

St. Anne Parish History—Part 1

The Life of St. Anne

“The Revelation of St. James”

Editors Note: The following biography of St. Ann is used by permission from St. Ann’s Media, Scranton, PA. The Passionist fathers (they spell Ann without the “e”) there host weekly novenas to St. Anne and an annual 10-day novena which attracts some 10,000 people.

By Father Peter Grace, C.P.

Christians, from the earliest times, had an interest in knowing more about Jesus’ family, especially about his mother and his grandmother.

Ann is the name of the Jewish woman who was Jesus’ grandmother and the virgin Mary’s mother. We know nothing about Ann from the Bible. A third century Greek manuscript called “the revelation of James” tells a fictional story about Mary and her parents Joachim and Ann. The story was probably written around the year 160 AD, by a non-Jewish Christian.

The Ancient Story

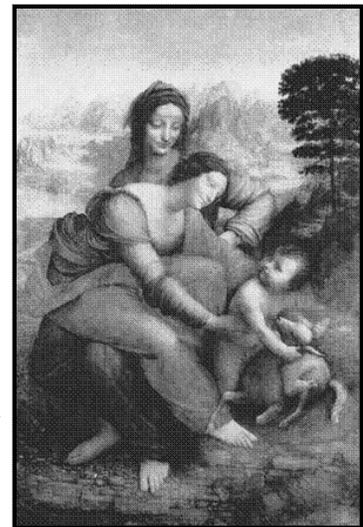
According to the ancient story called the “Gospel of James,” Ann the mother of Mary, was born in Bethlehem, where, years later, Jesus would be born. She married Joachim from Nazareth in Galilee. Their marriage was blessed in many ways. They loved each other very much and over the years their love only 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.

Unfortunately, after 20 years of marriage, Ann 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.

The 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 Anna,



The Virgin and Child with St. Anne by Leonardo da Vinci.

Samuel. Your wife Ann 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 Ann, 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."

***"... The Lord has
heard your prayer.
You shall conceive
a child."***

Suddenly, the angel of the Lord came to her and said, "Ann, 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, Ann conceived and bore a daughter, and called her Mary, a common name for Jewish women of the time.

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 seemed to know that her life was to serve God. The temple of God so near her home was a place she loved; there was nowhere else she would rather be. So as a little girl just three years old, her parents watched her ascend the 15 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, Ann 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.

***The one whose branch
flowered would
marry Mary.***

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 be-

trothed 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. Ann 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 Ann and Joachim died, or where, we do not know, none of the ancient stories tell us. But a later tradition says, that Jesus was with Ann and Joachim when they passed away.

Western churches have celebrated the feast of St. Ann since the 16th century.

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 550 A.D., a church in honor of Saint Ann was built in Jerusalem near the temple area on the site where Ann, 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 Ann, the conception of Saint Ann, and the feast of Saint Ann. The Western churches have celebrated the feast of Saint Ann since the 16th century.

Devotion to Saint Ann

Devotion to Saint Ann 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 Ann.

Loved by sailors and miners

According to the legend, the bishop, St Auspice, buried the body of St. Ann in a cave under the church of St Mary in Apt, France.

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 around Marseilles, France were very devoted to Saint Ann and their devotion spread to other parts of Europe and



A banner in our church showing three generations of Jesus' family: Anne (on top) Mary and Jesus.

The ancient shrines of St. Ann in Jerusalem and in Apt still exist, Saint Ann is the patroness of Brittany in France, a land of sailors. The great shrine of Sainte Anne 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 Anne 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 Ann.

“St. Ann will take care of her own.”

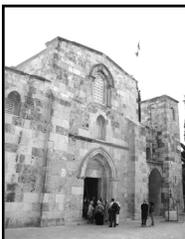
The monastery was built over a coal mine. On August 15, 1911 the monastery shook, cracked and split due to a severe mine subsidence. The community of priests moved out, but they had complete confidence that they would be able to come back again. In their words, “Saint Ann will take care of her own.”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

A gigantic “squeeze”

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 Ann. The next morning, on an inspection of the mines under the monastery, the miners found that the slide had suddenly stopped, turned back and settled solidly under the monastery.

So started the history of devotion to Saint Ann at Saint Ann's Shrine in Scranton.

The magnificent structure, which is now Saint Ann's Monastery Church, was dedicated on April 2nd, 1929. There, the weekly Saint Ann's Novena has continued every Monday throughout the years. More than 10,000 people per day attend the annual ten-day Saint Ann's Solemn Novena which begins July 17 and ends on July 26, the feast of Saint Ann.



The Church of St. Anne, Jerusalem

The oldest church dedicated to St. Anne stands in the

Arab Quarter of Jerusalem, built on the site that ancient tradition identifies as the location of the home of St. Anne and St. Joachim, and the birthplace of Mary. The first church was erected on this site about the year 475; it was replaced by the present structure by Crusaders in 1140. The building's elegant architecture and remarkable acoustics make it the finest example of Crusader architecture in the Holy Land.

When the Muslims reconquered Jerusalem from the Crusaders, their reverence for Mary led them to preserve the building, converting it a school for Islamic studies. It remained thus until it was restored to Christian use in 1856.

Today the Church of St. Anne remains beautiful in its simplicity and elegance. A statue of St. Anne with Mary stands in an apse at the back of the church. A stairway leads to a crypt beneath the nave, marking the site of the birth of the Blessed Virgin.

Our parish's Centennial Pilgrimage to the Holy Land will visit the Church of St. Anne in Jerusalem for a special time of prayer and intercession for our community.