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On the night of the feast of the Epiphany (January 6th) at the end of the Christmas season, in the year 1412 during the final waning period of the relative peace secured by the Truce of Leulinghen, a baby was born to Jacques Darc and his wife Isabelle in the village of Domremy. She was christened Jehanne (Joan) after her godmothers Jehanne Royer and Jehanne de Viteau. Her childhood was spent among the forests and strawberry-covered fields of the Meuse River valley, far from the northern regions where the political situation was becoming increasingly troubled.

Against the problems that were occurring around them, members of the Darc family continued to farm their 50-some acres of land near the Meuse.

According to the Domremy villagers whom later testified to Jehannes childhood upbringing, she was a dutiful child who helped her parents with the chore along with her other siblings: her three older brothers Jacquemin, Jean, and Pierre, and her little sister Catherine. She was deeply devoted to God and the Blessed Virgin. She also loved the ringing of the church bells. In 1414 her father rented the nearby Chateau de l'Il from a local aristocratic family to serve as a secure sanctuary for the villagers and their livestock.

In 1420 when Jehanne was eight, the Treaty of Troyes granted Henry V eventual title to the kingdom of France and the hand of Catherine, daughter of King Charles. In 1422 Henry V and Charles VI died within two months of each other, leaving the infant Henry VI as the nominal King of France.

Around that time, perhaps in the summer of 1424, the young farm girl from Domremy said she began to experience visions. She would later explain: I was in my thirteenth year when I heard a voice from God to help me govern my conduct. And the first time I was very much afraid.

And this voice came, about the hour of noon, in the summer time, in my fathers garden... A new chapter had begun for Jehanne and the various factions fighting for control of the Kingdom of France.

She believed that the voices came from God. She said the first of the voices were of Saint Michael. The voices told her two to three times a week that she must go away and that I must come to France; and my father knew nothing of my leaving. The voice told her that she should go to France and she could no longer stay where she was. It told her that she could raise the siege laid to the city of Orleans. The voice told her also that she should go to Robert de Baudricourt at the town of Vaucouleurs, who was the captain of the said town, and he would provide people to go with her.

Early in 1429, during the Hundred Years War, when the English were about to capture Orleans, the voices exhorted her to help the Dauphin, later Charles VII, King of France. Charles, because of both internal strife and the English claim to the throne of France, had not yet crowned king. Joan succeeded in convincing him that she had a divine mission to save France.

A board of theologians approved her claims, and she was given troops to command. Dressed in armor and carrying a white banner that represented God blessing the French royal emblem, the fleur-de-lis, she led the French to a victory over the English. At the coronation of the Dauphin in the cathedral at Reims, she was given the place of honor beside the king. Charles decided to send her to Poitiers, a little over 30 miles to the south of Chinton, to be questioned by a group of theologians who had relocated to the city. Although Joan had united the French behind Charles and had put an end to English

hopes of reign over France, Charles opposed any further campaigns against the English. Therefore, it was without royal support that Joan conducted in 1430 a military operation against the English at Compiègne, near Paris. She was captured by Burgundian soldiers, who sold her over to an ecclesiastical court at Rouen to be tried for heresy and sorcery. Joan was not an ordinary prisoner.

The archer who had captured her knew he had to give her up to his under lord, who in turn gave her to his overlord, Jean de Luxemburg to hold her for prisoner. Joan even tried to commit suicide by throwing herself off of the tower she was locked in but she survived. The University and the church only accepted those visionaries who had confided in and been approved by the church itself. Joan was thought to be a witch. She was kept in prison for seven months and in December, a few days before, Joan was taken by boat across the mouth of the Somme River to the city of Rouen where she was to stand trial. There were many irregularities about Joans trial and imprisonment.

Though she was to be tried by the Church, she was denied the right of being in church prison, where she would have better treatment. Even though the English considered her a prisoner of war, she was treated as a common criminal. And though the Church was going to try her, the English were going to pay for the trial. By February 21 Cauchon was ready with his evidence against Joan.

He had a long list of so-called crimes: wanton behavior, unseemly male dress, heretical beliefs, and from English and Burgundian sources, tales of

her sorcery and witchcraft. The trial centered on Joans claim that she communicated with God through her saints. On March 17 the court adjourned to draw up articles of accusation in preparation for Joans indictment. On May 24 Joan was taken to a platform and threatened with execution.

She recanted and was given the sentence of life in prison. After 14 months of interrogation, she was accused of wrongdoing in wearing masculine dress and of heresy for believing she was directly responsible to God rather than to the Roman Catholic Church. Because she resumed masculine dress after returning to jail, she was condemned again, this time by a secular court and on May 30, 1431, Joan was burned at the stake in the Old Market Square at Rouen as a relapsed heretic.

Twenty- five years after her death, the church retried her case, and she was pronounced innocent. In 1920 she was canonized by Pope Benedict XV: her traditional feast day is May 30. Though we dont know what she looked like, we know more about Joans character than about any other woman who lived before the modern age.

And what we know comes largely from her own words in the trial that condemned her and from the people who knew and testified about her in the retrial that cleared her. The men who condemned her never would have dreamed how valuable her Trial Record would be to her. I fell as well as most people that the trial was her greatest challenge and showed her in a new kind of glory. Joan has inspired more books than any other woman in history. Her fame is worldwide.

There are many questions still unanswered about her though. She is spoke about in poetry, music, opera, drama, dance, and art. Most schoolchildren know who she is too.

I think of Joan as a very strong headed young girl dedicated to the Catholic religion of her countryside. I think that Joan was so sure that she was in touch with the supernatural, that it directed her whole life. Joan sincerely believed in the reality of the saints she could see. Yet I find her a very normal human being. She was a peasant girl and did have practical thoughts.

Joans goal was heroic, to save her country and her King by fighting with courage and spirit. The fact that Joan had to struggle to overcome some human weaknesses makes her, for me, all the greater as a human being, and makes her achievements all the more remarkable. Words/ Pages : 1, 397 / 24