



Epiphany

JOY: *Jesus First, Others Second, You*

Happy Feast of Epiphany

دنج مبارك!! دايماً دايماً

St Anthony Maronite Church
كنيسة مار أنطونيوس المارونية

OFFICE HOURS

M-TH: 9 AM - 4PM

Friday: 9 AM—2 PM

Saturdays: By Appointment

MAILING ADDRESS

145 Amesbury Street
Lawrence, MA 01841

Phone: 978.685.7233

Fax: 978.688.4475

rectory@stanthonylawrence.org

www.stanthonylawrence.org

MEET OUR PRIESTS & DEACONS

Pastor

Fr. Elie Mikhael 305.807.9087

pastor@stanthonylawrence.org

Parochial Vicar

Fr. Jebrael Moussallem... 412.616.4144

pv@stanthonylawrence.org

Deacon Nadim B. Daou

Visiting Deacon

Michael Charchaflian

Sub-Deacon James T. Demers

PARISH

MISSION STATEMENT

You are welcomed and loved by St Anthony Community. We are transformed through prayer, acts of love, forgiveness, service and stewardship.

OUR CHURCH AT PRAYER

Daily Liturgies

M & W: 9 AM

T & TH: 7 PM

Weekend Liturgies:

Saturday: 4 PM Vigil

Sunday Liturgies:

8:15 AM - Arabic

9:30 AM - English

11:30 AM - English & Arabic

Holy days of obligation

Vigil Liturgy @ 7 PM

Feast Day @ 9 AM

SACRAMENTS

Baptism & Confirmation

1 month in advance with the Pastor

Matrimony

Couples should make arrangements six months prior to the wedding date

Reconciliation

One hour Before Thursday & Saturday Liturgies, or by appointment

Anointing of the Sick

Please notify the Rectory if a member of your family is ill, hospitalized, or unable to come to Church and would like to receive communion at home

Please refer to our website for more Sacrament Celebrations Guidelines

PARISH SECRETARY

Pat McKeever

rectory@stanthonylawrence.org

PARISH MINISTRIES

Religious Education

ccd@stanthonylawrence.org

Knights of Mary

kom@stanthonylawrence.org

Maronite Youth : MYO

myo@stanthonylawrence.org

Publishing: Bulletin

bulletin@stanthonylawrence.org

Choirs (English, Arabic & Syriac)

Kids Choir

Knights of the Altar

Maronite Young Adults

Bereavement Ministry

Cenacle of the Rosary

(Tuesdays @ 6PM before Liturgy)

Cenacle of Divine Mercy

(Sundays Before the Liturgies)

“Sacristan (s)

RESOURCES

AVAILABLE ONLINE

www.stanthonylawrence.org

Membership Registration

Under Welcome

Baptism & Confirmation:

Guidelines & Registration

Under Sacraments –Baptism

Sacrament of Marriage:

Guidelines , Foccus & Pre-Cana

Under Sacraments-Marriage

Banquet Hall Guidelines:

Contract Form & Donations

Under Events

Burial Guidelines:

Charges, Fees & Lot Sales

Under Cemetery

Epiphany of Our Lord

أحد ألدنح ألمجيد

Saturday, January 5 @ 4:00 PM -Vigil of Epiphany

For: +John Thomas By his Wife, Phyllis, and Family

Sunday, January 6 @ 8:15 AM

For: Special Intentions

Sunday, January 6 @ 9:30 AM

For: Special Intentions

Sunday, January 6 @ 11:30 AM

For: 1st Anniversary-Seniora Youssef & in Memory of George Youssef , By the Family of Youssef and Haddad.

Parish Clergies will be away from January 7 till January 11 in the Annual Eparchial Clergy Retreat.

Liturgy will be omitted. In Case of Emergency, please contact Fr. Faris @ 978.905.9065

1st Sunday of Epiphany

الأحد الأول-زمن ألدنح

Saturday, January 12 @ 4:00 PM

For: In Honor of Shaker & Gisele Asmar (Anniversary)

Sunday, January 13 @ 8:15 AM

For: In Honor of Ghassan & Claudine Raad (Anniversary)

Sunday, January 13 @ 9:30 AM

For: In Honor of Matthew & Katelyn Maroon (Anniversary)

Sunday, January 13 @ 11:30 AM

For: In Honor of Gaby & Adele Maroun (Anniversary)

THE SANCTUARY LAMPS

Right Sanctuary Lamp

This week's Sanctuary Lamp will burn

In Memory of John Thomas

Offered by his loving wife, Phyllis, and his loving family.

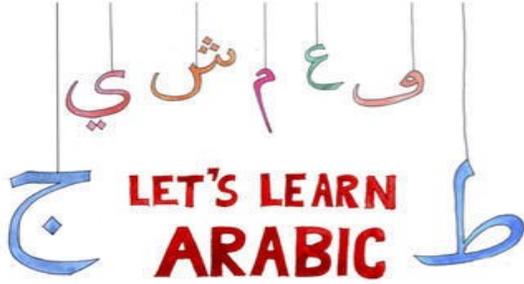
Left Sanctuary Lamp

This week's Sanctuary Lamp will burn

In Memory of John Thomas

Offered by his loving wife, Phyllis, and his loving family.

Launching Our Arabic School!!



Registrations Open!!!

Ages 7-13

Email the Office at

rectory@stanthonylawrence.org

Subject: Arabic Classes

Classes to begin in January 2019

On Saturday Mornings.

Classes are limited to Children age 7 and up

Program: Reading, Writing and Speaking

Cost per Semester: \$300 -Materials Included

****Registration form on page 8****

For the Feast of Epiphany Bottles of Water will be blessed and distributed for parishioners

Why put financial information in the bulletin

There are some churches that don't do this for a variety of reasons, but this is a mistake. Here are some of the reasons why it's important:

- The staff does not have time to individually discuss the financial situation with each person in the congregation.
- Churches need money to function; this is not something to be ashamed of, but to be treated honestly.
- The church is a family and every family needs to know its financial status.
- If you don't share, the finances can be seen as a staff secret and not a shared responsibility.
- People need to know where the church is financially so they can give and pray.

TITHES & OFFERINGS

December 23

Sunday Collection (Online)	\$ 2,405.00
Candles	\$ 224.00
Poinsettias & Decorations	\$ 623.00
Fuel	\$ 130.00
Christmas Offerings & Poinsettias	\$ 187.00
Total Deposit	\$ 2,989.00

Christmas Liturgies

Sunday Collection (Online)	\$ 16,342.00
Poinsettias & Decorations	\$ 600.00
Donations (Pastor Charities)	\$ 920.00
Fuel	\$ 50.00
Total Deposit	\$ 17,912.00

December 30

Sunday Collection (Online)	\$ 2,742.00
Candles	\$ 90.00
Poinsettias & Decorations	\$ 650.00
Donations (Pastor Charities)	\$ 390.00
Fuel	\$ 2,040.00
New Year's Day	\$ 212.00
Donations (Miscellaneous)	\$ 2,550.00
Total Deposit	\$ 8,674.00

Fuel Collection Envelopes

Throughout the winter months, you will notice a Fuel collection Envelope. Be advised that this collection is taken for us to help defer the costs of the Church heating bill. We thank you for your attention to this matter.

PARISH

MINISTRIES , ORGANIZATIONS & NEWS

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Susan Veilleux ccd@stanthonylawrence.org

Happy New Year to all of the families of Religious Education. We hope you all enjoyed your time with your families. Religious Education classes resume this coming Sunday, January 6. We have no Sundays off in the month of January. Please make every effort to bring your children weekly to class, especially those making first Communion.

January 13 grade 5 & 2 will serve the 9:30 liturgy. Your students will be coming home with assigned roles for participation this week. Please contact me if there a reason why your child cannot participate.

****Save the date. Saturday, March 2, is First Reconciliation for all children making First Communion. This date is mandatory per Fr. Elie. Please make sure your child is free on this morning. Children will need to be at the Church from 9:00 am until noon.

Looking forward to resuming our time together.



KNIGHTS OF MARY

Marie Charabati

kom@stanthonylawrence.org

◇ January 5 (Regular Session)

All sessions are 5:30pm to 7pm
unless otherwise noted.



Becoming an MYO Advisor?

Gloria Azzi

myo@stanthonylawrence.org

Sunday, January 6th: Nursing home Visit

We are looking for a committed and motivated parishioner, aged 25+ that is interested in becoming a MYO Advisor.

If you or someone you know may be interested, please contact Christian @ myo@stanthonylawrence.org or call the Church Office.



MARONITE YOUNG ADULTS

Sahar E. Ata

mya@stanthonylawrence.org

Events to be published



KNIGHTS OF THE ALTAR

Sub-Deacon James Demers

Meeting: Saturday, January 5th @ 11AM

KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS

Meeting: Tuesday, January 15th @ 7 PM



COMING SOON !!!!

A NEW MINISTRY FOR WOMEN

COMING TO OUR CHURCH

The Lord said to St. Francis, "Rebuild my Church," for such a time as this, the Lord is calling to women, asking them to work in the beauty of their natural gifts as women, and is saying to them, "Heal my body."

جمعية سيدة لبنان للنساء

يفتح باب الأنتساب في بداية السنة الجديدة . يسعى عضو الأخوية إلى أن يكون إنساناً ناضجاً ومسيحياً عميقاً ورسولاً في المجتمع من خلال الالتزام في دعوة ورسالة الكنيسة في العالم

Our Lady of Lebanon Ladies Guild,
an outreach to women who speak Arabic to nurture their faith and to nature their cultural background

PARISH

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

MATTHEW:
THE KING & HIS KINGDOM

Holy Adult Mind
Follow Soul Faith Spirit Believe
Heart Catholic Formation Understand Relationship
Love of God

Every 2nd and 4th Wednesday

January 9 @ 10:30AM
English Session

January 16 @ 7:00PM
Arabic Session

*Due to the Clergy Retreat,
the Arabic Session will be
postponed until January 16th*

Adoration

of the

Blessed Sacrament

Thursday January 17th

@ 7:30 PM



FAMILY OF ST SHARBEL

Resuming After New Year

تعاود عائلة مار شربل لقاءها الشهري في السنة القادمة

CONDOLENCES

Our sympathies to the family of the late:

+ **May Gabriel**, our condolences are expressed to her husband, Edward "Scotty" Gabriel, her children, Kenneth, and his wife, Linda, Edward, and his wife, Debra, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, the Touma family, their spouses and families.

*May her soul rest in peace and
her loved ones be comforted.*

2018 CONTRIBUTION STATEMENTS

If you would like to receive your 2018 End of year Contribution statements please contact the Rectory. The statement can be e-mailed to you or sent by mail.

News

Neighboring Events

SAINT JOSEPH'S MELKITE CATHOLIC CHURCH

241 Hampshire St. • Lawrence, Mass. 01841

Celebrating the Baptism of Our Lord, Theophany

Sunday, January 6th 2019

from 1:00 PM to 6:00 PM

Admission:

\$45.00 Adults

\$20.00 Children under 12

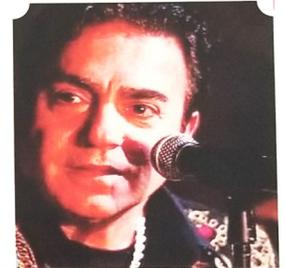
For Tickets Please Call:

Judy Farrah: 978-683-7624

Jeanane Kassis: 603-401-4740

Lara Francis: 978-902-1033

Arabic Mazza, Buffet and Dessert



Music by George Maalouf and ensemble



READINGS

Feast of the Glorious Epiphany

Titus 2:11-3:7 Transformation of Life

Brothers and Sisters: The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds. Declare these things; exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one look down on you. Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show every courtesy to everyone. For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. **Praise be to God always!**

Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Saint Luke 3:15-22

The Evangelist said: As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people. But Herod the ruler, who had been rebuked by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done, added to them all by shutting up John in prison. Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

This is the truth. Peace be with you.

LECTORS

Saturday, January 5 - 4:00 PM Lisa Abdallah

Sunday, January 6 - 8:15 AM Hitaf Nammour

Sunday, January 6 - 9:30 AM Sub-Deacon Jim Demers

Sunday, January 6 - 11:30 AM

English: Mounira Daher **Arabic:** Marcel Saade

Saturday, January 12 - 4:00 PM Alexa Ata

Sunday, January 13 - 8:15 AM Mona Hbaiter

Sunday, January 13 - 9:30 AM Elizabeth Frias

Sunday, January 13 - 11:30 AM

English: Mansour Chaya **Arabic:** Selim Matta

Pope Prayer Intentions - January 2019 - Evangelization:

That young people, especially in Latin America, follow the example of Mary and respond to the call of the Lord to communicate the joy of the Gospel to the world.

الأحد عيد الأذبح المجيد

القرارات

رسالة القديس بولس إلى طيطس

يا إخوتي، إِنَّ نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ قَدْ ظَهَرَتْ خَلَاصًا لِجَمِيعِ النَّاسِ، وَهِيَ تُؤَدِّبُنَا لِنَحْيَا فِي الدَّهْرِ الْحَاضِرِ بِرَزَانَةٍ وَبِرٍّ وَتَقْوَى، نَابِذِينَ الْكُفْرَ وَالشَّهَوَاتِ الْعَالَمِيَّةَ، مُنْتَظِرِينَ الرَّجَاءَ السَّعِيدَ، وَظُهُورَ مَجْدِ الْهَنَا وَمُخْلِصِينَ الْعَظِيمِ يَسُوعَ الْمَسِيحِ، الَّذِي بَدَلَ نَفْسَهُ عَنَّا، لِيَفْتَدِينَا مِنْ كُلِّ إِثْمٍ، وَيُطَهِّرَنَا لِنَفْسِهِ شَعْبًا خَاصًّا، غَيْرًا عَلَى الْأَعْمَالِ الصَّالِحَةِ. تَكَلَّمَ بِهَذِهِ الْأُمُورِ وَعَظُ بِهَا، وَوَبَّخَ بِكُلِّ سُلْطَانٍ. وَلَا يَسْتَهْنُ بِكَ أَحَدٌ. ذَكَرَهُمْ أَنْ يَخْضَعُوا لِلرِّئَاسَاتِ وَالسَّلَاطِينِ، وَيُطِيعُوهُمْ، وَيَكُونُوا مُسْتَعِدِّينَ لِكُلِّ عَمَلٍ صَالِحٍ، وَلَا يُجَدِّفُوا عَلَى أَحَدٍ، وَيَكُونُوا غَيْرَ مُمَاجِكِينَ، حُلَمَاءَ، مُظْهِرِينَ كُلَّ وَدَاعَةٍ لِجَمِيعِ النَّاسِ. فَحُنْ أَيْضًا كُنَّا مِنْ قَبْلِ أَعْيَاءَ، عَاقِبِينَ، ضَالِّينَ، مُسْتَعْبِدِينَ لِشَهَوَاتِ وَأَدَاتِ شَتَّى، سَالِكِينَ فِي الشَّرِّ وَالْحَسَدِ، مَمْفُوتِينَ، مُبْغِضِينَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا. وَلَكِنْ لَمَّا تَجَلَّى لَطْفُ اللَّهِ مُخْلِصِنَا، وَمَحَبَّتُهُ لِلبَشَرِ، خَاصَّنَا، لَا بِأَعْمَالٍ بَرٍّ عَمَلْنَاهَا، بَلْ وَفْقَ رَحْمَتِهِ، بَعْسَلِ الْمِيلَادِ الثَّانِي، وَتَجْدِيدِ الرُّوحِ الْقُدُسِ، الَّذِي أَفَاضَهُ اللَّهُ عَلَيْنَا بِعِزَارَةِ، بِيَسُوعَ الْمَسِيحِ مُخْلِصِنَا. فَإِذَا تَبَرَّرْنَا بِنِعْمَتِهِ، نَصِيرُ وَارثِينَ وَفَقَّا لِرَجَاءِ الْحَيَاةِ الْأَبَدِيَّةِ.

إنجيل القديس لوقا 22-15:2

فِيمَا كَانَ الشَّعْبُ يَنْتَظِرُ، وَالْجَمِيعُ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ عَنْ يُوْحَنَّا لَعَلَّهُ هُوَ الْمَسِيحُ، أَجَابَ يُوْحَنَّا قَائِلًا لَهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ: «أَنَا أَعْمِدُكُمْ بِالْمَاءِ، وَيَأْتِي مَنْ هُوَ أَقْوَى مِنِّي، مَنْ لَسْتُ أَهْلًا أَنْ أُحَلَّ رِبَاطَ جِذَائِهِ. هُوَ يُعْمِدُكُمْ بِالرُّوحِ الْقُدُسِ وَالنَّارِ. فِي يَدِهِ الْمِذْرَى يُنْقِي بِهَا بَيَدَرَهُ، فَيَجْمَعُ الْقَمْحَ فِي أَهْرَائِهِ، وَأَمَّا التِّبْنُ فَيُحْرِقُهُ بِنَارٍ لَا تَطْفَأُ.» وَبِأَقْوَالٍ أُخْرَى كَثِيرَةٍ كَانَ يُوْحَنَّا يَعِظُ الشَّعْبَ وَيُبَشِّرُهُمْ. لَكِنَّ هِيرُودُسَ رَئِيسَ الرَّبْعِ، وَقَدْ كَانَ يُوْحَنَّا يُوبِّخُهُ مِنْ أَجْلِ هِيرُودِيَّا أَمْرَأَةِ أَخِيهِ، وَمِنْ أَجْلِ كُلِّ الشُّرُورِ الَّتِي صَنَعَهَا، زَادَ عَلَى تِلْكَ الشُّرُورِ كُلِّهَا أَنَّهُ أَلْقَى يُوْحَنَّا فِي السِّجْنِ. وَلَمَّا اعْتَمَدَ الشَّعْبُ كُلُّهُ، وَأَعْتَمَدَ يَسُوعُ أَيْضًا، وَكَانَ يُصَلِّي، أَنْفَتَحَتِ السَّمَاءُ، وَنَزَلَ عَلَيْهِ الرُّوحُ الْقُدُسُ فِي صُورَةٍ جَسَدِيَّةٍ مِثْلِ حَمَامَةٍ، وَجَاءَ صَوْتُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ يَقُولُ: «أَنْتَ هُوَ ابْنِي الْحَبِيبُ، بِكَ رَضِيْتُ.»

ALTAR SERVERS

Saturday, January 5 - 4:00 PM

Elias Saab Sharbel Saab

Sunday, January 6 - 8:15 AM Volunteers

Sunday, January 6 - 9:30 AM

Antonio Hbaiter George Hbaiter

Sunday, January 6 - 11:30 AM

Anthony Sadek Charbel Merheb
Charbel Sadek George El Hachem

Saturday, January 12 - 4:00 PM

Elias Saab Sharbel Saab

Sunday, January 13 - 8:15 AM Volunteers

Sunday, January 13 - 9:30 AM

Caleb Hassan Noah Hassan

Sunday, January 13 - 11:30 AM

Andrew Azzi Anthony El Hachem
Charbel Yammine Geryes Geha

ST ANTHONY ARABIC SCHOOL REGISTRATION FORM	OFFICE USE ONLY Date Received: _____ Initials: _____ Payment Received: YES / NO Amount: _____ Cash: _____ Check: _____
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GENERAL INFORMATION

Last Name _____ Child's First Name _____
 Date of birth _____ Grade next fall _____
 Mother's Name & (Maiden Name) _____ Cell # _____
 Father's Name _____ Cell # _____
 Address: (City, State, Zip Code) _____
 Email _____

(Class assignments and ALL important notifications will be emailed to this address)

Registration Fees: \$ 300.00 Per Semester

Payment Methods: Check # _____ Amount: \$ _____ Cash Amount: \$ _____
 Credit Card (processing fee 2.75%)
 CC # _____ MM/YY _____ CVV _____

Cash & Checks are accepted.

Make payable to: St Anthony Maronite Church

MEDICAL CONCERNS: Please inform us of any learning challenges, social concerns, medications, allergies or other information: _____

IMPORTANT INFORMATION: In an emergency, and if a parent cannot be contacted, you have my permission to contact the following person to help make decisions regarding the care for my child:

Name: _____ Relationship: _____
 Home Phone #: _____ Cell Phone #: _____

I hereby consent and authorize Father Elie Mikhael or his designated representative, to obtain and provide for my son/daughter any and all medical care or treatment which might become necessary, until either parent or the emergency contact person can be reached. I further expressly release and waive Father Elie Mikhael, his designated representative, and St. Anthony Maronite Church, and the Eparchy of St. Maron of Brooklyn, from any liability, action, claim, cause of action which I might otherwise have in the event of illness or injury during the period that my son/daughter is attending the Arabic School.

Parent Signature: _____ Date: _____

PHOTO RELEASE (Please check appropriate box below)

AUDIO VISUAL TAPING AND PHOTOGRAPHY CONSENT: On occasion, videotape, audio tape, slides, and photographs are taken of children and youth during church and diocesan sponsored activities. These are utilized in newsletters, websites, event promotion, advertisements and another printed media. I / We consent / do not consent (check one) to the use of such materials in which I may appear. I release the staff and volunteers of St. Sharbel Mission and the Eparchy of St Maron of Brooklyn, NY from any liability connected with the use of my child's picture or voice recording as part of any of the above or similar activities.

Parent Signature: _____ Date: _____

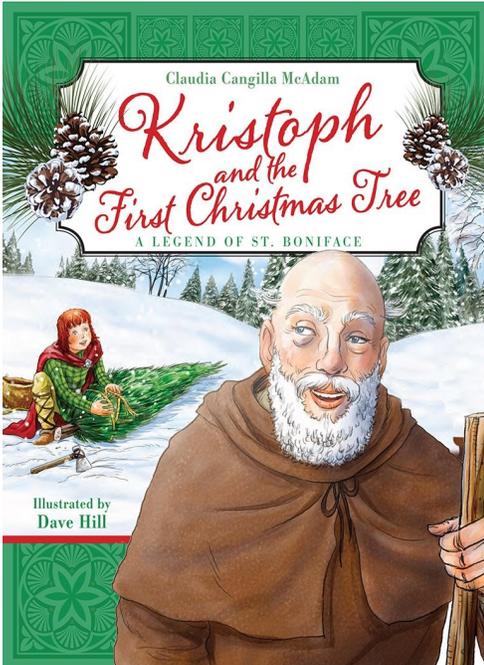
FORMED

Stanthonychurch.formed.org - Parish Code: N3CCNK

PREPARE THE WAY OF THE KING
DR. SCOTT HAHN



Dr. Scott Hahn, one of the most eminent Catholic theologians in our country today, reveals what scholars now know about the shepherds, the mysterious Magi, and King Herod. Your Advent journey will take on new meaning as you prepare your heart for the birth of our Lord. This illuminating presentation is sure to help you grow in appreciation of the greatest gift ever given to mankind—Jesus Christ.



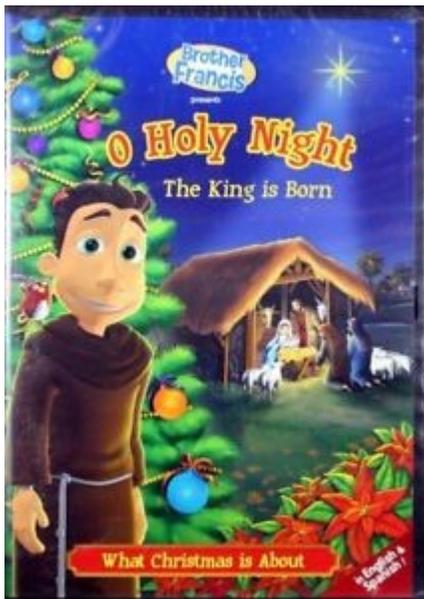
Kristoph and the First Christmas Tree

Based on an ancient legend, *Kristoph and the First Christmas Tree* is a video production drawn from the family-friendly story written by children’s author Claudia Cangilla McAdam and illustrated by Dave Hill.

It’s Christmas Eve in the year 722, and the young orphan Kristoph is accompanying the missionary priest Boniface through the German countryside on their way to the first Christmas the boy will celebrate outside the orphanage. They are hurrying to reach the next village by nightfall when they come upon a group of men worshipping a sacred oak tree and preparing to sacrifice the son of the village chieftain.

What happens next recalls the legend of how evergreen trees became part of the celebration of Christmas. This story beautifully retells an incident from the life of St. Boniface, the martyr who became the patron saint of Germany.

Brother Francis: O Holy Night



Celebrate the wonder and joy of Christmas with Brother Francis in this heartwarming presentation of the birth of God’s Son! Witness the moving submission of Mary, Joseph, and others as they make way for our Savior.

This episode contains:

- “The Christmas Story”—an animated presentation of the many wonderful events that led up to the birth of Jesus!
- “What is Christmas?”—a catchy, visualized song reminding us that Christmas is really about the coming of Christ.
- “Away in a Manger” and “Silent Night”—two traditional songs that continue to inspire praise and thankfulness for the coming of our Lord.

O Holy Night is a wonderful way to remind everyone of Who we celebrate during the Christmas season!

Got Faith?



A fresh brewed faith strengthens, renews & energizes.

I've never been happy with some of my activist friends who send out Christmas cards with messages like: *May the Peace of Christ Disturb You!* Can't we have one day a year to be happy and celebrate without having our already unhappy selves shaken with more guilt? Isn't Christmas a time when we can enjoy being children again? Moreover, as Karl Rahner once said, isn't Christmas a time when God gives us permission to be a happy? So why not?

Well, it's complex. Christmas is a time when God gives us permission to be happy, when the message from God speaks through the voice of Isaiah and says: "Comfort my people. Speak words of comfort!" But Christmas is also a time that points out that when God was born two thousand years ago there wasn't any room for him to be born in all the normal homes and places of the day. *There was no room for him at the inn.* Peoples' busy lives and expectations kept them from offering him a place to be born. That hasn't changed.

But first, the comfort of his birth: A number of years ago, I participated in a large diocesan synod. At one point the animator in charge had us divide into small groups and each group was asked to answer the question: What's the single most-important thing that the church should challenge the world with right now?

The groups reported back and each group named some important spiritual or moral challenge: "*We need to challenge our society towards more justice!*" "*We need to challenge the world to have real faith and not confuse God's word with its own wishes.*" "*We need to challenge our world towards a more responsible sexual ethos. We've lost our way!*" Wonderful, needed challenges, all of them. But no group came back and said: "*We need to challenge the world to receive God's consolation!*" Granted, there's a lot of injustice, violence, racism, sexism, greed, selfishness, sexual irresponsibility, and self-serving faith around; but most of the adults in our world are also living in a lot pain, anxiety, disappointment, loss, depression, and unresolved guilt. Everywhere you look, you see heavy hearts. Moreover, so many people living with hurt and disappointment do not see God and the church as an answer to their pain but rather as somehow part of its cause.

So our churches, in preaching God's word, need first of all to assure the world of God's love, God's concern, and God's forgiveness. Before doing anything else, God's word is meant to comfort us; indeed, to be the ultimate source of all comfort. Only when the world knows God's consolation will it accept the concomitant challenge.

And that challenge, among others, is to then make room for Christ at the inn, that is, to open our hearts, our homes, and our world as places where Christ can come and live. From the safe distance of two thousand years we too easily make a scathing judgment on the people at the time of Jesus' birth for not knowing what Mary and Joseph were carrying, for not making a proper place for Jesus to be born, and for not recognizing him as Messiah afterwards. How could they be so blind? But that same judgment is still being made of us. We aren't exactly making room in our own inns.

When a new person is born into this world, he or she takes a space where before there was no one. Sometimes that new person is warmly welcomed and a cozy, loving space is instantly created and everyone around is happy for this new invasion. But that isn't always the case; sometimes, as was the case with Jesus, there is no space created for the new person to enter the world and his or her presence is unwelcome.

We see this today (and this will constitute a judgment on our generation) in the reluctance, almost all over the world, to welcome new immigrants, to make room for them at the inn. The United Nations estimates that there are 19.5 million refugees in the world today, persons whom no one will welcome. Why not? We are not bad people and we are capable most times of being wonderfully generous. But letting this flood of immigrants enter our lives would disturb us. Our lives would have to change. We would lose some of our present comforts, many of our old familiarities, and some of our securities.

We are not bad people, neither were those innkeepers two thousand years ago who, not knowing what was unfolding, in inculpable ignorance, turned Mary and Joseph away. I've always nursed a secret sympathy for them. Maybe because I am still, unknowingly, doing exactly what they did. A friend of mine is fond of saying: "I'm against more immigrants being allowed in ... now that we're in!"

The peace of Christ, the message inside of Christ's birth, and the skewed circumstances of his birth, if understood, cannot but disturb. May they also bring deep consolation.

*Ronald Rolheiser***King Herod & the Wise Men - A Christmas Challenge**

The Christmas story is surely one of the greatest stories ever told. It chronicles a birth from which the world records time as before or after. Moreover, it is written in a way that has inflamed the romantic imagination for 2000 years. This hasn't always been for the good. Beyond spawning every kind of legend imaginable, the story of Christmas has, in the Christian imagination, too often taken on a centrality not accorded to it in the Gospels themselves. This is not surprising, given its richness.

Inside its great narrative there are multiple mini-narratives, each of which comes laden with its own archetypal symbols. One of these mini-narratives, rich in archetypal imagery, is the story King Herod and the wise men.

We see this in the Gospel of Matthew when he tells us how various people reacted to the announcement of Jesus' birth. Matthew sets up a powerful archetypal contrast, blessing and curse, between the reaction of the wise men, who bring their gifts and place them at the feet of the new king, and King Herod, who tries to kill him.

We are all familiar with this story since it has been much celebrated in song, icon, and legend. Jesus is born inside of a religious tradition, Judaism, and his birth is announced to that faith-community in a manner that befits religion, namely, by the angels, by supernatural revelation. But those outside of that faith-tradition need another way to get to know of his birth, and so his birth is announced to them through nature, astrology, through the stars. The wise men see a special star appear in the sky and begin to follow it, not knowing exactly to where or to what it will lead.

While following the star, they meet King Herod who, upon learning that a new king has supposedly been born, has his own evil interest in matter. He asks the wise men to find the child and bring him back information so that he, too, can go and worship the newborn. We know the rest of story:

The wise men follow the star, find the new king, and, upon seeing him, place their gifts at his feet. What happens to them afterwards? We have all kinds of apocryphal stories about their journey back home, but these, while interesting, are not helpful. We do not know what happened to them afterwards and that is exactly the point. Their slipping away into anonymity is a crucial part of their gift. The idea is that they now disappear because they can now disappear. They have placed their gifts at the feet of the young king and can now leave everything safely in his hands. His star has eclipsed theirs. Far from fighting for their former place, they now happily cede it to him. Like old Simeon, they can happily exit the stage singing: Now, Lord, you can dismiss your servants! We can die! We're in safe hands!

And Herod, how much to the contrary! The news that a new king has been born threatens him at his core since he is himself a king. The glory and light that will now shine upon the new king will no longer shine on him. So what is his reaction? Far from laying his resources at the feet of the new king, he sets out to kill him. Moreover, to ensure that his murderers find him, he kills all the male babies in the entire area. An entire book on anthropology might be written about this last line. Fish are not the only species that eats its young! But the real point is the contrast between the wise men and Herod: The former see new life as promise and they bless it; the latter sees new life as threat and he curses it.

This is a rich story with a powerful challenge: What is my own reaction to new life, especially to life that threatens me, that will take away some of my own popularity, sunshine, and adulation? Can I, like the wise men, lay my gifts at the feet of the young and move towards anonymity and eventual death, content that the world is in good hands, even though those hands are not my hands? Or, like Herod, will I feel that life as a threat and I try somehow to kill it, lest its star somehow diminish my own?

To bless another person is to give away some of one's own life so that the other might be more resourced for his or her journey, Good parents do that for their children. Good teachers do that for their students, good mentors do that for their protégés, good pastors do that for their parishioners, good politicians do that for their countries, and good elders do that for the young. They give away some of their own lives to resource the other. The wise men did that for Jesus.

How do we react when a young star's rising begins to eclipse our own light?