

Magnificat

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When you went down to death,
O undying Life,
You harrowed Hell
by the lightning of Your Divinity;
and when You raised the dead
from the depths of the netherworld,
all the heavenly powers cried aloud:
O Christ our God, O Giver of Life,
Glory be to You!

Troparion of the Resurrection, Tone 2

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



The Harrowing of Hell

Although one occasionally encounters western inspired Russian icons depicting a flowing haired, muscular Christ, loosely wrapped in a winding-sheet, bearing the marks of crucifixion, and triumphantly rising from the tomb, the Resurrection, itself, is not normally a subject of Byzantine iconography. No one was there to see it, and one cannot possibly imagine how this awesome display of Divine Power might have looked. A more traditional depiction is that of an angel showing the empty tomb and the discarded wrappings to the tearful women who had come to anoint the Lord's body. The imagery is poignant and visceral, realistically illustrat-

ing the Gospel account. But the most common Resurrection icon, by far, represents an event no one could have seen and illustrates a belief that, though held by Christians from very early times, is mentioned only vaguely (cf. Eph. 4:9; I Pet. 3:18-20) in Scripture: the harrowing of Hell.

A frequent theme of poetry and drama in Medieval England, and long a stock phrase in the English language, the expression is now encountered mostly by students of literature or historians of art. The rest of us, estranged from the land and cut off from the roots of our culture, are only vaguely, if at all, aware of its meaning. Consultation of an unabridged dictionary reveals

that a harrow is a farming implement for breaking up, pulverizing, and leveling the ground after plowing. The verb drawn from it indicates working the earth to break up large clods of soil or, in a like manner, lacerating someone's feelings, tormenting, or harassing them. Thus, we may refer to a "harrowing" experience, something that gravely frightens or upsets us. The Hell that is here harrowed is not the place of eternal damnation we usually associate with the term, but rather the Hell to which Christ is said to have descended in the Apostles Creed, the ancient Baptismal creed of the Roman Church. It is the abode of the dead, referred to by Jesus under various images in the Gospels (cf. Mt. 25:10; Lk. 13:29; 14:15; 16:22; 23:43), known to the Greeks as Hades, and to the scholastic theologians as the "Limbo of the Fathers."

God created man for happiness with Himself and placed him in Paradise. Through his sin, man, in the person of Adam, broke his relationship with God and shut himself out of Paradise. Through sin death came into the world, and all the descendants of Adam were made subject to it. Even the just were deprived of the vision of God, and when they died they remained dead, imprisoned outside heaven, until the coming of Christ.

Christ came into the world that they - and we - might have life. God the Son took on human flesh, becoming man to suffer and die in order to restore life to mankind. He willingly submitted to death in order to conquer death. Lifted up on the Cross, He has drawn us all to Himself, and His death has become the source of our life. He has gone down among the dead to free them from the grip of death. Through His death He has despoiled death's domain, broken down its gates,

shattered its bars. As the ground is harrowed to allow for new growth, He has harrowed Hell that life might spring forth. His Resurrection proves that death has no power over Him. In Him, it no longer has power over us.

The Resurrection icon, then, represents the effect rather than the event. Christ is portrayed not coming from the tomb, Himself, but raising us all from death. Standing victorious upon the demolished gates of Hades, He forcefully pulls Adam and Eve, progenitors and symbols of the human race, from their graves. Prophets, Patriarchs, kings and righteous men of old, together with the angels of heaven, gaze on in rapt

amazement. Scattered all about are broken locks and bolts; He has destroyed our prison of sin and death, and we have been set free.

Jesus rose from the dead for the same reason He suffered and died - for our salvation. Had He chosen to, He could have saved us some other

way. Yet, through the Cross He showed us the depth of His love for us, that we might love Him in return as much as we can. By His Resurrection He confirms for us His Divinity and the truth of His teaching, that we might believe in Him and walk in His ways.

Certainly, He did not need to prove anything. The Resurrection in no way adds to His already infinite greatness. It occurred not for Him, but for us. In becoming man He took on our nature as well as our flesh; in rising from the grave He also raises up our nature which is wedded to His. His Resurrection points to our own and demonstrates for us our future glory. In Christ Jesus, and through His Resurrection from the dead, we are empowered to become like Him. May we become truly worthy partakers of His Divine Nature.

Today, O Merciful One,
You arose from the grave,
and freed us from the realm of death;
today Adam dances for joy
and Eve exults:
with them the Prophets and Patriarchs
hymn in endless praise
the Divine might of Your Kingdom.

Kontakion of the Resurrection, Tone 3



A Conjunction of Feasts

This year, for those of us who follow the Gregorian calendar, the Feast of the Annunciation to the Virgin fell on Great and Holy Friday. This conjunction of celebrations occurs from time to time in the older Julian calendar, as well, and the various *Typica* (liturgical directories) provide detailed outlines for integrating the liturgical hymns and Scripture passages of both feasts. The resulting Services for the Holy Thursday Vespertine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great, the Good Friday Matins of the Twelve Gospels, and the Vespers of the Entombment on Good Friday evening become exceptionally long and present an almost overwhelming abundance of Scripture.

The marathon seems more than even the most pious could endure, and one is given to long for the expediency of the Western Church where, should it fall during Holy Week or the Easter Octave, Annunciation is transferred to the Monday of the Second week of Easter. But in the Byzantine tradition expediency is seldom a priority, particularly in liturgical matters. While lesser feasts may sometimes be moved or even suppressed in similar circumstances, the Feast of the Annunciation never is, even should it fall on Pascha, itself.

Annunciation is the pre-eminent feast of the Incarnation. It marks the beginning of the New Covenant, the new dispensation of God's Grace to mankind. God lowers Himself to take flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary and becomes Man. This is the root of our salvation. Without the Incarnation, God, Who is pure spirit, could not have suffered and died out of love for us. Without the Incarnation, the sufferings and death of Jesus are no more than common human misery – tragic, perhaps, but not able to save us. The power of the Cross depends on the truth of the Annunciation. It is fitting that, on occasion, we celebrate the two salvific events together.

Liturgical scholars increasingly conclude that it was so in the beginning. The passion, death, and Resurrection of Christ occurred at the time of the Jewish Passover. The first Christians, who

were Jews and continued to observe Jewish rites and festivals, would certainly have recalled this at their subsequent observances of Passover. Since Passover was a memorial of all God's saving acts toward the Jews from Creation to the coming of the Messiah, the celebration would be an occasion for these first Christians to recall formally all that Jesus said and did, as well as His suffering, death, and Resurrection, and to look forward to His return. In particular, because of the contemporary Jewish belief that the Patriarchs and other holy men died on the anniversary of their birth, they would have solemnly remembered His coming into the world.

Moreover, the date, itself, seems to be significant. After the Jewish Christians were expelled from the Synagogue, Jerusalem and the Temple destroyed, and the Jewish leadership driven into exile, it became difficult for Christians to know when Passover was being celebrated. The date was fixed at the 15th day of the month of Nisan, but when the month began was determined by the rabbis, who from time to time declared an extra month to bring their lunar calendar into closer harmony with the equinox and the secular solar calendar. Deprived of contact with the Jewish community and knowledge of when this might occur, some Jewish Christians resorted to celebrating Passover/Pascha on the solar date they calculated to coincide with the day before Passover – the day, according to St. John's Gospel, of the Crucifixion – in the year of our Lord's death. The date was March 25th.

Since the Fourth century the date of Pascha has been tied to the first full moon of spring and the universal Christian custom of celebrating the Resurrection each Sunday. Thus the Passion is now commemorated on the preceding Friday. This year that Great, Holy, and Good Friday fell on what may be the oldest date in the Christian calendar of feasts and the actual date of the event; through God's grace, we had the joy of remembering it while celebrating – as did those early Jewish Christians – His coming as Man.

A Monastic Consecration



Hegumen Nicholas helps the novice to his feet after having given him the encouragement:
*Our wise God, like a loving father, beholds your humility and sorrow.
 As you prostrate from your heart before Him, He receives you as the prodigal son.*

On Wednesday, February 2, 2005, the Feast of Our Lord's Encounter with Simeon, our Brother Sergius bound himself to life in our monastery by perpetual, solemn vows and received monastic consecration at the hands of our Hegumen, Hieromonk Nicholas. Raised to the rank of stavrophore, or cross-bearing, monk he now takes his place among the elders of the Skete. He possesses a deliberative voice in those decisions requiring the consent of their Council and has the right and duty of participating in Abbatial elections; in accord with the Eastern monastic tradition that was handed on to us, he is henceforth addressed as "Father".

We were pleased that about twenty-five friends were able to join for the joyous occasion.

Among them were Father Sergius' parents and four of his younger brothers and sisters, who travelled from downstate to witness the ancient rite. We rejoice with Father Sergius for his perseverance in responding to the Lord's call and for the courage he has shown in making this life-long commitment. We invoke God's continued grace and blessing upon him for the journey.

For the monk, the joy we all experience at such occasions must be tempered with a healthy dose of trepidation. Monastic consecration is not a reward for having survived three years formation as a novice. It is not an end, but a beginning; and the trials and labor of novitiate are merely training for the greater struggles that lie ahead.

The rite of consecration, itself, makes abun-



You have truly chosen a good and blessed work, but only if you persevere in it. For good works are conceived in labor and achieved with pain.

Our Brother Sergius is tonsured in the hair of his head, as a sign of his renunciation of the world, and of everything that is in the world, and for the restraining of his will and of all fleshly desires,...

dantly clear, that it is not the promise that brings merit, but, rather, the fidelity with which it is carried out. The monk has made a very big promise. Painfully aware of his past failings and present weakness, he understands that his own strength is insufficient for living out the commitment. Yet he also knows that God gives the strength to carry out the tasks He has assigned. He trusts God's grace will be sufficient for him, and he places in His hands any fears he may have concerning his own inadequacies.

For this reason, the rite does not focus on his vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. He makes them verbally, responding to the Hegumen's questions concerning each one that he will live them out *with the help of God*. By far the greater part of the service is devoted to prayers, on the part of the Hegumen and congregation, that the help be given. Monastic consecration is not the filing of a contract, it is a solemn blessing to impart the graces needed to live a particular state of life.

The graces are manifold and conveyed in diverse and continuing ways. Among these, in addition to the Hegumen's long prayers of petition and blessing, are his various exhortations





Our Brother, Sergius, is clothed in the garment of spiritual joy and gladness, for the putting away and trampling of all sorrows and troubles proceeding from the devil, from the flesh, and from the world; and for his perpetual joy and gladness in Christ,...

The new Father Sergius joyfully greets his young brother and sisters.

which, taken to heart and put into practice, will guide the monk through difficulties and encourage him in trial. So, too, will the habit, each part of which symbolizes some aspect of the monastic commitment and is solemnly handed over to the monk during the rite with a blessing and fervent pleas for God's mercy. With these we must also consider the monk's new mode of address.

Eastern tradition calls the monk "Father" not for of any achievement of power or authority, but because he stands in line of succession to the great Desert Fathers of third and fourth century Egypt. This is hardly a source of pride; it is, rather, a humbling reminder of his own inadequacies in the face of his commitment. As these holy men and women were lights to the people of their own day and of each succeeding generation, so must he be. The responsibility may seem terrifying, but, with God's grace, it will be seen as a challenge and an encouragement for growth in spiritual life.

God grant Father Sergius every blessing and grace as he strives for the life of holiness his vocation demands.





Among the First, O Lord...

This winter saw the fruition of a number of long ongoing projects. Two, in particular, will be noticed by visitors to our church.

Just as the truths they represent (Christ's coming among us as Man and His abiding presence in our midst as Eucharist) are central to our faith, the icons of the Annunciation and of the Mystical Supper (see the photo on page four) occupy the very heart of the iconostasis, on and above the Royal Doors. While not the largest of the projected grouping, their physical and theological centrality recommended that they be the first commissioned. After numerous delays,

we were pleased to take delivery of them at the turn of the year. We see them as a foretaste and a hope for the future. Seven major icons and twelve smaller ones remain to be commissioned. We trust that in due time the Lord will raise up those who will begin to make it possible.

Certainly He has already raised up many who have made much else possible. The building of this monastery has come about through the generosity of thousands of good people over these past twenty and more years. Much of this has come as "widow's mites," contributions that, while monetarily small, have involved great per-

sonal sacrifice. Sometimes, these have continued over the course of many years; surely the Lord, who knows what lies hidden in the heart, will richly reward such loving devotion.

From time to time, there have also been extraordinarily large gifts which have moved the work quickly forward. Sometimes, we had a personal acquaintance with the party responsible, often the **Jampot** and **Magnificat** had been our only previous contact; always the magnitude of the gift has come as a shock. Only God can prompt such generosity, and we thank Him for the manner of His loving providence; we trust in His abundant blessing upon those who serve as His agents in this regard.

We thank Him also for the many other good people of moderate means who regularly share some of their surplus with us. A number contribute every month, others annually, or in response to a newsletter or appeal. They, along with our **Jampot** and mail order patrons, provide for the everyday life and steady growth of this monastery. We pray God preserve them in their goodness of heart and continue to grant them the means of their good works.

We remember all of these, some individually, but most, because of the multitude of their names, in a general way, in our private and public prayer. The Divine Liturgy, in particular, offers opportunities in its Preparation Rite and at its Great Entrance for invoking God's remembrance of the "noble and ever to be remembered founders and benefactors of this holy monastery." The Lord, of course knows each one by name, and, even if we happen to be forgetful, we trust He will acknowledge their generosity with His abundant blessings.

It is fitting, however, that we also make some

acknowledgement before men. We know, of course, that public recognition is not the motive of generosity, which springs, rather, from a desire to serve God and from a loving heart. Still, it is good to have a record more permanent than our own limited and mortal recollection; if that record is attractively accessible to others, it may serve as a consolation for them in these bleak times, offer an encouragement to their own good will, and turn their hearts to prayer for those who have brought about this great work.

We, therefore, several years before construction of the new church began, resolved to erect a donor wall in its narthex. Last summer we affixed four walnut panels to the wall near

the entrance; since then several people have expressed puzzlement as to the purpose of grouping. This winter we installed the first nameplates; the significance now becomes clear.

From the beginning, because of spatial limitations, we felt it necessary to limit this permanent, public recognition to those whose contribution had been particularly significant. We rather arbitrarily chose a monetary benchmark of \$10,000.00 for this purpose. But we have also included the names of some long deceased friends whose help allowed for our survival during our precarious first years on this shore; without them, nothing of what is now here would have come about.

There are now twenty-one nameplates on the wall. Last month another benefactor qualified, and, because our reckoning is cumulative, we expect to add several more by January when we will again order plaques. This will still leave an abundance of space on the panels. We pray the Lord fill them in due course.

May the Lord God
remember in His Kingdom
the noble and ever to be
remembered founders
and benefactors
of this holy monastery.

Hope Springs Eternal

We were told on first approaching the Byzantine tradition that one could never truly celebrate Easter unless one had first suffered through Lent and Holy Week in a Byzantine monastery. While we might hesitate to state it in such sweeping terms, our experience these past ten or so years has born out the essential truth of the proposition. While Lent is not all suffering and is possessed of its own particular consolations, its rigor, even if only by contrast, certainly does heighten Paschal joy.

Life and Liturgy follow a similar logic, and much the same pattern could be asserted about Keweenaw weather. Winter is in many ways a good time here at Jacob's Falls, with its peace, quiet, and more leisurely pace; we felt deprived during those years we were required to spend a substantial portion of it in California. Yet, it always seems that its most endearing feature is its departure. The long dark snowy cold does indeed make for a glorious spring.

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The receding snow, damp air, and rushing, swollen creeks convey a uniquely exciting sense of happiness, and the emerging ground, new blossoms, and first green bring with them a deeply felt hope. This year the excitement will prove even greater than usual. We planted more than a thousand bulbs last fall; seeing the crocuses, daffodils, tulips, lilies, and anemones spring up in turn over the course of spring and summer should be an unparalleled joy.

Despite the heavy work that will dominate the months ahead, the oppressive burden of debt that hangs over us, and the economic uncertainties that cloud the immediate future, the glories of spring fill us with hope and gratitude. We thank God for the special wonder of this place, for His mercy in settling us here, and for the many good people whose generosity and patronage enable us to remain here and grow.

We invoke God's blessing upon you all.