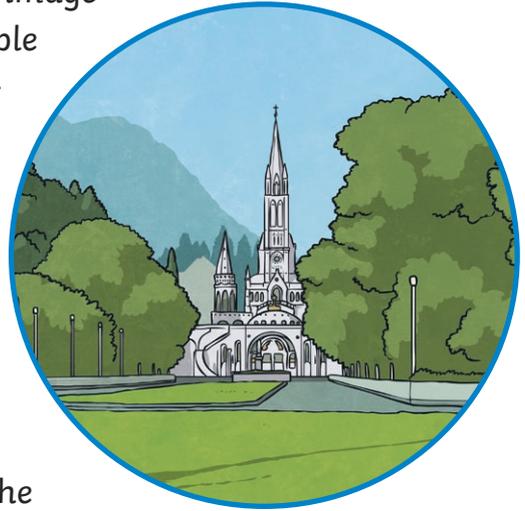


Our Lady of Lourdes

Have you ever heard of somebody going on pilgrimage to or visiting Lourdes? Each year, millions of people visit this special town. It is situated in south-west France, in the foothills of the Pyrenees Mountains. So what is it that makes Lourdes so special? Lourdes is now one of the world's most famous Marian shrines. In France, only Paris has more hotels than Lourdes, which is testament to its popularity as a pilgrimage and tourist destination.



It all began on 11th February, 1858, near the Grotto of Massabielle, a mile outside of Lourdes. A poor fourteen-year-old girl, Bernadette Soubirous, saw a small woman dressed in white, with golden rosary beads, a blue belt and two golden roses on her feet. Bernadette had been out collecting firewood with her sister and another friend when she heard two gusts of wind and became startled. Bernadette soon realised that the lady who appeared to her was the Virgin Mary.

Mary appeared to Bernadette many times afterwards and asked that a chapel be built where she had revealed herself to Bernadette. She told Bernadette that she would be happy in the next life. Later, Bernadette told her mother about the apparition. Her parents told her not to go back to the grotto again, but she sneaked away to visit it anyway. On other occasions, Mary told Bernadette that people should pray and stop committing sin. She also instructed Bernadette



to dig the ground in front of the grotto and drink the water that came from the spring that she would find. Later this same spring, water would be drunk by many other people who were hoping for miracle cures for illnesses they were suffering.

In the beginning, many people mocked Bernadette and would not believe her story. However, on 3rd July, 1876, Pope Pius IX approved Bernadette's account and the Lourdes Shrine as a place of apparition. To this day, the image of Our Lady of Lourdes, which is based on what Bernadette saw, is widely copied and is often displayed in churches, homes and other shrines around the world. The original statue was created by Joseph-Hugues Fabisch. Bernadette was canonized a saint in 1933.

Nowadays, people still flock to Lourdes in search of prayer, peace and miracle cures for their sicknesses or troubles. The Lourdes Medical Bureau was set up to determine which miracle cures were trustworthy. So far, sixty-eight cures for illnesses have been verified by the body, which is led by medical experts. Pilgrims bathe in the holy water at the shrine, drink it, or use it to bless their homes and belongings. Many films and songs have been based on Lourdes, including 'The Village of Saint Bernadette', which was recorded by Andy Williams in 1959.

It is difficult to know what Bernadette would have thought about Lourdes nowadays. What we can be sure of is that it will continue to be one of the most important places of pilgrimage for Roman Catholics and others for many years to come.

Questions

1. Where is Lourdes located?

2. Who was Bernadette Soubirous and why is she famous?

3. Describe the lady Bernadette saw.

4. List the requests Mary had for Bernadette.

5. What evidence is there that proves Lourdes is a very popular destination for tourists and pilgrims nowadays?

6. What does the Lourdes Medical Bureau do?

7. What do you think Bernadette would say about Lourdes nowadays? How would she feel about what it has become? Give reasons for your answers.

Answers

1. Where is Lourdes located?

Lourdes is located in south-west France in the foothills of the Pyrenees Mountains.

2. Who was Bernadette Soubirous and why is she famous?

She was a poor fourteen year old girl who witnessed the apparition of the Virgin Mary in Lourdes.

3. Describe the lady Bernadette saw.

Bernadette saw a small white lady who was holding golden rosary beads, was wearing a blue belt and had two golden roses on her feet.

4. List the requests Mary had for Bernadette.

She wanted people to build a chapel, pray and stop sinning. She also wanted Bernadette to dig in the ground and drink the water that came from a spring there.

5. What evidence is there that proves Lourdes is a very popular destination for tourists and pilgrims nowadays?

Lourdes has many hotels. It only has less than Paris in all of France.

6. What does the Lourdes Medical Bureau do?

These medical experts test the cures people claim to have received at Lourdes to see if they are trustworthy.

7. What do you think Bernadette would say about Lourdes nowadays? How would she feel about what it has become? Give reasons for your answers.

Pupil's own response.