

Magnificat

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News from
HOLY TRANSFIGURATION SKETE
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Society of Saint John
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Autumn
2015

O Apostle, beloved of Christ our God,
make haste to deliver a defenseless people:
for He who let you recline against His breast
will also heed your prayer for us.
Pray to Him, O John the Theologian,
that He dispel the pagan darkness
surrounding us,
and beg for us His peace
and boundless mercy.

Troparion of
St. John the Theologian

We are a Catholic Monastery of the Byzantine Rite, under the jurisdiction of the Eparch of Chicago, and belonging to the Ukrainian Metropoly in the United States of America, which is in union with the Pope of Rome, supreme pastor of the universal Church. We embrace Evangelical poverty, chastity, obedience, and stability of life, according to the Rule of Saint Benedict and the traditions of the Christian East. In our skete at Jacob's Falls, on the shore of Lake Superior in Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula, we devote ourselves to a common life of prayer and work for the praise, love, and service of God and for the upbuilding of His Kingdom through the arts.

Beloved Disciple

The multiplicity of our names sometimes sows confusion. Looking at a jar of jam, a first-time **Jam**pot customer may be moved to ask, "So your monastery is called *Poorrock Abbey*?" "Well, no. That's our brand name. The monastery is called *Holy Transfiguration Skete*, which is how you'll find us listed in the Catholic Directory." "OK. Then what's this *Society of Saint John* I see on the bottom of your sign?" "Ah, well, that's how Caesar knows us!"

The monastery is recognized under Civil Law as the Society of Saint John, Inc. an ecclesiastical corporation registered in the State of Michigan. Complying with all applicable rules and regulations of State and Federal Law in matters pertaining to property, business, revenues, and taxation, this Corporation exists to serve the monastery and enables it to function as a legal entity under prevailing Civil Law.

From our proposed
Monastic Typicon

And so it was in the beginning, as well. Predating the founders' arrival at Jacob's Falls by several months, the Society of Saint John allowed them to practice monastic poverty from the start. The non-profit corporation would hold title to all the monastery's assets; the individual monks would devote the entirety of their labor to the monastery's survival and growth, but would have no legal claim on any of its goods.

The founders took great care in naming this legal entity of initial and enduring importance. They had come with the inspiration to build a monastery that would be dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary; they could think of no better patron than the Beloved Disciple to whom Christ had committed her care (cf. Jn. 19:26-27). From the beginning, then, the Beloved Disciple has been the special patron of our life and work.

It was a great delight, therefore, to discover, on embracing it some twenty years ago, that the

Beloved Disciple of the Savior,
O virginal theologian,
from the Cross Christ entrusted
His virgin mother to your care,
and you preserved her
with great devotion,
intercede, therefore, for the salvation
of our souls.

From Vespers
for St. John the Theologian

that was said to rise from his tomb at Ephesus.

In practice today, the two celebrations are essentially the same. They share the same Troparion and Kontakion and many of the same poetic texts at Vespers and Matins, and where they differ, their tenor and message are essentially the same. The same three readings grace Vespers on both occasions, as do the Gospel readings at Matins and Divine Liturgy. Different Epistle readings are appointed for the two feasts, however.

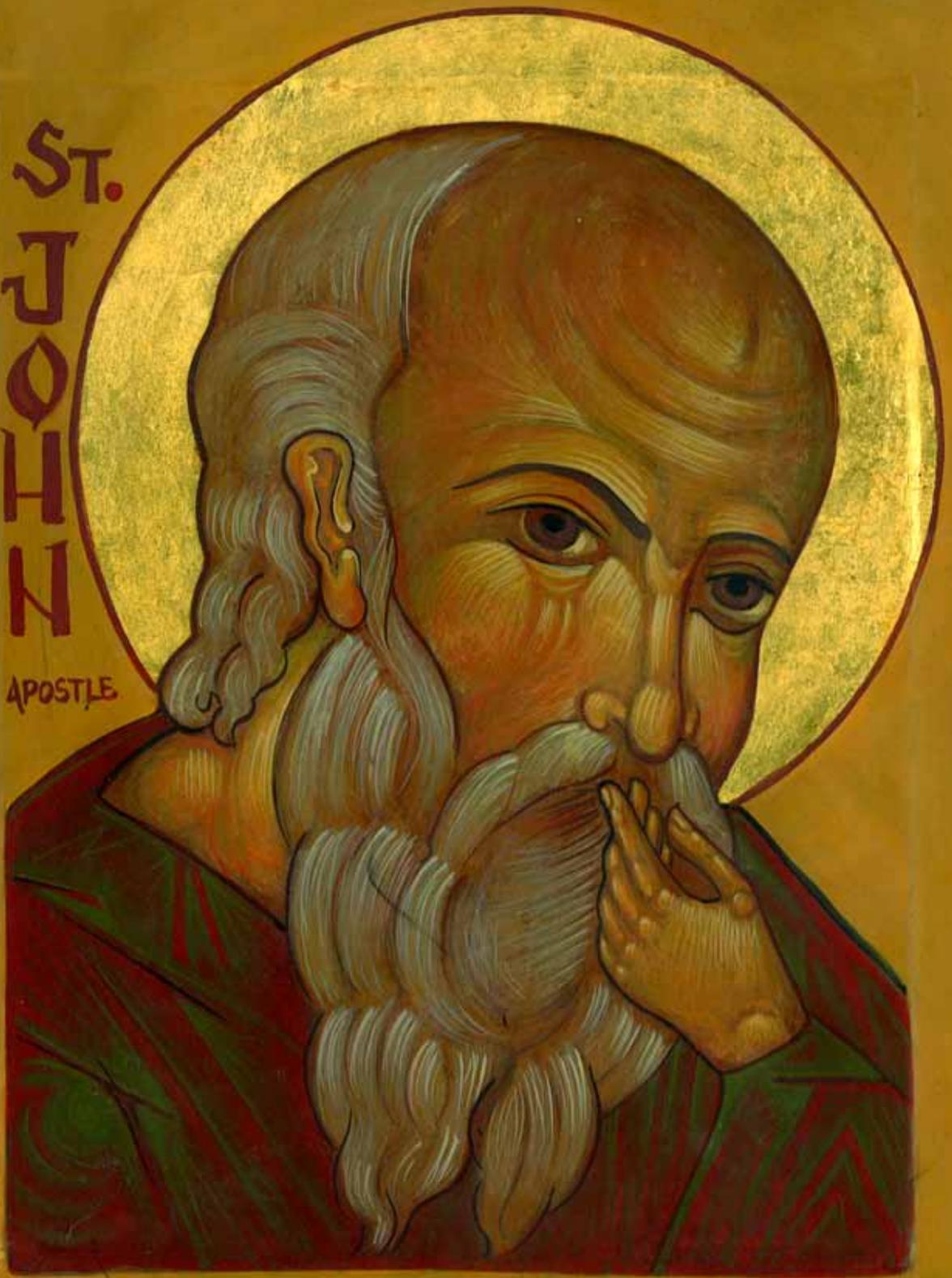
The Vespereal readings are all taken from the First Epistle of St. John (3:21 - 4:6; 4:11-16; and 4:20 - 5:5). The Apostle tells us that we may have confidence before God, and we will receive what we ask for, if our conscience is clean and we please Him by keeping His commandments to believe in Jesus Christ and to love one another. Thus, we abide in Him and He in us. We know He abides in us by the Spirit He has given us, but we must test the spirits, for not all are from God. If the spirit acknowledges Christ come in the flesh, it is from God, if not, it is the spirit of Antichrist, which is already abroad in the world. But God's Spirit in us is greater, and through it, we overcome the world. God loves us so much that He sent His Son as our propitiation. We cannot see God, but we know He abides in us if we love one another, for God is Love. We cannot claim to love God while hating our brother. We are all children of the same God, and one who loves the parent must love the child, as well. Loving one another, we love God and keep His

Byzantine Tradition holds two feasts in his memory. The principal feast, on September 26, as is usual for human saints, commemorates his death, his passing from earthly to eternal life. His secondary feast, often referred to as the Synaxis, originated as a remembrance of the miraculous appearance of the "Holy Manna", a healing dust that was said to rise from his tomb at Ephesus.

ST.

JOHN

APOSTLE



commandments. Thus, we overcome the world through faith.

The Epistle reading for the Divine Liturgy at the feast of the Disciple's passing (I Jn. 4:12-19) partially overlaps the Vespéral reading and continues their message. We love God because He has first loved us. When His love is perfected in us we will have boldness before Him on the day of judgment. For true love casts out all fear. At the Synaxis we again read from the Apostle's first letter (I Jn. 1:1-7). Here he testifies to the reality of the Incarnation in which we must believe. What was from the beginning, the word of life, the Apostle has seen, heard, and touched, in the person of Jesus Christ. With great joy he proclaims His manifestation to the world.

The Gospel reading at the Divine Liturgy for both feasts is brief (Jn. 19:25-27; 21:24-25). Its first three verses describe the scene at the foot of the Cross that first recommended the Beloved Disciple to the founders. The moment is poignant, and we hear it recounted on feasts of the Holy Cross, as well as in the Passion Narratives of Holy week. Its significance is more than sentimental. Here the Disciple represents all the faithful. By His sacrificial death, Christ has made us adopted children of His Father and co-heirs with Him of the Kingdom (cf. Rom. 8:15-17). In making us children of His Father, He also gives us a mother. Here Mary represents the Church, the mother He has given to nourish, guide, and protect us until we come into our inheritance.

The last two verses also conclude the Gospel read at Matins (Jn. 21:15-25). This final episode of St. John's Gospel, although it does mention the Beloved Disciple, is primarily about St. Peter

and speaks powerfully to the hierarchs of the Church. In Peter's threefold declaration of love and the Lord's triple command to feed the sheep, we see the essence of their role in preserving the Church as the mother who nourishes, protects, and guides, a role that sometimes will lead them to martyrdom.

The final verses identify this same Beloved Disciple as the author of the Gospel. They testify that his witness, though not exhaustive, is certainly true.

The testimony of the Beloved Disciple has had a great impact on Byzantine tradition, liturgy, and piety. We often hear this particular

passage of His Gospel at Matins. It is the eleventh in the cycle of Resurrection narratives read at Matins on Sundays through the year; we also hear it on the feasts of other Apostles. Likewise the Vespéral readings from his first letter appear frequently in celebrations of various Apostles. Five of the eleven Resurrection Gospels flow from his pen, and his recount-

As a Son of Thunder,
O Apostle John,
you proclaimed loudly to men:
"In the beginning was the word!"
For in faith reclining
against the breast of your Master
you have drawn from Him
streams of theology
with which you water all creation.

From Matins for
St. John the Theologian

ing of Christ's farewell discourse and high priestly prayer (Jn. 14 - 17) dominates the Passion Narratives of the final days of Holy Week. The Liturgical Cycle grants his Gospel pride of place, reading it at Divine Liturgy during the great fifty days from Pascha to Pentecost.

The high Christology of the Beloved Disciple informs Byzantine piety. This Jesus, who suffered, died, and was buried, has risen and now reigns in glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit. We rejoice in Him with trembling as we dare to call upon Him as our Lord, God, and Savior.

Milestones

We have often turned to the Beloved Disciple in prayer, seeking his intercession in our need for more men to share in the life and work of this holy monastery. It was with great delight, then, that the Synaxis of the Apostle this spring witnessed the Consecration of our Novice of three years as a monk of this monastery and the clothing of a new Novice to take his place. We had scheduled similar events in other years for this Patronal Feast which occurs during a time when our work schedule is still somewhat flexible. But this was the first occasion of an Investiture and a Monastic Consecration back to back. The conjunction invites some comparisons.



Having lived with us some six months as Candidate and Postulant – preliminary stages not specified in Canon Law, but which centuries of experience have proved prudent and useful – Brother James entered upon the first canonical stage of monastic life at Vespers for the Feast on the evening of May 7, 2015. Present for the event were various members of his family, as well as the assembled monastic community and numerous friends of the monastery. The Service followed the order set forth in the Euchologion published in 1902 at the Kiev Caves Lavra, the earliest and greatest of the monasteries of Ukraine.

The Euchologion prescribes no Scripture readings beyond those normally appointed for the feast, adding only Psalms 26 (27) and 15 (16), which express a longing to live in the house of the Lord and the conviction that happiness is to be found only in Him. Along with a special Troparion and Theotokion, the presentation of the new Novice to the community and a brief exhortation toward zeal and obedience, these texts extend Vespers by perhaps fifteen or twenty minutes. Enshrined amidst the texts, two ancient rites convey the essence of the occasion.

First, invoking the Name of the Holy Trinity, the Hegumen cuts the Postulant's hair in the form of a cross, and then, while the monks sing Psalm 15, he cuts it off completely. The new Novice then puts off the clothes he has worn as a Postulant and receives from the hand of the Hegumen the tunic and belt of the monastic habit. After donning the habit in silence, he learns the name by which he is to be known in monastic life.

Both rites are of venerable antiquity. Tonsure, or the cutting of the hair, was known before the seventh century, and distinctive clothing marked the monastic state as early as the fourth. Like the bestowal of the new name, they are analogous to Baptism. Tonsure, which represents a shedding of all earthly cares, desires, and attachments, corresponds to the renunciations that precede the Sacramental bath and anointing. The habit is a reminder of the white robe with which the newly baptized are clothed, although now it is black in repentance for sin.

The conversion and commitment demanded of the monk are not, of course, so easy as a haircut and a change of clothes. After a formal introduction to the community and a brief exhortation to zeal and obedience, the new Novice now takes his place among his brothers in the monastic choir. Canon Law prescribes he spend three



Behold, I present to you before God this new member of our family. Instruct him to live in the fear of God and in every virtue by your words and example. Watch carefully, that his soul not suffer destruction because of your carelessness; for you will give answer to God for it on the Day of Judgment.

years as a Novice. Soon he will begin to receive additional responsibilities in choir and in other areas of the monastery's life and work. Some of these he may find irksome or difficult. But he assumes them with joy, confident of the Lord's help and protection.

* * *

The following day, May 8, 2015, at Divine Liturgy for the Synaxis of St. John the Theologian, our Brother John, having completed his canonically prescribed Novitiate of three years, received Monastic Consecration at the hands of Hieromonk Nicholas, our Hegumen. Now bound perpetually to the monastery, its bless-

ings, and its struggles, he takes his place among the Elders of the community; he possesses a deliberative vote in their councils, and, in accord with the ancient tradition handed on to us, he is now addressed as Father.

In contrast to the confidence and serenity of the previous evening's Rite of Investiture, the Euchologion prescribes a Service considerably longer, and marked with a greater weight and sobriety as befit the occasion. As the prescribed texts make abundantly clear, it is not the making of a promise that brings merit, but, rather, the faithfulness with which the promise is carried out. The Novice is about to make some very big promises, which will bind the monastery, as well as himself. The appointed texts emphasize the magnitude of the undertaking.

Except for the addition of a few special petitions to the Great Litany, Divine Liturgy begins as usual and continues through the Little Entrance and the singing of the day's Troparia and Kontakia. While the choir sings the Troparion appointed for Monastic Consecration, the Novice is led into the Temple in a state of undress. Prostrate before the Royal Doors of the Altar, he is painfully aware of his personal inadequacies and failings. Yet he trusts in the love of God and begs entrance into His house.

Raising him to his feet, the Hegumen asks him why he has come before the holy assembly. *To embrace the life of asceticism.* Does he wish to be deserving of the angelic habit and to live the monastic life? *I do, Reverend Father, with the help of God.* The Hegumen responds that he has chosen a good and holy work, but he must persevere in it. *For good works are conceived in labor and achieved with pain.*

During a brief admonition, the Hegumen encourages the Novice to respond joyfully to the Lord's call, yet also with a certain sense of fear. He must be careful in answering the questions he is about to be asked. Along with the friends and family assembled with the monks, the Savior Himself is present, together with His Blessed Mother and all the Angels and Saints. They will

witness what he is about to promise and will remember on the Last Day, judging him according to the manner in which he has carried it out.

Does he come freely? Does he renounce the world and all it holds? Will he remain in the monastery and ascetic life for the rest of his days? Will he persevere in chastity, sobriety, and poverty? Will he be obedient to the Superior and to the whole monastic community? Will he endure the hardship and poverty of monastic life for the sake of the Kingdom? Will he observe all the ordinances and customs of the monastic tradition as handed down by the Typicon and Superiors of the monastery?

Having been assured by the Novice that he will do all these things *with the help of God*, the Hegumen addresses him with a long exhortation concerning what he ought to embrace and what he must avoid in his life as a monk. He must keep himself free of sin, be humble, and lay aside any worldly forwardness. He must be obedient and not complain or make excuses when assigned a task. He must be vigilant in his personal and communal prayer and unwavering in his fasting. He must be courageous in sickness or temptation and always be on guard against evil thoughts. Having made a good beginning on the road to the Kingdom of Heaven, he must not regret what he has left behind, but must prefer nothing to the love of God. He must not flinch in the face of poverty or hardship or the misunderstanding and contempt of the world. In the midst of trials he should recall the martyrs who won eternal life by embracing death in union with Christ, for to follow Him means to take up the Cross.

Does the Novice confess all these things and agree to hold fast to them to the end of his life,

by the grace of Christ? *I do, Reverend Father, with the help of God!*

The Hegumen then prays for his encouragement. He assures him that God, who welcomes all who come to Him with fervent desire and love, will provide him with the strength to fulfill His commandments. He begs the Lord that He receive, embrace, and shield the Novice; that He be for him a strong rampart, a rock of endurance, and a fellow combatant in his struggles against the Enemy; that He grant him courage, consolation, and peace, raising him when he falls, and counting him worthy of sharing the lot of the holy Fathers and Mothers who have gone before

him in monastic life; that with them he may inherit the Kingdom of Heaven in Christ Jesus.

Resting his book on the Novice's head, the Hegumen prays further: the Novice has forsaken all worldly possessions, family, and friends to follow Christ. The Hegumen begs God to accept him and guide him in the path of truth, to surround him with the power of the Holy Spirit so that no deception may overtake

him, and to fill him with patience and make him pleasing in His sight, through the intercession of the holy Mother of God and all the saints who have been pleasing to Him throughout the ages.

Turning toward the Royal Doors, the Hegumen addresses God, who has revealed different paths to salvation through Jesus Christ. He begs acceptance for this man who has left all and offered himself as a living sacrifice. As he is about to lose his senseless hairs in Tonsure, may he also shed senseless designs and actions. May he be found worthy to take up the easy yoke and light burden of Christ, to embrace the Cross and follow Him unreservedly. He asks God to preserve him in holiness and in the intention of keeping

Receive me with open arms,
O my Savior.
I have spent my life as a prodigal:
Beholding the wealth
of Your inexhaustible mercy,
do not despise my heart.
For to you, O Lord,
I cry in sorrow:
Father, I have sinned
against heaven and You.

Troparion for Monastic Consecration



*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.*

His commandments and to count him among the Chosen on the Last Day.

Having thus prayed at length – and only after having three times received the Novice’s assurance, by word and demonstration, that he is approaching the life willingly and free from constraint – the Hegumen proceeds with the ancient symbolic actions that lie at the heart of the Rite. Receiving the scissors from the Novice’s hand, he again cuts his hair in the form of the Cross:

Our brother, John, 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, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Let us pray for God’s mercy.

As they will during the following bestowal of the holy Habit, the congregation responds to the Hegumen’s invitation to pray with a threefold, *Lord have mercy*. As he bestows upon the monk the various items of the habit, the Hegumen of-

fers a brief explanation of the symbolism and purpose of each and requests the congregation’s prayers.

Thus the Scapular and Cross worn under the monk’s clothing serve as a constant reminder of the easy yoke and light burden of Christ the monk has assumed and of the humiliation, suffering, and death on the Cross the Savior endured for our sake; and also as a sign that, in so far as possible, he must strive to imitate this in his own life. The

Tunic is a robe of gladness for putting away all the sorrows and troubles proceeding from the world and for unending joy in Christ. The Belt symbolizes the power of truth, mortification of the body and renewed strength of spirit, for courage and caution in the battle against evil. His Shoes tell of his readiness to proclaim the Good News of peace, and they encourage his swiftness and diligence in obedience and in good deeds. The Mantle clothes him in the robe of salvation and the armor of righteousness, and surrounds him with the remembrance of his own death, that he might consider himself crucified to the world and dead to every evil deed, but ever alive for the shining forth of every Christian virtue. The Hood covers his head with the helmet of hope for withstanding the snares of the Devil and with the veil of humility and obedience for the love of spiritual wisdom and the shielding of his eyes from worldly vanity and foolishness. Bestowing the Prayer Rope as the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, he exhorts him to always

have the name of Jesus on his lips and in his heart and mind through diligent practice of the Jesus Prayer. Finally, he gives him a lighted candle as a reminder that, through a pure and virtuous life and a good character, he must be a light for the world that men may see and give glory to God. Thus, the monk is clothed in the whole armor of God and equipped for battle against evil and for vanquishing all the powers of the darkness of this age.

Such military language may seem out of place in our time, and some modern Christians may even find it offensive, but it springs from the writings of the Holy Apostle Paul. We will soon hear it all again in the special Epistle reading (Eph. 6:10-17) appointed for the Divine Liturgy of Monastic Consecration. It is as appropriate for us and our time and place as it was for the Christians struggling at Ephesus some two thousand years ago. Perhaps it is even more so now, as we begin to feel the tightening grip of the spirit of the age, and all around us the darkness deepens.

The Euchologian also prescribes a special Gospel reading (Mt. 10:37-38; 11:28-30) to be added to the one regularly appointed for the day. Christianity is a serious undertaking. It calls us to love nothing and no one more than we love Christ. Inevitably, this will entail a certain amount of sorrow and suffering; to follow Christ is to approach and embrace the Cross. Yet, in so doing, we

also find rest and peace of soul. Indeed, His yoke is easy and His burden light.

Monastic life is merely the life of the Christian, radically and single heartedly led. Like all Christians, the monk is called to fight against evil, to root it out within himself and where ever else he may find it. His weapons in the battle must be spiritual, for, as St. Paul tells us (Eph. 6:12), our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual forces of wickedness on high. In his commitment to this spiritual warfare, the monk is a model and an encouragement to Christians in the world. The brightness of his witness consoles and strengthens the faithful and scatters some of the darkness that surrounds us all.

We thank God for Father John's definitive commitment to the life of this monastery. We pray, through the intercession of the Beloved Disciple, that He inspire other men to join ranks with him and his brother monks in the ongoing struggle.



Our brother, John, 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.

Fruitions

Having arrived at Jacob's Falls in late August more than three decades ago, we tend to mark the years from autumn to autumn. The year just completed, our thirty-second on this blessed shore, proved to be the most visually productive since the dedication of our monastic church a dozen years ago. After seven years of bureaucratic delays and legal battles, we began work on a major **Jampot** expansion at the close of the season last fall. Although equipment continued to arrive well into the summer – the last piece being installed only in mid-August – the new facility was up and running by the beginning of the season and contributed greatly to its success.

Many times larger than the modest storage building originally envisioned in the spring of 2007, in addition to abundant cold and dry storage, the new building accommodates a receiving area for berries and other production materials, office space, an employee lunch room, and an area devoted to the soaking and wrapping of fruitcakes. These are all areas of which we have long been in need, and removing their functions from the existing kitchen has made the summer's work proceed more efficiently. The new building's major impact, however, has been in the production of confections.

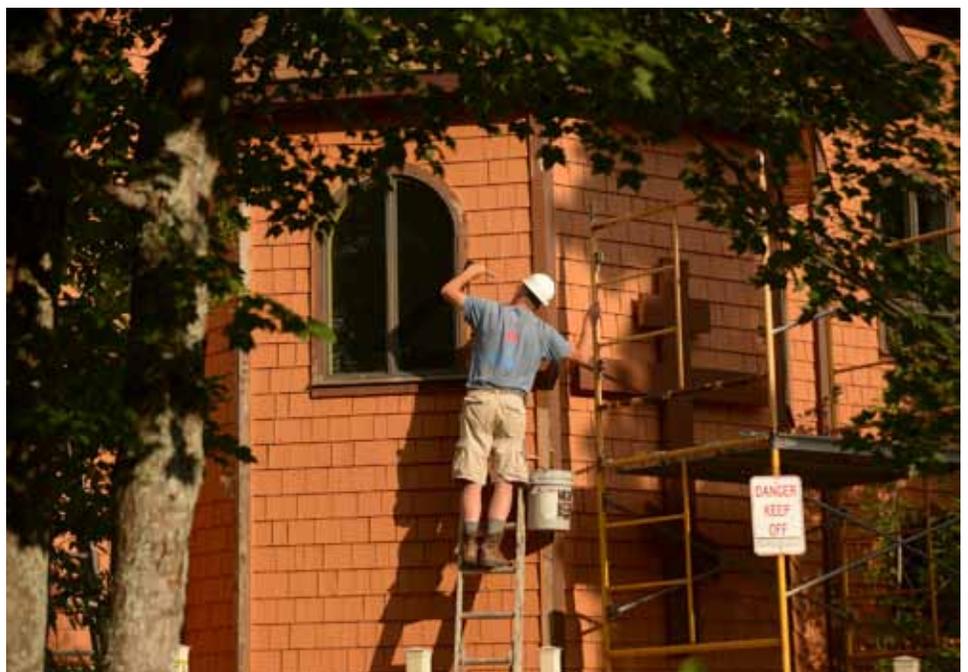
Candy is one of **Jampot's** newer offerings, and we have been hard pressed to keep up with demand; recent years have seen many days with little or no candy on the counter. This season we have been able to keep abreast of it; we have never been long out of the ever popular caramels and brittles; and, though varieties may have varied, we have maintained a good array of chocolates throughout the summer. We look forward to addressing other production issues in future expansions.

The current expansion completes the first of three projected

phases. Phase II will accommodate more efficient jam production, and Phase III will provide a new sales room and bakery. Work will proceed at intervals determined principally by the availability of funds. We will keep you posted.

Another long-germinating project came to fruition this spring. *Gladsome Light*, a sixty-nine minute film about our life at Jacob's Falls, was assembled from footage taken at various times over a period of three years. It was well received by the select audience present at its premiere in Marquette at the end of April and has since garnered several favorable reviews; one critic described it as a virtual retreat. It has been available online since May and at the shop on DVD and Blu-ray Disc since Independence Day. We look forward to its wider distribution in the future.

Meanwhile, twelve years of bright sun and harsh winters had taken their toll on the exterior of the monastery. The stain had been flaking off in many places, and the deterioration was becoming increasingly evident. When the painters began surface preparation in late July, they found whole areas where the existing stain practically fell off as they scraped. The work being completed by the end of August, the structure enters its thirteenth winter looking better than new.





At the Jampot

Jampot's new entrance elicited even more comment this summer than the new building looming up beyond the sales room. Patrons have complimented its appearance and expressed pleasure at the ease of its graded approach to the entry door. Moreover, its curved retaining wall serves to direct incoming traffic to the parking lot and away from customers exiting the building, and the terrace provides a congregating area for those waiting to enter.

Originally projected as part of Phase III of the expansion program, the presence of heavy equipment and ongoing grading for adequate drainage of the new loading dock recommended its construction this spring. Because of seasonal load restrictions on M26, **Jampot** was already open when work began. Workmen raised the grade step by step to allow customers access during construction. Patrons stepped around them as they set the paving blocks and completed spreading the gravel on the Saturday before Memorial Day. With the addition of potted shrubbery during the following week, everything was ready for the influx of summer visitors.

And they came. July and August saw a steady stream of customers at the shop, and even the marginal months of May and June showed a significant increase in sales. **Jampot** revenue was up by about twenty percent through the end of August. For the most part we kept up with it, although by late August we were running out of fruitcakes and holes were appearing on the jam shelf. The quieter weeks before and after Labor Day allowed for restocking before the busy color season.

The weather, however, has not been so co-operative. A delayed spring and a cooler than usual summer resulted in some berries being in short supply. As thimbleberries and wild raspberries finally began to ripen in mid-August, we raised the price we were paying in the hope of achieving a better supply. In the end, we obtained only half of what we had hoped. We are taking steps to make the jam last as long as possible.

Some weeks of beautiful color remain. We hope you will be able to visit. If not – or in anticipation of holiday needs – please avail yourself of the items offered on the following pages.

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

Through the Love of Friends

While, perhaps, useful for gauging progress, yearly enumerations tend to give a false picture. Happenings always come in train, and one can never be certain what the ultimate effect of an event – or even a series of them – might be. Sometimes a seeming reversal or roadblock may be the seed of a future good, as we have already seen several times in the brief life of this monastery. The recent Jampot addition is only the most recent case in point.

Certainly, without the initial denial of a zoning permit in the spring of 2007, development would have occurred differently and probably at a slower pace. So, too, the various abortive attempts at settlement along the way would, no doubt, have resulted in something less satisfactory. Each event in the train contributed to the outcome, and we can now see the guiding Hand of God in it all.

Ultimately, the resolution of the seven year controversy came, not by force of legal action, but through a softening of attitude – a change of heart. We believe that the grace of this conversion came in large part through the intervention of friends. Those who spoke at meetings, placed phone calls, or upheld the monastery in casual

conversation – often with little or no immediately obvious effect – acted as true agents of divine providence. Through their efforts, the peace was won.

Such has often been the case. This monastery has grown and prospered through the love of friends. Thus, it always occasions sadness when one of them departs this life. Several such passages occurred during the past twelve months. These women – unknown to one another, yet connected through their love of this holy monastery – had all been benefactors for many years, and their generosity has made possible much of what is here today. So, through their legacy, they live on in this place – and also in the hearts of future generations of monks who will read out their names each year on the Saturdays of the Faithful Departed. God grant them blessed repose and eternal memory.

Always remembering them in prayer, we honor their memory best by striving to build on what their generosity has thus far wrought. We trust in the long train of God's providence and mercy, and we hold close to our hearts all who continue to make possible our survival, life, and growth on this blessed shore.