

SAINT ANNE—Mother of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Feast: July 26th



St Anne was the mother of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the grandmother of Jesus Christ. She and her husband were rich, and very devoted to God. Their home was Nazareth. They had no children, and that was believed to be a punishment of God among the Jews. For this reason Joachim would not even offer sacrifice in the temple. He was very sad and went into the mountains to pray. Anne prayed to God in her home and begged Him to give her a child. She promised to dedicate her child to His service.

Their prayers were heard. An angel came to Anne and said, "Anne, the Lord has looked upon your tears. You will give birth to a daughter, and she will be honored by all the world." The angel made the same promise to Joachim. A daughter was born to Anne, and she called her Miriam, which means "Mary." Anne offered her child to God in the service of the temple at a very early age. St Anne's name means "grace." God endowed her with special gifts and graces to be the mother of the Mother of God.

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O God, You bestowed on St Anne such grace as she was found worthy to become the mother of Mary, who brought forth Your only begotten Son. Grant that we may be helped by her intercession.



The Life of Saint Anne

Christians, from the earliest times had an interest in knowing more about Jesus' family, especially about his mother and his grandmother. Anne is the name of the Jewish woman who was Jesus' grandmother. Anne is the virgin Mary's mother. We know nothing about Anne from the Bible. A third century greek manuscript called "the revelation of James" tells a fictional story about Mary and her parents Joachim and Anne. The story was probably written around the year 160 a.d. by a non-Jewish Christian.

Simple Way of Life

Since history has not passed on anything extraordinary about the life of Saint Anne it is safe to assume that she led the life of a typical Jewish woman of her time. What we see in many present day third world countries

perhaps gives us some insight into the simple way of life of the woman known today as Saint Anne.

I myself suppose that she spent much of her time with household chores

and the needs of her family. I spent a number of years in Africa and in India, and I noticed that even today in those countries women are very busy from morning to night. You see them early in the morning walking to get water from a river, a well, or some other water supply. You can see them washing their infants, combing a daughter's hair, gathering wood and

sticks to make a fire for cooking. During the day, women will gather food from their gardens and go to the town market to buy and sell vegetables, fruits, and dried fish. They assemble at grinding mills with bags of corn or kernels of wheat to have them ground into flour. Often they will

perform their daily routine with a child perched on their backs and a few more children at their side. Usually you see women walking along in a small procession of relatives or neighbors. They will prepare an afternoon meal and sometimes bring it to their husbands at work in the fields. They will help raise the chickens, rabbits and goats, will milk the cow, and in the late afternoon when it is cool will go out into the fields along with their husbands to spade and hoe the land, plant seeds, and pick the corn or harvest the rice. When passing a friend or neighbor's house, they'll often stop for tea, or buttermilk, or enjoy some home-made beer or alcoholic beverage.

Jewish Heritage

This daily routine is spiced with moments of great enjoyment and great sadness. There are celebrations for births and marriage, and sad gatherings for times of sickness and death. Nature brings days of hot sun and nights with cool breezes. There are seasons of torrential rain that make the land rich and green and then seemingly endless periods of drought

that turn the whole earth into a parched, barren brown wasteland. There are

no phones, no TV's, there is a lot of time to sit around as a family, walk over to your neighbor, tell stories, sing songs, and to pray to the God of earth and sky.

We must also remember that St Anne was thoroughly Jewish and enjoyed

all the cultural, political, and religious customs of Israel. She was a wife and mother and became the proud grandmother of the most beautiful grandson the world has ever known.

Ancient Story

According to the ancient story called the "Gospel of James", Anne the mother of Mary, was born in Bethlehem, where, years later, Jesus would be born. She married Joachim from Nazareth in Galilee. Their marriage was

blessed in many ways. They loved each other very much and over the years their love only grew stronger. The couple prospered when they moved to Jerusalem. Joachim, a shepherd who owned a large herd of sheep, was given the task of supplying the temple in Jerusalem with sheep for its sacrifices from his flocks, which grazed in the hills nearby the city. Unfortunately, after twenty years of marriage Anne and Joachim had no children. They prayed and prayed, and even vowed to dedicate to God any child they would have. Year after year they entered the Temple to plead with God for help. But no child came.

Once, when Joachim went to the Temple for the feast of Dedication, he overheard someone ridiculing him for not being able to father a child. Stung by the remark, he went out into the hill country near Jerusalem where shepherds tended his flocks and cried to God over his disappointment of so many years.

Angel's Message

After many days there alone, pouring out the sadness in his heart before God, an angel appeared to Joachim in dazzling light. The vision frightened him, but the angel said:

"Don't be afraid. I have come to tell you the Lord has heard your prayers. He knows how good you are and he knows your many years of sorrow for having no child. God will give your wife a child just as he did Sarah, the wife of Abraham, and Annea, the mother of Samuel. Your wife Anne will bear you a daughter.

You shall call her Mary and dedicate her to God, for she will be filled with the Holy Spirit from her mother's womb."

"I will give you a sign", the angel continued. "Go back to Jerusalem. You will meet your wife at the Golden Gate, and your sorrow will be turned into joy."

Meanwhile, Anne, not knowing where her husband had gone, grew anxious

and afraid. She, too, was hurt that she had no children and felt as though she were being punished by God. Going into the garden, she noticed some

sparrows building a nest in a laurel tree, for it was springtime, and she began to cry:

"Why was I born, O Lord? The birds build nests for their young yet I have no child of my own. The animals of the earth, the fish of the sea are fruitful, yet I have nothing. The land produces fruit in due season, but I have no infant to hold in my arms."

Suddenly, the angel of the Lord came to her and said, "Anne, the Lord has heard your prayer. You shall conceive a child whom the whole world will praise. Go to the Golden Gate in Jerusalem and meet your husband there." So she quickly went to the city gate. The two met there and embraced,

and joyfully shared the news the angel had given them. Returning home, Anne conceived and bore a daughter, and called her Mary. Mary was a common name

for Jewish women of the time. The name is derived from Miriam, who was the

sister of Moses. Perhaps the Jewish people then, longing for someone like

Moses to lead them from their long slavery to foreigners like the Greeks

and the Romans, chose that name for so many of their daughters, hoping that
a new Moses would come and find another Miriam at his side.

Dedication in the Temple

When Mary was three years old, her parents presented her in the Temple in Jerusalem as a gift to the Lord. Their family then lived close by that great center of Jewish life. Even from her first days, Mary as a child seemed to know that her life was to serve God. The temple of God so near her home was a place she loved and there was nowhere else she would rather be. So as a little girl just three years old, her parents watched her ascend the fifteen great steps to the temple courtyard and approach the altar of sacrifice. God was there and she wished to be near him. And that is what her parents, Anne and Joachim wished, that their daughter be near her God. The early story says that Mary spent most of her childhood in that holy place.

Mary's Marriage to Joseph

When Mary was 14, the age Jewish girls married at that time, she wondered what her future would be. Her parents knew their child had a special place in God's plan, but what it was they did not know. They began to arrange for her marriage, as customary in those days, and sought advice from the Jewish high priest himself. After praying for guidance, the high priest called every unmarried man from the tribe of David to come to the temple with a branch from the fields and lay it on the altar. The one whose branch flowered, he decided, would marry Mary.

Joseph was among those who came at the high priest's call, but he brought no branch with him. Yet God pointed him out as the one who should be Mary's husband. When Joseph finally placed a branch on the altar, it immediately flowered. The two were betrothed in marriage and Mary returned to her parent's home at Nazareth to wait some months and to prepare for the wedding. While she was there, the angel Gabriel appeared to her and announced that she was to be the mother of Jesus. By the power of the Holy Spirit she conceived the Child. After Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph returned to Nazareth where they would live and bring up their young son. Anne and Joachim visited them there and helped to care for the child. They told Jesus many stories about Adam and Eve, David and Goliath, Moses and the ten commandments. They watched Jesus play and walk, they fed him his favorite meals, bathed him, and gently rocked him

to sleep. When Anne and Joachim died, or where, we do not know, none of the ancient stories tell us. But a later tradition says, and we can believe that it is true, that Jesus was with Anne and Joachim when they passed away.

The story of Jesus' mother and grandmother as written in the Gospel of James was very popular among early Christians. It had a great influence on Christian worship, art and devotion. Around the year 550 a church in honor of Saint Anne was built in Jerusalem near the temple area on the site where Anne, Joachim and their daughter Mary were believed to have lived. In the 6th century the churches in the East celebrated two Feasts honoring Mary based on the story: Mary's birth and her presentation in the Temple. Since the 7th century the Greek and Russian Churches have celebrated feasts in honor of Saint Joachim and Anne, the conception of Saint Anne, and the feast of Saint Anne. The western churches have celebrated the feast of Saint Anne since the 16th century.

Devotion to Saint Anne

Devotion to Saint Anne grew in Europe through a popular French tradition. The French believed that Mary Magdalene, Lazarus, Martha, and other friends of Jesus crossed the Mediterranean Sea and landed at the southern French city of Marseilles where they spread the news about Jesus' death and resurrection. According to this tradition Mary Magdalene's group brought with them the remains of Saint Anne.

According to the legend, the bishop, St Auspice, buried the body of St Anne in a cave under the church of St Mary in Apt. When barbarians invaded that area, the cave was filled with debris, almost to be forgotten until it was dug out by miners 600 years later during the reign of Charlemagne. The Sailors and miners of the region around Marseilles were very devoted to Saint Anne and their devotion spread to other parts of Europe and eventually to the New World. The ancient shrines of St. Anne in Jerusalem and in Apt, France still exist. Saint Anne is the patroness of BritAnney in France, a land of sailors. The great shrine of Sainte Annee d'Auray, founded in the 17th century, is one of the largest pilgrimage centers in Europe and is especially popular with the Bretons of France. Settlers from that region brought their devotion to Canada where they established the shrine of Sainte Annee de Beaupre near Quebec in 1658. In 1905 American Passionist Priests and Brothers built a monastery in the mining center of Scranton, Pennsylvania and dedicated their foundation to Saint Anne. The monastery was built over a coal mine.

On August 15, 1911 the monastery shook, cracked and split due to a severe mine subsidence. The community of priests moved out. But they had complete confidence that they would be able to come back again. In their words, "Saint Anne will take care of her own." In a short time, with repairs, all was safe and the Passionists returned.

Again on July 28, 1913, an even more menacing disturbance took place. A gigantic "squeeze" threatened to slide the whole monastery and church down the hill. Immediately the Passionists and the neighbors prayed for help through the intercession of Saint Anne. The next morning, on an inspection of the mines that run under the monastery, it was found that the slide had suddenly stopped, turned back and settled solidly under the monastery.

So started the history of devotion to Saint Anne at Saint Anne's Shrine in Scranton. The magnificent structure which is now Saint Anne's Monastery

Church was dedicated on April 2nd, 1929. Here, the weekly Saint Anne's Novena has continued every Monday throughout the years. More than 10,000

people per day attend the Annual ten day Saint Anne's Solemn Novena which begins July 17th and ends on July 26th, the feast of Saint Anne.