

Magnificat

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News from
HOLY TRANSFIGURATION SKETE
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Society of Saint John
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Summer
2012

Come, O faithful,
with Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,
let us celebrate the glorious memory of all the Saints,
the Baptist of the Savior,
the Apostles, prophets, and martyrs,
the hierarchs and Doctors of the Church,
the righteous, the ascetics, and all the just,
together with the God-loving company of holy women;
venerating their sacred memory, let us sing:
O supremely good Christ our God,
by their prayers, grant peace to Your Church,
victory over the Enemy,
and great mercy to our souls.

From Vespers,
Sunday of All Saints

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.

Saints of the Golden Age

With the Leave-taking of Pentecost – on the Saturday following that great feast commemorating the descent of the Holy Spirit in tongues of fire upon the Disciples (cf. Acts 1-4) and His indwelling of the Church – we come to the end of the Paschal cycle that dominates our liturgical life for more than a third of the year. From now until the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee in late winter our Services follow the cycle of the Eight Tones, with the celebration of the Resurrection on Sunday setting the tone for each week, and the whole being punctuated by various feasts of the Lord and of the Saints.

Fittingly, the new order is ushered in, on the Sunday after Pentecost, with a commemoration of all the Saints. Not only does the Holy Spirit vivify, animate, empower and guide the Church, which is the mystical body of Christ, living and active in this world; He also works in the individual lives of the faithful, inspiring, sustaining, and, by His grace, leading them to holiness. In recalling the holy men and women of former times, today's faithful find encouragement in the face of their daily struggles and models to emulate in their own spiritual journeys. Therefore, in addition to the general commemoration on this Sunday, almost every day of the year marks the liturgical remembrance of one or several Saints. Three such commemorations during the month of July are of particular importance to the Church and people of Ukraine.

St. Olha (Olga), whose feast falls on July 11, was the wife of Grand Prince Ihor (Igor) of Kiev, a Varangian (Viking) mercantile city exercising a loose hegemony over the various tribal and commercial centers along the great rivers that flow southward through the vast lands of Eastern Europe toward the Black Sea. In 945,

while seeking to exact additional tribute from the Derevlians, a semi-independent slavic tribe living at some distance to the west of Kiev, Ihor was ambushed and killed. Olha took charge of Kievan affairs in the name of her three-year-old son, Svyatoslav, and, in keeping with her time and place, ruthlessly exacted revenge.

The Derevlians sent envoys to Kiev to inform Olha of their revolt and of her husband's death and to seek an alliance through marriage. Olha feigned interest in the proposal and requested negotiations with a larger, more prestigious delegation of Derevlian headmen. Meanwhile, she had the first envoys buried alive. When the

second group arrived she treacherously shut them up in the sauna while they were bathing and burned the building down around them. She then sent word to the Derevlians to prepare for a great feast since she was coming to them to celebrate her husband's funeral at the place where they had buried him.

Illumined by divine grace,
O God-wise Olha,
you lit the lamp of faith
in your homeland
and gave example
to our father, Volodymyr,
who led us out of darkness
into the light of Christ.

From Matins,
Feast of St. Olha

Accompanied by a small escort, she wept at Ihor's tomb and then sat down to feast with the Derevlians. During the meal, her men plied the Derevlians with mead until they were drunk and then fell upon them, massacring some five thousand people before returning to Kiev to raise an army. The following year, with the child Svyatoslav and the army, Olha revisited the Derevlians. They first met her with arms and then retreated to their fortified cities. After a year's siege of their principal town, the place where her husband had been slain, Olha devised a ruse whereby she burned the city to the ground and killed or enslaved its leading inhabitants. From those who survived her wrath, and from the other Derevlian towns, she exacted a heavy tribute, incorporating the entire territory into the Kievan domain.

HOLY OLGA THE WISE



Grand Princess of Rus

Despite the bloodiness of its beginning, Olha's rule of Kievan Rus is remembered for its peace and moderation. Remaining unmarried so as to maintain a free hand in governance and to preserve her son's right of inheritance, Olha worked to consolidate the Kievan lands into a functioning state. She began replacing the haphazard and often onerous tribute the Varangians demanded from the Slavic tribes with fair and uniform taxes, she established centers for the administration of trade and justice to supplant the ruthlessness of the local nobility, and she strengthened the realm's defenses by fortifying several strategic towns along its frontiers. Often, during her many administrative journeys through the country, she took Svyatoslav along with her, that he might learn statecraft as well as the military skills that would allow him to preserve his inheritance; when he reached his majority, she entrusted a much improved Kievan Rus into his hands. Her lasting impact on the land, however, would be spiritual.

The Varangian cities of Rus had long since established contact – not always friendly – with the Byzantine Roman Empire of the East. The river trade from the Black Sea to the Baltic was their livelihood, and the greatest source of their wealth lay at Constantinople. Olha seems to have visited there in September of 946, probably to ratify a treaty her husband had made with the Empire the year before his death at the hands of the Derevlans. What she saw in the Great City must have impressed her and perhaps inspired her subsequent enlightened rule in her own country. She likely revisited Constantinople in October of 957, and there, at the hands of the Patriarch, received Baptism

In the years remaining until her death, Olha labored for the establishment of Christianity in Kievan Rus, building churches and founding charities. However, she was unsuccessful in her efforts to establish a hierarchy – from either East or West – in the land. Nor could she convert her warlike son, who had haughtily dismissed the prospect: *My men would laugh at me if I took up*

a foreign religion. Svyatoslav, however, did not hinder her efforts; he was often away, expanding his realm through battle, and governance mostly remained in her hands; moreover, he allowed her an important role in the upbringing of his young sons, although she was forbidden to actively convert them. By the time she reposed in 969, the seed had been planted in her grandson, Volodymyr.

St. Volodymyr, whom we celebrate each year on July 15, was the youngest of Svyatoslav's three sons – each by a different mother – and would have been about fifteen at the time of his father's death in battle in 971. He was already ruling, however, under the guidance of an uncle, at Novgorod in the northern reaches of the realm, Svyatoslav having recently divided the administration of his vast lands among his sons. The eldest, Yaropolk, who had received the Principality of Kiev, wished to unite all of Rus under his sole rule; in 977 he attacked and killed his younger half-brother, Oleh, and seized control of the Derevlan lands, which had been his Principality. Realizing he was vastly outnumbered and without significant allies, Volodymyr fled by ship to the Varangians of Scandinavia, among whom he had familial, as well as mercantile, connections, leaving Novgorod temporarily to his ambitious sibling.

He soon returned at the head of a well-trained force of Varangian mercenaries and expelled Yaropolk's governor from Novgorod. He then advanced south, toward Kiev, and conquered Polotsk, where he married the daughter of the city's Prince, who had perished in the battle. Later that year he captured Kiev, itself, and had his adversarial half-brother put to death. Perhaps already feeling remorse for the fratricide, he took Yaropolk's widow for his third wife and received her infant son, his nephew, as a child of his own.

By 980 Volodymyr was Grand Prince of Kiev and undisputed ruler in all the lands of Rus. His rule had begun in turmoil and blood, and thus it continued. Like his father, he was constantly at

war, recovering lands lost to neighboring peoples during the recent power struggle, expanding his territories, and bringing most of the eastern Slav-ic tribes under his rule. He was also possessed of his grandmother's gift for administration, and he continued her efforts at consolidating the state and fortifying its frontier towns to strengthen its defenses. Unlike the Wise Olha, however, he was licentious – reputedly keeping some eight hundred concubines as well as the seven wives he had married for political reasons. He was also an ardent promoter of paganism.

During his brief reign, Yaropolk had been sympathetic to the small Christian community of Kiev, and Volodymyr attributed his victory over him, at least in part, to pagan forces. He had idols of several local gods prominently erected on the heights above Kiev and, indeed, throughout the land. There may have been some political rationale for this, as well: the deities were tribal in nature, and his devotion to a variety of them may have been an attempt to broaden his support among the many tribes that comprised his realm.

But his grandmother's teaching and example – and especially her prayers – had not been without effect. Volodymyr came to realize that the dark, animistic tribal cults and their bloody rites – sometimes even involving human sacrifice – could not unite his disparate people. Nor did they seem to have much future. During the preceding generation the Poles, Danes, Norwegians, and Hungarians had all embraced Christianity; politically, culturally, and commercially, it behooved Kievan Rus to do the same. His father had been reluctant to do so for fear of becoming

subservient to either of the great powers to which he would have to apply for missionary bishops: the Saxon Holy Roman Empire to the west or the Byzantine Eastern Roman Empire to the south. The neighboring kings had all turned to Rome via the Saxon Empire; providence led Volodymyr directly to Constantinople.

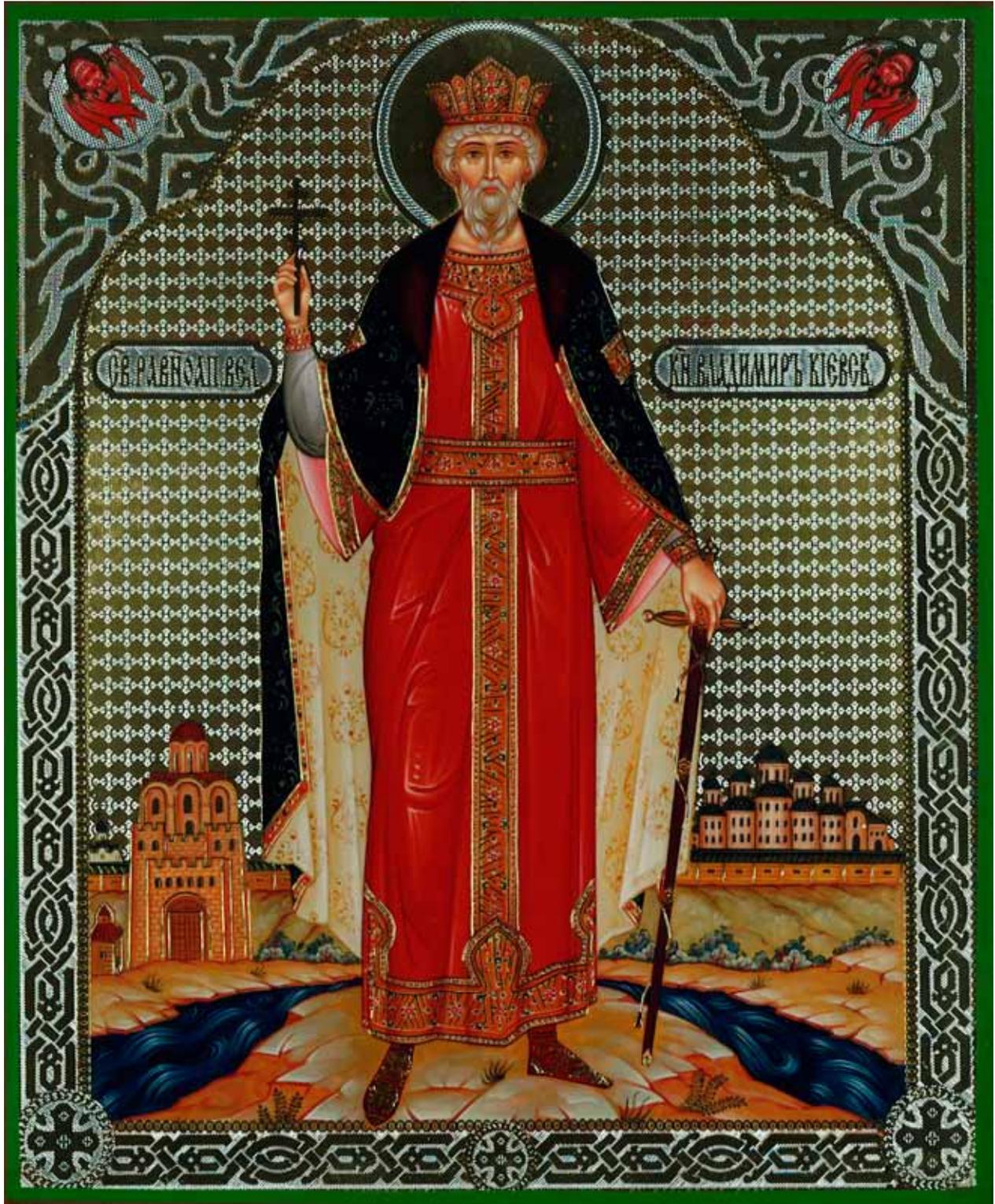
Kiev and Constantinople had been trading partners – and sometimes adversaries – for more than a hundred years. With the Mediterranean Sea blockaded by Muslim fleets, the river route from the Black Sea to the Baltic offered the Eastern Roman Empire its best possibility for trade with Scandinavia and Western Europe. Strategically situated on the banks of the Dnieper River, where the northern forest met the southern steppe, Kiev was the major entrepot along the route, and its Varangian ships would have been a familiar sight in the Great City. Moreover, under Svyatoslav and Volodymyr, Kievan Rus had grown to a significant military power.

In 987, the Emperor Basil II, faced with a revolt that threatened to deprive him of his throne, appealed to Volodymyr for help. The Grand Prince demanded marriage to the Emperor's sister, Anna, in return; agreeing to the Emperor's stipulation that he accept Baptism before the marriage, Volodymyr sent a fleet with six thousand warriors to Constantinople and saved Basil's throne. When the Emperor hesitated in fulfilling his part of the bargain, Volodymyr seized the Byzantine colony of Cherson in Crimea and threatened to attack the Imperial City, itself. The Emperor relented, Volodymyr was baptized at Cherson, and there he married the Imperial Prin-

O wondrous abyss of miracles!
 Those who once had raged
 with hardened hearts
 rejoice in the Church today
 in honor of the great Volodymyr,
 for Christ acquired him
 as another Paul
 and set him in his land
 as a faithful prince
 who enlightened his people
 with holy Baptism.

From Vespers,
 Feast of St. Volodymyr

Нолч Молодчмчг the Great



Grand Prince of Kiev

cess Anna, who, despite her misgivings about life among the northern Barbarians, reluctantly accepted the role providence – and politics – had assigned her. Volodymyr solemnly returned Cherson to the Emperor as a gift, and the noble couple journeyed to Kiev accompanied by scores of clergy from Cherson and Constantinople who had been designated for the unenviable task of converting Rus.

Volodymyr certainly took his own conversion seriously. He had already dismissed his many concubines and divorced his pagan wives, providing each with a generous settlement and allowing them to marry whomever they pleased. He listened intently to the catechetical instruction given him prior to Baptism and allowed it to sink deeply into his heart. Receiving the Sacrament and sincerely accepting its grace, the blindness of his former way of life fell away, and he resolved to live as a new man, walking by the light of the Gospel.

The zeal with which he had formerly devoted himself to debauchery now marked his good works. He promoted education among his inner circle and insisted his sons learn both Greek and Slavonic letters. He also freely distributed to the poor, providing a rich banquet for them every Sunday at his palace and dispensing staples in his courtyard each day. He was particularly solicitous of the sick and infirm, sending wagons of food and drink about the city to tend to the needs of those who were too weak to come to him.

While still obliged to defend his land and people from incursion by hostile tribes, and occasionally called upon to lend military aid to his Imperial brother-in-law in Constantinople, Volodymyr now devoted most of his energy to works of peace. Remembrance of the violence and bloodshed – and particularly of the murder of his brother – that had brought him to power now filled him with horror. He wondered within himself whether there was ever any situation where he had the right to take another's life, and he became reluctant to administer severe justice. The clergy, who had all come from the

Empire or its colony at Cherson, counseled that it was the sovereign's duty to exercise severity with malefactors when necessary; nevertheless, Volodymyr eliminated capital punishment from his courts, replacing it with a heavy fine.

He devoted his greatest effort, however, to the conversion of his people. Knowing that a common religion could help mold the multiple tribes of the land into a single nation, he made evangelization a state policy. He had his sons baptized, and he committed them to the cause. He enlisted his associates and retainers, as well, letting it be known that anyone who rejected Christianity could not be considered a friend of the Grand Prince. He even compelled the entire population of Kiev – high and low, rich and poor – to receive Baptism in a mass service conducted at the Dnieper. His concern was more than political: he had experienced the impact of the Faith in his own life, and he understood the good it would work within anyone who embraced it; he wanted this blessing for all of Rus.

His program met with visual success rather quickly among the nobles, elites, and merchants of the trading cities along the river, where there had long been a modest Christian presence. In the forests and villages of the north, however, the people proved less yielding. To free them from their fear of the old gods, Volodymyr threw down their idols with as much public display as he had formerly erected them, hewing them to bits, consuming them in fires, humiliatingly beating them with sticks, and throwing them into the rivers. He encouraged the building of churches, funding several, himself, in Kiev; and, wherever he could, and as the personnel available to him allowed, he established bishops and settled clergy. At his death, on July 15, 1015, Christianity lay brightly on the land of Rus.

To be sure, it was still a very fragile coating. It would take generations – and the efforts of wise civil leaders, the teaching of strong bishops and untiring clergy, and the example of humble and holy monks and nuns – for the Faith to penetrate the hearts of the people. Yet, even in those

**Holy
Passion-
bearers
Boris
and
Hlib**



tumultuous early days, there were some whose hearts it already penetrated to the utmost; the brightness of their witness enlightened many souls still in darkness.

Boris and Hlib (Gleb), whose memory we keep on July 24, were among the youngest of St. Volodymyr's sons. According to the custom of the time they should have inherited equally with their brothers; indeed, at the time of the saint's repose, all twelve had already been allotted their own lands. But the eldest of the heirs, Sviatopolk – actually the son of Volodymyr's murdered half-brother, Yaropolk – wanted the entire land for himself. He seized Kiev and devised plots to kill his brothers.

Boris learned of this while returning from a campaign against some plundering nomads. He had at his ready command a sizable company of soldiers, and his officers counseled him to march on Kiev and put down the usurper. However, he would not take up arms against his elder brother and plunge the realm into civil war. He hoped that by laying down his own life he could restore the peace. He dismissed his troops and turned to earnest prayer as he waited for what was to come. He chanted Vespers and meditated through the night on the goodness of life and the bravery of the martyrs who had willingly laid it down. In the morning a band of Sviatopolk's men overwhelmed and killed him.

Meanwhile Hlib, in his own Principality and as yet unaware of his father's death and his brother's perfidy, received an invitation from Sviatopolk to come to Kiev. On his way, he was

beset by his brother's henchmen. At first he pled for his life, not knowing why he was being attacked. When it became clear what was happening, he calmly surrendered to his brother's will and accepted death.

On July 24, 1020, the brother who had survived the ensuing war of succession, Yaroslav the Wise, interred the incorrupt bodies of the two brothers in the church of St. Basil at Vyshgorod. Soon many were coming there to venerate their

memory and invoke their intercession, but the Metropolitan of Kiev hesitated to canonize them formally. They were not martyrs, since they had not died for the faith; nor had they been ascetics, or teachers, or churchmen of any sort: nor, indeed, did they fit into any known class of saint. In the end, he relented: they would be known as *Passion-bearers*.

In God's great mercy, Christianity would serve to guide and form the emerging culture of Kievan Rus in a synthesis of elements inextricable to this day – Slavic, Byzantine, and Christian.

Across the vicissitudes of a thousand years, we the spiritual heirs of that culture and faith, gaze with immense gratitude upon the blessings forged for us in the heat of the tumultuous Golden Age of Kievan Rus. With generations of our forefathers in faith, we remember and venerate the Lord's instruments in that wondrous and holy work, the Equals to the Apostles, Olha the Wise and Volodymyr the Great, and the holy Passion-bearers, Boris and Hlib, through whose witness and prayers many souls have been brought to the light of Christ.

O holy Passion-bearers,
chaste Boris and innocent Hlib,
obedient to the Gospel of Christ,
you did not resist your brother,
who killed your bodies,
but could not touch your souls.
Let the evil lover of power lament
as you stand in joy with the angels
before the Holy Trinity.

Pray for those
who honor your memory
that they may be pleasing to God
and that He may save their souls.

Troparion
Sts. Boris and Hlib

An Investiture

On the evening of Monday, May 7, 2012, at Great Vespers for the Feast of St. John the Theologian, patron of our church and monastic brotherhood, we tonsured and clothed a new member of our monastery. His parents, brother, and several other members of his family had journeyed from downstate for the solemn occasion. Together with the monastic community and various friends who had come to know the young man during his seven months with us as Candidate and Postulant, they witnessed our Hegumen, Hieromonk Nicholas, receive him as a Novice, the first canonical stage of monastic life.

Two simple rites of venerable antiquity mark this entrance into the monastic state. Tonsure, the shearing of the hair, was already known by the seventh century, and the wearing of a distinctive garb came to mark the monastic commitment as early as the fourth. Both are symbolic of the conditions and purposes of monastic life and are related to Baptism, as well. The Tonsure, which symbolizes the setting aside of all worldly cares, pleasures, and vanities, is analogous to the renunciations that precede the baptismal bath; and, as the newly baptized are clothed in white garments symbolizing resurrection and newness of life, the monk, whose new life will be devoted to compunction and repentance, is clothed in black. Similarly, the Novice now receives a new name, as well.

Embracing the conversion of monastic life, however, is not so easy as a haircut and a change of clothes. It calls for constant effort and entails more than a few moments of hardship and loneliness. Nor is the life something the Novice invents for himself; rather, he receives it – like his Tonsure, habit, and monastic name – from those who have lived it before him. Heeding their teaching and example will make the endeavor possible.

Novitiate lasts for three years and serves as a time of learning and spiritual preparation for the permanent commitment of Monastic Consecration (perpetual solemn vows). The Novice gradually receives additional duties and



responsibilities. He is given a greater role in celebrating the Services and assumes a larger share in the many burdens of the monastery's life and work. Some he may find, difficult, distasteful, or annoying, but through them all he continues to learn and grow; thus, with the help and guidance of his spiritual father and his brothers, he attains in due course to the full stature of monastic life.

By the cutting of his hair and investiture with the monastic habit, our Brother John has manifested his departure from his former life in the world and has embraced monastic life as a Novicemonk of our Skete. We rejoice with him at the courage of this momentous step; we happily welcome him into the joys and burdens of our monastic family, and we pledge our continued love and our prayerful support of his commitment. God grant him long years of learning and spiritual growth in the angelic life of this holy monastery.



Winter was again mild. It was seldom bitterly cold, and the season's snowfall barely exceeded our area's all-time low. Holy Week proved exceptionally warm, and the little snow cover we had ran quickly down to the Lake. By Pascha, some of the daffodils were already in bloom and the magnolias near the entrance to the church had begun to unfurl their blossoms. It had turned cold again while we were away on pilgrimage during Bright Week, and just after Thomas (Divine Mercy) Sunday we inched our way home through a heavy fall of wet snow to frost-burned magnolias and drooping daffodils.

The snow left quickly, and the daffodils recovered. It remained relatively cool, and spring's show of anemone, crocus, muscari, hyacinth, daffodil, and tulip continued through Ascension. By Pentecost - which fell on the Sunday before Memorial Day this year - the leaves were out full and the lilacs and crabapples were in bloom; summer was nearly upon us.

Rainfall has been somewhat sporadic, though adequate so far for the wild berries. We

began to get wild strawberries the second week in June - a little earlier than usual - and we expect to pick our first thimbleberry between the monastery and the shop any day now. With continued modest rainfall, we should see another good berry year with abundant resources for a well-stocked jam shelf.

Jampot opened its doors for Michigan Tech's Graduation at the end of April. The weather was pleasant, and it proved a surprisingly busy weekend. We labored through the quiet weeks of May and early June to build inventories of jam and fruitcake against the busy times to come. Those weeks have turned out to be somewhat less quiet than expected, and we find our season already off to a good start as we head now into the exhilarating months of summer and fall.

As always, we look forward to seeing and serving old friends. We hope you will be able to visit us at least once during the coming months. If such is not the case, we cordially invite you to consider the items offered for shipment on the following pages.

Frustrations and Blessings

Despite the mild weather, winter proved rather frustrating, and we did not accomplish everything we had hoped to do. Acknowledgements and year-end statements were delayed, and our usual **Magnificat** for Holy Week failed to materialize. We missed attending the first ever Eastern Catholic vocations' fair because of weather, and our Advent newsletter – as is this one – was late.

Still, amid the adverse events and circumstances, the Lord sent many blessings. We were impressed and encouraged with the spirituality and outlook of the several seminarians and young priests who retreated with us during the early months of the year; their seriousness and quality bode well for the future of the Church. We also received more contacts from men genuinely discerning monastic vocations than ever before; we look forward to meeting some

of them and becoming better acquainted as the Lord provides.

Having a Postulant among us was, of course, the greatest blessing. Sharing the wonder of his first encounters with the austerities of Lent, the solemnity of Holy Week, and the exuberance of Pascha in the Byzantine tradition proved a contagious and rejuvenating joy. God grant many more such joys in years to come.

Winter, then, though not as productive as we might have liked, worked its usual restoration and healing upon us. We stand ready now for the high-energy days and months ahead. On the verge of summer, we anticipate the excitement yet to come, and we look forward to sharing some of it with friends, both old and new.

God grant us all a most happy and productive summer!

HOLY TRANSFIGURATION SKETE

Society of St. John

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