



THE APPEALS
OF OUR LADY
APPARITIONS
AND
MARIAN SHRINES
IN THE WORLD

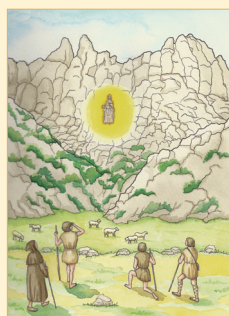
Apparition of the Virgin Mary in MONTSERRAT

SPAIN, circa 9th century

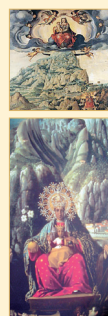
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he first image of the Virgin (in Catalan: "La Mare de Déu de Montserrat") was found by some young shepherds who tended a flock in a grotto in the year 880, after having seen a light upon the mountain. When the Bishop learned of the discovery he sought to transport the little statue to Manresa, but it was not possible for him to do so because the statue became too heavy. For this reason the Bishop interpreted this sign as the desire of the Virgin to remain in the vicinity of the site of its recovery and he ordered the construction of the Shrine. The statue of Mary now venerated is a wooden sculpture, measuring about 95 centimeters in height and it represents the Blessed Virgin Mary with the Baby Jesus. In her right hand the Madonna holds a sphere that symbolizes the universe, while Jesus, with his right hand gives a blessing and in his left he holds a pine cone. The Virgin is portrayed with swarthy features, a matter which earned her the popular nickname of *La Moreneta*, "the dark little one." On the 11th of September, the annual event of the national feast of the region of Catalonia, Pope Leo XIII officially declared the Blessed Mother of Montserrat as Patroness of Catalonia and he ordered for her to have her own feast day in the liturgical calendar, that festivity is celebrated the 27th of April.

Among the numerous miracles that happened in the monastery, the one that is remembered is the one of a mother who had gone on a pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Montserrat to beg for the liberation of her son who had fallen prisoner of the Muslims. According to the ancient tradition, here the Virgin appears to her and said: **"Do not lament and do not cry, because soon you will see your son again!"** In fact, after a few days, the son returned and recounted to his mother that the Madonna appeared, miraculously unchained him, and arranged for his return. The pilgrimage to Montserrat goes back to ancient times: since the 8th century many hermits retreated upon this mountain to conduct an ascetic life and, since the 9th century, many pilgrims went there to pray with the hermits.



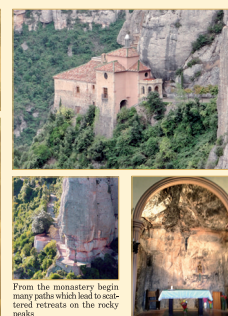
Drawing that depicts the apparition



The antique statue of the Madonna with Child for which the first Shrine was initially constructed



Right above the main altar is the large room where the statue of the Moreneta Virgin of Montserrat is enshrined, only accessible after having crossed an alabaster portal sculpted with scenes from the Bible



From the monastery begin many paths which lead to scattered retreats on the rocky peaks



The grotto where the apparition occurred



The Basilica of Montserrat was completely reconstructed in the 19th century and it has only one nave, around which are arranged several chapels. The aisle is supported by center columns, with wooden intaglio carvings by the sculptor Josep Llimona. At one extremity is the main altar and the choir. The crucifix of ivory, which came from Italy, was recently attributed to the young Michelangelo



Montserrat in the Catalan language signifies "serra montana" precisely because the aspect of the rocks invites a person to think they were seen, perhaps by Angels, as the popular legends narrate. Its geological origin is sedimentary. At the end of the second era, at the base of the actual mountain, there was the delta of a river, which originated from the Balkan continent and it flowed into a great Catalan lake. When the continent subsided, the lake dried up and the delta formed a great jagged mass of conglomerate. When this mass, vulnerable to the atmospheric agents, during the millenia, with the tectonic movements and climatic changes, took the form of a rugged sculpted relief. These shapes have stimulated the imagination of the people and they have received these particular nicknames: "The Dreaming Giant" or "The Trunk of the Elephant"