

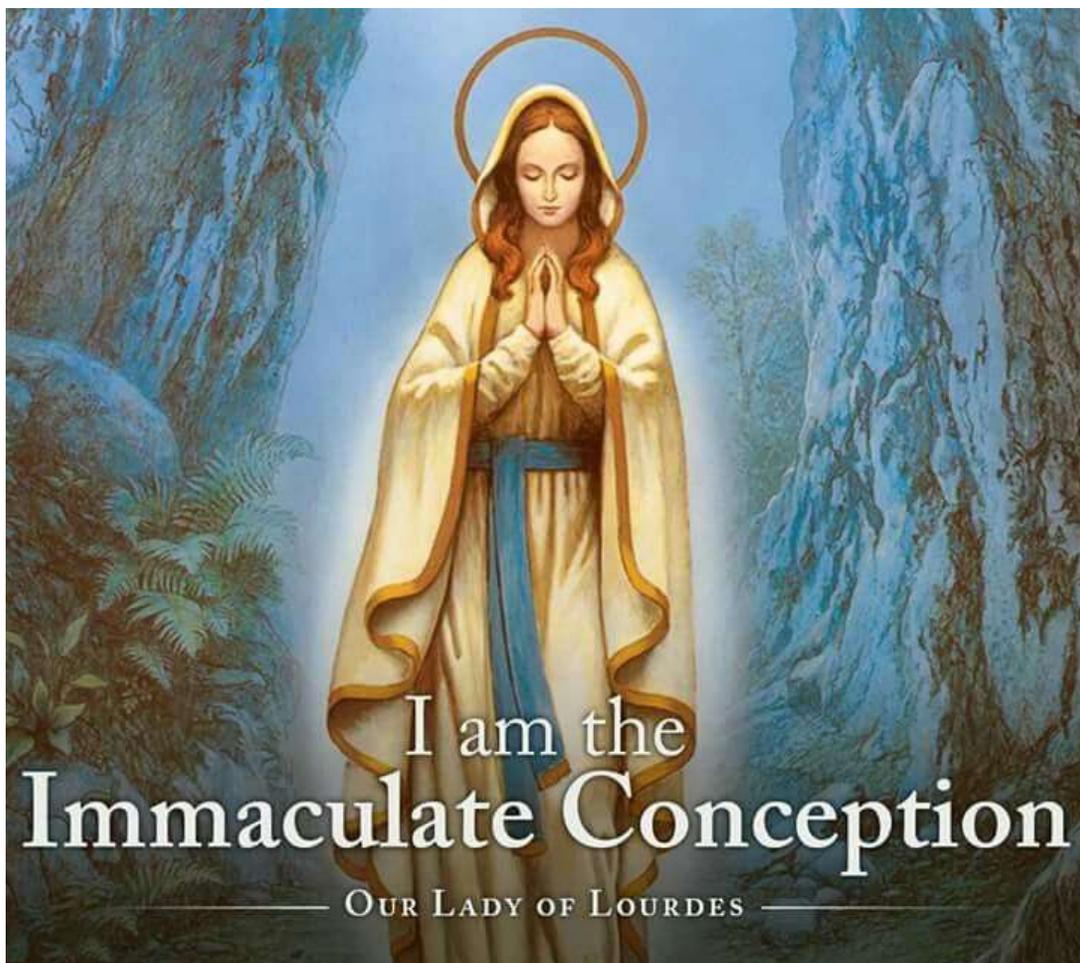
Lesson 10: The Immaculate Conception

Please click twice to watch the video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBTKMfEuVLO>

The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, is a Holy Day of Obligation in the Catholic Church. We must attend Mass on Holy Days.

Many Catholics believe this feast celebrates Jesus' conception through the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary. However, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception celebrates Mary's conception in the womb of Saint Anne without the stain of original sin. Jesus' conception is celebrated on the Feast of the Annunciation on March 25, nine months before Christmas.

Saints Joachim and Anne prayed for a child for a very long time. Just when they had begun to lose hope, Saint Anne became pregnant with Mary. In order for Mary to become the mother of Christ, her soul never suffered the effects of original sin.



Saint Bernadette Soubirous was born on January 7, 1844 into a very poor family. She had a pleasant personality, very poor health, and bad asthma. Bernadette helped her mother around the house and took care of her siblings. She once said, *"I was nothing and of this nothing God made something great."*

During the year 1858, Bernadette was 14 and preparing to receive her First Holy Communion. Bernadette, her sister, and her friend had gone to collect firewood. The two girls crossed the stream to the grotto. Bernadette, however, stayed on the other side because she did

not want to make her asthma worse by walking through the cold water. The girls insisted she join them, and Bernadette began taking off her shoes when she heard a rustling sound.

Bernadette looked around and then in the grotto, she saw a beautiful lady. She knelt and began praying the Rosary. After the lady left, Bernadette asked her sister and friend if they had seen anything. When they said no, Bernadette told them what she had seen and told them not to tell anyone. However, Bernadette's sister told their mother, who commanded Bernadette to stop day-dreaming and ordered them not to go to the grotto again.

Bernadette's mother eventually allowed Bernadette to return to the grotto and Our Lady appeared to her 17 more times. She promised Bernadette happiness not in this world, but in the next. During the sixteenth apparition, on March 25, the Feast of the Annunciation, Our Lady revealed who she was. Bernadette recalled: "With her two arms hanging down, she raised her eyes and looked up at the sky, and it was then that she told me, joining her hands together now at the height of her breast, that she was the Immaculate Conception. Those were the last words she ever said to me."

On February 11, 1858, Mary appeared to 14-year-old Bernadette Soubirous. This was the first of 18 visits, many of them with 20,000 people present. When Bernadette asked the Lady's identity, she replied, "I am the Immaculate Conception." Just four years earlier, the pope had proclaimed it a dogma that Mary was conceived immaculate without original sin. The Blessed Virgin, through Bernadette, had come to call sinners to a change of heart. Her message was a request for prayer and penance. She also instructed Bernadette to tell the priests that a chapel was to be built on the site and processions held.

Bernadette was ridiculed by the authorities and the clergy, but she remained determined, loving, and courageous despite the hardships. On January 18, 1862, the Church declared Bernadette's visions authentic and supernatural. Bernadette herself, never returned to the grotto once the visions ended.

In 1866, when she was 22 years old, Bernadette entered the Sisters of Charity of Nevers and spent the rest of her life praying for sinners, serving as a sacristan, and helping out in the infirmary. On April 16, 1879, Bernadette died. She was only 35 - years old.

Thirty years later, on September 22, 1909, Bernadette's body was exhumed. When her coffin was opened, there was no odor and she was found to be incorrupt. On April 3, 1919, Bernadette was exhumed once again and her incorruptible status was confirmed. She was placed in a gold and glass coffin and her body can still be seen today in the Chapel of Saint Bernadette in Nevers, France.



Each year over 2 million people make their way through the mountainous country of southeastern France to Lourdes. They come seeking cures, hoping to find answers, believing, and praying. At Lourdes, people recall the Lady dressed in white, with a blue sash, yellow roses at her feet, and a Rosary on her arm—the Blessed Virgin Mary.

On February 25, 1858, the Lady told Bernadette to dig in the dirt and drink of the stream. Bernadette began to dig, and after several attempts she was able to find the water to drink. The water continued to flow from where she had dug with her hands until it was producing over 32,000 gallons of water a day—as it still does. There have been over 5,000 cures recorded but less than 100 of them have been declared miraculous by the Church.





St Bernadette is the patron saint of:

- Bodily illness
- Lourdes
- France
- Shepherds and shepherdesses
- Against poverty
- People ridiculed for their faith

The Miracles of St. Bernadette:

Miraculous visions of the Virgin Mary

Miracles of healing in the waters of the spring of Lourdes

St. Bernadette's body remains incorrupt since her death

The Miracle of the Candle in which her hand was in direct contact with the flame of a candle for up to 15 minutes during an apparition but created neither pain nor injury