



St. Bernadette Soubirous

St. Bernadette Soubirous was born in Lourdes, France, on January 7, 1844, and suffered from severe asthma and abject poverty.

On February 11, 1858, she was granted a vision of the Blessed Virgin Mary in a cave on the banks of the Gave River near Lourdes. When she reported the vision, the civil authorities tried to frighten her into recanting her accounts.

Bernadette's story caused a sensation with the townspeople, who were divided in their opinions on whether or not Bernadette was telling the truth. Some believed her to have a mental illness and demanded she be put in an asylum. Others followed her on her daily journey to the grotto. They came with various degrees of faith and curiosity.

On February 25, 1858, a spring emerged from the cave and the waters were discovered to be of a miraculous nature, capable of healing the sick and lame.

On March 25, 1858, the vision identified herself as the Immaculate Conception. This dogma (that Mary had been conceived without the stain of original sin) had been promulgated only two years previously. The vision also directed that a church should be erected on the site. Many authorities tried to shut down the spring and delay the construction of the chapel, but the influence and fame of the visions reached Empress Eugenie of France, wife of Napoleon III, and construction went forward.

In 1866, Bernadette became a member of the Sisters of Notre Dame in Nevers, where she died on April 16, 1879.

Since that time, Lourdes has become one of the major pilgrimage destinations in the world. Close to five million pilgrims visit Lourdes every year, with individuals and groups coming from all over the world. In 2008, the 150th anniversary of the apparitions, some 8 million pilgrims visited Lourdes.

1. The message of Lourdes is Prayer. How does my life reflect my union with God?
2. The message of Lourdes is Penance. Where do I practice self-denial?
3. The message of Lourdes is Church. What is Mary's role as Mother of the Church?
4. The message of Lourdes is Poverty. What areas of my life need healing/simplifying?

