

## **Ask Fr. James**

### **How did we Catholics come about the stories of the parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary?**

St. Anne and St. Joachim are the parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary. True, many people ask: "How did Mary's mother, a woman not mentioned in the New Testament, rise to this lofty status of St. Anne and her Father, to St Joachim?" This question has led to nonetheless, an unsurprising amount of interest in the parentage of the Virgin Mary, the woman who had been worthy to bear the Son of God, especially that the canonical Gospels contain no reference to Mary's parents, although the gospels provide extensive genealogical lists of Jesus' ancestors through to Joseph.

The Catholic Church came about the legends about Mary and her parents in some other gospels called apocryphal texts. These books did not make it into the Holy Bible. The main apocryphal text that contained the story is called Protoevangelium of St. James, a Greek text written around 150 A.D. and translated into Latin by the fourth century. Stories about Mary and her parents also appeared in the apocryphal Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew (mid-fifth century A.D.) and the apocryphal Gospel of the Birth of Mary (sixth century A.D.).

These legends had it that Anne and her husband, Joachim, having been married for twenty years and living according to the laws of God, although rich and of noble descent from the line of David, could not have children. Joachim, one day goes to the Temple to make his yearly offering, and unable to face his friends or his wife any longer travels out into the desert to stay with his flocks and there spends his time fasting and praying and Anne too spent time weeping and praying.

After a month, during which the couple has been praying separately, an angel (often identified as the Archangel Gabriel, thus establishing a parallel with the Annunciation) visits both of them to inform them that God has heard their prayers, and that they will soon be blessed with a daughter, who will herself be an especially holy child. This came to pass.

St. Anne and St. Joachim inspired universal following as model for Christian marriage because of the way they handled the problem they faced in their marriage. They were declared saints in aid of maternity and models for grandparents. In the prayers asking for their intercession, the church prays: O glorious Sts. Joachim and Anne, grandparents of the most high, who by your example of married life, Mary and Joseph learnt how to be most chaste, we pray that our families may grow in holiness and be grace filled and by your powerful intercession guide all grandparents to be great examples of faith. July 26<sup>th</sup> is their feast day.