What do you like to do on a sunny spring afternoon? On a beautiful Sunday afternoon, May 13, 1917, three children were laughing and chatting as they kept watch over their families’ sheep. This afternoon they were building a playhouse out of brush and rocks. Suddenly a bright light flashed. They thought it was lightning. Then it flashed again. They saw a ball of light descend upon a shrubby little evergreen tree. Within the light was a beautiful woman dressed in white.

The children were Lucia dos Santos, who was 10 years old, and her cousins Francisco Marto, nine, and his sister Jacinta, seven. These children lived in Portugal, in a small village near Fatima. The shining woman told them not to be afraid and that she was from heaven. She told them she would return on the 13th day of each month for six months, and she asked them to meet her at this place, the Cova de Iria.

Many people, including Lucia’s family, did not believe the children. People laughed, ridiculed, harassed, threatened them, and put them in jail for two days. But nothing could change the truth.

Through that summer, on the 13th day of each month, the Blessed Mother Mary appeared to the children. Each time more and more people accompanied them to the Cova. Each time Mary told them to pray the Rosary for peace in the world and to sacrifice for sinners. On October 13, the day of the last apparition, more than 70,000 people were waiting. This time the Lady of the Rosary asked them to build a chapel on the rocky hillside. Then the entire crowd witnessed a remarkable sight. The sun seemed to dance in the sky. It was spinning like a top and shooting off brilliant colors of the rainbow. Suddenly the sun dropped treacherously close to earth. People dropped to their knees, and the sun just as quickly returned to its place in the sky.

You might think that if the Blessed Mother of God appears and speaks to you, you are a saint. But that is not necessarily true. What is true is that Mary chose to come to children who the year before had been visited by the Angel of Peace, children who had listened to the angel’s message and prayed the prayer the angel taught them. They responded to Mary in the same way. They listened to her and tried to do everything she asked. They prayed the Rosary and offered sacrifices for sinners and for the conversion of the world. They were children who wanted to please God with all their hearts, and that is why the Church has declared them Blessed.

Two of the three children—Francisco and Jacinta—died within a short time, as the Lady had said they would. They were beatified on May 13, 2000. At that time Lucia de los Santos was a Carmelite nun in Portugal. Sister Lucia died February 13, 2005 at age 97. On May 13, 2017 Pope Francis officially declared Francisco and Jacinta Marto saints of our Church.