

Magnificat

Volume XXXVII
Number 1

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

Autumn
2021

Celebrating today the memory of His holy Forefathers,
O Faithful, let us sing a hymn of fervent praise
to Christ our mighty Savior,
who has exalted them among all the nations
and from them has wondrously raised up a staff of power,
the immaculate Virgin Mary,
who would blossom forth Christ,
the bearer of salvation and eternal life for us all.

From Great Vespers
Sunday of the Holy Forefathers of Christ

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 community 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.

What Child is This?

The singular celebration of the Lord's birth on December 25 came to the East from Rome around the middle of the Fourth Century. The Church in the East was already celebrating His birth on January 6. This primordial feast was known as Epiphany, which means *manifestation* or *shining forth*. Its principal focus was His baptism in the Jordan by John, but also included, as well as the Savior's birth, the visit of the Magi and the working of His first miracle at Cana: all events manifesting Christ to the world. The Armenian Apostolic Church preserves the feast in its primitive form even today.

By the century's end, celebrating the Lord's birth on December 25 was almost universal in the East. The older feast remained and – now known as Theophany, or *manifestation of God* – came to concentrate on His baptism and its ramifications. By means of mutual enrichment and holy exchange, Epiphany came to be celebrated in the West as a commemoration of the visit of the Magi – seen as representatives of the Gentile nations – which served to exemplify Christ's manifestation to the world. In the East, however, the Magi and their guiding star remained central to the celebration of the Lord's birth. Together, the two celebrations may be seen as one great Feast of the Lord's Manifestation, with the post-festive days of the Nativity merging with the pre-festive days of Theophany in the Great Twelve Days of Christmas.

Unlike those of the West, Christians of the Byzantine tradition do not celebrate Advent as a distinct liturgical season. Rather, the Church proposes to the faithful, by way of inner prepara-

tion for a worthy celebration of the Lord's birth, a moderate fast of some six weeks duration. Beginning on November 15, the day after the Feast of the Apostle Philip, the observance is usually known as the Philip's Fast. Unlike the Great Fast of Lent, this "Little Lent" is not primarily penitential, nor is it accompanied by liturgical texts emphasizing repentance. Its intent is for the observant to clarify their minds and free themselves from an over attachment to worldly concerns, to dispose their hearts to a deeper understanding of the true meaning of the Feast. In this, the texts of the liturgical cycle offer significant help.

Today the invisible God is joined to men
through the Virgin!

Today the Boundless One is bound
in swaddling clothes in Bethlehem!

Today God guides the Magi by a star
to worship Him,
with gold, frankincense, and myrrh,
foretelling His three-day burial.

Let us earnestly, then, cry out to Him:
O Christ God,
made flesh from the Virgin,
save our souls.

From Matins
Synaxis of the Theotokos

From as early as the Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple on November 21, the poetic texts of the Divine Office point increasingly to the coming celebration of the Savior's birth, and special Scripture readings are appointed for the two Sundays preceding the Feast, itself. These Sundays are devoted to the holy men and women who preceded Christ, His ancestors according to the flesh and those who were spiritually related to Him in any

way. Tracing salvation history from our common forefather, Adam, through the Patriarchs, Moses, the Judges, the Kings and Prophets of Israel, the Three Holy Youths of the Babylonian exile, the last and greatest of the Prophets, John the Baptist, and the Virgin Mary, they point to the fulfilment of Old Testament Messianic expectation in the birth of the Babe of Bethlehem. Christ comes to fulfill the Law and the Prophets; He brings to perfection the work of those who preceded Him and announced His coming; He established the New Covenant of love for which they longed.





At Divine Liturgy on the Sunday before Christmas the appointed reading from the Letter to the Hebrews (11:9-10; 32-40) reminds us of Abraham and all the holy ones who kept the faith but did not receive the promise until the coming of Christ brought a fulfillment greater than they could possibly imagine. The appointed Gospel reading is the first Chapter of St. Matthew's account. His long recitation of Jesus' genealogy confirms His human descent as a child of Abraham and a son of David, a Jew, and heir to Israel's kingship. Significantly, the genealogy ends with Mary. Joseph, the descendant of King David, is not cited as His father, but, rather, as the husband of Mary, His mother.

Recounting the marvels surrounding the event, the Evangelist makes plain the extraordinary nature of Jesus' birth and points toward His being the long-awaited Messiah. Through Joseph, He is Son of David according to law and custom; by the power of the Holy Spirit, He is Son of God; and through Mary, He is Son of Man, a human being – one of us! In Christ Jesus, God and Man are joined; born of His creature, the Creator becomes part of His creation. Christ, our true God has become Man for our salvation! This is what impels our Christmas joy.

The Eastern theological perspective sees things in a holistic manner. The true significance of Christ's birth can only be understood in the light of His teaching, of His suffering and death, and of His resurrection and ascension in glory. The Church beautifully manifests this perspective in sound through the singing of poetic texts during its services – and in form and color through its icons.

Thus, the rocks surrounding the cave of the Nativity icon closely resemble those surmounting the tomb in the Resurrection icon of the Angel seated upon the stone, the manger is nearly identical to the tomb itself, and the same bands that served as swaddling clothes for the Infant now portray the abandoned shroud of the risen Lord. The meaning and purpose of the Savior's coming among us are made clear in the light of His death and resurrection.

The Scriptures offer similar parallels. Worldly powers oppose and persecute Jesus from the beginning; what is foreshadowed by Herod's massacre of the Innocents is fulfilled in Jesus' death under the Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate. He who as a newborn is laid in a bed borrowed from dumb animals is laid in burial in a borrowed tomb, and the three days His parents searched for the Child Jesus intimate His three days in the grave.

Salvation history is one story from the Creation to the Second coming. In meditating on the Nativity of Christ we ponder the totality of its significance. We recall the circumstances and consequences of our fall, and we look toward our ultimate destination of Glory

Through the Incarnation of the Logos, God 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, and we are again capable of attaining to our original destination of eternal glory. Divine and human nature having been joined in Christ, we, insofar as we remain in Him, through the workings of the Holy Spirit, may share of His divinity.

Entering once again upon the celebration of the Lord's birth, let us be truly mindful of just what it is we are celebrating; let us strive by our words and deeds to be worthy of so great a love. Let us open ourselves to the wonder and stand in awe of God's taking on our flesh. With the whole Church, and from the depths 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

The Face of God

Each year, on the Sunday following October 10th, the Church of the Byzantine Tradition bids us remember the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council.

Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father (Jn. 14:9).

The many and profound implications of the Incarnation were not quickly grasped. The shepherds who gazed in wonder and the Magi who bore gifts could have realized only dimly – if at all – that, in the serene face of the Babe at Bethlehem, they were seeing the face of God. Indeed, it was only after the Resurrection – and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit – that the Disciples, who had lived so closely with Jesus during His earthly ministry, began to understand just who He really was. So too, through trial and controversy during the ensuing centuries, the Church’s understanding of this mystery, and for what it meant for the life and faith of believers, continued to grow. Thus, it was, some seven hundred and fifty years after the Resurrection, that a right understanding of the Incarnation enabled the holy images to be restored to the Eastern Church and intimately bound to her life and worship for ages to come.

Imagery seems to have played some part in Christian life and worship from the very beginning – we find crude drawings and religious symbols in the Roman Catacombs and other early Christian sites – but the freedom of the Church in the early Fourth Century brought it into much greater prominence. Great churches were erected, often at Imperial expense, and these came to be elaborately decorated, with religious symbols cut into their stonework and biblical scenes covering their vast expanses of wall. In a

society that employed portraits of the Emperor as a focus for patriotism and political stability, it was perhaps inevitable that individual portraits of Christ and of the saints would begin to appear and be used as a focus for prayer.

The Old Testament had been very explicit in forbidding the use of images in worship (cf. Ex. 20:4). Decorating the churches with religious symbols and biblical scenes might be condoned, particularly because of the role they played in educating the faithful, but praying before icons certainly did smack of idolatry.

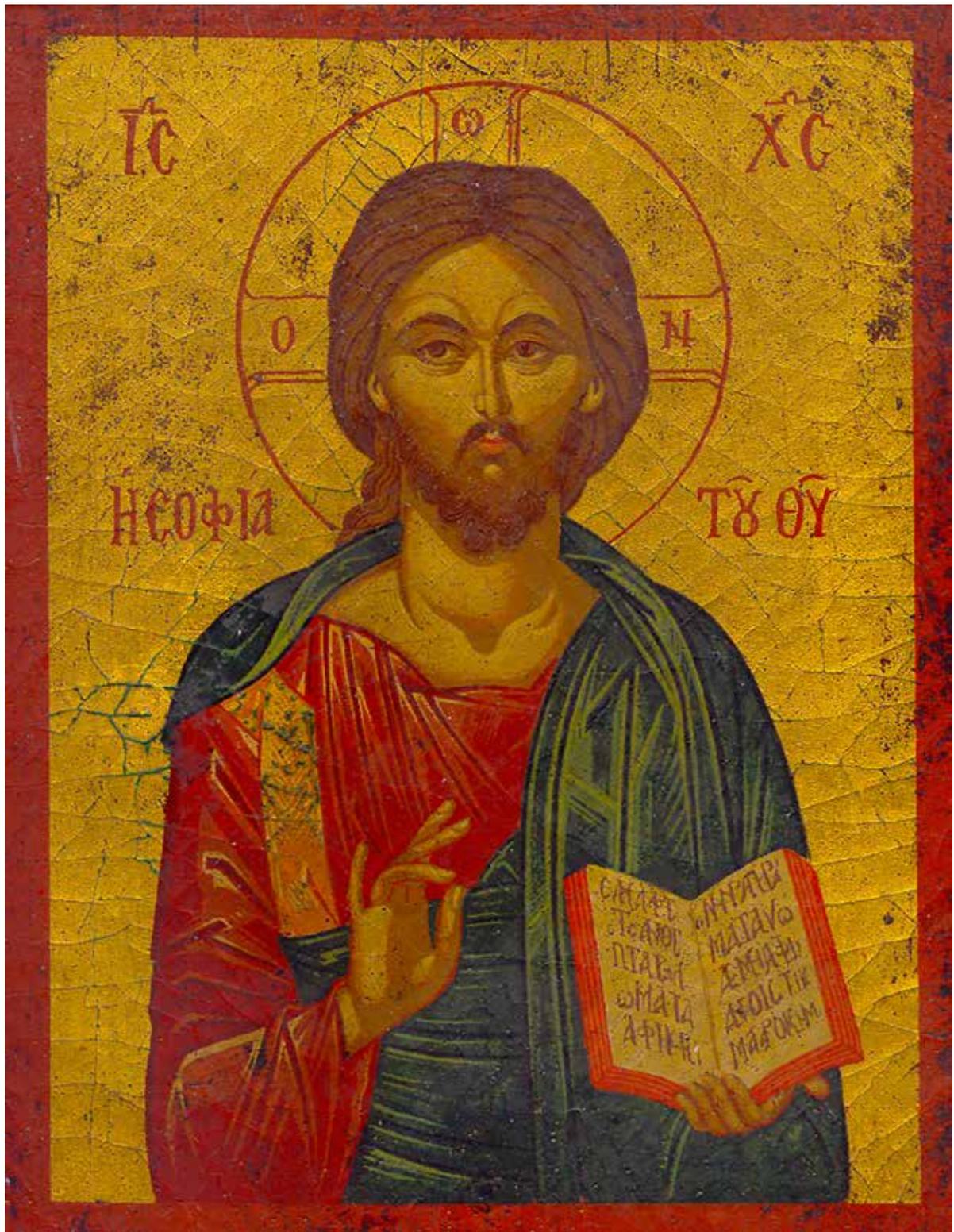
The Fathers were of varying opinions on the matter. Most Bishops, no doubt, exhibited a pastoral tolerance and saw the growing popular piety as good, a flowering of the faith among the people. While some felt that what was growing and flowering was not the true faith, but superstition and a relapse into idolatry, the veneration of icons continued to spread among the monks and the faithful and began to enter even into the public worship of the Church.

In 726 the Emperor Leo III published an edict declaring religious images to be idols and ordering them all to be removed from the churches and destroyed. The decree met with resistance among the people, opposition from the Patriarch, and a protest from the Pope of Rome. But the Emperor was steadfast, and the decree was ruthlessly enforced; those who resisted were persecuted violently. Monks in particular were singled out because of their great devotion to the icons, and many monasteries were suppressed or destroyed.

Distant from Constantinople and outside the sway of Imperial power, the West largely escaped the persecution, but it raged on in the East for more than a hundred years. In 787,

Rising from the Father like the sun,
the Son of God was born in two natures
from a woman.
Having come to know Him,
we cannot deny
the image of His features;
rather, we depict and honor it in faith.
Holding to the true Faith,
the Church venerates the icon
of the Incarnate Word.

Kontakion of the Fathers
of the Seventh Ecumenical Council.



during the brief respite offered by the Regency of the Empress Irene for her son, Constantine, about three hundred bishops, with two Legates representing the Pope of Rome, assembled in council at Nicaea. This Second Council of Nicaea, the Seventh Ecumenical Council, ordered the restoration of the images to the churches and defined their rightful place in Christian piety, a definition to which the Catholic and Orthodox Churches adhere to this very day:

Holy images remind the faithful of the prototypes they represent; they lift up the minds and hearts of those who behold them with faith and move them to prayer and veneration. This is not the adoration that belongs to God alone, but a relative veneration or respect which ancient custom accorded to holy things. Honor paid to an image passes to its prototype; one who venerates an image venerates the reality it depicts.

The century of Iconoclastic persecution left an indelible stamp on the Byzantine tradition. The love of religious imagery remains much stronger in the East than in the West, where the persecution had little or no effect. Moreover, the theological insights formulated by St. John Damascene, St. Theodore the Studite, and others in response to Iconoclasm have enriched our understanding of the effects of our Lord's Incarnation upon our world.

In Christ Jesus, God joined Himself to mankind for our salvation. He accomplished that salvation through the suffering, death, and resurrection, which He could endure only in the flesh since in His Divinity He was incapable of suffering. The fleshly body of Jesus – matter – had become the vehicle of salvation.

In Christ Jesus and in the Church, which is the continuation of His life on earth – His body,

St. Paul calls it (cf. 1 Cor.12:12f., 27; Rom. 12:5; Eph. 1:22f.) – matter can still convey salvation and grace. This is the basis of the Church's entire Sacramental system, of which the proper use of icons is a part.

Jesus Christ is true God and true Man. His two natures, though distinct from one another, cannot be separated. His Divinity is perfectly united to His humanity; His human form gives His Divinity substance, making it visible and palpable. In depicting His human form, something of His Divinity is manifested, as well.

The injunctions against religious images in the Old Testament were directed against idolatry (Ex. 20:4f.; 34:17; Deut.5:7-9; 12:2f.) – which the

veneration of images is not – and against attempting to portray Divinity, which, until the Incarnation, had been invisible (cf. Deut 4:15-18; Ex. 33:20, Deut. 4:12). But in Christ the invisible had become visible; images depicting Him and, by extension, His Blessed Mother and the saints who had some share in His divine life, were permissible and, in-

deed, salutary. They strengthened the faith and reaffirmed the truth of the Incarnation.

The resolution of these events of long ago and far away speaks strongly to us today, when Christianity is presented as merely a personal system of ethics, and when so many professional theologians take great pains to deny the Divinity of Christ and to “demythologize” the truth of His bodily Resurrection. Praise God for His guidance of His Church through perilous times, for His continuing preservation of her immemorial beauty, and for His vouchsafing the remembrance of His union with us through the holy icons.

Now the Church shines again
with the holy splendor of icons;
in her temples all creation chants
with those who sing to Him
who surpasses all mortal beauty:
Blessed are You,
O Lord, God of our Fathers.

From Matins of the Feast

HOLY PROTECTION MONASTERY
Society of St. John
6559 State Highway M26
Eagle Harbor, Michigan 49950

With Thanksgiving

This is the only issue of Magnificat you will be receiving this year. We pray circumstances in future years allow for more publication.

Far beyond the supply and production difficulties experienced at the Jampot this season, 2021 has proven a particularly difficult year for this holy monastery. This spring, in not unrelated incidents, we lost two members of our already undersized community.

One, a Consecrated Monk, who had been with us some fifteen years, announced his departure shortly after Pascha. Aside from the resulting manpower shortage – he had been deeply involved in many aspects of the monastery’s life and work – the renunciation of his solemn vows presented us with something of a canonical nightmare. His petition for dispensation of vows is still pending before the Holy See in Rome; we have been told not to expect a resolution one way or another until after the first of the year.

Then, in mid-June, our Novice experienced an emotional crisis and had to return home. Hopefully, time will allow for healing and his eventual return to the monastery. Meanwhile,

we are a third smaller than last year, and the work continues apace.

But God is merciful! Summer was soon upon us, and we have had no time to dwell on the loss. Some adjustments in choir allowed for the continuation of our schedule of Services without interruption. And the vital help of friends has gotten us through the season without major disaster or significant loss of revenue.

As we approach our national day of Thanksgiving, we look back on these events with gratitude and try to see in them the Lord’s direction. Things did not fall apart; connecting the dots with hindsight, we can discern warning signs, and patterns to be avoided; and the trials have brought growth and greater cohesion to us who remain. We trust the Lord to bestow what is needed next, and, in anticipation, we give Him thanks.

We thank Him, also, for you, our patrons, friends, and benefactors. Your faithfulness has helped us greatly along the way. In gratitude we humbly lift you up in prayer. May our gracious God provide all your needs and fulfill your desires according to His loving will.