

# Magnificat

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News from  
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**Come, O faithful, inspired by God**

**let us go to see the divine mercy that is revealed in Bethlehem.**

**Let us cleanse our minds and offer virtues in our lives  
instead of myrrh.**

**Let us prepare with faith to enter the feast of the Nativity,  
storing up treasure in our souls as we cry aloud:**

**"Glory in the highest to God in Trinity,**

**Whose good will is now being revealed to men;**

**in His love for mankind,**

**He will set Adam free from the ancient curse.**

From the Sixth Royal Hour  
Paramony of Christmas

We are a Catholic Monastery of the Byzantine Rite, under the jurisdiction of the Eparch of Chicago, and belonging to the Ukrainian Metropoly 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.

# God Becomes Man

The Byzantine religious tradition is proverbial for the length of its celebrations. Not only are its services generally twice – or more! – as long as their western counterparts, but the feasts themselves are usually prepared liturgically by a prefeast of a day or more and prolonged by a postfeast of sometimes lengthy duration. Thus, Christmas, while far from as intense a celebration as Easter, is, none the less, preceded by six weeks of fast, is represented by special texts appointed for the Sundays immediately preceding and following, and is followed by six postfestive days which merge with the prefestive days of Theophany in the great Twelve Days of Christmas.

Like the older and thematically related feast of Theophany (January sixth), the actual celebration of Christmas begins the day before. Called Paramony, from a Greek word implying continuity or lack of interruption, the day concludes with a the Vespertal Liturgy of St. Basil the Great, followed by the all-night Vigil of Great Compline and Matins of the Nativity. In former times this vigil did actually last through the night, as the people waited in church after the evening services for the morning service which began at dawn; today our Vigil Service is only about three hours in length.

The Paramony of Christmas is also marked by major services throughout its daylight hours. The minor hours of the Divine Office for the day receive an extended treatment and are known as Royal Hours because of their having been attended by the Byzantine Emperor (and, in later times, by the Czar of Russia). In addition to

the usual prayers, psalmody, and troparia, each Royal Hour is graced with readings from the Prophets, from the New Testament letters, and from the Holy Gospels, as well as with special meditative texts. Thus, we hear the events we celebrate predicted by the Prophets, elucidated by the Apostles, and proclaimed by the Evangelists. The poetic texts view the mystery in the clarity of Byzantine light.

The eastern theological perspective tends to see things in a holistic manner. The events of Christ's birth can only be truly understood in the light of His teaching, of His suffering and death,

and of His resurrection and ascension in glory. Salvation history is one story from the creation to the second coming; in meditating on the Nativity of Christ, we also ponder the purpose of His coming among us, the circumstances and consequences of our fall, and our ultimate destination of glory.

The Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is

both the creator and restorer of mankind. The first chapter of the Book of Genesis tells us that He created man in His own "image and likeness." However, man, in a perverse exercise of his God-given free will, was disobedient and estranged himself from his Creator, falling from communion with God. The divine image within him was thereby obscured, though not destroyed, and man was no longer capable of attaining the union with God for which he had been originally destined.

Through the incarnation of the Logos, God

**At that time,  
since Mary was of the House of David,  
she registered with the venerable Joseph  
in Bethlehem.  
She was with child,  
having conceived without seed.  
Her time was come  
and they could find no room in the inn,  
but the cave  
seemed a joyful palace for the Queen.  
Christ is born to renew the likeness  
that had been lost of old.**

Troparion for the Paramony of Christmas

the Son, in the person of Jesus Christ, human nature is joined with the Divine. By the saving events of His life, death, and resurrection, the curse of Adam's disobedience is wiped out, the divine image within man is restored, and he is again capable of attaining his original destination of eternal glory. Indeed, divine and human nature having been joined in Christ, man, himself, through the work of the Holy Spirit, Who enlivens and operates within the Church, may share in divine life and is now capable of attaining such a likeness to His Creator that he becomes divine.

At the mingling of the cup, the western Eucharistic Liturgy prays: *Through the mystery of this water and wine, may we come to share the divinity of Christ, who humbled Himself to share in our humanity.* The Eastern Fathers state it more bluntly: **God became man, that man might become God.** This sharing in divinity, this becoming God, is not, of course, a union of essence; our ultimate goal is not absorption into the Godhead, nor could that ever be possible. Rather, it is a union of adoption and similitude. By co-operating with the graces of the Holy Spirit throughout our lives, we gradually attain to holiness and perfection, becoming God-like in our acts and intentions. The likeness to God we had lost in the beginning is restored and surpassed through the work of the Holy Spirit in Christ Jesus.

Thus, in lovingly and repeatedly recounting the details of the Christmas Event, the Byzan-

tine tradition meditates on just Who it is that is born in Bethlehem. It marvels that the God who fashioned all creation dwells in the womb of His creature, that the Lord of Glory is wrapped in swaddling clothes, that He who established the heavens is laid in a manger, that He who rained down manna from heaven and feeds all living things is, Himself, fed with milk at His mother's breast.

It also keeps before us the purpose of it all: Christ has come amongst us to restore the divine image within us and make us sharers in His own divine life. It bids us fall down in awe and gratitude to the One who so wondrously extends His mercy to raise us up from our fall.

As we enter once again upon the celebration of Christmas, let us be mindful of just what it is we are celebrating and strive by our intent and deeds to be worthy of so great a love. Let us open ourselves to the wonder, and stand in awe before the mystery of God's assuming our flesh. With the whole Church, from the depth of our hearts, let us sing:

**He who holds the whole creation  
in the hollow of His hand is born  
of the Virgin... We bow down  
and worship Your Nativity, O  
Christ!**

From the Ninth Royal Hour,  
Paramony of Christmas

**Make ready, O Bethlehem:  
let the manger be prepared,  
let the cave show its welcome!**

**The truth has come,  
the shadow has passed away.**

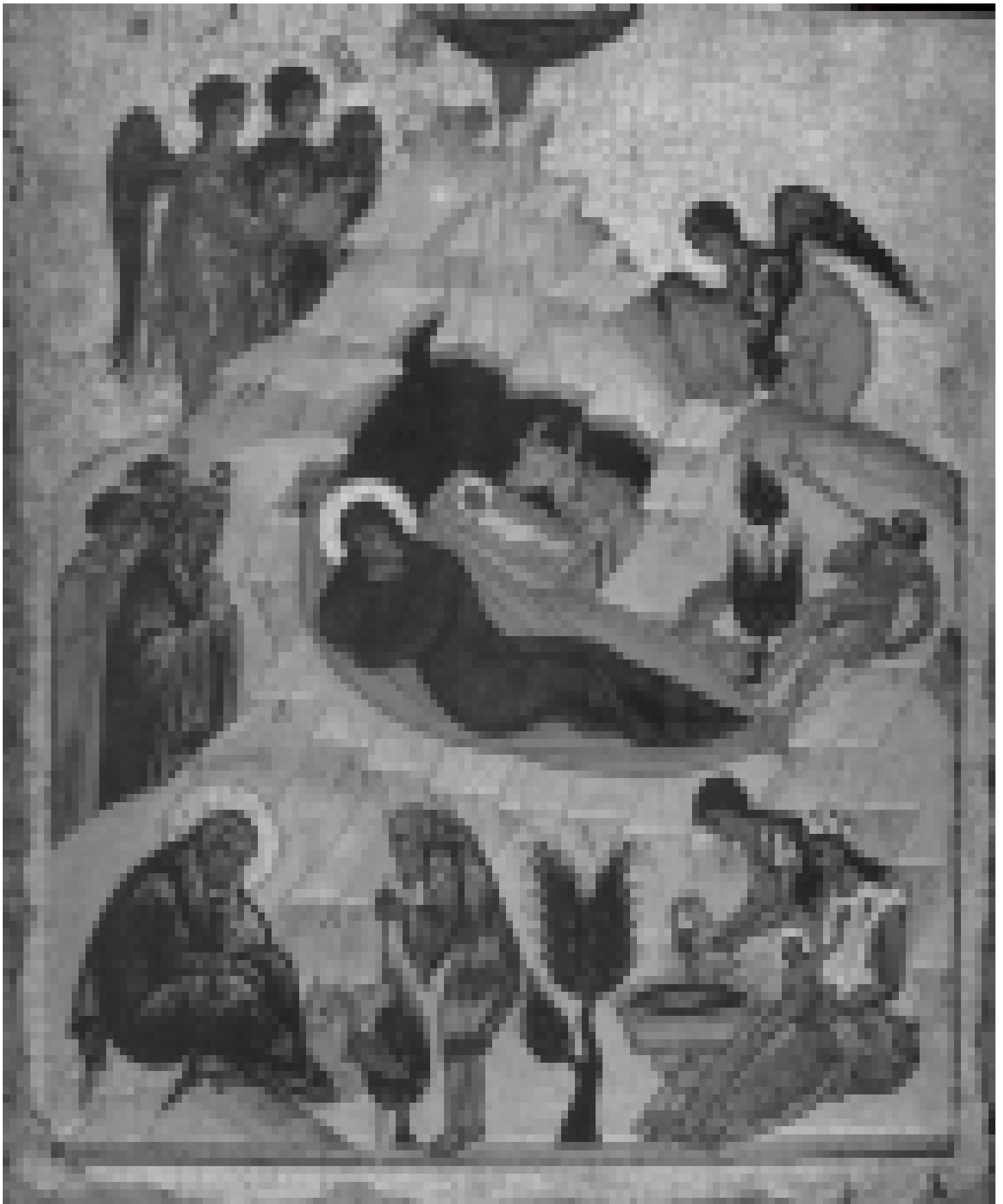
**Born of a Virgin,  
God has appeared to men,  
formed as we are  
and making Godlike**

**the garment of our nature  
which He has put on.**

**Therefore Adam is renewed with Eve,  
and they call out:**

**Your good pleasure  
has appeared on earth  
to save our race.**

From the First Royal Hour  
Paramony of Christmas



**Just as You have shown forth  
the splendor of the firmament above,  
so, too, You have shown forth the beauty  
of the dwelling place of Your glory here below;  
therefore, make firm forever this dwelling place,  
and accept all our petitions  
which we continuously offer up to You  
in this place of Your glory,  
through the Mother of God  
O Life and Resurrection of all mankind.**

Troparion for the Consecration of a Church



## Place of Beauty, House of Prayer

Our new church has drawn a great amount of interest this summer and fall. During the busy days of autumn people were constantly stopping and getting out of their cars to take pictures or just get a better look. We received many favorable comments on the structure's beauty from customers visiting the **Jampot**. Many people also asked about tours. Unfortunately this was seldom possible, given the shortness of our personnel. Though disappointed, most understood our reluctance, given the time and circumstances, to leave that holy place open and untended.

It sometimes happened, though, that we were able to accommodate an occasional request. Most of those thus able to gain entrance were

pleasantly surprised at the luminosity inside and the feeling of vastness engendered by what is in actuality a rather small space. We were pleased that, despite the incompleteness of its decoration and the provisional nature of much of its furnishing, people could sense, even if they did not completely understand, the holiness of the place. One woman commented quietly to a friend: *Some places just make you feel you should speak in whispers.*

The church was, of course, open most days for services, and, as we informed them of this, people would sometimes come to catch a glimpse of the interior immediately before Vespers. Those that stayed for the Service or came to Di-



vine Liturgy on Sunday were able to experience the church in its fullness and as it was intended – as a house of prayer. It is during Services, with its lamps lit and filled with the scent of incense and the sound of chanting, that the building most vividly fulfills its purpose as a vessel of the Lord’s praise. For this reason it was built, and for this reason it has been made beautiful.

Our intention was not to create a museum or an art object, still less a tourist attraction. Rather our purpose was to provide an adequate and beautiful place of worship for the monastic community here and for those who wish to pray with us. Three months into its use, we are satisfied that the new church functions well in that respect. After the initial period of adjustment to

the larger space, we have found the Services less taxing vocally and more frequently possessed of luminous moments. Despite our inadequacies, many who attend also find them beautiful and moving. God grant us the privilege of standing before Him in the midst of this temple of His holy glory and singing His praise for long years to come.

Prayer, however, has a private dimension as well; each of us must come to know God in the depths of our own heart and learn to speak with Him there. For many, a quiet church, filled with an almost palpable sense of the Lord’s presence because of the many liturgical actions that take place there, provides a conducive atmosphere for such silent, internal prayer. We look forward to



first of the year, as should the crucifix of the iconostasis. These – and the already completed Holy Cross of Sorrow and Suffering – are the only artistic works we have as yet been able to commission. We pray there will be others soon.

The beauty of the Lord's House is a necessary complement to its holiness. It proclaims God's glory and expresses the value we place on our worship of Him. It is a sacrificial offering in token of our gratitude for the unbounded love and mercy He extends to us and an aid to prayer for those who come to seek His presence.

God grant that we may always love the beauty of His house and ever work to make it grow.

the time – hopefully next year – when we will be able to open the church and, in particular, the Chapel of the Holy Cross of Sorrow and Suffering, at least during some hours of the day, to those who wish to enter for this purpose.

Meanwhile, there is much yet to do. The walls and ceiling of the church remain a blank canvas, the panels of the Great Doors are empty, and small icon prints on the iconostasis serve to remind us of the full size, hand-written icons that must in time replace them. The permanent Scripture Shrine is yet to be built, and temporary pieces of furniture still serve for the Bishop's Throne and for the Abbot's Chair.

Certain areas will be addressed during the coming months. Icons of the Mystical Supper and the Annunciation have been completed and will soon be installed; two of the eight carved panels of the Great Doors should be ready by the





Photo by Ken Steiner

# Thanksgiving

A group of three or four ladies caught us one autumn afternoon as we were leaving for the **Jampot**. They asked to see the new church, and, because of their age and the intensity of their request, coupled with the not very great pressure of our journey to the shop, we unlocked the door and accompanied them into the holy place. They were Roman Catholics and had never been into a Byzantine style church before. They asked the usual questions - where do the people sit? where is the altar for celebrating "Mass"? and so on - and spoke of the beauty of the place, while bemoaning the loss of elements of beauty - the eternal light, the crystal chandelier - from their own parish church. After a few minutes, satisfied that they had seen what they had come to see, they asked if they could light votive candles and then began moving into the narthex.

The eldest stayed behind a moment, wrapped in silence before the candle she had lit. As she was leaving she said quietly, "I was just saying a little prayer of thanksgiving. I always do that. I'm ninety-four years old and working on

a hundred. I have so very much to be thankful for, after all these years."

A week or so later a long time friend of the monastery, a woman now in her late eighties, paid us a visit. At the end of her most welcome visit we said that we would pray for her and for her daughter, who was to be facing surgery soon. "Pray in thanksgiving," she said. "We're so quick to ask for what we need, but so seldom take the time to be thankful. Whatever comes, I'm thankful."

There is little to add to the simple wisdom of these ladies full of years. We, too, have much to be thankful for. We are continually showered with benefits both manifest and hidden. God grant us the grace of expressing our gratitude unceasingly in thought, word, and deed. To the Author of all goodness and to the many holy ones who co-operate in His loving kindness, we extend our deepest and profound thanks.

May He grant all of you a most blessed Thanksgiving and Christmas.

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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED