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St. Anne's Episcopal Church, Warsaw
St. Anne's Day
July 25, 2021

Luke 1:26-33

In the year 1505, the young son of a German copper miner was caught in a bad thunderstorm and called upon a saint to help him through. The saint whom he invoked was Saint Anne, and the copper miner's son was the religious reformer Martin Luther. As the story goes, young Martin promised Saint Anne that, if she protected him through the storm, he would devote his life to God by becoming a monk.

Among Saint Anne's many patronages, she is the patron saint of miners, which would partially explain Martin Luther's invocation of her when he was in danger. Mining, particularly when done underground, is an extremely hazardous occupation and, in my opinion, would require all sorts of invocations, particularly when one's life is threatened. But, more commonly, Saint Anne is the patron saint of grandparents, along with her husband Joachim, and together they are the grandparents of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I recall reading that Anne was chosen to be the patron saint of this congregation because she was the mother of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and Mary, of course, is the focus of much devotion and honor, particularly among Episcopalians of the Anglo-Catholic persuasion. Logic would dictate that, if Mary had an important role in the history of salvation, then her mother (or parents together) would have an important role in the history of salvation, too.

Speaking personally, I don't think anyone would ever identify me as an Anglo-Catholic; I believe that saints need to be invoked cautiously, but maybe that has something to do with having spent forty-four years of my life as a Lutheran. This may be the position that Martin Luther himself arrived at later in life, even after Saint Anne got him through that thunderstorm!

Little is known about Saint Anne; her name, though, is derived from the Hebrew name Hannah, and in the Old Testament, Hannah is the mother of the prophet Samuel. In fact, the legends of Saint Anne that circulated in the second century, A.D. were based on Old Testament accounts of Samuel's birth (see 1 Samuel, chapter 1), as well as those of the birth of Isaac (see Genesis, chapter 21). Legend has it that Anne and her husband Joachim were childless into old age, much like another Old Testament couple -- Abraham and Sarah.

What we can learn from these stories is that faithfulness and perseverance have their rewards. People of extraordinary tenacity and courage have children like Mary, who went on to be the mother of Jesus. Today's Gospel text gives us the account of the angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary that she will conceive and bear a son, and as we read of Mary's initial trepidation over the matter, we might wonder about what kind of comfort her parents could've provided her. Perhaps they, like Gabriel, said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God" (Luke 1:30). Saint Anne deserves our recognition today for the kind of daughter that she brought into the world...one who perseveres in the face

of uncertainty, and one who is faithful from beginning to end.

One cannot help but note, too, that the thought of our Lord Jesus Christ having grandparents is very quaint. It can even soften a hardened cynic like myself, I must admit! Yes, the One who lived and died as one of us, who "for us and for our salvation" was crucified, died, and rose on the third day, and who is seated at his heavenly Father's right hand had a grandma and grandpa. I realize that not everybody here had the opportunity to get to know their grandparents, and I trust that those in this category had someone to occupy that role as a surrogate. Grandparents are often a very special part of a child's formative years...and yes, it's maybe okay to wonder if they were so in our Lord's formative years, too.

In Rose Hall, you can find two pictures, one of my Grandma Isabelle and the other of my Grandma Helen -- my paternal and maternal grandmothers, respectively. Grandma Isabelle died in 1972, a year and a half before I was born, so I know her only from stories, but my Grandma Helen lived until 1994, at which point I was twenty years old, and, naturally, I'm able to remember her quite well.

Looking back, I'd have to say that, as far as I can gather, my two grandmas weren't much alike. From stories, I've developed a picture of my Grandma Isabelle being brash and outspoken, while Grandma Helen was meek and quiet. They hailed from vastly different ethnic and social backgrounds; Grandma Isabelle was Polish and from a huge, wild family and had thirteen brothers and sisters,

while Grandma Helen was Swedish and from a more sedate family and had only two sisters and three brothers. (That would've been a relatively small bunch in the early twentieth century!) Grandma Isabelle liked a good drink of whiskey, while Grandma Helen was a teetotaler. Grandma Helen would go apoplectic at the sight of a deck of playing cards, while Grandma Isabelle couldn't have cared less. You're probably noticing a pattern developing here...

But, like most children of immigrants of that era, both of them started school knowing little or no English. Grandma Isabelle, however, became bilingual in Polish and English and had a vocabulary that belied her eighth-grade education. I think Grandma Helen forgot most of her Swedish, primarily because her parents were quicker to assimilate to American culture and language. Still, my Grandma Helen remembered the humiliation of being corrected in school for saying the Swedish word "gröt" instead of the English word "porridge," an experience that had to have been shared by countless children of immigrants.

Grandma Isabelle was only twelve when she completed eighth grade (she skipped two grades), and from there, she went on to be a maid and housekeeper, eventually landing a job with the Fischer family, where she met who would become my Grandpa Carl. Grandma Helen graduated from high school and completed two years of Teachers College, and began a career in elementary education. By the Sixties, teachers in North Dakota were required to have four-year degrees, and so Grandma Helen earned her Bachelor of Science degree in 1970.

Both my Grandma Isabelle and my Grandma Helen never really got to enjoy their "golden years"; Grandma Isabelle died of cancer at age 54, and Grandma Helen, in her seventies, began a gradual but steady decline into dementia (and, come to think of it, she wasn't that old when that started). Both had very active and busy lives; Grandma Isabelle was a talented gardener, canner, and cook, while Grandma Helen devoted her life to education, community, and church. I don't think Grandma Helen was quite as angelic in real life as I've portrayed her, though; I know that her busy schedule often necessitated fast driving, and she was known to have a heavy foot!

Of course, having had the privilege of getting to know my Grandma Helen, I have a lot more actual memories of her, and don't have to rely on only stories as is the case with Grandma Isabelle. One memory I'd like to share about Grandma Helen involves (not surprisingly) driving, and her aforementioned heavy foot. Going from Point A to Point B was, for Grandma Helen, never a matter of taking the same route every time; if she got there one way, she went back a different way. (I'm kind of that way myself, actually.) On this one occasion, Grandma got the job of being my taxi from our home in Crookston, Minnesota to somewhere "up north," perhaps to my babysitters' place in Drayton. Instead of going the usual way up Interstate 29, Grandma, in her "switch things up" kind of way, decided to take the narrow, two-lane Highway 75.

At that time, Grandma drove a green, 1974 Dodge Monaco...a big car with a 360 V8, four-barrel carburetor, and TorqueFlite 727 trans-

mission. (There has to be a gearhead here who understands all that...) Because Highway 75 was, as mentioned, narrow and only two lanes, Grandma would occasionally have to pass slower traffic, but she insisted on doing this as quickly as possible. When it came time to pass, Grandma punched it! That TorqueFlite 727 dropped into second gear, the secondaries on that four-barrel carburetor opened up, and that 360 V8 roared...

And, in case you're wondering, you don't get to experience that in a Toyota Camry; yes, the Toyota uses only about a third as much gas as Grandma's '74 Dodge, but it just has no "soul."

If you never got to know your Grandma, or any of your grandparents, remember, too, that they're now surrounding us with their prayer and fellowship -- along with Saints Anne, Joachim, and Mary -- at the altar of Christ himself. And for those of you with fond memories of your grandparents, those memories have a way of keeping their life and witness going for years beyond their deaths.

As for those of you with grandparents still living, you are very fortunate!

Finally, if you should ever find yourself in great danger, like a young Martin Luther in 1505, you might summon the prayers of the saints, but don't try to make a deal with them like Martin. That's not classy. Instead, you might remember the courage and perseverance of the saints as they themselves encountered great danger, and then use their example to inspire your own courage and

perseverance. Their witness to Christ, like that of all other forebears we have in the faith (grandmas and grandpas included), shall deepen your appreciation of the salvation that we, with the whole Church, share with Christ.

Amen.