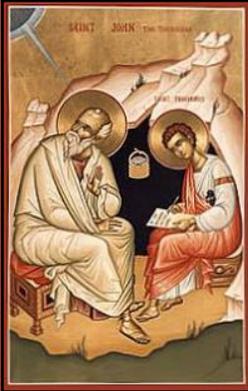


Volume 3 Issue 1

Winter 2006



Our Journey Together as Orthodox Christians

In Community

Formed for Life

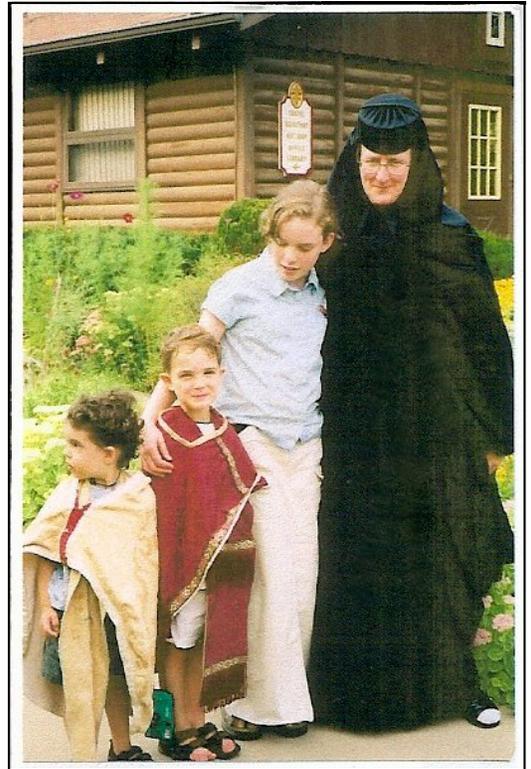
By Mother Galina

As I write these words, it is the end of a long, hot day, but the evening is cool and the air is thick with fireflies. I have just walked Kh. Heather Sommer up the path to our monastery guest house. Who would have guessed that 17 years after sharing a room in the Big House (now called the St. James House) at St. John's, we would one day be walking arm in arm on these beautiful monastery grounds? I am now a nun and Heather is a priest's wife and mother of three beautiful children. The mystery of God's grace continues to unfold in ways I never could have dreamed or imagined.

Kh. Heather and her children have been here for a week while her husband attends a conference at the Antiochian Village. It is an almost overwhelming joy to see the next generations spending time in prayer and play with us. I gaze at them full of hope, in defiance of a world that often shows its worst side to us. We live in trying times, yet love never ends or abandons us; love never fails. I want to share with you, as best I can remember, how my life at the St. James House led to my life here, and to encourage those thinking of living "in community," either parish or monastic, to do so.

I don't really know what possessed me to make such a drastic move, at the age of 32, from my former single, happy-go-lucky, party lifestyle to living, without my belongings, in a large house with a group of people of assorted ages (mostly younger than I) and backgrounds. My friends outside the St. John's community could not understand the change and I could not explain it to them. I only knew that since turning 30 my party lifestyle wasn't enough anymore and that Fr. Harold Dunaway and Fr. Paul Jaroslaw had a lot to do with guiding me in a new direction.

It was Jennifer Gillquist who first invited me to a service at St. John's. I met Fr. Paul and, with a casual air, told him that I would be visiting several other churches in Eagle River and would "let him know" if I was interested in St. John's. Seems the next thing I knew I was living with roommates Kirstin Parker Reese and Laurie Prather in



what is now the Sparks house on the hill. A few months later I was baptized and chrismated into the Orthodox Church, and moved into the St. James House later that summer. Then, in the fall, came the assortment of new teens and young adults to the House. This is when I found out who I really was!

Back then I imagined myself a "together sort of person, with a few prob-

Participating in various events in the house that was the heart of the St. John's community taught us all the joys of weddings, births, deaths, and how to live a Christian life in not only words, but also actions.

lems, of course." I was, I thought, quite mature. Much to my surprise, after a few months of sharing a house with a dozen others, sharing a bathroom with five girls, and sharing a bedroom with a 14 year old, I lost my "togetherness." Kh. Heather and I laugh now at the time I put masking tape down the middle of our room and, in a shrill voice of desperation, told her to stay on her own side and quit wearing my clothes. I also remember that Fr. Paul explained to me afterwards that I was the

(Continued on page 6)

Community Cooks

Featuring: Margaret Simmons

By JoAnn Webster



Margaret (center) at her 91st birthday party with JoAnn Webster and Eloise Lamb

Margaret Simmons, or “Magi” as her friends call her, grew up in Oklahoma and Texas, where her dad worked in the booming oil fields. She got her teaching degree from Baylor University and worked as a teacher for many years, raising 4 kids as well. But in 1960 Magi decided to spread her wings and apply for a teaching job in Alaska. She was hired to work at Wendler Middle School in Anchorage, so she packed her youngest son and two Chihuahua pups in her car and drove up the Alcan, with many adventures along the way.

After arriving in Alaska, she not only taught English and Spanish, but took summer jobs as well, as a cook at a beautiful lodge on Kenai Lake (where she had to chase a bear out of the kitchen), a cook aboard the Gypsy Queen tour boat, a bartender on the Alaska Railroad, and a piano player at a dancing school.

Her daughter, Sally, finally moved to Alaska where she discovered the Orthodox faith. Magi and her husband, Howard, had attended the Episcopal Church for many years, but after he died, she began going to St. John’s with Sally. Magi was finally chrismated on the same day as her great grandson, in 1992.

She celebrated her 91st birthday this past year, and recently became a great, great grandmother. So there are five generations of her family here in Alaska! And she still cooks her own meals and plays bridge on Fridays.

Magi’s Sweet Potato Casserole

3 c. sweet potatoes, cooked
1 t. vanilla
1 c. white sugar
½ stick butter
2 eggs
½ c. milk

Topping:
1 c. brown sugar
½ c. flour
1 c. finely chopped nuts
1/3 c. butter

Mash sweet potatoes with electric mixer. Add white sugar, eggs, vanilla, butter and milk to potatoes. Mix well. Put into casserole dish. Mix brown sugar, nuts, flour and 1/3 c. butter. Crumble over potato mixture. Bake 35 minutes at 350.

Welcome Home,

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

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Outpost of the Kingdom

By Mary Alice Cook

During this season, the two great feasts of Christ’s Nativity and Theophany (the commemoration on January 6 of His baptism by St. John the Baptist) remind us that Jesus is not only a divine being, but that He also was born and lived among us on earth as a human, and that in His incarnation, He became one of us. Further, His life and activity on earth instruct us that we, too, must not only accept

God’s word into our hearts and minds, but also obey it and carry it to others through movement and action.

In this issue of *In Community*, we feature stories about people here at St. John’s who have done just that. Our stories include those of a woman who said yes to the call to monasticism, two young women who spent part of a summer on a mission field, and a young man who left the familiarity of the church and home in which he was raised to become an Orthodox Christian and live for a time in Alaska. Their experiences recall the words of Deacon Dan Gray, himself a missionary, who often points out that “we must become God’s hands and feet.”

As St. John’s celebrates the light of Christ’s birth during the short, dark days of our Alaskan winter, we say, with Christians everywhere, “*Christ is born! Glorify Him!*”

“Who are these people and what are they doing?”

-Eudora Welty



CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM!



December 25, 2006

On Christmas morning Reader Joshua Rogers was ordained by His Grace Bishop JOSEPH as Deacon John of Damascus. Deacon John's parents, Fr. Gregory and Kh. Pamela, flew to Alaska from Aiken, South Carolina to participate in the services. This was Bp. JOSEPH's first major trip since his back surgery. Thankfully His Grace was able to be present at all of the scheduled events, including two back to back Hierarchal Divine Liturgies.

The following Sunday Deacon John and his wife Christine's daughter Megan was also baptized in the cathedral.

AXIOS! HE IS WORTHY!

A Gift from St. Nicholas

By Travis Cook

This past fall I was given the incredible opportunity to spend a semester studying in Rome. One of the most exciting highlights was a ten day journey throughout Greece. But before we even set sail across the Adriatic, I came upon a wonderful little church on the Italian coast.

The Basilica of Saint Nicholas of Myra is perched above the sea, overlooking the small port city of Bari. Although it appears bland from the outside, it contains some rather rocky history. The city of Myra, the original home of St. Nicholas, by 1071 was controlled by the Turks after their conquest of Asia Minor. In 1087 a group of Italian sailors abducted the relics of St. Nicholas from Myra and brought them to Bari.

The Bari church itself is obviously Roman Catholic, the nave decorated in the typical motif of white walls and sparse iconography. The crypt, however, resting place of the relics, is worlds apart. Thick clouds of incense swirl around. The halogen lighting of the nave is replaced with the soft glow of dripping candles. Dim icons depicting the life of Saint Nicholas cover every wall. As I entered, vespers was actually in progress, the choir singing the Trisagion Hymn before the tomb. I soon realized that the spirit of Greek Orthodoxy is kept alive in the crypt. The Byzantine tradition is embraced rather than abandoned. As I took part in the vespers service and venerated the relics, I thought about St. Nicholas the man. Secular traditions have converted his story into folklore, replacing his reverence with commercial impersonations. But the Holy Wonderworker Nicholas is more than a festive hero. He represents charity and faith to its fullest. His staunch influence at the Council of Nicea helped develop early Christian doctrine and fight the heresy of Arius.

The opportunity to pray at the church of the relics of St. Nicholas was especially meaningful to me because fifteen years ago when I was baptized at St. John's, I chose this great saint to be my patron. As we approach the Feast of the Nativity, it is important to question the secular traditions that dominate the holiday season. Santa Claus, one of the most recognized characters in the world, symbolizes something greater than festive generosity. Throughout St. Nicholas' feast day and on through Christmas, we should remember him as an example of Christian charity and a backbone of the Orthodox Church.



Out of the Comfort Zone

By Maye Johnson

If you have ever visited St John's community with our Cathedral, school and St James House at its center, maybe you have walked down peaceful Monastery Drive lined with the homes of many of our parishioners. Or perhaps you have not had the opportunity to visit but have read about some of our history and people through this newsletter. Whatever the case may be, you have probably formed a picture of a place of peace, security, sanctuary and support. Why, then, would anyone want to leave and go to Africa, especially during the short Alaskan summer? But that is what two of our young women recently did.



Mara Lamb in Kenya

of the trip turned out to be easier than either had expected. It was well worth it and it is an experience they would never have wanted to miss.

Both Mary Ruth and Mara had the opportunity to physically help build a new church building for the villages where they served. The churches there are growing and the parishioners needed more space. Because Mara was there for almost a full month, she was able to see the building nearly completed. Both young women participated in the worship services and the village life. They found the children to be especially endearing and Mary Ruth recalls they were fascinated by her fair complexion and light hair.

Mary Ruth said, "My trip to Ghana was important to my life in several ways. I was twenty years old when I went and, like many, unsure of who I was and what I wanted in life. When I was considering going, it appeared to be a new and good thing to do. It turned out to be both and better by far in different ways than I had thought possible. Is this something you should do? Yes, definitely. You will meet some wonderful people and experience things you cannot now imagine. I think your offering will be a blessing to the people you meet and more than that, *you* will be blessed."



Mary Ruth Zink in Ghana



Mara and a new friend.

Mary Ruth Zink grew up with stories of her mother serving on mission fields with Wycliffe Bible Translators.

This was one small part of the inspiration for Mary Ruth to apply for a chance to serve with OCMC (Orthodox Christian Mission Center). She said she wanted to push herself and get out of her comfort zone. Going to Ghana in the summer of 2003 was definitely a change from the life-long security she had known here on Monastery Drive.

Mara Lamb was also very used to the comforts of our community and had been encouraged to go to Africa after hearing about Mary Ruth's experience. Mara, too, wanted to push herself. She was accepted by OCMC and went to Kenya for a month this past July. Both of the girls said the hardest part of the mission was the application process and the orientation in St Augustine, FL where OCMC headquarters is located.

Raising money for support and the financing



Mara and her OCMC co-workers.

The sentiments were similar from Mara. "When I decided to join OCMC's mission team to Kenya, I was hoping for an amazing experience. I did not know in what way or how, I just knew I wanted something big to happen. And it did. When you put yourself in a situation where you know no one and all you can count on is God and the people you are traveling with, this puts you in a very humbling and helpless position. I believe this is the position God really wanted for me: to realize that I had to depend on others and Him to make it through a month long adventure of struggles and surprises."

Formed for Life

By Mother Galina



Mother Galina in 1990 at Saint James House

(Continued from page 1)

adult here and needed to act as such.

Being older did not guarantee me any special benefits either. When the St. Sergius Chapel was being built, it was on the backs of the young people and us old ones who hauled a good part of the construction materials up the hill in the dark. I begged to be let off of the "road kill runs," but I too was awakened in the early morning hours to help drag a poor, unfortunate moose around from yard to yard, only to drag it somehow into a pickup bed to be dismantled later in yet another location. These road kill runs almost always took place around 2 a.m. and in snowstorms at 15 degrees.

Together, there were meals, dish-washing, guests, arguments, embarrassments and, yes, surviving "Shamassy Susie's" home economics classes where we all learned to iron. We cleaned our home together, cleaned the church together and worshipped together. The study groups opened our minds and the service work opened our hearts. Participating in various events in the house that was the heart of the St. John's community taught us all the joys of weddings, births, deaths, and how to live a Christian life in not only words, but also actions. Some of my favorite evenings were spent in the St. James House living room, listening as Fr. Harold read to us from classic literature or poetry. From this reading, he led us into discussion of some contemporary topic, alerting us to the fact that either he saw more than we gave him credit for, or that he just under-

stood life better than we as he opened our hearts to honest conversation. We kept vigil by the fireplace, talking politics and religion, often until way past a reasonable bedtime.

All this formed me, in many ways, for the life I am trying to live today in the monastery. This is also a great way to prepare for married life. We learned to work things out and to ask forgiveness when we were wrong. For me, it was a time to discover, painfully, that I was no longer 20, that I was out of youth's inner circle. It was time for me to stop messing around and do something with my life.

Now, I ask forgiveness of all those I lived with in the St. James House and in the community. I know that, in my weakness, I failed not only some of the young people in the House, but also others in the community who so kindly took me into their homes and hearts. I realize now, as I am committed to living out my life in this monastic community, the disappointments and pain of having people come in and go out of one's life, often without our knowing all the reasons. I know the thoughts that can race in one's heart and head, and the doubts about how we could have done things differently, and the wondering if we are really doing enough, or even our best. I also know the joys of seeing others grow in their own way, and the bittersweet tears of parting with those we love but with whom we may disagree. It is true that we are connected forever in the body of Christ, both the lesser and the greater parts. I celebrate the fact that I was blessed with the gift of living in the St. James House and will be forever grateful.



Mother Capitollina and Mother Galina

A Cross for Saint Herman



The first two wooden crosses on top of Mt. Herman on Spruce Island, one placed there in 1970 and the second which replaced it in 1974, were both toppled by high winds. The third, a 28-foot steel giant anchored by 16 guy wires, should be there for generations. When the new cross was brought by Coast Guard helicopter last October to the mountain named for St. Herman of Alaska, Sasha Hartman was there to help plant it. Sasha, his wife Danielle and their twin boys live on Spruce Island, and he recalls the day as being a mild one at the foot of the mountain. But when he reached the top, his light clothing was not nearly warm enough and the crew (including local Orthodox priests, monks and students) had to wait two hours for the arrival of Bishop Nicolai and another two hours for the cross. Sasha was there until 5 p.m., working in the cold, but says he would not have missed it for the world. The construction and erection of the cross was a huge effort involving many skilled workmen from Kodiak and other Alaskan communities. A solar battery light will eventually be installed on top of the cross and will provide guidance to both airplane pilots and mariners in the sometimes dangerous waters nearby. It seems to be a fitting memorial to St. Herman, the faithful intercessor and protector of the people of Alaska. On his feast day on December 13, let us thank God for this great saint who "planted the cross of Christ firmly in America."

Everyone's Home

By Elijah Ferbrache

"...and after the fire a sound of a gentle blowing. And it came about when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. And behold, a voice came to him and said, "What are you doing here Elijah?"

1 Kings 19:12-13

Although my family is not Orthodox, I have always closely identified with the prophet for whom I am named. When I was a catechumen, I was given the option of changing my name, and considered taking the name of St. John the Baptist. I decided to stick with the Prophet Elijah. For my journey to Orthodox Christianity and to the St. James House is marked by several instances of a "gentle blowing" and a "voice," followed by the question, "What are you doing here Elijah?"

I was born in West Virginia, and raised in the Society of Friends, commonly called "Quakers." Our little Quaker community was nestled in the hills of rural Southeastern Ohio. Amidst the farms and coal mines, Ohio Yearly Meeting stood as one of the last bastions of "conservative" or "Wilburite" Quakerism. Some folks even called Ohio Yearly Meeting "Orthodox" Quakerism—a name I now find somewhat ironic.

There was a restlessness growing inside me from an "inner nudge," telling me that I was not where I was supposed to be.

While I was in high school, the question often came to my mind, "What are you doing here Elijah?" Like most mainline Protestant denominations, the Quakers are experiencing a lot of doctrinal confusion. At the Quaker boarding school my family has attended for three generations, I was faced with questions concerning everything from human sexuality to the divinity of Jesus. I often wondered, "Why are these things even questions? Why are we so dogmatic about a mere ideal like 'pacifism' when we are not at all dogmatic about the more important question of who Jesus is?" There was a restlessness growing inside me from an "inner nudge," telling me that I was not where I was supposed to be.

Quakers practice a unique form of worship in which Friends gather for "meeting" on First Day (Sunday) morning and sit quietly for about an hour in silence and wait for the Holy Spirit to speak. Friends call this "waiting worship." When someone hears the Holy Spirit speak, then that person will often stand up and share what has been laid on their heart by God. Growing up in my meeting, it was not uncommon for one person to stand up and share about how Jesus is God and we are called to repentance, while another person stands up and talks about "mystical energies," "Buddha," and how we do not need repentance because all people are "good" and all have the "inner light."

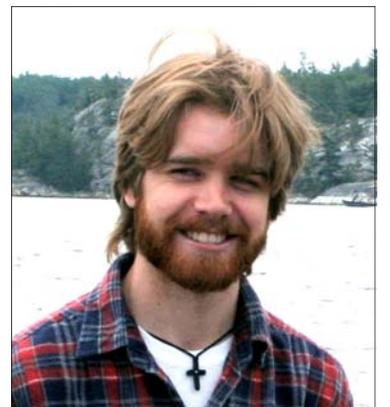
Due to these differences of doctrine, there was a large split in my family's meeting, and my mother left Quaker-



Ell's Baptism in 2004 at Holy Cross Church in Linthicum, Maryland.

ism when I was eighteen years old. She started attending a non-denominational Protestant Church with my younger brother and sister. I went with her for a little while, but I didn't find that brand of Christianity very challenging. After I graduated from high school, I took a year off to earn money for college. It was during this time that I made occasional visits to the local Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Church in a little coal mining town on the Ohio River. This ethnic Orthodox community was comprised mostly of elderly, blue collar industrial workers. They had already received into the Church one prominent Quaker family from our meeting after the split. I had visited the church several times before, once with my Western Civilization class and a couple of times with my family. I was impressed with the church, and even more impressed by their fiery young priest with a habit of "offending" people with his constant call to repentance.

To make a long story short, my mother was not comfortable with me converting to Orthodoxy at the time, so I wasn't baptized until I was halfway through college, at age twenty-two. By that time, my family had come to understand that I needed to be Orthodox. Towards the end of my junior year of college, I began to worry about what I was supposed to do after graduation. Shortly after this worry formed in my mind, I was flipping through *The Word* magazine and I saw a little ad for the St. James House. As my eyes fixed on the ad, I again felt an "inner nudge." Yet again, God seemed to be saying to me, "What are you doing here Elijah?" My priest and college minister both thought going to Alaska would be a good experience for me. I didn't really have enough money to come up here at the time, but provision was made through some amazing means. Now, I'm happy to be here, and confident that participating in St. James House program is God's will for my life right now.



The Holy Angels

By Mary Ann Northey

When we speak of the “line of Christ going out through all the earth, and their works to the end of the world,” it is good to remember the invisible beings who accompany us everywhere, and who have done so since the dawn of time. We speak of these heavenly beings, but do we remember to think of them? Although it is difficult to place them within our scientific reality, it is good to be aware that angels are at work on our behalf, and that the nations, the cosmos, and each of us have an angelic guardian.

We read in St. Matthew that angels are holy; Samuel tells us of their wisdom; King David sings of their strength, and how they do the Lord’s will, and hear His word. He sings of how they will keep us in all our ways when we seek the will of God. St. Peter speaks of their meekness. St. Paul warns us not to worship them. St. Luke speaks of their joy when one of us repents.

In her book, *The Holy Angels*, Mother Alexandra describes the angels as “... created, natural beings, as much a part of this world as we ourselves.” In the book’s preface, she says: “The Holy Scriptures abound with them; they are mentioned over 230 times. Our liturgy and prayers include them in the most solemn moments. We have special prayers, canons and akathist hymns addressed to the angels of God. Yet, generally speaking, the faithful know very little about them. They ignore them, or, what is sadder still, they disbelieve in the reality of the holy angels; thus, in so doing, they miss the vital comfort and joy of sensing their presence, and fail to participate in the Angelic Liturgy which eternally praises the Lord God: “Every creature of reason and understanding worships Thee...Thou art praised by angels and archangels...the many-eyed Cherubim... Round Thee stand the Seraphim...singing the triumphant hymn, shouting and proclaiming, ‘Holy! Holy! Holy! Lord God of Sabaoth...’” (Prayer and hymn during the Anaphora).

Let us remember these invisible companions and let us also listen, this Nativity season, for the angels, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” (Luke 2:14)



Archangel Gabriel

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