

Magnificat

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News from
HOLY TRANSFIGURATION SKETE
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Society of Saint John
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You are the beauty of Jacob, O Theotokos,
and the heavenly ladder
by which Christ came down to earth.
These images truly manifest your glory and honor,
and the angels in heaven,
together with earthly men,
bless you who gave birth to the God of all,
for you pray for the whole world
and spread your Holy Protection
over those who celebrate this holy feast.

From Great Vespers for
the Holy Protection of the Mother of God

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.



Maternal Intercession

On October first we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Protection of the Mother of God. Afforded only minor importance in current Greek tradition – the Great Synaxaristes lists it as seventh among the nine commemorations proper to the day – it remains a principal celebration in the Church of the Byzantine/Slav tradition. The proper texts for the Feast were composed by St. Andrew Bogoliubov, Grand Prince of Vladimir from 1157 to 1174. Its origins, however, lie with another, less certainly dated, Andrew, who is known to tradition as St. Andrew the Fool.

One of that peculiarly Byzantine class of saints who give up everything – even human respect – for the love of Christ, Andrew did not wish to be known as holy. Living his life of asceticism and contemplation under the guise of imbecility and buffoonery, he is said to have been granted the grace of many visions and private revelations, the last and greatest of which gave rise to the current celebration.

Founded by the Empress Pulcheria in the middle of the fifth century, the church of the Blessed Virgin in Blachernae was the most famous of her shrines in the Imperial City of Constantinople. In it was enshrined a relic of the Virgin's veil, and to it the people of the City often repaired to seek her protection in times of trouble. Praying there at the All-Night Vigil of Sunday one October first, together with his companion and disciple, Epiphanius, and a large crowd of people, St. Andrew saw the Virgin enter the church clothed in brilliant light and supported aloft by a host of singing angels.

Escorted at each hand by St. John the Baptist and the Beloved Disciple of Christ, St. John the Theologian, she proceeded from the Great Doors of the narthex to the front of the church and stood on the ambon of the soleas. There she

knelt and prayed at great length, shedding many tears. Then, rising and entering the sanctuary, she removed the Holy Veil from its golden reliquary and placed it over her head. Turning back towards the people assembled in the nave, she removed the veil from her head and extended it with her hands over the congregation. Andrew and Epiphanius, who alone experienced the vision and heard the angelic singing, saw the shimmering veil spread over the entire throng of faithful gathered in the church, bathing them in the glow of its radiance.

As the Mother of God rose to heaven the radiance gradually faded and became imperceptible, but the seer perceived that the grace and protection it symbolized remained with the faithful because of the holy veil enshrined in the church and by virtue of the Virgin's prayers.

The account is shrouded with the dimness of ages past. The church of the Most Holy Virgin in Blachernae is no more. The basilica built by the Empress Pulcheria burned down in 1070 and was re-

built, but was again destroyed by fire in 1434, only nineteen years before the Great City, itself, and the final vestiges of the Roman Empire in the East, succumbed to the Turks. The golden reliquary and the precious veil it enshrined are long lost, victims of the flames or of looters who could have no appreciation of their true worth.

Nor is it possible to date the vision or, indeed, the life of St. Andrew the Fool, himself. The many manuscript editions of the *Life of Saint Andrew the Fool for Christ* by the Priest Nicephorus of the City's Great Church of Holy Wisdom say only that he lived during the reign of the "pious Emperor Leo". Some scholars maintain that this refers to fifth century emperor Leo I, who had manifested a great devotion to the Blessed

Today,
the Virgin stands in the Church,
and with the choirs of Saints
invisibly prays to God for us.
Angels and Archangels do homage,
Apostles and Prophets sing praise,
because for our sake
the Mother of God
prays to the pre-eternal God.

Kontakion of the Feast

Virgin and who had donated to her church at Blachernae the golden reliquary for her veil. Others incline toward Leo VI who reigned from 870-912. Although internal evidence from the *Life*, itself, would suggest the earlier date, the matter remains unsettled among academics.

But the significance of the feast does not lie in the historical details. What is celebrated in recalling the vision is not so much a particular mystical experience in the life of an ancient holy man, but, rather, the unfailing reality of the Holy Protection of the Mother of God – her intercession for those who cry out to her in faith – throughout the ages.

The Eastern Christian liturgical tradition constantly reiterates three special privileges of the Virgin Mary: her divine maternity, her perpetual virginity, and her intercession on our behalf before the throne of God. Having been chosen and prepared beforehand, and having freely accepted the divine will and made it her own, without a human father she conceived

and gave birth in time to the Son of God, who was born of the Father, without a mother, before all ages. As a special and unique vessel of grace poured out for the salvation of the world, she retains her virginity in perpetuity; it is fitting that the door through which God entered His creation should remain forever closed (cf. Ezk. 44:2). She also remains eternally the mother of her Son, Christ our God; with a mother's confidence she ever supplicates Him on behalf of those who implore her intercession.

The scriptural reading appointed for the feast – all common to feasts of the Blessed Virgin – illumine these matters. In the first reading at Vespers (Gen. 28: 10-17) we hear of Jacob's dream at Bethel and recognize the ladder reaching up

to heaven as a symbol of the Virgin Mary, for by means of her, God, in the Person of her Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, came down to earth; making Jacob's words our own, we declare her the House of God, the Gate of Heaven.

In the second Vesperal reading (Ezk. 43: 27 – 44:4) we hear of the prophet's vision of the Temple, the place where the Lord promises to look with favor upon His people. In its outer east gate that must be kept shut since the Lord the God of Israel has passed through it, and we understand a foreshadowing of the perpetual virginity of the Mother of God, through whom God physically entered our world, and who, like the Temple, the House of God, was filled with His glory.

The symbolism of the Virgin as Temple returns in the Epistle reading at Divine Liturgy (Heb. 9: 1-7) where the Temple of former times is described, with its Ark of the Covenant and Holy of Holies where only the High Priest may enter only once a year with an offering of blood for his sins and those of the people. We see in the Ark an image of

the Theotokos, whose womb contained Christ so that He, though sinless, might ultimately enter into the Heavenly Sanctuary with His own blood to free us from our sins.

Likewise, the seemingly extraneous image of personified Wisdom calling all to her table in the third reading at Vespers (Prov. 9: 1-11) ties to the Gospel reading at Divine Liturgy (Lk. 10: 38-42; 11: 27-28). The Virgin's namesake, Mary the sister of Martha, has demonstrated true wisdom and chosen the better part in sitting at the Lord's feet and listening to His words of life. In this the Virgin is the prime exemplar, for she truly heard the Word of God and kept Him within herself. For this, as much as for having given Him birth and nursed Him at her breasts, as prophesied in the Gospel reading at Matins (Lk. 1:39-49, 56),

With all the hosts of heaven,
the all-glorious Apostles and Prophets,
with the Martyrs
and all the holy Hierarchs,
pray to God, O Holy Virgin,
for us sinners who gloriously celebrate
the Feast of your Holy Protection
in this land.

From Matins of the Feast

with all generations we hail her as most blessed among women.

The power and efficacy of the Virgin's intercessory prayer is the true theme of the Feast. Through her maternal prayers to Christ she is able to protect us from all the snares of the Enemy and help us along the road to salvation.

In her constant offering up of prayers before the throne of God, the all-holy Virgin is the image, the Icon, of the Church, who likewise never ceases to praise and glorify God and to beg His mercy upon this sinful world.

In the Church we do not stand alone in our wretchedness as we come before the throne of God seeking his mercy. All the angels and saints – members with us in the Body of Christ – stand beside us, joining their powerful prayers to our own desperate plea. Most especially, the Virgin Mother of God is there, standing in the midst of the assembly, her hands uplifted in prayer, and spreading over us the shimmering veil of her Holy Protection.

This truth has a particular resonance within Byzantine/Slav tradition. From the very beginning of their nationhood, the people of Rus-Ukraine have been surrounded by powerful enemies and beset with internal strife; their leaders have often felt the need of the intercession of the most holy Mother of God. One of the greatest of these, Jaroslav the Wise, Grand Prince of Kiev, placed the whole nation under her Holy Protection following an important victory in 1037. Many victories and narrow escapes in ages since have been credited to her aid. Indeed, many see the existence of an independent Ukraine today, after centuries of subjection and absorption by neighboring countries, as evidence of her abiding watchfulness and loving concern. Certainly, the emergence of our own Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church from forty years of suppression in the homeland attests to it, as well.

As a community we, too, have often begged Mary's intercession in times of trial. Against all odds, this monastery has survived and grown,

sometimes, in seemingly miraculous fashion. Such was the case some thirty-one years ago this fall, when we issued our first appeal letter to the good people who had received the early issues of *Magnificat*.

With only two weeks remaining before the balloon payment on our initial land contract was due, we had in hand less than half the funds needed. Our new business was barely supporting us through the summer months, and we had no established credit. Clearly, we needed a miracle.

Two days after we had mailed the appeal letter, contributions began to arrive – mostly from men and women unknown to us. There were some large checks and many more small and moderately sized checks. There were twenty and fifty dollar bills pressed into the hand and envelopes discretely passed by ladies requesting anonymity. We even found one hundred dollars taped to the inside of our screen door! Through the miraculous generosity of many good people, we had what was needed on the day appointed.

Although we remember the date of our arrival at Jacob's Falls some three years earlier, that day in 1986, when we paid off the land contract on our first purchase of property, seems in many ways the real foundation of this monastery. The date was October first.

We credit the miracle to Our Lady's intercession and look upon her as the true foundress of our monastery. Significantly, it was also on October first, in 1995, that the Bishop who had received us into the Ukrainian Catholic Church signed the Antimension authorizing celebration of the Divine Liturgy at this monastery.

We recall these blessings each year as we celebrate this holy feast of the Theotokos, along with the many other manifestations – financial and otherwise – of her loving care that have enabled this holy monastery to survive and prosper. And we continue to rely on her Holy Protection, especially now during this time of loss and transition.

Blessed Repose



Aerial view of Orchard, burial mound and borrow pit.

Although one should always be prepared for death, the untimely and swift passing of our Hegumen, Hieromonk Nicholas, caught us somewhat by surprise.

Several years ago, after speaking to a civic group, one of the audience inquired as to whether we had prepared a cemetery. When informed that we had yet to do so, he advised us not to delay. Death, he counseled, is often unforeseen, and we would not want to be left scrambling.

We had already selected a location adjacent to our orchard, and his sage council moved us to undertake clearing the area of its minor trees and undergrowth. After a little landscaping, spreading of topsoil and seeding with grass, we had a beautiful area for our departed monks to rest until the second coming. Seeing no immediate need, as is so often the case, we put off attending to the legal details.

This past winter, as the need approached immanence, we began scrambling. The first hurdle, our attorney informed us, would be the Health Department. They required a plat from a licensed surveyor and evaluation of the site by

one of their sanitarians. Neither would be possible until spring. The surveyor's plat arrived four days after Fr. Nicholas' passing; it was ten days more before the sanitarian's visit.

Test pits at three different locations on the one acre site disclosed a seasonally high water table about three and a half feet below the surface; the Health Department required at least seven. We suggested the possibility of bringing in fill to raise the grade over one of the test pits about four feet; they issued a conditional approval.

By mid-July our contractor had moved more than a hundred truckloads of earth from an adjacent area and deposited it over about a quarter of the cemetery site. The leveled surface of the resulting mound could easily accommodate twenty-five burials. The fill was compacted, covered with topsoil, and seeded. We drew up the new configuration and submitted it for final approval, which was granted in the middle of August. Eagle Harbor Township issued a zoning permit ten days later. We quickly disposed of the remaining legal paperwork and registered the cemetery at the County Courthouse shortly

after Labor Day. A week later, after completing the day's work at the **Jampot**, we formally blessed the site.

The summer had been unusually cool and wet, and the new grass had become well established during its two months of growth; the area appeared green and fresh in the oblique sunlight of that windy, late summer afternoon. Some days previous we had moved the old metal cross – which had originally graced the steeple of the long demolished St. Mary's Church in Mohawk – from its location above the rock garden along M-26, where it had for many years guarded the eastern approaches to the monastery, to the west corner of the burial mound, near the place where we planned to lay Fr. Nicholas to rest. Here it would continue its long service as a sign of consecration until a more suitable monument might be erected.

The rite began with the usual opening prayers sung in a funeral tone and followed by Psalm 50 (51). After the Great Litany, which included special petitions for the protection, purification, and sanctification of the holy ground, the priest blessed the four corners and center of the site with holy water while reciting verses from the Psalm. The proper Troparion, Kontakion, and Theotokion followed, and then the Prokimenon and Epistle reading (I Thess. 4:13-17) and the Gospel (Jn. 5:24-30) with its Alleluia. After incensing the cross and

blessing it with holy water, the priest pronounced the Prayer of Blessing. The rite concluded with the Litany for the Departed, the dismissal, and a final singing of *Eternal Memory*.

The ground having been thus hallowed, we consigned the body of our beloved first Hegumen, the Hieromonk Nicholas, to the earth on September 26, our patronal Feast of St. John the Theologian. It had been four months to the day since his passing, and the interment brought a sense of closure to us, to his family, and to the friends of the monastery who were present. Yet we all understood that this was not the end. Re-

turning to the earth the clay that had been taken from it, we trusted that what God had created in His own image He had already redeemed.

To our departed God-beloved Hegumen, the Hieromonk Nicholas, grant, O Lord, blessed repose and eternal memory.

We implore You, O God,
Who are easily moved,
grant rest in the bosom of Abraham
to Your servants who have departed
from this life of anxieties,
and who are buried here:
overlook their transgressions
and make them worthy of eternal light,
for You are a gracious God
and the lover of Mankind.

Troparion
for the Blessing of a Cemetery





o god almighty, eternal father, sanctifier of all places, from whom all blessings come, purify +, bless + and sanctify + this cemetery where the bodies of your servants will rest after their short lives on earth have come to an end. may your great mercy grant them and their bodies resting here, awaiting the trumpet sound of the archangel, forgiveness of their transgressions. send a guardian angel to guard this holy place, and make this place a sweet repose for the bodies buried here.

may the souls dwell today in the heavenly jerusalem, rejoicing until the great day of judgment, when they will receive their bodies back and stand before the lord with the fruits of good deeds and claim eternal life. for you are the resurrection and the life and the repose of your departed servants, o christ our god, and we give glory to you, together with your eternal father, and your all-holy, gracious, and life-giving spirit, both now and forever, and unto ages of ages.

At the Jampot



It was a quiet afternoon in mid-September of 1989, near the end of **Jampot's** third season. A gray haired man of, perhaps, sixty stepped up to the counter with a jar or two of jam and selected a muffin from the few varieties we had on offer, as well as a bag of hermit cookies. We mentally calculated the total, then named the price.

"Can I pay with a check?" He asked.

We replied, "Certainly. Make it out to the Society of Saint John."

The check had already been made out. Looking down at the \$14,000.00 figure, we said, "We can't make change for this!"

"Then you'll just have to keep it. I'm sure you can put it to good use!"

And we did!

Several weeks later, on a rainy Saturday that had been planned as the last day of shop sales that year, having crowded the motley mix of appliances into the sales room, we wielded sledgehammers and gleefully brought the old, tiny, woefully inadequate kitchen down. On Monday our contractor cleared away the debris and began laying out a kitchen with more than five times the area of the previous one. No more

would the mixing and kneading have to be done in the sales room; finally there would be more display room in the shop, and it would no longer be necessary to move work, ingredients, and product several times before completion. We had known the need for more space from the beginning, and we had been writing about it in the pages of *Magnificat* for some time; we were grateful to be working toward that goal at last.

That initial contribution did not fund the whole project, of course. A local church contributed to the effort and provided some volunteer labor by its youth group, as well. Other benefactors also contributed to the cause. Still, funds ran out during the winter, and it was only through the volunteer efforts of two retired tradesmen and the less skilled labor of friends who finished drywall and applied paint that the project was complete enough to resume sales on the Memorial Day weekend of 1990.

The reward was quick. Sales increased by fifty percent during the season of 1990 with no increase in personnel and with fewer hours expended. The new kitchen and the space it afforded made it all possible. But without the surprise gift – since we had no funds and no established credit – that kitchen might never have come to be. That it did is testimony to that man's unexpected generosity and to the courage it inspired within us to do what we knew needed to be done.

There have been similar occasions down through the years – and not all of them financial. Sometimes a word of encouragement was all that was needed to overcome hesitancy, or a convergence of ability and opportunity pointed out an unmistakable course, or a contact was provided that led to a way out of an intractable situation, and, more than once, seemingly disastrous mistakes led to positive results in the long run. Through it all, the Lord continues to guide and provide.

The kitchen resulting from that early, surprising generosity is now in its twenty-eighth

season. It continues to serve well as a bakery; equipment and personnel additions over the years have allowed it, for the most part, to keep pace with growing demand. Such has not been the case with jam, which still accounts for about forty percent of our sales.

A dozen or so years ago we added a commercial dishwasher to the jam corner for cleaning and sterilizing jars. Otherwise, procedures for stirring and ladling our small batches remain the same as they were in the beginning. We have not had the space for larger kettles, more efficient filling equipment, or additional personnel. And every year at about this time devastation visits our jam shelf as varieties dwindle and disappear during the season of peak demand.

Praise God! This may be the last autumn we face this difficulty. Phase II of the **Jampot** expansion will address the problem. We plan to begin construction at the close of door sales in only two weeks. It is an exciting prospect, and – again – extraordinary generosity provides the impetus.

Last winter the Reinerio Family Foundation provided us with a \$25,000.00 matching grant for funds raised during Advent. The challenge was readily met, and more than \$50,000.00 was applied toward retiring the monastery's remaining debt. That debt having been retired, they now issue a challenge for building the new jam kitchen.

This year they will match, up to \$50,000.00, contributions received during the fourth quarter. In effect, your gifts between now and the first of the new year will be doubled in impact. Meeting the challenge will provide nearly one fifth of what is needed for Phase II of the expansion. This is good news, indeed, and it has moved the project quickly forward; already preliminary earthmoving for relocation of utilities is underway.

Meanwhile, the busy final weeks of the season are still very much with us. Summer was cooler and wetter than usual, and few people were inclined to take a dip in the Lake. Still, visitors abounded, and, while May and June were quieter than we had experienced in the recent past, July and August maintained last year's busy pace. September – with the longest stretch of warm, sunny weather we had seen all season and the early arrival of brilliant color – looks to exceed it.

We look forward to the remaining busy days at season's end, to the coming excitement of construction, and to the Christmas rush of online and mail order sales. Unlike that first expansion some twenty-eight years ago – when we had to make the jam to fill our mail orders in the kitchen of a local church – the current project will not require the demolition of any existing structure. Production will continue apace after we close the shop, as we build an inventory of delights.

The cool wet summer did affect the berry harvest somewhat. Bilberries were not to be had, and wild raspberries were in short supply. The weather condition was widespread throughout the Midwest, and hot jalapeños have not been available. Therefore, this year we are using habañeros in place of jalapeños in our caramels. The offerings on the following pages reflect the current situation. Still, you will find much there to provide for your personal enjoyment or your gift-giving needs.



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Autumn Reflections

As the glorious days of fall color approach their end, and we descend into our thirty-fifth winter on this blessed shore, we feel the same sense of exhilaration and excitement as during those long ago days that seem still so near. Much has changed, of course, and the challenges are no longer those of survival, but rather of maintenance and continued growth. Still, the sunlight slanting through the golden trees, the blustery wind scattering the multicolored falling leaves, and the reassuring roar of the Great Lake remain the same, elemental constants of this time and place. After thirty-four years we all the more fervently say, *Lord, it is good for us to be here!*

Yet, this thirty-fourth year of our monastic life has brought about an immutable change. Fr. Nicholas is gone. We no longer hear his voice in choir, no longer does he sit by the fire in the Community Room, and we no longer have benefit of his wise advice and firm direction, nor do we have further occasion to smile at his exuberant expectations for the future. No doubt, as the income earning work diminishes and we enter

more deeply into the solitude of winter, we will feel the loss even more. We were told at the time of his passing that the first death of one of its members brings a new maturity to the life of a religious community. We would have, perhaps, preferred to delay such maturity a little longer.

But timing is the Lord's to determine, and we trust that what He brings our way - even if we cannot now understand how - ultimately works toward our good. And we are content. Besides, in many ways, we sense that Fr. Nicholas is still with us. The monastery he founded endures; his labor and guidance these past thirty-three years have marked out a course for us to follow; the foundation he laid will determine in large part the structure which we must now build.

So we move forward. Certainly, Fr. Nicholas would not have it otherwise. The work in hand follows long established contours. It now falls to us to develop and move toward fruition. We trust the Lord will provide what is needed along the way.