



SAINT ANTHONY MARONITE CHURCH

A Parish Family of the Eparchy of St. Maron of Brooklyn, NY

كنيسة مار أنطونيوس المارونية

Sunday, November 26, 2017

الأحد، 26 تشرين الثاني 2017

145 Amesbury St * Lawrence, MA 01841

Phone: 978.685.7233 * Fax: 978.688.4475

email: rectory@stanthonylawrence.org *Website: www.stanthonylawrence.org

OFFICE HOURS

M-TH: 9 AM - 4PM

Friday: Office is Closed

Saturdays: By Appointment

LITURGIES

Daily Liturgies:

M & W: 9 AM

T & TH: 7 PM

Weekend Liturgies:

Saturday

Vigil Liturgy @ 4 PM

Sunday Liturgies:

8:30 AM - Arabic

9:30 AM - English

11:30 AM - English & Arabic

HOLY DAYS OF OBLIGATION

Vigil Liturgy @ 7 PM

Feast Day @ 9 AM

Sacraments of

Baptism & Confirmation

1 month in advance with the Pastor

Sacrament of Matrimony

Couples should make arrangements six months prior to the wedding date

Sacrament of

Reconciliation

One hour Before Thursday &

Saturday Liturgies,

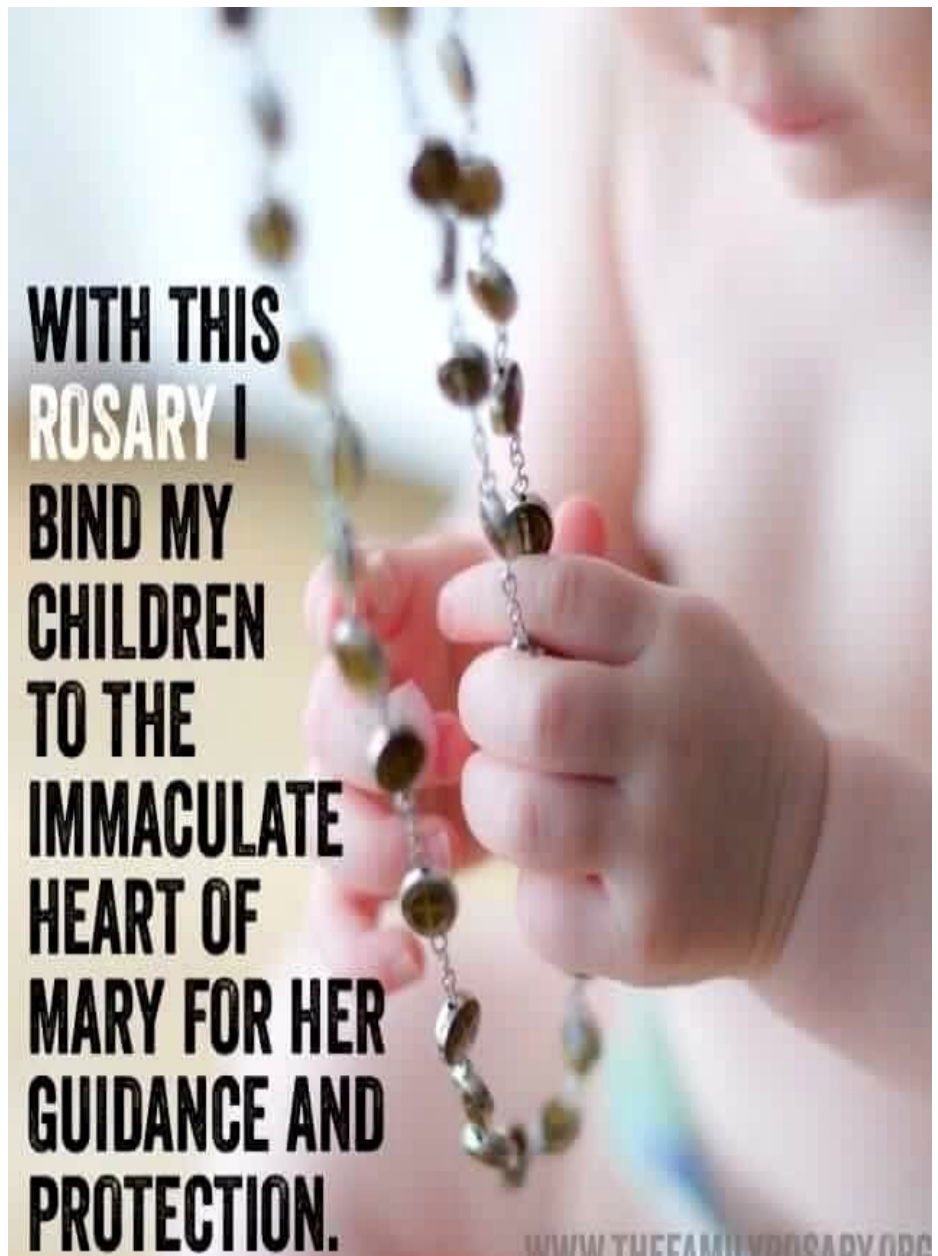
or by appointment

Anointing of the Sick

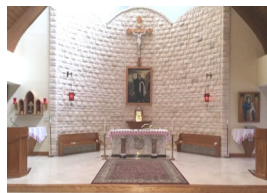
Please notify the Rectory if a member of your family is ill, hospitalized, or unable to come to Church and would like to receive communion at home

Please refer to our website for more Sacrament Celebrations Guidelines

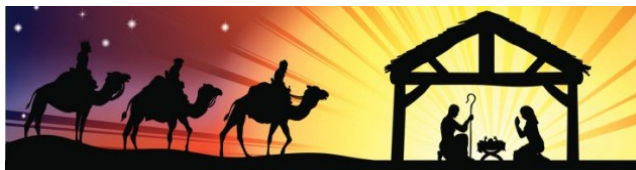
Season the Glorious Birth of Our Lord



Facebook: Saint Anthony Maronite Church Lawrence, MA



Liturgies Intentions



Meet our staff:

Clergy

Father Elie Mikhael, Pastor
pastor@stanthonylawrence.org

Father Joseph Abisaad,
Parochial Vicar
Father Tony Youssef,
Parochial Vicar

Phone: 978-685-7233

Emergency Contact:
Fr. Elie Mikhael
305.807.9087

Fr. Joseph Abi Saad
978.457.5889

Sub-Deacon James T. Demers
Sub-Deacon Nadim B. Daou

Secretary:

Mrs. Susan Fuccillo
978.685-7233

rectory@stanthonylawrence.org

Parish Ministries

- ◆ Religious Education
ccd@stanthonylawrence.org
- ◆ Publishing: Bulletin
bulletin@stanthonylawrence.org

◆ Choirs (English, Arabic & Syriac)

◆ Kids Choir

◆ Knights of the Altar

◆ Knights of Mary

◆ Maronite Youth : MYO

◆ Maronite Young Adults
(Coming Soon)

◆ Bereavement Ministry

◆ Cenacle of the Rosary
(Thursdays @ 6PM)

◆ Cenacle of Divine Mercy
(Sundays Before the Liturgies)

◆ Sacristan (s)

Announcement to Virgin Mary

أحد بشارة مريم

Saturday, November 25	4:00 PM	For: 40 Day Anniversary– Adele Najjar by her family.
Sunday, November 26	8:30AM	<i>Special Intentions.</i>
	9:30AM	For: + Nancy and Joseph Azzi, By Cheryl Coury
	11:30 AM	For: + Said Boutros and Chafica Azzi, Joseph and Nancy Azzi, By Pierre and Elham Azzi and their Family.

Week of Announcement to Virgin Mary

أسبوع بشارة مريم

Monday, November 27 @ 9 AM	For: +George Korban, By the Bou-Habib Family.
Tuesday, November 28 @ 7 PM	<i>Private Intentions.</i> 7 PM Bible Study-English
Wednesday, November 29 9AM, St. Andrew, Ap	<i>Special Intentions.</i> 7 PM Bible Study-Arabic
Thursday, November 30 @ 7PM	<i>Special Intentions.</i>
Friday, December 1	Office Closed

Visitation of the Virgin to Elizabeth

أحد زيارة العذراء
لأليصابات

Saturday, December 2	4:00 PM	For: +Habib and Alice Bistany, By their loving Children and Families.
Sunday, December 3	8:30AM	<i>Special Intentions.</i>
	9:30AM	40 Day Anniversary– Helen Hajj, By her children and families.
	11:30 AM	For: + John El-Helou By His Son Tony El Helou and His wife, Jeanette, His daughter, Lola, wife of Mr. Abraham Ata and their families.

Christmas Liturgical & Social Celebrations

Tickets are now on sale for the Men's and Ladies Christmas Parties!!!

Ladies

Christmas Party!

Sunday, December 10th
@ 4 PM



Tickets are on sale Contact:

Lori Corey @ 978-273-3594

Mounira Daher @ 603-235-0801

Men's Christmas Party!
Friday December 8, 2017

Tickets are now on sale. Contact
Rodney Pica @ 603.489.8363 or
Jason Azzi @ 413.364.3333 or
Peter Sarkis @ 603-303-3165
To purchase your ticket

CHRISTMAS WEEKEND LITURGIES

Saturday, December 23rd - 4 PM

Sunday, December 24th

- ◆ 11:30 AM, English & Arabic

Christmas Novena - تساعية ألياماد

- ◆ DECEMBER 15-23 Following the Divine Liturgy

Christmas Liturgies - قدايس عيد ألياماد المجد

Sunday, December 24th

- ◆ 4 PM, Vigil Liturgy - English
- ◆ 12AM - MIDNIGHT - English & Arabic

Monday, December 25th

- ◆ 10:00 AM - Arabic
- ◆ 11:30 AM, English & Arabic

New Year's Weekend - قدايس عيد راس السنة المجد

Saturday, December 30th - 4PM

Sunday, December 31st

- ◆ 8:30 AM, Arabic
- ◆ 9:30 AM, English
- ◆ 11:30 AM, English & Arabic

Monday, January 1, 2018 - 5 PM Liturgy.

تساعية ألياماد:

تبدأ ليلة 15 كانون الأول و تنتهي في 23 كانون الأول

قدايس عيد ألياماد المجد

الأحد 24 كانون الأول: 4 مساء باللغة الأنكليزية

قدايس نصف الليل: باللغة العربية و الأنكليزية

قدايس يوم العيد، الأثنين 25 كانون الأول:

10:00 صباحاً: باللغة العربية

11:30 صباحاً: باللغة العربية و الأنكليزية

قدايس عيد راس السنة المجد

الأثنين 1 كانون الثاني: الساعة 5 مساء

JOIN US FOR A
Christmas CONCERT
& SING ALONG

Featuring

St Anthony Choirs, The Children Choirs

Along with

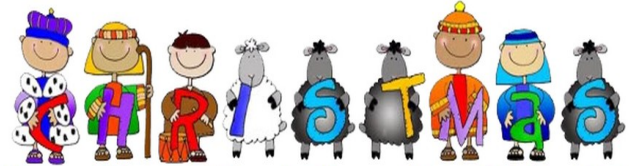
St Augustine & St Bernard Bellarmine Choirs

Saturday December 2 @ 6PM

Reception to Follow - Parish Hall

Annual Kids Christmas Party

Saturday, December 9th
from 5:30 - 7 PM



P A G E A N T

Sunday, December 17th-9:30 AM Liturgy

Giving Tree Angels will be in the
foyer starting the weekend
of the 18th.

All gifts MUST be UNWRAPPED
and the angel should be attached to the gift. All gifts
need to be brought to the church for collection on
Sunday, December 10th.



PARISH MINISTRIES & NEWS

Meet and Greet Launching
our first MYA get together



Saturday, November 25th
@ 5:30 PM

Religious Education - Sunday School

On Sunday, December 3, the grade 1 students will be serving the 9:30 liturgy. Please have your child to the church no later than 9:15 on that Sunday.

Grade 6 & 7 parents, as mentioned in my e mail, your students will be leading the pageant this year. Rehearsal will be on **Saturday December 2, 9, and 16** from 12 until 2. Students should be prepared to attend all three rehearsals. We know this is a busy time and appreciate your help and support.

Knights of Mary have invited all CCD students to attend the annual **Christmas party on December 9** in the hall. Further details will follow.

Christmas ornaments will be on sale in the Church lobby after the liturgies. Please stop by and take a look as we have some new and different ornaments this year. Some include pictures from our church.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Susan Veilleux, ccd@stanthonylawrence.org

مواعيد السهرات الأنجليكية:

باللغة الأنكليزية: الثلاثاء 28 تشرين الثاني الساعة 7 مساء.
باللغة العربية: الأربعاء 29 تشرين الثاني الساعة 7 مساء.

THE KNIGHTS OF THE ALTAR

The Altar Servers will be meeting on **Saturday, December 2nd** at 11:00 AM to 12:00 PM in the church. If there are any questions of conflicts, please call Sub-Deacon Jim Demers at 978-685-8423.



MYO SCHEDULE 2017-2018

- ◆ December 1st - Faith Formation
- ◆ December 17th - MYO Christmas Party

Old and new members are encouraged to attend,
Grades 9-12~Dates are Subject to change~

KNIGHTS OF MARY SCHEDULE

All Events run from
5PM - 7PM

After 4PM Liturgy

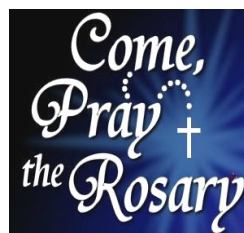
Dates are Subject to change



2017-2018

December 2
Christmas
Recital

January 6
January 20



Rosary Group
Every Wednesday @ 6PM

صلاة المسبحة الوردية
الأربعاء من كل أسبوع الساعة
السادسة مساء



Will be reserved to the Christmas
Novena during the month of December



K of M Children's Choir

January 13

Practices will be held from 5:00PM - 6:30PM

BE IN TOUCH!! STAY CONNECTED !!

Membership Registration: <http://stanthonylawrence.org/member-information-form/>

Online Donation: <http://stanthonylawrence.org/donate-now/>

Upcoming Events: <http://stanthonylawrence.org/upcoming-events/>

Monthly Calendar: <http://stanthonylawrence.org/upcoming-events/calendar/>

Our relationship
with God should
not just be a
Sunday event.

We've launched our new website and we're excited to introduce you to our new look

www.stanthonylawrence.org



ONLINE GIVING

Is now available in association with

 myEoffering

www.stanthonylawrence.org

WHAT IS myEoffering?

myEoffering is a service we've teamed up with to give you the ability to send your offerings online in the same way that many of you already pay bills and purchase products. We chose to use myEoffering because they are part of a trusted, Christian family-owned company, who have been serving the needs of churches for nearly 100 years. Their product is solid, secure, easy, and convenient.

WHY SHOULD I USE myEoffering?

Many of you already pay for most of your purchases electronically, whether online or with a credit or debit card. So we have decided to offer this service as a convenience to you - you can stop writing checks or having to remember to bring cash every Sunday. Simply log in to our service and set up your offering. You can set the donations to match your pay periods, and even send your one-time donations to the special offerings we may have from time-to-time. This new service allows you to give any amount, at any time, from home or on the road, with your computer or even your mobile device. Now you can control how and when you give your tithes.

HOW DOES IT HELP?

Online giving is the future. In the lifetime of our young people, we will see electronic payments overshadow traditional methods of paper payments. In order to position ourselves to continue doing the work of God in the future and to make it as convenient as possible to be a cheerful giver to God's work, we have decided to offer online giving to you. In addition to easier access to giving and more engagement with young stewards, online offering has many benefits for the church. It allows us to more easily track contributions for budgeting. It saves us from manually tracking those contributions every week. It saves us from large fees on check processing and allows us to more accurately forecast expenditures and needs.

HOW DO I SIGN UP?

Signing up is as simple as going to our church website listed above and look for the green computer mouse icon. That button will take you to the myEoffering page for our church. Simply sign up and begin giving online today! Or scan the code to the right with your mobile device to get started now.



SCAN THIS
CODE WITH
YOUR MOBILE
DEVICE NOW

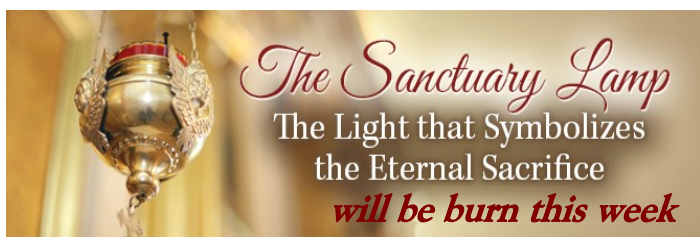


TITHES & OFFERINGS

WORSHIP THROUGH GIVING

November 19, 2017

Sunday Collection	\$ 2933.00
Candles	\$ 129.00
Fuel	\$ 200.00
Total Deposit	\$ 3,262.00



The Sanctuary Lamp
The Light that Symbolizes
the Eternal Sacrifice
will be burn this week

Left Sanctuary Lamp

*In Loving Memory of Edmond El-Hachem,
Offered by their daughter, Nazha Khoury, and family.*

Right Sanctuary Lamp

*In Loving Memory of Edmond El-Hachem,
Offered by their daughter, Nazha Khoury, and family.*

Guidelines:

Baptismal Guidelines: (Check our Website)

- ◆ Guidelines & Registration Form

Marriage Guidelines: (Check our Website)

- ◆ Guidelines & Check List Forms

Banquet Hall Guidelines:

- ◆ Contract Form (Check our Website)
- ◆ Banquet Hall Usage Donations:
 1. \$500 (For 6 Hours)
 2. \$250 For Registered & Active parishioners (with contribution history)
 3. Security Deposit \$250 (Returned after the event, if no Damages)
 4. Cleaning Donations: \$100

POPE PRAYER INTENTIONS ~ NOVEMBER 2017 CHRISTIANS IN ASIA



*That Christians in Asia, bearing
witness to the Gospel in word and deed,
may promote dialogue, peace, and
mutual understanding, especially
with those of other religions.*

ALTAR SERVERS

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Altar Servers</u>
Saturday, November 25	4:00 PM	Elias Saab Sharbel Saab
Sunday, November 26	8:30 AM	Volunteers
Sunday, November 26	9:30 AM	Max Sheehan Thomas Demers
Sunday, November 26 11:30 AM		Anthony Chamoun, Anthony ElHachem George ElHachem, Giorgio Abounasr

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Altar Servers</u>
Saturday, December 2	4:00 PM	Jacob Godfrey Youssef Chahine
Sunday, December 3	8:30 AM	Volunteers
Sunday, December 3	9:30 AM	Antonio Hbaiter Caleb Hassan
Sunday, December 3 11:30 AM		Anthony Sadek, Charbel Sadek Charbel Yamine, Michael Merheb



Lectors

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Lectors</u>
Saturday, November 25	4:00 PM	Fadi Chahine
Sunday, November 26	8:30 AM	Hitaf Nammour
Sunday, November 26	9:30 AM	Elaine Ferris
Sunday, November 26 11:30 AM		English: Elias Azzi Arabic: Ajia Elia

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Lectors</u>
Saturday, December 2	4:00 PM	Christine Ryan
Sunday, December 3	8:30 AM	Guita Bou-Habib
Sunday, December 3	9:30 AM	Sub-Deacon Jim
Sunday, December 3 11:30 AM		English: Mounira Daher Arabic: Marcel Saade



DAUGHTERS OF SAINT ANTHONY

The Daughters of Saint Anthony will hold their annual Christmas Party on **Monday, December 4th** at Saint Anthony's *Cedar's Hall*, starting at 12 NOON. The luncheon will be a donation of \$15.00 per person and all are welcome.

Everyone attending is kindly asked to participate in a Christmas gift exchange by purchasing a \$5.00 Lottery ticket.

Also, please bring your donations for the Lazarus House Donation bins.

For reservations and more information, please contact:
Elaine Ferris @ 978-682-2112,
Elaine Azzi @ 978-687-7454 or
Dianne Dewan @ 978-273-0693
by Friday, December 1st.

Poinsettia Dedication In Honor or In Loving Memory



Saint Anthony's Church invites you to place a poinsettia in the sanctuary for Christmas **"In Honor" or "In Memory" of special loved ones.**

Please complete this form and either place it in the offering plate, hand in at the rectory, or mail it to the church, along with your payment of \$15.00 per plant. **The deadline to order is Tuesday, December 19th.**

Given By: _____

In honor of:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

In memory of:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Formed | Your Faith Matters to Us!! Parish Code: N3CCNK

<https://formed.org/watch/593ac0021ccf198c29ce3c21>



THE BIBLE
and the
VIRGIN MARY
JOURNEY THROUGH SCRIPTURE

Journey through Scripture is the St. Paul Center's dynamic Bible study program designed to help ordinary Catholics grow in their knowledge of the Scriptures while deepening their understanding of the riches of our faith. Distinctively Catholic, *Journey through Scripture* reads the Bible from the heart of the Church, engaging both the Old and New Testaments and how they work together. It's grounded in history, yet actively engages topics faced by today's Catholic. More than just an ordinary Bible study, it's biblical catechesis.

The Bible and the Virgin Mary is a dynamic twelve-part video series that beautifully explains the Catholic truths about Our Lady, showing how she has been a part of God's plan to bring salvation to the world since the beginning of time. In addition to explanation of dogmas, answers to common objections, and demonstration of Mary's presence in the Old and New Testaments, this study discusses Church-approved Marian apparitions that play an important role in Catholic Tradition. It's sure to help Catholics and non-Catholics alike grow in an understanding and appreciation of the Mother of God.

Galatians 3,15-22 Sunday of the Announcement to the Virgin Mary

غلاطية 3:15-22

I give an example from daily life: once a person's will has been ratified, no one adds to it or annuls it. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring; it does not say, 'And to offsprings', as of many; but it says, 'And to your offspring', that is, to one person, who is Christ. My point is this: the law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. For if the inheritance comes from the law, it no longer comes from the promise; but God granted it to Abraham through the promise. Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring would come to whom the promise had been made; and it was ordained through angels by a mediator. Now a mediator involves more than one party; but God is one. Is the law then opposed to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could make alive, then righteousness would indeed come through the law. But the scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin, so that what was promised through faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

كَبَشَّرَ أَقُولُ: إِنَّ الْوَصِيَّةَ، وَإِنْ كَانَتْ مِنْ إِنْسَانٍ، إِذَا أَقْرَتْ، لَا أَحَدٌ يُبْطِلُهَا أَوْ يَزِيدُ عَلَيْهَا. فَالْوَعْدُ قِيلَتْ لِإِبْرَاهِيمَ وَلِنَسْلِهِ. وَمَا قِيلَتْ: «وَلِأَنْسَالِهِ»، كَأَنَّهُ لِكَثِيرِينَ، بَلْ «وَلِنَسْلِكَ»، كَأَنَّهُ لَوَاحِدٍ، وَهُوَ الْمَسِيحُ! فَأَقُولُ هَذَا: إِنَّ وَصِيَّةَ سَبَقَ اللَّهُ فَأَقْرَهَا، لَا تُلْغِيهَا شَرِيعَةٌ جَاءَتْ بَعْدَ أَرْبَعِ مِئَةٍ وَثَلَاثِينَ سَنَةً، فَتُبْطَلُ الْوَعْدُ. وَإِذَا كَانَ الْمِيرَاثُ مِنَ الشَّرِيعَةِ، فَهُوَ لَمْ يَعُدْ مِنَ الْوَعْدِ؛ وَالْحَالُ أَنَّ اللَّهَ بَوَّعَدَ أَنْعَمَ بِالْمِيرَاثِ عَلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ. إِذَا فَلَمَّادَا الشَّرِيعَةُ؟ إِنَّهَا أُضِيفَتْ بِسَبَبِ الْمَعَاصِي، حَتَّى مَجِيءِ النَّسْلِ الَّذِي جُعِلَ الْوَعْدُ لَهُ. وَقَدْ أَعْلَنَهَا مَلَائِكَةٌ عَلَى يَدِ وَسَيْطٍ، هُوَ مُوسَى. غَيْرَ أَنَّ الْوَاحِدَ لَا وَسَيْطَ لَهُ، وَاللَّهُ وَاحِدٌ! إِذَا فَهَلْ تَكُونُ الشَّرِيعَةُ ضِدَّ وَعْدِ اللَّهِ؟ حَاشَا! فَلَوْ أُعْطِيتُ شَرِيعَةً قَادِرَةً أَنْ تُحْيِيَ، لَكَانَ التَّبَرِيرُ حَقًّا بِالشَّرِيعَةِ. وَلَكِنَّ الْكِتَابَ حَبَسَ الْكُلَّ تَحْتَ الْخَطِيئَةِ، لِكَيْمَّا بِالْإِيمَانِ بِيَسُوعَ الْمَسِيحِ يُعْطَى الْوَعْدُ لِلَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ.

Luke 1,26-38

أحد بشارة مريم العذراء

لوقا 1:26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' 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 holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.' Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

وفي الشهر السادس، أُرْسِلَ الْمَلَكُ جِبْرَائِيلُ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ إِلَى مَدِينَةٍ فِي الْجَلِيلِ أَسْمُهَا النَّاصِرَةَ، إِلَى عَذْرَاءَ مَخْطُوبَةٍ لِرَجُلٍ مِنْ بَيْتِ دَاوُدَ أَسْمُهُ يُوسُفُ، وَأَسْمُ الْعَذْرَاءِ مَرْيَمَ. وَلَمَّا دَخَلَ الْمَلَكُ إِلَيْهَا قَالَ: «السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكِ، يَا مَمْلُوءَةٌ نِعْمَةً، أَلرَّبُّ مَعَكِ!» فَأَضْطَرَبَتْ مَرْيَمُ لِكَلَامِهِ، وَأَخَذَتْ تُفَكِّرُ مَا عَسَى أَنْ يَكُونَ هَذَا السَّلَامُ! فَقَالَ لَهَا الْمَلَكُ: «لَا تَخَافِي، يَا مَرْيَمَ، لِأَنَّكَ وَجَدْتِ نِعْمَةً عِنْدَ اللَّهِ. وَهِيَ أَنْتِ تَحْمِلِينَ، وَتُؤَلِّدِينَ أَبْنَاءَ، وَتُسَمِّيْنَهُ يَسُوعَ. وَهُوَ يَكُونُ عَظِيمًا، وَأَبْنَى الْعَلِيِّ يُدْعَى، وَيُعْطِيهِ الرَّبُّ الْإِلَهَ عَرْشَ دَاوُدَ أَبِيهِ، فَيَمْلِكُ عَلَى بَيْتِ يَعْقُوبَ إِلَى الْأَبَدِ، وَلَا يَكُونُ لِمُلْكِهِ نَهَائَةٌ!» فَقَالَتْ مَرْيَمُ لِلْمَلَكِ: «كَيْفَ يَكُونُ هَذَا، وَأَنَا لَا أَعْرِفُ رَجُلًا؟». فَأَجَابَ الْمَلَكُ وَقَالَ لَهَا: «الرُّوحُ الْقُدُسُ يَجِلُّ عَلَيْكِ، وَفُذْرَةُ الْعَلِيِّ تُظَلِّلُكَ، وَلِذَلِكَ فَالْقُدُّوسُ الْمَوْلُودُ مِنْكَ يُدْعَى ابْنِ اللَّهِ! وَهِيَ إِنَّ الْيَصَابَاتِ نَسِيبَتِكَ، قَدْ حَمَلَتْ هِيَ أَيْضًا بِأَبْنٍ فِي شَيْخُوخَتِهَا. وَهَذَا هُوَ الشَّهْرُ السَّادِسُ لِتِلْكَ الَّتِي تُدْعَى عَاقِرًا، لِأَنَّهُ لَيْسَ عَلَى اللَّهِ أَمْرٌ مُسْتَحِيلٌ!» فَقَالَتْ مَرْيَمَ: «هِيَ أَنَا أَمَةٌ الرَّبِّ، فَلْيَكُنْ لِي بِحَسَبِ قَوْلِكَ!» وَانْصَرَفَ مِنْ عِنْدِهَا الْمَلَكُ.

GIVING BIRTH TO GOD

I did my doctoral thesis on the classical, philosophical proofs for the existence of God. The concept had always intrigued me: “Can you prove that God exists?” After researching the thought of Aquinas, Anselm, Descartes, Leibnitz, and Spinoza (all of whom assert that you can “prove” the existence of God through rational argument) what was the conclusion? Can you prove that God exists?

No, at least not in a way that would compel anyone to make an act faith on the basis of a mathematical or scientific argument. God can’t be proven in that way, albeit these “proofs” point to some important things. The existence of God can’t be empirically proven because God doesn’t work that way. God doesn’t appear in the world as the conclusion to a mathematical equation. God, as we know through the way Christ was born, comes into our lives at the end of a gestation process.

That also describes how faith is born in our lives. God never dynamites his way into to our lives with a force so powerful that we can’t resist. The divine never takes us by storm. No. God always enters the world in the same way that Jesus did on the first Christmas. God is gestated in a womb and appears as a helpless infant that has to be picked up, nurtured, and coaxed into adulthood. The presence of God in our world, at least within the dynamics of the incarnation, depends upon a certain human consent and cooperation. For God to take on real flesh and power in the world we must first do something. What? The answer to that lies in the way Jesus was born. Mary, Jesus’ mother, shows us a certain blueprint, a pattern for how God is born into our world and how faith is born in our lives. What’s the pattern?

When we look at how Mary gave birth to Jesus, we see that there are four moments in the process: Impregnation by the Holy Spirit; gestation of God within one’s body and soul; the stretching and agony of giving birth; and the nurturing of an infant into adulthood. What’s implied in each of these?

Impregnation by the Holy Spirit: Mary, we are told, became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. What an extraordinary notion! This doesn’t just mean that Jesus didn’t have a human father, but also that Mary so let the seed of God’s spirit (charity, joy, peace, patience, goodness, long-suffering, fidelity, mildness, faith, and chastity) take root in her that it began to grow into actual flesh.

Gestation of God within one’s body: As we know, pregnancy is not followed immediately by childbirth. A long, slow process first occurs, gestation. In the silent recesses of her heart and body (and surely not without the normal morning-sickness that accompanies pregnancy) an umbilical cord began to grow between Mary and that new life. Her flesh began to give physical sustenance to the life of God and this steadily grew into a child which, at a point, as in all pregnancies, demanded to be born into the world.

The agony of giving birth: Only with much groaning and stretching of the flesh can a child emerge into this world. It is always excruciatingly painful to birth something to the outside world, to take what’s precious inside and give it birth outside. Mary, despite all the over-pious treatises that would make Jesus’ birth something unnatural, experienced the normal birth-pains common to all mothers. Nothing secretly gestated is born into the world without pain, Jesus included.

Nurturing an infant into adulthood: Annie Dillard once suggested that we always find God in our lives as Jesus was found in Bethlehem on Christmas, a helpless infant in the straw who must be picked up and nurtured into adulthood: “God’s works are as good as we make them. That God is helpless, our baby to bear, self-abandoned on the doorstep of time, wondered at by cattle and oxen.” Mary gave birth to the baby, Jesus, but what she ultimately gave the world was the adult, Christ. Like all mothers she had to spend years nursing, cajoling, teaching, and nurturing an infant into adulthood.

In that pattern, the incarnation, in looking at how Mary gave birth to Christ, we are given a blueprint that invites imitation not admiration. Mary is the model of faith. What she did each of us too is called upon to do, namely, give birth to God in our lives. Christmas is for marveling at what once took place, but it’s also for imitation, for continuing to give God flesh in the world.

How do you prove to anyone, yourself included, that God exists? You don’t. The object of our faith and worship doesn’t appear as a compelling proof at the end of a rational experiment. God has to be gestated into the world in the same way as Mary did all those years ago at the first Christmas.

