



Sts. Joachim & Anne

Joachim and Anne were greatly honoured by God who gave them a daughter conceived without sin who was to become known as the Mother of God! It would seem that they performed their parenting responsibilities with great grace. Their feast day on July 26 is a day to honour them and all grandparents for their contribution to our lives.

Fact File

We know very few facts about Sts. Joachim and Anne. The only recorded stories of them are from an apocryphal gospel dating from the 4th Century AD called the Protoevangelium of James. The legend told in this document says that after years of childlessness, an angel appeared to tell Anne and Joachim that they would have a child. Anne promised to dedicate this child to God. Whatever their names or the facts of their lives, we can assume that Mary was raised in a Jewish family home faithful to God and to the religious traditions of her day such that she was led to respond wholeheartedly to God's request with faith, "Let it be done to me as you will."

(adapted from www.catholic.org/saints)

Each Grandparent is unique and irreplaceable. As society changes, the role of grandparents changes. But some things about grandparents are constant. Lets take some time to reflect on...

The Gift of Grandparents

Grandparents provide memories

Memories help us to understand who we are. For most families, grandparents are the 'Central Bank of Memories'. Grandchildren never tire of hearing stories about their own parents when they were children. *"My brother died young, leaving a large family. When we come together at family gatherings the hunger for memories of their father is obvious"*

Grandparents see the inner beauty of the grandchild

To a grandparent, each grandchild is a wonderful mystery. Other people may look and see a pimply little child but the grandparent sees someone unique, special and loveable.

Grandparents benefit too. It's a two-way street!

To young children, their grandparents are simply beautiful and they tell them so; they don't seem to notice the wrinkles and sagging skin. As one grandfather said, "They even laugh at my jokes!" So both generations are helped to see themselves as God sees us – loveable, good and made in his image.

Grandparenting can also involve deep suffering and heavy sacrifices

The deepest hurts can come when we love most deeply. Grandparenting can involve hurtful separation, unfulfilled dreams. The inability to pass on the values we hold dearest can be a source of deep distress and a sense of helplessness when it seems that all one can do is to stand, like Mary and John at the foot of the Cross.



"May you see your children and your childrens' children ..."
That blessing from the Rite of Christian Marriage continues to be fulfilled in countless marriages around the world. For some couples, it is not fulfilled. For some it involves difficult challenges, even heartache. For many it is the greatest joy. And for everyone it is different.



Grandparents help wellbeing

British research from Oxford University showed that grandparents who are involved in the upbringing of their grandchildren contribute to the child's wellbeing.

Professor Ann Buchanan said: "Grandparents who got stuck in and did things with their grandchildren had this positive impact on their grandchildren." (from National Seniors Australia 'Connect' newsletter).

"The educational task of grandparents is always very important, and it becomes even more so when, for different reasons, the parents are not able to ensure an adequate presence to their children. May the Virgin Mary, who, ..., learned to read sacred Scriptures at the knee of her mother, Anne, help grandparents to always nourish their faith and hope at the font of the Word of God." (Pope Benedict XVI on the Feast Day of Joachim and Anne, grandparents of Jesus).

Grandparents are 'significant other adults' in the lives of grandchildren

Their support starts at the most elementary level of presence – babysitting, shopping, helping with homework and sporting activities. In Australia, nearly one fifth of grandparents are engaged in caring for grandchildren for an average of about 12 hours per week - a high percentage considering the common limitations of geographical distance or poor health.

Grandparents are often strong witnesses to the faith

Nowhere is their presence more important than in passing on the faith. This is most obvious at special faith events such as First Communion. More often, this witness is expressed through small family rituals such as grace before meals, the reading of bible stories, celebrating patron saint feast days and offering to pray for their special concerns. There are many resources, including websites, that offer ideas for family rituals and many of these are ideally suited to grandparents.

"I remember when I used to stay with my grandparents when I was 12. They used to always say the rosary in bed before they went to sleep. It seemed to me they would say it extra loud so that I would hear! But it had a big impression on me." (James, aged 19)

"Grandchildren are God's reward for being a parent."



In the words of children

"When they take us for walks, they slow down past things like pretty leaves and caterpillars."

"They show us and talk to us about the colours of the flowers and why we shouldn't walk on cracks."

"They have to answer questions like 'Why isn't God married?' and 'How come dogs chase cats?'"

"They don't say 'Hurry up'".

"When they read to us, they don't skip. They don't mind if we ask for the same story over again."

"My grandparents really, really spoil us – but they get cranky when we don't go to sleep".

"A grandmother we know makes a point of having a special outing with a different grandchild at regular intervals. Each outing is planned according to the special interests of just that child so that he or she is made to feel really loved and special. It strengthens the sense of self-worth of each child." (Mary)

Grandparents often have the gift of time

They are usually not as rushed as modern young parents. Many grandparents have the gift of time – to listen, to affirm and to explore the world together.

Grandchildren provide grandparents with a sense of meaning to life

As their health fails and not all their hopes are fulfilled, grandchildren remain as the living expression of their relationship. They give a sense that their life together had a purpose and that it was worthwhile.

"I will never forget this cosmic shift as I watched our first born walk from the birthing room with his first born in his arms. What a blessing it is to live this long! Being a grandparent allows me to swim in an ocean of questions that only more reveal the wonder of our creator who calls to us for even greater intimacy and union." (Vic)



Grandparents as primary carers

These are only 1% of Australian grandparents but they are growing in number and provide an incredible witness of love and generosity. Most often their care results from a sudden crisis in the families of their children. Not only is there personal grief about their own children and grandchildren but they often face new challenges such as loss of income or loss of plans for a quiet retirement together with increased stress on their own marriage. Suddenly they face the reality that they may die before they retire from the heavy burdens of child-rearing.

It is worth stressing that the law does not require grandparents to undertake the primary care of their grandchildren. However, the extent to which they will take on this new role is quite inspirational. Primarily they are acting out of love.