



THE SHEPHERDS  
OF  
FÁTIMA

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## CHAPTER 2



### *The Shepherds: Lúcia, Francisco, and Jacinta*

TWO FAMILIES FROM the Serra d'Aire, located in the center of Portugal, unknowingly prepared the heralds of Our Lady, who would bring her message to the whole world. Our Lady appeared to three children in the Cova da Iria: Lúcia, the eldest, age ten, and her cousins, Jacinta, age seven, and Francisco, age eight, who were the two youngest children of the Marto family. They were all born in the same area in the parish of Fátima. Lúcia's memoirs provide the details of the story.

#### *A village in the solitude of the Serra d'Aire*

Aljustrel is about a kilometer from Fátima... and about two kilometers from the Cova da Iria, which belonged to my parents when the apparitions occurred. The village of Aljustrel has one street with a few little curves.... Coming from Fátima, we first arrive at Jacinta's parents' house, the eighth on the right. Continuing down the road, perhaps after a two or three minute walk ... my parents' house is the eighth one on the left. It is a standard height, whitewashed inside and out. The side facing the road has a door with a porch and two windows: the first was my parents' bedroom; the other is a room that had two looms: my eldest sister used one of them, and various young girls learned to weave on the other.

Between these two rooms was a square room that we called the outdoor house. It was entered by a door that opened onto the street, and then one had to climb four stone steps. Five doors opened off this room

... first, my parents' room; next, the room where my three eldest sisters slept; then the room where I slept with my sister Carolina; then another door that led to the kitchen; and the door to the room with the looms.<sup>1</sup>

## LÚCIA DE JESUS

### *Birth and Baptism*

The eldest of the three shepherds, Lúcia de Jesus Santos was born on March 28, 1907. She tells us:

Asked when I was born—I heard my mother recount in an interview with Father Manuel Formigão, who had asked her my date of birth—my mother answered: “We say it is on March 22 because she is registered as having been born on that day, but this is actually not true. She was born March 28, 1907.” Only then did I learn the real date of my birth. This wasn’t surprising, because in Fátima at the time we didn’t attach any importance to one’s birthday, nor did we celebrate it; we did not speak about the subject.<sup>2</sup>

Lúcia’s mother tells us what happened the day Lúcia was born: “It was Holy Thursday morning, I went to Holy Mass and Communion, expecting to return later to visit the Blessed Sacrament. But that was not to be, because that afternoon she was born.”<sup>3</sup>

Lúcia was baptized two days after her birth, on Holy Saturday, then known as Alleluia Saturday. An unusual circumstance regarding her baptism explains why her birth date had been given as March 22, as her mother relates:

Her father took care of getting her baptized right away. He couldn’t arrange for it to take place the following week because of his work. But because it was required for fathers to bring their children for baptism eight days after birth, her father decided to give Lúcia’s birth date as March 22. Thus, the pastor baptized her on Holy Saturday, which was March 30.<sup>4</sup>

At the baptism, the godfather was Anastácio Vieira, a friend of Lúcia’s father. The godmother was Maria Rosa Marto, the daughter of José Pedro Marto, who was Jacinta and Francisco’s uncle. The godmother’s father insisted that the child should be called Lúcia. The visionary herself recounts the story:

[My father] invited a young neighbor to be my godmother. She was the goddaughter of my mother.... She gladly accepted and asked her father's permission.... Her father asked what they would name the little girl. She told him it would be Maria Rosa, because her mother already had four daughters and none of them had that name.... Her father said: "No! You have to name her Lúcia! If not, I won't give you permission to be her godmother." She went to tell my parents, who were surprised and asked: "But where did your father get that name?"<sup>5</sup>

Lúcia's family was amazed because in Fátima, as in other parts of Portugal, it was customary to give the youngest daughter her mother's name, or a boy, his father's. However, it is worth emphasizing the coincidence: "Lúcia" means "she who shines." This child, entrusted by Our Lady with the task of spreading the message of Fátima throughout the world, was baptized with a name appropriate for her future mission.

Maria Rosa still tried to prevent the godmother from giving her child such a name, begging her not to listen to the strange suggestion. But "she couldn't do anything, because she resting in bed for the thirty days of recuperation that was the custom after the birth of baby girls (forty days for boys)."<sup>6</sup>

When the rest of the family returned home after the Baptism, Maria Rosa asked anxiously whether the child had received her name. They answered, "No, it is Lúcia." Gazing at the child in the cradle beside her bed, Maria Rosa murmured, sadly, "Ah, Lúcia, where did they get such a name?"

Her parents used to tell Lúcia that she had come from heaven surrounded by roses and flowers in "a little wicker basket we had in the house."<sup>7</sup>

### *Lúcia's childhood*

Lúcia grew up an ordinary child in a healthy family under her parents' watchful, demanding, and loving care. She was healthy and robust. As can be seen in her photographs, Lúcia had a round face, dark eyes, and full eyebrows. She gave the impression of being resolute, serious, and thoughtful. She liked to dress well, especially at feasts. She would wear a gold chain, large earrings that reached her shoulders, and an attractive hat decorated with gilded beads and feathers of different colors.<sup>8</sup>

Her sister Maria dos Anjos tells us: "We loved her very much because she was very intelligent and loving. When as a little girl she

would return home with the cattle, she would throw herself into her mother's arms. Holding her closely, she would play with her, hugging and kissing her."<sup>9</sup>

Lúcia was a great friend of all the children and they took to her readily. There might easily be ten of them in the yard of her home. At one time, her mother put her in charge of some local children while their mothers worked in the fields.

"She would dress up the little children with flowers or ivy, hold processions with holy pictures, and organize games.... If they were in the church, she would sing hymns to Our Lady ... and end everything with a blessing."<sup>10</sup>

She loved to play "hide-and-seek," and she had a gift for storytelling—some were stories she had heard, others she made up herself—and the children listened with great interest. She was popular with the little ones.

They would run up next to me, excited and happy, and when they knew I would be taking my flock around the village, groups of them would come along to spend the day with me. My mother used to say: "I don't know what attraction you could have; the children run to be with you as if there were some feast!" But as for me, I often felt ill at ease in the midst of so much screaming, and so for that reason I would try to hide.<sup>11</sup>

The visionary of Fátima cherished many memories of her happy childhood at home, from the pastimes she enjoyed to the games she played with other children. She was blessed by God "with the use of reason from my earliest childhood,"<sup>12</sup> and she learned to pray very early on in her mother's arms. Lúcia testifies: "The first thing I learned was the Hail Mary, because my mother used to hold me in her arms while she taught it to my sister Carolina."<sup>13</sup>

Lúcia recalled how her sisters would dress her when she accompanied them to festive celebrations: "I had the most elegant clothes used by the peasants of my region at that time. I wore a pleated skirt, a shiny belt, a cashmere kerchief ... and a hat with golden beads and brightly-colored feathers."<sup>14</sup>

She talked like a parrot, to use her own expression, and she went with her sisters to dances suitable for families, where the people of the village enjoyed themselves.

With such a happy childhood, Lúcia continued to grow and develop in every way. Meanwhile, unknown to Lúcia, the Lord was preparing



her for the mission he would soon entrust to her. While still a small child, she learned from her mother the practice of charity, helping the sick and needy:

Sometimes my mother would prepare a small basket . . . with gifts that she sent me to bring to various persons whom she knew didn't have much. . . . Sometimes it was a basket of chestnuts, and when she sent me to bring them to Ti Coxa's house or to the old lady . . . she would send me there with a bundle of dry firewood—because theirs was wet since they couldn't guard it from the rain—so they could light the fire and roast the chestnuts. So I would leave, carrying the chestnuts on my arm and the bundle of firewood on my head.<sup>15</sup>

### *Learning to live a virtuous life*

In her daily family life, by means of the small tasks that her mother gave her, and by her keen spirit of observation, Lúcia learned how to live a virtuous life. As a child, she had her occasional tantrums. In all simplicity, the visionary of Fátima tells us about them. Fortunately, her mother did not let Lúcia indulge her whims but corrected her faults, as she did when Lúcia refused to eat her plate of beans. Another incident occurred when Lúcia was trying to find the nests with the eggs the chickens had laid:

The next day I was spying on [the chickens] and I saw them fly over the courtyard gate and go down the path toward the well. I ran after them and saw that they went under some thistle on a low wall that supported the soil next to the well. My father had some beehives there. Burrowing under the thistle, the chickens disappeared behind the beehive. . . . I took a stick and tried to move the thistle, wanting to see where the chickens were and what they were doing there. Instead, I saw bees buzzing all around me, stinging me on every side. I threw away the stick, and shaking them off I ran to the house, calling for my mother: "Mother, help! The bees want to eat me!"<sup>16</sup>

Besides going to her daughter's aid, Lúcia's mother gave her some advice so that, next time, she would be less curious and more prudent.

Lúcia had her difficulties, too, resulting from childish ways that she slowly grew out of with the help of grace. She herself concluded that it is part of human weakness to slip and fall. She recounts one incident that had particular significance for her:

It must have been around Christmastime, which was when my mother would make offerings. She took three good clusters of grapes that she

had in the loft, arranging them well in a small basket ... and she sent me to Fátima to bring them to the pastor. I went there, but on the way I began to nibble on the top bunch of grapes ... so that by the time I arrived at the square in front of the church, I realized that the cluster of grapes was in no condition to offer to the pastor. I ate the rest of them and threw the stem over the wall around the cemetery ... and went to give the two remaining bunches of grapes. I walked up the steps of the rectory, knocked on the door, and the pastor's sister answered the door, smiling and grateful.

I went down the steps and across the square, heading to the church to visit the Blessed Sacrament.... I then realized that if the pastor went to tell my mother that there were two bunches of grapes and not three, she would scold me and ask what had happened to the rest. So with this fear, I went into church, knelt down next to the altar rail and prayed: "Please don't let the pastor tell my mother that there were two bunches, not three." So I prayed I don't know how many Our Fathers and Hail Marys. I prayed like that all the way home ... and God granted my prayer. I believe my mother never found out, because she never said anything to me.<sup>17</sup>

### *A childhood marked by a life of prayer*

In her family, Lúcia learned the various popular devotions the Portuguese people practiced. She tells how her family celebrated the May devotions at home. People from various districts in the parish gathered to participate:

In the month of May we would pray the Rosary as a family every day. My mother would start this prayer at night after supper.... At the end of every mystery we would sing to Our Lady a verse of the hymn, "Hail, Noble Patroness." Many other people came from the surrounding villages.... Sometimes there were so many people that they could not fit inside our small house. They stayed outside on the road and in the courtyard, joining their voices with ours, praying and singing the praises of God and of Our Lady, asking their blessings and protection.<sup>18</sup>

### *Learning the catechism*

From an early age, Lúcia was attentive to what she saw and heard. But she interpreted things with the mind of a child, as the following delightful episode indicates. One day she heard her mother asking her father what fruits from the farm were ready to be picked:

[My father said:] “The fruits that are now ready for the Holy Spirit [it was near Pentecost] are fava beans, peas, and cherries.” I had this in my mind, and when on Sunday after Mass the pastor taught catechism to the children, he asked: “Now then, children, which one of you can tell me what the fruits of the Holy Spirit are?”

I stood up very quickly and said: “I can!”

“Yes?” he answered, adding, “tell us what they are.”

“They are beans, peas, and cherries.” I was very surprised when I saw the pastor laugh, along with my mother and all the other people who were in church. . . . Then the pastor asked me: “Tell me, my little one, who taught you that?”

I answered: “I heard my father say it to my mother.”<sup>19</sup>

Lúcia’s mother, of course, hastened to explain why Lúcia had given that answer.

### *A joyful family atmosphere*

Lúcia grew up in a healthy family that enjoyed dialogue and shared experiences. The following is one example among so many presented in the *Memoirs*:

Supper was a happy and serene meal, shared in peace and contentment. Each one freely recounted the events of the day, while the others laughed or made comments. . . . Life in our house was like that, peaceful, serene, and happy. We had no worries other than those arising from our daily work, which each one did according to what our parents decided without refusals or discussions. My father took charge of the work in the fields, while my mother looked after running the house. . . .<sup>20</sup>

In her six *Memoirs*, Lúcia recreates for us<sup>21</sup> not only her childhood, but also family customs and events with such detail that we seem to be witnessing them.

### *First Holy Communion*

Lúcia made her first Communion at the age of six.<sup>22</sup> She owed that grace to the intervention of the Servant of God, Father Francisco Cruz, who happened to be preaching in her parish at the time. With her prodigious memory, Lúcia tells us about that unforgettable day:

The day approached that the pastor had designated for the children of the village to make their solemn first Holy Communion. My mother

thought that her little daughter knew her catechism and because she was six years old, she could receive her first Communion. For this purpose she sent me with my sister Carolina to the catechism classes that the pastor was giving the children to prepare for that day. I went there bursting with joy, hoping that I would soon receive my God for the first time. The priest was teaching while seated on a chair up on a platform. He called me next to him, and when some child didn't know an answer, he would have me answer. . . .

The evening before the great day, the pastor sent all the children to church to tell them definitely who would make their Communion in the morning. I was so disappointed when the priest called me . . . and said I had to wait until I was seven years old! I immediately started to cry, and since I was next to my mother, I put my head on her knees, sobbing. Just then another priest came into the church, one whom the pastor had asked to help with confessions.<sup>23</sup> He asked the reason for my tears, and after finding out he took me to the sacristy and questioned me regarding doctrine and the mystery of the Eucharist. Then he led me by the hand to the pastor and said: "Father Pena, you can allow this little one to make her Communion. She understands better than many of the others."

"But she's only six years old," objected the good priest.

"It doesn't matter! I'll take the responsibility for that myself."

"All right then." The good pastor said to me. "Go and tell your mother that tomorrow you can make your first Communion."

Off I went, clapping my hands with joy, and running all the way to give my mother the good news. She immediately began to prepare me to go to confession that afternoon.<sup>24</sup>

### *A "public" confession and a smile from the Mother of God*

Lúcia prepared for the Sacrament of Reconciliation with all the seriousness possible at such a tender age. The confessor was Father Francisco Cruz, and Lúcia would always remember this moment with nostalgia and gratitude:

Upon arriving at church I told my mother that I wanted to confess to the visiting priest [Father Cruz]. He was hearing confessions in the sacristy, sitting on a chair. My mother knelt down in front of the altar near the door, next to the other women who were waiting for their children. There in front of the Blessed Sacrament my mother gave me her last advice. When my turn came, I knelt down at the feet of our good God, represented by his minister, to implore pardon for my sins. When I finished I saw everyone was laughing. My mother called me and said: "My daughter, don't you know that when you go to confession you

should speak softly, that it's a secret? Everybody heard you! Only at the end you said something no one heard."

On the way home my mother tried several times to find out what she called the secret of my confession; but the only answer she got was complete silence. Now, however, I am going to reveal the secret of my first confession. After he heard me, the good priest said these brief words: "My daughter, your soul is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Keep it always pure so that he may continue his divine action in it."

On hearing this, I felt at awe of my interior and asked the good confessor what I should do. He replied: "Kneel down over there at the feet of Our Lady and ask her, with great trust, to take care of your heart, to prepare it to worthily receive her dear Son tomorrow, and to keep it for him alone."

The church had several statues of Our Lady. But since my sisters took care of the altar of Our Lady of the Rosary,<sup>25</sup> I always used to pray near that statue, so I went there then. I asked her very fervently to keep my poor heart for God alone. Upon repeating this humble request several times with my eyes fixed on the statue, it seemed to me that she smiled with a look and a gesture of goodness, and told me yes. I was so overwhelmed with joy that I could barely say a word.<sup>26</sup>

Lúcia's experience before the image of Our Lady of the Rosary has a prophetic quality. At the end of the apparitions in the Cova da Iria, on October 13, 1917, the Mother of God—who had promised in May, "In October I will tell you who I am and what I want"—identified herself as "the Lady of the Rosary."

Lúcia would never forget the advice the kindly priest gave her. Years later, they would meet again, before and after the apparitions, and Lúcia would again benefit from his advice in order to live a more intense union with God. Lucia never revealed what she whispered into the ear of Father Cruz.

### *The great day arrives*

Lúcia's first Communion was to take place on the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The joy her family felt at the first Communion of the youngest involved all of them in a night of work. Lúcia tells us:

My sisters spent the night making me a white dress and a wreath of flowers. I couldn't sleep because I was so happy, and the hours dragged on slowly. I constantly got up . . . to see if they wanted me to try on the dress and wreath, etc. Finally daylight dawned, but it seemed forever until 9:00 A.M. I put on my white dress, and my sister Maria brought me to kitchen to ask pardon of my parents, to kiss their hands and ask

for their blessing. After this ceremony my mother gave me some last advice. She told me what she wanted me to ask Our Lord when I had received him in my heart, and sent me off with these words: “Above all, ask Our Lord to make you a saint.” Her words made such an indelible impression on my heart that they were the first words I said to Our Lord when I received him.<sup>27</sup>

Her first Communion was certainly an important day for Lúcia, because many years later she still remembered details that could easily have been forgotten:

I set out on the way to church with my sisters, and my brother carried me the whole way so the dust from the road wouldn't get me dirty. As soon as I arrived at the church, I ran to the foot of Our Lady's altar to renew my request. I stayed there contemplating her smile from the previous day, until my sisters came to get me and took me to my place.

There were many children. They formed four lines, two of boys, two of girls, from the back of the church to the altar rail. As I was the smallest, I wound up next to the angels on the altar rail step. The sung Mass began, and as the moment approached, my heart beat faster in expectation of the visit of the great God who would descend from heaven to unite himself to my poor soul. . . . I had the good fortune to be the first. I prayed: “Lord, make me a saint, keep my heart pure, only for you.” Then it seemed to me that our good God spoke these distinct words to me in the depths of my heart: “The grace you received today will remain in your soul, producing fruits of eternal life.”<sup>28</sup>

Although the ceremony did not end until about 1:00 P.M. Lúcia's mother came looking for her, distressed because she thought Lúcia would be hungry.<sup>29</sup> Lúcia confesses: “Filled to overflowing with the bread of angels, I found it impossible to take any food whatsoever.”<sup>30</sup> This event marks another decisive step, as she relates: “From then on, I lost the taste and attraction that I was beginning to feel for the things of the world, and I only felt well in some solitary place where, all alone, I could recall the delights of my first Communion.”<sup>31</sup>

Lúcia did not record the date of this memorable event. According to her statement that she made her first Communion at the age of six, and because she was born March 28, 1907, it must have taken place in 1913.<sup>32</sup>

### *Work and play*

Lúcia continued to enjoy a carefree childhood and the warmth of her loving family. When her sisters grew and took up other work—at the

loom or in the fields—Lúcia began to take their place as a shepherdess.<sup>33</sup> She was then almost eight years old. She did this work until she was ten, when it became impossible for her to remain with the flock because people were continually looking for her. The tasks her parents entrusted her with helped to develop her sense of responsibility.

But she also had time to play. Everywhere children have favorite games that change according to the time of year. Lúcia recalled what life was like in the early twentieth century in that corner of the Serra d’Aire: “The games we knew and liked best were pebbles, catch, pass the ring, buttons, hit the mark, quoits [a lawn game similar to horseshoes], and cards. . . . We had two packs of cards; I had one and the other was theirs. Francisco preferred to play cards.”<sup>34</sup> Between games and the duties their parents had given them, the children grew up in a wholesome atmosphere.

Festivities were organized, especially at carnival time, with dances among friendly families. Most participants were young people, enjoying themselves under the affectionate but attentive eyes of their parents. A meal prepared especially by the youngest members was always part of the festivities.

Lúcia was the life and soul of these gatherings until her mother put a definite end to them when the new pastor of Fátima began to discourage these amusements in his Sunday sermons. When someone remarked that until the new pastor arrived it wasn’t a sin to dance, Maria Rosa answered: “I don’t know. . . . All I know is that the pastor doesn’t want dancing, and as far as I’m concerned my daughters will no longer go to those gatherings. At most I would let them dance in the family because the pastor said there is no harm in that.”<sup>35</sup>

### *Spiritual help*

In his providence, God makes use of other people to help us in our spiritual life. Lúcia was no exception. She testifies to the help she received after the apparitions began:

I think it was during this month [August 1917] that Father Formigão came here for the first time to question me. His interview was serious and very detailed. I liked him very much because he spoke to me about the practice of virtue, teaching me some ways to put it into practice. He showed me a holy card of Saint Agnes, told me the story of her martyrdom, and encouraged me to imitate her. His Reverence continued to come every month to question me, at the end of which he

always gave me some good advice that helped me spiritually. One day he said to me: “You have an obligation to love Our Lord very much for the many graces and favors he is granting you.”

These words were so deeply engraved in my soul that to this day I acquired the habit of constantly saying to our Lord: “My God, I love you in thanksgiving for the graces you have granted me.” I shared with Jacinta and her little brother this prayer that I liked so much. Jacinta took it so much to heart that in the midst of our most entertaining games, she would ask: “Did you forget to tell our Lord that you love him for the graces he has given us?”<sup>36</sup>

### *The death of Lúcia’s father*

Her father’s unexpected death, referred to in the preceding chapter, must have been very painful for the little shepherdess of the Serra d’Aire. It was an experience of suffering quite unlike any other. Her testimony in this respect is striking: “My pain was so great that I thought that I too would die.”

Apart from her filial affection for her father, she missed him because in the midst of all the confusion and hostility aroused by the apparitions, he alone in the family understood her and believed firmly in her sincerity. “He was the only one who continued to be my friend, and the only one who defended me when discussions arose in the family against me.”<sup>37</sup>

### *Lúcia learns to read*

The Lady of the Cova da Iria had told Lúcia to learn to read, thus preparing her for the mission in the world with which she would entrust her. At that time girls in her village were not usually taught to read. Lúcia relates: “At home they told me that it was only because of vanity that I wanted to learn to read. Until then, little girls almost never learned to read; school was only for the boys. It was only later that a school for girls was opened in Fátima.”<sup>38</sup>

One reason Lúcia did not attend school was because she had to bring the flock out to pasture every day. When the family later had to sell the sheep, the door opened for her to enroll in the primary school. Jacinta also attended. Their teacher, Maria de Jesus Carreira, found the two little girls to be good students.

Lúcia would complete her education some years later, in the College of Vilar, run by the Dorothean Sisters.