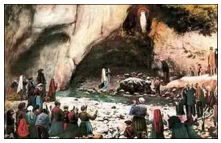

Famed visionary of Lourdes, baptized Mary Bernard. She was born in Lourdes, France, on January 7, 1844, the daughter of Francis and Louise Soubirous. Bernadette, a severe asthma sufferer, lived in abject poverty. On February 11, 1858, she was granted a vision of the Blessed Virgin Mary in a cave on the banks of the Gave River near Lourdes. She was placed in consider able jeopardy when she reported the vision, and crowds gathered when she had futher visits from the Virgin, from February 18 of that year through March 4.The civil authorities tried to frighten Bernadette into recanting her accounts, but she remained faithful to the vision. On February 25, 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, Bernadette announced that the vision stated that she was the Immaculate Conception, and 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. Crowds gathered, free of harassment from the anti-clerical and anti-religious officials.

In 1866, Bernadette was sent to the Sisters of Notre Dame in Nevers. There she became a member of the community, and faced some rather harsh treatment from the mistress of novices. This oppression ended when it was discovered that she suffered from a painful, incurable illness. She died in Nevers on April 16,1879, still giving the same account of her visions.

St Bernadette's incorrupt body in Nevers, France today

Lourdes became one of the major pilgrimage destinations in the world, and the spring has produced 27,000 gallons of water each week since emerging during Bernadette's visions. She was not involved in the building of the shrine, as she remained hidden at Nevers. Bernadette was beatified in 1925 and canonized in 1933 by Pope Pius XI.