



**HOLY COMFORTER**  
 ORTHODOX CHURCH  
 CATHEDRAL OF ST. AMBROSE OF MILAN

**M O N T H L Y N E W S L E T T E R**



## *Peace and Joy to the World: King of Peace and Savior of the World is Born*

Dear Parish Community,

As the joyous season of Christmas approaches, our hearts are filled with hope and love. In a world often plagued by conflict and division, it is essential for us to reflect upon the significance of peace and extend our Christmas wishes for a harmonious future.

The message of peace lies at the core of the Christmas story. The birth of Jesus Christ symbolizes a divine gift of love and reconciliation, reminding us of the importance of unity and understanding. It serves as a powerful reminder that peace is not merely the absence of conflict, but the presence of justice, compassion, and respect for one another.

In today's world, peace may seem like an elusive dream, but it is within our reach if we choose to embrace it. As members of the parish community, we have a responsibility to actively promote peace, both in our personal lives and in the wider world. Here are a few ways we can contribute to creating a more peaceful society:

1. **Cultivating Inner Peace:** Peace begins within ourselves. Let us strive to cultivate inner peace by practicing forgiveness, empathy, and gratitude. By nurturing our own peace, we can radiate positivity and inspire others to do the same.
2. **Fostering Dialogue:** Engaging in open and respectful dialogue is crucial for building bridges and resolving conflicts. Let us make an effort to listen attentively

to differing perspectives, seeking common ground and understanding, even in the face of disagreement.

3. **Promoting Justice and Equality:** Peace cannot flourish in the absence of justice. Let us advocate for fairness, equality, and human rights, standing up against discrimination, poverty, and violence. By working towards a more just society, we create an environment where peace can thrive.

4. **Extending Acts of Kindness:** Small acts of kindness can have a profound impact. Let us reach out to those in need, offering support, compassion, and love. By spreading kindness, we contribute to a ripple effect of positivity that can bring about peace in our communities.

As we exchange Christmas wishes with our loved ones, let us also extend our hopes for peace to the world. May this Christmas be a time of reflection and renewal, where we recommit ourselves to making a difference in the pursuit of global harmony. Let us pray for an end to conflicts, for the healing of broken relationships, and for the understanding that binds us all as children of God.

In this season of joy, let us remember that the true spirit of Christmas lies in embracing peace, love, and goodwill towards all. May the light of Christ guide us on this path, and may our collective efforts bring us closer to a world filled with peace.





Wishing you all a blessed and peaceful Christmas!

In His Service,  
 Very Rev. Fr. Martin Njenga  
 Rector, Holy Comforter Orthodox Parish

**Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.  
 Acknowledge Him in all your ways and He will make straight your paths.**

*Proverbs 3: 5 & 6*

# DECEMBER CALENDAR

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					1	2
3 ● EUCHARIST 10:30 AM ADVENT I	4	5 ● DISCIPLESHIP 7 PM S. BARBARA, V. M.	6 VIGIL S. NICHOLAS, B.C.	7 ● BIBLE STUDY 7 PM S. AMBROSE, B.C.D.	8 CONCEPTION OF B.V.M. 	9
10 ● EUCHARIST 10:30 AM ADVENT II	11	12 ● DISCIPLESHIP 7 PM	13 S. LUCY, V.M.	14 ● BIBLE STUDY 7 PM	15 	16
17 ● EUCHARIST 10:30 AM ADVENT III (LÆTARE)	18	19 ● DISCIPLESHIP 7 PM	20 VIGIL EMBER DAY	21 ● BIBLE STUDY 7 PM S. THOMAS, AP.	22 EMBER DAY 	23 VIGIL EMBER DAY
24 ● EUCHARIST 10:30 AM ● CHRISTMAS EVE MASS 6 PM ADVENT IV	25 ● CHRISTMAS MASS 11 AM NATIVITY	26 ● DISCIPLESHIP 7 PM OCTAVE S. STEPHEN, DN.M	27 OCTAVE S. JOHN, AP.	28 ● BIBLE STUDY 7 PM OCTAVE HOLY INNOCENTS	29 OCTAVE S. DAVID, K.P.	30 OCTAVE
31 ● EUCHARIST 10:30 AM SUNDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF NATIVITY	● THE RECTORY ● THE CHURCH					

## Pastoral Parish Committee & Evangelism

We say goodbye to both Martin and Michael. Both have decided to move as their busy schedules caused difficulty for them to serve. We wish them well as the Parish continues to move forward.

As chairperson of the Pastoral Parish Committee and Evangelism, we continue to grow despite the remodeling. The Lord has opened the door for us to work with those in Dutchess Care Facility on Washington Street. In addition, we have been blessed with several new folks from the neighborhood.

Our weekly Discipleship and Bible Study meetings continue to grow. We have also started a new Bible Study which Erik is leading. We thank God for Erik and all his efforts to serve.

Recently, Archbishop Bondi has given us more bibles to supply into our Blessing Bags. We use Blessing Bags in our evangelism program.

Our coffee hour continues to grow as we socialize in the unity of the Holy Spirit. We are forming a close bond with one another. We are very grateful for this unity.

Now that the Rectory is complete it is so nice to be able to share such a beautiful home with others.

We have been attending Vespers at the Holy Cross Monastery on Friday evenings at 5pm. On most Fridays, we also have dinner with the monks.

We anticipate a busy 2024 as we implement more of the BFC community programs and move into our community center. We praise God.

Come and worship with us Sunday mornings at 10:30 and experience the beauty of the first century orthodox movement.

Merry Christmas to you and your families, and Happy New Year.

Faithfully Yours,  
Peter Braman

## Church Fund Drive

Updating as our heating system is hanging in there and doing well. Upon this writing, our slate roof is going to be completed. Our organ has been delivered and speakers will be installed the week of December 4th.

On December 9th, we will be picking up marble and granite to begin laying the floor on the altar, aisle, and entrance.

### ***If you are able to donate, please do so:***

PO Box 5148, Poughkeepsie, NY 12602

Or online at [holycomforterny.org](http://holycomforterny.org)

### ***Upcoming renovations are as follows:***

1. Outdoor flood lighting installed to light up the church at night
2. New parking lot and gardens with a new entrance on main street.
3. A used van to help transport church goers
4. Organizing and opening up the Holy Comforter Community Center

We Thank You & Praise The Lord For Your Financial Support. Be Ever Blessed.

with him in his resurrection, . . . so too have we been born along with him in his Nativity.”[2]

At the basis of it all is the biblical event accomplished once and for all in Mary: the Virgin became the Mother of Jesus by the action of the Holy Spirit. This historical mystery, like all the events of salvation, is extended at a sacramental level in the Church and at a moral level in the life of the individual believer. Mary, as the Virgin Mother who generates Christ by the Holy Spirit, appears as the “type,” or the perfect exemplar, of the Church and of the believer. Let us listen to an author in the Middle Ages, Blessed Isaac of Stella, summarize the thinking of the Fathers in this regard:

Mary and the Church are one mother, yet more than one mother; one virgin, yet more than one virgin. Both are mothers, both are virgins. . . . In the inspired Scriptures, what is said in a universal sense of the Virgin Mother, the Church, is understood in an individual sense of the Virgin Mary. . . . In a way every Christian is also believed to be a bride of God’s Word, a mother of Christ, his daughter and sister, at once virginal and fruitful. [3]

This patristic vision was brought to light by the Second Vatican Council in the chapters of the constitution *Lumen gentium* dedicated to Mary. In three separate paragraphs in fact, the document speaks of the Virgin Mother Mary as the exemplar and model of the Church (no. 63), which is also called to be a virgin and mother in faith (no. 64), and of the believer who, imitating Mary’s virtue, gives birth to and allows Jesus to increase in his or her heart and in the hearts of brothers and sisters (no. 65).

### 2. “By the Holy Spirit”

Let us meditate next on the role of each of the two protagonists, the Holy Spirit and Mary, to seek to draw inspiration for our own Christmas. St. Ambrose writes,

The birth from the Virgin is the work of the Spirit. . . . We cannot doubt that the Spirit is the Creator whom we know was the Author of the Lord’s Incarnation. . . . If the Virgin conceived as of His operation and power of the Spirit, who will deny the Spirit as Creator?[4]

In this text Ambrose perfectly interprets the role that the Gospel attributes to the Holy Spirit in the Incarnation, which calls him successively “the Holy Spirit” and “the power of the Most High” (Lk 1:35). He is the “Creator Spirit” who acts to bring beings into existence (as in Gen 1:2), to create a new and higher form of life. It is the Spirit who is “the Lord, the giver of life,” as we proclaim in the same creed.

Here also, as at the beginning, the Spirit, creates “from nothing,” that is, from the complete absence of human possibilities, without any need for assistance or support. And this “nothing,” this void, this absence of explanations and natural causes, is called, in this case, the virginity of Mary. “How shall this be, since I have no husband? And the angel said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God’” (Lk 1:34-35). Her virginity here is a magnificent sign that cannot be eliminated or nullified without tearing the whole fabric of the Gospel account and its significance.

The Spirit that descended upon Mary is, then, the Creator Spirit who miraculously formed the flesh of Christ from the Virgin. But there is even more. In addition to being the “Creator Spirit” he is also for Mary “fons vivus, ignis, carita, / et spiritalis unctio,” “fount of life and fire of love, and sweet anointing from above.”[5] The mystery becomes enormously impoverished if it is reduced merely to its objective dimension, to its dogmatic implications (duality of nature, unity of person), while overlooking its subjective and existential aspects.

St. Paul speaks of “a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts” (2 Cor 3:3). The Holy Spirit wrote this marvelous letter that is Christ above all in Mary’s heart so that, as Augustine says, Christ “was kept in Mary’s mind insofar as he is truth, he was carried in her womb insofar as he is man.”[6] The famous saying, also by Augustine, that “Mary conceived Christ first in her heart

## Music Ministry

The new organ has been installed and is playing very well. Come and listen to Erik as he plays some special Christmas Hymns.

Erik requests that we pray for him as he plans as Music Director of the Holy Comforter.

Erik is well qualified and we wish him well in this position. Erik hopes to be able to direct a choir at the church.

## A Word from our Archbishop Anthony

### 1. Christmas, a Mystery “for Us”

In continuing our reflections on the Holy Spirit, and given the imminence of Christmas, let us meditate on the article in the creed that speaks of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Incarnation. In the creed, we say, “For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.”

St. Augustine distinguished between two ways of celebrating an event in salvation history: as a mystery (in sacramento) or as a simple anniversary. In the celebration of an anniversary, he said, we only need to “indicate with a religious solemnity the day of the year in which the remembrance of the event itself occurs.” In the celebration of a mystery, however, “not only is the event commemorated, but we do so in a way that its significance for us is understood and received devoutly.”[1]

Christmas is not a celebration in the category of an anniversary. (As we know, the choice of December 25 as the date was chosen for symbolic rather than historical reasons.) It is a celebration in the category of a mystery that needs to be understood in terms of its significance for us. St. Leo the Great had already highlighted the mystical significance of “the sacrament of the Nativity of Christ” saying, “Just as we have been crucified with him in his passion, been raised

**The Holy Comforter Worship Services**

10:30AM | SUNDAYS

**Christian Discipleship**

7PM | TUESDAYS

**Prayer**

7PM | WEDNESDAYS

**Bible Study**

7PM | THURSDAYS

and then in her body" ("prius concepit mente quam corpore")[7] means that the Holy Spirit worked in Mary's heart, illuminating it and inflaming it with Christ even before filling her womb with Christ.

Only the saints and mystics who have had a personal experience of God's eruption in their lives can help us understand what Mary must have experienced at the moment of the Incarnation of the Word in her womb. One of them, St. Bonaventure, writes,

When she gave her consent to him, the Holy Spirit came upon her like a divine fire inflaming her soul and sanctifying her flesh in perfect purity. But the power of the Most High overshadowed her (Luke 1:35) so that she could endure such a fire. . . . Oh, if you could feel in some way the quality and intensity of that fire sent from heaven, the refreshing coolness that accompanied it, the consolation it imparted; if you could realize the great exaltation of the Virgin Mother, the ennobling of the human race, the condescension of the divine majesty, . . . then I am sure you would sing in sweet tones with the Blessed Virgin that sacred hymn: My soul magnifies the Lord.[8]

The Incarnation was experienced by Mary as a charismatic event of the highest degree that made her the model of a soul who is "aglow with the Spirit" (Rom 12:11). It was her Pentecost. Many of Mary's actions and words, especially in the account of her visit to St. Elizabeth, cannot be understood unless we see them in the light of a mystical experience that is beyond compare. Everything that we see operating visibly in someone who is visited by grace (love, joy, peace, light) we should recognize in unique measure in Mary at the Annunciation. Mary was the first to experience "the sober intoxication of the Spirit" that I spoke about last time, and her "Magnificat" is the best evidence of that.

**If you'd like to hear more, join us for our Christmas Eve Mass at 6pm, or our Christmas Day Mass at 11am.**

## Assistance for Seniors

The Church of the Holy Comforter has good news! We now have a volunteer to drive our bus. We are placing Holy Comforter literature in senior housing developments and meeting with officials. Please pray for us to continue to complete the Lord's work.

## Prayer List

Bill Marotta: Still in Mid-hudson hospital, improving.

Marion has been able to successfully have a "win" with her doctors. We thank God.

The rectory has adopted a beautiful black cat. We have named her Lucky.

Please pray for our leadership as we serve mass and church service through construction.

Ronald Warden has asked for prayer that he is to move to Albany, NY.

Prayers for Martin and Mike. They have moved on from the Parish.

Prayers for the Archbishop as he installs a new Priest for the Parish.

## 7 Sacraments

### **Baptism:**

Baptism is the sacrament through which a person becomes a member of the Orthodox Church. It is a spiritual rebirth, symbolizing the washing away of sins and the beginning of a new life in Christ.

### **Chrismation (Confirmation):**

Chrismation, also known as Confirmation, is the sacrament that follows Baptism. Through the anointing with Holy Chrism, the newly baptized person receives the gift of the Holy Spirit, strengthening their faith and sealing their commitment to Christ.

### **Eucharist:**

The Eucharist, also called Holy Communion, is the central sacrament of the Orthodox Church. It is the partaking of the consecrated bread and wine, which are believed to become the body and blood of Christ. This sacrament nourishes the soul and provides spiritual unity with Christ and fellow believers.

### **Confession:**

Confession, or the sacrament of Penance, is the opportunity for believers to confess their sins to a priest and receive absolution. It is an important part of the Orthodox spiritual life, allowing for repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation with God and the Church.

### **Holy Unction (Anointing of the Sick):**

Holy Unction, also known as the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick, is the anointing of a person with blessed oil for the healing of physical and spiritual ailments. It is administered to those who are ill or in need of spiritual strength and comfort.

### **Holy Matrimony:**

Holy Matrimony is the sacrament of marriage in the Orthodox Church. It is a sacred union between a man and a woman, blessed by God and witnessed by the Church. Through this sacrament, the couple commits to a lifelong partnership of love, support, and spiritual growth.

### **Holy Orders:**

Holy Orders is the sacrament through which men are ordained as clergy in the Orthodox Church. It includes the ordination of bishops, priests, and deacons, who serve as spiritual leaders and shepherds of the Church, guiding and ministering to the faithful.

## WANT TO JOIN ORTHODOX CHURCH?

Contact the Rector for sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Chrismation, Eucharist) and or Religious Education – Catechumenate Classes.

### **Confession, Matrimony Anointing**

Contact the Rector

### **Called to Serve (Holy Orders)**

Contact His Eminence – Archbishop Anthony.

### **Funerals**

Contact the Rector

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