

Magnificat

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Mercy and Peace

Although it ranks fourth (after Pascha, Pentecost, and Theophany) among the Great Feasts of the Church year, Christmas holds first place in the hearts of believers. Despite the often all too successful efforts of those who would drive all expression of religion from the public square, Christmas remains our nation's greatest holiday. Even in the midst of our dark, bleak, and selfish times, the birth of this Child remains the cause of unbounded joy.

For this Child is like no other. In Him, the Babe of Bethlehem, the Son of Mary, we have found our Savior and Messiah. Son of

God, and God the Son, Jesus is our Immanuel, our God-with-us. In Him alone, in this One whom we now contemplate as a helpless infant lying in a lowly manger, rests all our hope for peace.

How incredibly marvelous this all is! How beautiful beyond telling! Our mighty God comes to us gently, not in splendor or power, but simply, in innocence and love, in the tender flesh of a newborn baby. He comes with no letter of appointment, no mandate of the people, no display of power. His arrival occasions no

revelry among the rich and beautiful, provokes no media frenzy. Only a handful of common

Today the Virgin comes to the cave
to give birth
in a manner beyond understanding
to the Word who is from the beginning.
Rejoice, all you ends of the earth,
at this good news;
with the angels and shepherds
glorify Him
who willed to manifest Himself
as a newborn babe,
yet still is God from all eternity.

Kontakion: Vigil of Christmas

We are a Catholic Monastery of the Byzantine Rite, under the jurisdiction of the Eparch 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.

shepherds, who learned of the event by word of mouth, and some barnyard animals, who shared their shelter with the principals, are there to celebrate His birth. A few foreign academics also know and will arrive later. The rest of the world lies fast asleep.

He comes without pomp or display, makes no show of authority or force. He brings no credentials with Him, nothing to support His claims. Indeed, he makes no claims at all, issues no statements of purpose, outlines no programs. Tonight He does only the normal baby things, cries, nurses, sleeps. He makes no demands – save to be loved.

Yet this night the angels sing so as to be heard on earth, praising God and proclaiming peace. For this night has witnessed the most momentous event of all time: God has been born as man. The Creator has accepted the limitations of His creation. The course of history has been irrevocably changed. The peace of God has dawned upon the earth.

This peace is not imposed at the end of a sword; it is not negotiated, nor arrived at by consensus. It is not merely the fearful and grudging silence of stifled grievances, nor does it result from some strategic balance of terror. It issues, rather from truth and justice, and these derive from living and acting according to the law of God's love.

Only when the world turns to God, accepts His direction, and acts according to His will can there be true and lasting peace. This seems an impossible dream and in our time we have seen it grow dimmer. We are no longer secure within our borders, truth gets twisted beyond all recognition, justice eludes many, slander passes for news, and the slaughter of innocents continues unabated. The world spirals ever downward, and darkness deepens in the abyss. In the face of this, what hope can there be for real peace?

Left to our fallen human nature, there is, indeed, probably none. But, in the Holy Child, human frailty is raised to the divine. God is joined

to man, and our fallen nature is transcended. We have only to accept the graces flowing from the saving events of His life – and to allow them to act in ours. We have only to repent, turn our hearts from our wicked ways, and open them up to Him.

There will be a profound change, a radical transformation within us. It will be as astonishing as a lion sharing the manger with an ox or a wolf sitting down to dinner with a lamb (cf. Is. 11:2-9). Such is the power of Jesus to transform our lives – if only we let Him into our hearts.

Christmas is a powerful time. Despite our society's multiple attempts to trivialize it – or destroy it outright – it remains an amazing period of divine grace. In it, the deepest of religious mysteries is inextricably bound up with human merriment and joy. In the celebration itself, no less than in the mystery it celebrates, the human and the heavenly are conjoined,

The Baby Jesus is the embodiment of God's mercy. Through Him hearts are softened and sinners return to the fold; grudges are forgotten and reconciliations wrought; and mercy is shown to the poor, helpless, and downtrodden. In this Child we are all raised up.

Let us then each make a special attempt to prepare ourselves for a worthy and mindful celebration of the approaching Holy Day. Let us clear away those things that might prevent us from allowing the Infant to touch our hearts. Let us contemplate the mystery – and appreciate the true significance of what we are about to celebrate. Let us receive Him with fervent joy.

Jesus is the Prince of Peace. When the world turns to Him and allows Him to work His radical transformation upon it, then truly it will come to know peace.

We are talking here about the conversion of the world. And that conversion must begin with each of us.

God grant us all the joy of a peaceful and hope filled Christmas, aflame with the Christ



The Entrance of the Theotokos

Even for those who hold her in no special veneration, the Virgin Mary holds a central place in the celebration of Christmas. Beginning with the Gospel narratives found in the opening chapters of St. Matthew and of St. Luke, the many retellings of the Christmas story in word and image all assign her a prominent role. It is, after all, nearly impossible to relate the events of a child's birth without reference to its mother. This is all the more so in the case of Jesus because of the wondrous circumstances and purpose of His coming among us: conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, Christ, our true God, has become Man for our salvation. The immense joy of Christmas flows from belief in the Incarnation.

For us Christians of the Eastern tradition Mary is never absent from religious celebrations. We meditate on the Incarnation and its significance for our salvation throughout the year; hardly a Service goes by without some touch of Christmas wonder and joy. Certain texts at Vespers and Matins each day focus on Christ as God and Man, fully human and fully divine. He is born of the Father before all ages without a mother and, in the fullness of time, is born for us of the Virgin Mary without a human father. Remembering that God took flesh entails remembrance of the woman from whom His flesh came. Thus, we often associate Mary with Jesus in image and song; we remember her in some way at every Service for her central place in the economy of salvation. Our veneration of Mary is intimately bound up with our understanding and worship of her Son.

Like Christmas, certain other major celebrations of the Byzantine tradition also associate Mary with her Son in the context of some event where Scripture records her presence. Such is the case of the Feast of the Encounter with Simeon, February Second (cf. Lk. 2:22-38) and, especially, of the Feast of the Annunciation, March Twenty-fifth (cf. Lk. 1:26-38). There are also several Great Feasts celebrating aspects of the Virgin's life

before and after Christ's life on earth – her death (August Fifteenth), her birth (September Eighth), and her early life (November Twenty-first).

These events are outside the scope of the Gospels, which focus on the life, ministry, death, and Resurrection of Jesus. Although not recorded in Scripture, these other aspects of the Virgin's life, being common to any human life, had to have taken place. Sacred Tradition, the living memory of the Church, supplies many colorful details.

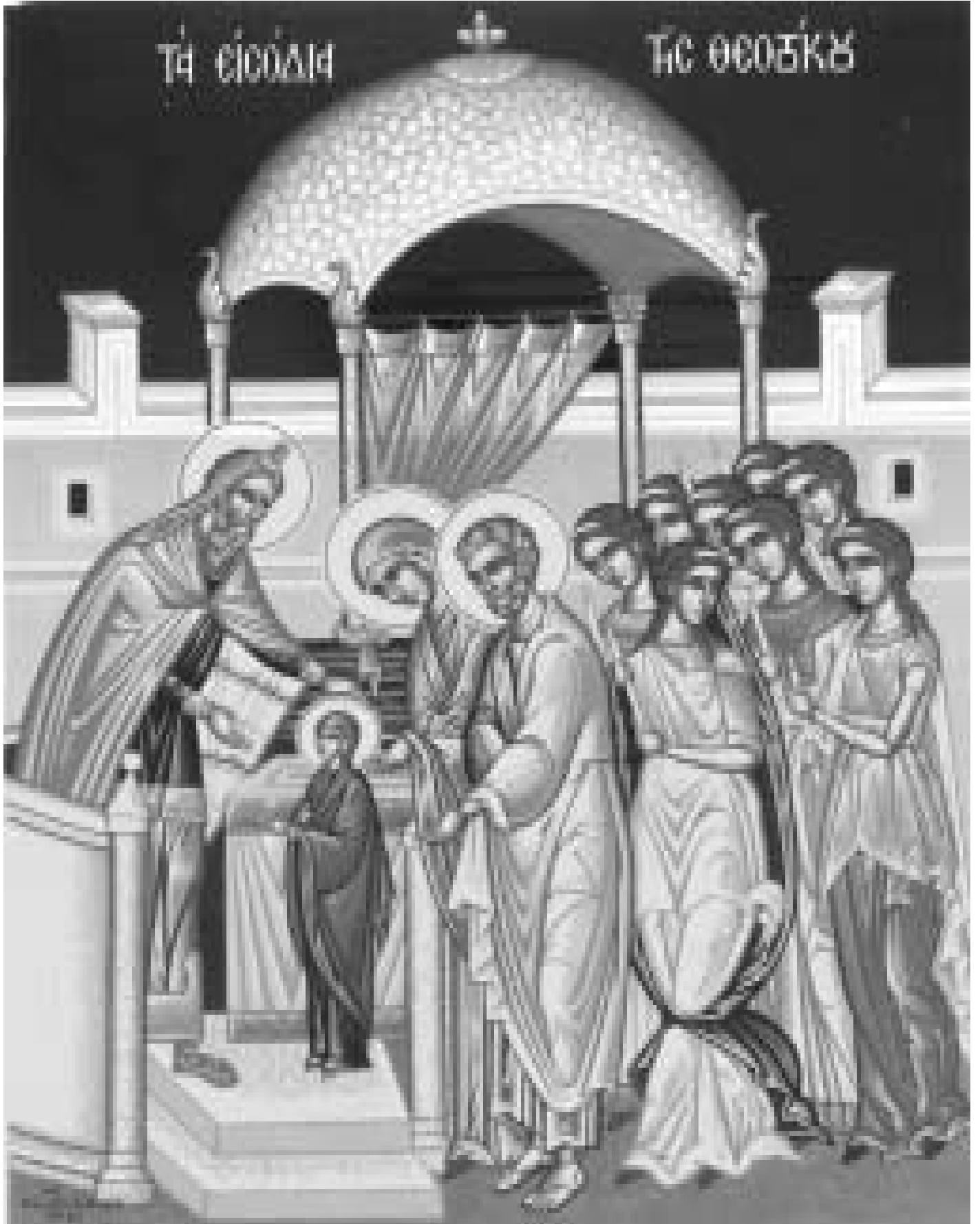
Legends concerning the Virgin's early life go back to the first generations after the Apostles. The earliest written witness to them, the *Proto-evangelium*, or *Infancy Gospel, of James* seems to date from the middle of the Second Century. It was known to Origen (185-232), and Justin Martyr (ca. 100-165) was familiar with much of its contents. While scholars as early as St. Jerome (ca. 340-420) have rejected its historicity, and it has never been accorded scriptural status, the attention devoted to the Virgin Mary by this apocryphal gospel bears strong witness to the very early development – even before the end of the Persecutions – of Marian piety among Christian believers. From its narrative the Church has drawn various elements of its Marian celebrations. The Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple is a case in point.

The Feast, itself, is of relatively late origin and was probably derived from a commemoration of the dedication of New St. Mary's Church in Jerusalem in 543. It became general in the East only in the Eleventh Century and was not made universal in the West – where it is known as the Presentation of Mary – until the Sixteenth. Since the reform of its calendar following the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Church has celebrated it as a simple memorial. In the Byzantine East it retains its status as one of the twelve Great Feasts of the year; it is anticipated by one pre-festive day and followed by a post-feast of four days.

The poetic texts of the Feast make use of

Τῆ ΕΙΣΟΔΟΥ

Τῆς ΘΕΟΤΟΚΟΥ



material set forth in the seventh chapter of the *Protoevangelium of James*. Here it is recounted that Joachim and Anne, the aged and hitherto childless parents of the Virgin, in fulfillment of a vow they had made prior to her birth, brought the three year old Mary to the Temple and there dedicated her to God. She remained in the Temple where she was raised and educated, praying constantly in the Holy of Holies and meditating upon Scripture, until she reached the age of marriage and was betrothed to Joseph, a widower who had agreed to respect and preserve the life of virginity to which she had already vowed herself.

Although the dedication to God of a child received in answer to prayer is not foreign to Scripture (cf. I Sam. 1), the details of the story seem fanciful and not in accord with what we know of Jewish custom at the time of Christ. The events they elaborate are not articles of faith, nor are they heretical, but fall, rather, into the category of pious legend. While not necessarily historically accurate, they illustrate – and result from – ancient and strongly held Christian beliefs concerning the Virgin Mary: her unique role among all mankind as Mother of God, and her perpetual virginity. Herein lies the true meaning of the Feast.

The First Reading at the Great Vespers (Ex. 40:1-5, 9-10, 16, 34-35) describes how Moses completed and consecrated the Tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, in the desert; it tells of God's visible and overpowering entrance into His sanctuary when all was ready. The Second Reading (I Kgs. 7:51 - 8:1, 3-7, 9-11) narrates similar events at the consecration of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem – when all was fittingly prepared, God entered and took possession. In the Third Reading (Ez. 43:27 - 44:4) the Prophet sees God's glory filling

His Temple and falls down in worship; but first he is shown the gate through which God has entered. The gate is shut, and so it must remain, for God Himself has passed through it. Thus, the Old Testament, in types and veiled references, prepares the New.

The Virgin Mary is the true Temple of God. In her, God has dwelt in bodily form. She is the closed gate through which God has passed. Through her, when all was ready, God has come to His people, clothed in flesh formed in her womb and united to her – and our – human nature.

The Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple has been called the feast of God's betrothal to human nature. It presents the twofold image of the young Virgin adorning herself in virtue through vigilance and prayer – out of love for God, unknowingly preparing herself to receive Him within

her – and of God preparing in secret a mother for Himself out of rebellious humanity.

The Feast looks toward Christmas. It is all about getting ready, becoming prepared for God's coming among us. It reminds us that the preparation entails prayer, silence, meditation upon Scripture, and withdrawal from worldly pleasures. One week into the pre-Christmas fast, it exudes a childlike joy and lightness of heart. May God grant such joy to us all as we enter into the temple of our heart and prepare for His coming within us.

The all-pure Temple of the Savior,
the precious bridal chamber and Virgin,
the sacred treasury of the Glory of God,
is led today into the House of the Lord,
bringing with her the grace
of the divine spirit.

Of her God's angels sing in praise:
Behold, the heavenly Tabernacle!

Kontakion of the feast

Entering the Temple

The Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple is a feast well beloved by monks and nuns. In former times many religious orders in the West – where the celebration is known as the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin – observed it as a feast of first or second rank, higher than it was placed in the general calendar of the Roman Church. Many of these same orders still make and renew their vows on this day, even though the calendar reform following the Second Vatican Council reduced its prominence for the West as a whole.

In the Byzantine East, where Church observance has developed along monastic lines, it ranks among the Twelve Great Feasts of the year. The texts proper to the celebration amply demonstrate the affection held for it by the monastic hymnographers who composed them more than a thousand years ago. With strikingly beautiful symbols and analogies, the profound dogmatic poetry sings the praises of Mary's divine motherhood, her perpetual virginity, her holiness, and her constant intercession.

The mood is one of unremitting lightheartedness and joy. Joachim and Anne are glad to bring their only child to the Temple and dedicate her to the service of God. For her part, the little girl happily, and without a backward glance, climbs the steps to the Holy Place. Zechariah, the High Priest, embraces and receives her with joy. The angels in heaven rejoice, and all creation is filled with merriment and dancing.

It is not simply unfettered love for the Mother of God that fuels this exuberance. Her other feasts, while equally beautiful, are more sober and restrained. Nor is this her most important celebration in the calendar – the feasts of her Dormition and Nativity take precedence. Rather, it is the nature of the Feast, itself, that provokes such joy.

In the event being celebrated, we have a profound and beautiful image of the consecrated life. Monastic life is very much life in the Temple. The life is separated from the world and sheltered

from many of its storms. It is centered upon prayer and the reading of Scripture. Much of each day is spent in religious services, and the monk or nun is never far from the Holy of Holies. In the innocent joy of the Virgin Child, the monastic sees mirrored the joy he has found in his own vocation.

Indeed, the call to serve God is often first heard while quite young. Sadly, in our time, it is seldom nourished. The image of Joachim and Anne joyfully sending their only child off to a life of prayerful seclusion does not accurately reflect the attitude of most modern parents. Nor does anyone presently approach the monastery at the innocent age of three. The Postulant and Novice will already have experienced a certain amount of life in the world; no one arrives unstained.

Innocence and joy are results of the life, if not necessarily its precursors. In the monastic life well lived, one experiences a cleansing, a lightening of the heart, and the profound happiness of growing closer to God. It is a time of preparation for ultimate union with Him. While it entails its share of struggles, perseverance brings unrivaled peace and bliss, and there are many consolations along the way.

At Jacob's Falls, we strive to keep lightheartedness and joy at the center of our life close to the Holy of Holies. Like Zechariah, we gladly embrace those who are called to join us in the happy struggle.

To explore the possibility of a call to serve God in the life of our monastery contact:

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 Holy Transfiguration Skete
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Lord, Have Mercy!

As well as being very different in order, content, and ceremonial, from those of the Roman Church and its descendants, the Services of the Byzantine tradition exhibit a great deal of variety among themselves. Besides the Divine Liturgy – the Eucharistic sacrifice Christ commanded be done in memory of Him – there are the major Offices of Matins and Vespers, both full blown services with their own particular characteristics. There are also special services for the administration of the various Sacraments and for the burial and remembrance of the dead. In monastic communities one may encounter the minor hours of Prime, Terce, Sext, and Nones, as well as the Midnight Office and the Office of Compline. In addition, there are frequent Molebens – prayer services for various intentions – and occasional blessings of objects for sacred or profane use.

All of these are “official” services of the Church and may be found in a bewildering array of liturgical books. While some may occur but seldom, each has its own special context and

content. Not all are overly long, but, in general, clergy of the Byzantine tradition find themselves spending far more time in liturgical services than their Western counterparts.

The faithful are usually quite comfortable with even those that occur infrequently, and they participate actively, often without the aid of written materials. Despite their great number and variety, the Services have many elements in common, and familiarity with one inevitably makes the others more accessible. Almost all, for instance, open with the same set of prayers – styled “the usual beginning” in the service books – which are often repeated at the end of the service, as well. The faithful have these prayers by heart, since they also recite them at home to begin and end the day. Indeed, the faithful of the Byzantine tradition make little distinction between public and private prayer; most of their personal prayers are derived from the Services. In a certain sense, all Byzantine prayer is liturgical, and the faithful who pray at home naturally

find themselves at home in church.

For those new to the tradition, the litanies are, perhaps, the easiest element to grasp. These prayers for the needs of the faithful, the Church, and the world punctuate all the major services, tie their sections together, break up the monotony of their length, and provide an easy avenue for congregational participation. The format is simple: a short petition, ending in "Let us pray to the Lord," evokes the response, "Lord, have mercy." Even first timers quickly catch on.

Moreover, most people find them more immediate and visceral than the Scripture, psalmody, and often exquisite ecclesiastical poetry that may comprise the rest of the Service. A visitor recently asked after Vespers, "When was this Service written?" We answered that the English translation we used was, of course, recent, but the Service, itself, contained some elements that went back to the very beginnings of Christianity, and, so scholars informed us, it had essentially reached its present form by the Fourteenth Century. "Amazing!" she said. "It's so up to date; you even pray for hostages!"

The petition to which she was referring, *for the captive*, also intends those legitimately imprisoned for crime, who, perhaps even more so, stand in need of prayer. It comes from the **Great Litany**, which is found at the beginning of Vespers, Matins, and Divine Liturgy, as well as many *molebens*. This litany is also called the **Litany of Peace**, because its first three petitions beg for this precious, and often all too lacking, grace. The human condition has really changed very little these past several thousand years, and the ancient formularies still address our basic needs; we begin all our major Services with a cry for peace.:

In peace, let us pray to the Lord...

We seek first to set ourselves at peace, free from the trials, cares, and pressures of life. We must approach God without agenda, in stillness of heart, yielding to His will and plan for our lives. This is not always so easy to do in our

busy world, but for the moment, as we enter into prayer, the measured pace of the Service gives us a glimpse of the timelessness and peace of eternity.

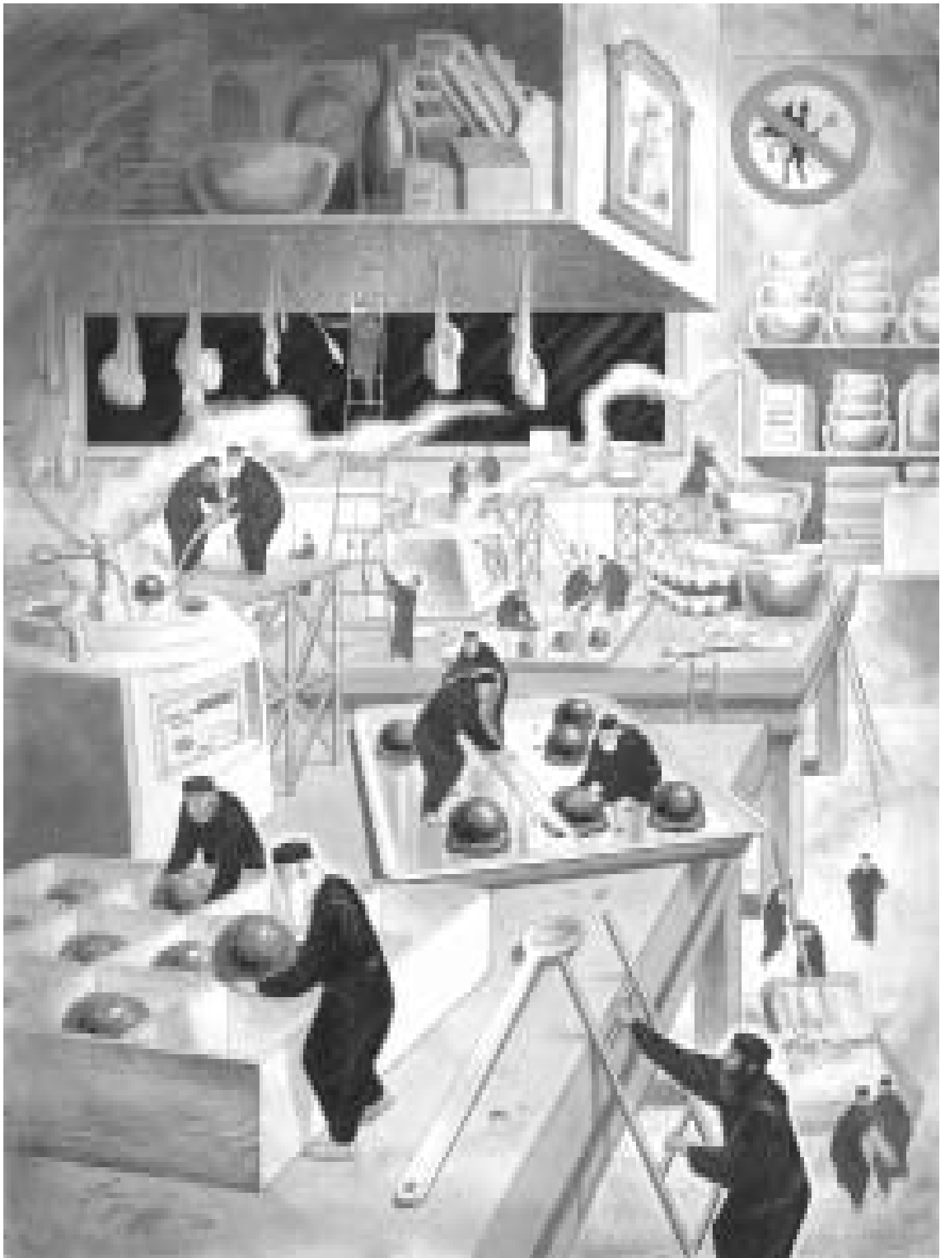
For peace from on high and the salvation of our souls, let us pray to the Lord...

We can never achieve true peace by our own effort. Human means inevitably fail. Only the Prince of Peace, Christ our God, can bring us peace. Like salvation it comes to us only by grace.

We pray for the peace in the whole world, for the Church, and for Christian unity. We pray for the church in which we are standing and for those who come into it in a spirit of reverence and prayer. We pray for our religious leaders and all the faithful, for our monastery and for every city and country place and those living in them. We pray for good weather, peaceful times and general prosperity. We pray for the safety and salvation of those in particularly difficult circumstances, those traveling, the sick, the suffering, the imprisoned. We pray that God may deliver us from difficulties, as well; and that He may help, save, have mercy, and protect us by His grace.

In all these matters we ask the Lord for the only thing we can – for His mercy. We have no claim upon Him; He owes us nothing; if we demand justice of Him, we are surely doomed. We know that everything we have from Him comes not by way of merit, but by grace; we trust in His merciful love, and we humbly beg Him to send His healing mercy and grace upon us.

At the litany's end, confidently remembering His most blessed mother and all the other holy ones who throughout the ages have been exemplary recipients of His mercy, and whom we believe are praying with and for us even now, we commend ourselves and one another to Christ, our God. Christ Jesus is the embodiment of Divine Mercy, He is God's gift of Himself to us; He it is who will have mercy and save us; He is truly the lover of mankind.



Scoofies at the Jampot?

The autumn color was again delayed this year, and it lingered almost until October's end by our shore of the Great Lake. While generally mild, the weather did give us a display of temperament in mid-month as strong winds and heavy wet snow bowed trees to the ground along the highway and sent tourists scurrying on **Jampot's** last day of business. Many people braved the wildness of the day, however, and stopped by the shop to bid farewell for a time, wish us a good winter, and lay in their own hibernation supplies of goodies.

Though it dumped nearly a foot of wet white stuff on Calumet, the nastiness was brief. The return of sunshine and relative warmth brought a fair number of intrepid souls back to our highway to experience the last golden days. Though we were officially closed, quite a few dropped into the **Jampot** on the chance there might still be something to purchase. We were always happy to break away from the tasks at hand and accommodate them as best we could.

The last leaves are now gone, the daylight hours are short, and the work has settled into the quiet pattern of production and shipping. Jam, fruitcake, and truffles are the order of the day – and in abundance! Orders keep coming in heavily from the autumn issue of **Magnificat** and on the internet. Already, we have had to burn some midnight oil; no doubt, more will be spent during the coming month. It has almost always been this way. We see it, in fact, as a great and on-going blessing.

Certainly it is less chaotic now than in years past. The mail order portion of the enterprise has grown faster over the years than our door sales. It now accounts for about a third of our annual earned income, and most of it comes in November and December. With the advent of employees, a larger community, more efficient production techniques, the warehouse, and computerized labeling and record keeping, we have had to spend fewer late hours baking, jamming, truffling, or packing. Still, there continue

to be those moments when, bleary eyed, and lightheaded with fatigue, we stare out into the darkness and mutter, *Where are the Scoofies when we really need them?*

These tiny, elfin creatures had long been the subject of some speculation for us. Soon after our arrival at Jacob's Falls we had heard tales of their elusive existence in the nearby gorge. No one, of course, had actually seen them or could pin point their whereabouts, and any evidence of their presence was meager, to say the least. Still, if such creatures were to exist, the wild, wet gorge of Jacob's Creek would seem a perfect place for them to hide from the prying eyes of bigger creatures.

In our late night weariness, we would sometimes suppose that they would be gentle souls and inclined toward helpfulness. Perhaps they would at times come secretly to the aid of those in difficulty or distress - or overwhelmed by trials, cares, or...work! *Wouldn't it be nice if we could just go home, fall to sleep, and return tomorrow to find all this stuff done?*

We cannot truthfully say that such wishful fantasies have ever been fulfilled. Over the years there have been many nights spent boxing or in jam sessions. Once in a while though, we amaze ourselves. Coming back upon the scene after an all too brief rest and surveying the piles of packages or the neat rows of jars, we wonder how – tired as we were – we could have managed to do so much the night before. *Maybe there is something to this Scoofy thing, after all...*

Now, with the help of our friend Norm Breyfogle, we can begin to visualize the possibilities.

Meanwhile, Scoofies or no, we stand ready to assist you in your holiday shopping. We hope you will take this opportunity to secure – for yourself or for friends – some of the fine **Jampot** items listed on the following pages.

Thanksgiving

Our national holiday of Thanksgiving arrives in just a few days. As is our custom, we will again mitigate our pre-Christmas fast to allow for the traditional turkey dinner with all the trimmings. Though separated from the world, we to some extent share its joys and concerns. Making an effort to celebrate this national feast is a pleasant way to express our solidarity with our fellow countrymen.

Sometimes, during the summer, when asked whether the **Jampot** will be open on Memorial Day, or the Fourth of July, or Labor Day, we respond that we observe every Sunday as the Lord's holy day, but on Caesar's holidays, we work. We do, however, observe Thanksgiving – with a meal, special prayers, and rest. This secular holiday is in essence a religious observance, a hold over from former times when our culture was not ashamed to acknowledge the Source of

its many blessings. While praying for the return of such humility to our land, we keep this one of Caesar's holidays as a holy day.

We hope you do, too. We all have been blessed in many ways; it behooves us all to render the Lord proper thanks.

In particular, we thank God for you. To us, you are, perhaps, His greatest blessing. Your support as benefactor or **Jampot** patron makes our life in this wilderness outpost possible. That you take the trouble to read these pages indicates you are also a good friend. Thank you, for your continuing friendship and support. We will remember you in prayer in a special way in our prayers of thanksgiving during the coming holy days.

God grant us all a blessed and peaceful Thanksgiving and Christmas.

HOLY TRANSFIGURATION SKETE

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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED