

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Anne, Mother of the Virgin Mary

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: July 26

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IN BRIEF

Saint Anne, Mother of the Virgin Mary

Mother of the Virgin Mary and grandmother of Jesus according to tradition, wife of Saint Joachim, patron saint of mothers and grandparents.

Feast day	July 26
Canonized	pre-congregation (venerated since the early Church)
Patron saint of	mothers, grandparents, pregnant women, couples hoping for a child, Brittany, Quebec, carpenters, cabinetmakers

In this booklet

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Novena to Saint Anne

Sainte-Anne-d'Auray, Shrine of Saint Anne in Brittany

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Anne, Mother of the Virgin Mary

Saint Anne is, according to Christian tradition, the mother of the Virgin Mary and therefore the grandmother of Jesus. The Gospels say nothing about her, not even her name: it comes from a 2nd-century writing, the Protoevangelium of James. With her husband, Saint Joachim, she has been venerated for centuries in East and West alike. Patron saint of mothers, grandparents, Brittany and Quebec, she is celebrated together with Saint Joachim on July 26.

Who was Saint Anne?

The New Testament introduces Mary but never mentions her parents. Everything tradition knows about Saint Anne comes from an apocryphal account, that is, a text not included in the Bible: the Protoevangelium of James, written around the middle of the 2nd century. This text, widely read in the early Church, tells of the birth and childhood of Mary. It is not a historical document in the modern sense, but it is a precious witness to the devotion of the first Christians toward the mother of Jesus and her family.

Her name, Anne, is the Greek form of the Hebrew Hannah, meaning "grace." It recalls Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel in the Old Testament, who also remained childless for many years before receiving a son through prayer.



The meeting of Anne and Joachim at the Golden Gate, fresco by Giotto (c. 1305).

Key dates

- **1st century BC**: Life of Anne and Joachim, parents of Mary, according to tradition; no dates are known.
- **c. 150**: The Protoevangelium of James is written, giving their names and the story of Mary's birth.
- **6th century**: Emperor Justinian builds a church dedicated to Saint Anne in Constantinople.
- **12th century**: The Crusaders build the Church of Saint Anne in Jerusalem, on the traditional site of the home of Joachim and Anne.
- **1584**: Pope Gregory XIII extends the feast of Saint Anne to the whole Latin Church.
- **1625**: Yvon Nicolazic finds a statue of Saint Anne, the origin of the pilgrimage of Sainte-Anne-d'Auray in Brittany.

- **1969**: The calendar reform unites Anne and Joachim in a single feast on July 26.
- **2021**: Pope Francis establishes the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, held near their feast.

The story told by the Protoevangelium of James

According to this account, Joachim was a wealthy and devout man of Israel, married to Anne. They had no children, which at the time was experienced as a humiliation. One day at the Temple, Joachim's offering was refused because he had no descendants. Hurt, he went into the desert to fast and pray for forty days.

Meanwhile, Anne wept in her garden. She saw a nest of sparrows in a laurel tree and lamented: even the birds have young, and she had none. An angel appeared to her and announced that she would conceive and that her child would be spoken of throughout the world. An angel brought the same message to Joachim. The couple met again at the gate of Jerusalem, which tradition would call the Golden Gate, and embraced. Anne promised to dedicate her child to the Lord.

The child was a girl, whom they named Mary. The account says that when she was three years old, her parents brought her to the Temple, where she grew up. This episode is the origin of the feast of the Presentation of Mary, on November 21.

Saint Anne and the Immaculate Conception

The Immaculate Conception is sometimes confused with the virginal conception of Jesus. The dogma of the Immaculate Conception, defined in 1854, concerns Mary herself: from the moment she was conceived in the

womb of Anne, she was preserved from original sin. Mary was conceived in the natural way, through the union of Joachim and Anne. The feast of December 8 therefore also honors Saint Anne, indirectly.

Devotion to Saint Anne through the centuries

In the East, Saint Anne was venerated early: Justinian dedicated a church to her in Constantinople in the 6th century. In the West, devotion to her grew from the Middle Ages and became very popular in the 15th and 16th centuries. Artists often painted Anne, Mary and the Child Jesus together, three generations in one image, a theme known in German as "Anna Selbdritt."

Brittany made her its patron, and Bretons affectionately call her their grandmother. In Quebec, she has been venerated since the 17th century at the shrine of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, one of the great pilgrimage sites of North America, and many French settlers and sailors brought her devotion to the New World. In the United States, the city of Detroit has honored her since its founding through the parish of Sainte Anne de Detroit.



The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne, by Leonardo da Vinci (Louvre Museum).

Why is Saint Anne the patron saint of mothers and grandparents?

As the mother of Mary and grandmother of Jesus, Saint Anne is naturally invoked by mothers, by pregnant women and by couples who long for a child, in memory of her long wait. With Saint Joachim she is the patron of grandparents, whom Pope Francis wished to honor with a world day. She is also the patron saint of Brittany, Quebec, and of carpenters and cabinetmakers.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Anne in art

Saint Anne is usually shown as a mature woman wearing a cloak, often red or green. She is frequently depicted teaching the young Mary to read, with an open book on her knees, or holding both Mary and the Child Jesus. The most

common scenes of her life are the meeting at the Golden Gate and the birth of Mary.

Where to pray to Saint Anne

In Quebec, the Basilica of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, near Quebec City, welcomes great numbers of pilgrims every year, especially around July 26. In France, the great shrine is Sainte-Anne-d'Auray in Brittany, where a grand "pardon" (pilgrimage festival) takes place on July 26. In Jerusalem, the Church of Saint Anne, next to the Pool of Bethesda, is one of the finest Crusader churches in the Holy Land and stands on the traditional site of Mary's birth.

Praying to Saint Anne

Catholics pray to Saint Anne for families, mothers, grandparents, couples hoping for a child, and children to be raised in the faith. Read the prayer to Saint Anne and pray the novena to Saint Anne, beginning on July 17.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Anne for the Family

Prayers to Saint Anne are many, especially in Quebec and Brittany, where she is loved as "Good Saint Anne." None of them goes back to Anne herself. The prayer below is an original text by Saintspedia, inspired by what tradition tells of her: her long wait for a child, the birth of Mary, and her role as mother and grandmother.

Prayer to Saint Anne

Good Saint Anne, mother of the Virgin Mary
and grandmother of Jesus,
you who knew the long wait and the tears,
and received from God the unexpected joy of a child,
I come to you with confidence.

Watch over my family.
Keep mothers and fathers patient and tender,
children in faith and joy,
grandparents in peace and hope.

You who taught Mary to know and love God,
help us to hand on the faith to those who come after us.

I also entrust to you couples who long for a child,
expectant mothers, divided families,
and all elderly people who feel alone.

With Saint Joachim, your husband,
present our requests to your daughter Mary and your grandson Jesus.
Saint Anne, pray for us. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal, family and parish prayer.

A prayer for grandparents

> *Saint Joachim and Saint Anne, I entrust to you my grandparents (or: my grandchildren). May their wisdom and love be recognized, may their faith be passed on, and may no one be forgotten in old age. Amen.*

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia.

When to pray this prayer

You can pray to Saint Anne at any time, and especially on July 26, the feast of Saints Joachim and Anne, and on the World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly, held on the fourth Sunday of July. It is a good prayer for a couple hoping for a child, for an expectant mother, for parents raising children in the faith, and for grandparents who carry their families in prayer.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Anne, from July 17 to 25, and read the life of Saint Anne.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Anne

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by what tradition tells of Saint Anne and Saint Joachim, the parents of the Virgin Mary. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of their feast, begin on July 17; it ends on July 25, the day before the feast of July 26. You can also pray it at any time of the year for a family, a pregnancy, the hope of a child, or for grandparents.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for each day helps carry the prayer into daily life. If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off. A novena is not a formula that obliges God to answer; it is nine days of perseverance in the company of a grandmother who knew how to wait and trust.



The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne, by Leonardo da Vinci (Louvre Museum).

Opening prayer for each day

Lord God, you chose Saint Joachim and Saint Anne to be the parents of the Virgin Mary, and through them you prepared a home for your Son. As I begin this day of my novena, I place before you my intention (name it in silence), and every member of my family, the living and the dead. Through the prayers of Good Saint Anne, keep us united in love, faithful in prayer, and open to your grace. Saint Anne and Saint Joachim, pray for us. Amen.

Day 1: A family chosen by God

God willed that his Son be born into a family, with parents and grandparents. Saint Anne reminds us that the story of salvation also passes through our ordinary families.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust my intention to you for these nine days, and my whole family with it.

Today: Write down your intention and place it near an image of Saint Anne or of the Virgin Mary.

Day 2: The long wait

According to tradition, Anne and Joachim waited many years for a child. Waiting can be painful, but it is never forgotten by God.

Prayer: Saint Anne, you who knew the long wait, support those who are waiting for a child, a healing or an answer.

Today: Pray for a couple who long for a child.

Day 3: Tears entrusted to God

The Protoevangelium of James shows Anne weeping in her garden and Joachim alone in the desert. Their sorrow becomes prayer. God is not afraid of our tears.

Prayer: Lord, I lay before you what makes me weep. Turn my sorrow into trust.

Today: In silence, entrust to God a pain you have not dared to share with anyone.

Day 4: The joy of the promise

An angel tells Anne that she will have a child. The couple meet again at the Golden Gate and embrace. God's joy always goes beyond our expectations.

Prayer: Saint Anne, teach me to recognize the joys God gives me and to thank him for them.

Today: Write down three reasons to give thanks in your life.

Day 5: The love of husband and wife

Anne and Joachim went through trial and joy together. Their faithfulness is a model for couples today.

Prayer: Saint Joachim and Saint Anne, keep husbands and wives faithful and tender toward each other.

Today: Show a special kindness to your spouse, or pray for a couple in difficulty.

Day 6: Giving a child to God

According to tradition, Anne brought Mary to the Temple to dedicate her to the Lord. Children do not belong to us: they are entrusted to our love.

Prayer: Saint Anne, help parents to love their children without holding them back, and to entrust them to God.

Today: Bless your children, or pray for each of them by name.

Day 7: Handing on the faith

Saint Anne is often shown teaching Mary to read. Handing on the faith begins with simple gestures at home.

Prayer: Saint Anne, help us to pass on the faith to our children and grandchildren, with patience and joy.

Today: Read a passage of the Gospel with your family or to a child.

Day 8: Honoring the elderly

As the grandmother of Jesus, Saint Anne is the patron of grandparents. Older people are the memory of families and carry a precious wisdom.

Prayer: Saint Joachim and Saint Anne, watch over grandparents and over elderly people who are lonely or sick.

Today: Call or visit a grandparent or an elderly person.

Day 9: With Mary, toward Jesus

The whole life of Saint Anne leads to Mary, and Mary leads to Jesus. To pray to Saint Anne is to enter the family of Jesus.

Prayer: Good Saint Anne, present to your daughter Mary and your grandson Jesus the intention I have entrusted to you. Keep my family under your protection.

Today: If possible, attend Mass on July 26, or pray the Rosary with your family.

Closing prayer

Lord God of our fathers, you gave Saint Joachim and Saint Anne the grace of bringing into the world the mother of your incarnate Son. Through their prayers, grant what I have asked in these nine days, if it is your will, and bless my family, from the youngest to the oldest. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Read also the prayer to Saint Anne and the life of Saint Anne.

PILGRIMAGE

Sainte-Anne-d'Auray, Shrine of Saint Anne in Brittany

Sainte-Anne-d'Auray, in the Morbihan, is the foremost place of pilgrimage in Brittany and the great shrine of Saint Anne in France. Since the 17th century, the Bretons have come here to pray to the woman they consider their grandmother and patroness. The great pardon of July 26 gathers thousands of pilgrims every year.



The Basilica of Sainte-Anne-d'Auray, in the Morbihan.

Yvon Nicolazic and the rediscovered statue

In the early 17th century, Yvon Nicolazic, a peasant from the village of Keranna, reported seeing a lady carrying a torch several times, who introduced herself as Anne, the mother of Mary. According to his account, she asked him to rebuild a chapel that had once been dedicated to her on his land. In 1625, guided by a light, Nicolazic discovered an ancient wooden statue of Saint Anne in a field. After an inquiry, the Bishop of Vannes authorized the devotion, and a first chapel was built.

The pilgrimage grew very quickly. The Carmelites, followed by other communities, led it over the following centuries. The original statue was largely destroyed during the Revolution, but a fragment of it is preserved and venerated.

The basilica and the shrine

The present basilica, in the Neo-Renaissance style, was built in the second half of the 19th century. Its tall bell tower is crowned with a statue of Saint Anne. Around it, the shrine includes the Scala Sancta, a monumental staircase that pilgrims climb on their knees in prayer, the miraculous fountain, the cloister, and a treasury rich in ex-votos offered over the centuries, notably by sailors.

The shrine also houses a large memorial to the Bretons who died in World War I. In 1996, Pope John Paul II came on pilgrimage to Sainte-Anne-d'Auray.

The great pardon of July 26

The pardon is the Breton form of pilgrimage. On July 25 and 26, the feast of Saint Anne draws crowds from all over Brittany: solemn Masses, a torchlight procession, parish banners, and traditional costumes. Other pardons and pilgrimages take place throughout the year, especially for families and grandparents.

Tips for your pilgrimage

Sainte-Anne-d'Auray is a few kilometers from Auray, which is reached by train from Paris and Rennes. The shrine is open year-round and admission is free. A pilgrim reception desk provides information on Mass times and lodging options. For the pardon of July 26, it is best to arrive early and book lodging well in advance.

Other places of Saint Anne

In Jerusalem, the Church of Saint Anne, built by the Crusaders in the 12th century near the Pool of Bethesda, stands on the site where tradition places the house of Joachim and Anne and the birth of Mary. It has belonged to France since 1856. In Quebec, the Basilica of Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, near Quebec City, has been a major shrine since the 17th century. In France, according to a local tradition, the cathedral of Apt, in Provence, preserves relics of Saint Anne.

CREDITS

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