

December 9

The Conception of the Holy Virgin Theotokos by Saint Anna



Saint Joachim and Anna who lived in Nazareth in Galilee «in the whole piety of the Mosaic law», up to their very old age had no children (see 8 September). On one great feast the righteous Joachim, according to the custom of the law, gave gifts and offerings to God in the temple in Jerusalem. The high priest Issachar who accepted the offerings of the numerous throngs of people, and did not want to accept the gifts from Joachim, telling him: «It is not right to accept gifts from you as from a true Israelite; for you are childless; because of some kind of heavy sins you have not received the blessing of God». Struck by the speech of the High Priest, as though by the awesome verdict of the judgment of God Himself, the righteous man had no time even to withdraw from the altar, as a new heavier insult struck his hearing. One of the Israelites bringing his gifts, pushed him away, said: «depart from here, did you not hear that you are unworthy to bring gifts to God together with us, because you have not left offspring for Israel». With deep humility Joachim accepted this accusation as if it were from the mouth of the very God with deep sadness left the temple, with a painful heart he recognized himself unworthy not only to remain in the sight of the house of God, but also to return to his own house, and he withdrew to the desert, where he grazed his cattle. In fasting and repentance, in tears and prayer he spent 40 days, imploring the Lord to forgive him all his sins, to remove his dishonor in Israel, to bless him in old age by the birth of a child.

The inexpressible sadness of heart struck the righteous Anna also, when she heard about the disgrace of her spouse before the altar of God by the numerous throngs of the sons of Israel on the day of the great feast of the Lord. She herself was judged by all for the guilt, the sin of all Israelite wives, unworthy to even see the light of God because she was deprived of

God's blessing. Having confined herself to her room, in fasting and repentance, in tears and in sighing she cried out to the Lord day and night, imploring Him not for her sake, but for the sake of the piety of her righteous spouse, to relive them from the curse of childlessness and to bless the fruit of her womb. Being alone in the garden under the shade of the laurel tree, Saint Anna saw a bird's nest, about which the mother flew feeding her nestlings. Everything in nature, Saint Anna thought, gives birth, everything is by the blessings of God – the birds of the sky, the animals of the forest and the very earth in growing various fruits, but she alone is deprived of happiness and the blessings of God. Even more fervently Saint Anna began to pray to the Lord and the Lord heard her tearful prayer: she heard (the voice of the angel proclaimed to her: God has granted you the desire of your prayer». «Thou, the Angel announced to her, will conceive and give birth to the Most Blessed Daughter, before whom all with knees to the ground will bless and who will be the salvation of the world; her name will be Mary». Pleased by the heavenly annunciation, Saint Anna quickly sped to Jerusalem to pour out before the Lord, in His sacred temple her feelings of thanksgiving and the joy that filled her heart.

At the same time the heavenly messenger was revealed to the crying and praying Joachim in the desert with the same joyful annunciation, and with the confirmation of his words commanded him to go to Jerusalem, where he returned to his wife. Before the doors of the temple of God the rejoicing spouses met, with one voice glorified and thanked over and again the Lord God, who saw their humility; with one voice have promised before the Lord to devote to Him their promised children. Soon, after returning to their home, the pious spouses were even happier with the fulfillment of the divine promise: Saint Anna conceives in her womb and “begins to grow the divine rod, who will sprout the mysterious flower of Christ, the Creator of all.” “Come joyful day, exclaims the Holy Church in its hymns for this day, all the orders and ages of mankind, with the angelic choirs let us celebrate the glorious conception of the Theotokos: the patriarchs – the Mother of all kings, the prophets – the One Whom you prophesied, the forefathers – the One Whom from us is the Mother of God, the elders – the ancestors of God, the ancestors of God – the Maiden of God, the virgins – the Ever Virgin One, the faithful – the roots of faith, the priests – the all dedicated temple of God, the saints of all people – the wine of your assemblies, the angelic hosts – gave birth to the Master of all creation and the Savior of our souls. (1).

Troparion, Tone 4

Today the bonds of barrenness are broken,

**For God has heard the prayers of Joachim and Anna.
He has promised them beyond all their hopes,
To bear the Maiden of God,
By whom the indescribable One was born as mortal man,
Who commanded an angel to cry to her: //
Rejoice, full of grace, the Lord is with you.**

Kontakion, Tone 4

**Today the universe celebrates
The conception by Anna, through the grace of God:
For she has conceived the one who will give birth to the ineffable Word.**

Notes:

(1) The Holy Orthodox Church, calls the conception by Saint Anna of the Most Holy Theotokos "most glorious", nevertheless is far from the idea to recognize her as immaculate, in the idea of perfect freedom from the original sin. The only sinless one is the Word of God the Lord Jesus Christ, the God-man, incarnate from the Most Holy Virgin Mary through the infusion of the Holy Spirit (Mt 1: 18,20; Luke 1:35; 1 Peter 1:19, 2:22; 1 John 3:5; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 7:26), and the Holy Fathers agree that the Most Holy Virgin Theotokos Mary was conceived, though it is wonderful - from barren parents, but not beyond the usual laws of human birth. The Holy Orthodox Church teaches, that the Most Holy Virgin was born according to the ordinary law of human birth, but also for the mystery of the incarnation of the Word of God Who was «pre-cleansed by the Spirit in soul and body » (Tserkovniya Vedomosti (Church News) 1888, 36).

Epistle Gal: 4:22-31; sel. 210. **Gospel** Luke: 8:16-21; sel. 36.

Holy Prophetess Anna, Mother of the Prophet Samuel

For a long time she had no children and suffered much distress because of her barrenness. Finally, because of her prayers, she was granted a son from the Lord, whom she named Samuel (which means obtained from God by entreaties). She lived about 1100 years before the Nativity of Christ.

Venerable Stephen the New Light

The son of a God-fearing Constantinopolitan Presbyter Zechariah, he from youth served the Lord among the clergy of the Great Church of

Constantinople, persevering in fasting and prayer. After the death of his father, the Venerable Stephen led a reclusive life and thus was glorified for his ascetical struggles, that was worthy of a vision of the Holy Apostle Peter and St. Antipas. The Venerable Stephen died in the ninth century. The "new light" refers to his extreme ascetical struggles, which is compared to his ancient obedience, which shone "in abstinence and every kind of good deeds".

St. Sophronius, Archbishop of Cyprus

He was glorified for his life of good deeds, love of the poor and strict abstinence. For this he was worthy of the gift from the Lord to work miracles. He lived in the sixth century.

*S.V. Bulgakov, Manual for Church Servers, 2nd ed. 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900) pp. 450-452.
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