



# COMFORT

## O COMFORT my PEOPLE

*says your God! Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her ... Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together." (Is 40:1f)*

From the beginning God has watched over us, his beloved children, he whose image and likeness we bear. Just think how closely parents watch their newborns. Every move is cherished; every cry is considered and interpreted. The color of their cheeks, their eyes – nothing is missed. There is hardly a second when the mother and father aren't looking at them. This is only a small reflection of the gaze of our God on us.

Soon we will hear that long list of names in the liturgy, names of the blood line of humans that will be incarnated in God the Son, whom we know and love as Jesus! Eons lead to that birth while God carefully guided humanity, with his foreknowledge and everlasting love unfolding his plan. There were great pivotal events in this story: the Creation, the Flood, the Exodus and more. But there were also tiny little things: small moments, girl-meets-boy kind of things too. God himself intervened in humble but crucial ways. Scripture says that he "breathed into his [Adam's] nostrils the breath of life" (Gn 2:7). After the fall of mankind that necessitated a Redeemer, "the Lord God made garments of skins for man and his wife, and clothed them" (Gn 3:21). And when God saw that Cain was angry with Abel he spoke to Cain: "Why are

you angry, and why has your countenance fallen?" (Gn 4:6). God worked through those little things: warm clothes, and a gentle nudging of the wayward one towards the good.

God continued his vigil over humanity as it multiplied and moved out over the earth. After the Flood three visitors seeking rest appeared to stumble upon the tent of Abraham and Sarah, but in reality they brought the promise of a son who would be born to them in their old age. A blind Isaac was deceived by a pelt and a bowl of his favorite stew to give the birthright-blessing to his youngest son (Gn 27); nine brothers' envy of their younger brother's special robe set in motion God's providential placement of Joseph in Egypt, paving the way for all the children of Israel (Gn 37ff). God guided events through these very practical human things: the desert code of hospitality, a favorite dish, and a robe were all part of that long preparation towards the fullness he so longs to share with us.

Then there was that odd basket afloat on the river where the daughter of Pharaoh bathed. Moses, saved from death that day, years later was shepherding a flock when he came upon a bush, burning but not being consumed. Even later there was another fire: this time on the top of Mt Sinai, from which he carried down stone tablets with God's own commands on them (Ex 1f). God was guiding the plan of salvation from all eternity through little things like a tarred basket, a bush and cut stones.

The devotion of Ruth to her mother-in-law made her willing to glean after the wheat harvesters in the fields of Boaz, because they had no resources. This was God's way of entwining lives together to bring about the line of David, from which Jesus would descend. David himself was brought by Samuel the prophet out of the hills, where he shepherded his father's flock. But it was God's gift to David of a sharp eye and sure sling-shot arm that brought him to the attention of the royal eye of Saul (I Sam 17f). God ordained and accompanied innumerable small personal events in individual lives that are part of, and necessary to, the great whole.



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Oh, the faithfulness and determination of God to send his redemption to his creatures! Finally everything was prepared for his incarnated love to enter into the human story. God chose that silent night to begin pouring out the good news, the great joy that Jesus, his tiny little son, is here breathing the air, drinking mother's milk and receiving warmth from his father's arms as a helpless infant, with his Godhead hidden but actual.

To receive this greatest revelation that ever was and ever will be, God did not choose Tiberius, emperor of Rome, nor Herod, king of Israel, nor the Sanhedrin, nor the great city Jerusalem; he chose some watchers of the night, a small group of shepherds in a field. They knew how to read the heavens with its clouds and colors by day and stars by night. But these men were not astronomers, nor did they simply appreciate the vastness and beauty of the stratosphere. They examined the skies for survival, for knowledge of where they were and what to prepare for in their craggy ranges. At dusk they began to secure their flocks in a sheepfold and try to get comfortable as they watched and dozed through the night. They watched shadows and movement. Their ears were wide open to listen intently to the scuffling, soft shifting of their herds as they settled down, and for anything not part of that nightly ritual. Surely as they unwound and found a spot to lay their weary bodies, they told their stories. These shepherds were doing what God willed for them – living their ordinary lives as they always had.

That is where God meets us too, isn't it? In the little things we often call coincidences: how you entered into a conversation, smiled at someone, arrived at a particular instant to bear the seed of Jesus into someone else's life, or how you've been there to receive it in your own. Mostly we simply go about what the day requires of us. We might think that God could not possibly be interested in such details. But that is exactly where

God works. He also gave us free will, freedom to respond or not, but that doesn't mean he is not working with us just as we are with those we love. God asks us to be his partner in Salvation History by little things that we can do. He has shown us that little things make all the difference to this world. Including being where we should be, like those herdsmen that night.

Those shepherds are now part of God's Word and revelation in the Bible! They were "watching their flock by night. Suddenly an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified" (Lk 2:8-9). To these terrified men, hardworking and humble men, who were no fools, was given the job to hear and to begin to proclaim the best of all news, "Do not be afraid. For see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord!" (Lk 2:10-11).

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those of good will!'" Those shepherds did their part, their little part – they "went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger" (Lk 2:8-16). Oh yes, this tiny little One is the tender love of our God – be comforted, be comforted, says your God!

MMEK



**Sr. Mary Gertrude Webster, OSB**

Since the beginning of my observorship in November 2016 I have been in the habit of walking the driveway at St Scholastica Priory. During one of my walks last year right around this time, I was pondering how it is that my adventure-loving-self could be called to the hidden life in a contemplative monastery? And if Christ is the fulfillment of all desire, how could he possibly fulfill that desire I have for adventure? Just then I passed a gray leafless crab apple tree that stands alone in a grassy patch off to the side almost at the entrance gates.

I realized that, in a way, this crab apple tree was the answer. My new adventure, would be the slow seasonal change of this tree. I knew that though it was at the moment, leafless and dead looking, in the spring it would be covered in flowers. I would have to wait and see what color they would be.

So, on March 25<sup>th</sup> of this year I entered the monastery to start this adventure. The crab apple tree has not disappointed. First, it was covered in pretty pink flowers. Then cute little green leaves took their place. A fleet of tent caterpillars during the summer attacked my crab apple tree and nearly ate all the leaves. The rest of the summer the poor tree looked a little drab. Now it is back to having no leaves at all! My sure hope is in Spring, in the Resurrection, when the crab apple tree blooms again! Beneath it I planted a spring garden of bulbs.

The adventure of this tree has been a bit like my postulancy, those first six months of being in the monastery. There have been ups and downs, lots of dying but with faith in the Resurrection. The question is, do I truly hope in the Resurrection? Do I truly believe that whatever I have given up to be here that I will receive a hundredfold back? Not just in the life to come, but now, here? I can tell you something I have experienced already that by putting aside my beautiful clothes, cutting my hair to make the veil easier to wear – I feel more beautiful than ever before in my life. Pray for me. I do for you!

SMGW



Our Christmas gift to you is a novena of Masses during this Christmastide for all of your intentions!

*A blessed and Merry Christmas!*

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# HAPPENINGS

We have had a very eventful fall season--- full of God's blessings!



Prior Peter Funk, OSB of Holy Cross Monastery in Chicago and Sr. Ancilla Armijo, OSB from the Abbey of St. Walburga in Virginia Dale, Colorado came to conduct our triennial visitation from Sept 19th-21st. It was a wonderful opportunity to share experiences with fellow Benedictines from other monasteries, and we had a celebratory dinner with the brothers and their visitors, Abbot President Guillermo Arbolada Tamayo, OSB and Fr. Brendan Creeden, OSB, to conclude the event.



Our second Oblate Retreat of the year was held on September 23rd, with more than thirty retreatants gathering for the day to pray with us and reflect together on Benedictine life. It was a particularly joyful occasion, as three lovely women made their final oblations as affiliates of St. Scholastica Priory.



On September 25th, the sisters welcomed Sr. Anna Izbicka, a Benedictine sister from Krzeszow, Poland, who stayed with us for three weeks. She was able to improve her English and spend time on retreat while we enjoyed her Polish cooking! *(She is just behind Chaeli next column)*



The following day the brothers and sisters attended the reburial of our deceased community members in our new monastic cemetery. Four of our brothers and sisters, including the founders of our twin communities, Fr. Cyril Karam and M. Mary Clare Vincent, were transferred from the Petersham town cemetery, along with six sisters from Our Lady Queen Monastery, our former daughterhouse in Tickfaw, Louisiana. While the official cemetery blessing will be in the spring with the arrival of a granite crucifix, the two communities rejoiced to have our monastic family all together again.



Our Old English sheepdog, Chaeli, had her second birthday on September 28th. We honored the day, in part, to remember Mother Mary Clare who first suggested we get a dog back in 2015. We celebrated with a gift-wrapped package of dog toys (which Chaeli delighted in ripping to shreds) and candy for her thirteen mothers!



At the end of September, Fr. Gregory and M. Mary Elizabeth traveled overseas to the historic Minster Abbey in Kent, England for the Superiors' Meeting of the Subiaco-Cassinense Congregation. While it was a brief trip, they were able to visit our Benedictine brothers in Ramsgate-Chilworth and Farnborough as well.

Mother was back home just in time for our final Monastic Experience Weekend of the

year on October 6th-8th. Two young women were able to spend time discerning God's will, while learning more about our contemplative religious vocation. We continue to keep these and all of our participants in prayer, wherever they may be in their journey with God!



On October 14th, we had the joy of clothing Vivian Webster, now Sr. Mary Gertrude, as a novice of our community! It is a great blessing to have this white-veiled sister in our midst to help carry on our Benedictine tradition.

A few days before Sr. Anna's return home to Poland, the sisters accompanied her on a boat and bus tour through Boston - a first for many of us Americans too! It was a wonderful way to recall the rich history of the city, which played a central role in the founding of our country nearly 250 years ago.

Sr. Monica, Steve Baldwin and a few helpers were able to clear out many invasive trees and underbrush from the backyard at the end of October, with the help of a wood chipper. We thank God for this beautiful new space!



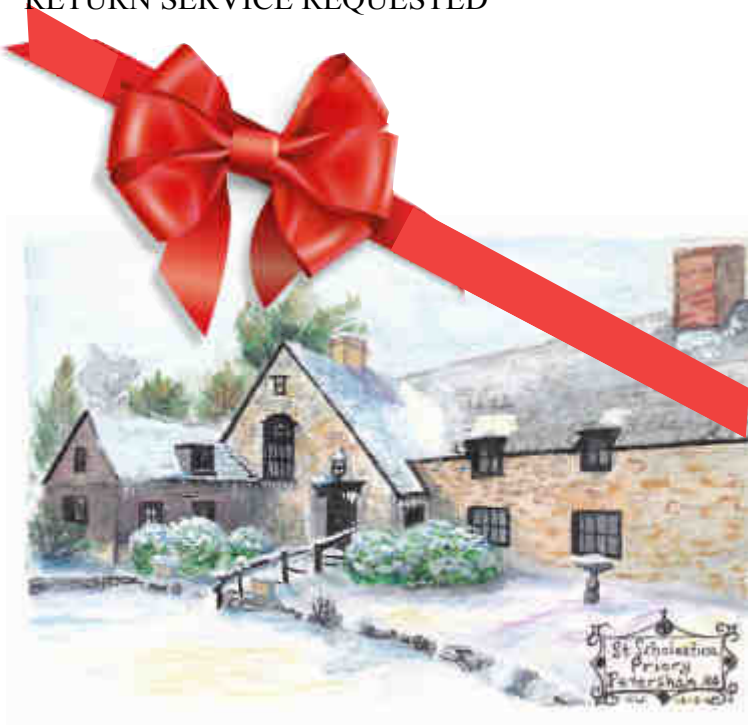
And as we have done for many years - dozens of cookies for the children's Halloween party at the Petersham Town Hall.

Brandon Vennink, a musician and friend of the community from Southbridge, came on November 9th to give the two communities singing lessons. We are extremely grateful for the donation of his time and expertise! We hope to give ever greater glory to God with our new and improved voices as we chant the Lord's praises each day.

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Dear Friends, Christmas 2017

How good God has been to us! We thank Him for all of the many blessings of this past year that you have read about in our newsletters. We are all smiles as we think of you and thank you for your prayers and support! We are so blessed to have this vocation and we never forget you in our daily prayers.

There is a gift we can all give this year - the gift of hope. The world needs this hope, hope that points to a fuller life, an everlasting love that never abandons us, disappoints us or even, bores us! How could we possibly imagine what God has in store for us when we could never have fathomed that God would show us his love by taking on our nature. Not only being a human being but a helpless infant? He did not fear losing his dignity, prestige or power. This is why we can have hope, give hope and, despite what the culture says have great joy! Jesus is our Savior! We send you a holy, grace-filled and very Merry Christmas and a blessed New Year! All our love and prayers!

M. Mary Elizabeth, Sr Mary Angela, Sr Monica, Sr Mary Frances, Sr Gemma, Sr Christine, Sr Mary Paula, Sr Emmanuel, Sr Maria Isabel, Sr Mary Gertrude, Elena and Kate!



Front cover illumination:

Stefaneschi miissal: Florence, Italy or in Avignon, France during the late 1320's. Gratitude to the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York