

# Blessed Virgin Mary Sightings in Mojave Desert

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Subject: Blessed Virgin Mary Sightings in Mojave Desert

[It's on-topic: Unusual sightings in the Mojave Desert! Tom Mahood sent this to us and suggests that the Interceptors gather there on April 13, which happens to be a Sunday. It's a plan! --GC]

(Los Angeles Times, Feb 16, 1997)

California Album: Waiting For Mary

Hundreds gather in the Mojave Desert on the 13th of each month to watch for the mother of Jesus. Almost as eagerly awaited is Maria Paula Acuna, who says she sees the Virgin with regularity.

By CARLA HALL  
and PAULA BRYANT PRATT  
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

CALIFORNIA CITY, Calif.-They come with lawn chairs, rosaries and religious pictures to this stark, scrubby desert. Polaroid is the camera of choice--the better to see immediately if the Virgin Mary has appeared in the sky and allowed herself to be captured in some earthly form, if only on film.

Under a sunny, cloudless sky, they are bundled against the chill of the desert wind as they pray in a circle near two huge white crosses. They hope to see Mary, but at the moment they are eagerly awaiting Maria Paula Acuna, a 45-year-old Catholic woman from California City who comes on the 13th of each month to this site--now christened Our Lady of the Rock--and declares that Mary is in their midst.

Whether it's rainy or sunny, a throng gathers. On weekends, it can number 1,000 or more. On Thursday, the crowd is 300 strong, and two vendors are selling rosaries, religious-themed jewelry and an Automatic Miracle Fold self-opening umbrella.

The faithful are veterans of this Mojave Desert trek and neophytes, predominantly Catholic and mostly Latino. They tote stacks of snapshots taken of the sky over the course of their visits and compare them like collectors at a baseball card show.

Some are part of the Marian movement--devotees of Mary--who travel to sites around the world renowned for visitations by Mary. But most are Southern Californians who simply believe that something--something blessed--happens under this desert sky on the 13th of each month.

"See, it's the Virgin," says Lissette Sandoval, 41, cradling a snapshot she took just before Acuna's arrival. She points to a vaguely diamond-shaped smudge of white light.

Maybe you could construe it to be the shape of a veiled and robed Mary in her traditional pose with outstretched arms. Suggestions that photographing the sun will result in odd shapes and blips of light carry as much weight here as any earthly apparition of Mary does.

Only Acuna claims to see the mother of Jesus with regularity and incredible clarity.

"The Blessed Mary always appears around 10, 10:30, 11, something like that," Acuna had explained over the phone Wednesday, the day before the 13th. "She looks like a big ray of light coming from the sky very slowly and then she appears in front of me. She looks like a cloud. I see her very clearly. She's a very beautiful woman, very young.. Maybe 18 years old. About 5'5".

Local Catholic authorities have officially-if gently-suggested that there is no Mary there.

"The church's official position is that there are no apparitions, and people are to be discouraged from going there," said Father Gregory Coiro of the Roman Catholic archdiocese of Los Angeles, which spent more than a year investigating the desert case. "It was looked into and found to be wanting. It was found to be due to somebody's imagination-not anyone's bad will."

The diocese in Fresno, which has immediate authority over California City, has concurred with Los Angeles officials. But it has placed no restrictions on people gathering at the unpaved site about 10 miles northeast of California City.

Not that the devotees care about such pronouncements. They have their own research. They talk of the time when rose petals fell from the sky as Acuna prayed-- and then mystically rose back into the sky. They remember when a rainbow appeared around the sun.

Maria Morales, 34, brings her 3-year-old daughter outfitted in a little blue cape and white gown like a miniature statue of Mary. Morales says that Acuna's prayers healed her daughter's dislocated hip.

"I made a promise to the Virgin Mary that I would dress her up as soon as she was healed," she says.

On this Thursday morning, Evelyn Velasquez, 23, waits for Acuna to arrive. "There will be a moment when she says, 'Take the picture,' and everyone will go crazy with their cameras," she says. "But if you don't believe it, you won't see it."

Acuna says she doesn't know why she started coming to the desert on the 13th of each month, but suggests that there is some history of Mary appearing on that day.

In one of the most famous religious sightings of the century, a woman standing on a cloud reportedly appeared to three children on May 13, 1917, in Fatima, Portugal. She told them to return to that spot on the 13th of each month until October when she appeared and told the children that she was the Virgin Mary.

When Acuna arrives, smiling and waving from a teal Dodge Grand Caravan, she is a dark-haired woman, swathed in white veil, white gown and white gym shoes. She is attended by white-clad volunteers.

A group of children in white robes follows a procession of men carrying a statue of Mary surrounded by a bed of plastic roses. They walk slowly to a table on a small makeshift platform.

After one of Acuna's aides leads the group in a hymn, Acuna walks to the center of the circle her audience has made. They fall silent as she clutches a microphone and recites the "Hail Mary" in English and then prays in Spanish.

Softly she says in Spanish, "Our Mother is with us," and suddenly the air is filled with the whir of polaroid cameras snapping directly at the sun. Those without cameras look toward the sky, hands draped in rosaries shielding eyes from the bright sun. All that is visible to the naked eye is a trail of vapor from jets flying out of nearby Edwards Air Force Base.

"The light of the Blessed Mother looks like a crown and covers all the people here," she says in English before launching into something of a sermon--a lament for the homeless that leaves her and some of her listeners in tears.

After the prayers have been said and photos snapped, Acuna works the crowd, listening to people's problems, laying her hands on their heads as she prays, laughing and smiling with those who bring her good news. She is trailed by a volunteer in white who carries a bottle of holy water and a tin of holy oil for Acuna's use.

Seven years ago, Acuna says, she had her first vision when she went to pray in Lopez Canyon near her home in Pacoima. She went back repeatedly, bringing with her bigger and bigger crowds of people until the owners of the property complained.

"That was private property in Lopez Canyon," says one of her aides who declined to give his full name. "The Blessed Mother told her the desert is wide, so she came here."

As the morning turns to afternoon, people search their snapshots for images of the Virgin Mary. "I can't say I've stood here and looked up and seen her," admits first-time attendee Jodi Kepler from Tehachapi.

"But I feel like she's here. I'm for anything that has a positive effect."

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