

## **BIOGRAPHY: JOAN OF ARC**

**By Kelly E. Preston**

Joan of Arc was born during a time period referred to as the Medieval Ages and Renaissance Era. The Renaissance “rebirth” Era was also known as a time of exploration and discovery. This was the same era that Christopher Columbus was given funds to set sail and explore the new world. Besides Joan, several other extraordinary females were born during this era: Christina of Sweden, Vittoria Colonna, and Elisabetta Sirani.

In January of 1412, during the Hundred Year’s War, in Domremy, France, Jehanne Romee, who would later be known as Joan of Arc, was born. She was born to father, Jacques d’Arc and mother, Isabelle Romee. Joan was one of five children. Joan had a simple upbringing in a rural village on her family’s small farm. Her father was respected in the community of Domremy and worked as a farmer and tax collector. Nicknames were not uncommon in this time period. Friends and neighbors referred to Joan as Jeanette, which means “little Joan.” Later in her life, Joan referred to herself as “La Pucelle,” meaning “the Maid.”<sup>1</sup>

Joan’s life started out ordinary enough until around the age of twelve when she began receiving visions and heavenly visitors. She was told that she was a daughter of God and that she needed to faithfully attend church and fulfill her purpose on earth.<sup>2</sup>

As a devout Catholic, it was not uncommon in those days to give patronage to the saints. It is said that Joan’s mother, Isabelle, went on her own holy pilgrimage. Even as a

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<sup>1</sup> Yeatts, Tabitha. *Joan of Arc: Heavenly Warrior*. (New York, NY: Sterling, 2009.) Page 3

<sup>2</sup> Wilkinson, Philip. *Joan of Arc: The Teenager Who Saved Her Nation*. (Washington D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2007.) Page 18

little girl, Joan frequented her local church and prayed to Saint Mary. Perhaps, she felt a connection to the mother of Jesus since she too was a teenager when God singled her out for a greater purpose. Mary's life story and unwavering obedience to God would have been a role model for any young and pious Catholic girl. Mary was counted as an important saint of the Catholic Church. It was customary for church constituents to be familiar with the various stories of the saints and the great works they achieved in their lives. It is said that Joan also felt a special connection to Saint Catherine. In fact, when she prepared for her first battle, she believed that Saint Catherine came to her and instructed her to use a sword that was buried inside of a Catholic Church that was named after her in the town of Fierbois.

For nearly 100 years, France and England had been at war over the French throne. The nation of France had been oppressed by the enduring war and power struggle with England. Joan, like other French citizens, longed to see her country independent once again. As she grew older the voices began to give her specific instructions regarding her role in the war against England. In the year, 1428, Joan was visited by Saint Michael, who told her, "Daughter of God, go to Robert de Baudricourt."<sup>3</sup> Baudricourt was captain of the fortress of Vaucouleurs and would be the first of several government officials that Joan would win over. Though Joan did not gain favor from Baudricourt until her second meeting with him. Joan needed his permission to be escorted to the city of Chinon to meet with Charles VII. She was told by the saints that Charles VII was the rightful heir to the throne of France and that it was her mission to lead him to Reims where he would be crowned king of France. What finally won Baudricourt over was when Joan predicted the

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<sup>3</sup> Williams, Jay. *Joan of Arc: Warrior Saint*. (New York, NY: Sterling, 1963.) Page 11

exact day the Battle of Herrings would take place. Convinced that Joan was indeed sent by God, Baudricourt granted her escort and weaponry for her journey.

Finally, Joan was on her way to meet Charles VII, the Dauphin. When she was brought in to meet the Dauphin, he was dressed in plain clothing in order to trick her, but Joan knew exactly who he was and walked straight over to him showing her respect by kneeling down. He was impressed by Joan's discernment and granted her a private meeting. What was discussed in that meeting was not recorded in history books, but the result was Charles VII full support Joan's mission. In order for Joan to move forward in what God called her to do, Charles VII first had her sent to Poitiers for extensive examination from the Armagnac clergy. After interrogation, the clergy concluded that Joan's motives were pure. This was her final step before she was released to fight in the war. Joan made 3 promises to Charles VII, first, to raise the siege on Orleans, second, to make the way for Charles VII to be crowned king in Reims, and third, to free France from England's control. She confided in Charles VII that she only had a limited time to serve and that every moment counted.

Based on her instructions from Saint Catherine, Joan requested a specific sword that was hidden inside Saint Catherine's Chapel in Fierbois. Though she never saw the sword prior, she described it as having 5 crosses engraved on it. When the churchmen found the sword that Joan described they delivered it to her. Later this would prove to be one of the miracles surrounding her life. Joan was also given body armor to protect her in battle. And finally, Joan carried a white banner, referred to as a "standard" with the words, "Jesus Christ." The flag she carried rallied the troops wherever she went. It is said

that the French could have been losing a battle, but once they saw Joan's banner they got inspired to keep fighting and would win the battle.

Joan was not eager to shed blood. She wrote 3 letters to the English army warning them to remove their troops from French soil. Each time they mocked her by saying they would not surrender to a woman and if they ever captured her they would burn her body. Joan knew she would go into battle, but wanted to give the English a fair chance first. Before Joan engaged in the battle at Orleans, the Duke of Alencon befriended her. Alencon was of noble blood and highly ranked in the French army, yet his imprisonment under English control 5 years prior, made him just as passionate to see France's freedom as Joan's. He gave her a horse and a mount and personally introduced her to the warriors under his command. "At first they could not believe that a peasant girl could know anything about the art of war, for they themselves had learned that hard way. Yet like Alencon, they quickly fell under the spell of her personality."<sup>4</sup> Another nobleman, named Jean, who later would become the Count of Dunois, also befriended Joan. He was the half brother of Duke Charles of Orleans who was captured by the English. During his brother's imprisonment, Jean stepped in to defend the city of Orleans. He was distinguished in the army by his warfare skills. These 2 men, along with many other strategic players in the war, believed in Joan and that God sent her to save France. Undoubtedly, this was further confirmation to the Maid that she was following her destiny. Joan's personality and sincerity captivated the soldiers.

Joan immediately rolled up her sleeves and took charge of the army. Her first command was telling the soldiers to be respectful, stop swearing, and go to church.

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<sup>4</sup> Williams, Jay. *Joan of Arc: Warrior Saint*. (New York, NY: Sterling, 1963.) Page 31

“Joan’s ideals of chivalry and good behavior by the army were a refreshing change for the citizens of Orleans. Unlike before, they did not have to fear the Maid’s army.”<sup>5</sup>

Though she was young and inexperienced, she fascinated the soldiers with her giftings in warfare. She outmastered the English armies with her strategy and timing. She led the French army to victory in her first battle to lift the ten-year siege over Orleans. “Knight Thibault d’Armagnac said, ‘She behaved as if she had been the shrewdest captain in the world and all her life been learning [the art of] war.’”<sup>6</sup>

By the time Joan went into battle at Orleans, she was already famous to the French citizens living there. Word got around that a peasant girl with the touch of God on her life was coming to save not only Orleans, but France as well. When Joan arrived in the city of Orleans, the people were inspired and hopeful once again that perhaps God had not forgotten them. The Hundred Year’s War took a toll on both the French and the British. The townspeople of Orleans became so destitute that their only hope was a miracle and Joan represented the miracle.

Finally, after many battles, Joan’s victories for the French, paved the way for Charles VII to be crowned in Reims. Once the Dauphin was crowned, Joan had completed her mission. She did what she set out to do and the final freedom from England was within France’s reach. However, Joan did not feel released to go back to her family and home when her soldiers would still be engaged in war. She wanted to see things through so she stayed with troops and fought on. Later Joan was captured and imprisoned by the Burgundians. The Burgundians were French who were sympathetic with the English. Though she knew she would endure hardship, she did not seem to know

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<sup>5</sup> Yeatts, Tabitha. *Joan of Arc: Heavenly Warrior*. (New York, NY: Sterling, 2009.) Page 39

<sup>6</sup> Yeatts, Tabitha. *Joan of Arc: Heavenly Warrior*. (New York, NY: Sterling, 2009.) Page 31

the entire outcome of her fate. She hoped that her imprisonment would not end in death. However, her imprisonment went from bad to worse when she was sold for 10,000 francs to the English, by the Burgundians. An investigation and trial lasting over six months proved to be an eternity for Joan. Church and government officials routinely interrogated her, and she was accused of many crimes, among those was heresy. Joan, though weary by this time, stood her ground and spoke with authority and boldness to her accusers. She would not deny the mission and purpose for which she was created. Though she came close to fully recanting, in the end she stayed true to what she believed in and did not deny the work of Christ in her life.

During her trial, she did not receive any aid from Charles VII who perhaps could have swayed her accusers and changed the outcome of her story. To this day, no one understands the reason Charles VII did not make an effort to save the one that saved him. Perhaps this was because Joan had known she must go through this and made him promise he would not intervene. The history books do not mention any insights on this dynamic of the story.

In May of 1431, Joan was officially accused of heresy and was condemned to be burned at the stake. As Joan was walked to the city square of Rouen, where she would be executed, “she asked for a cross, she was given a little wooden cross by an unknown Englishman who made it out of an end of a stick. She placed it inside her dress.”<sup>7</sup> She was devoted to Christ until the end of her journey. “Jesus!” was her final word.

Twenty-five years later, Joan’s case was re-examined by the Catholic Church. Her life, her work, and her mission were analyzed. A new investigation was launched and a

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<sup>7</sup> Yeatts, Tabitha. *Joan of Arc: Heavenly Warrior*. (New York, NY: Sterling, 2009.) Page 102

fresh trial was conducted. Family, friends, and supporters of Joan were given permission to testify on her behalf. There were countless stories of her honesty and devotion to Christ. Eventually, Joan's earlier verdict of heresy was overturned and she was declared innocent.

Almost 500 years after her death, in 1920, the Catholic Church sainted Joan of Arc. Joan's life was once again re-examined and evidence was reviewed proving Joan was worthy of sainthood. Her life was created for a purpose and she was God's instrument to free France from the impending rule of the English.

“Although France would be lost by a woman, a maiden would save it.”<sup>8</sup> By all standards in that day, Joan was an uneducated, peasant girl. She was not of noble blood. But Joan was devoted to God and chosen by Him to fulfill a specific purpose. She was created to rescue her nation from the oppression of the English. After almost 100 years of war, her nation undoubtedly was discouraged by the continual gain of power of the English government. Joan was called to fight battles, crown a new king, and lead her country back to freedom. She faithfully lived out her mission and in the process touched countless lives.

Joan made herself available to God through prayer and devotion. Through her frequent visits to church and her dedication to Christ and the saints of the Church, Joan took seriously the things of God. The lives of the saints and their works of service for God inspired her. Though young, she knew her purpose and mission in life. Regardless of the outcome, Joan was committed to fulfilling her destiny. Her story does not have an “Americanized” happy ending, but it is inspiring because she was faithful to her God and

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<sup>8</sup> Yeatts, Tabitha. *Joan of Arc: Heavenly Warrior*. (New York, NY: Sterling, 2009.) Page 2

her calling as an individual. She was obedient in spite of obstacles. She did not allow her personal doubts, background, and gender keep her away from the mission of her life. She went forward bravely and conquered in Jesus' Name. Though Joan did not get to live "happily ever after," and there was no prince waiting to whisk her away after her final battle, she still honored God and her calling to the end. Joan did what she was asked to do and faithfully obeyed the Lord through overwhelming circumstances. Joan's actions reminded an entire nation that God existed and that He personally involves Himself with mankind. From what was recorded about Joan's life, she seemed to others to be humble and did not expect fame or glory. She was simply doing what she was told to do. Joan stayed true to the task at hand. She did not get distracted by fame or in pleasing others. Imagine if she had, her story may have ended much different and perhaps she would not have fulfilled all God had intended. A nation may not have experienced independence.

Honesty and fearlessness were two common descriptions that followed Joan of Arc. She held high moral standards for herself and the soldiers under her command. She did not apologize for the unusual war strategies she was told to perform by the saints. Nor did she apologize for consulting with God prior to her missions. Joan was known for her focus and passion to free France from English control. She was not lukewarm in her relationship with God and she had a profound affect on everyone she met. History records two main reactions of those who crossed paths with Joan of Arc; either they loved her or despised her. She was a symbol of freedom to the citizens of France and she was a symbol of fear to the English. A mere maiden, provoked fear in the enemy; just hearing her name caused the English to become unnerved. However, Joan did not seem

concerned about the opinions of others, she stayed the course and continued to lean on God and the voices that had gone before her.

After reading her life story, I do not doubt that God used whatever means necessary to lead and speak to young Joan of Arc. It is evident that she was chosen for a specific purpose and that God graciously confirmed that purpose to her as many times as she needed and in ways she could culturally relate to. No one knows for sure Joan's true convictions, but her life paints a clear story of commitment and dedication to Jesus Christ. Her choices and her journey brought and continue to bring glory to God. Witnesses recorded and testified at Joan's re-trial in the 1450's that she operated not in her own wisdom, but in the power and authority of Jesus Christ.

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