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## The Story of Mary as Our Lady of Hope

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***Q: What is the story behind our Blessed Mother's title "Our Lady of Hope?"***

In 1861, Kaiser Wilhelm I ascended the throne of Prussia, and immediately appointed Otto von Bismarck as his chancellor. Their goal was to unite all German-speaking states into a single country. Together, they assumed an aggressive, bellicose stance. To assert as well as to test its position among their neighbors, Prussia waged three quick wars: first, against Denmark in 1864, taking Holstein; second, against Austria in 1866, putting Prussia in control of Germany; and finally, against France in 1870.

On August 1, 1870, the first cannon was fired, beginning the Franco-Prussian War. The French army quickly fell to the militarily superior Prussian army. By December 27, the Prussians had invaded Paris. Then they turned to the western provinces of Normandy and Brittany.

By mid-January, 1871, the Prussian army was just a few miles from the town of Pontmain, which was located right inside the French defensive line. The citizens feared for their lives. Father Guerin, who had been the parish priest for 35 years, instructed the children to pray to the Blessed Mother for protection.

On the evening of Tuesday, **January 17**, 12-year-old Eugene Barbadette was leaving his father's barn. He looked up into the starry sky and saw a beautiful lady standing in the air, about 20 feet above the roofline and between the two chimneys of Jean and Augustine Guidecoq's home across the way. The lady was wearing a dark blue dress covered with gold stars, a black veil and a simple gold crown. Eugene stood there in the snow, entranced, for about 15 minutes.

His father and 10-year-old brother, Joseph, came out of the barn. Eugene cried out, "Look over there! Above the house! What do you see?" Joseph described the lady in the same way Eugene had seen her. Their father did not see her, so he sternly ordered them to return to feeding the horses in the barn.

For whatever reason, a little later, the father told the brothers to go out and look again. Again they saw her. Joseph kept saying, "How beautiful she is! How beautiful she is!" Their mother, Victoria Barbadette, had now appeared on the scene, and told Joseph to be quiet since he was attracting so much attention. Knowing that the boys were honest and did not lie, she said, "It is perhaps the Blessed Virgin who appears to you. Since you see her, let us say five Our Fathers and five Hail Marys in her honor." (The brothers were truly pious; they had begun their day serving Holy Mass, reciting the rosary and offering the Stations of the Cross for the intentions of their older brother, serving in the French army.)

After reciting the prayers in the barn so as not to attract attention, Mrs. Barbadette asked if the children still saw the lady. When they replied, "Yes," she went for her eyeglasses. When she returned, bringing their sister Louise with her, neither of them saw anything. The mother's mood changed, and she accused them of lying.

Mrs. Barbadette then thought of calling the religious sisters. She said, "Sisters are better than you are. If you see, they will certainly see, too." Sister Vitaline also knew that the boys were honest. However, she too could not see the lady. Sister Vitaline then went to a neighboring house, and asked two little girls, Françoise Richer (age 11) and Jeanne-Marie Lebosse (age 9) to come with her. The two girls described the lady in the same way.

Sister Marie Edouard had now joined the group. Upon hearing what the two girls had said, she went to bring Father Guerin and another child, Eugene Friteau (6-and-a-half years old). Eugene also saw the lady. By this time a large crowd of about 50 villagers had gathered. Augustine Boitin, only 25 months old, reached to the lady and said, "The Jesus! The Jesus!" Only these six children would see the vision of Our Lady of Hope.

Father Guerin told everyone to pray, so they knelt and said the rosary. Sister Marie Edouard led the crowd in reciting the Magnificat. Gradually, a message in gold letters appeared in the sky: "But pray my children." All of the children saw the same message.

Sister Marie Edouard then led the crowd in singing the litanies of the Blessed Virgin. The message continued to unfold, "God will hear you in a short time."

News came that the Prussians were now at Laval, very close to Pontmain. The message continued, “My Son allows Himself to be moved with compassion.” When the children had announced this message, Father Guerin told the crowd to sing a hymn of praise. Sister Marie Edouard said, “Mother of Hope, of name so sweet, protect our country, pray for us, pray for us!” The people responded, “If [the Prussians] were at the entrance of the village, we should have no fear now!”

At the conclusion of the hymn, the message disappeared. The crowd then sang a hymn of repentance and reparation to Jesus. The lady appeared sad and held a large red crucifix with the inscription “Jesus Christ.”

At 8:30PM the people sang, “*Ave, Maris Stella,*” and the crucifix disappeared. She again smiled, and two small white crosses appeared on her shoulders. She lowered her hands, as seen in images of the Immaculate Conception. A white veil gradually covered her, from foot to crown. At about 8:45 PM the children said, “It is over.” Our Lady had disappeared. While this apparition was happening, General Von Schmidt received orders from the Prussian High Command to halt his campaign and withdraw. Ten days later, an armistice was signed between France and Prussia. The miraculous intercession of our Blessed Mother had saved Pontmain.

Because of this apparition, devotion to Our Lady of Hope spread. The message of our Blessed Mother is that of hope: “But pray my children. God will hear you in a short time. My Son allows Himself to be moved with compassion.” As we offer our rosary each day seeking the maternal care of our Blessed Mother, we must be mindful that she — who stood at the foot of the Cross filled with the hope of the forgiveness of sin and the resurrection to everlasting life — affords us hope also during our journey of life. With Our Lady of Hope, we indeed have assurance of never being abandoned, and have hope of being united with our Lord now and forever in heaven.

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