On 17 January 1871, at the height of the Franco-Prussian War, 12-year-old Eugène Barbedette looked out at the night sky over Pontmain and saw a beautiful woman wearing a blue gown studded with stars and a black veil under a golden crown.

His 10-year-old brother also saw the apparition, but their parents, and other adults, saw nothing. Two other children described the apparition in the same detail as the two brothers. Adults could only see a triangle of stars.

After three hours, the apparition vanished. That same evening, Prussian forces inexplicably abandoned their advance towards the town. The children who saw the apparition later became priests and nuns.

Pontmain is a place of pilgrimage, also from Germany. Bob Hope and his wife donated funds for a chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Hope of Pontmain at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington DC.

Interior of the basilica of Pontmain. The blue color effect is created by the tinted windows.

Image: Michel GILE/Gamma-Rapho via Getty Images

