



**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**



*Father John Dunivan & Father Thaddeus Obba*

*Happy New Year!*

We welcome you to the new year of 2024. Remember the steadfast love of the Lord is never ending and great is His faithfulness. Below is our scripture for the year. As an Orthodox church we will follow the Church calendar, and very much grow into a healing center. As the church is remodeled and larger spaces are added we will be able to accommodate room for various community meetings and recovery. Grow in learning how to hear the Holy Spirit, spend more time with God alone. Make your meditations and prayer time the most important appointments of the day.

Always remember the single most command: " To love the Lord Thy God with all your Heart, your mind and spirit and to Love Thy Neighbor as Thy self. "

Have a blessed 2024!

*Welcome To Our New Members!*

Say hello to our new clergy!

We are so privileged to have such talented clergy.

Father John Dunivan works in the music industry as a producer and composer. Originally from Houston now lives in Hudson Valley w/ wife 3 children. Father John developed in Orthodox Christianity hesychasm and rich mystical tradition of the orthodox church.

Father Thaddeus serves as a Chaplin in the great New York area. A Former Catholic Priest, he was ordained Orthodox recently.

Together they will serve our parish regarding Baptism, Confirmations, The Eucharists, Confession, Holy Unction, marriage and Holy Orders.

Pray for our clergy and give a warm welcome.

**The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies , His mercies never come to an end; they are new ever morning great is your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion says my soul, therefore I will hope in Him.**

# JANUARY CALENDAR

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	1 CIRCUMCISION	2 ● DISCIPLESHIP 7 PM S. SERAPHIM OF SAROV, MK.	3	4 ● BIBLE STUDY 7 PM	5 VIGIL 🐟	6 EPIPHANY
7 ● EUCHARIST 10:30 AM SUNDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE S. ALOPEN AND JINGING ENLIGHTENERS OF CHINA	8 OCTAVE	9 ● DISCIPLESHIP 7 PM OCTAVE	10 OCTAVE	11 ● BIBLE STUDY 7 PM OCTAVE	12 OCTAVE 🐟	13 THE OCTAVE OF EPIPHANY S. KENTIGERN, B.C. S. HILARY OF POITIERS, B.C.
14 ● EUCHARIST 10:30 AM EPIPHANY II	15	16 ● DISCIPLESHIP 7 PM	17 S. ANTHONY, MK.	18 ● BIBLE STUDY 7 PM	19 🐟	20
21 ● EUCHARIST 10:30 AM EPIPHANY III S. AGNES, V.	22	23 ● DISCIPLESHIP 7 PM	24 S. TIMOTHY, B.M. S. XENIA, W.	25 ● BIBLE STUDY 7 PM CONVERSION OF S. PAUL	26 🐟	27 S. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, B.C.D
28 ● EUCHARIST 10:30 AM SEPTUAGESIMA S. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, B.C.D.	29	30 ● DISCIPLESHIP 7 PM OCTAVE S. STEPHEN, DN.M	31 OCTAVE S. JOHN, AP	● THE RECTORY ● THE CHURCH		

## Evangelism & Church Events

### Community Meetings

We have witnessed a substantial increase in the number of individuals actively participating in our community meetings. The community meetings serve as a hub for spiritual growth and fellowship, providing a space where members can delve into Bible Study and Discipleship Study to strengthen their faith.



*Bible Study, Dec. 28th*

The growing attendance reflects the church's commitment to fostering a sense of community and connection among its members, creating an environment that encourages both spiritual exploration and personal development. As more individuals find value in these gatherings, the Holy Comforter Church continues to thrive as a vibrant and inclusive community centered around shared faith and mutual support. We thank God for the opportunity to spread His word within the community and nurture faith among its members.

### Christmas Day Celebration



*Christmas Day Mass*

On Christmas, The Holy Comforter hosted Mass which drew a heartwarming crowd of over 24 attendees! During our Christmas Eve Mass, 19 faithful members joined the celebration. Our church had received its most generous contributions in over 55 years, a fact we can confirm through meticulous records dating back to our consecration service on October 25, 1860. We're immensely grateful for the incredible turnout and the overwhelming support from our community. Thank you for making these gatherings truly special!

### Christmas Dinner

Our Christmas Dinner was a wonderful blessing, as 24 parishioners gathered to celebrate the festivities. We enjoyed a hearty meal together, gaining a pound or two in the process. Santa even made a special appearance on Christmas Eve, spreading joy with gifts for everyone.





The Rectory was filled with good tidings and great cheer, creating a warm and festive atmosphere. We thank God for the community that continues to thrive and grow among us.

## Church Fund Drive

As we move through our remodeling, we are aware and are praying for additional funds. Please pray and ask the Lord how you can help. Whether talent or treasure, we need your help. Currently we are adding new granite/marble flooring throughout the sanctuary area and other areas of the church floor. As you can see Paul and Joshua are doing a great job. We thank God that we are able to move forward.



## Music Ministry

We thank God for our new organ that was installed in early December. We are blessed to have our Music Director/Organist, Erik M. Erik is able to play a wide range from Traditional Church Hymns to Classical Mozart, Bach, and Tchaikovsky. Come and enjoy the lovely sounds of our organ!



## A Word from our Archbishop Anthony

### Animals Witnessing the Nativity: Unraveling Their Mysterious

#### Presence

The ox, the donkey, the sheep — how did these humble creatures find their way to the manger in the cherished Nativity scene? This tableau, with its donkey, calf, and curly white lambs surrounding the Christ Child, warming Him with their breath, is both familiar and heartwarming. Yet, it's intriguing to ponder their origins in this sacred setting.

On one hand, the creche, traditionally depicted as a cave, was likely a shelter where shepherds housed their livestock. It's easy to imagine the animals' surprise at finding the Divine Child nestled in their manger, an unexpected holy presence in

their humble abode.

However, the New Testament itself makes no mention of animals at Christ's birth. The inclusion of oxen, donkeys, and sheep is a product of Church tradition, with holy Fathers and theologians over the centuries offering various interpretations of their symbolic presence in the Nativity story.

Furthermore, if we consider the actual circumstances logically, it seems probable that when Joseph and Mary arrived, the cave was... empty.

Understanding the nature of this cave is crucial. Professor Alexander Lopukhin, in his "Interpretation of the Holy Scriptures," explains, "The New Testament's reference to a manger, a place for cattle feed, suggests that the Virgin Mary and Joseph found shelter in a cattle pen attached to an inn. With all rooms taken and the common area unsuitable due to Mary's impending labor, they were lodged in this enclosure. According to ancient texts, this pen was within a cave not in, but near Bethlehem" (citing Justin the Philosopher's "Dialogue with Trypho" and Origen's "Against Celsus"). Thus, Lopukhin posits that this cave, adjacent to an inn, housed animals brought by travelers to Bethlehem.

Another perspective is offered by St. Demetrius of Rostov. He describes a cave to the east of Bethlehem, near the well of David, embedded in the stone mountain upon which Bethlehem sits. This cave, belonging to Salomia, a Bethlehem resident and relative of both Mary and Joseph, served as a refuge. Unable to find lodging in the crowded city, due to the influx of people for the census, Joseph and Mary sought refuge in this cave, as there was "no room for them in the inn," especially as evening approached.

Tracing the Journey of the Ox and the Donkey to Bethlehem The presence of the donkey and the ox in the Nativity scene is not just a picturesque detail but a narrative enriched with profound symbolism.

Joseph, a carpenter, and his betrothed wife Mary were temporarily residing in Nazareth. Though both natives of Bethlehem, the census compelled them to return. Alexander Lopukhin insightfully notes, "Mary's advanced pregnancy was the primary reason Joseph could not leave her alone in Nazareth for an extended period. The journey to Bethlehem was long, and in Nazareth, she would have been defenseless."

The three-day journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem was a challenge for Mary, given her condition. Therefore, she was carried on a donkey. Whether the animal was owned or borrowed by Joseph is uncertain, but it is clear that this donkey accompanied them from Nazareth.

The ox's presence, however, is intriguing. St. Demetrius of Rostov suggests that Joseph brought the ox to Bethlehem intending to sell it. This was to pay the tribute demanded by Caesar and to cover essential expenses. Archimandrite Nicephorus Bozhanov describes Joseph as "a righteous and pious man living a modest life in Nazareth, sustaining himself through hard work." The ox, then, was a crucial asset for the elderly carpenter to fund the unforeseen journey and stay in Bethlehem. The sale of the ox possibly facilitated the Holy Family's move into a house, as the Gospel of Matthew recounts the Magi visiting them in a house, not a cave (Matthew 2:11). This suggests that after the initial rush of the census, Joseph was able to provide a more comfortable dwelling for Mary and the newborn Jesus, likely financed by the sale of the ox.

#### The Nativity Scene and its Symbolic Animals

Returning to the creche at the moment of the Nativity, St. Demetrius of Rostov poignantly describes the ox and the donkey warming the Christ Child with their breath in the cold of winter, serving their Lord and Creator in humble reverence.

In the Holy Scripture, every detail carries multiple layers of meaning. Although the New Testament does not mention these animals, the Old Testament does. Isaiah's prophecy vividly states: "...the ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib; but Israel does not know, My people do not understand" (Isaiah 1:3). Thus, on Christmas, this prophecy finds its fulfillment: the animals bowing before Christ

The Holy Comforter Worship Services

10:30AM | SUNDAYS

Christian Discipleship

7PM | TUESDAYS

Prayer

7PM | WEDNESDAYS

Bible Study

7PM | THURSDAYS

symbolize both the Gentiles (the donkey) and the Jews (the ox). St. Augustine of Hippo elaborates on this symbolism: "In the person of the shepherds and wise men, the ox has recognized its owner, and the donkey its master's manger. The Jews, symbolized by the horned animal, were unwittingly preparing the horns of the cross for Christ. The Gentiles, represented by the long-eared animal, were prophesied to obey swiftly: 'A people I have not known shall serve me. As soon as they hear of me they obey me' (Psalm 17:44-45)." In the humility of the manger, the ox and the donkey, representing Jews and Gentiles alike, found their sustenance in the Word made flesh.

#### Exploring the Symbolic Presence of Animals in the Nativity Scene

Sheep may have been present, not at the exact moment of Christ's birth, but shortly thereafter. St. Luke the Evangelist notes: "Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night" (Luke 2:8). The Messiah was believed to be born in the "tower of the flock" near Bethlehem, where sheep intended for temple sacrifices were herded. The shepherds, possibly connected to the Jerusalem temple, were chosen by the angel of the Lord to herald a new era – a time when sacrifices would cease, as the Son of God Himself would become the ultimate sacrifice. If these shepherds brought their flocks to the cave, the lambs there would also witness their Saviour.

Alternatively, the angel's announcement to the shepherds could symbolize the Saviour's preference for the humble and pure-hearted over the wealthy and influential. This aligns with the portrayal of Christ as both the Great Shepherd and the Lamb.

In some Nativity scenes, a dog is included. While it may seem unusual, shepherds have long relied on dogs for guarding their flocks. Aleksey Uvarov, in his book on Ancient Christian symbolism, notes that early Christian grave monuments often featured images of dogs, symbolizing fidelity to Church doctrine and vigilance against heresy.

Other creatures frequently depicted include doves, representing the Holy Spirit, and roosters with hens and chicks, with eggs symbolizing life and resurrection. Occasionally, camels appear, reflecting the journey of the Magi who brought gifts from the East, as foretold by Isaiah: "The multitude of camels shall cover your land... they shall bring gold and incense, and they shall proclaim the praises of the Lord" (Isaiah 60:5-6).

Thus, in the Nativity scene, every creature finds its place and meaning, embodying the universal joy of Christ's birth. As the Matins hymn of the Nativity Feast proclaims: "Today every creature rejoices and is glad because Christ was born of the Virgin Mary." This joy transcends the human realm, encompassing all of creation – people, animals, and heavenly beings. Christ is born, glorify Him!

### Assistance for Seniors

Pray as we prepare to buy a Van to pick up seniors and those that are in need of a ride to church events and mass.

Call the church at 845-471-2286

### Prayer List

William Marotta — released from the hospital but is in the rehab  
Our Tears Orphans in Sierra Leone Africa  
Phil Braman — Recovery from auto Accident  
Mark S — Recovery

## 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

Online Giving: Please Visit [holycomforterny.org](http://holycomforterny.org)