

Meditation 2026

“Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.”

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Introduction

Lourdes 2026 – 2028
A three-year journey with Mary

Over the next three years, the Sanctuary of Lourdes is inviting us on a spiritual pilgrimage, a journey to the heart of the Virgin Mary's story. We'll go step by step, guided by the Gospel of Luke.

Our journey, our hope

2026 : the Annunciation

"Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you" (Lk. 1:28)

This is the year of the welcome, of listening and of the 'yes' that changed everything.

2027 : the Visitation

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

This is the year of service, of joyful charity and of reaching out to others.

2028 : the Magnificat

"His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation." (Lk. 1:50)

This is the year of praise, of gratitude and of singing in acknowledgement of God's wonders.

This year, we are at the beginning of our adventure...

We'll let ourselves be guided by the story of the Annunciation.

Our purpose is to follow Mary on the threshold of her incredible adventure of faith, at the very beginning of her absolute trust in God's will.

Let us join her in the house of Nazareth. Let us open our hearts to the Word.



Fra Angelico's silence

Who doesn't know the magnificent painting of the Annunciation by Blessed Fra Angelico? Let us look at it, together, with discerning eyes.

The angel Gabriel

He doesn't come storming in. He bows, almost on his knees. His magnificent wings are folded in reverence. His hand indicates but does not impose. He brings a light that does not dazzle but reveals.

The Virgin Mary

Seated on a simple stool, she is the embodiment of humility. Her hands are crossed over her chest, in a gesture of welcome, of inner protection. Her gaze is turned towards the angel, but also inwards. It is the fruitful silence of the heart meditating on the Word. What is striking about this work is the silence. It is the dense silence of presence.

The dawn of an adventure

The Annunciation is not just a distant event. It is the embodiment of every beginning in faith. At that precise moment, Mary did not know the future. She had no detailed map. She had no idea about the flight into Egypt or the darkness of the Cross. So, what did she have?

- A deep inner willingness.
- A calmness marked by a Presence ("the Lord is with thee").
- An unmerited divine gift, a grace.

Our pilgrimage: the threshold of our “yes”.

What about us in Lourdes? Our pilgrimage echoes this moment. We arrive here, often without knowing what awaits us, carrying our questions, our hopes, our sorrows. It is right here, in this place where the Heavens reach down towards the Earth, that an inner dawn can happen:

- The silent beginning of a conversion.
- The first step towards an unexpected healing.
- The awakening of a dormant faith.
- The sense of a call whispered in our hearts.

1. The icon of the Annunciation

a. “Hail” (Lk. 1:28a) (Χαῖρε – khaîre)

God’s first word to Mary is not just a simple greeting. It is a joyful command: “Rejoice!”

- This call echoes that of the prophets who announced the end of the period of waiting. By uttering this word, the angel Gabriel reveals to Mary that the promise has been fulfilled. She, a young girl from Nazareth, becomes the Daughter of Zion, the face of all humanity who is now at last welcoming her Saviour.
- Through her, God’s joy comes to dwell on our Earth.

b. “Full of grace” (Lk. 1:28b) Κεχαριτωμένη – kecharitōmenē)

The angel does not bestow a quality on Mary but reveals her true name to her in the eyes of God: ‘Kecharitōmenē’, ‘filled with grace’. It was a term that was unique in the Bible, and it deeply troubled her.

- This Greek word tells us the whole history of God’s love for her. It means: one who has been filled with God’s love in the past, and who remains forever in this state of grace.
- It is not a grace that is earned, but a perfect gift from God, offered from the very first moment of her existence. It is the very essence of her being. Pope John Paul II put it this way: “Full of grace’ is Mary’s name in the eyes of God.”

c. “The Lord is with you” (Lk. 1:28c) ὁ Κύριος μετὰ σοῦ – ho Kýrios metà soû)

These words are the source of Mary’s joy. It is not a simple statement, but a promise that runs through the whole Bible: the power of God who undertakes to act at the heart of our frailty.

For Mary, this promise took on a unique and overwhelming meaning. The Lord will not only be beside her, but he will also take flesh in her. She thus becomes the new Ark of the Covenant.

- In the past, the Ark contained the tablets of the law; Mary carries the living law in her womb.
- In the past, the cloud of glory covered the tabernacle; now the Holy Spirit covers Mary with his shadow. She becomes God’s living dwelling place on earth.

d. The heart of the proclamation (Lk. 1:29–37)

The Annunciation is not just a dialogue; it is a divine masterpiece in which the whole Trinity reveals itself and acts for the salvation of humanity.

1. The Father: the author of love

Everything begins with the action of the Father. It was his loving gaze that chose Mary, not because of her virtues, but because of the pure grace of her heart. The expression 'you have found favour with God' reveals this freely given invitation, a love that precedes our human response and gives us the courage to accept his plan.

2. The Son: the heart of the mystery

At the heart of the proclamation is the revelation of the Son, Jesus. The announcement "you will conceive a son" is the event that changes history: God becomes man to share our human condition. His name, Jesus, reveals his mission: 'God saves'. He is the living promise of salvation and reconciliation.

3. The Holy Spirit: the creative power

The impossible becomes reality through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is he who covers Mary with his shadow and renders her the Mother of God. His action teaches us that the Christian life does not depend on our efforts, but on our capacity to allow ourselves to be transformed by grace. The Spirit not only inspires us but also recreates us from within.

e. Mary's agreement (Lk. 1:38): the 'yes' that changes history

In the face of God's plan, a human response is expected. The great Saint Bernard expressed this in a stirring supplication, "O Virgin, hasten to answer. Speak the word for which earth, hell and heaven are waiting."

Mary's response, 'Behold, here I am, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word,' is the heart of the story. Its richness can be appreciated in three stages:

1. "Behold, here I am...": a complete willingness

It's not a simple "Here I am". It is the expression of a heart that professes to be actively present and entirely at God's service, without reserve.

2. "the servant...": a humility that opens the way to God

To acknowledge oneself as a "servant" is to accept one's own insignificance so that God's greatness can work. It means letting go of all pretence so that the Almighty can work freely.

3. "...let it be to me according to your word": absolute trust

This is the pinnacle of faith. Mary does not ask to understand but entrusts herself to the power and fidelity of the One who has spoken. It is an act of absolute trust, a desire that is aligned to God's promise, even when it defies all logic.

Her 'yes' is an act of total freedom and unconditional trust.

O Mary, we look to you and give you thanks,
for it is precisely in your humble and courageous response:

«Behold, here I am the handmaid of the Lord;

let it be done to me according to your word»,

that you allowed God to become man.

O Mary, may we too, respond each day
to the Lord's call with a humble and strong 'Yes',

so that our humble lives may become

through the power of your Son

and the action of the Holy Spirit,

a place where God dwells

and an instrument for the salvation of all.

Saint Paul VI, Pope
Angelus, 25th March 1975

2. Some pastoral reflections

a. Lourdes, a place of Gospel joy

La God's first words to Mary are an invitation: "Rejoice!" This is not a command to 'do' something, but to welcome a Presence that brings joy. Mary's example reminds us that faith, in all its purity is, above all, a joyful trust in a God who has shown that he is close and constant.

- Mary, the epitome of joyful faith

In accepting this invitation, Mary becomes the epitome of the joyful believer. Her faith, which explodes in the song of the Magnificat, is a joyful welcoming response to a God who has shown that he is loving and entirely faithful.

- The Grotto: joy meets suffering

Au In the heart of Lourdes, the Grotto of Massabielle shows us that this joy in God is not the absence of pain. It is a presence that consoles fragile hearts, that brings hope in the midst of trial and that transforms even suffering by opening the door to trust.

- Pilgrimage: rediscovering joy

Millions of pilgrims arrive here with their burdens. The experience of Lourdes is an invitation to rediscover the original joy of faith: not a superficial joy, but the deep joy that comes from a living encounter with God, through Mary's maternal presence.

- Our mission: to nurture joy

Our pastoral duty is to help everyone rediscover this source of inner joy. A joy that is not born of our efforts, but of the certainty that we are never alone. It's the deep feeling of being lovingly accompanied by Mary, a strength that brings hope and peace of mind even in the midst of trials.

b. Lourdes, a place where grace becomes a physical encounter

In Lourdes, we discover a fundamental truth: God's grace always precedes us. Like Mary, we are 'filled with grace' not by merit, but because God loves us first. Holiness, then, is not a struggle, but a trusting surrender to that love.

This grace is not an abstract idea; it is a living force that is at work and is manifested in practical ways:

- In healings, especially those of the heart: wounds that heal, fears that are dispelled.
- In conversions, which bring the light of a new beginning.
- In reconciliations, where forgiveness frees us from the weight of the past.
- The water in the Grotto is a powerful symbol of this grace. It has no magical powers, but it is a visible sign that connects us to the world beyond our sight. It is a grace that washes, purifies and quenches our deep thirst for peace and meaning.

The Lourdes experience means learning to open up to this fullness. The best ways to do this are through the sacraments (reconciliation, the Eucharist) and, above all, through a spirit of trusting self-surrender: letting go of our resistance to allow God to work in us and, in turn, to become witnesses to his love.

c. Lourdes, a land embraced by heaven, a sanctuary of physical presence

The most prevalent experience in Lourdes is that of presence. It is an almost physical sensation, the impression that the veil between heaven and earth has been lifted. You feel watched over, listened to and loved personally by a God, who reveals himself through the tenderness of Mary. This presence also manifests itself visibly in the people praying and in the faces of the sick.

However, the Grotto itself offers us an important visual catechesis. While our gaze is drawn to the statue of Mary, the real focus is the altar and the cross. This reminds us of Mary's role:

- She is the way, not the goal. She is the perfect guide who welcomes us, but her mission is to lead us to Jesus.
- She reveals Christ to us. Her presence in Lourdes has a single purpose: to take us by the hand and help us to recognise her Son, who is often invisible in our daily lives. Her message is the same as at the wedding feast in Cana, a timeless invitation to trust: "Do whatever he tells you."

d. The decisive words: Behold, here I am, let it be to me...

For heaven to touch earth, a free and full human response was needed. That response is Mary's "Behold, here I am".

It is not the acquiescence of a servant, but the joyful and active acceptance of a heart that trusts completely. It is an act of love and total freedom in which Mary does not submit to God's plan but desires it and makes it her own.

This radical 'yes', which has deep roots in the whole of biblical history, becomes the key that opens the door to God's action. It is the model for every response of faith.

e. Bernadette's willingness

In response to the Lady's invitation, "Would you do me the honour of coming here for fifteen days," Bernadette's "yes" was not a word, but a concrete commitment. It is the perfect echo of Mary's fiat, lived out in the reality of everyday life. Her 'Behold, here I am' is expressed in two key aspects:

- Steadfast fidelity. Despite fear and pressure, she returned to the Grotto day after day. Her obedience is an act of absolute trust.
- Absolute trust. She performs 'illogical' actions (digging in the earth, drinking muddy water) with disarming simplicity, showing that her trust in the Lady is stronger than her fear of ridicule. Bernadette's example teaches us that our own 'yes' to God is lived out less in our words than in our daily actions. It's the choice to "come back", to persist even if we don't understand everything. And in this trusting self-surrender we discover, not a burden, but a source of profound peace.

Conclusion

'Behold, here I am': a heartfelt commitment

→ From priests to members of the hospitality, a pilgrimage is peppered with "Behold, here I am" moments. It's not just words, but the heartfelt promise to be present and to serve, trusting in God's grace.

The heart, the place of true adventure

→ Pope Francis reminded us of an essential truth: in a world that prioritises the intellect, true adventure is to be found in the heart. It's the place where our lives find unity and meaning, where we learn to love and where we decide what really matters.

Bernadette's summary: "Love is enough."

→ Saint Bernadette offers us the key to this adventure: 'Love is enough'. This is not a superficial statement, but the ultimate truth of a heart suffused with grace. It is love that gives prayer, conversion and service to others their true value.

The final invitation: an inner pilgrimage

→ The real Lourdes pilgrimage therefore means journeying back to our hearts. It invites us, like Mary, to humbly make ourselves available so that God's love becomes visible through us. For grace acts in the faithfulness of our simple gestures and so transforms the world.

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