

## KS3 2 - The Story of Lourdes comprehension

In the south of France, close to the Pyrenees Mountains, there is a little town called Lourdes. Millions of Christian pilgrims from all over the world visit this place every year.



Inside a cave (the Grotto of Massabielle) in the town, there is a very special spring of water, discovered in 1858 by a fourteen-year-old girl called Marie-Bernarde Soubirous.



On the 11th February of that year, whilst collecting firewood, the young girl experienced a vision. She saw a beautiful lady dressed in a white veil, a blue sash and a golden rose on each foot. The beautiful lady also held a Rosary of pearls.

The lady hovered in the air at the entrance of the Grotto. She told the girl to return each day for the next fortnight. Marie-Bernarde did as she was told and each day the same lady appeared, sometimes speaking to her. In total, Bernadette saw the lady eighteen times. That lady is called Our Lady of Lourdes.

On the 25th February (the ninth vision), the 'small, beautiful lady' (believed to be Mary, the Mother of Jesus) told Marie-Bernarde to drink from the water of the grotto. This was a confusing command because there was no water in the Grotto of Massabielle.

This is what Marie-Bernarde said about the discovery of the spring, *"The Lady told me that I should go and drink at the spring and wash myself. Seeing no spring I went to drink at the River Gave. She said it was not there; she pointed with her finger that I should go underneath the rock.*

*I went, and I found a puddle of water which was more like mud, and the quantity was so small that I could hardly gather any in the hollow of my hand.*

*Nevertheless I obeyed, and started scratching the ground. After doing that I was able to gather some water but it was so dirty that three times I threw it away. The fourth time I was able to drink it.*

*She made me eat herbs growing in the same place where I had drunk; once only. I do not know why. Then the Vision disappeared and I went home."*

The newly-discovered spring of clean water flowed!

It is believed that the water is very special and that many sick people have been miraculously healed by touching or drinking the water. Every day, sick people visit this place in the hope that the water will cure them. It is estimated that around 200 million people have visited this little town since 1860! Second to Paris, it is the most visited French town.



When you visit Lourdes, you can fill bottles of the precious water to take home. The young girl who discovered the spring was made a saint in 1933 and is now called Saint Bernadette.



### Saint Bernadette's childhood

She was born in 1844 and was the oldest of nine children. Three of her brothers and sisters died in infancy. The family lived in extreme poverty in one tiny room within a mill (picture left).

Bernadette was weak and suffered from asthma and she did not learn how to read or write until she was an adult. Her parents were called François and Louise (picture below).



In 1856, the family struggled to pay the rent and they were homeless. A relative allowed them to live in an old prison cell he owned. This was called 'Le Cachot' (photo right). The owner of 'Le Cachot' was André Sajous. This is how he described the family's living conditions, *"The room was dark. In the backyard was the toilet which overflowed and made the place smell terrible. We kept the dung-heap there. The Soubirous were destitute: two poor beds, one on the right as you entered, and the other on the same side nearer to the fireplace. They had only a little trunk to put all their linen in. My wife lent them some nightshirts: they were full of vermin. She often gave them a bit of bread made of millet. Yet the little ones never asked for anything. They would rather have starved."*



The family had no money and no food to eat. In 1856, Bernadette's father stole two bags of flour and was imprisoned for eight days.

It was during the period that the family lived in the converted prison cell that Marie-Bernarde experienced her visions in February 1858. The first vision was whilst collecting firewood beside the grotto. In those times, the grotto was a very dirty and muddy place nicknamed 'the pig-sty' because pigs used to shelter there. To the right is a picture of the Grotto as it was in 1858.



In 1879, Marie-Bernarde died in the convent of the Sisters of Charity in Nevers where she had lived and worked as a nurse and a nun since the age of twenty-two. When she died, she was only thirty five years old.

The date on which Saint Bernadette is remembered every year is 16th April. This is the date when she died.

Today, Saint Bernadette can be seen lying, as if asleep, in her gold and crystal tomb in the chapel of Saint Gildard at the convent (photo right). In fact, she is sometimes referred to as 'The Sleeping Saint of Nevers.'



**Answer the following questions in your exercise book. Answer in full sentences.**

1. What is the name of the town where Bernadette was born?
2. What was her full name?
3. Describe Bernadette's family situation – what happened to her family over the years? Where did they live? What did they do?
4. Why was Bernadette by the Grotto?
5. What did the Lady tell Bernadette to do?
6. Who was the Lady?
7. Draw an image of the Lady according to Bernadette's description
8. When did Bernadette die?
9. Where is Bernadette now?
10. Draw an image to show the Lady appearing to Bernadette