

# Once Upon a SAINT

by Rebecca O'Loughlin



## St. Maron

My dearest children, in Syria, a hermit-priest named Maron was born a long time ago. He was a quiet little monk, and lived at the top of a mountain without a house. If the weather was very bad, he had a small shelter made of animal skins. The mountain was his home.

The mountain wasn't always the hermit's home, though. In the Bible, the mountain is where Heaven and Earth meet, and where God reveals Himself, such as to Moses on Mount Sinai or to the Apostles during the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor. Abouna (Father) Maron had moved to the mountain to be close to God, and to live a life of simplicity and complete trust in our Lord's care.

Abouna Maron saw God everywhere and spoke to Him always. "Lord, I see you in this open sky! I praise You in the buds of the tree. I welcome You in the air that caresses me."

Abouna Maron stood on the mountain, arms raised high in praise of the Lord. Nearby sat a giant pagan temple to the god Nebu. Nebu was the "god of learning."

"The all-knowing God takes over this temple," Abouna Maron's eyes lifted up to heaven, "and Nebu bows down, for he knows nothing, being an idol built of dead stone."

Abouna Maron prepared the temple by destroying the idols in it. Then, blessing the temple with prayer, consecrated it to the One True God.

People came often to see Abouna Maron. The visitors wanted words of wisdom, healing, comfort, and even brought their animals to him for healing. Sometimes they brought food for him as a thank you, which was good, because there wasn't much to eat, although there was a natural spring on the mountain. Abouna Maron didn't mind if he was hungry or not, and he shared whatever he was given.

“Abouna Maron!” A voice called out. A man hopped on one foot up the mountain, half carried by his friends. “Abouna Maron! Pray for me!”

Abouna Maron blessed the man, and his limp leg was immediately healed. Next came a woman, whose heart was heavy and broken with sorrow.

Abouna Maron prayed over her and said: “my daughter, do not be sad. Your aging mother is dead in this world, but she is not gone. She is in Heaven. She sees everything you do and is with you, praying for you. She is happy and without suffering.”

A man came to Abouna Maron in secret. “Father, help me! I try to be good, but when I get angry, I am a scary person. I yell and hurt others. One day I am afraid I might kill some one.”

Abouna Maron commanded with authority: “in the name of Jesus Christ, you wicked spirit of anger, leave this man at once!”

The man immediately felt relief as the demon left him. “Oh, thank you! Thank you, Abouna!”

Abouna Maron looked stern. “Take care, my son. Where the demon used to be is an empty and clean room. Take care to not leave it empty, or it will return. You must fill the emptiness with prayer and love. You must avoid the temptation of anger, and work in doing loving actions and reparations. If you give into the habit of yelling and anger like you used to do, then the demon may return. Do not let that happen! You must change your heart entirely.”

The people called Abouna Maron “the undivided one,” because he belonged to God completely, holding nothing back. It did not bother him if he ate or not, or if the weather was bad. It was all in God’s hands, and Abouna Maron trusted in God without reservation.

One day a man came to Abouna Maron with a different purpose. “Abouna, I have a letter for you...from the Patriarch of Constantinople.”

Abouna Maron smiled. He had been educated at the university in Antioch and John Chrysostom was a beloved friend.

The letter was simple, and went something like this:

“I am bound together with you by love and by disposition, and I see you here as if you are present. For such is the vision of love: not cut off by a road, not faded by time. I want to send letters to you more frequently, but this is not easy because the road is difficult and has few travelers. Inform me about your health more often, so that although we may be separated in body, I will be filled with joy and consolation when I hear that you are well. Above all, be so kind as to pray for me.”

Abouna Maron folded the letter. “How blessed it is to receive a word from my dear brother in the Lord! Thank you!”

Abouna immediately got down on his knees to pray for the future saint, John Chrysostom, feeling joy in his heart.

St. Maron died around 410AD. He was a very old man. He taught a way of life, a pureness and open heart toward God. Many monks and priests learned from him, and his spirituality continually spread in the area. Because the people were largely isolated by the mountains, the church took on its own distinct beauty and traditions. A few

hundred years later, a different monk, St. John Maron, became the first patriarch of the Maronite Church. St. Maron’s feast is celebrated on February 9th.

You don’t have to go to the mountains to be close to God, or to find God in everything. Look around you. He is there in the beautiful flowers, in the sun and in the wind. God is there in each member of your family. Do you see Him?

To celebrate St. Maron’s feast, enjoy this version of Sfouf or Lebanese Tumeric cake. This Sfouf is a Fast friendly food in honor of the hermit, having no meat, eggs, dairy, or oil.

### THE HERMIT’S SFOUF

- Ⓢ 2 cups flour (I used a gluten free blend)
- Ⓢ ½ cup honey
- Ⓢ 1 Tablespoon of ground turmeric
- Ⓢ 1 ½ tsp baking powder
- Ⓢ ½ cup raisins boiled in 1 ½ cup water for five minutes.
- Ⓢ Handful of nuts for garnish

Preheat oven to 375°

Line a 9x9 pan with parchment paper

Mix dry ingredients. Add honey. Add boiled raisins and 1 cup of the boiled raisin water (if there isn’t enough of the water left after boiling, add until you have 1 cup). Mix and put into the lined pan. Dab with wet and clean hands if you want a smooth top. Decorate with chopped nuts.

Bake for 30 minutes.



Here’s a coloring page of St. Maron to print and enjoy!

