

Today, *Catholic Family News* continues its occasional look at the divine plan of salvation as related by Ven. [Maria of Agreda](#), a 17th-century Spanish nun. Her extensive writings, known to us as *The Mystical City of God*, serve as the record of the revelations which she received from the Blessed Virgin herself on the mystery of salvation and her hidden life as the Mother of our Divine Savior. Today's article features the first "annunciation" - as the Archangel Gabriel announced separately to Joachim and Anne that they would become the parents of the Mother of the Messiah.

The Mystical City of God is available in English both in print as well as [online](#). The text below (*in italics*) is extracted from Volume I (The Conception), Book One, Chapter XIII. This chapter is only one of several which treat of the beginning of the new divine covenant with mankind. The previous chapter (XII) addresses the divine role in the blessed marriage and life of Saints Joachim and Anne, whom Maria of Agreda calls "two morningstars as harbingers of the law of grace." Subsequent Chapters XIV through XX address God's revelation of His plan for the Immaculate Conception to the angels in Heaven through the nine months of the holy infant Mary in the womb of her mother. The previous chapter (XII) concludes with the long, fervent, and anguished prayers of Joachim and Anne for a child after twenty years of an otherwise blessed and happy marriage.

The petitions of the holy Joachim and Anne reached the throne of the Holy Trinity, where they were accepted and the will of God was made known to the holy angels. The three Divine Persons, according to our way of expressing such things, spoke to them as follows: "We have in our condescension resolved that the Person of the Word shall assume human flesh and that through Him all the race of mortals shall find a remedy. We have already manifested and promised this to Our servants, the Prophets, in order that they might announce it to the world. The sins of the living and their malice are so great, that We are much constrained by the rigor of justice. But Our goodness and mercy is greater than all their evil-doing, nor can it extinguish Our love toward men. We will look with mercy upon the works of Our hands, which We have created according to Our image and likeness, so as to enable them to become inheritors and participators of Our eternal glory (1 Pet 3:22). We will consider the services and the pleasure derived from Our servants and friends and regard the multitude of those, who shall distinguish themselves in Our praise and friendship. And above all have We before Our eyes Her, who is to be the chosen One, who is to be acceptable above all creatures and singled out for Our delight and pleasure; because She is to conceive the Person of the Word in Her womb and clothe Him with human flesh. Since there must be a beginning of this work, by which We shall manifest to the world the treasures of the Divinity, this shall be the acceptable and opportune time for its execution.

Joachim and Anne have found grace in Our eyes; We look upon them with pleasure and shall enrich them with choicest gifts and graces. They have been faithful and constant in their trials and in simplicity and uprightness their souls have become acceptable and pleasing before Us. Let Gabriel as Our ambassador bring tidings of joy for them and for the whole human race; let him announce to them, that in Our condescension We have looked upon them and have chosen them."

Thus the celestial spirits were instructed in regard to the will and the decree of the Almighty. The holy archangel Gabriel humbled himself before the throne of the most blessed Trinity, adoring and revering the Divine Majesty in the manner which befits these most pure and spiritual substances. From the throne an intellectual voice proceeded, saying: "Gabriel, enlighten, vivify and console Joachim and Anne, Our servants, and tell them, that their prayers have come to Our presence and their petitions are heard in clemency. Promise them, that by the favor of Our right hand they will receive the Fruit of benediction, and that Anne shall conceive a Daughter, to whom We give the name of MARY." Together with this mandate of the Most High many mysteries and sacraments pertaining to this message were revealed to Saint Gabriel. With it he descended from the vault of the empyrean heaven and appeared to holy Joachim, while he was in prayer, saying to him: "Just and upright man, the Almighty from His sovereign throne has taken notice of thy desires and has heard thy sighs and prayers, and has made thee fortunate on earth. Thy spouse Anne shall conceive and bear a Daughter, who shall be blessed among women (Luke 1:42-48). The nations shall know Her as the Blessed. He Who is the eternal God, increate, and the Creator of all, most upright in His judgments, powerful and strong, sends me to thee, because thy works and alms have been acceptable. Love has softened the heart of the Almighty, and has hastened His mercies, and in His liberality He wishes to enrich thy house and thy family with a Daughter, whom Anne shall conceive; the Lord Himself has chosen for Her the name of MARY. From Her childhood let Her be consecrated to the temple, and in it to God, as thou hast promised. She shall be elect, exalted, powerful and full of the Holy Ghost; on account of the sterility of Anne Her conception shall be miraculous; She shall be a Daughter wonderful in all Her doings and in all Her life. Praise the Lord, Joachim, for this benefit and magnify Him, for in no other nation has He wrought the like. Thou shalt go to give thanks in the temple of Jerusalem and in testimony of the truth of this joyful message, thou shalt meet, in the Golden Gate, thy sister Anne, who is coming to the temple for the same purpose. Remember that marvelous is this message, for the Conception of this Child shall rejoice Heaven and earth."

All this happened to Saint Joachim during his prolonged prayer and in a miraculous sleep, into which he fell for the purpose of receiving this message. He experienced something similar to that which happened to Saint Joseph, the spouse of the most holy Mary, when it

was made known to him that her pregnancy was the work of the Holy Ghost (Matt 1:20). The most fortunate Saint Joachim awoke in great joy of soul and with solicitous and ingenuous prudence he concealed within his heart the sacrament of the King (Tob 12:7). With a lively faith and hope he poured forth his soul in the presence of the Most High, and full of tenderness and gratitude, he thanked and praised Him for His inscrutable judgments. In order to do this more appropriately he hastened to the temple as he had been ordered.

In the meanwhile, the thrice blessed Anne was exalted in prayer and divine contemplation and totally wrapped up in the mystery of the Incarnation, which, after having been previously filled with a most high understanding and a specially infused light, she solicited from the eternal Word. With the profoundest humility and lively faith she was praying for the hastening of the coming of the Redeemer of the human race in the following words: "Most high King and Lord of all creation, I, a most vile and despicable creature, and yet the work of Thy hands, desire at the price of the life which Thou hast given me, to urge Thee to hasten in Thy mercy the time of our salvation. O may Thy infinite kindness incline toward our need! O that our eyes might look upon the Restorer and the Redeemer of men! Remember, O Lord, the mercies of old shown to Thy people, wherein Thou hast promised Thy Only-begotten, and may this promise of infinite kindness unbend Thee! May it come now, that day so much longed for! Is it possible, that the Most High should descend from His holy heaven? Is it possible, that He is to have a terrestrial Mother? What woman shall She be, that is so fortunate and blessed? O who shall be so favored as to look upon Her? Who shall be worthy to be the servant of her servants? Blessed the race that shall be able to see Her and prostrate themselves at Her feet to reverence Her! How sweet shall be the sight of Her and Her company! Blessed the eyes that shall see Her and the ears that shall listen to Her words, and the family, from whom the Most High shall select His Mother! Execute, O Lord, this decree: fulfill Thy divine benevolence!"

In this prayer and colloquy Saint Anne occupied herself after having received enlightenment regarding this ineffable mystery. She weighed all the conferences, which she had had with her guardian angel, who on many occasions, and now more openly than ever before, had manifested himself to her. The Almighty ordained that the message of the Conception of His holy Mother should in some way be similar to the one by which the Incarnation was announced. For Saint Anne was meditating in humble fervor upon her who was to bear the Mother of the Incarnate Word. And the most holy Virgin was making the same reflections upon Her, who was to be the Mother of God, as I will relate in its place (Part II, 117). It was also the same angel that brought both messages and in human form, though he showed himself in a more beautiful and mysterious shape to the Virgin Mary.

The holy archangel Gabriel appeared to Saint Anne in human form more resplendent than

the sun, and said to her: "Anne, servant of God, I am an angel sent from the council of the Most High, Who in divine condescension looks upon the humble of the earth (Ps. 137:6). Good is incessant prayer and humble confidence. The Lord has heard thy petitions, for He is nigh to those who call upon Him with living faith and hope, and who expect His salvation (Ps. 144:18). If He delays hearing their clamors and defers the fulfillment of their prayers, it is in order to dispose them to receive and to oblige Himself to give much more than they ask and desire. Prayer and almsgiving open the treasures of the Lord, the omnipotent King, and incline Him to be lavish in mercy toward those, who ask (Tob. 11:8). Thou and Joachim have prayed for the Fruit of benediction and the Most High has resolved to give you holy and wonderful Fruit; and by it He will enrich you with heavenly gifts, granting to you much more than you have asked. For having humiliated yourselves in prayer, the Lord wishes to magnify Himself in conceding your petitions: because those who in humble confidence pray to Him without belittling His infinite power are most agreeable to the Lord. Persevere in prayer and ask without ceasing for the Redemption of the human race in order to constrain the Most High. Moses by unceasing prayer brought victory to the people (Exod. 17:11); Esther by prayer obtained liberation from the death sentence (Esther 4:11); Judith by the same means was filled with fortitude to execute a most arduous task for the salvation of Israel: she fulfilled it, though a weak and frail woman (Judith 9:1). David came forth victorious in his combat with the giant, because he prayed, invoking the Name of the Lord (1 Sam. 17:45; 1 Kings 18:36). Elias drew fire from heaven by his sacrifice and by his prayer opened and closed the heavens. The humility, faith and the alms of Joachim and of thyself have come before the throne of the Most High and now He sends me, His angel, in order to give thee news full of joy for thy heart: His Majesty wishes that thou be most fortunate and blessed. He chooses thee to be the mother of Her who is to conceive and bring forth the Only-begotten of the Father. Thou shalt bring forth a Daughter, who by divine disposition shall be called MARY. She shall be blessed among women and full of the Holy Ghost. She shall be the cloud that shall drop the dew of heaven for the refreshment of mortals (1 Kings 18:44): and in Her shall be fulfilled the prophecies of thy ancestors. She shall be the portal of life and salvation for the sons of Adam. Know also that I have announced to Joachim, that he shall have a Daughter who shall be blessed and fortunate: but the full knowledge of the mystery is not given him by the Lord, for he does not know that She is to be the Mother of the Messiah. Therefore, thou must guard this secret; and go now to the temple to give thanks to the Most High for having been so highly favored by His powerful right hand. In the Golden Gate thou shalt meet Joachim, where thou wilt confer with him about this tidings. Thou art the one who art especially blessed of the Lord and whom He wishes to visit and enrich with more singular blessings. In solitude He will speak to thy heart and there give a beginning to the law of grace, since in thy womb He will give being to Her who is to vest the Immortal with mortal flesh and human form. In this humanity, united with the Word, will be written, as with His own Blood, the true law of Mercy."

In order that the humble heart of the holy Anne might not faint away with admiration and joy at these tidings of the holy angel, she was strengthened by the Holy Spirit and thus she heard it and received it with magnanimity and incomparable joy. Immediately arising, she hastened to the temple of Jerusalem and there found Saint Joachim, as the angel had foretold to them both. Together they gave thanks to the Almighty for this wonderful blessing and offered special gifts and sacrifices. They were enlightened anew by the grace of the Holy Spirit and, full of divine consolation, they returned to their home. Joyfully they conversed about the favors which they had received from the Almighty, especially concerning each one's message of the Archangel Gabriel, whereby, on behalf of the Lord, they had been promised a Daughter who should be most blessed and fortunate. On this occasion they also told each other how the same angel, before their espousal, had commanded each to accept the other, in order that together they might serve God according to His divine will. This secret they had kept from each other for twenty years, without communicating it, until the same angel had promised them the issue of such a Daughter. Anew they made the vow to offer Her to the temple and that each year on this day they would come to the temple to offer special gifts, spend the day in praise and thanksgiving, and give many alms. This vow they fulfilled to the end of their lives, spending this day in great praise and exaltation of the Most High.

The prudent matron Anne never disclosed the secret that her Daughter was to be the Mother of the Messiah, either to Joachim or to any other creature. Nor did that holy parent in the course of his life know any more than that She was to be a grand and mysterious woman. However, in the last moments of his life the Almighty made the secret known to him, as I will relate in its place. Although great revelations have been made to me concerning the virtues and the holiness of the two parents of the Queen of heaven, I shall not dilate upon that which all the faithful must presuppose. I shall rather hasten to the main point.

After the first conception of the body which was to be that of the Mother of grace, and before creating Her most holy soul, God granted a singular favor to Saint Anne. She had an intellectual and most exalted vision or appearance of His Majesty in which, having communicated to her great enlightenment and gifts of grace, He disposed her and forestalled her with the blessings of His sweetness (Ps. 20:4). Entirely purifying her, He spiritualized the inferior part of her body and elevated her soul and spirit to such a degree that thenceforward she never attended to any human affair which could impede her union with God in all the affections of her mind and will, and she never lost sight of Him. At the same time, He said to her: "Anne, my servant, I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob: My blessing and My eternal light is with thee. I have created man in order to raise him from the dust and to make him the inheritor of My glory and participator of My Divinity. I also

showered My gifts upon him and placed him in a position and state of high perfection; but he listened to the serpent and lost all. Out of My goodness and in fulfillment of the promises made through My holy Prophets, I wish to forget his ingratitude and to repair the damage by sending My Only-begotten as their Redeemer. The heavens are closed, the ancient Patriarchs are detained, deprived of the sight of My face and of eternal life promised to them. The inclination of My bounteousness is as it were strained in not communicating itself to the human race. Now, at this time do I wish to show mercy, giving them the Person of the eternal Word to become man, to be born of a Woman, who shall be Mother and Virgin, immaculate, pure, blessed and holy above all creatures. Of Her, My chosen and only One, I make thee mother" (Cant. 6:8).

I cannot easily explain the effect of these words in the upright heart of holy Anne, she being the first of those born of men to whom was revealed the mystery of her most holy Daughter, who was to be the Mother of God and chosen for the greatest sacrament of the divine Omnipotence. It was befitting that she should know of this mystery and properly estimate the Treasure which she was to possess and to which she was to give birth and existence. She heard with profound humility the voice of the Most High and with a submissive heart she answered: "Lord, God eternal, it is the essence of Thy immense bounty and the work of Thy powerful arm to raise from the dust those that are poor and despised (Ps. 112:7). I acknowledge myself, O Lord, a creature unworthy of such mercies and benefits. What shall this lowly worm do in Thy presence? Thy own Being and Thy own magnificence alone can I offer in thanksgiving, and my soul and all its faculties in sacrifice. Use me, O Lord, according to Thy will, since to it I resign myself entirely. I wish to be as completely Thy own as such a favor requires; but what shall I do, who am not worthy to be the slave of Her who is to be the Mother of the Only-begotten and my Daughter? This I know, and shall confess always: that I am a poor creature; but at the feet of Thy greatness I await the course of Thy mercy, who art a kind Father and the all-powerful God. Make me, O Lord, worthy in Thy eyes of the dignity Thou bestowest upon me."

During this vision Saint Anne was wrapped in a marvelous ecstasy, in which she was favored with the highest understanding of the laws of nature, and of the written and the evangelical precepts. She was instructed as to how the divine nature in the eternal Word was to unite itself to our own; how His most holy humanity was to be elevated to the Being of God, and she understood many other mysteries, which were to be fulfilled in the Incarnation of the Divine Word. By these enlightenments and by other gifts of grace, the Almighty disposed her for the Conception and the creation of her most holy Daughter, the Mother of God.