

**“Therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.”**

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”*

**Once upon a time**, there was a book-turned movie, with which many of us are familiar. It is called **The Song of Bernadette**.

The story took place in 1858, which centered around a 14-year-old French, peasant girl. She reported apparitions of the Blessed Mother at a hillside outside her village of Lourdes, France.

As a result, sick people began to visit the site and were cured. There are over 1,200 documented cures, certified by a distinguished team of 20, international doctors of various faiths.

Though many of us are familiar with **The Song of Bernadette**, few of us are familiar with the story behind the writing of the book. So, **listen and learn.**

It goes back to WW II. A well-known writer, Franz Werfel, and his wife had just slipped across the German border into France with the intention of making their way to Spain and, ultimately, to America. **But**, & there's that proverbial **BUT** in life, the Spanish, border guards turned them back.

The couple sought shelter in nearby Lourdes, where the famous shrine of Our Lady is located. Late that night, Franz Werfel went to the shrine. Standing alone in the darkness, he said:

**“I am not a believer; I must be honest and say so. **But**, in my extreme need, on the chance that I could be wrong about God, I ask him for help –for my wife and me. See us safely to the United States & I promise to write the story of this place for all the world to read.”**

Upon returning to the village, Werfel would later say that he never felt such peace of mind. Within days, they found a way to Spain. Shortly thereafter, they were safely aboard a ship, sailing to the United States. The first thing the Jewish writer did was to write the story of Lourdes, calling it **The Song of Bernadette**.



Today/night, we gather to celebrate the great feast of Mary, called, the **Immaculate Conception**. This doctrine was defined by Pope Pius IX on Dec. 8, 1854, four years before the apparitions of Mary at Lourdes!

Belief in Mary's Immaculate Conception dates back to the dawn of Christianity, for it holds that Mary **was** conceived in her mother, St. Ann's, womb without the effects of Original Sin, certainly, a fitting tribute to the one who would, one day, bear the Son of God.

**Teachings on the Immaculate Conception stand in accord with Scripture.**

**For example**, in our 1<sup>st</sup> reading, God says to Satan:

**“I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers.”**

Catholics have always held that the **‘woman’** here refers, ultimately, to Mary and her **‘offspring’** to refer to Jesus. Mary and Jesus stand at one end of the spectrum; Satan at the opposite end.

**For example**, in today's Gospel reading, which I just read to you from St. Luke, the angel says:

**“Rejoice, O highly favored daughter! The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women.”**

This passage certainly can speak for itself. Clearly, Mary is in a class apart from all women.

Since we American Catholics dedicated our country, from its earliest days, to Mary under this title, it is, in a special way, **‘our’** feast. Many of us have always had a special devotion to Mary. Regardless, we should realize from scripture, from our earliest traditions, and from the stories like the one behind the writing of **The Song of Bernadette**, that Mary is not only the mother of Jesus, **BUT** ... **our** spiritual mother as well!

Like all mothers, she wants to help us along the path of life. So, if our life isn't what it should be or if something seems to be missing from it, perhaps today's feast holds a special message for us. Perhaps it's inviting us to do what Franz Werfel did in his time of need & turn to Mary in prayer.

*I now close with a prayer to Mary and invite you to pray along with me ...if only in silence.  
It was written over 800 years ago by St. Bernard of Clairvaux:*

***The Memorare***

***“Remember, O most loving virgin Mary,  
That never was it known  
That anyone who fled to your protection,  
Implored your help,  
Or sought your intercession  
Was left unaided.***

***Inspired with this confidence,  
We turn to you, O Virgin of virgins, our Mother.  
To you we come, before you we stand,  
Sinful and sorrowful.***

***O Mother of the Word Incarnate,  
Do not turn from our petitions,  
But, in your mercy, hear and answer us.***

***Amen.”***

*May our loving God, our Abba, bless you...  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*