never developed a distinct Advent season as preparation for Christmas. Rather the Church prescribes a moderate fast of six weeks duration, beginning in mid-November and becoming increasingly severe with the approach of the Holy Day.

Her meditations on the Incarnation likewise increase in number and complexity as Christmas draws near. Already on the Feast of St. Nicholas, December sixth, she is exhorting us, along with all creation, to prepare ourselves for His coming into the world, to be ready to receive Him, to offer Him the gifts of our love and good deeds, to stay watchful, and to bear witness to the great wonder.

Christmas celebrates an event of cosmic significance. Through His Incarnation God not only acts upon His creation, He actually enters into it and becomes part of it. In becoming Man, God forever joins His nature with ours, adopts it, so that we may come to share in His divinity. Human nature is thereby redeemed, raised by grace to a higher level that it had before the Fall. Having been touched by divinity, our fallen nature, indeed all creation, is no longer the same; the old relationships and separations no longer apply.

Just as all creation shared in the shame and sorrow of our original fall, it now shares in the

joy and glory of our redemption. Because of the Incarnation, creation is restored to its original state of goodness. By the grace of God, created things, too, may now become vessels of the Divine. Here is the source of our respectful love and caring for nature, and of sacramental theology, and of the theology of icons, as well.

Christmas is also a profound celebration of sacrificial love. In assuming our nature, God accepts it completely in its fallen state, with all its limitation, trials, and pains. He shares everything that is ours, except for our sinfulness. He feels pain and sorrow, He endures temptation; ultimately He suffers, and dies the most degrading of deaths. In becoming one of us, Christ our God pours Himself out for our sake, spends Himself totally, out of love for us all.

How can we, in the midst of our frantic lives, worthily celebrate this mystery? How can we ever be sufficiently thankful for so great a gift, or, for that matter, even be capable of accepting it?

The answer, of course, is that we cannot. Only by the grace of God can we get any glimmer of understanding about these things. We can, however, purge ourselves of the things that hinder our receiving God’s grace, free ourselves of the sinfulness and selfishness that obscure our minds and harden our hearts against the message the Church lays before us in her liturgies. Above all, we can try to go about our various tasks with love in our hearts, with a generosity and openness to others that is unreserved and self-emptying.

Perhaps, in this matter, our noisy and frantic culture, with its all too materialistic emphasis on Christmas gift-giving, is not so far off the mark. Christmas is the celebration of God’s having given himself to us. What better way to prepare ourselves to receive Him, than by emptying ourselves in the love of others?

Trusting in the love and mercy of Him Who pours Himself out for us, we wish you all a most blessed celebration of His coming.

# Do Not Forget Us

While celebrating the great truths of our salvation, the Church does not forget the holy ones who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith. Christianity is not a set of abstract principles, but a way of life. The divine brightness of Christ, God become Man, must be reflected in the lives of His followers. The shining example of the saints who have done His will throughout the ages provides us with inspiration and models of virtue for our emulation. Moreover, since they now reign with Christ in Heaven, the saints can be powerful intercessors for us before the throne of glory. One, whose feast falls within the twelve days of Christmas, has been a constant source of hope for us in the midst of our particular trials in this small and struggling monastery.

St. Melania the Younger, as she is called in most writings, was the daughter of a Roman senator named Publicola and his wife, Albina, the Christian daughter of a pagan priest. Despite their high rank and the luxurious life their great wealth afforded, her immediate family was devout, and Melanie was raised in strongly Christian surroundings. Indeed, the family already included a saint, to whom the child could look for inspiration.

Her paternal grandmother, the elder Melania, daughter of an ancient and noble Roman family, had been widowed at a young age and, having left her son, Publicola, in the care of guardians and tutors, had journeyed to the East, visiting and discoursing with many Desert Fathers in

Egypt. She continued on to the Holy Land where she founded a monastery at Jerusalem for fifty maidens. There she settled and lived in piety and asceticism for thirty-seven years, providing sustenance to various monasteries from her own resources and ministering to the needs of the many pilgrims visiting the holy places.

Melanie was inclined to follow the example of her illustrious ancestor; while still young she had decided to heed a call to serve God in the life of a maiden. She had made this desire known

to her parents, but her father, though religious, was also ambitious, and would hear none of it. The family was of senatorial rank and possessed a fortune second only to that of the Imperial House; Melanie was an only child, and she would have to provide an heir to keep the patrimony intact. Accordingly, in 397,

at age fourteen she was married to her seventeen year old kinsman, Valerius Pinianus.

Pinian was not interested in heeding Melanie's plea that they live together in continence. Soon a child was born, a girl who did not survive infancy. In 399, with much travail, Melanie gave birth to a second child, a boy, who died the next day. Melanie, herself lay on the verge of death, and Pinian, who was sincerely and devotedly attached to her, swore that if she were spared she would be free to follow God as she willed. Melanie recovered, and Pinian was true to his oath.

Melanie's father, however, demanded that

**Your soul shone with light from the One  
born for us of the Virgin,  
and you sparkled with all the virtues,  
for you are worthy of all praise.  
You shared your worldly wealth  
with those on earth  
and stored for yourself  
treasures in heaven,  
becoming a marvelous example  
of ascetical life.  
Therefore, O holy Melanie,  
we honor you with love.**

Kontakion of St. Melania of Rome



she conform, outwardly at least, to the life befitting her status as a Roman matron; her asceticism and prayer life remained secret, except to those immediately around her. Five years later, as he lay on his deathbed, Publicola repented of his harshness and begged Melanie's forgiveness, admitting that he had stood in the way of her heavenly vocation. He bequeathed to her all of his estates which were scattered throughout the Western world, one of the greatest fortunes of the day.

Meanwhile, both her mother, Albina, and Pinian, her husband, had reconciled themselves to Melanie's new way of life; in time they would come to accept it for themselves, as well. Leaving Rome, all three moved to a villa in the country, taking with them a large number of servants. Their exemplary treatment attracted attention, and soon many young girls, widows, and nearly thirty families attached themselves to them. The villa became a center of hospitality, charity, and religious life.

But Melanie felt oppressed by the great wealth she possessed. She knew that the overabundance of the rich belonged by right to the poor and naked all around them, that, as St. Ambrose of Milan had said, the rich who give to the poor do not bestow alms, but pay a debt. She asked Pinian for permission to give away most of their riches, and he consented. They sold off their properties in the Western provinces of the Empire, retaining only certain estates in Italy and North Africa for the purpose of funding monasteries. They distributed the proceeds far and wide to the benefit of the poor, sick, captives, bankrupts, and pilgrims; they endowed churches and monasteries as far away as Egypt, Syria, and Palestine. In a two year period they gave free-

dom to more than eight thousand slaves.

Fleeing the danger and chaos of the barbarian invasions to which Italy was subject at the time, they retired for a time to North Africa, where they visited St. Augustine at Hippo. There the townspeople tried to make Pinian a priest, his reputation of holiness had already grown so great. Moving further east, they visited many of the holy Fathers in the Egyptian desert and finally settled in Jerusalem. After fourteen years together in the Holy City, Albina died, soon to be followed by Pinian. Melanie buried them side by side on the Mount of Olives and built a small cell for herself near by. Others came to join her there,

and, expending the last of her once great fortune, she founded a monastery for consecrated virgins on the very spot and a community of monks nearby.

On December 31, 439 AD, St. Melania the Younger died at age 56, worn out by austerity, fasting, and asceticism. Her final words were those of Job: "as the Lord

willed, so is it done." She is named with Pinian, her spiritual brother and former husband, in the Roman Martyrology; beyond this, the Western Church extends her no particular recognition. From early times, however, the Byzantine Church has continued to remember her on the anniversary of her death.

Each day, in our little monastery, we add her tropar and kondak to those prescribed for day and season. Recalling her holiness and generosity, and trusting in her intercession for our many needs, we remember her with love: **O holy Melanie, pray to Christ, our God, to raise up others like you in our day.**

**You loved the purity of virginity  
and supplicated your beloved  
with gracious words.  
You spent your fortunes  
for the monks and nuns,  
and you even built them monasteries,  
O blessed Melanie.  
Now that you have retired  
to a heavenly monastery,  
do not forget us.**

Troparion of St. Melania of Rome

# Reaching Higher

The trusses for the Church were raised dur-

The new wing of the monastery continues to take shape. With the raising of trusses in early October over the Narthex of the Church and over the Chapel of the Holy Cross of Sorrow and Suffering, the building's construction entered a new phase. Now, as one could begin to discern rooflines, the ultimate shape of the complex was becoming more apparent.

The arrival of the construction sign also helped clarify things in people's minds. Sporting a fine rendition of the building's East elevation – the view from the highway – as well as the usual information about contractor, architect, and engineer, the sign provides a quick reference for checking progress and a guide to understanding how the current work will grow into the whole. It is also beautiful in itself, and many visitors during the color season have stopped to get a better look; a few have even posed for pictures beside it!

Work also began to proceed at a faster pace. A larger crew and more machinery joined the effort, and, despite several days having been lost to the abnormally wet weather, we seem still on schedule for close-in before winter. None the less, everyone is praying that the recent pattern of delayed season changes continues to hold true.



ing the second week of October, and scaffolding was erected in the Nave to provide safe support for the workers who would soon be erecting the central tower. Meanwhile, sheathing continued, the timber work of the South Gallery was completed, and the metal roofing of the Narthex installed. Erection of the Church's gable walls completed the enclosure of the public areas; we now begin to get some sense how light will enter the spaces, we feel the impact of their volumes, and we anxiously await the day when they will be filled with the chanting of God's praises.

But we are not yet secure. The trusses for the living area arrive next week. The complicated roof of the Dormitory and the difficult connections at the stairwell have yet to be built. We pray the weather holds until all is enclosed.

The contractor expects the domes to arrive before Christmas. Their installation will truly be a great day; we anticipate it with joy. Look for the pictures and for views of the completed exterior in our Lent issue this winter.

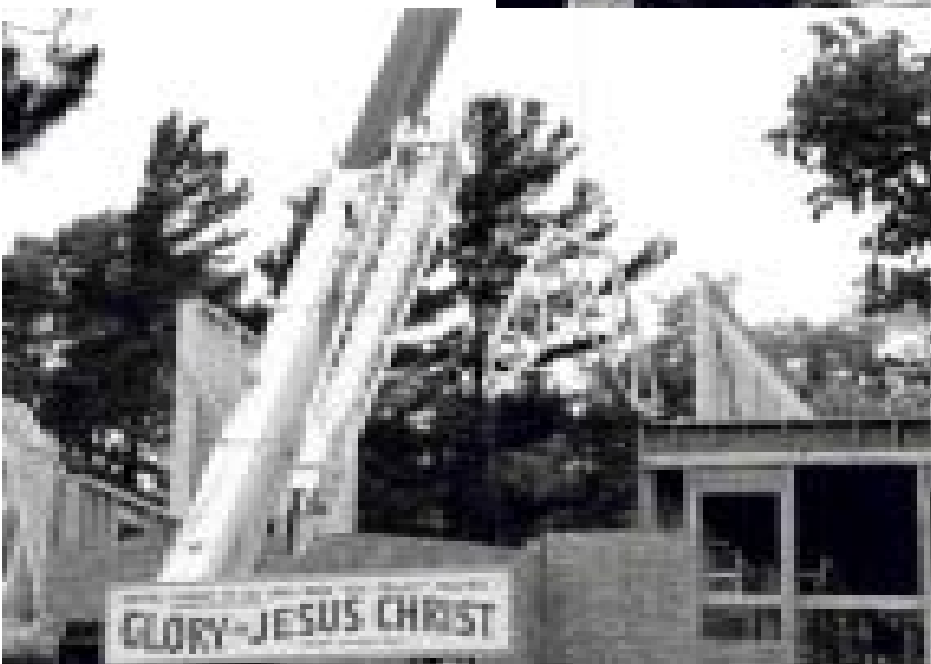


*The Sign: Credit where credit is due*



*Trusses for the Church arrive in the Jampot parking lot.*

*Trusses define the roofline of the Chapel of the Holy Cross of Sorrow and Suffering*



*The crane raises the first truss for the Church.*

*The Church roof begins to take shape as additional trusses are raised into place.*



*Beyond the sheathed roof of the Chapel of the Holy Cross of Sorrow and Suffering, the tower begins to take shape*

*From Our Lady's rose garden: the sacristy, library mezzanine, and apse.*



*From the highway: Trusses for the Church roof and Tower in place.*



*Interior of the Nave: Scaffolding provides safe footing for workers erecting Tower trusses, and for later insulation and drywall installation.*



*An eagle eye view of the Church roof and Tower trusses.*



# Music from the Monastery

From the very beginning of our monastic life at Jacob's Falls, we have seen as our special charism and apostolic work the building up of God's Kingdom through the arts.

We firmly believe that human artistry is a divine gift, given by God that we might come to know Him better. In creating beauty, we exercise and manifest an integral part of our nature. We were created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26-27). God is the ultimate Creator; through our own creative abilities we can express our likeness to Him, render Him thanks and praise for His many blessings, and proclaim His love for the whole world.

Beauty has the power to touch the soul directly, to evoke in the heart feelings of joy, exaltation, or sadness. It can elevate the mind to spiritual matters and make the soul more receptive of things divine. Through their beauty, the works of our hands and minds may move others closer to God.

Here we enter the realm of art. True art is communication; it carries messages of the Lord's power and glory and of His limitless love. These messages, conveyed by physical beauty, are perceived for the most part in a subliminal or spiritual manner. They bring joy to the heart and prevent the world from falling into despair. Thus, the arts may serve as a bridge between the physical and the spiritual realms. This has tremendous implications for the life of the Church and, indeed, of the whole world.

For many years we could exercise our artistic apostolate only through talk and through beautifying - to the extent we were able - our chapel and immediate surroundings. Constraints of survival allowed for little else. Recently, the situation has begun to change.

A friend and benefactor who wishes to remain anonymous, through a gift designated for the performing arts, allowed us to acquire a vintage concert grand piano and build a small recital salon during the winter of 2000-2001. The piano, originally constructed in Boston by Mason & Hamlin in 1910 and rebuilt by the James Reeder

Company of Lansing some ninety years later, proved to have a resonant timbre and an elegant, well balanced tone that thrilled the artists who played upon it.

In October of 2001 Nancy Larson and Rolf von Walthausen, pianists from the Interlochen Arts Center, performed the inaugural recital of inspirational music on the instrument. The forty or so guests present shared their enthusiasm for the piano's sound; many said they were moved and deeply touched by the experience. We felt that the experience should not be limited to the few people our room could accommodate.

Ms. Larson returned this past spring to record pieces she had played on the recital, as well as some additional repertoire. The compact disc resulting from the recording session will be available December 1st. You will find ordering information on pg. 12 of this issue.



# Taking Stock

As we face our twentieth winter by the shore of the Great Lake, we feel ourselves singularly blessed. The past nineteen years have seen their share of labor and trial; the struggle is now reaching fulfillment. The new Church and adjacent spaces progress every day; they seem a dream come true, and sometimes we find it hard to believe that they are actually coming to be; yet we see it happening before our very eyes. Truly this is the work of the Lord, a marvel to behold.

We see the Lord's hand, as well, in **Jampot's** increased revenue this season. It came at a time when engineering and design work made particularly heavy demands on our cash flow – still another example of the Lord providing through the work of our hands. Strangely, except for the final two weeks, it seemed no busier than usual. Yet, there had been no increase in prices, and the figures were generally higher throughout the season. A large part of the credit must go to our employees who labored with the monks in the kitchen and to the volunteers who helped

from time to time. Through their efforts there was stock to sell. Truly, the Lord works through them, as well.

This issue of **Magnificat** is also significant. It is number four of volume eighteen. Number four! The most issues we have gotten out in any past year has been three; in a number of years it has only been two; four seems almost a miracle. Praise God for the increase in our monastic community and for the adjustment of work loads which has made this possible! We thank Him for this great blessing, and we pray the increase continue. Perhaps, in time, we will also see increased efficiency in getting out thank you letters.

Certainly, much thanksgiving is due. The work moves forward through the generosity of our benefactors and the patronage of our customers. To them we owe our deepest gratitude for their sharing in this holy work. We pray God bless and keep them and bring to fruition all their endeavors and plans. To Him be glory forever!

HOLY TRANSFIGURATION SKETE

Society of St. John

Star Route 1, Box 226

Eagle Harbor, Michigan 49950

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