

Maria Bambina, Her Immaculate Conception, and the Grandparents of Jesus

Maria Bambina in Italian means Baby Mary. While there is great devotion to the childhood of Mary in Italy, Mexico and Poland, this devotion is not well known in America. St. John Eudes, St. Joseph of Cupertino and St. Padre Pio loved to contemplate the Blessed Mother as a baby, for hers was a perfect reflection of the childhood of Jesus.



This simulacrum or image, modelled in wax by Sister Isabella Chiara Fornari of the Poor Clare Sisters in Todi, Italy, was brought to Milan by Bishop Alberico Simonetta in 1738. After his death, the image was entrusted to the Capuchin sisters of the Monastery of St. Maria degli Angeli, fervent devotees of **the mystery of the Nativity of Mary**. During the suppression of religious congregations, it passed to various groups in varied locations, until it was brought to the Motherhouse of the Sisters of Charity on April 24, 1876. The image, venerated in the novitiate, was only venerated in the chapel on the feast of the Nativity of Mary and its octave. When the face became discolored and unattractive, the image was put in a chest of drawers and only brought out for the feast of Mary's Nativity and its octave. By 1884, Maria Bambina began to work miracles for her devotees. A novice, unable to move, held the image and prayed and was miraculously cured. Other sick sisters were also cured. The sisters became known as the Sisters of Maria Bambina. The next year the yellowed image took on the warm hues of a living baby's face. The Santa Madonnina, little Madonna, was then returned to the Motherhouse in Milan where crowds venerate her to this day. In 1904, the image was solemnly crowned by Cardinal Ferrari, and on September 9, 1990, St. Pope Pius X granted a plenary indulgence on September 8, the Nativity of Mary, in all the chapels of the Sisters of Charity. The devotion spread throughout Italy and beyond. During World War II, the motherhouse was bombed but the image had been sheltered in a safe place. In 1945, the image was returned to Milan and placed in a chapel of the Visitation while the Mother House was being rebuilt. On November 21, 1953, the new shrine was consecrated by Cardinal Schuster and the image was again installed for public veneration. Each year, on the feast of the Nativity of Mary, the sisters touch small pieces of cotton to the miraculous image to distribute to devotees of Maria Bambina. It became a custom to give newlyweds a small wax image of Maria Bambina as a wedding gift. Reference: <http://www.hcikolkata.org/history.php>

What is the mystery of the Nativity of Mary? It is none other than that of the most singular privilege of her Immaculate Conception in the womb of her mother, St. Anne, who with St. Joachim, Mary's father, would be the maternal grandparents of Jesus. Most of what we know about them comes from the second century apocryphal **Protoevangelium of St. James** and the third century **Gospel of the Birth of Mary**. The visions of the mystic, Venerable Anne Catherine Emmerich, coincide with details on Mary's parents and her ancestry contained in the Protoevangelium of St. James. Mary's mother, Anne, was a pious, child-like person born into a wealthy family, but who consistently gave a great portion of it to the temple and the poor. From the age of five to seventeen, Anne

lived in the temple. She did not wish to marry, but was counseled by her ancestors to marry Joachim, also called Heli, whose father Matthat was a stepbrother to Jacob, the father of St. Joseph. At nineteen she married and lived with her parents. Anne and Joachim gave birth to a daughter whom they named Maria, but they did not believe this was the child of the promise made to them by the angel. Anne, having been angry with a maidservant who had entered into a bad relationship and subsequently had a stillborn child, felt God was punishing her.

Leaving Maria with her parents, Anne and Joachim set out for Nazareth for a life of prayer, penance, and seclusion. For nineteen years they prayed but remained barren. Neighbors ridiculed them as bad people for not being blessed with children. When Joachim took sacrifices to the temple to pray, he was ridiculed by the priest for his unfruitfulness and his sacrifices were discarded. The distressed Joachim fled to the Essenes for comfort. Anne, too, was ridiculed by another maidservant as punished by God. She went out to her garden and prayed and wept, when an angel appeared and assured her God had heard both her and Joachim's prayers and they would have a child. She was to meet Joachim at



the Golden Gate of the Temple the next day, for he, too, had been visited by an angel with a similar message. When Joachim arrived, the priest now led him into the Holy of Holies. An angel then gave Joachim a shining globe from the Ark of the Covenant. As he gazed into it, he saw the Most Holy Trinity and the whole plan of salvation and God's preparations through the centuries for the priestly and royal ancestry of the Messiah and of the Virgin who would bear the Messiah into the world. He saw the plan

unfolding before his eyes. While we cannot confirm this story as factual, the Church does refer to the names of Mary's parents as Joachim and Anne and celebrates their feast days. Since Mary was born without original or any sin and was ordained to that most illustrious role of Virgin-Mother of the Redeemer, many believe it would be fitting that her birth would have been miraculous. Her Immaculate Conception, celebrated on December 8th, is nine months before her Nativity on September 8th. <https://www.assumptionbvm.com/the-story-of-the-virgin-marys-miraculous-birth/>

(Venerable Anne Catherine Emmerich, **THE LIFE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY**, Tan Books, 2011, Pages 20-42.)

As for Jesus's paternal grandparents, we turn to another mystic, Maria Cecelia Baij, O.S.B. St. Joseph's father was Jacob, a native of Nazareth, and his mother was Rachel, a native of Bethlehem. How fittingly they mirror Jacob and Rachel of old whose beloved son, Joseph, would be made lord over the Pharaoh's treasures. Jacob and Rachel, too, were childless for a period and prayed and fasted and made sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem, begging for a child. On one trip, Rachel was convinced she would become pregnant, and on returning to Nazareth she saw 3 unusually bright stars hover over their abode, a sign from God that their child was destined to establish the terrestrial trinity on earth and become head of the Holy Family. An angel appeared to each, disclosing mysteries about their child and they were to call him Joseph, for he would be great in the



sight of God. Shortly after, Joseph was born and displayed such beauty and advanced knowledge and grace. At 3 he could read and learned about the Patriarchs and the mysteries of the Jewish Faith. At a young age, he made a vow of perpetual celibacy; to show His pleasure, God sent an angel with a cincture to tie around his waist as a sign of special grace to preserve his purity. At 18, his mother died of a long illness. He had a second guardian angel who communicated God's will to him. He was told his father would die soon also. Relatives took his inheritance, so he went to Jerusalem to be close to the temple and to learn a trade to support himself and to help the poor. The angel informed him God wanted him to be poor, for God would provide what is necessary. By 20, he finished an apprenticeship with a skilled carpenter in the Holy City and became independent. News of a holy maiden in the temple reached his ears, but he had already been given insights about Mary by the angel. Mary was 14 and the eligible men of the house of David were called to the temple, Joseph included, and were given a dry branch. When Joseph's bloomed with white flowers, the priests knew he had been ordained by God to be the spouse of holy Mary. An angel placed a white dove in his hands and bid him accept this gift from God and guard her purity. The priests then consigned Mary to Joseph, and they were betrothed. Joseph had only his small workshop, but Mary remembered a small home in Nazareth that would be enough for them, for the angel told Joseph he must live in Nazareth. Joachim, maternal grandfather, likely died before Jesus' birth, and both paternal grandparents died before that most blessed event on earth for which Mary and Joseph had prayed, begging God to hasten the time of the coming of the Messiah. Only St. Anne lived to see the birth of our long-awaited Savior and God.

(Maria Cecelia Baij, O.S.B., *THE LIFE OF ST. JOSEPH as manifested by Jesus to Maria Cecelia*, The 101 Foundation, 2000, Pages 1-87,)

What does this have to do with Our Lady of America? Everything! We begin to understand the importance of the trinity on earth, the Holy Family, and Our Lady's call for the renewal of the family. We begin to understand better how God had involved Mary and Joseph deeply in His plan for mankind's salvation through their royal ancestry in preparation for His first Coming that Silent and Holy Night. We see how angels relay God's will just as they did to Sister Mildred Neuzil. We see the significance of the little white dove,



as Our Lord referred to Sister, as a sign of purity and total consecration to Him. We see that everything with God is planned for a purpose; there are no accidents with Him. We see the role of suffering in bringing the soul into that complete surrender to the wondrous ways of God and workings of the Holy Spirit. We see the importance of prayer, fasting and almsgiving, and how dearly God looks upon those who plead for the salvation of souls. We see the importance of the Immaculate Conception in the salvation of the world, and we see its importance in the conversion and salvation of America, a chosen nation for the glory of God, given a mandate from heaven to lead the world to His kind of peace, the sanctifying grace of His presence in every soul. Our Lady of America, the Immaculate Virgin, Patroness of our land, let your Immaculate Heart triumph over all evil and usher in the lasting reign of your King-Son over all the world.

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