

The Story of Fátima

Lucia dos Santos was 10 years old when she was shepherding sheep on her family's land in Cova da Iria, outside Fátima, on 13th May 1917.

Together with her two younger cousins, Francisco and Jacinta Marto, the children were suddenly taken aback by a bright flash of lightning on a serene, sunny day and had decided to turn home when they saw "a lady dressed in white, more brilliant than the sun."

With words of reassurance, the lady spoke to them, telling them that she was "from heaven".

The lady went on to request that the children return to that same place for six consecutive months on the 13th day, to offer themselves to God, and to pray the Rosary every day to obtain peace for the world and the end of the war.

News of the apparition soon spread throughout the community, triggering mixed responses, including disbelief - even from the children's own families.

On 13th June, the children returned as the lady requested and bore witness to the second apparition. Each month - with the exception of August, when the children were detained by the civic authorities - the young visionaries returned to the spot and communicated the messages from the lady to an ever-growing crowd of believers.

The Miracle of the Sun

The apparitions reached a climax on 13th October 1917, when as many as 100,000 people gathered at Cova da Iria after hearing reports of the lady's promise of a miracle.

As the lady finally revealed her identity as the "Lady of the Rosary" and repeated her message that people must pray the Rosary, crowds reported a startling natural phenomenon.

On what had so far been a dark, rainy October day, the clouds broke to reveal the sun as a spinning disc in the sky. Some onlookers described the sun as "dancing", whilst others saw radiant colours and multicoloured lights, before the sun suddenly careered towards the earth, before zig-zagging back to its original position in the sky. The once-sodden ground was now dry, and the soaked crowds no longer had wet clothes.

Legacy

As is usually the case with events such as these, the story of Fátima inspired a wave of faith - but also a great deal of scepticism.

Despite the differing opinions, the story of these young visionaries and the apparitions has stretched across the world and still bring more than four million people to the shrine at Fátima each year, according to [Portugal Travel Guide](#).

On the centenary of the first apparition, Pope Francis canonised Francisco and Jacinta Marto at the Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary in Fátima. The siblings died in 1919 and 1920, as Our Lady had revealed in one of her apparitions, after falling ill in the 1918 influenza epidemic that swept across Europe.

Left alone as sole witness to the apparitions, Lucia dedicated her whole life to God, beginning life as a postulate with the Sisters of St Dorothy in 1925, before taking vows as a Carmelite in 1949, taking the name Sister Maria Lucia of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart. She died at 97 years old on 13th February 2005.



The Secrets of Fátima

On 13th July 1917, Our Lady's third visit to the children, three secrets or visions were revealed. The first was a vision of hell: or a "great sea of fire which seemed to be beneath the earth". Although Lucia reported that the vision lasted "but an instant", it had a profound effect on the children, who began to "tremble with fear".

The second secret was a prophesy of the Second World War. During the apparitions, Our Lady promises that the First World War would end soon but another world war would follow during the papacy of Pope Pius XI (who died in 1939). Lucia said the lady told her that "a night illuminated by a strange light in the sky" would be the sign that war was near. On 25 January 1938, a remarkable aurora borealis lit up skies right across Europe and even as far as America. The following year, the world was once again plunged into war.

This secret also includes Our Lady's request that Russia be consecrated to her Immaculate Heart, an act that has been carried numerous times since the apparition, most recently in 2022 when Pope Francis

asked all bishops across the world to consecrate Russia and Ukraine to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Read more about the consecration at Salford Cathedral [here](#).

The third and final secret is perhaps the most talked about and controversial. At the time of the vision, Our Lady ordered the children not to reveal the third secret to anyone - other than Francisco, who was able to see but not hear Our Lady. Lucia stayed true to this promise and chose to omit it from her 1941 memoir. However, after becoming seriously ill in 1943 with influenza - the same illness that killed her cousins - Lucia thought she was close to death and she was ordered by the Bishop of Leiria to write down the third secret, so there would be a record in the event of her death. Because of her Carmelite vows of obedience to her superiors, Lucia was unsure what to do but eventually wrote down the secret in a sealed envelope, saying it could only be opened in 1960, when it would be better understood, or on the event of her death, whichever came first.

The secret was kept from the world until 13th May 2000, when it was revealed that the vision was about the persecution of Christians in the 20th-century that culminated with the failed assassination attempt of Pope John Paul II, which took place on 13th May 1981. The secret published by the Vatican read:

"I write in obedience to you, my God, who command me to do so through his Excellency the Bishop of Leiria and through your Most Holy Mother and mine.

After the two parts which I have already explained, at the left of Our Lady and a little above, we saw an Angel with a flaming sword in his left hand; flashing, it gave out flames that looked as though they would set the world on fire; but they died out in contact with the splendour that Our Lady radiated towards him from her right hand: pointing to the earth with his right hand, the Angel cried out in a loud voice: 'Penance, Penance, Penance!'

And we saw in an immense light that is God, something similar to how people appear in a mirror when they pass in front of it, a Bishop dressed in White. We had the impression that it was the Holy Father. Other Bishops,

Priests, men and women Religious going up a steep mountain, at the top of which there was a big Cross of rough-hewn trunks as of a cork-tree with the bark; before reaching there the Holy Father passed through a big city half in ruins and half trembling with halting step,

afflicted with pain and sorrow, he prayed for the souls of the corpses he met on his way; having reached the top of the mountain, on his knees at the foot of the big Cross he was killed by a group of soldiers who fired bullets and arrows at him, and in the same way there died one after

another the other Bishops, Priests, men and women Religious, and various lay people of different ranks and positions. Beneath the two arms of the Cross there were two Angels each with a crystal aspersorium in his hand, in which they gathered up the blood of the Martyrs and with it sprinkled the souls that were making their way to God."

Many have contested the veracity of this third secret but the late Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that we must view these secrets through the lens of hope. He said: "the purpose of the vision is not to show a film of an irrevocably fixed future. Its meaning is exactly the opposite: it is meant to mobilise the forces of change in the right direction." In other words, these secrets - and the message of Fátima itself - must be used to help us shape our future to build lives of holiness and a legacy of peace.

We invite you to visit our website at <https://www.dioceseofsalford.org.uk/the-story-of-Fátima/> to read more about how this remarkable story can shape our faith lives today and help us grow closer to God through the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Our Lady of Fátima,
Pray for us.

