

Sermon: 18 July 2021,

Patronal Festival: St Anne Zeph 3:14-20; Jas 1:16-21; Lk 1:26-33

May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be now and always acceptable unto You O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

The canon of Scripture as we know it today contains no information at all about St Anne. I've been known to be a bit sceptical of things that aren't in the OT/NT, and it's a very Protestant thing to be ... sceptical about things Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox. But we need to be careful with such rigid positions. It's entirely appropriate that we identify the difference between authentic history and legend, but we shouldn't dismiss the power of a story to comfort and restore the faithful. Think of the way we use analogy and metaphor to tell other stories with greater colour and depth of understanding.

All our information concerning Mary's parents, is derived from apocryphal literature: the Gospel of the Nativity of Mary, the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew and the *Protoevangelium*, or Gospel of James. In the Eastern Church the Gospel of James had great authority, but in the West it was rejected until its contents were incorporated into other popular stories in the thirteenth century. From that time on, the story of St. Anne spread quickly until she became one of the most popular saints of the Latin Church.

The Gospel of James says the following:

"In Nazareth there lived a rich and pious couple, Joachim and Hannah. They were childless. When, on a feast day Joachim presented himself to offer sacrifice in the temple, he was repulsed by a certain Ruben, under the pretext that men without offspring were unworthy to be admitted. Whereupon Joachim, bowed down with grief, did not return home, but went into the mountains to make his plaint to God in solitude. Hannah, having eventually learned the reason of the prolonged absence of her husband, also cried to the Lord to take away from her the curse of sterility, promising to

dedicate her child to the service of God. Their prayers were heard. An angel came to Hannah and said: "*Hannah, the Lord has looked upon thy tears; thou shalt conceive and give birth and the fruit of thy womb shall be blessed by all the world*". The angel made the same promise to Joachim, who returned to his wife. Hannah gave birth to a daughter whom she called Miriam (Mary)."

The supposed relics of St. Anne were brought from the Holy Land to Constantinople in 710 and were still kept there in the church of St. Sophia. The tradition of the church of Apt in southern France pretends that the body of St. Anne was later brought to Apt by St. Lazarus, the friend of Christ, was then hidden by St. Auspicius, and were found again during the reign of Charlemagne. St. Anne is the patroness of Brittany, and of Canada, where she is the principal patron of the province of Quebec. St. Anne is patroness of women in labour and of miners; Christ being compared with gold, Mary with silver. [*From New Advent*]

How St Anne came to be associated with this church here, I don't know, but it may have been that this building was dedicated on or near the date of her feast. Does anybody here have a better story? I heard recently that our church at Woodbury was dedicated to St Thomas *by mistake* ... apparently the Bishop who did the job said the wrong name on the day! I think that's quite funny, but I can imagine that it might have upset a few people at the time. Whether or not it's true doesn't really matter ... it's a good story.

The main point of Anne's story though supports the veneration of Mary, the mother of Jesus. The Roman Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception applies to Mary not to Jesus.

The doctrine says that in order for Jesus to have been born sinless, His mother also needed to be born to a virgin, hence the story we've heard this morning.

You know that I, along with many other Protestants, find this doctrine less compelling than some, but I don't see a problem with others holding a different view if helps them recognise both the humanity and the divinity of our Lord.

Our OT reading today commands us to *rejoice at good news: the enemy has been/will be turned away ... the Lord is King ... the people have nothing to fear.*

The prophet pictures a day when all the sorrows associated with our sin and judgment will be removed and our burden relieved ... and this was fulfilled by the incarnation of Anne's grandson; the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

The NT reading reminds us of Jesus' divinity and encourages us to *not be deceived*. Remember that in the aftermath of Jesus' resurrection many prophets claimed to receive visions from God, and James encouraged the faithful encourages us to remember that *every good gift comes from above ... that Jesus gave us birth by word of Truth ... in essence God's Truth is implanted in us as a gift. He also encourages us to be quick to listen and slow to speak, [because] ... anger does not produce righteousness ... [and] we need to be doers of the Word, not merely hearers of it.*

These messages are brought together in the gospel reading where we hear a five-fold description of who Jesus will be when He is born: God's Son, David's heir, future king, whose reign will never end ... *Messiah!* The language used tells us that Mary was just an ordinary girl; she was not especially pious or religious. While she was *highly favoured by God*, she was also *deeply troubled*, perhaps in part because of the scandal and grief that she knew would follow.

In one sense I like the fact that Jesus had real grandparents because it makes Him more human and credible as a human person, but in another I know that His Truth stands alone and doesn't need all the pomp associated with St's Anne and Joachim. I'm going to leave you to make your own judgments on this one.

Amen.