

1st JANUARY – A SINGULAR DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

Mosaic icon of Mary, Holy Mother of God in the Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Philadelphia.



[Photo: Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Philadelphia]

The 1st of January is truly a singular day in the life of the Church! For on this first day of the calendar new year, the Church observes the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God concurrently with the World Day of Peace!

What is the history of the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God?

Already in the earliest days of the Church the Blessed Virgin Mary was officially honoured as the Mother of God. In the synoptic Gospels and in Acts 1:14 she was clearly identified as ‘the mother of Jesus’ who is the Son of God. But there were heretical movements in those earliest centuries that challenged whether Jesus was indeed true God and true man at the same time. Hence, they also rejected the religious practice of the Virgin Mary being honoured as the ‘Mother of God’.

By challenging the truth that Jesus was true God and true man at the same time, the heretics were likewise challenging Mary’s role in God’s plan of salvation for us.

The heretics refused to accept the genuineness of Mary's obedient consent, her **fiat**: "Let it be according to your word" [Lk 1:38], Mary's response when Angel Gabriel revealed that the child whom she had agreed to bear "will be called holy, the Son of God". [Lk 1:36].

During the papacy of Pope Celestine I, a council in Ephesus was convened in 431 which crushed the dissent and heresies of the day. It **pronounced the dogma that Mary is the Holy Mother of God**. The Council defined the dogma in the steadfast belief in the true incarnation of the Son of God through the Blessed Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. <https://conciliarpost.com/christian-traditions/eastern-orthodox/why-we-call-mary-the-mother-of-god>

Why is the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God observed on 1 January?

The Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God is about Mary's motherhood of God's only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ. We know from the Gospels of Luke and Matthew that the Blessed Virgin Mary gave birth to Jesus. Luke further narrates that being Jewish, Jesus was circumcised on the 8th day – the 'octave' - and given the name that Angel Gabriel had spoken: namely 'Jesus'. [Lk 2:21].

As Christians we celebrate Jesus' birth as Christmas on 25th December. His circumcision thus falls in the octave of Christmas. Some Christian denominations and Orthodox Churches observe the Circumcision (and Naming of Jesus) on the octave of Christmas, namely on 1 January. Not so in the Roman Rite of the Catholic Church.

Since the reform of the Roman liturgy in the Catholic Church in 1969, the Christmas season unites in commemoration and celebration both Jesus' birth and the Blessed Virgin Mary's motherhood within God's plan of salvation.

Pope Saint Paul VI puts it succinctly in his 1974 Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus*: "**...the Solemnity of the Birth of Jesus Christ both adores the Savior and venerates his glorious Mother**".

Therefore, in 1974, Pope St. Paul VI removed the feast of the Circumcision of Christ, which had been observed on 1 January, and replaced it with the Solemnity of Mary, Holy Mother of God.

What is the history of the World Day of Peace?

Pope St. Paul VI initiated the World Day of Peace of the Catholic Church in 1967. It is significant that on Easter Sunday, 26 March 1967, he promulgated the encyclical letter **POPULORUM PROGRESSIO** – THE DEVELOPMENT OF PEOPLES in which he coins the phrase: "**development is the new name of peace**". In this encyclical letter Pope St. Paul VI exhorts everyone to become a peacebuilder:

"...if development is the new name for peace, who wouldn't want to cooperate with all his strength? Yes, everyone: We invite you to respond to Our cry of anguish, in the Name of the Lord." [PP #87].

Why are the World Day of Peace and the Solemnity of Mary, Holy Mother of God always celebrated together on 1st January?

On 2nd February 1974, the feast of the Presentation of the Lord, Pope St. Paul VI issued the Apostolic Exhortation, **MARIALIS CULTUS** – FOR THE RIGHT ORDERING AND DEVELOPMENT TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY. https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19740202_marialis-cultus.html. He addressed this Exhortation “To All Bishops in Peace and Communion with the Apostolic See” to inform bishops and priests of the proper way to observe the Marian devotions of the Church.



In *Marialis Cultus* His Holiness also explains why the Solemnity of Mary, Holy Mother of God and the World Day of Peace are both to be celebrated on 1st January in the liturgical calendar:

“In the revised ordering of the Christmas period, it seems to us that the attention of all should be directed towards the restored Solemnity of Mary the holy Mother of God. This celebration, placed on January 1 in conformity with the ancient indication of the liturgy of the City of Rome, is meant to commemorate the part played by Mary in this mystery of salvation.”

It is meant also to exalt the singular dignity which this mystery brings to the “Holy Mother...through whom we were found worthy to receive the Author of life.” (17)

It is likewise a fitting occasion for renewing adoration of the newborn Prince of Peace, for listening once more to the glad tidings of the angels (cf. Lk. 2:14), and for imploring from God, through the Queen of Peace, the supreme gift of peace.

It is for this reason that, in the happy concurrence of the Octave of Christmas and the first day of the year, we have instituted the World Day of Peace, an occasion that is gaining increasing support and already bringing forth fruits of peace in the hearts of many.” [MC #5]

When was the first World Day of Peace observed?

The first World Day of Peace was observed on 1st January 1968 by Pope St. Paul VI. In his magisterial Message for the observance of this first Day of Peace, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_p-vi_mes_19671208_i-world-day-for-peace.html.

Pope St. Paul VI exhorts 'all true friends of Peace' to come together to celebrate this Day in the repeated hope that a peace born of justice will direct the course human history in the coming years and decades.

"We address Ourselves to all men of good will to exhort them to celebrate "The Day of Peace", throughout the world, on the first day of the year, January 1, 1968. It is Our desire that then, every year, this commemoration be repeated as a hope and as a promise, at the beginning of the calendar which measures and outlines the path of human life in time, that Peace with its just and beneficent equilibrium may dominate the development of events to come."

"The proposal to dedicate to Peace the first day of the new year is not intended...as exclusively ours, that is, Catholic. It would hope to have the adherence of all the true friends of Peace, as if it were their own initiative, to be expressed in a free manner, congenial to the particular character of those who are aware of how beautiful and how important is the harmony of all voices in the world for the exaltation of this primary good, which is Peace, in the varied concert of modern humanity."

"The subjective foundation of Peace is a new spirit which must animate coexistence between peoples, a new outlook on man, his duties and his destiny. Much progress must still be made to render this outlook universal and effective; a new training must educate the new generations to reciprocal respect between nations, to brotherhood between peoples, to collaboration between races, with a view also to their progress and development."

"Men (sic) must always speak of Peace. The world must be educated to love Peace, to build it up and defend it. Against the resurgent preludes to war (nationalistic competition, armaments, revolutionary provocations, racial hatred, the spirit of revenge, etc.), and also against the snares of tactical pacifism, intended to drug the enemy one must overcome, to smother in men's (sic) minds the meaning of justice, of duty and of sacrifice – we must arouse in the men (sic) of our time and of future generations the sense and love of Peace founded upon truth, justice, freedom and love (cf. Pope John XXIII: "*Pacem in terris*")."

"LET NO VOICE BE MISSING FROM THE GREAT CHORUS OF THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD, BESEECHING CHRIST WHO WAS IMMOLATED FOR US TO 'GRANT US PEACE!'"

VIDEO: Pope St. Paul VI's First World Day of Peace on 1 January 1968.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a1Hs8kShzvU>

To view the video of the Holy Father going to the Vatican's Bambino Gesù Children's Hospital to celebrate Holy Mass in its chapel and to visit and comfort the little patients, click on the image above.

Papal Messages for the observation of World Day of Peace: 1968 to 2024

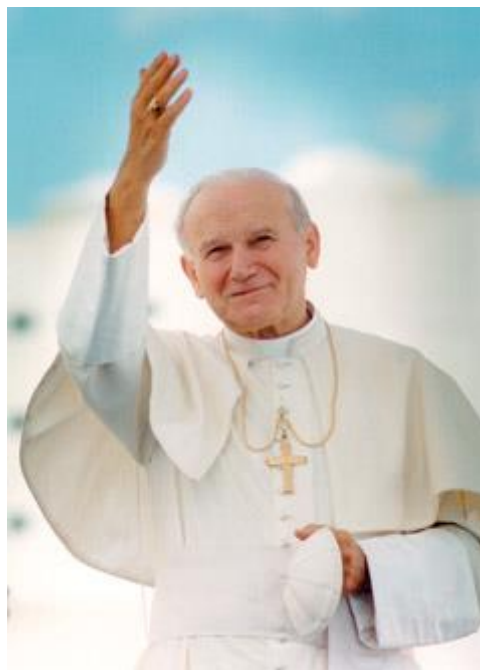
Since Pope St. Paul VI's magisterial Message for the Observance of the World Day of Peace January 1968, all sitting Popes deliver a Message on World Day of Peace which speaks to either social doctrine and peace, or to current social issues that challenge global peace from the perspective of Catholic social teaching.



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Paul VI Messages World Days of Peace 1968 to 1978

<https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/messages/peace.index.html>



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John Paul II Messages World Days of Peace 1979 to 2005

<https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace.index.html>



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Benedict XVI Messages World Days of Peace 2005 to 2013

<https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace.index.html>



(CNS photo / Paul Haring)

Francis Messages World Days of Peace 2014 to 2024

<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace.html>