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Summer 2008



## Faith of the Fathers

By Fr. Marc Dunaway

On the Sunday after the Feast of Ascension, the Church remembers the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council. In 325, a brutal persecution of Christians had recently ended, and the Emperor Constantine called a general council of Church leaders in the city of Nicea. As these leaders gathered, many bore scars from their suffering under persecution. As Constantine entered the assembly, he greeted some of them by kissing the wounds they had borne for Christ.

How were these Christians able to bear their suffering? It was because they understood who it was that had died on the Cross.

Jesus was not merely a prophet or a holy man. He was the incarnate Logos, the divine Son of God, who was consubstantial and coeternal with the Father, who in time took on human flesh and, in this union of natures, experienced death. In St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 1, verse 23, he says: "We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block [the Messiah would not die] to the Greeks foolishness [God would not

become incarnate]."

The gospel reading for the Sunday of the First Ecumenical Council, St. John 17:1-13, sheds more light on how persecuted Christians, both in the early days of the Church and right up to the present time, are able to endure suffering in the name of Christ. St. John tells us that Jesus is with His disciples in the Upper Room, where they have just shared the Last Supper. He

is talking to them, and He sees that the time of their being together has come to an end. He looks ahead to what now lies before Him and He says: "Truly, the hour is coming, yes, has now come, when you will be scattered, each to his own,

and leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. These things I have spoken to you that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. . ."

The disciples' hearts are heavy and they are confused. At one point, He pauses and they look at each other, "We do not know what He is saying."

*"God's love for His world is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. For this, the apostles suffered and died."*

(Continued on page 5)

## Community With a Capital C

By Mara Lamb

I grew up in "The Community". Not just any community but The Community- capital T, capital C. Even in our local high school, we kids who grew up attending Saint John's Orthodox Cathedral were known as the kids who were a part of The Community. I must admit, there were times when I almost hated disclosing the fact that I was a part of it. People know us, and they know what we stand for. There are expectations and standards which go along with being a part of The Community.



Mara Lamb at her college graduation with her parents Dn. Pat and Jane Lamb.

This makes me remember a party I went to during my freshman year of college. At this particular party, I ran into two kids I went to high school with. I was crammed onto a couch with them, a beer in one of my hands. "Mara, you drink!?! I thought you went to that one church?" one of them

shouted in my ear. "Yeah, I go to that church," I said. Then I added, abruptly and awkwardly, "But I also can do whatever I want." She just stared at me with a puzzled

(Continued on page 6)

Our Journey Together as Orthodox Christians

In Community

## Community Cooks: Featuring Sherrilyn Ihde - By Maye Johnson



### **Congratulations Graduates!**

**High school graduates:** Drew Stallman, James Patras, Mathew Finkler, Thaddeus Johnson, Thomas Snider, Nathaniel Ray, Mattie Bookbinder, and Gus Gray.

**College graduates:** Sherrilyn Ihde and Mara Lamb.

Sherrilyn's introduction to our church began in 1982 while attending UAA, where she met Diana Dyal Truelson. Diana told her about our group and what we were doing, but at that time, Sherrilyn was in the process of being baptized into the Roman Catholic Church.

In 1986 after meeting Barbara Parker through a food co-op, Sherrilyn learned more about the church community, but three years of homesteading took precedence. Fast-forward about 13 years, and Sherrilyn decided St John's School would be a good choice for her children. Soon after their enrollment, Maye Johnson invited her to attend a service at the Cathedral. She accepted the invitation, but it took about four months before she realized this was the same place she had been invited to back in 1982. She didn't recognize it because the Cathedral was so new and beautiful, and she had pictured guitar playing and singing in a home setting. She and her husband, Kent, then knew that this is where they needed to be and where God had been leading all along. Sherrilyn and her family were chrismated in April 2000, and they moved into the community a month later. In May 2008, she received her Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education from the University of Alaska and she will be teaching this fall. Congratulations, Sherrilyn!

### **Blueberry Tart**

Pie crust for 11" double-crust pie, chilled  
3 pt. fresh blueberries  
1/3 to 1/2 cup flour  
1 cup + 1 T. sugar  
1 T. unsalted butter, cut into small pieces

#### **GLAZE:**

Beat together: 1 egg and 1/2 cup heavy cream

Preheat oven to 400°. Roll out half the pastry dough into a circle large enough to fit a 2 in. deep, 11 in. tart pan. Line the pan and refrigerate. Roll out the remaining pastry to a thickness of 1/8-in. and cut out leaf shapes using a sharp knife. Put the blueberries into a mixing bowl; sprinkle with flour, 1 c. sugar and butter. Gently toss so the berries are completely covered. Brush the entire pastry crust with egg glaze and pour the blueberries into the shell. Arrange the leaves on top of the fruit, covering it almost completely. Brush the leaves with the egg glaze and sprinkle with 1 T. sugar. Bake for 50 minutes, or until the juices have bubbled and thickened. Let cool completely on a wire rack before cutting.

***In Community*** is published by: Mary Alice Cook, Barbara Dunaway, Maye Johnson and Rebekah Johnson

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## **Outpost of the Kingdom**

**By Kh. Barbara Dunaway**

*"Who are these people and what are they doing?"*  
-Eudora Welty

I watched my neighbor drive past my house at 10 p.m. the other night, and marveled that he could comfortably set out at that late hour for the Russian River, 105 miles south of Eagle River. His aim was to get there in time for the midnight opening of the red salmon fishing season.

I decided that after having lost a good part of every day during the long, dark days of winter, we Alaskans go slightly crazy in the summer. It is the phenomenon of enduring the long winter in order to enjoy having two days in one. We stay up too late, planting flowers and doing yard work, as if our lives depended on it. I am told that the children in the Bush villages play outdoors until 3 or 4 a.m. and then sleep until late the next morning to recover.

What is the purpose of it all? Why do we stay in this upside down place? Maybe we are frontiersmen at heart. Living where we do, we endure isolation, no new places to drive to, and a high cost of living. Is it all to say "I did it. I made a life in faraway Alaska?" That does require something of a pioneer spirit.

Many here in our church and community have said, "If it were

not for the church, I wouldn't still be here." A large number of these people are retired or post-military folks, others are people who find their living here, others have come to join family members here. I can say that I have come to love Alaska, the land, and the people that I know. They have made up my life since age 33, and now, at 73, I am committed – to it and to them.

Thus we stay, connected to each other, to family, to church, to church community, even to our jobs. We chose Alaska, more or less, in the beginning, but now it seems to choose us, offering one reason or another to stay in place. Blessed be the light!



**The Cathedral at 11:00pm on June 9, 2008.**

# The Portable Community

By: Mary Alice Cook

It is a cool, overcast, summer day, and I am with a group of St. John's neighbors on our yearly pilgrimage to the Kasilof River on Alaska's Kenai Peninsula. On the windy shore of Cook Inlet, we have set up a temporary community of tents and RV's and are here to catch salmon, hopefully lots of them, as many (within our legal limit, of course) as we can gather into our nets.

The state of Alaska, on certain rivers and at certain times, allows its residents to harvest the red salmon run with long-handled dipnets. We are camped near the mouth of the Kasilof, where it empties into the ocean waters of Cook Inlet. On board a small boat carrying five crew members, we take turns trolling up and down the river, dragging our nets in the cold, murky water, waiting to feel the bump that means we have snared a salmon. Then the fish is quickly dumped into the holding box and the net goes back in the water. If we hit a few good runs, we will fill our freezers for a year. If not – well, as Duke, one of our captains, likes to say, "They call it fishin', not catchin'."

This afternoon, I am part of the shore team. I am sitting on a slippery gray log, and the ocean in front of me is flat and gray, the white volcanic peaks of Mt. Iliamna and Mt. Redoubt outlined faintly in the distance. The air smells beachy, like salt and damp and rotting fish. Tall grasses wave nearby, reminding me of the big pots of leafy alder branches we brought into the church for Pentecost. Green is the color of Pentecost.

St. Luke says that just before the descent of the Holy Spirit, Christ's Mother, His Apostles, and about a hundred other believers got together in the upper room in Jerusalem where they prayed "with one accord" (all agreeing and no one dissenting). On the actual Day of Pentecost, when the wind blew through the whole house and the tongues of fire sat upon them, they were still "all with one accord in one place." It seems that the Holy Spirit came upon them, not only because of who they were, or where they were, or what they were saying, but because they were *united*. In the words of the Orthodox Study Bible, "Their unity creates an environment in which the Holy Spirit will come."

The boat is back, loaded with salmon, and everyone goes into



Rebekah Johnson, Martha and Mary Ruth Zink gutting fish. 2002



Enjoying the sunny day and a little break from fishing. 2007

action. For the next hour or so, we work in an assembly line of intense, but usually calm, activity. Fish are pulled from the box and handed to cutters who slice off the heads, scoop out the guts and notch the tail fins (a requirement of the state, to prevent the selling of non-commercially caught fish). Fish parts are tossed into the water and immediately snatched by the circling, shrieking gulls. Other team members wash the gutted fish in the cold surf before plopping them into coolers of ice. Finally, the coolers are hauled back to the campsite and stowed under tarps.

A good catch puts a smile on everyone's face, and when the work is done, we can wash up, open a cold drink, and turn our attention to food. After we've had our fill of burgers (along with some of the just caught salmon), Susie brings out a pie, warm from the oven in her RV, and coffee cups are filled. Bob stokes the campfire, which never goes completely out during our long weekend, and we pull our chairs around it for an evening of talk which will continue into the small hours of a short midsummer night.

We watch as a long line of commercial fishing boats queues up in the inlet, waiting to enter the Kasilof, where they will unload their catch and get ready to go out again. The hum and throb of their engines keeps time with their twinkling lights, dancing in the wind like diamonds on a long, invisible chain.

Our young children play nearby in the sand and our teenagers drift back and forth from the grownup circle to one of their own, waiting for the soft darkness so they can set off the fireworks they brought with them.

Our firelit circle seems never to break into smaller conversation groups. Throughout the evening, it stays unified and whole as we listen to our storytellers, Dn. Dan, and Al and Bill. Theresa and Maye, the historians, reminisce about how we all came to be together in this place. MaryAnn remembers Rosalie, whose campsite was always our anchor and home base.

The desire of Christians to live in close community is nothing new, and we at St. John's are certainly not unique. From the earliest Christians, of whom the book of Acts says "...all who believed were together, and had all things in common...." to the rise of monasteries, to the communes of

(Continued on page 5)

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## *How I Got From There to Here*

*By Debbie Rainville*

As my husband Peter and I traveled up the Alcan Highway in July of 1999, I prayed that since I apparently was eccentric enough to be moving our household 2059 miles north, from the beautiful Sandia Mountains of New Mexico to the chilly and wild Chugach Mountains of Alaska, God would somehow use this move to bring me closer to Him and strengthen my faith.

By September of that year Peter had cleared an acre of land in Wasilla, and I was working at Providence Hospital some 45 miles south in Anchorage. As secretary for the Spiritual Care Department, my new co-workers were mostly Catholic priests and nuns, and a couple of things were clear to me:

a) God was being pretty direct in answering my request for an opportunity to grow closer to Him; and, b) I found Catholicism a little exotic and quite interesting.

Fast-forward six years to the autumn of 2005. The Spiritual Care Department had changed from a conservative Catholic group into an liberal-minded, mostly Protestant group. Our latest manager was a German Lutheran, immersed in a dark existential world view. He spoke at a staff meeting about the “deep significance for him personally, on several levels,” as he attended the same-sex “wedding” of one of our chaplains at a local Episcopal church. I was being stretched in ways I was not comfortable with, and found my elasticity sadly lacking.

The one bright spot at work was Fr. Christopher, an Orthodox priest. Around that same time I read *Becoming Orthodox* by Fr. Peter Gillquist, and realized that one of the parishes mentioned in the book was right down the road from me in Eagle River. I took a short ride and found Monastery Drive. I was impressed by the quiet beauty of the neighborhood in the late afternoon sunshine. There was a long church lawn, with children playing on it. I felt like I had driven into a Thomas Kinkade painting.

I don't remember much about the first Liturgy I attended, except that I felt mostly like a fish out of water. And in spite of a kind invitation, I did not stay for coffee. I continued, however, to be infatuated with Orthodoxy. Although the sermons at my Protestant home church were spirit-filled and inspirational, I felt restless. I kept returning to Orthodox writings



because I found in them a depth and authenticity.

At work the tension between me and our Lutheran manager intensified. I prayed that he, like two of our past managers, would find work he liked better outside Alaska. That was not to be, and by March I found myself scanning the Providence job page in earnest and going to job interviews. I settled on a job in Radiology.

The new job was hurry-hurry-hurry-wait, and the waiting could stretch for hours. During those

times I would usually be reading material on Orthodox websites. One of my co-workers was a young man named Isaac. He noticed my penchant for Orthodox websites, and one day mentioned that he went to that church on Monastery Drive, and in fact lived on Monastery Drive, and his uncle was the priest. He thought I ought to come to a service again some time, and check it out. I told him I would be there the next Sunday, and then I did not show up.

But eventually I did attend a service, and a few months later noticed an Inquirer's Class on the calendar of the St. John's website. I attended class that week, and by the end of the evening, the hospitality of the St. James House and the teachings had caught me hook, line, and sinker.

I began attending Liturgy regularly, and was a typical hurry-up Protestant, wondering if Fr. Marc might allow me to be chrismated that first Pascha, just 3 months after I had started attending Inquirers Class. He patiently told me we would wait, and I would be “prayed over” a few more months. I continued my reading, and Fr. Marc recommended books for me to read during the summer.

Finally on December 24, 2007 I was chrismated by Bishop JOSEPH.

My husband Peter was there and Maye Johnson was my sponsor. Maye has faithfully guided me through my first few months as a member of St. John's. Like others before me, I have found that “becoming Orthodox” is a journey that only *begins* with chrismation.

*“...the hospitality of the St. James House  
and the teachings had caught me  
hook, line and sinker.”*

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## *Faith of the Fathers*

*By Fr. Marc Dunaway*

*(Continued from page 1)*

Jesus sees their faces, troubled and thoughtful, and He says, “But have courage, cheer up! I have overcome the world.”

Then Jesus lifts up His eyes to Heaven and prays, “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son may also glorify You.”

The words of His prayer raise several questions: How was it that the Son was about to be glorified? What hour has come? Was Jesus referring to His glorious Resurrection, His triumph over death, His appearing to His disciples and all the joy this would bring and which the Church has recently celebrated for forty days?

No, Jesus was referring to His betrayal by Judas, which was taking place at that very hour, the betrayal that would lead to His arrest, trial and death on the Cross. This is how He is to be glorified, because this is the proof of His great love. God so loved us that He sent His eternal and only-begotten Son to become a man, born of the Theotokos. He so loved us that this Son voluntarily bore our weaknesses and our struggles and our temptations. He grew weary. He hungered. He slept. He wept.

And now He is betrayed. He will let Himself be arrested and beaten because He loves us. He will let Himself be nailed

onto a Cross and lifted up above the earth and be tortured and killed for our sakes, that He might win us back to God. He will bow His bruised and bleeding head, and cry out, “It is finished.” Then he will give up His spirit. This is the moment, not of His humiliation, of His defeat or of His sorrow. It is the hour of His glory. This is how it is finally revealed to the world how much God loves His creation.

Jesus ends His prayer by saying, “And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare [I have told them who You are], that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”

This is the heart of the Christian message: God’s love for His world is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. For this the apostles suffered and died. And for this countless Christians, including some of those who gathered at that first great council, suffered and died throughout the centuries.

Why is it important for us to remember these things? We remember because it reminds us what we mean when we speak of “glory.” We are not called to be rich. We are not called to be comfortable, or popular, or famous. We are called to be like Christ, and to let His kind of love – the love that ultimately calls one to offer his own life for another – to work its way into us. “By this,” Jesus said, “men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” This is what Christianity is all about.

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## *The Portable Community*

*By Mary Alice Cook*

*(Continued from page 3)*

the sixties’ Jesus movement – Christians have always desired to share more of their lives than just a couple of hours together on Sunday morning.

But, although many of us have chosen to live close to the church and to each other, other St. John’s parishioners live on other streets in Eagle River and elsewhere, so it is not mere physical location that binds us all together. The Holy Spirit did not descend on the Apostles only because they were sitting together in the same room on the same street in the same city. It is the mutual assent to the basics of our faith – the basics that were hammered out with great effort and sometimes at great cost by the Church’s councils – that is at the heart of Christian community.

In his meditation on the 15<sup>th</sup> century Russian Pentecost icon, “The Descent of the Holy Spirit,” Henri Nouwen (a priest of the Roman Catholic Church) says that “...a life in the Spirit is in essence a life in community.” Once we understand this, he says, our concern shifts from questions about *my* spiritual life to the realization that “...we can no longer separate the spiritual life from life in community, belonging to God from belonging to each other, and seeing Christ from seeing one another in Him.”

The fire smolders and the breeze on the beach is chilly, but our portable community is snug and cozy. Each of us is reluctant to make the first move to get up and head to our tent or RV. But we do not yet have enough fish to provide a good



**Mary Ann Northy, Theresa Grey, and Mary Alice Cook  
at the Kasilof River. July 2000**

catch to each family, so we must go out again tomorrow morning and put our nets in the water and see what will happen.

Rain is in the forecast so the next day’s work is likely to be chilly, damp and maybe downright unpleasant. But it is made easier, as so many tasks are, because we will do it together.

1. Nouwen, Henri, *Behold the Beauty of the Lord*, 1987.

## Community With a Capital C

By: Mara Lamb

(Continued from page 1)

look, and turned to talk to the next person.

I have looked back on that dialogue quite a few times since it happened. I wonder now why I was so defensive about being questioned about my behavior. I guess I almost hated admitting that, yes, I was a part of “that church.” I think I was attempting to emphasize that even though I am an active Christian, I still have the freedom to do whatever I choose. But also, when I look back, I feel like I was ruining this certain ideal for the kid at the party. Because I was there, partying alongside of them, it became okay. I now see that because I was participating, I was giving The Community, and myself, kind of a bad name.

I think that moment was a learning experience for me. I finally realized that God happily allows me to be free, yet yearns for me to always make the right choices with that freedom. Every day I am discovering a little more about myself and about the different roles I play: I am a student, employee, sister, daughter, girlfriend, roommate, and an Orthodox Christian. While defining who I am in these roles, I am coming to understand that I can not fulfill them all to their highest standards. All I can do is be me and seek God in all things.

This realization does not necessarily make “being me” any easier. The past four years of being out of my parent’s house have been quite the journey. I am now a college graduate with no idea what to do next. I am entering into a grown up’s world that I don’t feel entirely ready for. I am trying to reestablish and configure my personal relationships that were once so clear. How I feel towards my church, my community, and my family is constantly changing and developing.

I am starting to understand how my church is my family, too. Sometimes I want to give up and run away. Being a part of this family can be hard. I just want to ditch out on all of the services, functions, and gatherings that go along with being a part of the church and do what I want, when I want to do it.

But then there are times when I am lost and feel lonely and isolated. I go from school, to work and then home to my apartment, and feel like something is missing. These are the times I can go back to my parent’s house, which is in the heart of The Community. I pop in and say hi and take a stroll up to the church. I run into neighbors and we talk, and they tell me how much they have missed seeing me and want to know all about my life. Sometimes I feel such intense joy to be a part of my church, an excitement and pride in being a part of this family. I am never lonely with them.

I may be learning this a little more slowly than others, but I really have no reason to feel the isolation that sometimes bears down on me. I have so many people eager to welcome me home, back into The Community. I don’t always get along with everyone or want to be around that much. Yet there is this strange love that I have never found anywhere else, a kind of support and structure that is only found in a loving family. A sense of strength and independence empower me when I realize that I can step out into the world all alone. But then I realize that being all alone in the world is not really what I want. I want to share my life with my family, who are always there to support and encourage me.

## Summer Solstice June 2008



The Saint James House. 11:00pm



11:30pm and the sun is just disappearing over the hill.



Sun setting on the Cathedral. 11:40pm



Mt. Susitna (also called Sleeping Lady) 12:30am

# Everyone's Home: The St. James House

By Elizabeth Chaffin

Looking back on this past year, it seems as though I packed the events of a full-length novel into just a few short months. As I made my way back to Alaska after a month-long journey to Colorado, I realized I hadn't even begun to plan the next chapter of my life. Arriving home, I helped my boyfriend, Will, move into his new room at the St. James House, and I soon began to see how impressive the St. James House program truly is. I knew I wanted to learn more about Orthodoxy, and, luckily, I have a spontaneous attitude that allowed me to quickly decide to pursue becoming a resident of the House.

The hardest part of moving in to the St James House was moving out of my parent's house. It was very difficult at first to gain my parent's blessing to move seven miles away and to go to a church I had never been to before, but they loved me and wanted the best for me. At first, it caused a lot of hurt between us, but through the year, we all came into agreement that moving out had truly been in my best interest.

I became an official resident at the beginning of October, and soon I fully embraced the program. I began to observe the living habits of others, and had to learn to communicate with all the other residents when a problem did occur. Often

“The services soon became the highlight of my week, and catechumen class was a time for me to gain a better understanding of what it means to love God.”

we had “family meetings” where we would discuss the upcoming events and the things we all needed to improve on. This part was the hardest part of the year for me. Like anyone else, I have trouble facing my faults, the ones I thought were just a part of my personality. I soon saw that truth is often hurtful, but most of the time necessary. I can see now that we never stop learning and improving ourselves. Although a lot of the credit for my experiences is owed to my fellow residents and the hosts of the House, I have to say that none of it would have affected me as much had I not wanted it to and allowed it to.

At the beginning of the year, Fr. Marc told us that attendance at church services should be engraved into us, like a default setting. This I found to be the most helpful part of the program. I was at times overwhelmed with events, work, school and trying to learn a new way of living. I can admit that at times I was too tired or stressed to go to the services, but since it was a priority in the week, I tried my best to endure what I at first did not understand. The ser-



vices soon became the highlight of my week, and catechumen class was a time for me to gain a better understanding of what it means to love God. I spent many nights in deep discussion with other residents, all of us finding greater enlightenment about Orthodoxy.

At the end of November, I requested to be chrismated. When I met with Fr. Marc, he gave me a hefty book to read, dealing with Orthodoxy's history, maybe to see how much I wanted to become an Orthodox Christian. I read the book and wrote down my questions, and, in the end, found myself to be even more foundationally set in my faith. For the first time, I met Bp. JOSEPH, and was able to experience the beauty of the Christmas season. I was chrismated on Christmas Eve morning, 2007, and received my first communion that night.

At the time, every day moved in slow motion; I was taking things at a steady pace. Will and I planned a New Year's Eve party for our friends and relatives. We organized the good food, along with fireworks and games. That night, as we entertained our guests, having a good ol' time at the St. James House, Will took center stage by the fireplace and read to me what I thought was going to be my late Christmas present, a poem written by him. He proposed that night, in front of everybody, and I accepted with great joy as we blasted off the fireworks in celebration. The year continued with plans for our wedding and with me continuing to learn more about the faith.

Since New Year's Day, time has seemed to quicken its pace, quickly coming to the end of the St. James House year. Everything seems to be as it should be. Time is filled now with little stress and a great deal of anticipation. I am excited for all that is to come in the future, as Will and I continue to live within the St. John's community.



Liz with her fiancé, Will Ihde. They were united in marriage on July 27. This amorous pose is uncharacteristic of Will and Liz as they lived in the St. James House.

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## *St. Anna: Mother of the Theotokos*

*By Mary Ann Northey*

My patron saint, St. Anna (Hannah in Hebrew), is not mentioned by name in the Bible. We learn from the Gospel of James in the Apocrypha (the collection of scriptural texts which falls outside the canon), that Anna was married to Joachim (Eliakim in Hebrew), and that they were childless for many years. At that time, Israel was waiting for the birth of a Savior, and childlessness was considered a cause for shame. Joachim was ridiculed in the Temple because he had no children, and he left Jerusalem for several days to be alone and pray. An angel came to him and told him that his prayers had been heard, and that his wife would bear a child who would be filled with the Holy Spirit. The angel then told him to run to the city and meet Anna at the Golden Gate.

Anna, waiting at home, was afraid because Joachim was missing, and she went into her garden to pray. An angel came to her also and told her the amazing news that she would bear a child, and that she should go and meet her husband at the Gate.

Joachim and Anna were blessed with the birth of a daughter, who was called Mary. They took Mary into the Temple when she was three years old and she was brought up there. Mary later became the mother and birthgiver of Jesus.

I feel strongly connected to St. Anna. Like her and Joachim, my husband and I were married a long time before we began to adopt our children. Our daughter's birthday is September 8, the day celebrated by the Church as the birthday of Mary, the Mother of God.

Among the icons which depict the life of St. Anna is one called the "Conception of the Theotokos," in which St. Joachim and St. Anna embrace each other at the Golden Gate. The icon of the Feast of the Presentation of the Mother of God depicts St. Joachim and St. Anna bringing their young daughter to the Temple. In this icon, St. Anna is often shown holding her daughter in her arms while Mary, in turn, holds a flower which represents Jesus. St. Anna's feast day is celebrated on July 25.

