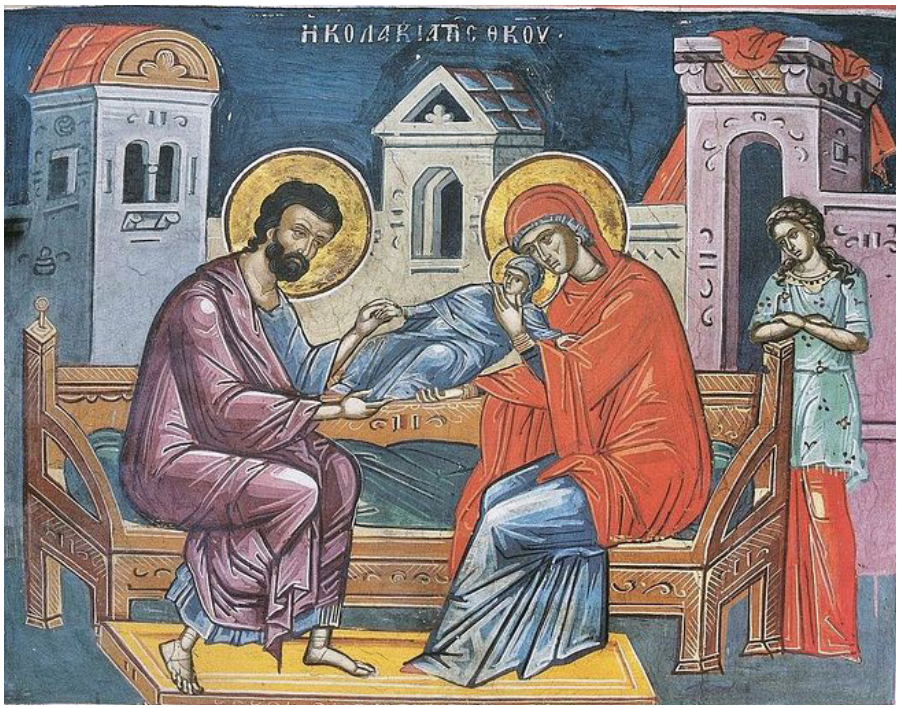
The Birth of the Theotokos in the Protoevangelium of St James

In the histories of the twelve tribes of Israel, Joachim was an extremely rich man. He always brought a double offering to the Lord, telling himself, "My offering for all the people is from my surplus and my own offering to the Lord God is for forgiveness, to atone for my sins."

As the great day of the Lord was drawing near and the children of Israel were bringing their offerings, however, Reubel stood in his way, saying, "You cannot offer your gifts first because you have not conceived a child in Israel."



And Joachim became extremely frustrated and went away to the history of the twelve tribes of his people, saying to himself, "I will look in the history of the twelve tribes of Israel and see whether I am the only one who has not conceived a child in Israel." And he searched and found that all the righteous people had raised children in Israel. And he reminded himself about the patriarch Abraham and that the Lord God gave his son Isaac to him in his last days.

Then, Joachim was extremely frustrated and did not appear to his wife, but gave himself to the desert and pitched his tent there. He fasted forty days and forty nights. All the while, Joachim was saying to himself, "I will not go down for food or drink until the Lord my God visits me; prayer will be my food and drink."

Then, his wife Anna mourned and lamented greatly for two reasons, saying, "I lament that I am a widow and I lament that I am childless."

When the great day of the Lord was drawing near, her servant Juthine said to her, "How long are you going to humble yourself? Do you not see that the great day of the Lord is approaching? You are not allowed to mourn."

...So Anna also became extremely frustrated and removed her mourning garment, washed her head and clothed herself with her wedding dress. Around the ninth hour, she went down to her garden to walk around. She saw a laurel tree and sat down under it. And after a rest, she petitioned the Lord, saying, "God of my ancestors, bless me and hear my prayer, just as you blessed our mother Sarah and gave her son Isaac to her."

And Anna looked up to the heavens and saw a nest of sparrows in the laurel tree. Immediately, Anna cried out mournfully, saying to herself, "Oh me, who gave birth to me? What womb caused me to grow? For I was born cursed in front of the children of Israel. I am reviled and they treat me with contempt and cast me out of the temple of the Lord my God.

"Oh me, what am I like? I am not like the birds of the sky, for the birds of the sky are fruitful before you, Lord... I am not like the domestic animals, for the domestic animals are fruitful before you, Lord... I am not like the wild animals of the earth, for the wild animals of the earth are fruitful before you, Lord... I am not like these waters, for these waters are fruitful before you, Lord... I am not like this earth, for the earth produces its fruit in season and blesses you, Lord."

Suddenly, an angel of the Lord stood in front of her, saying, "Anna, Anna, the Lord God has heard your prayer. You will conceive and give birth and your child will be spoken of everywhere people live."

And Anna said, "As the Lord God lives, whether I give birth to either a male or a female child, I will bring it as an offering to the Lord my God and it will be a servant to him all the days of its life."

Next, two angels came, saying to her, "Look your husband Joachim is coming with his flocks." For an angel of the Lord had gone down to Joachim, saying, "Joachim, Joachim, the Lord God has heard your prayer. Go down from here. Look, your wife Anna has conceived in her womb."

Immediately, Joachim went down and called the shepherds, telling them, "Bring ten lambs without spot or blemish here to me; the ten lambs will be for the Lord God. Bring twelve tender calves; the twelve calves will be for the priests and the elders. And bring one hundred male goats; the one hundred male goats will be for all the people."

Then, Joachim came with his flocks. Anna was standing at the gate. When she saw Joachim coming with his flocks, Anna ran and wrapped herself around his neck, saying, "Now I know that the Lord God has blessed me greatly. See, the widow is no longer a widow and the childless woman has conceived in her womb."

And Joachim rested for the first day he was home. The next day, when he was presenting his offerings, he said to himself, "If the Lord God will be reconciled to me, he will make it clear to me with the priest's metal disc." And Joachim presented his offerings and paid attention to the priest's metal disc until he went up to the altar of the Lord. And he saw no sin in it. Joachim said, "Now, I know that the Lord God has been reconciled to me and has sent all my great sins away for me." And having been justified, he departed from the temple and went to his house.

And his wife's pregnancy came to term. After nine months, Anna gave birth and she said to the midwife, "What is it?"

The midwife said, "A girl."

Anna said, "My soul exalts this day." And she put her baby to bed.

After her days were completed... she gave her breast to the child and gave her the name Mary.

Through your holy birth, O Immaculate One,
Joachim and Anne were delivered from the shame of childlessness,
and Adam and Eve from the corruption of death.
Your people, redeemed from the debt of their sins, cry out to you to honor your birth:
"the barren one gives birth to the Mother of God the Sustainer of our life!"

Kontakion of the Nativity of the Theotokos