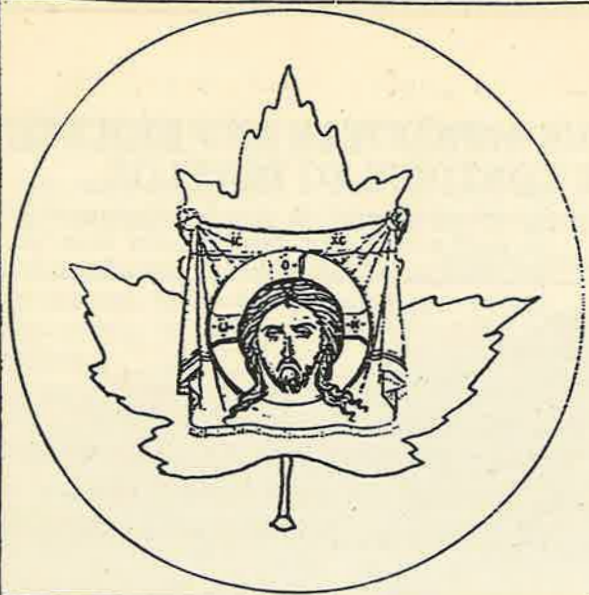




The CANADIAN ORTHODOX MISSIONARY

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July/August, 1992



"JOY OF CANADA," 1992

Following the Ark of the New Testament

"And the ark of the covenant of the LORD went before them..." (Numbers 10:33).

"God commanded the Hebrews to fashion the ark of the promise and the old covenant, in the wilderness. But He made thee, O Theotokos, the fulfilment of the promise and the Ark of the New Covenant..." (Kontakion Six, Akathist for the Joy of Canada).

Like a scene from old Romania or pre-revolutionary Russia, the Ikon of the Theotokos, "Joy of Canada" is borne in procession along the lower monastery road. From the gatehouse, along the lake and into the monastery church, this symbol of Canadian Orthodoxy was accompanied by 120 worshippers from Canada and America.

The ikon is carried by Bishop Lazar of Vancouver and Father Aurel Sas (Descent of the Holy Spirit Romanian Parish, Vancouver). Fr Joasaph Billy (Diocesan circuit priest) and Hieromonk Moses (Monastery of All Saints of North America) flank the ikon with censers. Archimandrite Varlaam, diocesan vicar, follows with the Gospel book. Visitors from Salt Lake City, Utah and Washington state, newly arrived immigrants from Russia and Romania, Serbs, Byelorussians, Greeks and Canadian converts, all received the ikon with joy and tears.

Following our Canadian Orthodox custom, the ikon paused at the entrance of the church and the faithful passed under it, casting handfuls of flowers and rose petals on the ikon. Rose petals were strewn in front of the ikon as it entered the church and was carried to its analogion. The congregations of St Nicholas Canadian Orthodox Church and St Tikhon's Canadian Orthodox Church chanted the Akathist for The Joy of Canada in unison, joined by many of the visitors. The Liturgy followed, served in English and Romanian. Fr Aurel, an outstanding preacher, delivered the guest sermon in Romanian, with his son Timothy acting as interpreter.

The "Joy of Canada" pilgrimage was preceded by the first diocesan summer Bible camp.

More details and photos on pages 2 and 3.

SCENES FROM THE "JOY OF CANADA" PILGRIMAGE, 1992

In the photos below, (1) the clergy set out to meet the ikon, passing through the plum, apple and cherry trees. (2) The ikon passes along the lower monastery road, through the hay fields, to meet the clergy and congregation. (3) The Akathist Hymn for "Our Lady, the Joy of Canada," is chanted, followed by the Divine Liturgy. (4) Vladika Lazar reads the Gospel in English, followed by Fr Aurel Sas reading it in Romanian.



PROGRESS: THE MONASTERY AND DIOCESAN CENTRE CONTINUE TO DEVELOP.

Parishioners continue to participate in the development of the monastery and diocesan centre.



Vasile Samoila felled trees and cut firewood for the winter. The monastery church and the konak (residence) are heated with wood.



Helen Holland, Gensa Hollingsworth and Laura Hailes harvested plums. The monastery has plum, cherry, pear and apple trees, as well as wild blackberries and blueberries.



Vladika Lazar at work in the field. The tractor was donated by Dr and Mrs Weeden of Chilliwack.



The future seminary wing of the main building had been severely damaged by fire before the monastery purchased the property. In preparation for renovation, Timothy and Chiprian Sas, sons of Fr Aurel Sas (Descent of the Holy Spirit Parish, Vancouver) clean up the fire rubble.

DIOCESAN BIBLE CAMP

Last year's success with a short day camp for local young people gave us an impetus to have a full one week summer camp for children from all parts of the diocese. As the photos below show, the programme was varied and the camp was an unqualified success, despite the lack of full facilities at the monastery.



By the time the kids had chased frogs in the pond, climbed on the mountain, played with the dogs and had a baseball game, it seemed best to have vespers outdoors.



Meals were served picnic style. Parents rotated preparing meals, but some of the kids were great with a barbeque.



Evening campfires were popular. Fr Moses taught the children to sing Orthodox songs. On non-lenten days, pounds of hotdogs and marshmallows were roasted.



The outing to the fish hatchery provided an educational event. Most interesting to the kids was a 150 year old sturgeon named Henry, which weighed over 300 lbs.



The Vancouver Game Farm, with its large collection of wild animals, proved more interesting for the kids.



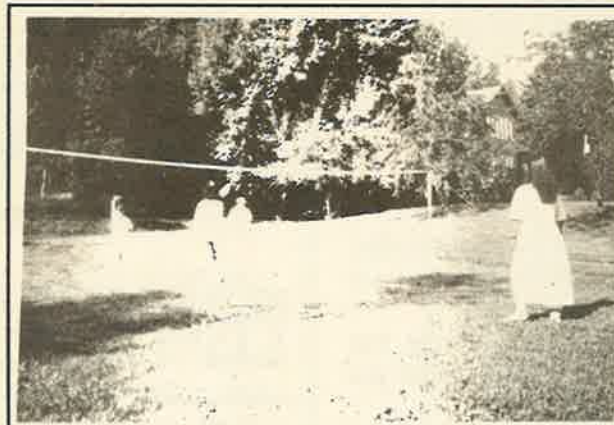
The kids voted the aquarium trip the most fun. Here, they watch the killer whales in a natural setting.



Merideth Franck and son Sebastian join Bishop Lazar and Dorel Samoila in loading the pick up for a hay ride.



The unfinished baseball field did not deter the kids. The field will be finished later to provide a baseball and soccer area.



Elly Morgan and Marina Almas join some of the girls at badminton. The net also served for evening volley ball matches.



Merideth Franck supervises a Bible study game which she designed herself. The game turned out to be very useful, and we plan to use it for adults in future.



Alex Ierokomos demonstrates principles of kinetic energy. He was the motor for the merry go round.



The main purpose of the camp was well served. The new friendship between Ion Samoila of Vancouver and Sebastian Franck of Salt Lake City is symbolic of the purpose of such camps.



Common roots - common bond: Ion and Dorel Samoila came to Canada two years ago from Romania. Peter and Andrei Golub immigrated to America two years ago from Russia. Orthodoxy is, for them, a common reality which makes them one despite apparent worldly differences.

Many activities were planned for the camp, however, in the final analysis, the kids all agreed that catching frogs in the monastery pond was most fun of all. They spent more time playing in the pond than anywhere else. Fr Moses had lessons daily, and morning and evening prayers were served. The oldest camper, "Yaya" Ierokomos, in her eighties, enjoyed the company of the kids. The monastery dogs and cats were totally spoiled by the attention and "handouts," and everyone is looking forward to next year, when the facilities, God willing, will be improved. We offered a special thanks to twelve year old Dorel Samoila who not only helped look after the younger children, but also made sure the grounds were kept clean and ready for the Joy of Canada pilgrimage which followed the camp. Thirty three people participated in the camp.



56 A DISCIPLE OF A GREAT ELDER

In Phoenicia there is a city called Ptolemaida. One of the suburbs of the city is called "Parasima." A certain great elder lived in it. He had a disciple named John, also a great ascetic, who was especially distinguished by obedience.

Once, the elder sent his disciple to do some work and gave him a little bread with which to strengthen himself. The disciple departed and having fulfilled the work, he returned, not having touched the bread.

The elder saw the bread and said to him, "Child, why did you not eat the bread which I gave you?"

"Forgive me, father," replied the disciple, bowing to the elder. "When you sent me off, you did not bless me to eat the food. That is why I did not eat it."

The elder was amazed at the understanding of the brother and blessed him.

After the demise of the elder, this brother fasted for forty days and he heard a heavenly voice, "No matter upon what ill person you place your hands, the same will be healed."

On the next morning, by God's Providence, a man came to him with his wife who suffered from breast cancer. The husband begged him to pray for his wife's healing. Father John only called himself a sinner and said that he was unworthy of such a deed. Nevertheless, the husband persistently begged him to have mercy on his wife. Then the ascetic placed his hands on her, made the sign of the Cross over her breast, and the woman was quickly healed. From that time on, God showed many signs through His servant, not only during his lifetime, but also after his repose. Such are the fruits of obedience.

57 THE DEATH OF SIMEON THE STYLITE AND ABBA JULIAN

Four miles from the city of Egius stood the pillar of the stylite Simeon. One day, he was struck by lightning and died. Abba Julian who lived near the gulf, some thirty miles away, suddenly said to the novices, "Place incense in the censer."

Since it was an unusual time of day to light the censer, the novices asked, "Abba, why are we doing this now?"

"Brother Simeon who lived in Egius has just died, struck by lightning, and his soul is departing with joy."

And the stylites were a distance of almost twenty-four miles from one another.

58 ABOUT THE SAME FATHER JULIAN

Here is what else Abba Stephen Trikhina told us about Abba Julian the Stylite: In his region there appeared a lion who had eaten many travellers and natives. Once, the elder told his disciple Pankratios:

"Depart two miles to the south from here. There you will find a lion lying. Tell him, 'The humble Julian, by the name of Jesus Christ the Son of God, orders you to depart from this region'."

The brother set out and found the lion. He had scarcely said what he had been told, when the lion departed, and everyone glorified God.

59 ABBA THALALIOS

The presbyter of that monastery, Father Peter, told us about Abba Thalalios the Cilician — how he struggled in monasticism for sixty years and continually wept, saying, "God gave us time in this life for repentance, and He will demand from us a strict account of it."

60 AN AMAZING ACT OF A CERTAIN PIOUS WOMAN

During our stay in Alexandria, a Christ-loving person told us:

A certain nun lived in her own home, spending her days in solitude and care for her soul. She fasted, prayed, spent nights in vigil, and gave much alms. But he who wars eternally against mankind stormed against her by inspiring in a certain youth a satanic passion toward her. This youth waited for her near the threshold of her house.

If she set out any where or went to church to pray, the youth did not miss the opportunity to solicit her favours and even offend her, whispering shamelessly to her, so that finally she had to stay home to avoid his offences.

Once, the nun sent her servant to invite him to her home. "Tell him, 'Come, my mistress calls for you.'"

The young man rejoiced, imagining that he had finally achieved his goal, and went to her.

The nun was sitting in her room: "Sit down here," she said to the guest.

And, seating him, she said, "Tell me, my brother, why do you pursue me so that I cannot even go out of the house?"

"From a passionate love for you, my lady. As soon as I behold you, I am all burned in flames."

"What attracts you that you have come to love me so?"

"Your wondrous eyes — they have charmed me."

Hearing this, the nun seized a veil and covered her face so that her eyes were obscured. From thence forth, no one ever saw her eyes again. The youth had scarcely seen this, when he was struck deep in his heart; he departed for Skete, where he became a monk.

61 LIFE OF ABBA LEONTY THE CILICIAN

Some of the fathers told us about Abba Leonty the Cilician and how he was especially fervent at services in the "New" Monastery of Our Lady the Most Holy Theotokos. He struggled for forty-five years, not leaving her church but submerged in himself.

They also said that if a blind man came to him, he himself gave him alms. If the beggar could see, he placed coins on the base of a column, or on a bench, or on the church steps, where the beggar could take them.

An old monk asked him, "Father, why do you not hand the alms thyself?"

"Forgive me, Father," replied Leonty, "It is not I who give but my lady the Theotokos, who feeds me and them."

62 LIFE OF ABBA STEPHAN PRESBYTER OF ILIOT

An elder told us about Abba Stephan, Presbyter of the Iliot Lavra: Once he was sitting in his cell, and the devil suggested, "Go away from here; you will receive no benefit here."

"I shall not listen to you," answered the monk: "I know who you are: you desire that no one be saved. But Christ, the Son of the living God, will crush you."

63 THE SAME ABBA STEPHAN

They also told us that once he was reading in his cell. Again a demon appeared to him, saying, "Go away from here, old man; you will receive no benefit here."

"If, as I know well, you want me to leave here, then make the chair I am sitting on, walk." He was sitting on a plaited chair.

The devil listened to the monk's words and made not only the chair, but the whole cell, walk.

"You are clever!" said the monk, seeing the devil's cunning. "But, I still will not leave."

The monk prayed and the impure spirit disappeared.

64 THE RETICENCE OF ABBA STEPHAN

Three monks once came to Abba Stephan the presbyter. They sat with him a long time, discussing the salvation of the soul. Abba Stephan was silent.

"Why do you not say something to us, Father? We came to you for spiritual benefit."

"Forgive me. I heard nothing that you have said up to now. However, what I know, I shall tell you. Day and night, I gaze on nothing but our Lord Jesus Christ, nailed to the tree of the cross."

The monks departed, having received a lesson.

65 ANOTHER STORY OF ABBA STEPHAN

Abbas John, called Moliva, told us about the same monk, Stephan:

He became very weak and ill. Then the doctors forced him to eat meat. In the world the blessed monk had a brother, a pious man of God-pleasing life. Once one brother, a layman, came to his brother, the presbyter; finding him eating meat, he became confused. He was very grieved that after great feats of restraint, toward the end of his life the brother allowed himself meat. Suddenly, he saw before himself an unknown man, who said to him, "Why are you scandalized that the monk is eating meat? Do you not know that he is doing this of necessity and obedience? Truly, you ought not to be tempted. Would you like to see what glory your brother is worthy of? Turn around and see."

Turning around, he saw, as in a vision, his brother nailed to a cross, like Christ.

"This is the glory your brother is worthy of! Glorify Him Who glorifies those who truly love Him!"

THE IKON AS SCRIPTURE

{Continued from last issue}

3

GOD THE WORD; GOD THE MESSIAH

All ikons are dogmatic statements, each one is a sermon on the Gospel message, on the *"mystery which was kept hidden from the ages and generations, but now is revealed to the saints"* (Col.1:26; Rm.16:25-26). Thus, the key to understanding ikonography is to understand the Gospel. This means that every corruption of ikonography is inevitably a corruption of the Gospel message itself. It is precisely for this reason that St. John the Damascene boldly declared: *"Show me your ikons so that I may be able to understand your faith"*.¹

All ikons deal with Christ, no matter who is portrayed in the ikon. An ikon always speaks of the truth of the Incarnation: of the virgin birth (as when the virgin is shown); of the Person and Divinity of Christ and His saving acts (as in the ikons of the twelve great feast days); His victory over death and His transforming power (as when the saints are shown).

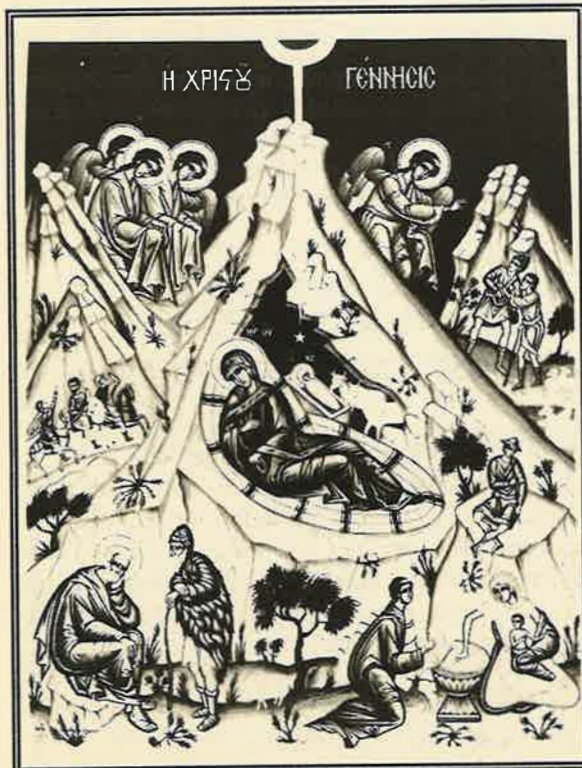
The Person and Nature of Jesus Christ

Let us look first of all at the nature and person of Christ, for this is the foundation of our salvation.

Christ is both truly God and truly man. Since He was incarnate and took on human form, we paint His ikon with a human form. To represent Christ in the form of only a man however, is only half the truth – indeed, it is not the truth at all. It remains devoid of the Gospel message and opposed to scriptural truth. It is false to represent Christ in a merely human form, for He is very God. This is as fundamental to ikonography as it is to the understanding of the New Testament: Jesus Christ must be presented not as a man, but as the God-man. This truth, that He is very God, must always be evident together with the truth that He is perfect man: for though he is *"the Son of man,"* (Mk.8:31; see Dn.7:13), He is also *"the Christ, the Son of God"* (Jn.11:27) and, *"in Him dwells the fulness of the Godhead bodily"* (Col.2:9).

Since Christ was God in the womb of the virgin, even as He took on the form and nature of man, the truth of His divinity must be clear in portrayals of each stage of His life. This is particularly important when we recall that Christ, as God and man, sanctified each stage of human life, from conception to the full maturity of thirty years. This is an indispensable aspect of our redemption: the redemption of the fallen human nature in all its fullness.

Let us see the depth and profoundness of scriptural understanding and revelation in three ikons of Christ as a child. Since the ikon is concerned with a clear revelation of the Gospel, it must reveal to us the Person and Nature of Jesus Christ. In none of these ikons may He be shown as a helpless infant. The Gospel truth that Christ was always God, always in control, is demonstrated not only by the form of the ikon, but by the fact that He is shown as a *"miniature adult,"* only with youthful features, and identified in symbolic ways as God the Word.



In this ikon of the Nativity, Christ is pictured not only wrapped in swaddling cloths, but wrapped in the manner of burial: for this is the Saviour of mankind, who entered the world as a babe in order to die for it. His birth in the manger-cave is a prefiguration of His sabbath in the tomb-cave following His life-bestowing crucifixion. Note the nimbus, the so-called halo, around Christ's head. In it, we see the form of the cross, and in the arms of this form, is the

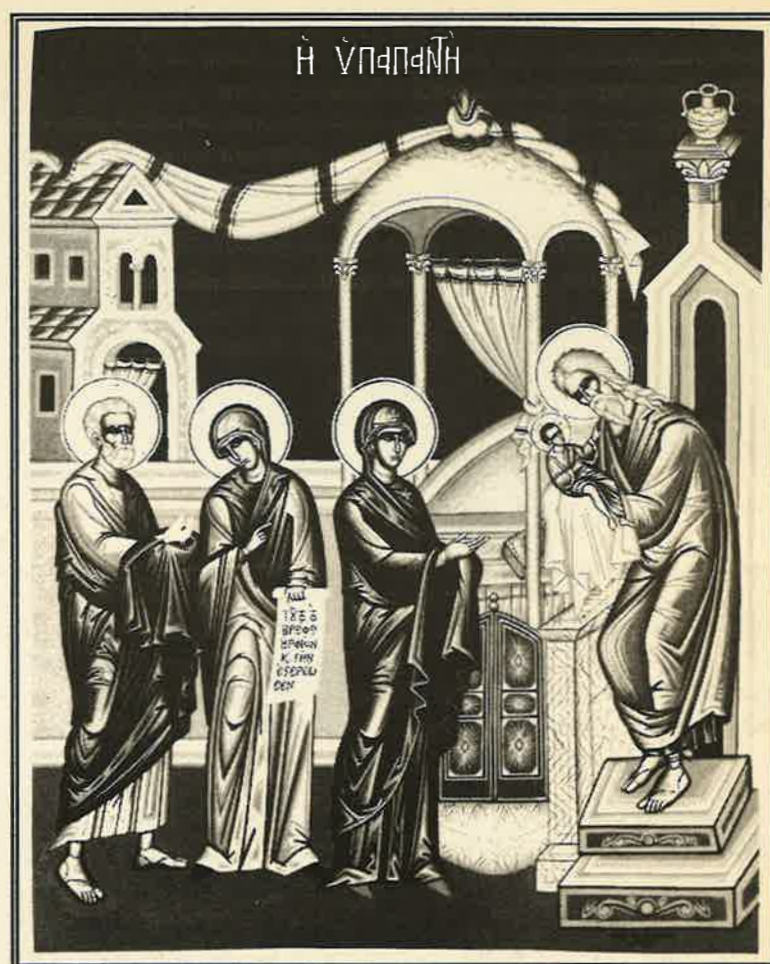
name which God-The-Son gave to Himself when He spoke to Moses on Sinai – "I Am" (in Greek and Slavonic: ο ων), thus, testifying that this infant is truly, God, the God of Moses, the

God Who gave the law on Sinai.

Note too, that in the Orthodox ikon, Joseph is not painted together with Christ and the Virgin. He is painted off to one side or even in a corner of the ikon. This is so because the ikon is scriptural, and in Scripture we learn that Joseph did not participate in the Incarnation, he had no hand or role in the matter of the birth of Christ. The virgin dominates the ikon, together with Christ, for the message is clearly the Virgin Birth, the Incarnation of God. It is scripturally necessary for the figure of Mary to dominate in the ikon precisely because the Nativity ikon reveals the fulfilment of the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit revealed through the prophet, *"The Lord Himself will give you a sign: a virgin shall conceive and bear a Child"* (Is.7:14). This ikon thus has three primary purposes: to reveal the fulfilment of the prophecy, the giving of the "sign" by which we are to know that the Messiah has come; to teach us that the one born of the virgin is God incarnate and; to foretell the repose of Christ in the tomb that He might fulfil that for which He came into the world.

The whole ikon reflects and proclaims the miraculous nature of the event. This is why the angels overshadow and loom above the landscape, which is cast up in awe and rejoicing. They dwarf the magi and the shepherds. For heaven has reached down to earth that earth might be drawn upward to heaven, and neither the shepherds nor the magi are approaching a merely earthly event: they are approaching heaven itself, the throne of the King of Glory. Christ is truly God, and Heaven is with Him. He is both here in the manger cave, but in no wise absent from heaven. To carnal eyes, everything may seem just as it was before, but the world is no longer the same. It is changed, for God has emptied Himself, and poured Himself out for His creation. The ikon perceives this change, this difference in the world, this presence of heaven on earth, this great Gospel wonder that has come to pass *"in the fulness of time"*: The Son and Saviour Jesus Christ, Who is God over all was willingly Incarnated for us (Ti.2:13; Rm. 9:5).²

In the following ikon, we see the meeting of Christ in the Temple. The Virgin presents Him to St. Simeon the Prophet, but notice that, in the ikon, Christ is seen blessing St. Simeon. He is blessing the aged prophet both to receive Him, and to depart in peace; for Simeon is praying to none other than the infant in his arms when he exclaims: *"Master, now lettest Thou Thy servant*



depart in peace according to Thy promise, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation..." (Lk.2:29). It is the child in his arms Who responds, bestowing the blessing for the prophet to depart this life in peace. Christ as God is clearly in control and everything is happening only with His consent and blessing. To the carnal eye, He may seem to be only an ordinary babe, the ikon has clearer vision, however, and it sees the reality of the matter, the deep, eternal truths of the Scripture, and conveys this to the faithful.

Now, let us look at an ikon of Christ as a youth of twelve, teaching in the temple.

[Cont. on P.6, Col.1: IKONS]

["IKONS", cont. from p.5]



He is not shown as a callow youth as he usually is in Western art, but as a font of wisdom and understanding; for, indeed, He is not a callow youth, He is the Word and Wisdom of God. In the ikon, He is clearly Christ, God incarnate. The globe of light round his head bears the title of the Creator and Law-giver, come now to reveal and teach the truth of His law to His creation. He has appeared to beseech, one last time, the guardians of His

law to understand and reverence that law, to perceive and practice the true meaning of the law. Let us see how beautifully the ikon reveals this unity of the Old and New Testaments, this continuity of the Word, Who was revealed in the Old Testament, and now seen face to face in the New Testament. In the following ikons of *The Lord Immanuel* and *The Divine Wisdom*, we see exactly the same Person as the youth in the temple. The Orthodox Christian who properly venerates ikons is deeply and profoundly aware of this. Western religious art presents only an actor pretending to be Jesus.



Detail, Christ the Divine Wisdom.



Christ Immanuel of Isaiah's Prophecy
(Dome of the Russian Cathedral, N.Y. City)

The Alpha and the Omega

It is a very old saying that the New Testament is concealed in the Old Testament, and the Old Testament is revealed in the New. This is quite true, and Orthodox Christian ikonography is faithful to this fact, as we shall see in the next issue of *The Canadian Orthodox Missionary*, *The Alpha and the Omega*, the Beginning and the End.

EDITORIAL

JUNK FOOD FOR THE SOUL

Junk food is artificially flavoured and coloured, excessively sweetened and highly addictive. It is harmful to physical and mental health and its consumption interferes with or even deprives one of beneficial, healthful nourishment.

Television is an almost precise spiritual equivalent of junk food. The entire content of its programming is unedifying, unnourishing, opposed to sound mental and emotional health and filled with value-training which is diametrically opposed to a sound and healthy society. The life styles and ideals it portrays are artificial, corrupt and undesirable. Moreover, television is highly addictive.

Even cartoons designed especially for children instil uncompassionate, aggressive and violent attitudes which are definitely reflected in children's behaviour in school and at play. It has been repeatedly demonstrated, by University of British Columbia studies, and by several studies and commissions in the United States and Europe, that television viewing imparts negative ideals and behaviour patterns to young people, and that children tend to accept the T.V. version of life and behaviour as acceptable norms. In addition, television commercials, which are designed to increase and exploit every human passion, are very popular with children. It has been shown repeatedly that television advertisements have a powerful residual effect not only on the impressionable minds of children, but on adults as well. These advertisements do succeed in initiating, building, strengthening and then exploiting the passions of every sort.

If one carefully examines the moral content of television programs, including that of children's cartoons and the commercials, one will see that they are precisely the opposite of Orthodox Christian ideals. Having contemplated this, stop and compare the number of hours both adults and children spend under the influence of television with the amount of time spent in church, prayer and the reading of the Divine Scripture and other spiritually edifying books. Thus, the heavy influence of Satan and his ideals in the lives of our children begins at a very early age, and in our very own homes.

This problem is often compounded by the sorrowful fact that many parents who are proud of their colour television set are ashamed of the ikon of our Saviour. The television set is given a place of prominence, almost a place of honour, in our homes, while often there is no ikon corner to be found, and if there are ikons, they are hidden away out of the main room of the house, where they will not "cause any embarrassment". Many parents who will consent to their children spending hours glued to the television set, will not spend so much as ten minutes together with their children praying before the ikons. The Saviour and His saints are embarrassments, not entirely welcome guests, while the liturgy of the evil-one, served daily on television, is given a place of singular honour in the household. Families which would never think of reading together the life of a saint or from the Scripture, will eat in front of the television, just as pagans shared their feasts with their idols — and often such families even neglect to bless the food before the meal.

Later, the parents of such families will bemoan the moral and spiritual state of their offspring. How often do you read the lives of the saints to your children? How much time does your family spend together at the ikon corner in prayer? How often do your children catch sight of an ikon of the Saviour or the saints in your home? On the other hand, how much time do they spend with violent, aggressive and uncompassionate cartoons? How much time do they spend with loud, aggressive, sensual and immoral anti-heroes on television?

No one is foolish enough to suppose that a physically and mentally healthy child can be raised if his intake of junk food exceeds or even equals that of healthy, natural, beneficial food. Why would someone be so foolish as to suppose that one can raise an emotionally, mentally and spiritually healthy child on spiritual junk food?

Television, like so many of man's inventions, has been consecrated to the demon of greed and envy, and it is manipulated primarily for the purpose of increasing and exploiting every human passion. Even the occasional "decent" program is more than counterbalanced by commercials designed to feed, and to feed on, human passions. Some people have asserted, with good reason, that it is better to have a television set in one's home, where T.V. watching can be controlled, than to have one's children watching television elsewhere, in uncontrolled circumstances. There is considerable truth in this. But stop and consider for yourselves whether your television set takes precedence over your ikon corner, whether T.V. is given a greater position in the lives of your children than is Christ. Are you feeding your children more spiritual nourishment than spiritual junk food? The knowledge that parents must answer before the Judge of All for the manner in which they reared their children ought to be enough to make them pause for serious consideration of this matter, even if parental love is too weak to do so.

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THE CHILDREN'S CORNER

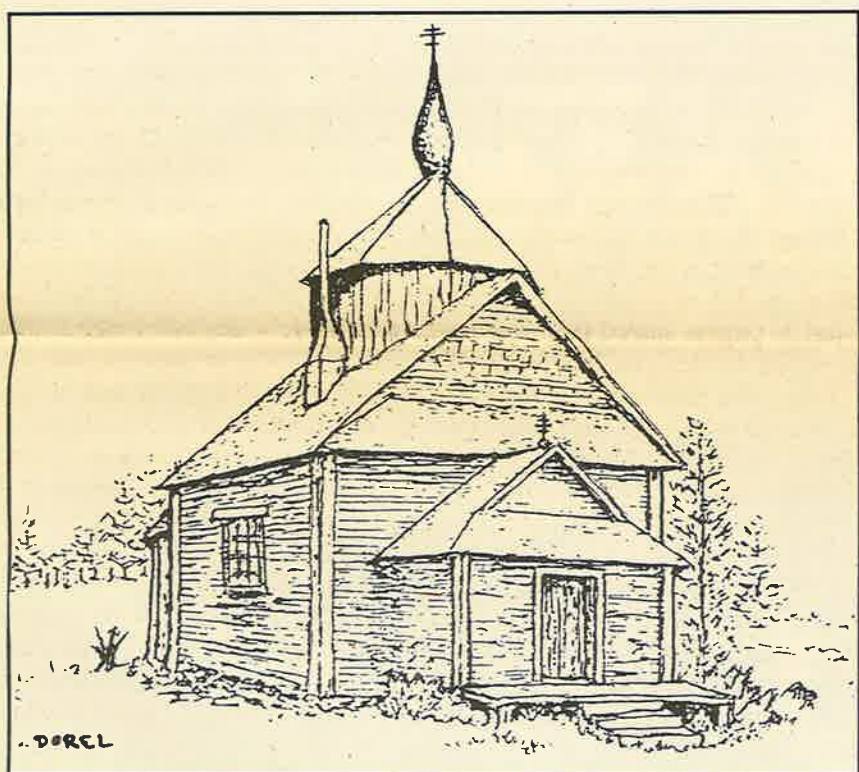
by Fr Moses Armstrong

BEHOLD THE WOOD OF THE CROSS¹

Sunday, after church, we went for a drive and picnic. It was hot so we went home to first pick up some sodas and our lunch. After getting settled in the car, we drove out of town and into the country. It was really good to get out of Edmonton where there are so many people and so much noise. I like Edmonton and it has lots of great things to see and do but, it is just not as nice as the country.

Since it had been raining for the past week, everything was green and clean and fresh; it reminded me of baptism and all that baptism means. We left the city and were immediately driving through green fields with bright yellow flowers looking like the light of little candles burning before the icons in church.

As we drove through the fields, we saw a little wooden church standing all alone. "Let's go take a look at it". When we got closer, we could see that it was all made of wood and in pretty good condition. Instead of nails, wooden pegs had been used to put the joints together. Everything was made by hand and must have taken a lot of time and work to complete. Even the roof was made of wooden shingles that had been shaped by hand. The windows still had their glass and the door, made of wooden planks which had been fitted together, was closed and had helped to keep out the rain, snow and dust.



The old Annunciation Russian Church, Alberta
Drawing by Dorel Samoila

"Can we go in?" I asked dad. "Yes, but remember that it is a church. Cross yourself first and don't talk loud or yell when we are inside."

Dad pushed on the door and it wouldn't open. We all pushed on it and little by little made enough space to get in. The door must not have been used for years and it seemed to be too big for the frame it was in.

We all got inside, brushing the tickly threads of spider webs off our faces as we entered the church. The floor was of wood and covered by a thick layer of black dust. After sweeping some of it aside, we could see that the floor was made of wood which was almost perfectly smooth; we couldn't tell if the smoothness came from the builders or the feet of those who had prayed here.

The little church had the three traditional divisions of our Orthodox buildings; the entrance porch, the body of the church and the sanctuary. It was interesting that whomever had built this church was so careful to do everything right. In the front was a little icon screen, so carefully carved and joining the sanctuary to the body of the church. Some of the icons were missing and the curtains hanging in the holy doors were falling apart and kept in place by threads. We could see the Holy Table with the candlestand and cross behind it, standing with a blanket of dust over it.

Along the side and back walls were wooden benches. A small, black metal stove sat on a platform of brick and had a chimney of iron piping going up through the ceiling. The area

around the pipe had been leaking and so some of the roofing seemed to be rotting away. Also, the stove seemed to be slowly tipping a bit and looked as though it was about to settle through the floor.

It was wonderful to find this little church and we were grateful to be able to enter and say a little prayer in this deserted holy place. At the same time, we were very unhappy to see that no one was paying attention to this place of prayer. Why was this so?

We took pictures of the church and then went on our way. Driving through the countryside, we passed other churches that were surrounded by tall grass and bushes. There were graveyards where you could barely see the crosses through the tall grass, shrubs and wild flowers.

We spent time at the lake fishing and swimming and camping. We also had time to visit some other spots of natural beauty and interest.

Our holiday was good but we were all happy to be home again, to sleep in our own rooms and our own beds.

On Sunday, we went to church and this time I looked at things more carefully. The first thing that I noticed was that we have many more older people than younger people. Next, it was noticed that especially teenagers and young married people are the ones who come seldom or only once or twice a year. We have lots of children and lots of older people but not many in between. Is this the way the little wooden church began dying? I just couldn't put it out of my mind: the wooden floor carpeted with dust; the iron stove sinking through the floor; the chimney with rust streaming down like blood on a slaughtered animal; the quiet; the crosses overgrown with grass and bushes and wild flowers. Will this be our own church in 50 years time?

How sad to think of all the hard work to build the beautiful wooden church. This church and the people who built it are part of our Orthodox inheritance, part of our Orthodox history; they are our Orthodox ancestors (Save, O Lord, Thy people and bless Thine inheritance). How much do we really understand about their way of life and their struggle to pass the Orthodox Faith on to us and our children? How many of us are thoughtless and ungrateful to them for their efforts in our behalf? Sure, they might not have had a university education or even high school but they knew things we have never heard of. Many of these people struggled against a long list of problems and changes that would have driven many of us to despair. Even with all these problems, many people kept their faith, passed what they knew on to us and trusted us to build on it and pass the sacred traditions on to future generations. I hope and pray that we pass on to our children more than a floor covered with dust and a rustic cemetery overgrown with grass, bushes and wildflowers.

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{"SPIRITUAL MEADOW", continued from P.4}

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LIFE OF THE HERMIT
ABBA THEodosy

A bba Antony, founder and abbot of the Iliot Lavra, related what Abba Theodosy the Silent had told him about himself.

Before departing into the desert (related Abba Theodosy), in spiritual ecstasy I saw a youth whose face shone brighter than the sun. He took my hand and said, "Let us go; you are on the verge of a competition," and he led me into a theatre of indescribable size.

The theatre was filled with spectators. Part of them wore white robes; the others had dark countenances. The youth led me to the centre of the theatre. There I saw a warrior of unusual size: his head touched the clouds. He was deformed and had a provoking appearance.

The youth said to me, "You are about to struggle with him."

At the sight of the giant, I became terrified and began to tremble. "What mere man can wrestle with him?" I exclaimed, gazing beseechingly at the youth who had brought me in.

"Nevertheless, go out bravely against him. I will be present at the competition. I will be the judge and will hand you a victory crown."

My opponent also stepped into the centre and we began to struggle. Soon, the wondrous judge appeared and handed me a crown. Then the multitude with dark countenances suddenly disappeared with a cry. The people in white robes praised Him Who helped and obtained a glorious victory for me.

HOMILIES ON MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

by Bishop Lazar Puhalo

MATTHEW 7:13-14

"Enter in at the narrow gate: for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter therein. But the gate and the road which lead to life are narrow, and there are only a few who find it (Matthew 7:13-14).

There are certain urgent truths proclaimed by our Saviour in clear, unambiguous terms, which should be recalled every day. This statement is one of them. Every Orthodox Christian should contemplate these words. They should be in our thoughts when we begin a lenten period; they should cross our minds when there is a vigil at church on the eve of a feast and we must choose between being gathered in God's house with our brothers and sisters, or following some other pursuit which may seem so important at the moment, but which is really secondary to the main goal of our lives. This profound saying of our Lord is of much greater and deeper importance than the occasional choices we must make, for it is concerned with the whole course of our lives — with those vital decisions we take which shape the whole direction and tone of our journey through this earthly life.

Often the departure from the narrow way which leads to life is subtle. The broad gate is always more appealing and, after all, the majority are choosing it. We hear the justifications, and we know that the speaker is not even convincing himself, but is only seeking an excuse to depart from the Saviour's way: "But surely God wants us to be happy;" "I don't think God wants us to suffer;" "Well, it says in the Bible, 'It's not what goes into the belly that defiles one,' so I don't think it is necessary to keep the fasts." There are a hundred such meaningless and empty minded phrases, and each one of them is designed to rationalize the abandoning of Christ's words and warnings, and departing to the wide gate and broad road that leads inexorably to destruction.

Orthodox Christian people: let us leave aside such devious excuses and sly phrases. Let us take our Lord Jesus Christ at His word. The road to salvation and everlasting life is indeed narrow, and the gate is so narrow that few even find it. Must it be a sorrowful path? In terms of the worldly passions, yes, it is a sorrowful path. In terms of hope, freedom from the bondage of passions, and that deep, indescribable peace and joy of Christ, no, it is far from sorrowful.

The broad road leads us past the manors and palaces of the rich and powerful so that we may learn envy, jealousy, desire and lust. The narrow path leads us to a vision of the everlasting mansions which our Saviour has prepared for us, that we may learn hope and peace, that not envying the things of this world, we may truly cherish our neighbours as ourselves. The broad gate opens onto the freedom of this world: the freedom of debt beyond measure because we lust after more than we need and desire possessions so that others might burn with envy toward us. Through this gate a world of pleasures appear — alcohol, drugs to drown the sorrow and emptiness that were not supposed to be there. Sexual

liberty, so that we may pursue the phantom of fulfilment and ruin our lives: betrayal of spouses, corruption of love, sexually transmitted illnesses, aids; the hellish tragedy of a person who lives for the passions, but becomes too old to obtain fulfilment of them, and so is trapped in a misery which is a foretaste of hell itself. The wide gate which opens to all the promises of the world is only a facade on a rotting, decayed structure, and the broad road leads only to emptiness and the grave — and to hell beyond. For the pursuit of the pleasures of this life is a vain attempt at happiness, a hopeless attempt to stave off old age and the thought of death, while depriving one of an abiding joy that transcends every concept of mere happiness.

The narrow gate at first appears confining and its way appears more like a path than a road; and yet, once one enters it and begins the journey, every turn brings light, discovery, new joys, hope, peace and a freedom which lightens both soul and body. The insincere, those who stumbled on the gate as it were, by accident, and set out on the road unwillingly, are often tempted by the scene of the majority merrily entering into the broad road — a gate that is like the door to a majestic mall, filled with promise. Yet, every promise has a price, and there are no promises for the poor.

It may be that there is a price also for the promises offered on that narrow and more certain path, but the price of those promises is only love, and no one needs be poor in this.

Beloved of Christ, let us, each day, contemplate this truth, spoken in love by our Saviour. Understanding the meaning of these words opens to us an understanding of the meaning of our own lives and of the course of our passage through this world as ones "in the world, but not of the world," (John 8:23) as ones who "have here no abiding city, but who seek the one which is above" (Hebrews 13:14).

BAPTISM AT ST NICHOLAS

The recent baptism of Anastasia, daughter of Micki and Cecilia Jahura was an especially happy occasion. Kuma was Leposava Djurdevich and the godfather was Edward Merinuk. Anastasia is the granddaughter of St Nicholas parishioners Radi and Olga Jahura. This newest member of the parish family was welcomed with a special feast.



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