



July 24, 2011
The Solemnity of Sts Joachim and Anne
Parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary (17th week of OT)

*"We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."
Romans 8:28*

Dear Friends;

Today we celebrate our parish feast day. Nothing is mentioned in the New Testament about them. But the names Anna and Joachim were given to the parents of Mary by Christians who wanted to honor them. Much of the stories about them are contained in a book (AD 145) that was and is held in high regard in both the Greek and Latin speaking Churches—the *Proto-evangelium of James*, sometimes called the *Infancy Gospel of James*.

The story of Joachim and Anne is a type of Christian Midrash (a Jewish way of explaining something by using Scripture). According to the *Infancy Gospel of James* Joachim and Anne were *anawim*, that is part of the poor faithful remnant of God's people. They were like Zechariah and Elizabeth or Mary and Joseph.

Joachim and Anne like Abraham and Sarah, Elizabeth and Zechariah were barren. They prayed for a child for many years. And finally it was revealed to them, in separate apparitions by the angel Gabriel, that they were to have a daughter who would be a worthy mother for the Messiah. They named their daughter Mary, and when she was very young they brought her to the Temple in Jerusalem where they dedicated her to God.

The name "Anne" or "Anna" is the English form of the biblical name Hannah—meaning "grace." In the Old Testament Hannah was a barren woman who begged in tears that God would give her a child. She conceived and bore a son the prophet Samuel. The name Anne also recalls the story in Luke where at the time of Jesus' presentation in the Temple an elderly prophetess, Anna, blesses God for the redemption of Israel.

What I find interesting about this story of Joachim and Anne is it represents a new twist. When we look at all the infancy type stories in Scripture it is always a male child that is desired and promised by God. In the story of Joachim and Anne it is a girl-child that is promised, celebrated and loved. After Jesus the early Church increasingly puts value on the call and purpose of women in God's plan for salvation. This story embodies that opening of the door to valuing women in their fullness.

There is a church in Israel built over the place where it is said that St Anne was born. A few years ago when on pilgrimage to the Holy Land my group celebrated Mass in Jerusalem in a Crusader era church dedicated to St Anne. It was said to be over the place where Joachim, Anne and Mary once lived. St Anne was very popular throughout the Middle Ages and beyond. Traveling through Europe you find her image everywhere. In Quebec in the little town of Beaupré there is a shrine dedicated to St Anne and nearly 200,000 people visit each year.

In many countries people make a point of naming one of their daughters Anne. It is also a day in parts of Europe where people celebrate young women and grandparents as well. The official feast day is July 26 (we are anticipating it this Sunday as it is a Solemn feast in our parish). We are blessed to have such a patron and I pray that we use this day to celebrate the gift of women and the wisdom of our elders and grandparents.

Happy Feast Day!

Sr Ron