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Seasoning the Seasons™

The Institute for Christian Formation, Inc.

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Saints Joachim and Anne, Parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary

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Each year on July 26 our Church celebrates the feast of Saints Joachim and Anne, Parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary, as an obligatory Memorial. The tradition of the conception and birth of Mary has been part of the tradition of our Church since the earliest years, and although it is not recounted in the Bible it has a long standing history in the liturgy, music, and art of both the Eastern and Western Church. In the Scriptures we first encounter Mary when the Archangel Gabriel visits her at the Annunciation (see Luke 1:26-28). Nowhere in the Bible do we hear about Mary's early life, nor are her parents, Saints Joachim and Anne, mentioned. If they aren't mentioned in the Bible, how do we even know their names?

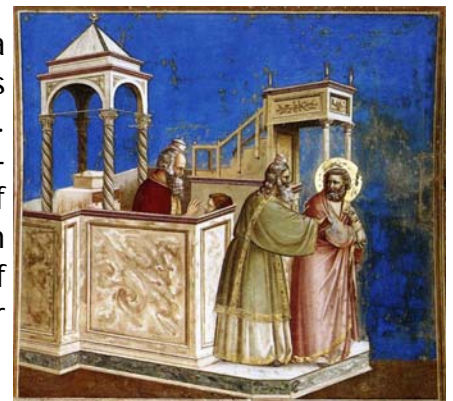


Saints Joachim & Anna
15th Century
School: Novgorod
Heritage: Russian

Recall that there were many writings in the early Church, many, if not most, of which never made it into the official canon of Scripture. But these writings, and the stories they recounted, were well known amongst the early Christians. Most of these stories come to us from the early apocryphal sources, especially the "Protoevangelium of James." It is from this document that we learn, for example, the names of Mary's parents, Joachim and Anna (Anne).

According to the "Protoevangelium of James," Joachim was a wealthy man. But when Joachim went to the temple to offer his gifts, as was the custom of his people, he was refused entrance. He was told that since he had no children, he was not worthy to offer his gifts to God. Joachim even researched the Twelve Tribes of Israel, and found out that he was the only one of the righteous men who did not have a child. This greatly disturbed him, and instead of going home to his wife, Anna, he went out into the wilderness for forty days and forty nights and fasted, living only on prayer.

As the story goes, Anna then mourned for both the loss of her husband and for being childless. But because it was a time of



Rejection of Joachim's Sacrifice
Giotto, circa 1304-1306
Scrovegni (Arena) Chapel, Padua, Italy

celebration in the Jewish faith, Anna cleaned herself up and put on her wedding garments. She then went out into the garden, sat under a tree, and prayed to God to bless her with a child, just as God had blessed Sarah with a son, Isaac. Just as Anna was lamenting that all of creation except her – even the birds and beasts – were fruitful, an angel appeared to her and told her that God had heard her prayer and that she would conceive and bear a child. Anna rejoiced and said she would bring her child as an offering to God to minister all the days of his/her life.



Prayer of St. Anna; 11th Century
Daphni Monastery, Katholikon

Then two angels came to Anna and told her that Joachim was returning. An angel had also appeared to Joachim and told him to go home because his prayer had been answered and his wife would conceive a child. As Joachim was returning with his flocks, Anna was at the gate and when she saw him she ran and threw her arms around his neck.



The Meeting at the Golden Gate
Giotto, circa 1304-1306
Scrovegni (Arena) Chapel, Padua, Italy

The story continues that on his first day back, Joachim rested. The next day, he returned to the temple with his offering of gifts, and this time his offering was accepted. He left the temple and went home rejoicing and giving glory to God. After nine months, Anna bore a daughter, whom she named Mary. And that is the story of Mary's conception and birth, as recorded in the "Protoevangelium of James."

July 26th, the Memorial of Saints Joachim and Anne, Parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary (and grandparents of Jesus), is a good day to send your grandparents a special note of blessing! If they live nearby, why not invite them to celebrate Mass with you on this feast day, then make or treat them to breakfast or lunch afterwards? And grandparents, take this opportunity to share your faith stories with your grandchildren! If your grandparents are no longer living, say a prayer for them and remember them in a special way on this feast day. Are their "elders" in your parish and neighborhood who live far from family, or have no grandchildren of their own? Include them in your celebration of this feast, as well!