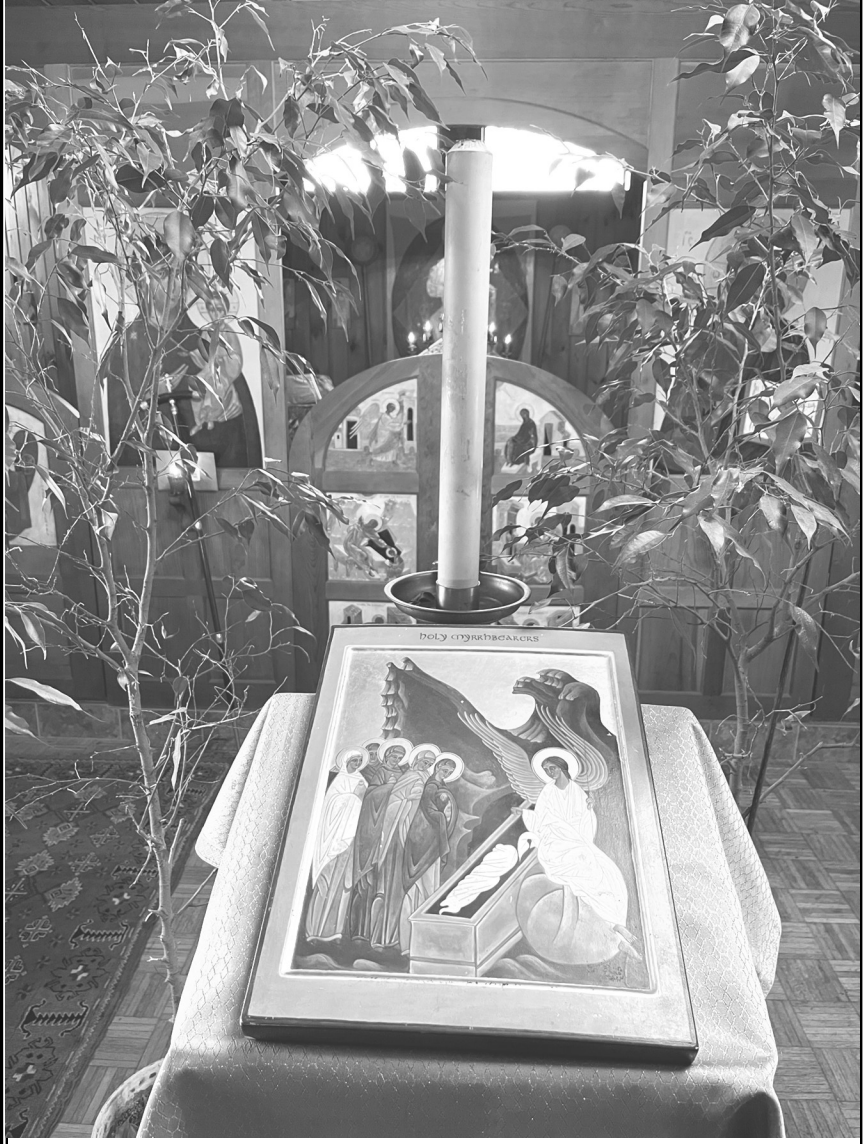


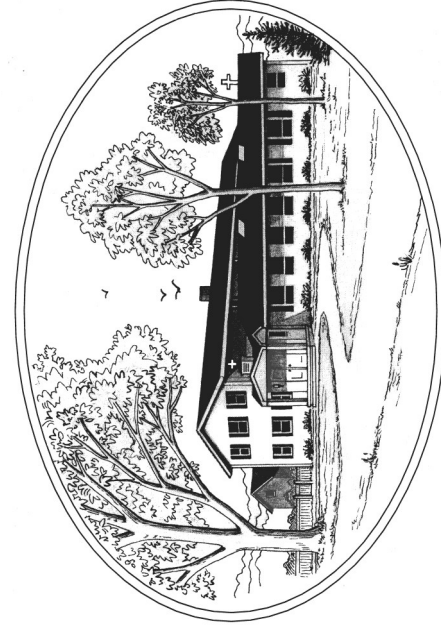
# Essays and Notes

volume 22, no. 1



**HOLY MYRRHBEARERS MONASTERY**  
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Great Lent 2025

Dear Friends,

As food for thought during this season of repentance, we offer an essay by Mother Raphaela, "Adam Cast Out of Paradise," from our very first issue of *Essays and Notes* 30 years ago during Great Lent 1995.

We have started hosting guests again post-pandemic, and have a new postulant as a result! As always, the sisters are far outnumbered by our sheep, goats and chickens. You can read our news starting page 8.

It's almost time for Pascha cards! A sample of our many hand-drawn cards available for purchase is on page 10 -11. Sending our cards is a great way to introduce your friends to our monastery. The online store is open 24 hours, and we also accept orders by phone, mail and email.

After a few quiet years, we are planning a public celebration this year on the Leavetaking of the feast of the Holy Myrrhbearers, and hope that many of you can join us for a service and a meal.

Greetings and prayers for you on our Lenten journey to Pascha.

**Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!**

With love in Christ,  
The Mothers and Sisters



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## Adam Cast Out of Paradise

I am Adam; I am Eve. I know the joy and the freedom of Paradise, but here I am sitting outside on the step, with the door closed behind me. And as a direct result of my own choices.

I can't go back. I can't pretend this hasn't happened. I know the choices I've just made. And as much as I mourn for the beauty of Paradise, I know that I am caught here pretty thoroughly. When I see things as vividly as I just saw them a few hours ago -- when the serpent opened my eyes to the alternatives -- even though I know the consequences now and realize that this seemingly clear vision of my alternatives was based on sheer illusion; was a lie; still, how seductive that vision of alternatives is!

**It isn't fair! I should be able to eat anything that I see and that looks good!**

Perhaps the serpent and I can work hard enough on those alternatives out here so that they will become what I want them to be: a form of life, even more solid than the rarified air of Paradise.

I've just learned that I have to work around the new fact of life my alternatives have created: death. That wasn't there before. How was I to know that when the pictures in my mind began to change and I saw that God was keeping me from something that would taste good and give me a good feeling, and that I could be "god" too and could set rules as easily as He does... How could I know that my rules would bring death instead of the life His rules bring?

It isn't fair! I should be able to eat anything that I see and that looks good! Especially when there is someone there to assure me that denying myself isn't necessary. What kind of a God is it, anyway, who would make up such rules? "Eat that fruit and you're dead." I'm not sure I can love such a God anymore.

He says that if I love Him, I'll keep His commandments. He just kicked me out of His place, so why should I love Him? I'll just forget Him and His rules and create my own reality. The serpent is out here with me, and he seems to be pretty sure of himself. If he can survive on his terms, I should be able to also.

I've got all this resentment and anger and it's going to be such hard work to maintain my life of alternatives, fighting against God all the way. It's better there's death. I don't have to go through this forever the way I would have had to if I'd passed up that fruit. I had to work pretty hard to keep up the garden of Paradise and it sounds as if that

part isn't going to be any easier out here. I don't like the way the animals are looking at me now, and all those beautiful plants seem to have turned into weeds. With death, though, it will all be over one of these days and I can rest. In the meantime, I can enjoy my own rules.

But this is going to be hard. If I can think of all of this as a sort of game, I'll be fine. I'll make this life into a game of chance and have fun cheating. After all, I'm going to have to die anyway -- why not enjoy myself on the way? There are so many things I can see that I enjoy not just eating, but also using and doing. Yet God's rules say that the way I'm going about this brings even more death. I have to work this out.

There is a problem here. I've heard that God has a real war going on with this serpent. He knows the serpent is sitting out here with me helping me think all these thoughts. What if He figures out a way to leave His perfect world and sit out here, too? It would be pretty uncomfortable to have Him around here. The serpent and I are setting up a whole alternative universe, and we should at least be allowed to play with it until we die. God kicked us out of His super-pure environment -- I guess He felt He was too good for us and we'd just mess up His pretty arrangements. Well, now He can just leave us alone. We're adults. We can make our own decisions and live with the consequences. That death we've caused isn't such a bad thing after all, since we don't have to live with those consequences forever.

I'm having a pretty hard time. I've been living out here for awhile and now there are a lot of other people just like me in this world. Even I can see that this place isn't at all like Paradise. My rules seem to run into trouble everywhere. All of us out here keep making decisions so we can continue to have our alternatives to God's way and I don't like the consequences of the other people's decisions. I'm willing to die for my own reasons, but why should I have to suffer for what some other stupid person does? It isn't fair. I need to work harder on my alternatives so they are stronger than other people's and then they won't be able to touch me. I'll ignore them or move away from them or find some other way to get rid of them if they won't follow my rules. After all, that's what God did to me, isn't it? I can even kill them if there is no other way.

I had a dream the other night. In my dream, God finally got out here in a way that I would never have thought of before: He managed to

**There is a problem here. I've heard that God has a real war going on with this serpent.... I'm having a pretty hard time.**

take on this flesh He gave me from one of my great grand daughters. In my dream, it seemed that He had to live in this place just like I do -- had to face the results of everyone else's alternatives and have the serpent play games with His thoughts, too. He could make His flesh anything He wanted to, since He's kept that secret. He could have ruled every one of us and forced us to live here the way He wanted us to, since He could have been as powerful as He chose.

He did a very strange thing in my dream. He didn't even try to beat us at our own game. He picked the most vulnerable position possible. Instead of avoiding us, or putting up defenses so we couldn't touch Him, He spent all His time with us -- wanted to get as close to us as He could. He kept talking about love, and the opposite of my own feelings of anger and resentment. He kept saying that forgiveness is the key. And He seemed to mean it. I knew Who He was, because once in my dream He blew His cover and let that glory light of Paradise shine through when He went up a mountain with some disciples. **Death was supposed to end it for Him and for us, but it didn't.** But there was no other minute that seemed to make Him different from any of the rest of us.

My dream became like a nightmare towards the end. He could have done all the things I do to keep this life from getting too serious. He could have made it a game. Instead, He brought out the worst in us -- really forced us to be as mean and cruel and resentful as we could be. He took away the atmosphere of niceness we've created out here to make up for that super-pure goodness and beauty of His we left behind in Paradise.

So we did the only thing we could do to keep our world going out here - after all, He's the one who made that rule about death - we killed Him.

But it's the last part of my dream that keeps bothering me. Death was supposed to end it for Him and for us, but it didn't. It seemed we killed His body, but we couldn't kill Him. He even managed to come back with the body we killed. It had that same Paradise glory it had had for that brief time on the mountain. And then I heard in my dream that because we couldn't kill Him that way, death won't be final for us, either, since we are exactly like Him in every way except for all that goodness and love. Worse than that, I will be living on His terms again and I won't be able to continue to play all my games. The fun will be gone.

**I have to think about this...  
I have a decision to make.**

When I woke from my dream, the serpent came over to assure me at once. It wasn't real. Even if something like that could happen, we still have our alternatives. I

can keep being resentful for having to be out here going through all this and I can continue to avoid God, even if He comes to me showing me how much He understands and loves since He has been out here Himself. I can continue to prefer my games and my rules. The serpent pointed out that he himself is going to do that, and I can join him. We'll keep this life of alternatives going for eternity, just like we have it here. Only there won't be any death to end it. It will get worse and worse for eternity. All of us will be making up our own rules and no one else will obey them. We'll spend all our time destroying each other's dreams and creations. It will be hell.

How hard would it be to move away from this serpent? This God -- He even has a name now -- He let me call Him Jesus in my dream -- what would happen if I tried to do it His way instead? What if I can learn to love and forgive? What if I begin to deny myself some of those alternatives I know will never make it in Paradise?

It is going to be very, very hard. And I'm going to be as defenseless as He was here. All those noble things: laying down my life, my dreams and my plans because I want to help someone else? Learning to love someone else enough to do that? Even letting that someone else be anyone else? Not picking and choosing which ones are worth it? He says there is no one who isn't worth it. It is tempting. He even says He will give me His own life so I will have the strength and the love and the power to do things His way.

I have to think about this. I realize now that I have a decision to make. I'm just not sure which way I really want to go.

From the book *Living in Christ, Essays on the Christian Life by an Orthodox Nun*, c. 1998 by Mother Raphaela. Published by St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 575 Scarsdale Road, Crestwood, NY 10707. Used with Permission. Original version published in *Essays and Notes*, vol. 1, no. 1, Great Lent 1995.

### In Memoriam



Since our last newsletter, Mother Anna, a member of Holy Myrrhbearers for many years, passed away in February 2024 in her home state of Michigan where she had returned a few years ago due to health concerns. We miss Mother Anna's kind heart, good sense of humor and also her diligent work with bookkeeping and publishing orders. May her memory be eternal in God's heavenly kingdom!

## For our news

We are thankful to publish this newsletter again after a few years' lull. During this time, we have been so grateful for the ongoing support from those near and far who request prayers, order cards and service books, and send donations and letters. Every day we especially remember the parishes of Herkimer, Watervliet and Binghamton who years ago built our chapel and monastery with their own hands!

To share some recent news, last summer we welcomed Fr. Micah Breland, the new priest at St. Innocent Orthodox Mission (OCA) in Oneonta, where the Sisters attend on Sundays and holidays when there is no Divine Liturgy in our chapel. Fr. Micah with Matushka Rachel and their children, Simeon, Elijah and Anastasia, came to bless our chapel and residence after Theophany. Fr. Micah also brought us a



work party from the growing Orthodox Christian Fellowship (OCF) chapter of students from nearby colleges. While at the monastery, they helped read the Hours, took down Nativity decorations, and fed the old Christmas trees to our sheep and goats!

Zoar Farms continues well in the hands of Mother Katherine. We now have about 50 sheep (Icelandics, Romneys, Churro and Baby Doll) and 12 goats (including a Cashmere), as well as 14 chickens and two dogs to keep watch over them all. With the egg shortage in grocery stores, our “Eggs” sign out front allows us to meet our neighbors and reconnect with old friends who stop by for a dozen. Mother Katherine continues to win ribbons for fleeces and animals at the New York Sheep and Wool Festival and the Otsego County Fair.

The monastery also earned a 2024 Best in Show at the Otsego County Fair in the knit and crochet category for an aquarium displaying 30 figures of fish and wildlife hand-knitted by Sister Piama. Sister Piama unfortunately had health issues which required her to return home last summer. She is now living in Idaho and keeps in touch with us.

Our Board of Trustees met in June, and in September we were pleased

to host Metropolitan Tikhon for a visit.

On the domestic front, Mother Michaela looks after our cats, who are friendly and keep away mice. Sadie and Sammie live in the basement, Indiana Jones upstairs, and Canda and Butch in the barn. Mother Michaela recently celebrated her 89th birthday and is still going strong.



Mother Raphaela continues valiantly in spite of her chronic illness. We are fortunate to have her wisdom and experience to guide our monastery through all the seasons since its founding, almost fifty years ago!

We are glad to be able to welcome guests again, having gotten through the challenges of the pandemic. Our first guest last fall was a woman who had been reading our newsletter for years, but had never seen the monastery in person. Emily visited a few times and returned in January as a postulant. She is enjoying learning many aspects of life in a small monastery: ringing bells, lighting lampadas, chanting prayers, crocheting with our own woollen yarn, and helping in the barn.

We have also hosted several other women interested in learning about monastery life. They joined the sisters for prayers and meals, took walks on our grounds, and helped with cooking and cleaning projects. Our guest room is always available for inquirers who would like to experience daily life in the monastery. New postulants of any age are welcome to come share our life of prayer and work. We can provide opportunities to offer your skills — or learn new ones — in garden-



ing, animal husbandry, library management, business admin, sewing and yarn crafts, wool spinning and weaving, and singing, just to name a few!

We trust in your continued prayers for our monastery, for the health of Mother Raphaela and the sisters, and that God will continue to send women who have been called to test their vocations to monastic life. We seek to grow, but only as He wills.

During the Lenten journey to Pascha, we keep all of you in our prayers and are blessed by your prayers for us also. May we soon greet each other, “Christ is risen! Indeed He is risen!”

Pascha and Western Easter are April 20!

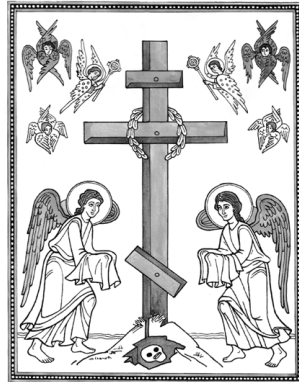
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 ICRISTO HA RESVCITADO!  
 CHRIST IS RISEN!

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 חַי וְחַיִּים  
 ХРИСТОС ВОСКРЕСЕ  
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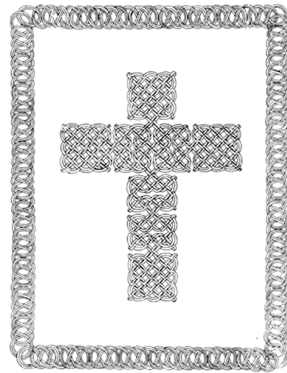
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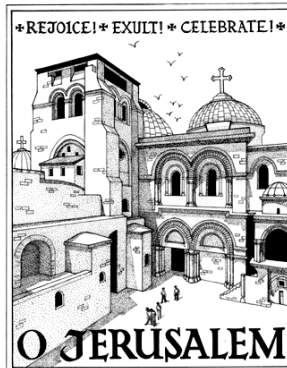
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by Resurrection,  
 O Christ our  
 Savior, the angels  
 in heaven sing.  
 Enable us on earth  
 to glorify Thee  
 with purity of  
 heart.

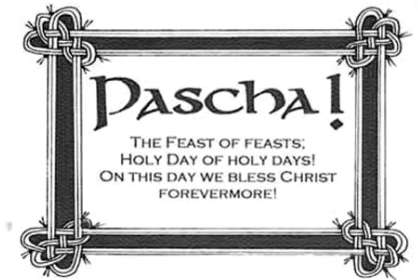
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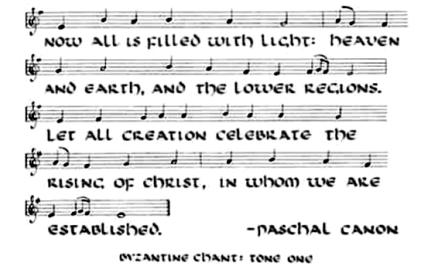
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No. 128



No. 129



No. 118

All cards measure 4 1/2" x 5 1/2" and are printed on heavy stock and come with matching envelopes. Each set of 12 cards is \$15.00.

Our online store also displays our prayer books, including:

- Royal Hours: Christmas, Theophany and Pascha* No. 921
- The Kathisma Psalter with the Nine Canticles* No. 922
- A Manual of the Hours of the Orthodox Church* No. 901
- A Manual of Communion Prayers, Vol 1 & Vol 2* No. 902, 904
- A Manual of Prayer and Praise to the Theotokos* No. 903

And you can order books by Mother Raphaela:

- Living in Christ: Essays on the Christian Life by an Orthodox Nun*
- Growing in Christ: Shaped in His Image*
- Becoming Icons of Christ*

Order now at [www.holymyrrhbearers.com](http://www.holymyrrhbearers.com)!

We also receive orders by phone at (607) 432 - 3179, by mail, and by email to [orders@holymyrrhbearers.com](mailto:orders@holymyrrhbearers.com). Thank you!