Meditation 2027

« In those days Mary set out and went with haste » (Lc 1, 39)

Introduction

The year 2028 will mark the 170th anniversary of the Apparitions, during which the Virgin Mary transformed Bernadette's heart. In the run-up to this anniversary, the Sanctuary of Lourdes invites us to explore the opening chapters of the Gospel according to Saint Luke over the course of three consecutive years. It is a way for us to learn from Mary, allowing her to transform our hearts.

- In 2026, we reflected on the Annunciation: "*And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.*" (Lk. 1:28) Fra Angelico's painting portrayed the encounter between the angel and Mary, opening our eyes to the encounter we experience in Lourdes; Lourdes, where the presence of heaven becomes tangible through the sacraments and concrete gestures; Lourdes, where hearts respond in echo to Mary's 'Yes' and to Bernadette's willing availability.

- In 2027, our theme is the Visitation: "*In those days Mary set out and went with haste.*" (Lk. 1:39)
  We will follow the Gospel step by step:
  1. Mary's journey and arrival;
  2. The welcome she receives from Elizabeth and the child she is carrying;
  3. The blessing that Elizabeth gives her.

- The conclusion of the account of the Visitation – namely, Mary's response – will be next year's theme, enabling us to sing with her of the Lord's mercy on the 170th anniversary of the Apparitions. In 2028, we shall be praying through the words of Mary's hymn, the *Magnificat*: *"His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation."* (Lk. 1:50)

Having stepped into the house in Nazareth for the Annunciation, let us now accompany Mary on her journey to the home of her cousin Elizabeth.

THEME OF THE YEAR 2027

First aspect: the journey and the arrival.
In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. (Lk. 1:39-40).

Second aspect: the leap of joy.
When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, '(…) Why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.' (Lk. 1:41-45).

The third aspect: the blessing.
Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.' **(Lk. 1:41-2).**

The narrative consists of three distinct aspects, each of which casts its own light of revelation on us. Let the Gospel enlighten us: as we reflect on each part, let us meditate on the mystery, and then embrace the light that reaches us. This is what we do when we pray the Rosary: with each decade, we meditate on the mystery and then ask for the corresponding spiritual fruits.

O Mother Blest

**Thou art clement, thou art chaste,
Mary, thou art fair;
of all mothers sweetest, best;
none with thee compare.**

O Mother blest, whom God bestows
on sinners and on just,
what joy, what hope thou givest those
who in thy mercy trust.

O heavenly mother, mistress sweet!
It never yet was told
that suppliant sinner left thy feet
unpitied, unconsoled.

O mother pitiful and mild,
cease not to pray for me;
for I do love thee as a child,
and sigh for love of thee.

Most powerful mother, we all know
thy Son denies thee nought;
thou askest, wishest it, and lo!
His power thy will hath wrought.

O mother blest, for me obtain
ungrateful though I be,
to love that God who first could deign
to show such love for me.

THEME OF THE YEAR 2027

First aspect:
"In those days Mary set out and went with haste." (Lk. 1:39).

Those days' are the days of the Annunciation: Mary sets out, carrying within her the One she has just conceived…

And to us, as pilgrims, the Lord grants so many gifts, and the greatest of all is His presence within us through grace! It is this that draws us out of our comfort zones and inspires us to take action.

Mary feels a deep inner urge to look after her cousin… Elizabeth would need help and support right up until she gave birth. "The Blessed Virgin does not merely give her cousin something of herself; she gives her whole self, asking nothing in return… in the unassuming quietness of daily service" (saint John-Paul II, Homily of 15th August 2004 in Lourdes).

And we, as pilgrims, can echo St Paul's words that, "the love of Christ urges us on" (2 Cor. 5:14) ! We, too, can offer acts of service; we may even offer some of our material possessions, but above all, what we have to offer is our hearts.

This brings to mind the words of Saint John Paul II to young people in the Basilica of Saint Pius X on 15th August 1983:
"*Mary guides our gaze, our heart, our hands towards others, as in Elizabeth's house, as in Cana. We cannot close ourselves in the narrow circle of our interests, of our judgments. (…)Happy are those who welcome the son who arrives, and who is rejected by some. The person that society considers useless. The person who suffers in body and spirit. The one who forgot her human dignity. (…)*
In Lourdes, we learned what the love of life consists of: in the Grotto and in hospitals, it consists of helping the sick. Up there, in the Chapel of Confessions, it consists of listening to moral miseries, in Christ's comforting forgiveness. Love is inseparable from the spirit of service, which gives value to life, to the lives of young people. This spirit is not just a help: it is an exchange, an offer of communion."

Mary is carrying a treasure…
Mary's act of charity does not consist merely in performing a service, but in offering Christ, who is living within her.

And if we, as pilgrims, have encountered Jesus, how can we keep this treasure to ourselves, which we 'carry in earthen vessels' (2 Co 4,7) ? When we share it, taking it right to the edges of society, it is like a Visitation. Elizabeth represents the world waiting for Christ. If there were one grace to ask of Mary, would it not be to carry Jesus with the same zeal as she did, to proclaim the Good News – in other words, to evangelise?

Mary greets Elizabeth… We do not know the exact words she used, but we can guess at the feelings she expressed: courtesy, respect, and affection.

And for us, as pilgrims, who meet such a wide variety of people in Lourdes, Mary teaches us to greet and look at others as she does. She teaches us to show kindness towards everyone, through our eyes, our words and our actions.

Second aspect:
"And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb." (Lk. 1:41).

This scene brings to mind a scene from the Old Testament: the journey of the Ark of the Covenant, a chest made of precious wood, which stayed in a house for three months. On its arrival, it is said that King David 'made merry before the Lord' (2 Sam 6:5). Is not the leaping of Elizabeth's child another kind of making merry?
The Ark of the Covenant contained signs of God's active presence: the Tablets of the Law, a little manna, and Aaron's staff. Mary is for us the new Ark of the Covenant. Our devotion is therefore not superstition but trust, for it is God who acts in our lives through her.

Here we witness a connection between Jesus and John the Baptist whilst still in the womb, which reminds us of the human dignity of every child from the moment of conception. This calls on us to support pregnant women and to care for life, from the embryonic stage right through to its fulfilment.

Elizabeth senses that what causes her child to leap for joy is joy itself: 'The child leapt for joy within me' (Luke 1:44).
Mary brings us joy. This joy, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit, runs deeper than any psychological state; it is an inner leaping for joy at the splendour and goodness of God.

Third aspect:
“Blessed are you among women.” (Lk. 1:42).

Firstly, to be blessed means to be filled with grace and to be made fruitful. A blessing is not only the sowing of seed but also fruitfulness. Mary teaches us to be blessed too, to open ourselves up like good soil to the Dew from heaven, so that we may become fruitful.

What’s more, Mary is proclaimed, ‘blessed amongst all women’, just like two female warriors from the Old Testament: Jael and Judith. She is therefore also the one who defends us against evil and encourages us in our spiritual struggle.

Pastoral outreach

The mystery of the Visitation shines out for us in a special way at Lourdes. We come here with Bernadette to be touched by its radiance.

I. *In the first aspect*, Mary sets out on her journey to be of service, to share her treasure, and to greet her cousin.
– Is Lourdes not the best of places to set us on our way, to serve, to share the grace we have received, and to show kindness to everyone?

II. *The second aspect* is the thrill of joy.
– How can we experience this thrill in Lourdes? Through the Mother of the Lord, through whom God acts; through human life, which reveals itself as a treasure; and through the joy that is offered to us.

III. *The third aspect* is blessing.
– The acts and practices in Lourdes prepare us to receive God’s blessing, in other words, to allow His grace to envelop us, so that we may bear fruit. Here, we are also strengthened to face the spiritual battle alongside the woman who is ‘blessed amongst all women’.

We can ask the Virgin Mary and Bernadette’s help to meditate on and truly live out the mystery of the Visitation at Lourdes, so that its light may shine into our lives.

LOURDES SANCTUAIRE

THEME OF THE YEAR 2027

SWEET VIRGIN MARY,

In the mystery of the Visitation, we meditate on your love.
Grant us the grace to model ourselves on you.
Give us a heart that sees those in need and help us to serve them.
You went to visit your cousin, who was pregnant and advanced in years:
help us to serve life from its very beginnings right through to its end.
Help us to honour the worth of every human person, called to eternal life with God.

Abbé Augustin CAYLA
Chapelain du Sanctuaire

Abbé Charles FORMERY
Chapelain du Sanctuaire