

Lesson 14: Our Lady of Zeitoun

Please click twice to watch the video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Skkd7DCNSWc>

It was the evening of April 2, 1968. A Muslim bus mechanic named Farouk Mohammed Atwa [was working across the street](#) from [St. Mary Coptic Church](#) in Zeitoun, a district of Cairo, Egypt. The church is revered as one of the locations Christians believe the Holy Family stayed during their flight to Egypt.

Suddenly, something on the roof of St. Mary's caught his eye: a figure that appeared to be a young woman. He pointed it out to a few people nearby who saw the same thing. Worried that someone was about ready to commit suicide, they called the local police. A crowd gathered to watch the spectacle. Then, after just a few minutes, the beautiful figure quickly vanished.

Over the next few days, everyone was talking about it. Who was it? Where did she go? What did it mean? The police said it was just some light reflecting in a weird way from a street light – but the crowd knew that wasn't the case.

Then, exactly one week later, on April 9th, the figure [appeared again](#)! Like the first time, she stuck around only for a few minutes before disappearing. And it started to dawn on people what was going on: it was the Blessed Virgin Mary!

She started appearing more frequently, sometimes staying around for hours at a time. She sometimes appeared to be bowing toward the cross on the church or blessing those watching on the streets below. And sometimes there appeared around her what some took to be doves of light.

Huge crowds flocked to see her. Church officials, government officials, scientists, believers, and skeptics all saw her. The President of Egypt at the time, President Gamal Abdel Nasser, visited the site and saw the apparition. TV crews captured it on film. Newspapers took pictures and wrote stories about the phenomenon. The police did another thorough investigation, but came up short: they could find no natural or human explanation.

Soon, the head of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria, Pope Kyrillos VI of Alexandria launched an investigation. At the same time, a group of Catholic nuns who saw the apparition sent a report to the Vatican, who in turn sent their own team to investigate, and who also saw the apparition. Because the apparition was on a Coptic church, though, the Vatican decided to let the Coptic Church officials make a ruling.

Which they did on May 5th, 1968: the apparition was real!

But that's not all: the Egyptian government also did an investigation and, amazingly, publicly accepted the apparitions to be real as well.

In all, the apparition was witnessed by somewhere between hundreds of thousands and millions of people, until Mary appeared for the last time in 1971.

