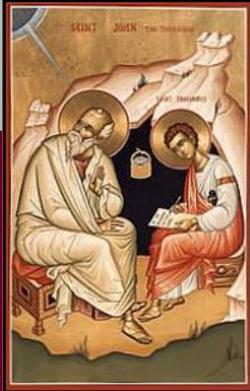


Volume 3 Issue 2

Spring 2007



Our Journey Together as Orthodox Christians
In Community

Bright Sadness

By Father John Breck

The beautiful expression “bright sadness” came back to me with special poignancy during Holy Week this year. In Greek the compound noun is *charmolype*, variously translated as “bitter joy,” “joyful mourning,” or “affliction that leads to joy.” It expresses what the Fathers of the Church call an “antimony,” a truth that defies normal logic. The word is an oxymoron of sorts, which describes a paradoxical spiritual state characterized by a profound mingling of joy and grief. St. John of Sinai formulates the idea in the seventh step of his *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, where he speaks of it as “the blessed joy-grief of holy compunction.” (1)

In his classic work, *Great Lent*, Fr. Alexander Schmemmann describes “sad brightness” as “the sadness of my exile, of the waste I have made of my life; the brightness of God’s presence and forgiveness, the joy of the recovered desire for God, the peace of the recovered home.”(2)

It is sadness that permeates the Lenten season, with its long, fatiguing, magnificent liturgical services and its constant call to repentance. Yet it is a sadness leavened by a deep joy that only tears can adequately express. Tears of longing for the glory and peace to come, for the recovered home where the Father embraces each of us, His prodigal children, with an unfathomable depth of forgiving love.

That bright sadness puts me in touch with a vital sensitivity that I otherwise rarely experience. This past Lent and Holy Week, it enabled me to see for the first time the faces of people I have known, in some cases for years, yet without really seeing them or knowing them very well at all. It happened especially with members of our parish community, many of whom have lived through degrees of hardship and suffering most of us can barely imagine: new immigrants from Russia, Ukraine or Romania, for example, whose faith remained strong despite constant threats, persecution and material deprivation. Or a young couple who just lost their first child four months into the pregnancy; or a recent convert who is attempting to recover from a divorce and the loss of everything he



*Fr. John and Lyn Breck spoke at our Eagle River Institute in the summer of 2001. As often happens in the Church, we felt an immediate affinity with them, recognizing in them a kindred spirit, both of them sincere and humble people whose lives show they truly care about the things of God and His people. In his newly-released book, **Longing for God**, Fr. John includes a short chapter about Great Lent and community. He describes how easily we can find ourselves standing in church with people for years, and yet never really knowing them deeply. He writes how this was revealed to him one year during Holy Week, as he looked intently at the careworn faces of the people who stood beside him through the many long and solemn services. His words seemed timely for our own parish newsletter, so we sought and received permission from him to reprint them here. I hope his words will inspire you to find the encouragement that can come from discovering how God has worked uniquely in the life of every person around you. Fr. John and Lyn live near Charleston, South Carolina and continue to direct the St. Silouan Retreat Center.*

– Fr. Marc Dunaway

(Continued on page 6)

Community Cooks

By Maye Johnson

Featuring: Deborah Stallman



Stallman Family in 2006

Deborah Stallman is a living icon of serving and commitment. She has an abundance of energy and a desire to serve our parish school, choir and church. She and husband Dwight, along with Cara and Andrew (Arianna was born here), moved to Alaska in September 1994, acting on the suggestion of one of Dwight's fellow psychiatrists. Deborah knew Alaska would be a good place for him to practice psychiatry because it is always dark and cold! She soon discovered the warmth of our community and our desire for worship. She is our choir director, serves St. Johns School in multiple ways, and volunteers at her son's high school in Anchorage. Deborah's doctor's degree prompted her to organize a system for anyone in the parish who is sick or in need of care. The list of her gifts and giving seem endless and we are blessed to have her among us. Her Raw Apple Cake is easy and delicious.

Welcome Home,
our church cookbook,
is available for \$18.00.
Contact Maye Johnson
to order.

tommajej@mtaonline.net
Phone or fax: 907-696-3326

Raw Apple Cake

Cream together:

1 ¼ c. oil
1 ½ c. + 2 T. sugar

2 eggs
2 t. vanilla

Stir in:

4 c. diced apples
1 c. chopped walnuts

Sift together and add to creamed mixture:

3 c. flour
1 t. baking soda

3 t. cinnamon
½ t. salt

Bake in a 9x13 inch pan for 45 minutes to 1 hour at 375 degrees. No frosting needed.

Outpost of the Kingdom

By Mary Alice Cook

If ever there is a time to revel in the pageantry of Orthodoxy, that time is Pascha. And one great thing about this pageant is that nobody sits in a chair and watches. We all have a role. I love joining the processions, holding my candle, shouting "Hell was embittered!" during the homily of St. John Chrysostom. But I also treasure my behind-the-scenes role. For almost ten years, I have helped to prepare the bier or epitaphios, as some call it, for the Holy Friday evening Vespers service. The bier is the wooden frame on which the body of Jesus symbolically rests after it is removed from the cross. Each year, I meet one or two other ladies – Sally Eckert and I often work together – in the church kitchen where we separate the bundles of ferns and carnations and baby's breath before arranging them around the edge of the bier. As we unwrap and fasten the flowers, I think of the faithful women who went to Christ's tomb very early in the morning, carrying the spices and perfume to anoint His body. Each person who comes to Saturday morning matins is given a flower from the bier and I often see those little blooms decorating Easter baskets on Sunday morning. When the bier is taken away, the remaining flowers are saved to place on the graves Sunday afternoon.

The Pascha flowers are like a little bit of springtime to us winter-numbed Alaskans, and we are always grateful to Judi Hoyt and her helpers, who stay behind everyone else on Saturday night to transform the nave into the glowing place we find when we return early Sunday morning. Judi tells me there is a woman – not a St. John's parishioner – who comes to the Cathedral every year during the Paschal season just to sit in the nave and admire its beauty. I can understand this. From Pascha to Ascension, I love finding excuses to slip into the church, to smell the lingering fragrance of incense and flowers, and to listen as the empty nave almost seems to ring with the echo of the censer bells and the happy words: "Christ is risen!"

"Who are these people and what are they doing?"
-Eudora Welty

In Community

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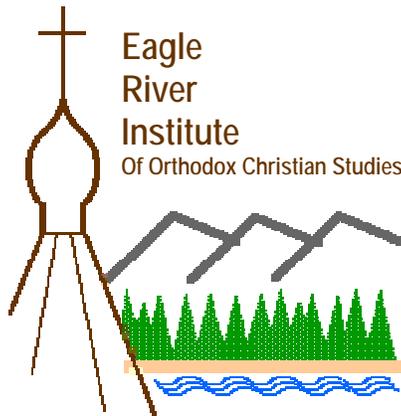
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Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese



Please attend the 13th annual Eagle River Institute this August. The speakers this year are Fr. Gregory Rogers and Dr. Albert Rossi. Make plans now to participate from August 1-5 and then join with us in celebration of the Feast of the Transfiguration on August 6., 2007



Dr. Albert Rossi

Dr. Rossi teaches courses in pastoral theology at Saint Vladimir's Seminary. He is a member of the SCOBA Commission on Contemporary Social and Moral Issues. He has written numerous articles on psychology and religion and published a book through Paulist Press entitled,

Can I Make a Difference: Christian Family Life Today. After teaching at Pace University for 24 years, he retired as Associate Professor of Psychology. He is a licensed clinical psychologist in the state of New York.

Track 1:

The Inner Journey for the Christian: Be Still and Know that I Am God.

1. Christian Identity: Be Still and Know Who, Whose, I Am
2. Journey into Stillness: Personal Prayer
3. Stillness Expressed: Vocation
4. Be Still and Know through Relationships



Father Gregory Rogers

Fr. Gregory Rogers has taught several subjects at Aiken Technical College, Aiken, SC, where he now serves as Dean of General Education and University Transfer. He is a graduate of Lincoln Christian College and Valparaiso University and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the History of Christianity at the University of Chicago. He is the Pastor of St. Catherine Antiochian Orthodox Church, Aiken, SC and St. Barnabas Antiochian Orthodox Church, Lexington, SC, as well as the blessed husband of Pamela, proud father of three and grandfather of one.

Track 2:

A Journey Remembered: The Story of the Evangelical Orthodox Church Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of the Evangelical Orthodox Church's Reception into the Antiochian Archdiocese

Coming in from the Cold: Campus Crusade, The New Covenant Apostolic Order, and the Church.

1. Born to Die: The Formation and Development of the Evangelical Orthodox Church
2. Rebuilding the Ancient Ruins: Life and Aspiration in the Evangelical Orthodox Church
3. The Place Where God Dwells: Two Patriarchs, Two Visions, the End, and the Beginning.

Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World

By Henri Nouwen

A Review by Jill Parker

Of all Nouwen's books, *Life of the Beloved* is my favorite. I found it while wandering the aisles at Title Wave, a used bookstore in Anchorage. I had been looking for books by Nouwen, because Fr. John Downey had recently recommended this author to me. Nouwen explains that the book was written as an attempt to express the reality of the spiritual life to a young man and his friends who were not familiar with religion or spirituality.

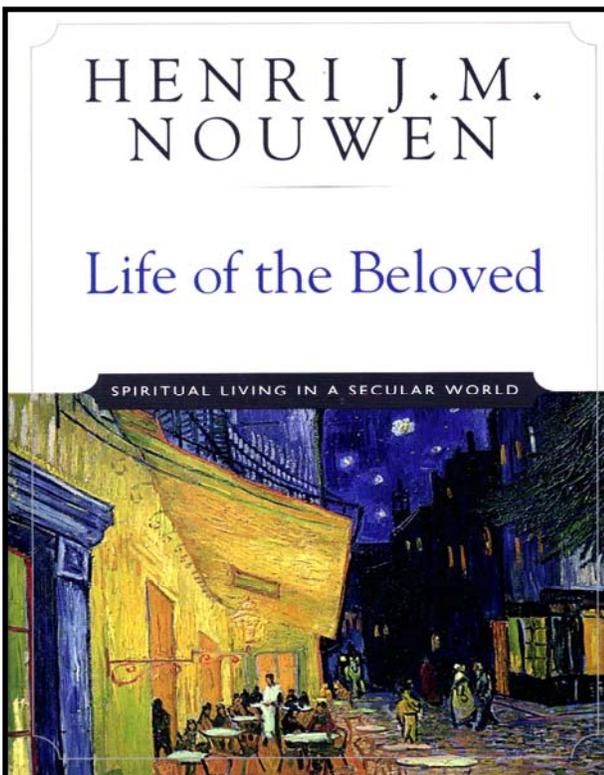
The first chapter, "Being the Beloved," opens with these sentences: "Ever since you asked me to write for you and your friends about the spiritual life, I have been wondering if there might be one word I would most want you to remember when you finished reading all I wish to say. Over the past year, that special word has gradually emerged from the depths of my own heart. It is the word, 'Beloved', and I am convinced that it has been given to me for the sake of you and your friends."

When I began reading this book, my fourth child and only son had just been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. I was processing this information at the same time I experienced the confusing loss of a painful divorce. Here is one sentence in particular that I underlined for future reference:

"Self-rejection is the greatest enemy of the spiritual life because it contradicts the sacred voice that calls us the 'Beloved.'"

Nouwen calls the second part "Becoming the Beloved," and he explains what he means: "To identify the movements of the Spirit in our lives, I have found it helpful to use four words:

*Beloved You:
refract the light in moments of stillness;
spin with the spheres in their dance round the sun;
embrace moist droplets as their meniscus;
kindle the fire between music and words;
your name burns in flames of incandescence;
earth, air and water sing of your praises;
the spirit is the place of your presence;
where I can hear whispered, this tender phrase:
"you are beloved."*



taken, blessed, broken, given...These words summarize my life as a Christian, because, as a Christian, I am called to become bread for the world..." These words almost overflow with meaning for those who read them in a Eucharistic context.

Nouwen elaborates on what it means to him to be "taken" or chosen as the Beloved: "First of all, you have to keep unmasking the world about you for what it is: manipulative, controlling, power-hungry and in the long run, destructive." He admits, from his own experience, that claiming our own "chosen-ness" can be a difficult, though rewarding, process.

Nouwen goes on to speak of ways in which we are able to be "given", or give of ourselves to others. He touches upon the joyful re-marriage of his young friend. He speaks of the gifts that his handicapped parishioners have been able to give, even though some of them are not able to walk, talk, or feed themselves. "More surely than ever before," he writes, "I know now that we are called to give our very lives to one another and that, in so doing, we become a true community of love." The final gift of which he speaks, curiously enough, is that which we give in death. "The spirit of love," he says, "once freed from our mortal bodies, will blow where it will, even when few will hear its coming and going."

Life of the Beloved found its way into my home, and has now settled into permanent residence on my bedside table. I believe it is out of print, but can be ordered fairly cheaply on the Internet through used books sources such as Amazon. Here is a poem I wrote while meditating upon the word *beloved*.

Keep Faith, No Matter What

By Laurie Snider

One year ago this month, I waited in the doctor's exam room with our 16-year old son Thomas, thinking I might be overreacting to his vague complaint of abdominal pain. I had taken Thomas to two other doctors within the past three weeks and nothing had appeared out of the norm.

The doctor came in, washed and dried his hands and made small talk about the newly discovered "bump" on Thomas' neck. But as he palpated the "bump," his tone shifted quickly from light and casual to quiet and serious. While slowly backing away, the doctor pointed to Thomas' enlarged lymph nodes and said, "THIS is very serious...he needs to go to a head and neck surgeon tomorrow." My expression remained calm, but inside I was screaming, "Shut up! Shut up!"

The biopsy specimen was sent to Tennessee and the results took a few days. I had arrived at work earlier than usual when "the call" came in from Alaska's only pediatric oncologist. "Mrs. Snider? This is Dr. Schulz. I have your son's pathology report."

I knew the doctor would tell me that Thomas had cancer, but I did not know the type and stage. My mind raced and I thought: *Please don't be stage II yet.*

"Thomas has stage IIIB Hodgkin's Lymphoma," the doctor said. "It is in his belly, abdomen, chest, spleen, and upper back. Without a Gallium scan, we are unsure of bone marrow involvement. He could possibly be stage IVB." She made an appointment for him to be seen in Seattle four

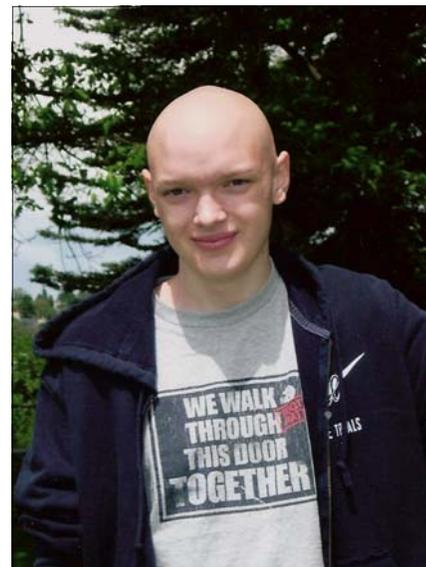
days later. No treatment for this advanced pediatric cancer is available in Alaska.

I hung up the phone and felt a bizarre, chilling numbness throughout my body. I dropped to my knees with my hands gripped tightly overhead, praying out loud to God, "Please help me. *Please, dear God, help me.*"

On a snowy March Sunday, just after Liturgy and hours before our flight to Seattle, we were surrounded by our St. John's family while Fr. Marc prayed for healing for Thomas, encouraging him to "keep your faith, no matter what." The words from that service, along with Dr. Schulz' reassurance that "even Stage IVB Hodgkins can go into a complete remission," kept me going in the months to come.

Leaving our daughter Alana, a high school senior, at home in Eagle River, we - my husband Stan, Thomas, and I - arrived in Seattle, picked up a car on loan from Stan's sister and headed to our motel. That first week was a whirlwind of activity, including several scans, medical appointments, two surgeries, and our move into our new home at the Ronald McDonald house. We were given a time frame for treatment of stage IIIB Hodgkins lymphoma: six months.

Separated by 2000 miles, our family faced huge logistical and emotional challenges. Thomas needed us, but Alana also needed support and stability. Stan and I worked out a plan that allowed us to switch places with each other once a month, averaging a week or so at a time in each state.



Thomas in May 2006

Our savings, along with miscellaneous fundraisers held by friends and family, kept us from worrying too much about finances. Fr. James Bernstein, Dn. Larry and Natalie Hartman, along with others from Sts. Peter and Paul church in Seattle, continually offered their help and support. We were fortunate to have an abundance of resources available to us, and they were very much appreciated. Still, I struggled against feelings of bitterness at living in a strange house, driving someone else's car in an unfamiliar town, while I watched our son battle through painful chemotherapy.

Life became very real to me as I stayed with Thomas on the pediatric cancer unit at Children's Hospital and watched all the high tech machines deliver the dreaded chemo to each patient. Thomas did better when his room was very quiet, dark and cold. My job was to keep him comfortable, while occasionally fending off well intentioned musicians and clowns.

Through laughter in good times and tears of sadness through hard times, we parents at the Ronald McDonald house bonded tightly, held together by our common goal of a cure for our kids. Sadly, we met children who, in spite of the newest medical technology, went home without hope. But Thomas was not among them. After six months of chemotherapy and 24 radiation sessions, Thomas' cancer was declared to be in complete remission. When he has been cancer free for five years, he will be considered cured.

By God's mercy, one year after that chilling doctor visit, our family is together again. Alana is gearing up for her summer job as a tour guide for the Alaska Railroad. Thomas is a hard working high school junior, taking on extra credits to keep up with the rest of his class. But our lives will never be the same. I am frequently asked if life is back to normal and I always reply: "Normal is just a setting on the dishwasher."



Snider Family in April 2004

Bright Sadness

By Father John Breck

(Continued from page 1)

held dear, including his children.

There are many others in the parish, too, who tend to keep to themselves their personal stress and suffering. Yet their eyes and their body language betray the weight of the burdens they carry. Some are caring at home for elderly parents who are afflicted with dementia or alcoholism. Others are struggling to offer love, support and guidance to disruptive or promiscuous adolescents; or depriving themselves in order to feed and clothe their children after their business collapsed or they fell victim to “downsizing.”

Multitudes of different stories, yet with one common theme: they long ago placed their trust and their hope in Christ, the source and end of their most intense longing, and in these past few days they gathered together to celebrate their faith and their hope at the Feast of feasts, Holy Pascha.

What produced a truly bright sadness for me this year was not my feeble attempts at fasting or my less than enthusiastic efforts toward repentance. It wasn't even so much the liturgical celebrations, as splendid and moving as they were, and always are. Instead, it was seeing certain faces for the first time. These were faces I

of the Lenten season is not merely an individual feeling. It is a profoundly ecclesial experience, one I can know in its painful yet glorious fullness only insofar as I share it with other people. Through this experience – perhaps more than through any other, apart from Eucharistic communion itself – we find ourselves joined, in compunction and longing, with all those who make up the universal Body of Christ.

Bright sadness may be the most powerful and important experience we can know. It brings to our mind and heart, in the most direct and personal way, the ultimate purpose of our life and the object or end of our most passionate desire. It reminds us of who we are, as beloved children of God, created in His image and invited to glorify and enjoy Him forever.

That conflicted emotion of bright sadness is a blessed gift, bestowed by the God who loves us with a “love without limit.”⁽³⁾ It comes to us through our ascetic struggle during the Lenten season, as it does

That conflicted emotion of bright sadness is a blessed gift, bestowed by the God who loves us with a “love without limit.”

had looked at, or spoken to, or shared coffee hour with any number of times. But they had usually seemed rather at a distance, interesting, intelligent, amusing, often warm and gracious; but still people whom I hardly knew.

Somehow, by God's grace, I was able during this past Holy Week to see in those faces new depths of personal joy and suffering, of hope and selfless attentiveness to others, as well as of spiritual struggle and fervent commitment to Christ – depths I can't find in myself, but that reveal themselves so clearly through the strength and honest simplicity of the witness these people offer to me and to others around them.

This implies that the grief-filled joy

through the solemn beauty of the Church's liturgical services.

But it can come to us as well when we observe it in the people around us: people with whom and for whom we pray, people who in many cases pray for us without our being aware of it. We find that bright sadness in communion with them, in hearing their stories, in sharing their hopes, fears and longings. We find it through being attentive to the beauty and truth of their life and their unique presence.

We find it once we find them, possibly for the first time; not merely as parishioners, nor even as friends, but as brothers and sisters, united forever in the Body of Christ. Here and now, we share



Longing for God

ORTHODOX REFLECTIONS ON
BIBLE, ETHICS, AND LITURGY

John Breck

their pains, their struggles and their delights. That bright sadness, though, tells us that one day we will also share with them, in intimate communion, a glory and joy that know no mourning, no grief, no sorrow nor sighing, but only life everlasting.

(1) Trans. By Archimandrite Lazarus Moore [London: Faber & Faber, Ltd. Repr. Willits, California; Eastern Orthodox Books; 1973] 113.

(2) Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press [1969], 36.

(3) This is an expression widely used among Orthodox Christians in Western Europe, especially under the influence of Fr. Lev Gillet, also known as “a monk of the Eastern Church.” He wrote about *l'amour sans limites* and bore witness to it throughout his life.

The Summer of the Angel

By Mary Greene

It was my brother-in-law, Fr. James Meadows, who suggested to me the possibility of a new start in Alaska. It was the summer of 1991 and I had just lost my job. Fr. James, who saw me through quite a few ups and downs and always gave me good advice, had heard of the St. James House program and advised me to give it a try. So, with some fear and trepidation, I left everything behind me in Mississippi and boarded a plane for Alaska, not knowing what I would find or how different my life would be.



Mary Greene

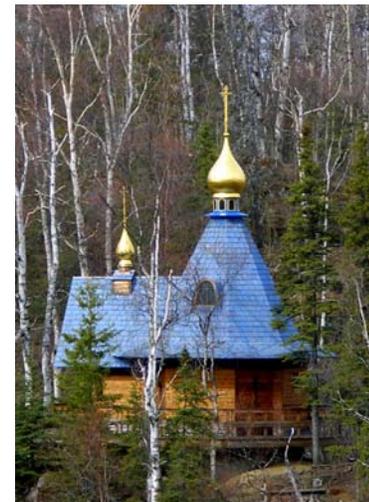
I went from living with my brother in a nice apartment to sharing a small space with six total strangers. I was 5000 miles from everything I had ever known and it was hard at first. But I struck up a friendship with Judy Miller (now Mother Galina). We were about the same age, we shared a love of art and the creative life. We liked movies, making things with our hands, and, eventually, I even grew to share her love for hiking and being outdoors.

The thing I remember most about that summer was the building of the St. Sergius Chapel. Scott Reese, who also lived in the St. James House, was the principle carpenter. Fr. Harold had the idea that Judy should carve an angel to be placed above the chapel door. Judy found a large block of wood deemed suitable for the project and for weeks the angel was a work in progress, laid out on the counter in the kitchen of our suite. Each week would see the angel taking shape, growing, springing to life.

All summer, people came and went at the House, offering advice, criticism, or merely curiosity about the angel. Yuri Sidorenko, the chapel architect and iconographer, would often

stop by with suggestions and stay for hours to work. Scott shared what he knew about carving and loaned Judy his tool catalogues. A German couple (the wife was a sculptor) who had heard of our community came to visit and Judy brought them to the suite for a look. They stayed several hours, teaching Judy new and better ways to carve.

As the summer drew to a close, work on the building came to a halt. With the weather turning to cold and snow, effort shifted to the making of the door and windows and gilding of the dome. As each new item was finished, it was carried to the church basement and, for the first time, we saw the icons, the key-shaped windows, and the massive chandelier. In time, the angel also was finished and carried to the basement.

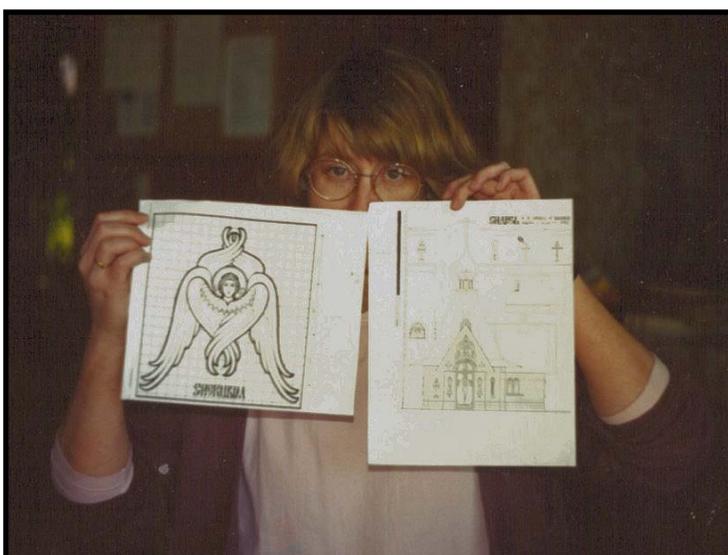


Saint Sergius Chapel

The St. Sergius Chapel is a beautiful, tiny architectural jewel. It graces the surrounding woods and, I believe, blesses them.

Some of those who had begun work on the chapel were not able to complete it. Scott got married and Judy went away to the monastery. But there would be others who would finish it. The Patriarch of Moscow would bless the icons and the *Anchorage Daily News* would print the story.

The St. Sergius Chapel is a beautiful, tiny architectural jewel. It graces the surrounding woods and, I believe, blesses them. It fits into the landscape as if it has been there for a very long time. We are all blessed by its presence and should truly treasure it.



Judy Miller with the sketch of the angel and the chapel.



I walked to the chapel the other day and, even in winter, it is a nice walk. The angel resides there above the door, protecting and guarding. Seeing the carving takes me back to the time when I was new to the St. James House and to this community. Many things have happened to me since then, but I don't think I will ever forget the summer of the angel.

Patrick: Patron Saint of the Irish

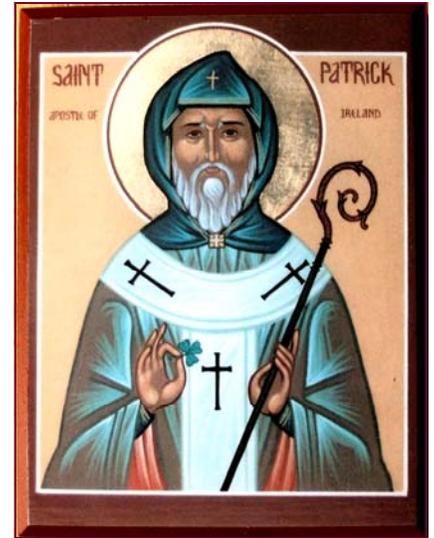
By Mary Ann Northey

As children in school, we needed to wear green on his day, or we would be pinched. We knew that he was somehow connected with a shamrock. We knew he was Irish, and we knew he was associated with joy. Maybe we didn't know much else about him. But St. Patrick was always familiar to us, even if we didn't learn about him in church.

St. Patrick lived so long ago that it is still difficult to say exactly when he lived and who he was, but it seems he was born in Roman Britain in about AD 373. He was the son of a Christian deacon and the grandson of a priest. In his teens, he was kidnapped by Irish raiders and taken as a slave by Niall of the Nine Hostages, a famous king of Ireland. Patrick worked as a shepherd in Antrim on the Slemish Mountain for six years, with only the sheep for company. He prayed day and night to God who brought him comfort, until one night he heard a voice calling and telling him to escape. "See," the voice said, "your ship is ready." Patrick knew the sea lay to the south, so he traveled for 200 miles in that direction until he found his ship waiting in Wexford. Patrick gained passage to Britain but was captured by brigands on the way home and spent two more months in slavery. Eventually, he managed to return home to Britain.

Patrick spent several years traveling in Europe, seeking God's will for his life. He decided to become a true servant of God, so he began studies at Lerin Monastery on an island off the Cote d'Azur. He returned to Britain as a priest. After a few years at home, he had a vision which he described as follows: "I saw a man coming...he carried many letters, and he gave me one of them. I read the heading: *The Voice of the Irish*. As I began to read the letter, I imagined in that moment that I heard the voice of those very people...and they cried out, as with one voice: We appeal to you, holy servant boy, to come and walk among us."

Patrick returned to Ireland, with the blessing of the Church, to take the Gospel to the Celts. Soon, he became Archbishop of Armagh and is today a beloved patron of the Irish people, known for his generosity, courage and forgiving spirit. He is remembered for teaching the concept of the Trinity by use of a shamrock, "three divine persons in the one God." There is a legend that he "chased the snakes out of Ireland," but this is likely a reference to the serpent symbolism of the Druids of that time and place, as post-glacial Ireland never was home to snakes. St. Patrick probably died in AD 493 and is said to be buried under Down Cathedral in Downpatrick, County Down, alongside St. Brigid and St. Columba.



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