

QUAD Cinema NYC
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MYSTERIES OF THE JESUS PRAYER

Opens April 8 at New York's QUAD Cinema

A Pilgrimage to the Heart of an Ancient Spirituality

New York, March 9, 2011 – New York's QUAD Cinema, Magnetic Arts and Passion River Films are honored to present the revelatory new documentary, *MYSTERIES OF THE JESUS PRAYER* (114 minutes) opening on April 8. In 2003, Emmy Award winning filmmaker, author and theologian, Dr. Norris J. Chumley and historian and author the Very Reverend Professor John A. McGuckin embarked on a journey of a lifetime. Their goal was to trace and document the origins of early Christian monastic life and to meet the keepers of thirteen holy sites in the regions where Christianity and the Church began.

Over the course of eight years, the filmmakers gradually gained the trust of the most eminent Patriarchs, Archbishops, Abbots, Abbesses, Monks and Nuns who allowed them unprecedented access to the inner sancta of these sacred sites—never before seen by the outside world. Their travels took them to the cave of St. Antony in Egypt; St. Catherine's monastery at the foot of Mount Sinai; across the Mediterranean to the Greek peninsula of Mt. Athos, to the forests of Transylvania in Eastern Europe, Ukraine, and finally to Russia.

Along the way, they repeatedly discover the use of a simple and elegant ancient prayer. Known by generations of Eastern Christians as the *Jesus Prayer*, it is one of the earliest and most widely practiced prayer rituals of the ancient Church. The prayer has been chanted in remote caves and active monasteries for centuries but is largely unknown to the Western World, until now. Many say that with this prayer, it is possible to communicate directly with God.

We meet a broad spectrum of male and female monastics, including a former atheist and professor of political science (specializing in Marxism) from New Zealand and now the spiritual master of *St. Antony's Monastery* in the Red Sea Mountains of Egypt (the first monastery ever erected at the burial site of a canonized ascetic). On the island of Serifos, Greece, a solitary monk maintains the buildings and exquisite grounds of an otherwise empty monastery. Abbess Josephina at *Varatec Monastery* in Transylvania brings us into her private cottage and demonstrates the ancient *Jesus Prayer* on camera. We meet a young Ukrainian priest who, raised under the Soviet regime, came to his calling during the "*Second Spring*" in the early 1990s. Eminent Romanian scholar and priest, Father Teofil, blind since birth and author of volumes of influential theology, teaches us that we need to make a bridge between mind and heart. In stark contrast to the remote cave and nearly empty ancient church of St. Antony, the film concludes with the newly appointed Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, performing his exquisite ritual duties to thousands of parishioners at *Sergiyev Posad Monastery* near Moscow.

Like the illuminated icons among the spiritual treasures on this journey of discovery, the very presence of this film exerts more than material influence. By a combination of academic and

historical seriousness, a patient camera and an enveloping calm, this film seems illuminated from within. Without exaggeration, a patient viewing of the film has the effect of contemplative prayer, bringing at minimum a sensation of profound peace. “This is a documentary film, but not in the traditional sense,” says Chumley “...it utilizes an apophatic mode: that of negation, or a process of elimination...this film is a study in essences and in absences: what is not spoken is as important or more important than what is.”

With this unique weave of intellectual authority and respectful sense of wonder ***MYSTERIES OF THE JESUS PRAYER*** is accessible to any audience regardless of one’s religious conviction, and will work as a catalyst for understanding the core spiritual nature of Christian religious life and its earliest roots of devotional prayer and practice.

Father John McGuckin and Dr. Chumley are available in a series of events before and after selected screenings. It is their hope to reach across denominations and religions to foster an understanding of profound peace and love. Each has a career of achievement.

About the filmmakers:

Dr. Norris J. Chumley is an Emmy Award winning documentary producer, director and author whose work has been featured on major networks including PBS, NBC, ABC, A&E, USA, SHOWTIME, and HBO/Cinemax channels. He has received numerous awards including the SONY/American Film Institute’s Grand Prize in Video and the Emmy Award for Outstanding Cultural Programming. He is currently a featured columnist for the Huffington Post, daily editor and columnist for Beliefnet.com, Executive Producer and Director of Media for Columbia University’s Institute for Religion, Culture and Public Life, and the chairman of Manhattan Neighborhood Networks, the original and largest public-access television network in America. Chumley is also an instructor at New York University’s Kanbar School of Film and Television.

V.Rev. Dr. John Anthony McGuckin is Nielsen Professor of Late Antique and Byzantine Christian History, Union Theological Seminary and Columbia University. Born in Newcastle, England, he is a priest-theologian of the Romanian Orthodox Church, a fellow of the British Royal Historical Society and the Royal Society of Arts and has authored 22 books including: *Standing in God’s Holy Fire: The Byzantine Spiritual Tradition; The Orthodox Church: Its History and Spiritual Culture;* and *The Book of Mystical Chapters: Meditations on the Soul’s Ascent from the Desert Fathers and other Early Christian Contemplatives.*

Extended interviews and additional footage from the movie will be available on the film’s website as a study guide beginning in April. Special features of the online guides are interviews with local teens and young adults in respective surrounding locations that were asked how they view the local monasteries, exploring their views on religion, violence and conflict resolution.

March 24 – April 4: Please note: Producers Dr. Norris J. Chumley and Revd. Prof. John A. McGuckin will be available for interviews in New York and at designated QUAD screenings for Q&A

April 5: Publisher HarperOne releases the companion book by Dr. Norris J. Chumley

For booking in theaters: Matt Levy, Passion River Films:

Mat@PassionRiver.com (732) 321-0711 x135

Official website and trailer: www.JesusPrayerMovie.com

Page link to Online Press Kit: www.JesusPrayerMovie.com/press_kit.html

Hi-res photos link: <http://www.jesusprayermovie.com/press/>

MYSTERIES OF THE JESUS PRAYER (114 minutes) premieres April 8, 2011 at the Quad Cinema, 34 West 13th Street, New York, New York 10011 p: 212-255-2243 f: 212-255-2247
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