

In my Mary DVD I mention that Mary's father Joachim was a priest. I received the following question for someone who thought I was incorrect. My response follows.

Dear Mr. Ray:

Thank you for all your good and hard work. We very much enjoy your *Footsteps* series. In fact, "Mary, Mother of God" is so helpful; we use it in our RCIA class because it says everything we want to say—much better than we could say it.

I am writing to you because our Bible study instructor recently saw "Mary, Mother of God" and has raised the following point in an email to me:

When it described Mary's parents, the video identified them as Joachim and Anne, which is the commonly accepted names – very likely from the "Proto-Evangelium of James".

The part I am very concerned with is that it said that both were from priestly families – which makes Mary a member of the TRIBE of LEVI!

That is wrong: because of God's promise to David (2 Sam 7:12-14), Mother Church believes her to be of the family of David, and therefore of the TRIBE of JUDAH.

Neither I nor the parish priest involved in RCIA knows the answer. We would appreciate it if you would help us clarify this matter. Thank you.

\*\*\*\*\*

Hello Susan:

Thanks for your very kind words and encouragement. The *Footprints* project is very demanding and has been the controlling factor of our lives for the last 5 years and will be for at least four years to come. It has been a great burden on our family, but a great blessing as well. I understand the comments made by your friend -- the comments are very perceptive and whoever it is to be applauded for their concern for truth and accuracy. If I were to re-do the Mary video I would change the wording in that sections to say things less dogmatically and with a bit of nuance. However, here are a few observations:

1) The ancient writings relating to Joachim and Anna are not completely historically reliable. The sketchy information comes from several ancient documents not accepted by the Church, in themselves as trustworthy, although it can be assumed some of the information may come from faithful traditions. I wish now that I had explained the questionability of the source material with phrases such as "it is widely believed" or "many scholars hold" or something like that.

2) Because we have no infallible information about Joachim and Anna and even their names are drawn from questionable sources, neither me nor your friend can prove they

were or weren't from priestly families in any definitive way. Even the questionable ancient sources do not reveal their tribal associates in a definitive way - to the best of my knowledge.

3) It is interesting that David and Solomon were both from the tribe of Judah yet acted as priests as well as kings and prophets. When reading 2 Samuel 6 one cannot miss the priestly function of David -- even to the point of the author stressing David's apparel -- he was wearing of an ephod, the clothing of a priest. He also offered sacrifices and blessed the people as a priest would do. Solomon's priestly prayer at the inauguration of the Temple was prefiguring Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17. Melchizedek was a priest of the Most High God but not from the tribe of Levi. And Jesus himself was a priest according to Hebrews, and Jesus was not from the tribe of Levi but from the tribe of Judah. Regarding Solomon and David being priests, I believe Scott Hahn has done some excellent work in this area.

4) The lineage of Mary is not definitive either. Some say that Luke's gospel provides the lineage of Mary but this is far from certain. According to Matthew's Gospel we know the line of Joseph precedes from Judah but we are not told the lineage of Mary. Jesus could very well have been from the tribe of Judah through his father Joseph without his mother Mary herself being from the tribe of Judah. This would have been fully adequate to fulfill the promise of 2 Samuel 7:12-14. Nowhere is it required that Mary herself have a proven lineage from Judah. If that was essential, it would have been made plain in Scripture since it would have been crucial. Jesus was from the line of Judah through his legal father Joseph.

Matthew says, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. . . and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ" (Mt 1:1, 16). Matthew is writing to Jews proving the Kingship of Jesus. Lineage here is crucial to establishing Jesus as the Jewish king from the tribe of Judah. It is the line of Joseph the father that is followed. The line of Mary is unmentioned. Mary could have been from any tribe without in any way invalidating the promise of 2 Sam 7.

5) Though many have asserted that Mary is from the tribe of Judah, I do not believe that the Church has ever definitively taught that Mary is from the tribe of Judah or had to have been for the Messianic promises to be fulfilled. But it is clearly taught that Jesus is from the tribe of Judah and that this lineage can be achieved through the line of Joseph as drawn out in Matthew.

6) From the *Catholic Encyclopedia* 1913 edition (Vol. 15, pg. 464E) we read "Some of these writers add that the birth of Mary was obtained by the fervent prayers of Joachim and Anna in their advanced age. As Joachim belonged to the royal family of David, so Anna is supposed to have been a descendant of the priestly family of Aaron; thus Christ the Eternal King and Priest sprang from both a royal and priestly family ( cf. Aug., *Consens. Evang.*, l. II, c. 2). Basing my conclusions on this authority is not without merit -- in my humble opinion.

I would note that the *Protoevangelium of James* does not say anything about the lineage of either Joachim or Anna. It says the Joachim had flocks but that is no preclusion from him being a priest.

7) Though we are not definitively told the lineage of Mary in Scripture, there are some pretty strong hints that would confirm my statement in the Mary DVD—that Joachim was a priest in the.

First, Mary was a relative of Elizabeth, likely a cousin.

Second, both Elizabeth and her husband were from the tribe of Levi; but not only of Levi, but more importantly, of the family of the High Priest Aaron (Lk 1:5). Therefore, John the Baptist was of the line of the Aaronic priesthood.

Third, priests in the line of Aaron jealously guarded the purity of their priestly line; and therefore were known to carefully marry only woman of the Aaronic line.<sup>1</sup>

Fourth, Mary as a close relative (probably a cousin) Elizabeth (a daughter of the family of Aaron, married to a priest of the family of Aaron) was probably full-blooded Aaronic, or certainly had one line back through the family of the Aaronic priesthood.

Fifth, since Mary's relative Elizabeth was full-blooded Aaronic, then at least one of Mary's parents, and likely both of them, were also Aaronic which means Mary could trace her lineage back to the High Priest Aaron.

8) According to tradition, Mary was born in the grotto under the Church of St. Anne's which would have been in the shadow of the Temple. It is likely that a priest would have lived so close to the Temple.

9) In conclusion, Joseph was from the tribe of Judah and therefore Jesus, through the ancestral line of his father, was from the tribe of Judah. However, since his mother Mary was Aaronic either in part or most likely in whole, then Jesus was of Aaronic blood too through the line of his mother. However, the son was considered to be of the tribe of his father.

---

<sup>1</sup> It was lawful for a priest to marry a Levitess, or indeed a daughter of Israel but it was most commendable of all to marry one of the priests' line. Hence that story in *Taanith* (ubi supr.), "Four-score pair of brethren-priests took to wife fourscore pair of sister-priestesses in Gophne, all in one night." There was hardly any thing among the Jews with greater care and caution looked, after than the marrying of their priests; viz. that the wives they took should not by any means stain and defile their priestly blood: and that all things which were fit for their eating should be hallowed. Hence that usual phrase for an excellent woman, *She deserves to marry with a priest*. Josephus speaks much of this care, "that the whole priestly generation might be preserved pure and unblended" (Lightfoot, Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica, 3:13).

Having said all that, I still commend your Bible Instructor and if I ever get the chance to revise the videos, I would possibly alter the wording a bit on this point in the video. I might say that Joachim was most likely a priest, but the facts I've presented certainly no cause for alarm, being quite feasible and believable. Very few authors don't wish to go back and revise a thing or two, here or there. There are very few major projects one endeavors to do that they don't look back on Monday morning and wish they couldn't change a wee bit -- especially since your humble servant does not have the guarantee of infallibility granted to the pope and bishops.

Having said that, there are only two minor things that I would change in the five videos I have finished so far, and this is one of them. Over all I am very happy with our products and for a guy with no formal training or video training, my wife and I are pleased at what the Lord has done through us.

God bless you for your kind words and encouragement. I am very gratified that the videos have served you well and hope to have five more for you in the next few years. My wife and I and our crew are flying to Israel in November to film "David & Solomon: Expanding the Kingdom".

Your humble and perfectionist-seeking brother in Christ.

*To be a worthy Servant of the King,*  
**Steve Ray**