

# Magnificat

Volume XXIII  
Number 1

News from  
HOLY TRANSFIGURATION SKETE  
Courtesy of Poorrock Abbey Publishing  
Society of Saint John  
6559 State Highway M26  
Eagle Harbor, Michigan 49950  
<http://www.societystjohn.com>

Autumn  
2007

Reclining at the Lord's Supper  
upon the breast of Christ the Teacher,  
O Beloved Disciple, you came to know things ineffable,  
and your heavenly voice has thundered to all:

**In the beginning was the Word,  
and the Word was with God,  
and the word was God:**

The true Light that enlightens every man  
coming into the world,  
Christ our God, the Savior of our souls.

From Vespers for the Falling Asleep of the  
Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian

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.



# Beloved Disciple

**Seeing His mother there with the disciple whom He loved, Jesus said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son." In turn He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother." From that hour onward, the disciple took her into His care.**

Jn. 19: 26-27

It was this poignant passage of Scripture, more than anything else, that motivated us in the beginning to choose John, Apostle, Evangelist, and beloved disciple of the Lord, as the special patron of our community. Our task, as we saw it a quarter century ago, was to build a monastery dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, and we could think of no better defender and promoter of the holy effort than the one whom Christ, Himself, had entrusted with His mother's care. Thus, we incorporated as the Society of Saint John in the spring of 1983, and this remains our official title, for legal and financial purposes, even now.

Throughout the growth and changes of the ensuing years, we have continued to look to the Beloved Disciple as a special protector of our life and work. We hold him the patron of our church, we sing his troparion or kontakion at almost all our major Services, and we celebrate with special solemnity the two principal feasts the Byzantine liturgical calendar accords him. Following the tradition handed on to us, we draw faith and understanding from his unique closeness to the Savior and lovingly address him as Theologian.

This year we feel a heightened joy as we celebrate, on September 26th, the feast of his passing from this earth. In Late August, just before the twenty-fourth anniversary of our arrival on this

blessed shore, we received the gift of a recently restored statue of the Beloved Disciple. Pen and scroll in hand and accompanied by the far-seeing eagle that symbolizes the sweep of his wisdom and insight, the Apostle appears young and vigorous, serenely confident of the Lord's guidance through whatever may lie ahead. We take the gift's arrival at this time as a reminder of God's continuing providence for this little monastery as we encounter the many possibilities our twenty-fifth year in this holy place will afford. In peaceful happiness we recall the testimony of Scripture and Tradition concerning the greatness of our Patron Saint.

O Evangelist John, equal of the Angels,  
O divinely taught virgin Theologian,  
in true faith you presented to the world  
the all-pure side of Christ  
which gushed forth blood and water,  
through which we obtain  
everlasting life for our souls.

From Matins of the Feast

John, son of Zebedee was a fisherman from Galilee. With his brother, James, he heard the Lord's call while at his work and immediately abandoned family, business, and property to follow Jesus (Mt. 4:21-22). Both brothers seem to have been particularly close to Christ, and He includ-

ed them in many significant moments in His ministry. With Peter they were present when He raised the daughter of Jairus (Mk. 5: 37-42; Lk. 8:51-55); again with Peter, the brothers beheld Him in glory on Mt. Tabor (Mt. 17:1-8; Mk. 9:2-8; Lk. 9:28-36). Perhaps it was only natural for their mother to request a special place for them in the Kingdom (Mt. 20:21). What that would entail they soon learned when they witnessed His agony and arrest (Mt. 26:36-37; Mk. 14:32-33).

John was favored with a special closeness to Christ. He reclined next to Jesus at the Last Supper (Jn. 13:23), and, alone among the Apostles, with anguish of heart, he witnessed the Lord's crucifixion; at the foot of the Cross, he received His sorrowing Mother into his care. Arriving first

at the Tomb to verify Mary Magdalene's report of the Lord's Resurrection, he humbly waited and allowed Peter to enter before him; entering then, himself, he saw and believed (Jn. 20:4-8).

After the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, along with Peter, John possessed a leadership role among the faithful in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 3 and 4); together with Peter, the other Apostles sent him to Samaria to confirm the faith those who had newly accepted the word of God there and to give them the Holy Spirit through the laying-on of hands (Acts 8:14-17). Some years later, St. Paul (Gal. 2:9) identifies John, along with Peter and James, as an acknowledged pillar of the Church in Jerusalem.

According to early and nearly unanimous tradition, he later (probably after the passing of the Virgin) preached the Faith in Asia Minor and settled at Ephesus. During a period of persecution under the Emperor Domitian, in the closing years of the first century, John endured exile on the island of Patmos; there he wrote his Book of Revelations with his own hand. On the death of the Persecutor, he returned to Ephesus, where he wrote his Gospel, dictating to a secretary whom tradition identifies as Prochorus, one of the first seven deacons (cf. Acts 6:1-6) of the Church at Jerusalem.

Traditionally considered the youngest of the disciples, John lived to an advanced age. While the early witnesses disagree as to the exact number of his years, they all place it near the century mark, and it is clear from Scripture that many people thought he would not, in fact, die until the Lord's Second Coming (cf. Jn. 21:20-23).

Saint Jerome (who died in 420) recounts that as he neared the his end, the aged and enfeebled Apostle would simply and repeatedly exhort his flock: "Children, love one another! This is the command of the Lord, and if you have done this, you have done enough."

This gentle preacher of love has had a profound effect upon the Christian Faith. His express purpose in writing his Gospel was that

Mystically expounding  
on the Son of the Most High,  
co-eternal and consubstantial  
with the Father,  
unchanging Light from Light,  
perfect image of the Divinity  
eternally shining forth  
from God the Father,  
the Creator and Lord of all,  
O Beloved,  
you preached to the world  
Christ our God,  
as the Light that leads us  
out of darkness.

Entreat Him to save our souls.

From Vespers of the Feast

we might believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this faith we might have Life in His name (Jn. 20:31). Because of the sublimity of its teaching, the Church of the Byzantine tradition accords the Beloved Disciple's Gospel account pride of place and prescribes its reading at Divine Liturgy throughout the Paschal Season.

John was an eyewitness to the events he reports; through the signs he saw and heard, he, himself, came to believe and have life in Christ. He testifies to them for our sakes, and his testimony we know is true

(Jn. 19:35). Through his eyes we see the blood and water of Eucharist and Baptism flowing from the opened side of Christ, through his ears we hear the Lord's discourse on His oneness with the Father for all time and on His having come into the world to lay down His life that we might possess Him as our food unto eternal life.

The Theologian was privileged a deep intimacy with Christ through which he came to penetrate the bright mysteries of God. By his teaching we have come to know that God is light (1 Jn. 1:5) and that God is love (1 Jn. 4:16). Through his witness, testimony, and intercession, may the love and light of Christ enlighten us all.

# Light of the Evening

From the beginning Christians have sought to keep the Scriptural injunction to pray joyfully and without ceasing, to remain watchful and to persevere tirelessly in prayer in every circumstance and at every opportunity (cf., e.g., Lk. 18:1; I Thes. 5:16-18; Col. 4:2; Eph. 6:18). Early solitary ascetics of the Egyptian and Palestinian deserts continuously recited the Psalms by heart, often all 150 of them in a single day. Monastic communities prayed the Psalms together at fixed times throughout the day. Christians in the world were also encouraged to set certain daily times of prayer.

Thus Tertullian, writing in North Africa during a time of persecution at the end of the second century (On Prayer, Chap. 25), proposes from the example of Scripture (cf. Acts 2:15, 10:9, 3:1) the third, sixth, and ninth hours of the day as particularly appropriate times for prayer in addition to the already prescribed times at the beginning and end of day. By the last quarter of the fourth century, barely two generations after the persecutions had been lifted, these morning and evening prayers had developed into full-blown public services in the cathedral churches of the major cities. The Apostolic Constitutions, compiled in Syria about 380 A.D., one of our major witnesses for ancient Christian liturgical practice, sees them as obligatory for all the faithful, and admonishes bishops (II, 59) to command and exhort their flocks to attend morning and evening Services each day.

Morning and evening would seem natural times for prayer and had been pivotal in the worship of the Hebrew Temple (cf. Ex. 29:38-41, 30:7-8; Num. 28:3-4). It seemed proper for Christians to offer their sacrifice of praise then, as well. Moreover, the beginning and end of day would naturally remind Christians of the death and resurrection of Christ. Already, during the last decade of the first century, St. Clement of Rome had commented in his first letter to the Corinthians (Chap. 24) that "day and night declare to us a resurrection." Nature

constitutes God's first revelation of Himself (cf. Rom. 1:19-20), and, even now, it can aid us in our groping toward Him. Thus, we still observe the hours of sunrise and sunset as privileged times for prayer.

In the Byzantine tradition, as in the Hebrew, the day begins at sunset; the Office of Vespers, then, is the first Service of the day. The troparia sung before the dismissal announce the coming day's commemoration or feast; similarly, its other poetic texts offer reflection and commentary on the person or event being remembered. Thus, at Vespers on Saturday evening, we begin our Sunday celebration of Christ's Resurrection.

As was true in both monastery and cathedral, psalmody is the heart of the Service. In monasteries, the singing of Psalms continued the early ascetic pattern of meditative recitation. The Psalter came to be divided into twenty sections, however, and the portions distributed among the morning and evening Services; thus the monks could recite and meditate on the Psalms together, completing the Psalter and beginning it anew each week. The cathedral practice was more exuberant, engaging the people with hymns, litanies, and ritual; it assigned certain characteristic Psalms to each Service and repeated them daily to provide an unchanging format for ease in congregational participation. Over the course of a thousand years the traditions merged into a common format normative for monastery and cathedral alike; today's Services integrate both approaches.

We begin Vespers with an initial blessing, the singing of the Pascal Troparion or an invocation of the Holy Spirit according to season. Next we recite the Trisagion Prayers, which also serve as private morning and evening daily prayers for many of the Faithful. After the Invitatory call to worship the Lord Jesus Christ, our God and King, we chant Psalm 103 (104), bringing our workday to a close with thanksgiving for the bounties of God's providence. With childlike delight

we note the order of Creation and the place of various creatures within it, the alternation of day and night, of work and rest, and how God gives food to the beasts and makes human labor fruitful, providing both sustenance and joy. To Him all Creation owes its being, through Him it is sustained and renewed, it constitutes an unending manifestation of His glory.

**How many are Your works, O Lord,  
in wisdom have You made them all!**

Ps. 103 (104):24

Confident of His love and mercy, we turn to Him in prayer for our needs and those of the whole world through the petitions of the Great Litany. Clearing our minds and quieting our hearts, we beg His peace upon ourselves, upon the whole world, and on the entire Church. We pray for our little church and the people who pray in it; we pray for our Hierarchy, for the clergy, and for all the faithful; we pray for those in public service, for our monastery, for every town and locality, and for their faithful inhabitants. We ask for good weather and abundant crops, for peaceful times and the safety of travelers, for the welfare of the sick, the suffering, and the imprisoned, and for our own protection, preservation, and deliverance from all adversity.

Next follows the continuous psalmody of the monastic tradition. For Vespers on Saturday and for most major feasts, the first section of the Psalter is prescribed. On such festal occasions we usually sing an abbreviated setting of verses drawn from the first three Psalms, before returning to the cathedral structure and the chanting of Psalm 140 (141).

Thankful for the Lord's many blessings, at end of day we are also conscious of the many temptations that assail us and of the numerous occasions we have not resisted them as well as we should. We earnestly beg for a purification of our minds and hearts and for protection against our own evil inclinations. Repeating the second verse as a refrain, we raise our hands in prayer while the priest incenses the whole church, bathing us in the cleansing scent of repentance.

Joy-giving Light of the sacred glory  
of the immortal, heavenly,  
and blessed Father,  
O Christ Jesus!

Now, as we come upon the sunset  
and behold the evening light,  
we sing to the Father and the Son  
and the Holy Spirit of God.

You are worthy at all times  
to be praised by undefiled tongues,  
Son of God, O Giver of Life,  
for this the whole world praises You.

Vespers:  
Hymn at the lamp-lighting

We next chant the Stichera. After these theologically illuminating poetic texts, which are interspersed with verses drawn from Psalms 129 (130) and 116 (117), and are proper to the celebration at hand, the priest proclaims: **the Light of Christ enlightens all!** Then, taking light from the candle that has burned on the altar from the beginning of the Service, we light all the lamps of the altar, iconostasis, and principal icons, and the candles in the votive stands throughout the church, as well.

Here we have the ancient heart of Vespers. The Apostolic Constitutions (ca. 380) already prescribe Psalm 140 (141) to be said at the evening Service (II, 59). About seventy years later, St. Theodoret of Cyr, a native of Antioch, in commenting on Exodus 30:7-8, notes that Christians perpetuate the divinely instituted temple services when they offer incense and the light of lamps to God in the course of their worship. For us, of course, the ritual action conveys a profoundly Christian meaning.

The hymn we sing during the lamp lighting is among the oldest of Christian hymns outside of Scripture. St. Basil the Great (d. 379) com-



mented (On the Holy Spirit 29:73) that it was so old that no one in his day remembered who had written it. With the singing, the humble and necessary act of providing illumination for the evening Service becomes solemn praise of Christ, Who is the light of the world (cf. Jn. 1:4-9; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35-36 & 45-46). As the candle shining on the altar is not overcome by the gathering darkness, and its light, spread to the other lamps and candles, illumines the whole church, so Christ enlightens the whole world through the Faithful who shine with His brightness. Recognizing His presence among us (cf. Mt. 18:20), we joyfully greet Him and welcome Him as light for our lives.

At festal Vespers we now listen to words of Scripture. Except for feasts of Apostles - when they come from the New Testament Epistles - these readings are drawn from the Old Testament and are usually three in number. Following the pattern established by the ancient Synagogue, we read from the Law, from the Writings (history or wisdom books), and from the Prophets. Usually, the Lessons pertain in some way to the feast being celebrated. Reading them in the light of Christ, we understand them with the mind of His Church, seeing the New Testament prefigured in the Old, and the Old fulfilled in the New.

We enter the final portion of the Service with three litanies of supplication. We reiterate with greater insistency our prayers for the whole Church, for the leaders and defenders of our country, and for the people praying with us. We pray that the Lord preserve us from sin during the evening ahead, that He teach and enlighten us through understanding of His commandments; we praise, bless, and glorify Him for His everlasting love. Begging Him send us

an angel to guide and protect us, we ask for forgiveness of our offenses, for what is beneficial to our souls, for a life of peace and repentance leading to a holy death and a good account at the last judgment.

After bowing our heads during a silent priestly prayer, we sing a closing set of poetic theological texts interspersed with verses of Psalms. These lead to the singing of the Cantic of Simeon from St. Luke's Gospel (2:29-32), filling us with the peace and confidence of one who has at last seen God's word fulfilled in Christ, the light and salvation of all peoples. The association of this touching cantic with Vespers is also of great antiquity; already, in the fourth century, the Apostolic Constitutions (VII, 48) prescribe it as a close for evening prayer.

Now you may let Your servant  
go in peace, Master,  
according to Your word;  
for my eyes have seen Your salvation  
which You have prepared  
before all people:  
a light of revelation for the nations  
and the glory of Your people, Israel.

Cantic of Simeon  
(Lk. 2:29-32)

The Cantic flows into a solemn recapitulation of the Trisagion prayers that opened the Service. After chanting the troparia that announce the saint or mystery to be commemorated during the coming day, we again bow our heads to receive the Lord's blessing imparted by the priest. Like the aged Simeon, we depart in peace, enlightened by the grace of Christ, the lover of mankind and the Savior of our souls.

At Vespers we give thanks for the blessings of creation, we express repentance for our failings, we praise and welcome Christ as the light of our lives, and we are filled with His peace. Having more or less reached its present form about seven hundred years ago, the broad outlines of the Service are already attested in the late fourth century, and certain of its elements were considered very ancient, even then. Blessed be God Who has granted us to stand in direct line with the earliest of Christians in our worship of Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the Light and Salvation of the World.

# The Beauty of His House

From the beginning of our monastic journey we have held that beauty – be it in nature or through the work of human hands – is a path to the Divine. It has the power to touch the soul directly, to invoke in the heart feelings of joy, exaltation, or sadness, to elevate the mind to spiritual matters, and to make the soul more receptive to things divine. Conveying subliminal messages of God’s power and glory and of His limitless love, it serves as a sort of bridge between the material and spiritual realms.

Certainly, this understanding played a large part in our coming to this place of great natural beauty some twenty-four years ago, and it continues to shape our present and future vision. In addition to his prayer, the monk impacts the world primarily by his presence and witness. Despite the many constraints of survival we have had to face, we have always worked toward beautifying our immediate surroundings that they might better show forth God’s goodness and truth.

Erection of our new church in 2003 marked a new phase in the life of this monastery. Many passers-by know the monastery only by its buildings, of which the church is the most prominent; we are pleased our monastery is identified with so beautiful a structure. Resplendent in the russet and brown staining completed last summer, the golden-domed temple, rising beside the highway out of its purposefully evolving landscape, manifests the faith and commitment to beauty our life entails. So, too, do our Services.

We count it a blessing to be heirs of the Byzantine liturgical tradition, which presents a remarkable fusion of poetry, music, ceremonial,

and visual art. Within the limits imposed by our numbers, finances, and abilities, we strive to make our worship as beautiful as possible. Many have already found the Services we chant in our somewhat spare surroundings to be moving and inspiring. But we have still a long way to go, particularly in the realm of visual art.

In the Byzantine liturgy, text, music, and visual art form an indissoluble whole. The icons of the iconostasis, the decoration of the walls and ceiling, and the general beauty of the surroundings – as much as the chanting and ceremony – convey the sense of mystery and of the presence of God. We know that Christ is present

with us when we pray together in His name; in our liturgy, we seek to render His presence palpable. Beauty is integral to a church because it is God’s house, and everything about God is beautiful. We must love that beauty and constantly work toward its increase.

Three times the Divine Liturgy speaks about loving the beauty of God’s house. The usual Ambon Prayer near the end of the Liturgy calls upon God to sanctify and glorify those who love the beauty of His house. Near the Liturgy’s beginning the silent Prayer of the Second Antiphon makes the same request, and in identical words. While washing his hands during the Preparatory Rites before the Liturgy, the priest recites the Septuagint version of Psalm 25 (26): 6-12; professing his innocence and his love for the beauty of the Lord’s house, he begs divine protection and mercy that he may worthily and without blame, carry out his ministry at the altar. God grant us all the grace of zeal for His house – and the will to make it more beautiful.

You bless those who bless You, O Lord,  
and sanctify those who trust in You.  
Save your people and bless your inheritance.  
Protect the fullness of Your Church.  
Sanctify those who love the beauty  
of Your house  
and glorify them by your divine power.  
Do not forsake us who hope in You...

from the Divine Liturgy  
Prayer Behind the Ambon



Four years into the occupancy of our new church, its interior remains a blank canvas, its iconostasis void of icons, and its walls and ceilings empty, except for the darkening left by the passing years of incense, candles, and votive lamps. While not without a certain architectural grandeur, our house of worship is still sadly lacking the visual art that is so vital to the total Byzantine liturgical experience. With God's help we hope to begin addressing this lack within the coming year.

Because of the time and expense involved – to say nothing of the disruption – work will have to proceed in stages. We plan to begin work in the center of the church, at its highest point: the dome. There, looking down on the assembled worshipers, it is traditional to place the image of Christ Pantocrator: this Jesus, Who was crucified, is risen from the dead, and now sits at the right hand of God the Father; He, the Lord of all creation, the just judge, and the re-

deemer of our souls. In the eight panels of the drum immediately below, we envision images of the four Evangelists through whom we have come to know Him and of archangels who continually render Him glory. Lighting the images – and, indeed, the whole church – a sixty light chandelier will hang in the central tower, below the opening of the dome.

This first phase of decoration is the most complicated and disruptive of the project. It is also, because the necessary surface preparation, the scaffolding, and the electrical work, the most expensive. It is with some trepidation that we contemplate undertaking it at this time. Yet, if not now, when?

To love God, is to love beauty, for God is Beauty in the absolute. May He make us ever more aware of the beauty with which He surrounds us, and more mindful of His presence as we worship Him. May He strengthen us for perseverance in the task at hand.

# Complications

You will note that this fall issue of **Magnificat** is labeled volume 23, number 1. For the first time in quite a number of years, we are managing to get out only two issues of our newsletter this year. This does not represent the wave of the future – we hope to publish our usual four issues next year – rather, it was the result of special and unusual circumstances.

In January we discovered that a production and equipment problem had occurred during the final three weeks of last year. Having almost no jam fit to sell and no hope of further production until the problems could be rectified in the spring meant no sales income to help offset the cost of printing and mailing. Reluctantly we concluded it best to forgo a spring issue of the newsletter.

In April we made the necessary investment and installed new jar sterilizing equipment at the Jampot. We also insulated and isolated from the general bakery kitchen an area entirely devoted to the production of truffles. We also had planned to gain a little extra production space in our overcrowded kitchen by building a small storage room on to the rear of the building.

However, zoning problems prevented securing a building permit, and some time was lost on proposals, meetings, and paperwork.

Meanwhile, other developments, vital to the growth of the monastery unexpectedly lay before us. We acted quickly on the situation and we counted it a blessing, but it did demand a lot of time and attention in early summer. Then, suddenly, June ended, and the busy time was upon us!

Despite the long hours and often frantic days, summer has been a joy. The work has gone well, with few aggravations, and the weariness it brought has made for sound sleep. Most especially, however, the joy has come from the many good people who pass through our door each day and briefly bring their own particular uniqueness into our life. We relish the return of long time friends and the opportunity to make new ones. We wish them well during their time in our area and in every situation of their lives. We ask God to bless them, and we thank Him for having given this monastery so happy an interface with the world.

HOLY TRANSFIGURATION SKETE  
Society of St. John  
6559 State Highway M26  
Eagle Harbor, Michigan 49950