

Go therefore and make disciples of
all nations
Mt 28:19



Allez, faites de toutes les nations
des disciples
Mt 28:19

CANADIAN ORTHODOX MESSENGER

Founded by the blessed Archbishop Arseny (Chahovtsev), 1866 – 1945
Published by the Archdiocese of Canada, Orthodox Church in America
Fondé par le bienheureux Archevêque Arseny (Chahovtsov), 1866 – 1945
Publié par l'Archidiocèse du Canada, Église orthodoxe en Amérique

New Series 15:1 Winter 2003/2004

Nouvelle Série 15:1 Hiver 2003/2004

The Ever-Virginity of the Mother of God

—Priest John Hainsworth, Victoria BC

A question often asked of the Orthodox is why they believe that Mary remained a virgin even after she gave birth to Jesus. In other words, why call Mary the *Ever-Virgin* Theotokos (Mother of God)?

The question, however, should in the first instance be inverted. Why not believe in her ever-virginity?

The Church's witness to this fact went largely undisputed and assumed until late in the reformation in the West, and in the East until now, and even Luther and Calvin accepted the tradition. Indeed, to suggest

- that the tradition about her perpetual virginity was introduced later,
- that this tradition went unnoticed and unquestioned by a Church in the throes of questioning everything about what it believed in the first millennium,
- that such a novel tradition was considered inconsequential enough to pass without discussion before it became universally proclaimed,
- and that such a tradition had no discernable literary or geographical origin and yet was universally accepted as fact from very early in the Church's history,

is to suggest a very unlikely hypothesis.

How could Mary have been otherwise?

To argue against the Virgin's perpetual virginity is to suggest another highly unlikely hypothesis, namely that both Joseph and Mary felt that it was appropriate to have sexual relations after the birth of the Son of God. This is highly unlikely, not because sexual relations are considered bad within marriage, or because Christianity was considered the liberation from bodily things, but because no pious Jew of the first century would consider sex to be an option after so great a manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

An early first-century popular rabbinical tradition concerning Moses and the burning bush (first recorded by Philo, 20BC–50AD) claims that he “separated himself” from Zipporah his wife when he returned. Another rabbinical tradition concerns the choosing of the elders of Israel in Numbers 7 and relates how after God worked among them, one was reported to have said, “Woe to the wives of these men.” Whether these rabbinic stories reflect actual events or not, they nevertheless express the piety popular in Israel at the time of the birth of Christ, a piety which understood virginity and abstinence not as a mere negation of something enjoyable, but as part of the joyful path of one whose life has been consecrated by the Lord's Spirit to be a vessel of salvation to His people. Several centuries of social, religious, and philosophical modernity have made us suspicious of virginity and chastity in a way that no one in the Lord's time would have been, and it is predictable that objections should be raised about Mary's virginity in step with the rise of the Enlightenment and the Modern world.

In Mary's case, becoming the vessel for the Lord of Glory Himself, and carrying to term in the flesh Him whom heaven and earth cannot contain, surely would have been grounds to consider her life, including her body, as fully consecrated to God and sexual relations as unthinkable. Even in the comparatively minor (and strikingly parallel) incident of the Lord's entry through the East gate of the Temple in Ezekiel 43-44, prompts the call:

This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it, for the LORD God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut (44:2).

With respect to Joseph, surely a Virgin birth, several miraculous dreams, and gazing upon God incarnate in the face of Jesus Christ would have been enough to convince him of the magnitude of the Holy Spirit's presence and work in his life and marriage. If Uzzah could not touch the Ark even to save it from

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falling; if the High Priest could only enter the Holy of Holies once a year; if even the scrolls containing the Law, the Psalms and the Prophets were venerated; then surely Joseph, man of God that he was, would not have dreamed of approaching Mary, the chosen of Israel, to have sex with her.

For many, however, no argument is made beyond the fact that such a tradition belongs to the Catholic tradition of the West (and Orthodox tradition of the East) and therefore is suspect along with its source. For others, protestations against the tradition are based upon the witness of the Scriptures, and it is this witness which is the primary focus of what follows.

Three main scripture-based objections

1. *Scripture says that the Lord had “brothers”*

The first question usually concerns the passages of Scripture which state explicitly that the Lord had “brothers.” There are nine of these passages:

Matthew 12 : 46-47: While He was still speaking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him. And someone said to Him, ‘Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You.’

Mark 3 : 31-32: And His mother and His brothers arrived, and standing outside they sent word to Him, and called Him. And a multitude was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, ‘Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You.’

Luke 8 : 19-20: And His mother and brothers came to Him, and they were unable to get to Him because of the crowd. And it was reported to Him, ‘Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, wishing to see You.’

John 2 : 12: After this He went down to Capernaum, He and His mother, and His brothers, and His disciples; and there they stayed a few days.

John 7 : 3-5: His brothers therefore said to Him, “Depart from here, and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may behold Your works which You are doing. ‘For no one does anything in secret, when he himself seeks to be known publicly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world.’ For not even His brothers were believing in Him.

Acts 1 : 14: These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

1 Corinthians 9 : 5: Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?

Matthew 13 : 55-56: ‘Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things?’

Mark 6 : 3: ‘Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, and Joses, and Judas, and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?’ And they took offense at Him.

The use of the word “brothers” by the Evangelists does not, of course, prove or disprove either side to this debate. If the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures used by the Apostles—abbreviated LXX) has special words for “cousin,” notably *adelphino* and *anepsios*, they are rarely used (not at all in some versions of the LXX), whereas the word *adelpho*, which can mean “brother,” “cousin,” “kinsperson,” “fellow believer,” “fellow countrymen,” is used consistently throughout the LXX, even when cousin or kinsman is clearly the relation (such as in Gen 14:14, 16; 29:12; Lev 25:49; Jer 32:8; Jer 32:9; Jer 32:12; Tob 7:2; etc.). Lot, for instance, who was the nephew of Abraham (*cf.* Gen 11:27-31) is called his brother in Gen 13:8 and 11:14-16. The point is that the commonly used Greek word for a male family relation, *adelpho*, can be translated “cousin” or “brother,” if no specific family relation is indicated.

But is there a specific family relation indicated? In other words, is there a clear statement in the Scriptures linking the Lord’s brothers as children of the Lord’s mother, making them full brothers and not just cousins or other near relations? In fact, there is not. Nowhere is Mary explicitly stated to be the mother of His brothers. “His mother and His brothers” seems to be the formula (in Mark the possessive, *autou*, “of Him” is inserted before *both* His mother and His brothers, indicating a clear differentiation). In Acts 1:14, the separation is even more pronounced, where we read the disciples who were gathered included “Mary the mother of Jesus, and His brothers.” Here the Greek does not allow a maternal association of the Mother of Jesus and the brothers, but seems rather to force the comma to reflect the emphasis, and in some manuscripts includes the conjunctive, *syn*— “along with” or “in company with,” so that the text reads “Mary the mother of Jesus, along with His brothers.” In any case, as Mary is never identified as the mother of Jesus’ brothers (nor they as her children), but only as the Mother of Jesus, no evidence can be drawn from the passages listed above.

One of the main places where we might expect to find explicit mention of Mary’s other children is in the temple incident recorded by Luke. Here, the Lord accompanies His parents on their yearly journey to

Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover. Note, however, that when His parents realize that He is not with them in the caravan, they are said to have looked for Him “among their relatives and acquaintances” (2:44), not among their “children” and acquaintances. If Mary did have four more sons and several daughters (many of whom would have to have been born by the time the Lord was twelve years old), the word “children” would have been more appropriate. Certainly there were other children in the caravan for the oversight and the subsequent search to make sense, but they were relatives, as the Scripture states, and most likely included at least James and Josés.

2. *Matthew 1:25:—Scripture says that Joseph knew her not “until” she gave birth*

Another objection to Mary’s continued chastity following the birth of the Messiah concerns the use of the words “until” in Matthew 1:25 and “firstborn” in Luke 2:7. In the case of the word “until,” a reliable case can hardly be made. To begin with, why Joseph would see fit to keep her a virgin just until she gave birth and not afterwards as well (when the full revelation of just WHOM she had borne in the flesh was made manifest to him), seems inexplicable. However, should one persist in arguing this point, the word “until”(Greek, *eos*, denotes, unlike in English, no fixed limit. Fr William Most, in a short article, “Brothers and Sisters of Jesus” points out that

most ancient words have a broad span of possible meanings. Sometimes the word for ‘until’ leaves room for a change after the time point indicated. However not nearly always. In Dt 34:6 Moses was buried, ‘and to this day no one knows where the grave is.’ That was true in the day of the writer of Dt—it is still true even today. In Psalm 110:1, as interpreted by Jesus Himself (Mt.22-42-46), ‘The Lord said to my [David’s] Lord: “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool”.’ Of course, Jesus was not to stop being at the right hand of the Father at any point. So the word “until” here does not mean a change of status. Psalm 72:7, a messianic Psalm, says that in his days ‘peace will abound until the moon is no more.’ Again, the power of the Messiah is not to stop when the moon no longer gives its light (Mt 24:29). In 2 Samuel 6:23 that David’s wife Michal ‘had no son until the day of her death.’ Of course, she did not have one after that! In Mt 11:23 Our Lord says that if the miracles done in Capernaum had been done in Sodom, ‘it would have lasted until the present day.’ Had it lasted, Jesus did not intend to destroy it in His time. In Mt 28:20 Jesus promised to be with His Church, His followers until the end of the world—nor would He desert them in eternity. In Romans 8:22 St Paul says that all creation groans, waiting for the revelation of the sons of God until Paul’s day.

Nor did it stop then, that will continue until the restoration at the end. In 1 Timothy 4:13 the Apostle tells Timothy to devote himself to reading, exhortation and teaching ‘until I come.’ He did not mean Timothy should stop such things when Paul did come.—and there are more, but these should be more than enough to show that not always does ‘until’ in OT and NT, mean a change of things is to come at the point referred to.

3. *Luke 2: 7—Jesus is called “firstborn”*

With regards to any objections that might be raised with the word, “firstborn” (Greek, *prototokos*), it should be pointed out from the outset that this is more of a technical term than a way to number one’s children. Indeed, the use of the word does not mean or demand that there was a “second-born.” In Hebrews 1:6, for instance, it is impossible that the application of “first-born” in reference to the Incarnation of the Word of God could imply that there would be a “second-born” Word of God, effectively another incarnation of another Son of God. More to the point, “Firstborn” denotes an “heir,” and is a title of privilege and responsibility with legal and social ramifications, and it is used as such in this passage, just as throughout the New Testament. Nowhere is the term used to express merely the order of birth; instead in Romans 8:29, Colossians 1:15, Colossians 1:18, Hebrews 11:28, Hebrews 12:23, and Revelation 1:5, the title is applied to Jesus as the privileged and legal heir of the Kingdom and the Church as reflected and ratified in the fact that He is truly first in all things.

Clearly there exists no Scriptural testimony to Mary’s having borne more children after Jesus. There does exist, however, enough Scriptural information to sketch out a probable relationship between the Lord and His brothers, and it is here that we will now turn.

What Scripture does tell us about the Lord’s family

The perpetual virginity of our Lord’s mother (her virginity after Christ’s Birth) is not only established in Tradition and confirmed by early Church history, but it is also witnessed to by Holy Scripture.

“Woman, behold thy Son.”

In the first instance, consider the moving passage from St John’s Gospel in which our Lord commits His Mother into the care of St John as He dies on the Cross, and not into the care of one of His “brothers” (Jn 19:26-7). This action is simply inexplicable if Mary had other children (and the more so if one of them, James, would soon see the resurrected Christ and even go on to be

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Bishop of Jerusalem—1 Cor. 15:7, Acts 12:17, 15:13ff). Jewish custom dictated that the care of the mother would fall to the second born if the first born dies, and if the widow had no other child she would be left to her own defenses. Not having other children, Mary is given into the care of the Beloved Disciple by her only Son.

***The women at the cross and the identity of the brothers of the Lord*¹**

However, we can gain more insight into the relationships within the Lord's family by a careful examination of the identity of the Women at the Cross. In Mt 27:55-56 the women at the Cross were said to be:

- 1) Mary Magdalene;
- 2) the mother of the sons of Zebedee;
- 3) Mary the Mother of James and Joseph.

In the parallel passage in Mk 15:40-41, the women are said to be

- 1) Mary Magdalene;
- 2) Salome;
- 3) Mary the mother of James the less (Greek, *mikros*) and of Joses.

In Jn 19:25, the women are listed as

- 1) Mary Magdalene;
- 2) Christ's mother;
- 3) His mother's sister, Mary wife of Clopas. (*This listing presupposes that St John means "His Mother's sister, that is Mary wife of Clopas" so that "His Mother's sister" and "Mary wife of Clopas" are the same person and not two different people. This reading seems certain, for St John would surely not mention "His Mother's sister" without giving her a name; nor would he mention the otherwise unknown "Mary wife of Clopas" without saying why this person was listed. Thus it is well-nigh certain that "His Mother's sister, Mary wife of Clopas" is a description of one person, not two.*)

For our purposes we should focus on the woman who is referred to by St Matthew as "Mary the mother of James and Joseph," by St Mark as "Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses [a variant of Joseph]," and by St John in his list as "His Mother's sister, Mary wife of Clopas." Note that in Matthew the names "James and Joseph" were mentioned before. Indeed, the way Matthew mentions "Mary mother of James and Joseph" in 27: 55-56 presupposes that he has already introduced this "James and Joseph—as indeed he has. In Mt 13:55,

we read that our Lord's "brothers" are "James and Joseph and Simon and Judas." Similarly, in St Mark's Gospel, "James and Joses" are mentioned as if we know who "James and Joses" are, which in fact we do from Mk 6:3, where Christ's "brothers" are listed as "James and Joses and Judas and Simon". It seems beyond reasonable dispute that the Mary at the Cross in St Matthew and St Mark is the mother of our Lord's "brothers," "James and Joses." Also, it is inconceivable that Matthew and Mark would refer to the Lord's Mother at the foot of the Cross as the mother of James and Joseph, but not mention that she is the Mother of Jesus as well, or just as the Mother of Jesus, as John does!

If it is the case, as the Scriptures suggest, that Mary wife of Clopas is the same as the mother of James and Joseph, we have the following conclusion: the Theotokos had a "sister," married to Clopas, who was the mother of "James and Joseph," our Lord's "brother." Here, the question ought to immediately arise concerning the Theotokos' relationship to Mary; what kind of "sister" is she? Hegisippus, a Jewish Christian historian who, according to Eusebius, "belonged to the first generation after the apostles" and who interviewed many Christians from that apostolic community for his history, relates that Clopas was the brother of St Joseph, foster-father of Christ (apud. Eusb. Eccl. H. iv:22). If this is so (and Hegisippus spoke to the original witnesses and is acknowledged as a fully reliable and orthodox Church writer), then "Mary wife of Clopas" was the Virgin Mary's "sister" in that she was her sister-in-law.

The puzzle therefore fits together completely. St Joseph married the Virgin Theotokos, who gave birth to Christ, her only Son, preserving her virginity and having no other children. St Joseph's brother, Clopas, also married a woman named Mary who had the children "James and Joseph" (along with Judas and Simon, and daughters also). These children were our Lord's "brothers" (using the terminology of Israel, which made no distinction between brothers and cousins but referred to all as "brothers"). St Matthew and St Mark, focusing on our Lord's family (Mt 13:53ff and Mk 6:1ff) naturally refer to Clopas' wife Mary as "the mother of James and Joseph (Joses)." St John, on the other hand, focuses on our Lord's Mother (cf. Jn 2:1ff) and just as naturally refers to this same woman as "His Mother's sister, Mary wife of Clopas. But it is apparent that it is one and the same woman being referred to by all.

The point is this: our Lord's "brothers" are evidently not the children of the Virgin Mary. Against this, no argument that is reasonable as well as Scriptural can be made; protestations arising from reformational antiquity are simply unnecessary. The second point, that the Lord's

¹ I am gratefully indebted to Fr Lawrence Farley's article, "The Women at the Cross."

brothers are from His mother's sister-in-law, Mary of Clopas, is the best solution given the Scriptural and historical evidence. Other theories exist, of course. For instance there is the Apocryphal theory (it is derived mainly from the Protoevangelium of James and from the Death of Joseph and is passingly mentioned by Origen, Epiphanius, and a couple of other Greek Fathers, as well as Hilary, Ambrose, and Gregory of Tours). This theory claims that the brothers are the step-brothers of Jesus of a previous marriage on Joseph's side. This has the advantage that it distinguishes between Mary of Clopas and Mary, the Mother of Jesus, but it also has the fatal disadvantages that we would then have to identify Joseph with Halpahi (Cleophas) and explain how it is that Mary of Clopas (his first wife) is still alive during the Crucifixion, standing alongside Mary the Mother of Jesus no less. Another theory, namely of Jerome and a few other Latin Fathers, is that the brothers are first cousins of Jesus on Mary's side. There are several serious objections to be made of this theory, one of which is that this gives Mary a sister also named Mary, which is highly unlikely. For these reasons (and for more) the only fully supportable family tree left is that which we have outlined above.

Why is Mary's Ever-Virginity important?

Initially, we suppose, because it is the truth. However, the fact that this tradition is true, or that her ever-virginity is a part (however small or large) of the full Apostolic Faith, part of what makes the Orthodox orthodox, hardly seems to matter in this bottom-line world. But we can not pick and choose our Christianity: the orthodoxy of our faith depends upon the totality of our faith being upheld and proclaimed. To be sure, many divisions from the Church have and do state that Mary had children after Jesus; but in most cases, such a belief is assumed without investigation, and arises from a Protestant reaction to alleged Catholic excesses in general. But in all cases such a belief is espoused by churches which have been formed sixteen centuries after the foundation of the Church by Christ, and always with a theological emphasis or bias which *de facto* excludes such a church from representing the fulness of the orthodox faith. A church in which men pick and choose what to believe, however inspired the choices, cannot be said to be the one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church for which the apostles' blood was spilled, in which the Scriptures were written and handed down, and by which the creed was written and defended. This is of course an argument for Orthodoxy in general, but as has been noted, Mary's ever-virginity is a part of the larger Orthodox tradition and cannot be summarily discarded without weakening the integrity of the whole.

Even so, many would say that Mary's ever-virginity is not essential to the proclamation of the Gospel, and, to

some extent, this is true. Essentially, the Orthodox Church proclaims the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is our message, our reason for being, the very life of our life. Teaching about Mary is meant for the initiates, those who have accepted the Gospel and have committed themselves to Christ and to service in His Church. This is so because what Mary teaches us about the Incarnation of the Word of God requires that we first accept the Incarnation. Once we do, then not only her virginity after birth, but also before, and indeed the character of her entire life become in themselves an inexhaustive and matchless teaching about life in Christ and the Glory of God. Indeed, she said as much herself. By stating that "All generations shall call me blessed," Mary was not so much singling herself out for special veneration—this was not a moment of vanity—but was saying that by virtue of what God has done through her life she would become a witness and occasion for praise of God's glorious victory in His Christ.

What we learn from Mary's virginity after the birth of Messiah is manifold. Initially, we learn that life in Christ is perfectly fulfilling in itself. Mary did not have to have a sexually active life, or more children, to be totally satisfied, completely fulfilled. Families, careers, money, reputation, success and even failure of any kind, are not necessary for a truly joyful and complete life on earth. Christ came to give life and that more abundantly, and said that believing in Him would bring from our innermost being "a well of water springing up to eternal life" (Jn 4:14). In as much as we give birth to Christ in our own life, and follow Him even to the Cross ourselves, we will understand why Mary did not need to have more children, or success, or certainly a good reputation—we will understand and share in Mary's matchless joy. We will see that her perpetual virginity is just an expression of her perpetual joy—her ever-virginity is her ever-joyfulness, her ever-fulfilment.

On a more abstract, theological level, we learn that Mary was not a "happenstance" vessel of God, but that her role in our salvation was prepared from the beginning of the ages, that she was a fore-ordained vessel of God, born for a single purpose. Her virginity after Jesus emphasizes this uniqueness. The whole history of Israel—the patriarchs, the psalms, the prophets, the giving of the commandments—all reached to form the woman who would answer in exactly the way all Israel should have always answered, as we all are expected to answer now, "Behold the handmaiden of the Lord..." But having done so, and having flowered from her perfect stalk the Christ, the bloom of our salvation, she did not become useless, her purpose fulfilled and she discarded. Rather, her purpose in salvation history would

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Looking ahead: The coming Assembly

For many of us, the joy of being together in Edmonton for the Archdiocesan Assembly in 2001 is still remembered fondly. Already it is time to plan on attending the Archdiocesan Assembly of 2004 this coming summer. So please circle the dates on your calendars. You may want to adjust your work schedules, or even your holidays, around the Assembly dates: **July 20 - 23, 2004, in Saskatoon.** This Assembly is hosted by Saskatoon's Holy Resurrection Sobor.

Assemblies are a strong Orthodox tradition. Here in Canada, rather than focusing only on business, we try to get the most from being together, enjoying warm fellowship, and centring on a theme that speaks to all of us. The 2004 topic is "Without a vision, the people perish: promoting scripture in parish life," and we hope that this will be helpful for the spiritual growth of all, at both the community and the personal level. Be sure to bring your Bible with you!

We will also do Assembly business, receiving reports and approving a proposed budget. The 2004 gathering has the added, important factor of assisting in the process of nominating an Auxiliary Bishop for our Archdiocese. And here, a word of clarification about this process is in order. Various persons have been nominated, and soon there will be a special section of the *Messenger* to introduce them all generally. We have a committee which is gathering references and other necessary information about each candidate. At the Assembly, it will be important for the delegates to listen with their hearts to the prompting of the Lord in this matter. During the sessions, there will be a vote on the part of the delegates. The name of those two or three men with the most votes will be put in a chalice, and after prayer, a child will draw a name. But this does not end the process, for these names will be sent to the Holy Synod of Bishops, and it will be for them to make the final decision, after further investigations. One may correctly ask why I am creating this process, when all I would have to do is simply nominate my preference for an Auxiliary. The answer is that I am going about it this way because the Auxiliary Bishop will be serving the whole diocese, and I want our faithful to make their contribution towards the selection. Further, there will be some men who will not, finally, be chosen. These will serve as possible future candidates for the Church, and they will be persons to whom I will be inclined to give more responsibilities as possible.

As in other Assemblies, we will have various workshops on key topics relating to the main theme and to the development of Church life; there will be a youth assembly with its own activities and practical helps, such as babysitting available on request. In the process, there will be plenty of time for conversation, walks, browsing in a gallery of books, photos and religious items, and just enjoying each other and getting to know one another better.

Prior to the Assembly, there will be a Clergy Synaxis on July 19 and 20. It will also be held at the site selected for the Assembly, the Queen's House of Retreats. This pleasant facility, where we gathered fourteen years ago as an Assembly, overlooks the Saskatchewan River and has been enlarged and improved. Accommodation and all events and meals, except for the banquet, will take place there. For those who need alternative accommodation, blocks of rooms have been reserved at two hotels. Plan to attend the registration reception (a barbeque), the Assembly banquet at the Willows Golf and Country Club; and if you can stay, take in Friday's event—a trip to historic Batoche to experience this important site of our early Canadian past.

If possible, His Beatitude, Metropolitan HERMAN will be present, celebrating the opening liturgy with us, and he would give his Primatial Address to us all. Our OCA Chancellor, Protopresbyter Robert Kondratich from New York will join us also. The keynote speaker will be His Grace, Bishop JOB of Chicago and the Midwest, who recently celebrated his 20th anniversary of consecration to the Episcopate, and the 100th anniversary of His Cathedral. His diocese reaches from North Dakota to Kansas and from Missouri to Ohio and includes more than seventy parishes, monasteries, missions and other institutions, many of which he visits regularly by car.

It will be a joy and privilege to gather as the faithful of the Church—as clergy, delegates and observers. It is also "normal activity" for us to meet in this way. There is something at the Assembly for all ages, so please bring your families. Saskatoon is a friendly city, with large green spaces and plenty to see and do, including taking in "Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan" on the riverbank. How wonderful it is for us and our children to attend assemblies of the Archdiocese, building up in both us and them good memories of our Orthodox life here in Canada: as we work, pray, study, and play together, as we gather around the Lord's table as a whole diocese, we are strengthened and enlivened, filled with new joy, hope, and a sense of mission. May we all look forward with great anticipation to the 2004 Assembly, to being together in the love of Christ in Saskatoon.

Canadian Bishops speak On same-sex unions

I would like to draw the attention of all our faithful to the letter sent by Metropolitan Archbishop SOTIRIOS, on behalf of all the Canadian Orthodox Bishops, to the Prime Minister of Canada on August 1. Copies of the letter were sent also to the leaders of the Official Opposition (Canadian Alliance), the Bloc Quebecois, the New Democratic Party, and the Progressive Conservative Party:

Dear Prime Minister:

Re: Redefinition of Marriage to include
Same-Sex Union

The Orthodox Bishops in Canada do not agree with the recent redefinition of the term "marriage" adopted by the Appeal Courts of Ontario and British Columbia, to include in it, 'Same-sex union.' The Orthodox Bishops in Canada affirm the 2000 Statement as defined in section 1.1 of the *Modernization of Benefits and Obligation Act* as an interpretive clause, stating that nothing in the *Act* altered the existing meaning of Marriage as the 'lawful union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others' also as expressed in 2001, section 5 of the *Federal Law-Civil Harmonization Act 1*, confirmed the opposite sex meaning of marriage in Quebec.

Marriage is and should remain the union of one man and one woman and the traditional meaning of marriage should not be altered or modified. The redefinition of marriage to include same-sex unions, in our collective agreement, would devalue and debase the traditional institution of marriage, being the foundation of the family unit and basic institution for the stability and balance in our society.

The Orthodox Bishops in Canada are of the opinion that the explicit definition of marriage is to remain as defined and passed by Parliament, June 2000, in the amended *Modernization of Benefits and Obligations Act*, ' . . . that is, the lawful union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others,' and again re-iterated in the government's position on *Bill C-23*.

The House of Commons has also clearly defined the definition of marriage as being the union of one man [and] one woman. In 1999, an

overwhelming majority of MPs passed the following motion:

'That, in the opinion of this House it is necessary in light of public debate around recent court decisions, to state that marriage is and should remain the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others, and that Parliament will take all necessary steps within the jurisdiction of the Parliament of Canada to preserve this definition of marriage in Canada.'

We urge the Government of Canada to preserve this definition of marriage, as expressed by the overwhelming majority of the elected representatives of the people of Canada.

Yours truly,
For the Orthodox Bishops in Canada
Metropolitan Archbishop Sotirios
Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Toronto (Canada)

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Trust and responsibility

We have been hearing from our diocesan Treasurer, for almost a year and a half now, that the Archdiocese of Canada has a financial deficit which is growing, and which could lead to a very difficult financial situation. The reason for this deficit is that some parishes have given very little recently, or even nothing; and some parishes that usually have given a larger amount have not contributed and have not told the Treasurer the reason for this.

In most dioceses of our Church, the Bishop would demand and get a copy of each parish's annual budget of income and expenditures. As yet, I have not made that demand, because in the Archdiocese of Canada we have a relationship of trust. So, we trust the parishes to give 10% of their income to the Archdiocese (unless the temporary inability to reach this level of giving is explained to the Bishop and/or the Treasurer); and the parish has its responsibility to give 10% of its income for the support of the diocesan structure, without needing to be asked.

If everyone gave their 10% in a parish, and a parish its 10% to the Archdiocese, we would all have enough to do what God expects of us. We owe him the first fruits of our substance, out of loving gratitude for His gift of life. Let us all try to do better, then, in being stewards of His gifts.

+Seraphim

Psalter Corrections

For those who have a copy of *The Psalter According to the Seventy*, published by the Archdiocese of Canada, we are offering some post-publication corrections to the text, which have revealed themselves in the course of daily use. We apologise for the inconvenience.

Page xxi, and throughout the text in “Our Father,” “give us this day our bread of this day” should read: “give us this day our daily bread.”

Psalm 12, verse 3, p. 18	“I lay up <u>counsels</u> . . .”
Trisagion Prayers, P. 79	“Save me . . . the publican ; <u>and</u>
Psalm 56, verse 5, p. 98	“out of the midst <u>of</u> . . .”
Psalm 60, last verse, p. 104	“Name until ages <u>of</u> ages” (in errata sheet)
Psalm 77, verse 8, p. 139	“out His commandments ; <u>so</u> that they . . .”
Psalm 87, verse 5, p. 157	“down into the pit.”
Psalm 88, verse 7, p. 159	“in the <u>council</u> of His . . .”
Psalm 110, verse 2, p. 204	“in the <u>council</u> of the . . .”
Trisagion Prayers, p. 228	“Cleanse me, as . . . have mercy on me, O God.” <i>no quotes</i>
Psalm 120, verse 6, p. 232	“a shelter on <u>your</u> right . . .”
Psalm 127, verse 2, p. 236	“the fruits of <u>your</u> labour”
Psalm 132, verse 2, p. 240	“as one; <u>as</u> myrrh”
Psalm 134, verses 1, 2, 3, p. 245	“ <u>Praise</u> the name . . . <u>praise</u> the Lord <u>Praise</u> the Lord”
Canticle 1, line 6, p. 271	“the God of my fathers”
Canticle 7, #1, p. 289	“highly praised <u>and</u> exalted . . .”
Psalm 56, line 9, p. 302	“ <u>midst</u> of the lions’ cubs”

Pastoral Notes

31 Aug 03: **Priest John Jillions** was installed as Dean of Annunciation/St Nicholas, Ottawa ON.

1 Sep 03: **Priest John Jillions** was appointed Dean of Ontario.

1 Sep 03: **Prest Daniel Guenther** was released from his duties at Holy Trinity Church, Kayville SK, and attached to Holy Resurrection Sobor, Saskatoon SK.

19 Sep 03: **Priest Vladimir Tobin** was received into the Archdiocese of Canada through Metropolitan Herman from Metropolitan Philip. He is confirmed as Rector of St Vladimir of Kyiv's Mission in Halifax NS.

20 Sep 03: the establishment of a Mission Station in Red Deer AB was blessed, under the pastorship of **Priest Michael Schaplowsky**.

1 Oct 03: **Priest Phillip Eriksson** was released from his attachment to Holy Resurrection Sobor, Saskatoon SK, and appointed Second Priest at St Herman of Alaska's Sobor in Edmonton AB.

1 Oct 03: **Priest Miroslaw Wojtiuk** was released from his assignment as Second Priest at Christ the Saviour Sobor, Toronto ON, but remains attached to the same Altar.

The **CANADIAN ORTHODOX MESSENGER** is published quarterly by the Archdiocese of Canada, Orthodox Church in America, with the blessing of His Grace SERAPHIM, Bishop of Ottawa and Canada.

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*Dedicated to the memory of St Tikhon,
Patriarch of Moscow (+1925),
Archbishop Arseny (Chahovtsev),
and other missionary labourers
of the Orthodox Church in America.*

ISSN 1183-4773

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Canadian women Witness spiritual treasures Of Church of Finland

In August 2003, Anna Belzile from St Herman's Sobor in Edmonton and Mother Magdalen (Williams) from Holy Trinity Sobor, Winnipeg attended the iconography course given by Hieromonk Vladimir (Lysack) at the Valamo Lay Academy, a residential "folk high school" situated on the grounds of New Valamo Monastery in Finland. Besides the interesting lectures and the icon-writing classes, there were excursions to the Church Museum in Kuopio, the Orthodox seminary church in Joensuu, the Jyväskylä art museum, and the Orthodox Church of St Elias in Ilomantsi, one of the most Orthodox towns in Finland, one hour from the Russian border.

Near this church is "Iljala: a centre for serving one's neighbours." Here marginal people—recovering alcoholics, the emotionally or mentally challenged, the unemployed—can come for three-week stints to help others and be helped themselves in the process. It was heart-warming to meet the staff whose work in listening and sharing burdens can be very heavy. The centre is surrounded by three hectares of kitchen gardens and five hectares for the sheep and the crops. "If you pray you can stay" is the motto. Volunteers are strongly encouraged to attend the daily Orthodox services. There is an exhibition of icons there, donated by Finnish iconographers, funds from the sale of which help to defray some of the expenses of the centre.

We visited many other churches and lovely wooden chapels during these excursions. To find so many churches adorned with very fine hand-written icons, and to learn of the many "icon-writing clubs" in churches all over Finland, was truly amazing. It was bewildering to try to keep track of all the contemporary iconographers and the various schools of iconography they represent. Mention must be made of Petros Sasaki, a Japanese iconographer who studied in Greece and settled in Finland in 1968. He reposed in 1999 and is buried in the new cemetery at Lintula Monastery. He and Leonid Ouspensky had a great influence on Finnish iconography.

We had the opportunity to visit Lintula, a place of peace and beauty. These hard-working nuns (twelve professed and four novices) produce all the candles required by the Church of Finland. From beeswax imported from England, huge custom-made machines turn out one million candles annually. In their bright, newly-renovated monastery church, the very large icon of the Theotokos of the Sign in the altar, as well as their iconostasis, are the work of Petros Sasaki who also wrote the fine icon of

St John of Kronstadt at the front of the church. Under this icon is one of the saint's stoles in a glass cabinet. There is a special veneration for St John here, for the founding nuns at old Lintula received much support from him in the 1890s when it was still a Russian monastery in Karelia. Just like the monks of Valamo, the nuns had to re-establish themselves in Finland, fleeing for their lives on 11 October 1939, at one hour's notice, it is said.

A whole article could be written about the lively and growing parish of St Herman of Alaska in Espoo, a suburb of Helsinki, a parish which was celebrating its feast day and the fifth anniversary of the dedication of



One of the two Canadian pilgrims, Anna Belzile, in front of the chapel at the Lintula Monastery

the new church building on August 9. One unforgettable memory was hearing the tropar to St Herman sung to the Alaskan melody as a procession of three hundred or so wended its way to the Gulf of Finland for the blessing of water after vigil. There the rocks, the pines and the birch trees lining the shore, and the vast expanse of the sea, all seemed to be joining in song.

The Orthodox choirs in Finland were exquisite in their pure and quiet singing. Often only four or five people would be singing in a choir with total control, and

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the sound produced was totally thrilling and uplifting without any pretention or grandiosity, and the melodies were simple and familiar.

Simplicity and purity characterize the singing in the Orthodox parishes, and the more recent church buildings echo these qualities in wood and stone. In the main monastic church at New Valamo are two wonder-working icons of the Theotokos. The icon of the Mother of God of Konevitsa is considered to be the most valuable spiritual treasure of the Finnish Church. Amazing healings and blessings have been bestowed through it upon the faithful even up to very recent times.

It was good to see so many young volunteers at New Valamo exchanging six to eight hours of work each day for board and room at the monastery. Some of the women wore the colourful Karelian long skirts and aprons and white blouses. This national dress can still be seen sometimes in the parishes on special feast days.

Across the lake from Valamo, surrounded by woods, is the cemetery where are the graves of bishops, monks from the monasteries of Old Valamo, Konevitsa, and Petsamo, as well as forty nuns from Lintula (from the time before their own cemetery was built), and many of the faithful. Above some of the graves are rustic wooden "spirit houses" as in Alaskan cemeteries. It was good to be able to spend time at the graves of Archbishop Paul, Bishop Mark, Archimandrite Simforian, Igumen Chariton and Staretz John.

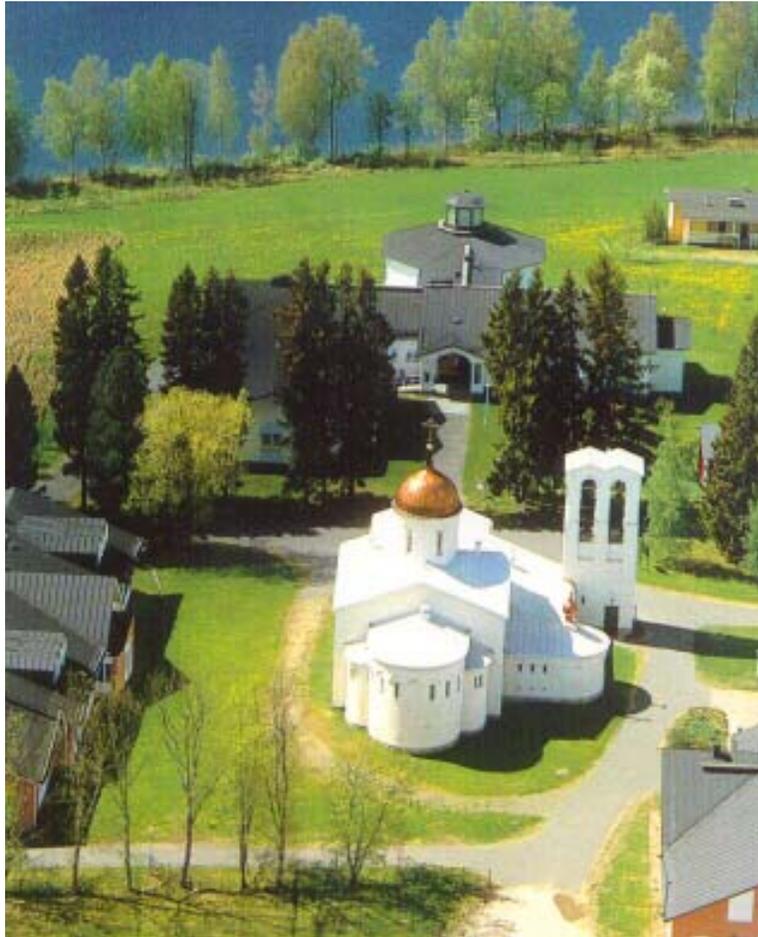
Anna was especially impressed with the excellent job which the Church of Finland has done of translating

many Orthodox works into Finnish, which has all happened in fairly recent years. She heard one amazing story from Helena Nikkanen, who is the head of the art/icon restoration department at Valamo Monastery. Ms Nikkanen told of how her mother translated most of the *Philokalia* from Greek into Finnish, sometimes while scrubbing floors or doing dishes, a valuable testimony to the great importance to Orthodox Christians of having access to Orthodox literature and services in their own language. One of the most comforting things for Anna, after having attended a week of services at the Valamo monastery all in Finnish, was Fr Vladimir's receiving a blessing to have some separate services in English for the iconography class.

Only a quarter of the students in Fr Vladimir's class were Orthodox, and many of the students as well as others who were studying or working at Valamo gathered for Matins and Vespers served in English. Some said that this was the highlight of their stay: singing and praying with people from Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, South India, Norway, Sweden, Russia and Canada. These services were held in the "old church" (which is preserved as a sort of museum)

where for so many years Archimandrite Simforian of blessed memory had served, and also Staretz John (who is known to those who have read *Christ is in our midst: Letters from a Russian Monk*). Standing in that old church one could strongly sense that the prayers of these holy monks who came over to Finland from the Russian monastery of Valamo in 1940 are still most evidently sustaining that monastery and the Church of Finland.

Thanks be to God for this unforgettable experience, and thanks to all those who made it possible for us to get to Finland!—*Nun Magdalen, Winnipeg, and Anna Belzile, Edmonton.*



New Valamo Monastery: the main church at centre, with a few of the many surrounding outbuildings

New pastor for cathedral Also Dean of Ontario

The new dean of Annunciation/St Nicholas Cathedral in Ottawa, and the new Dean of Ontario, is Fr John Jillions

Fr John was born in Montreal in 1955 and baptized at Sts Peter and Paul Cathedral by Fr Oleg Boldireff. He moved to the US with his parents, three sisters and a brother in 1963. After living, going to school and attending churches in California, Connecticut and New Jersey he returned to Montreal for his university education at McGill from 1973 to 1977. While studying for a BA in Economics he attended Sts Peter and Paul and sang in the Slavonic choir (under the direction of the late Alexander Kaminsky) and in the English-choir of the then newly-formed mission headed by Fr John Tkatchuk.

In 1977 he was tonsured a reader by Archbishop Sylvester and that fall entered St Vladimir's Seminary. In 1979 he married Denise Melligon and in 1980, after graduating from the seminary, he went to work in New York as Administrator of Sts Cosmas and Damian Adult Home and then Bankers Trust.

Archbishop Peter of New York ordained him deacon in 1981, and he served at Holy Protection of the Virgin Cathedral in New York City. Ordained priest in 1984, he was sent on a mission assignment to the OCA parish near Brisbane, Australia. Three years later he moved back to the USA, where he was assigned to Holy Trinity Church in Rahway, New Jersey. He served there until 1994 when he moved to Greece with his family (now three children) to begin a PhD in New Testament at the University of Thessaloniki, where he was also attached to his local parish.

In 1995 Fr John and the family moved to Cambridge, England to continue his research. In 1997, with the blessing of all the Orthodox bishops in England, and collaborating closely with Bishop Kallistos (Ware) and Bishop Basil of Sergievo, he and Matushka Denise

began work to found the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies in Cambridge. He was appointed the Institute's first Principal when it opened in 1999. At the same time he also served as priest of St Ephraim parish in Cambridge (under the late Metropolitan Anthony Bloom). He completed his PhD dissertation in 1998 (*Divine Guidance in Corinth: Graeco-Roman, Jewish and Pauline Views*), it was translated into Greek for official submission to the University of Thessaloniki, and he received his PhD in 2002.

Returning now to North America, in addition to serving as dean of the Ottawa Cathedral and the Ontario

Deanery he teaches at St Paul's Sheptytsky Institute. Fr John has published a number of scholarly articles and translations (especially of the sermons of Fr Alexander Schmemmann) and has participated widely in inter-Orthodox and inter-Christian discussions.

Fr John and Matushka Denise have three sons. Andrew (20) is an

undergraduate at the University of York in England (politics and philosophy), Alexander (17) is completing his high school education in Cambridge, and Anthony is in grade 8 in Ottawa. They have a cocker spaniel named Achilles.



Fr John Jillions at his installation by Bishop Seraphim.

Archives corner:

'An historic day' in Alberta

July 29th was an "historical day" at Smoky Lake, when Father Vasili and Matushka Oksana Kolega and several parishioners from Holy Trinity Parish, Smoky Lake, met to talk history with the Archbishop Arseny Archives' history-collectors, Katya Szalasznyj and Krista Eriksson. It was a delightful time of reminiscing, picture-taking and touring the church and hall. The Archives staff partook of good Orthodox hospitality with a special lunch and freshly-baked raspberry torte. Several valuable spiritual

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volumes nearly one hundred years old were donated to the our Archdiocesan archives. They had been donated to the parish by its youth in 1933. Now these books have found a special place on the shelves of the Archbishop Arseny Archives at our Archdiocesan centre.

The Alberta field trip included another rich experience: taping the remembrances of Matushka Lena Ostashek, who is blessed with a fantastic memory! Her husband, Father Vasil (Bill), served many of the rural parishes in the area, travelling even as far as St Walburg, Saskatchewan. A visit to the Star parish brought an added bonus—a chance to have a chat with Jim Kuzyk, who has recorded a good deal of the parish's past. Next day, a stop was made at the Sochawa cemetery to view its old tombstones.

All in all, it was a most worthwhile trip, hopefully the first of many. There is a great deal of our history in the Alberta parishes in many forms—photographs, documents, built heritage and memories. These treasures need to be preserved for the future.

The Archbishop Arseny Archives welcomes all donations from all parishes, brotherhoods, sisterhoods and communities. Please e-mail katya-sz@shaw.ca or call (306) 374-7143 if you have any photos, letters, architectural plans, books for the Archives, or other items. We recently acquired a shelf for “tiny artifacts” such as ribbons from old Gospels. And don't forget that interesting historical memories are also sought, so please call!—Katya Szalasznyj, Saskatoon



At the Holy Trinity Church, Smokey Lake AB are shown, from left to right, John Purich, Steve Fedoretz, Sophia Purich, Olga Fedoretz and Rose Davidovich. They deposited three of the books with the Archbishop Arseny Archives. One they kept, at least temporarily, as someone had inquired about it recently.

Our father among the saints

St Grigor Narekatsi

A writer once said “it is worth learning Armenian, just to read Narekatsi!” On the 1000th anniversary of his repose (1003–2003), we pause to remember this prolific Armenian saint/poet who impacted through the centuries on the heart of Christendom. His value is realized in North America as well. Harvard University's Armenian Studies Programme recently sponsored an international conference devoted to St Gregory of Narek and his influence as theologian, poet and mystic. Throughout the world, Armenian choirs still make use of his hymnography.

St Grigor is best known for his prayers and odes, for which he has been called Armenia's “Pindar.” His talent and faith combine to speak to contemporary man principally through his *Matean voghbergutyun* or *Book of Lamentations*, an epic poetic expression of the soul's longing for the Lord. This book of ninety-five prayers became so central to the Armenian Christian faith over the centuries, that the book has become synonymous with the name of the author, and is colloquially called “The Narek.” It has been compared with psalms of David and is akin to the writings of St Simeon the New Theologian or those of the fourth-century saint, Ephrem the Syrian. For many hundreds of years, it was copied from hand to hand, never losing popularity, and serving to fortify strongly the faith in times of oppression. For the millennial anniversary, it has been translated into English and published as *Speaking with God from the Depths of the Heart*.

Who was this alive, responsive believer? Born in 951, the son of Bishop Khosrov Andzevatsi, he was raised in the scholarly Andzevatsi family near Lake Van. Having lost his mother when he was a child, it is said that he grew to love the Church as his mother. He lived in the renaissance of Armenian life and culture, for the land was free of foreign invasion at that time, but not for long. Ani, Armenia's capital city with its one thousand and one churches, had a population of over 100,000 at that time, on par with the other great cities of the Middle East. The Armenians were a creative people, known for their church architecture, music, literature and science, and miniature-drawings; St Gregory the Illuminator had given a strong theological legacy to the country. When Grigor Narekatsi was fifty, the invading Seljuk Turks drastically changed Armenian society, which doubtlessly produced an

apocalyptic sense to the poet's work—that the Lord God alone is our anchor.

Grigor drew inspiration from both his father, the Bishop, and his uncle, the Abbot Anania, a teacher and pillar of Armenian Christian mysticism. In time, he and his brother, Hovhannes, as well as his father and uncle, would be part of the same monastery at Narek. The poet would become an almost legendary figure within the Armenian church and in cultural folklore, renowned for his gentle ways and depth of spiritual feeling.

His lengthy *Lamentations*, written near the end of his life when he had a debilitating, terminal illness, touches all of life. While writing it, he prayed that his words might be made “powerful salves for incurable wounds, effective medicines for invisible pains and multi-symptom remedies for the pang of turmoil, for the passions of all temperaments.”

His poetry is like a compact disc “Spiritual Library,” raised up in a pre-technological age. Parts of it is on beginning to pray, other parts on the need for personal effort of the heart seeking reconciliation with God, and on Orthodox psychotherapy of wounds of the soul. It is theology combined with worship: how to offer a sacrifice pleasing to the Lord. “With what shall I come before the Lord?” The Narek focuses on the “sacrifice of the Word,” with reference to the ethereal fragrances of rising incense, which he compares with “the Old Testament sacrifice of the fatted calf in rich smoke.” Even his titles are poetic, such as, “Do not let your mercies be meted out in mortal measure,” “My sins outweigh Mount Ararat,” and “Lord, O Lord, Who bears no grudges.”

“The soul's every movement is a reminder of God,” he writes in Poem 31. His work has been called the sighs of a broken and contrite heart. Interestingly he refers to his life as a “living book” and his writings as prayers for all times and nations, truly prophetic, given the scope of interest in his work.

The life of this saint emphasizes the diversity and beauty of those serving the Lord. His work demonstrates the varied, unique methods of healing such as prayer/poetry, that can be applied as balm to the soul. It is interesting that his prayers have been physically worn for healing over the ages, and placed under the pillows of the sick. Through his work, we experience a new perspective of the faith—the rich, deep and dramatic imagery of a Middle Eastern Orthodox world, a true integration of body-soul-spirit in worship. His words wrap, as a grapevine planted in fertile earth reaches upward. It is interesting to note that his poetry was all-encompassing, directed toward both the monastic and non-monastic worshipper.

The translucence of St Grigor's life and his steady example earned him great respect even in his lifetime, and his sainthood was recognized by his contemporaries. However, he did meet with a certain amount of persecution, even in old age, being called forward to defend his beliefs, which he accomplished in a worthy way. He is called *Saint Gregory* in the earliest extant manuscript of the *Book of Prayer* (*Matenadaran Ms.* 1568, dated 1173), copied and illuminated by the scribe and miniaturist, Grigor Skevratsi and his life is written by St Nerses Lambronatsi (1153-1198).

Sentence after sentence fall as jewels. One key, powerful phrase from so many that ripples truth is “Great Mystery, remember me, with mercy rather than legalisms.”

Holy Father Grigor, pray to the Lord for us!

Our mother among the saints

St Theodora of Vasta

St Theodora lived during the tenth century on the Peloponnesus in Greece, near the border between the regions of Messenia and Arcadia in a town called Vasta. As a youth, she was devoted to our Savior, Jesus Christ, and dedicated her whole life to Him. The *Synaxarion* offers no explanation as to why this young woman entered a men's monastery as a “monk,” but it does state that she reached great heights of holiness.

After years of a monastic life of obedience, the evil one, jealous of St Theodora's devotion to Christ, decided to test her humility and the depths of her saintliness. She was accused of having an affair with a young girl from the village who had become pregnant. Under the customs and laws of those days, such an accusation warranted the death penalty. St Theodora made no efforts whatsoever to vindicate herself. She willingly accepted the blame meant for someone else because she believed that God would reward her and bring the truth to light in the end. Following in the footsteps of Christ, she was led like a lamb to the slaughter and never opened her mouth in her own defence (*cf.* Isa. 53:7). After she was put to death, the townspeople discovered with shame and amazement that the supposed wicked monk was really an innocent nun. All the villagers and monks shed tears, moved at the humility and dispassion of this monastic who had truly carried her Cross and followed Christ (Matt. 16:24).

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In an attempt to redress a wrong, the townspeople built a small, stone church on the place of St Theodora's martyrdom in Vasta. Soon a spring emerged at the site, gushing forth holy and miracle-producing water. Another inexplicable phenomenon then occurred. On the stone roof of the church, seventeen trees began to grow, without soil, without earth, without nutriment. They grew very tall over the centuries. They have never been bent over or broken down, nor have they been damaged even when battered by storms and strong winds. It was as if God Himself planted the trees in the stone. Numerous miracles have taken place around the church, the trees and the spring, and most scholars, baffled and ignorant of God's power reflected in the deathless lives of the saints, have concluded that the laws of physics and of nature simply do not function in this vicinity.

The influence of the supernatural phenomena in the vicinity of the church has been extensive. Not only have many physical healings occurred, but moral and spiritual cleansing and rejuvenation have taken place. Many people come to the area devoid of faith and leave with great faith. The sight of strong, healthy trees growing in thick, cold stone, without soil, causes pilgrims to ponder God and His ways and to affirm that there is indeed something higher than human thoughts, deeds and reasonings. Many people come here who never recognized their sins. Once in the area of the church, trees and spring, they suddenly become aware of their sins and seek the Sacrament of Confession. They experience a great rebirth and return to the Church.

The supernatural phenomena of the church, trees and spring fulfil the prophecy St Theodora made in her final prayer before her martyrdom which concluded with these words: "my body to become a church, my hair to be tall and strong trees, and my blood to be a river." Psalm 15:3 aptly expresses this power of God in His saints: "In the saints that are in His earth hath the Lord been wondrous; He hath wrought all His desires in them."

*Holy blessed martyr Theodora,
pray to the lord for us!*

The *Canadian Orthodox Messenger* is indebted to the nuns of the holy monastery of Sts Mary and Martha in Wagner, South Carolina (OCA Diocese of the South) for this account of the life of St Theodora of Vasta. It was translated by a beloved friend of their monastery, Despina Brown, from the Greek *Synaxarion of New Martyrs* and printed in their newsletter, *One Thing Needful* (July 2003). To the best of their knowledge, it is the first translation of the account in English.

Come bless the Lord!

"Come bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord . . . May the Lord bless you from Zion, He who made heaven and earth."

As the beautiful new tune of Psalm 133(4) engraved its words upon my being, my heart responded, "Yes! I will bless my Lord and my God!" . . . and then my mind whispered the question, "But just *how* does one *bless*?" What is this thing that God does for me that I can also do for Him?!

I long understood that the adjective "blessed" in the Beatitudes means "happy" or "well-poken of," but somehow that did not help with this Old Testament verb. It was in the lexicon of "Strong's Exhaustive Concordance" that I made a discovery that painted for me a masterpiece. The root of the word translated so often as the English "bless" is the Hebrew *barak*, a primary root: *to kneel—by implication to God (as an act of adoration) and vice versa to man (as a benefit).*

Ponder it! Kneel before the Lord. Offer Him awe-struck praise; fervent, trusting supplication; deeply repentant confession; humble, heart-felt thanks. Bless the Lord!

On the other hand, may the Lord bless you. Consider the intimacy of living with a God who kneels down to His people. Commune eye-to-eye with your heavenly Father as He kneels down to you, His little child, as He pays attention to your concerns despite all the universally important things His work entails. Look straight into His eyes and see there the grief and reproof that makes you know the seriousness of your sin—and resolve to shape up. Look up into the face of your rescuer as he kneels to minister to your wounds. Tug on his sleeve and ask Him to kneel down to help someone else in need.

Come, kneel down to the Lord, all you servants of the Lord. May the Lord kneel down to you, and yours. Come bless the Lord!—*Susan Gander, Westport ON*

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Auxiliary Bishop nomination process : an update

In the Summer 2003 issue of the *Canadian Orthodox Messenger*, His Grace Bishop Seraphim announced the appointment of the Search Committee of four people to come up with a list of possible episcopal candidates. The four members of the committee are: Fr Robert Kennaugh, Dean of Manitoba and Saskatchewan and Rector of St Nicholas Church in Narol, Manitoba; Ms Helene Culhane of Annunciation/St Nicholas in Ottawa, Ontario; Mr David Grier of Holy Resurrection in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan; and as chair, Fr John Tkachuk, Rector of The Sign of the Theotokos in Montréal, Québec.

At the same time, His Grace Bishop Seraphim issued a general appeal to the members of the Archdiocese of Canada for submission of nominations of candidates. As a result of this appeal and the work of this committee, five candidates are being considered. They are, alphabetically:

Protodeacon Cyprian Hutcheon (The Sign of the Theotokos, Montréal)

Hieromonk Vladimir (Lysak) (New Valamo/*Valaam* Monastery, Finland)

Archpriest Orest Olekshy (Holy Resurrection, Saskatoon)

Archpriest Dennis Pihach (St Herman of Alaska, Edmonton)

Igumen Irénée (Rochon) (St-Benoit de Nursie, Montréal)

In order to introduce the above candidates to the faithful of the Archdiocese, a special section or edition of the *Canadian Orthodox Messenger* will be published shortly.

His Grace Bishop Seraphim is now inviting once again all members of the Archdiocese, who are interested to do so, to send to the Search Committee their comments about the candidates, in the form of a serious assessment regarding their capability, suitability, and other comments based on facts. These should be addressed:

- in a written or typed letter
- and must be mailed via Canada Post only—no telephone calls or e-mails will be allowed—to:

Bishop's Search Committee
c/o His Grace, Bishop Seraphim
Archdiocese of Canada OCA
P.O. Box 179
Spencerville ON K0E 1X0

—and mailed by **January 15, 2004.**

Ever-Virginity, *continued from p.5:*

only continue and increase in that her whole being and life would point us without distraction to her Son. At the wedding of Cana in Galilee, thirty or so years after her Son's birth, she would express it wonderfully, "Whatever He says to you, do it" (Jn 2:5); at her Son's crucifixion, she would embody it in standing with John at the foot of the Cross. Icons of Mary in the Orthodox Church almost invariably present her with her Son as a child in her arms: He is blessing us, she is pointing to Him. Again, as we undertake to embody this purpose of always pointing to God through our life and deeds, we will begin to see in the same measure that her perpetual virginity is an expression of her perpetual purpose—her ever-virginity is in fact her ever-ministry, the ideal example of our own.

Examples of what Mary, and specifically her ever-virginity, teaches us about the glory of God and about life in Christ, could be outlined *ad infinitum*. The purpose here has been just to show that this tradition of the Church is not without proof, scriptural or logical, and it is certainly not without benefit to the Orthodox

Christian. Recent Christian history has consistently over-looked Mary and her role in history (perhaps because some have over-extended her role too), and it is important to recover the proper veneration of Mary which the apostolic Church has always held, not because Mary is the great exception but, as one Orthodox theologian has said, because she is the great example. Such veneration, and the reasons for it, is wonderfully expressed in an Orthodox hymn which poetically recounts Gabriel's first encounter with Mary, who was about to become the ark of the new Covenant, the throne of God, the flesh which gave flesh to the Word of God:

*Awed by the beauty of your virginity
and the exceeding radiance of your purity,
Gabriel stood amazed, and cried to you,
'O Mother of God, by what name shall I call you?
I am lost and bewildered,
but I shall greet you as I was commanded:
Rejoice, you that are full of grace.'*

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