

The Basilica of Saint Anne, Jerusalem



The construction of the Walls of Jerusalem and its gates are credited to Suleiman the Magnificent in 1539.

The Lions Gate is one of the seven gates located in the Old City Walls of Jerusalem. This gate is also known as St. Stephen's Gate as it was through this gate that the Sanhedrin threw him out of the city and stoned him (Acts 6 & 7). The road through the Lion's gate leads to Mary's house and thus the gate is also known as Saint Anna's gate or St. Mary's Gate or in Arabic *Bab Sitna-Mariam*. Christian celebration of Holy Week generally begins with processes through the Lion's Gate.



The gardens of the Basilica of Saint Anne.



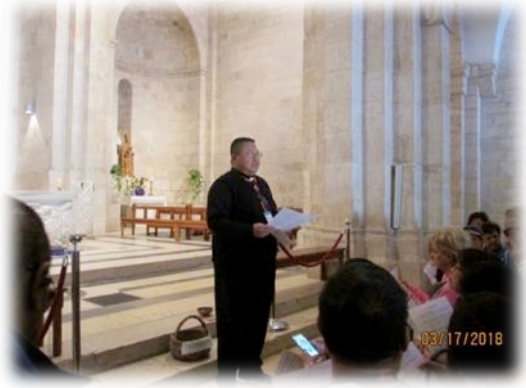
The Basilica of Saint Anne with the pools of Bethesda in the foreground.

In the 5th century a Byzantine basilica was built over the site of what was believed to have been the birthplace and home of Mary, the mother of Jesus. This church was destroyed in 614 by Persian invaders, and was occupied by various Muslim rulers until Jerusalem was liberated during the First Crusade. The existent Basilica of Saint Anne was built over the site of the original Byzantine church between 1131-1138 during the reign of Queen Milisende. The city was once again conquered by the Muslims under the leadership of Saladin. Unlike many of the Crusader churches in Jerusalem the Basilica of Saint Anne was not destroyed but turned into a *madrassa* (Islamic school). In 1856 the Church was gifted to the French government for their support of the Ottoman Empire during the

Crimean War. The Church is currently administered by the French Catholic order called the "White Fathers," named after the distinctive white robes that they wear.



Nave of the Basilica of Saint Anne.



Father Joel conducting the OLS Pilgrims Choir.



Sanctuary and altar of the Basilica of Saint Anne.

The Basilica of Saint Anne's is a classic Crusader Church built in the Romanesque style. It is simple, unadorned, with clean lines and is known for its remarkable acoustics. The OLS pilgrims had the opportunity to test out the legendary acoustics under the direction of maestro Father Joel. We sounded amazing!—a credit to the architectural genius of its Medieval builders.



Grotto of the Basilica of Saint Anne.



Grotto and Basilica of Saint Anne.



Statue of Saint Anne and her daughter, Mary, at the Basilica of St. Anne.

The Basilica of Saint Anne is dedicated to the mother of Jesus, Mary. What does the Holy Scriptures have to tell us about Anne and her husband, Joachim? Well, actually nothing, they are not mentioned anywhere in the New Testament. So how is it that we know that they were the parents of Mary? Tradition. Much of the source material regarding Anne and Joachim originates from what is called the *Infancy Gospel of James*. This apocryphal gospel is believed to have been written around 150AD so it is not possible for James to have written it since he was martyred in 65AD. It is likely that much of the content of the *Infancy Gospel* had been passed on by word of mouth until it was finally collated by the author who used the name of the Lord's "brother" as a means to add credibility to the narrative. Although the Church Fathers rejected the *Infancy Gospel of James* from the canon of the New Testament it still contributed

significantly to beliefs, and practices of the Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican Churches. So what does the *Infancy Gospel of James* tell us about Mary's early life?

The story begins with the father of Mary, Joachim. He is a rich man who gives one third of everything he has to the poor. When he goes to bring an offering to the Lord the High Priest rejects Joachim's offering telling him that he is not worthy to bring an offering to the Lord as he is childless. Dismayed, Joachim goes off into the desert for forty days to fast and pray and to beseech the Lord to give he and his wife, Anne, a child.

Meanwhile, Anne is at home in despair fearing that her husband is dead, and because of her childlessness. While in the garden she sees a sparrow's nest and laments that even the birds and the beast have offspring. At this moment an angel appears to her saying, "*Anna, Anna, the Lord hath heard thy prayer, and thou shalt conceive, and shall bring forth; and thy seed shall be spoken of in all the world.*" Joachim, likewise, was visited by an angel who spoke to him saying, "*Joachim, Joachim, the Lord God hath heard thy prayer go down hence; for, behold, thy wife Anna shall conceive. So Joachim obeyed the angel and returned to Jerusalem. When Anna saw her husband approaching the Golden Gate she ran and embraced him saying, "Now I know that the Lord God hath blessed me exceedingly; for, behold the widow no longer a widow, and I the childless shall conceive."*

Anna promised the Lord that she would offer her child to the Lord as Hannah had done with Samuel. And when her time was due, Anna gave birth to a girl, and they named her Mary. And Mary grew strong and when she was a year old her parents held a great feast and invited the priests, and the scribes, and the elders of all of Israel. Joachim then presented Mary to the priests and they proclaimed, "*O God of our fathers, bless this child, and give her an everlasting name to be named in all generations.*" And all the people said: "*So be it, so be it, amen.*"

When Mary was three years old the "undefiled" daughters of the Hebrews brought her to the Temple. *And the priest received her, and kissed her, and blessed her, saying: The Lord has magnified thy name in all generations. In thee, on the last of the days, the Lord will manifest His redemption to the sons of Israel. And he set her down upon the third step of the altar, and the Lord God sent grace upon her; and she danced with her feet, and all the house of Israel loved her.*

So like Hannah left Samuel in the Temple with the priest, Eli, and then return home, Anne and Joachim left Mary in the care of the priest of the Temple: "*And her parents went down marvelling, and praising the Lord God, because the child had not turned back. And Mary was in the temple of the Lord as if she were a dove that dwelt there, and she received food from the hand of an angel.*" This ends that which the author of the *Infancy Gospel* had written in regards to the parent of Mary. Joachim and Anna are much beloved in the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. As the grandparents of Jesus, the Church recognizes them as the Patron Saints of Grandparents. A Troparion of the Orthodox Church is dedicated to Joachim and Anna:

*Let us sing praises to Joachim and Anna, the couple honored by God (and they are His kinsmen).
They have borne for us the Maiden who in a manner beyond understanding gave birth to Him Who though
fleshless, became the incarnate to save the world. With her they intercede for our souls.*

Kevin's Reflection:



Joachim and Anne Meet at the Golden Gate
by Giotto di Bondone, 1305

My *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) friends would not understand the Catholic and Orthodox love of Tradition and, therefore, our devotion to Saint Anne and Saint Joachim. I think this is borne out of a misunderstanding of what Tradition means in the life of the Christian Catholic and Orthodox. For many Protestants, Tradition is at best an unnecessary adjunct and at worst, a source of heterodoxy. For the Christian Catholic or Orthodox, Tradition is a beautiful compliment that elucidates the Holy Scripture in the life of the believer. Tradition is not equal to Holy Scripture, rather like the Magisterium in Catholicism or the Ecumenical Councils in Orthodoxy, it is a servant to the Divine Word (Catechism of the Catholic Church 86). As such, Tradition must be coherent with the *depositum fidei*, that is, the “Sacred deposit” of the faith handed down by the apostles. In this regard Catholics and Orthodox are not *Sola Scriptura*, but *Primatus Scriptura*, that is we give primacy to the Holy Scripture in that all that the Church lives and teaches must be coherent with the Word of God.

When I think of Tradition and how it operates in my life I think of the Parable of the Sower:

“A sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep, ⁶ and when the sun rose it was scorched, and it withered for lack of roots. ⁷ Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it. ⁸ But some seed fell on rich soil, and produced fruit, a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold.”
(Matt 13:3-8)

The soil is our hearts and its receptivity to the Word of God. As Catholics and Orthodox Christians our soil is not placed in individual pots, but in the field which is the Church. This field is enriched with the humus of Tradition. Our roots grow deep into this soil assimilating our two thousand year heritage of Faith. Our prayers and worship are united in a mystical way in oneness with both the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant. Through Scripture and Tradition we enter into the Mystery of the Word made Flesh as we are transformed into the Bride of the Lamb.

Joachim and Anne are part of the Tradition of the Church, and as such we must move beyond forensic analysis of their authenticity and enter into the mystery of their lives through devotion and prayer. It was through Joachim and Anne that God prepared a mother worthy to receive His Son. Mary, full of grace, is the culmination of all that the Law and the Prophets could produce, and her Son is its fulfillment. Joachim and Anne are more than historical figures, or even archetypal parents and grandparents to whom every Christian parent should seek to imitate, they are living saints who stand before the throne of God interceding for every parent and grandparents who asks their assistance in prayer.

Jan's Reflection:

My first impression of St. Anne's Church is the spirit of joy reflected in the music and the amazing acoustics which gives way to making a joyful noise unto the Lord.

Joachim and Anne, the parents of Mary, were childless until God met them in their prayers and suffering. Mary was the fruit of their prayers and seeking God. Mary, our spiritual mother, the example for all in the Church, gives birth to Jesus through her, “Yes.” This place cements the reality of our spiritual grandparents and the birthplace of our spiritual mother, and how we too give birth to Jesus in our hearts.



Prayer to Joachim and Anna

Joachim and Anne, you cried out to the Lord in your barrenness, and God promised you a child whom “all generations would call blessed.” You believed God and acting in accordance with faith you embraced each other in love at the Golden Gate of Jerusalem. Joachim and Anne, pray for all of us who seek to bear fruit for the Kingdom of God. Like you, grandparents of the Word Incarnate, let us turn to each other in love confident in knowing that it is through the Church that we grow, mature, and “produce fruit a hundred, sixty, or thirtyfold.” Amen.