

### **This Wild Country**

Our Lady had described Wisconsin as “this wild country” where children grow up not having been taught the saving truths of God. How much more urgent is the state of children today! Most children, and even most Catholic children, do not receive a convicted witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ; most receive, instead, the anti-gospels of false gods that will destroy them: the doctrines of “my body, my choice,” of transgenderism, and of selfish pleasure above all.

“But how shall I teach them who know so little myself?” Adele asked Our Lady. “Teach them their catechism, how to sign themselves with the sign of the cross, and how to approach the sacraments; that is what I wish you to do. Go and fear nothing. I will help you.” Our Lady lifted up her hands, as if in blessing, and gently faded back into the sky. Adele slowly got to her feet and walked back to the farm.

### **The Mission**

Adele Brise began her work. Rather than marry and have a family of her own, she entered the Third Order Franciscans, gathering other women to help catechize the scattered Catholic children of Wisconsin. She would walk as many as 50 miles up and down the Green Bay peninsula, going house to house, bringing the Word of Life to parents and their children. Her father built a small chapel to Our Lady of Good Help, next to which she built St. Mary’s Boarding School. In 1888 she built a larger chapel, school, and convent, and sweetly convinced the town council to rename Robinsonville “Champion,” for her hometown in Belgium.

In 2023 “Our Lady of Good Help” was renamed Our Lady of Champion and remains the only approved apparition of Our Lady in the United States. She came to promote Catholic education: teaching children first principles and final ends, or in Thomas Jefferson’s words, “the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God.” Without education in these truths, citizens become merely instruments of totalitarian power. Let us pray, through Our Lady, for our Catholic schools.

### **Ecclesiastical Approval**

On December 8, 2010, the Bishop of Green Bay, David Ricken, published the results of his canonical investigation about these events, which had borne such wonderful fruits but never been officially approved: “I declare with moral certainty, and in accord with the norms of the Church, that the events, apparitions, and locutions given to Adele Brise in October of 1859 do exhibit the substance of supernatural character and I do hereby approve these apparitions as worthy of belief.”



### **Recommended reading**

Leo Winstead has written a delightfully-illustrated book on Adele and the message, *A Message for Adele*. The National Shrine website has some good information as well.

## **Our Lady of Champion Historical Facts and Essential Messages of Our Lady in 1859**



*Welcome to Our Lady’s Shrine here in San Francisco. In this pamphlet, prepared by our pastor, Fr. Joseph Illo, you will learn the basic facts and message of this apparition. You are encouraged to spend some time in quiet prayer and perhaps go to confession. Please keep a reverent silence in the Church, especially when the Blessed Sacrament is exposed.*

### **Star of the Sea Church**

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**What:** Three Apparitions of Our Lady

**Where:** Champion, Wisconsin

**When:** October 1859

**To Whom:** Adele Brise (age 28)

### Wisconsin Territory

What we now know as the Beer and Cheese Capital of America, home to the Green Bay Packers and the Milwaukee Brewers, was once a wild territory on the shores of Lake Michigan, home to floods of Catholic immigrants from Germany and other parts of Europe. The Brise family emigrated from Brussels to the farmlands and fisheries of Wisconsin's Green Bay in 1855, seven years after it had attained statehood. The Wisconsin this Belgian Catholic family discovered had very few priests to instruct its many large immigrant families. The entire northeastern part of the state, for example, had only one pastor, and the Brise family had to travel eleven miles (by horse or on foot) to attend Mass.

### Adele Joseph Brise

Adele Brise was born in 1831 near Brussels to a devout Catholic family. She had little education and had lost an eye in an accident when she was six years old. Despite these limitations, she had the graces of a charming personality and fervent piety, especially to the Blessed Mother of Christ. *Notre Dame de Bon Secours* ("Our Lady of Good Help") was the most beloved title for Mary among the Belgian people. Little Adele, with some friends in her hometown of Champion, Belgium, had promised Our Lady that she would enter an Ursuline Convent. When her family emigrated, however, her parents needed her to stay on the farm.

### Between a Maple and a Hemlock

Adele was already 28 years old and had not fulfilled her promise to become a nun. The local priest had told her to obey her parents unless God gave her a clear sign to enter religious life. Early in October, as Adele was on her way from the farm to the grist mill, she saw a Lady in white, with a golden sash and stars above her flowing blonde hair. She stood between a maple tree and a hemlock tree. The Lady said nothing, and within a few moments faded, leaving a white cloud. Frightened, Adele hurried back to tell her parents. "It may have been a poor soul in Purgatory, asking for prayers," her father said. So the whole family prayed for this soul that evening.

### The Second Apparition

The following Sunday (October 9), Adele was on her way to Mass with her sister Isabel and a friend. As they approached the same two trees, Adele saw the apparition again, although the others saw nothing. Again troubled, Adele spoke to the priest after Mass, who told her that if the vision were from heaven it would appear again and would not harm her. "If you see her again," the priest said, "ask her: In God's name, who are you and what do you want of me?"

### The Third Apparition

Adele returned to the two trees, and sure enough the beautiful Lady was standing between them. Adele asked her: "In God's name, who are you and what do you want of me?" The Lady answered: "I am the Queen of Heaven who prays for the conversion of sinners, and I wish you to do the same." She certainly appeared as a queen, clothed in white with a golden sash, tall and regal, with a circlet of gilded stars above her flowing locks.

She identified herself as "one who prays," and she called upon Adele to imitate her virtue and her prayer. In every one of her apparitions, Our Lady asks the same thing of her young visionaries: pray and do penance. The Queen of Heaven herself prays and makes atonement, and so to be counted among her heavenly court, we must join her in prayer for sinners.

"You received Holy Communion this morning and that is well," she told Adele. "But you must do more. Make a general confession and offer Communion for the conversion of sinners. If they do not convert and do penance, my Son will be obliged to punish them." Mary had asked Adele to pray, and now she asked her to make "communions of reparation" as she would describe it at Fatima, 60 years later. "What are you doing here," she then asked Adele, "while your companions are working in the vineyard of my Son?" Some of her friends from Belgium had indeed entered religious life, but Adele was needed on the farm. "What more can I do, dear Lady?" Adele asked her with tears. "Gather the children in this wild country and teach them what they should know for their salvation."



*Procession of school children at the Shrine, 1954*