

Feast of St. Ann

What is the greatest story ever told? As Christians, your answer should be “The Gospels
But have you ever asked yourself when, where and how “the greatest story ever told” begins?

When we look at the Gospels, we find that each author has a different beginning point. After going home, you may like to check the beginning point of all the four Gospel writers.

The Christians from the earliest times had another starting point for the Good News, the greatest story ever told, totally different from the Gospels. And they were able to do so based on unwritten family history passed on by oral traditions. And this unwritten story began with an ordinary family, an ordinary couple, a man and wife. His name was Joachim. Her name in Hebrew was Hannah, meaning “grace” or “favor”; she is known to us better by the name as it comes through the Greek: Anna or Anne.

Joachim and Anna were an ordinary couple, as ordinary as perhaps most of you couples present here. They were warm, loving and caring for each other. They were blessed with material abundance. and from their abundance they offered one third of their material blessing to the work of the Temple and its priests; one third to the needs of the poor; and they cared for themselves with the remaining third.

But they lacked one thing each couple dreams – a child. This couple had to bear the pain of childlessness which was a social stigma at that time and considered a punishment from God. And after being ridiculed in the temple, in despair Joachim almost committed suicide as he hid himself in some cave leaving Ann all by herself.

So, one might say that they had everything – except the joy of children.

Yet, the greatest story of human history starts with such an ordinary family, ordinary couple—giving us hope that God can make wonderful things happen.

And a wonderful thing did happen for Joachim and Anna, a wonderful thing for all humanity. A child was born, a little girl. They gave her a name from the history of God’s mercy on His people, the name of the sister of Moses—Miriam. Today, when we call her blessed, we address her as Mary. And we call her blessed, because she gave birth to the Savior, to Jesus Christ – to God in the flesh.

Joachim and Anna were well along in years when they became parents—in their late sixties at the least. Their child was a miracle. Not only this child was a miracle, but in fact every child is a miracle born in the image of God himself. It is so unfortunate and sad that many parents today prevent this miracle to happen.

The infant Mary was a miracle. But she was not magical. She was not born ready made for her role as the Virgin Mother. The work of Joachim and Anna in God’s plan of salvation did not end after a conception and nine months of pregnancy. They were called to prepare her for this great role. All parents must play a similar role - to prepare a child to become an adult—through instruction, through patience, by word and example.

This, too, is part of the greatest story ever told. That the mother of our God had parents who were role models of love and self-sacrifice, of perseverance and prayer.

Today Joachim and Ann are honored because it is, they who nurtured Mary, taught her, brought her up to be a worthy Mother of God. It was their teaching that led her to respond to God's request with faith, "Let it be done to me as you will." It was their example of parenting that Mary must have followed as she brought up her own son, Jesus. It was their faith that laid the foundation of courage and strength that allowed her to see her son die on the cross.

The strong characteristics of Mary that are evidenced in her decision-making, her steadiness in the face of crisis, her practice of continuous prayer and treasuring the Word in her heart, her devotion to the Jewish practices and traditions, her dedicated services to relatives and neighbors all are indications of the close-knit, loving and God-fearing upbringing she had.

So, this feast of St. Ann and Joachim should inspire all the parents and grandparents to become like Sts. Ann and Joachim. They should help their children and grandchildren grow up in faith so much so that some of them could later on be able to say as Mary said "thy will be done" and dedicate their lives fully in the service of God as priests and nuns. This is the biggest challenge for the parents, grandparents and children and grandchildren of St. Ann parish Warsaw today.

This feast of St. Ann and Joachim should also inspire the young ones to love and care for their parents and grandparents as well as other elders as Mary and Jesus did.

Life of St. Ann and Joachim should inspire us to be generous as they donated 2/3 of their income to the temple and the needy people. You can still donate to diocesan mission collection or towards the construction of St. Ann church in my hometown or to support the St. Ann nuns in my diocese.