

**“Blessed are you who believed
that what was spoken to
you by the Lord**



would be fulfilled.” Luke 1:45

Our Lady of Lourdes

Fourth Sunday of Advent • December 24, 2006



Welcome to our Parish Family! New Parishioners are cordially invited to register as members of our parish family. Please call or visit our Parish Office.

Pastoral Team

Rev. Michael A. Vetrano

Pastor

Rev. Stanislaus Chukwube

Associate Pastor

Rev. Robert Scheckenback

Associate Pastor

Deacon John DeGuardi

Deacon Jack Meehan

Coordinator of Stewardship

Deacon John Teufel

Sr. Margaret Bickar

Senior Ministry-SAGE

Sr. Nancy Campkin

Director of Religious Education

Regina Ann Cioffi

School Principal

Jennifer Gallagher

Director of Youth Services

Carol M. Goetz

Parish Music Director

Sr. Diane Liona

Director of Religious Education

Vita Scorgia

Ministry Spiritual Director

John Sureau

Coordinator of Worship

Sr. Betty Toohig

Senior Ministry-SAGE

Anthony Trombino

Business Manager

Pastoral Council

Michael Abbruscato

Salomon Acosta

Regina Ann Cioffi

Jane Desthers

Stephen Frodell

Jen Gallagher

Anne Kerrigan

Maria Lucie (*co-chair*)

Mary McMahan

Doreen Spiller

Mary Steck

Fr. Mike Vetrano

Marie Yuliano (*co-chair*)

Parish Staff

Barbara Catusco

Religious Education Office

Mary Anne Lettieri

Parish Office

Debbie Meyer

Bulletin/Parish Office

Rosemary Multer

School Office

Rex Muro

Organist

Rita Spera

Religious Education Office

Lori Walsh

Parish Office

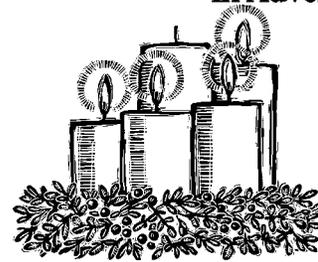
*Our Lady
of Lourdes*

455 Hunter Avenue
West Islip, New York 11795

Mission Statement

As stewards of all that God has given us, the Parish Family of Our Lady of Lourdes serves and ministers to all who come to this place. Regardless of a person's history, ethnicity, gender, orientation, age or race, we commit ourselves to open wide the doors of our Parish to provide a place of welcome and hospitality.

Fourth Sunday in Advent



Vision...

so that all may know that they are a vital part of the Body of Christ, we further recommit and challenge ourselves to:

- **Live** out our Baptismal call passionately by caring for all of God's people with justice.
- **Grow** in an understanding of God's role in each of our lives.
- **Respond** to the Gospel in a radical way, inviting and inspiring all to form the Kingdom of God in every moment of life.
- **Acknowledge** we are not complete without the willingness to grow, discern and discover the Spirit who moves and guides us.

Parish Office

661-3224

Monday-Friday: 9 AM - 7:30 PM

Saturday: 9 AM - 3 PM

Sunday: 9 AM - 2 PM

email: ParishOffice@ollchurch.org

fax: 661-7143

website: www.ollchurch.org

Our Lady of Lourdes School

587-7200

Monday-Friday: 9 AM - 3 PM

email: rcioffi@ollschool.org

Religious Education Office

661-5440

Monday-Friday: 9 AM - Noon

1 PM - 5 PM

7 PM - 9 PM

email: ReligiousEd@ollchurch.org

S.A.G.E.

661-3224

(Senior Advocates for Growth
and Enrichment)

email: Sage@ollchurch.org

Living Liturgy



Receiving Communion

So many people, particularly around the holidays, ask about receiving communion. First and most important, know that you're welcome here at OLL – whether you worship regularly or only when you can! So let's review how to receive communion to put you at ease...

If you're going to receive, the ushers will show you where to go. While on line, join in our Communion Hymn and sing. Our voices give such glory to God! Those who wish to receive should make a slight bow of the head while on line before receiving. When in front of the priest or Eucharistic Minister, you should come forward with hands extended (or mouth open if you want to receive on the tongue). When the minister says, "The Body of Christ," you say: "Amen!"

The Church tells us that the most complete form of the Eucharist is to receive it under both species – bread and wine. This is certainly your choice. If you wish to receive from the cup, make a slight bow of the head while waiting on line. When you come forward, the minister will say, "The Blood of Christ" and you should reply, "Amen" and take a sip of the wine. The minister will clean the cup after you have received.

When you return to your seat, take some time to pray quietly and then join in our beautiful Communion Hymns.



Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults

What's it all about?

IF you are an adult **AND**

- ... you were never Baptized
- ... you were Baptized in another faith and would like to become a baptized Catholic
- ... you never received Holy Communion (Eucharist)
- ... you never received your Confirmation

IF you are an adult **and** one or all of the circumstances above apply to you

IF you feel you would like to become a Baptized Catholic or become more fully initiated into your Catholic faith,

please contact John Sureau, S. Nancy, Jen Gallagher or Fr. Stan at the Parish Office. You can call 661-3224, option #1, and we would be happy to help you!

Adult Faith Formation

Preparing for life ending decisions...

Reasons to hope...

Tuesdays, January 9, 16, 23, 30, and February 6, 2007

7:30-9:30 PM

Parish Center

Presenters include *S. Diane Liona, Barbara Redmond, Deacon John and Anne DeGuardi... and more*

As we journey through the seasons of life, we must move with them and become aware of these life ending decisions... challenges... sorrows...

How do I face walking with someone who is seriously ill?

How do I prepare for the loss of a loved one-as a spouse, an adult, daughter/son, a friend, a sibling?

Through the support of others, these evenings will guide us as we walk this journey. Together we will discuss, reflect, share and pray. Please join us – don't miss it!

Pre-Registration is necessary and helpful. This will enable us to have enough reading material and refreshments for all those attending. Please call the Religious Education Office, Monday-Friday, between 9AM – 5 PM and 7PM – 9PM, at 661.5440 x3, or e-mail to: religiously@ollchurch.org. Fee: \$25 [No fee is required for those who have paid the Religious Education Family Fee or Our Lady of Lourdes School Tuition. Fees may vary appropriately.]

Prophets and Promises

This Advent, our Children's Liturgy and Family Liturgy teams are going to help our young people focus on the prophets of Advent and the promises we are called to be a part of. Each week, our young people will reflect on the promises of peace, forgiveness and service and encounter some people who have worked to bring that about both in the times of the Bible and our lives today. Be sure to take a look at our Prophets and Promises newsletter that will be given out at the end of each Children's Liturgy celebration.

If you have not been part of our 9:30 AM Liturgy, we celebrate the readings in a special way with young people from approximately age four to about fourth grade.

After the Opening Prayer, they journey to the Parish Center to hear God's Word in a way that keeps the message but makes it a little more understandable for them.

If you have small children or are one yourself, consider coming to the 9:30 AM Liturgy one Sunday to find out more about this great experience for young people.

School News

Support Catholic Education and Become a Classroom Angel

A gift of \$1000 to Our Lady of Lourdes School will support programs of science, technology, and the arts in our award winning Catholic School. Your name will be engraved on a plaque over the door to the classroom of your choice for a whole year!

The new school newspaper, "*OLL Chronicles*" has just gone to press. In addition to giving a copy to each student, we will make copies available at the doors of the church.

Host Families

We are looking for "Host Families" to host Korean students who are coming to St. Cyril/Our Lady of Lourdes School at Deer Park/W. Islip Cultural Exchange Program in the beginning of January, 2007. The students will be staying for four weeks and the students range in ages from third grade through eighth grade. You must provide transportation, meals, and basic necessities. You will be paid \$600 a month. If you are interested in hosting a Korean student, please contact Ernest Yang at 917.579.7990 and/or email to ernestnsyang@gmail.com

All Are Welcome (especially at Christmas!)

This weekend, we will welcome thousands of people to our parish for Christmas Masses. Let's remember they are guests and we welcome them with open arms (even if they took our parking spot or only come when they can!). Say hello, offer the sign of peace, and be a real example of OLL's hospitality at our Christmas Eve and Christmas Day Masses!

Christmas Parking

Remember we are fortunate to be able to use the parking lot of Manetuck Elementary School during busy feast days like Christmas. You can enter the driveway off of Hunter Avenue. The entrance is on the West Side of the Rectory. This will save you some stress for sure on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

Cell phones and more...

Please remember to turn off your cell phones, pagers, beepers, etc. when coming to pray here at OLL! These are wonderful creations...but they can easily interfere with our prayer and the prayer of others! Rather than telling your friends and family to call you – tell them to come with you to our parish here at Our Lady of Lourdes!



Please take a moment and visit our beautiful Church website for the latest information about Advent 2006. There is information about our "Giving Tree", Advent Monday Mornings, Christmas Shopping Day for El Salvador, Advent Evening of Prayer, and so much more! Visit us at www.ollchurch.org.

Eucharistic Adoration

One way we can celebrate the gift of the Eucharist is through prayer. Our Lady of Lourdes has a prayerful and active Nocturnal Adoration Society that leads adoration of the Blessed Sacrament on the first Saturday (*next date – January 6*) and the first Wednesday of every month. Consider coming to pray with them!



Saint Bernard League



The winter months can be a stressful and tough time for many in our parish community. Our parish's youth community and Social Action Group have created a special group
-The Saint Bernard League-
 to help with shoveling for our parishioners in need throughout the winter months.

How does this work?

When it snows – “your” Saint Bernard will call you to see if you are in need of help. If you need their services, you will set up a convenient time and your Saint Bernard will shovel for you and your family.

Do you need the services of our OLL Saint Bernards?

If you would like to be included on the list of parishioners who may need the services of our OLL Saint Bernard League volunteers, please call the Parish Office at 661.3224 or email to jsureau@ollchurch.org.

Do you want to be a Saint Bernard?

We are in need of individual parishioners and parish families to be “Saint Bernards” to those in need within our parish community. If you want to become an OLL Saint Bernard, just call the Parish Office at 661.3224 and leave your name and phone number or e-mail to jsureau@ollchurch.org.

A Day with Fr. Carl Arico

Contemplative Outreach of Long Island/Queens presents “A Day with Fr. Carl Arico.” Fr. Carl will speak about the four superstars of our tradition-Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila, Jean DeCaussade, and John Cassian.

The presentation will be on Saturday, January 13, 2007 from 9:30 AM until 3:30 PM at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish Center. We will gather at 9:30 AM for coffee and fellowship.

Please bring a bag lunch. Donation is \$30. For registration and further information, please call Betty Teufel at 631.586.6608.

SAGE

The SAGE Group (Senior Advocates for Growth and Enrichment) will meet on **Tuesday, January 2, 2007** in the **Parish Center at 9 AM**. All older parishioners are welcome.

Holy Name Society

Our Holy Name Society meets on the second Sunday of each month. The next meeting will be on **Sunday, January 14, 2007**. We will begin with the **Rosary at 7:40 AM in the Church** and the **meeting will follow the 8 AM Mass at 9 AM in Room 16**. Come and join us!

Senior Circle

The Senior Circle meets on the last Monday of each month. The next meeting will be held on **Monday, January 29, 2007** at **12:30 PM in the Parish Center**.

Rosary Christian Mothers

The Rosary Christian Mothers meet on the first Monday evening of each month. The next meeting will be **Monday, January 8, 2007**. (*second Monday for the month of January*) We will begin with **Rosary at 7:45 PM** followed by **meeting at 8 PM in the Parish Center**.

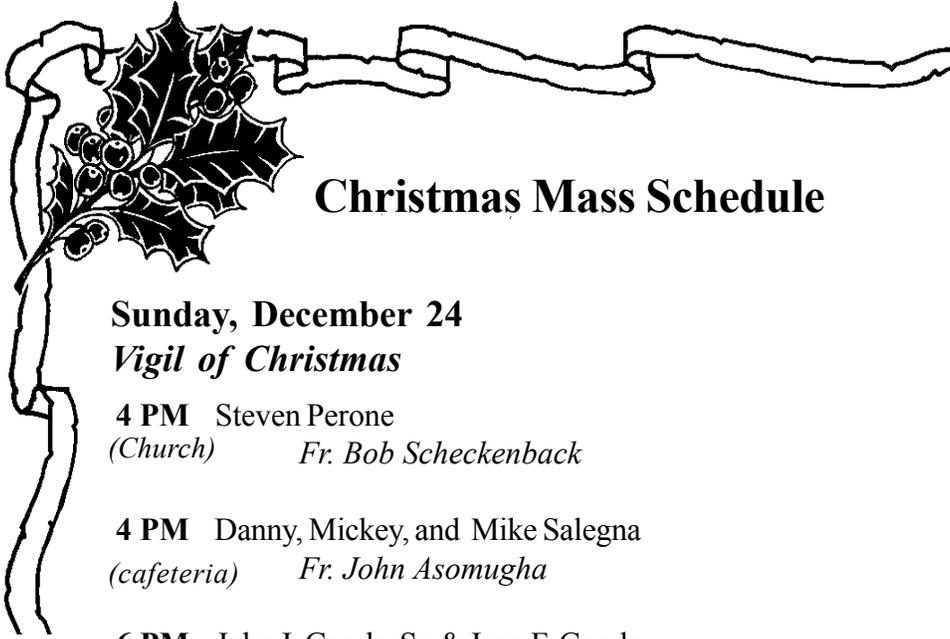
Jesus, King of All Nations Prayer Group

The Jesus, King of All Nations Prayer Group meets each **Thursday afternoon** in the **Church**. The meeting is from **3 PM until 4 PM** in **front of the Blessed Sacrament**.

Good Samaritan Prayer Group of L.I.

The Good Samaritan Prayer Group of Long Island holds their **meetings every Friday** (*except the first Friday of the month*) **at OLL School in Room 16 from 8 PM until 10 PM**.

All are welcome to experience singing, praying and fellowship each evening.



Christmas Mass Schedule

Sunday, December 24

Vigil of Christmas

4 PM Steven Perone
(Church) *Fr. Bob Scheckenback*

4 PM Danny, Mickey, and Mike Salegna
(cafeteria) *Fr. John Asomugha*

6 PM John J. Goode, Sr. & Joan F. Goode
Fr. Mike Vetrano

8 PM Nicholas Lo Porto & Great Grandparents
Fr. Stan Chukwube

11 PM John L. Pizzella
Fr. Mike Vetrano

Monday, December 25

Christmas Day

8 AM Lillian LaRocca
Fr. Stan Chukwube

9:30 AM Anthony Alfieri
Fr. Bob Scheckenback

11 AM Mark & John Nardone
Fr. Mike Vetrano

12:30 PM Dec'd mbrs of Dixon & Isola Families
Fr. John Asomugha

Celebrating New Year's

The Church will gather on Sunday, December 31 and Monday, January 1 to ring in the New Year and to celebrate the Solemnity of Mary—a holy day.

We'll celebrate the Solemnity of Mary on **Sunday, December 31 at 5 PM** and **Monday, January 1 at 8 AM and 9:30 AM.**

PLEASE NOTE:

“The Six” Sunday night liturgy *will not* be celebrated on Sunday, December 31.

Daily Mass

8 AM

Weekend Masses

Saturday: 5 PM

Sunday: 8 AM, 9:30 AM,
11 AM, 12:30 PM and 6 PM

Reconciliation

Saturday: 4 PM - 4:45 PM

Altar Bread and Wine

Baby and Richard Joseph Shaddock



Rest In Peace

Mollie Verdone

William A. Small

Nicholas Caiozzo

Rosary/Novena

Rosary:

Daily after 8 AM Mass

Miraculous Medal Novena:

Monday after 8 AM Mass

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults(RCIA):

A process to be embraced by the Catholic Church. For non-Catholics and for Catholics who have never received formal religious education. If interested, please call the Parish Office.

Anointing of the Sick

Throughout the liturgical year. If needed sooner, please call the Parish Office.

Baptism

Please contact the Parish Office to schedule an appointment.

Marriage

Arranged at least six months in advance, please call the Parish Office.

Support Groups

Alcoholics Anonymous

Monday and Tuesday at
8 PM and Saturday at
7 PM in Lourdes Hall-
convent lower level.

ALANON

Each Wednesday at
10 AM in Lourdes Hall-
convent lower level.

Remembering...

Monday, December 25

Please see **Christmas Mass Schedule** on page 9

Tuesday, December 26

8:00 AM Joseph Santangelo

Wednesday, December 27

8:00 AM Rose & Frank Monroe
Louise & Henry Riedemann

Thursday, December 28

8:00 AM Daniel J. LoCricchio

Friday, December 29

8:00 AM Frank DeLeo & Michael DeLeo

Saturday, December 30

8:00 AM Mark A. Polito, Roland & Wayne Van Acker, In Honor of St. Anthony,
Lisa Valentino, Richard J. Gargiulo, John Rusnak, Martha Wills,
Frank Magri, Marge Magri, Bill Lane

5:00 PM Barbara McGarrity
Fr. John Asomugha

Sunday, December 31

8:00 AM Robert Wilson
Fr. Bob Scheckenback

9:30 AM Josephine Mickens
Fr. Mike Vetrano

11:00 AM Lodespoto Family
Fr. Ed Dowling

12:30 PM Francisco, Felizberta and Ramon Dimaculangan
Fr. John Asomugha

5:00 PM Louis Ruocco
Fr. Mike Vetrano

Please see **New Year's Mass Schedule** on page 9



Social Action Alert

The work of the Church calls each of us to work hard and work well for the good of those in need within our community. We do that in many ways and YOU can be part of that any time!

Social Action Food Baskets

Every time you come to Mass at Our Lady of Lourdes, please check our parish shopping list which appears in our weekly bulletin. These are some of the items needed for our parish's food pantry. Our food pantry services those in need within our own parish and in local organizations and parishes in the region including Our Lady of Miraculous Medal, Wyandanch, St. Anne's in Brentwood and PRONTO. Your food donation – whenever you come – is a big help!

Helping Local Charities

We are great cooks!! We serve meals at local soup kitchens and shelters when they're in need. Are you great in the kitchen? Dinner for 100 or so not a problem (with some help)?

Let us know...we'll call you when we're cooking! Call 631.661.3224 or e-mail to jsureau@ollchurch.org.

Look for more info in upcoming issues of the bulletin about...

our ecumenical outreach to other faith communities in the area and our work with Habitat for Humanity.

Living God's Call for Charity and Justice in Political Life

An excerpt from *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love), the first Encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI
...to the Bishops, priests, and deacons, men and women, religious and
all the lay faithful on Christian love.

Where Politics and Faith Meet

The just ordering of society and the State is a central responsibility of politics. . . .Justice is both the aim and the intrinsic criterion of all politics. . . .The State must inevitably face the question of how justice can be achieved here and now. But this presupposes an even more radical question: what is justice? The problem is one of practical reason; but if reason is to be exercised properly, it must undergo constant purification, since it can never be completely free of the danger of a certain ethical blindness caused by the dazzling effect of power and special interests. Here politics and faith meet. Faith by its specific nature is an encounter with the living God—an encounter opening up new horizons extending beyond the sphere of reason. But it is also a purifying force for reason itself. From God's standpoint, faith liberates reason from its blind spots and therefore helps it to be ever more fully itself. Faith enables reason to do its work more effectively and to see its proper object more clearly. This is where Catholic social doctrine has its place: it has no intention of giving the Church power over the State. Even less is it an attempt to impose on those who do not share the faith ways of thinking and modes of conduct proper to faith. Its aim is simply to help purify reason and to contribute, here and now, to the acknowledgment and attainment of what is just.

Parish Outreach



**Food
Pantry
Needs**

detergent
kleenex
paper towels
personal feminine products
shampoo
soap
toilet tissue
toothbrush
toothpaste

Outreach Office Hours

Monday through Friday from 9:30 AM until 3:30 PM.

For information/assistance call 661.9262.

Religion & Rock

Tune into "Religion & Rock" with Fr. Jim Vlaun on Sunday from 7 AM to 8 AM on WBAB 102.3 FM or 95.3 on the East End of Long Island.

Next Sunday's theme is: **"Christmas Special."**

Don't forget to tune in!

Visit "Religion & Rock" on the web, www.religionandrock.com.

Also watch "Good News with Father Jim" on TELECARE, channel 29, on Mondays and Fridays at 9:45 AM; Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays at 7:45 PM; Sundays at 8 PM.

Financial Summary

December 17, 2006

Weekly Collection	\$
Weekly Budget	-\$ 21,000.00
+/- for the week	\$

Due to a change in bulletin deadlines, the collection amount for December 17 will appear in next week's bulletin.

The estimated weekly collection needed to maintain and operate our parish buildings, ministries, programs and salaries is \$21,000.



Fourth Sunday of Advent

Luke 1:39-45

The ship docks at the pier, and hundreds of family members eagerly scan the railings to look for their loved ones, gone for many months on deployment around the world. The plane finally lands, and behind velvet ropes parents wait in great anticipation for the college student to come down the ramp, home for the holidays. On a snowy Christmas Eve, the sedan finally pulls into the driveway and grandparents make their way up the sidewalk, bright packages in hand.

An expectant Mary travels to a town in Judah to visit her cousin Elizabeth. Without even seeing Mary's face, Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit and as her own child leaps in her womb, she joyfully welcomes Mary as the most blessed among women. How wonderful that God would bless Elizabeth and her child — later to be known as John the Baptist — with the knowledge of the fulfillment of God's promise to give the world a savior!

Today, we remember Mary's visit to Elizabeth that day so long ago. In that Mary had accepted God's will to bring Jesus to the world, Elizabeth, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, realized the significance of this visit, and in doing so forever gave us the foundation of our prayer to Mary, the "Hail Mary" (CCC 2676). "Blessed are you among women," Elizabeth tells her, "and blessed is the fruit of your womb." This Christmas, may you also be filled with the Holy Spirit as you remember the coming of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Readings for the Week of December 24, 2006

Sunday:	Mi 5:1-4a/Heb 10:5-10/Lk 1:39-45
Monday:	Vigil: Is 62:1-5/Acts 13:16-17, 22-25/Mt 1:1-25 <i>or</i> 1:18-25 Midnight: Is 9:1-6/Ti 2:11-14/Lk 2:1-14 Dawn: Is 62:11-12/Ti 3:4-7/Lk 2:15-20 Day: Is 52:7-10/Heb 1:1-6/Jn 1:1-18 <i>or</i> 1:1-5, 9-14
Tuesday:	Acts 6:8-10; 7:54-59/Mt 10:17-22
Wednesday:	1 Jn 1:1-4/Jn 20:1a, 2-8
Thursday:	1 Jn 1:5-2:2/Mt 2:13-18
Friday:	1 Jn 2:3-11/Lk 2:22-35
Saturday:	1 Jn 2:12-17/Lk 2:36-40
Next Sunday:	Sir 3:2-7, 12-14 <i>or</i> 1 Sm 1:20-22, 24-28/Col 3:12-21 <i>or</i> 3:12-17 <i>or</i> 1 Jn 3:1-2, 21-24/Lk 2:41-52

Altar Society

Altar linens this week will be cared for by *Carol Grillo*.
If you would like to help care for our altar needs, please call the
Parish Office at 661.3224.

Communion Calls

Communion brought to those who are homebound.
Contact the Parish Office at 661.3224.



Pastoral Care of the Sick

Please call the Parish Office at 661.3224 to leave the names
of parishioners who:

- are homebound and would like to receive the Eucharist
- are in Good Samaritan Hospital and would like to be visited
by a member of our Pastoral Care Ministry.

Pray for Our Sick

Please remember to keep in your thoughts and prayers ...

*Pat Bonavita, Thomas Brennan, Elise Brenner, Jo Brogan, Christian Bullock, Sr.
Nancy Campkin, Regina Cranor, Joseph Cristallo, Nicholas Curella, Irene D'Auria,
John Eifler, Joseph Fiore, Jason Fisher, Patricia Funk, Kathleen Kerrigan, Loretta
Koskasko, Anthony Lombardo, Michael Lombardo, Millie Lombardo, Mike
Lorento, Diego Marino, Michele McCann, Peter McCann, Sr., Donato Miranda,
Bryan Monahan, Freida Perry, Gene Perry, Robert Petersen, Joe Radosti,
Dan Rodriguez, Fred Ruggio, Rose Serragano, Dorothy Sullivan, Loretta Vitale*

Members in the Military

We ask that you pray especially for those in our parish that are on active duty in the
Middle East conflict.

They are:



Daniel D'Arienzo-US Army
Frederick Wm. Ellis-US Army
John Finn-US Army
Paul McEvoy-US Army
Michael Mallimo-US Army
Peter Provenzano-US Army
James Stultz- US Army

...and remember those of our parish family that are in the armed services, listed in our
Parish Book of Intentions.

Giving Birth to God

Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI

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 of 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 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 marvelling 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.

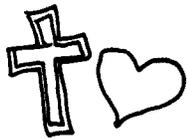
Used with permission of the author, Oblate Father Ron Rolheiser. Father Rolheiser is a theologian, teacher, and award-winning author and is currently the President of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, TX. He can be contacted through his website www.ronrolheiser.com.

Sharing the Gospel

Long ago, God promised to send a Savior into the world. So when Jesus was finally born in Bethlehem, the angels praised God. The angels shared God's great news with the shepherds, so they could find Jesus and praise God, too.



Mission for the Week



You can praise God like the angels did. Go Christmas caroling together as a family. Sing all of your favorite songs together.

Puzzle

Fit this Gospel message into the empty squares:

Peace on earth to everyone who pleases God.

P							
L							
E							
A							
S							
E							
S							



Dear God,

thank you for sending Jesus into the world.

I want to praise you like the angels did.

©LPI