

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Asaph

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: May 1

IN BRIEF

Saint Asaph

Sixth-century Welsh monk and bishop, disciple of Saint Kentigern and his successor at Llanelwy (St Asaph).

Feast day	May 1
Born	mid-6th century, Hen Ogledd (the Old North of Britain), according to the genealogies
Died	late 6th or early 7th century, Llanelwy (St Asaph), Wales
Canonized	Pre-Congregation (immemorial cult)
Era	6th century
Patron saint of	St Asaph and its diocese

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Asaph, Faithful Disciple

Novena to Saint Asaph

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Asaph

Saint Asaph, in Welsh *Asaff*, was a Welsh monk and bishop of the late sixth century. A disciple of Saint Kentigern at the monastery of Llanelwy, in northeast Wales, he succeeded his master as head of the community and became the first Welsh bishop of that see, which today bears his name: St Asaph. His feast day is May 1.

Who was Saint Asaph?

Asaph belongs to the Welsh "Age of the Saints," the fifth and sixth centuries, when monks founded many communities across Wales. Very little is known about him for certain. The Welsh genealogies of the saints, the *Bonedd y Saint*, call him a son of Sawyl Penuchel, a prince of the "Old North," the *Hen Ogledd*: the Brittonic kingdoms of what is now northern England and southern Scotland.

Most of what is told about him comes from the *Life of Saint Kentigern* written in the twelfth century by Jocelyn of Furness, some six hundred years after the events. His story should therefore be read with care. Even so, the memory of Asaph has shaped a whole corner of Wales: a town, a cathedral and one of the oldest dioceses of the country carry his name.



St Asaph Cathedral, Wales.

Key dates in the life of Saint Asaph

- **Mid-sixth century**: Born into a princely Brittonic family, according to the Welsh genealogies.
- **Youth**: Becomes a monk at the monastery of Llanelwy, on the River Elwy, founded according to tradition by Saint Kentigern.
- **c. 573**: After the Battle of Arfderydd, Kentigern is recalled to the kingdom of Strathclyde, and Asaph succeeds him at Llanelwy.
- **Late sixth century**: He governs the community and the diocese as bishop.
- **Late sixth or early seventh century**: Dies on an unknown date, traditionally a May 1.

The disciple of Kentigern

According to the *Life of Saint Kentigern*, the bishop of Glasgow, driven from his homeland, took refuge in Wales and founded a great monastery where the Elwy meets the Clwyd. The place took the name *Llanelwy*, "the holy enclosure on the Elwy." Hundreds of monks lived there, sharing their time between prayer, study and work in the fields.

As in other Celtic communities, the monks practiced perpetual praise, the *laus perennis*: they took turns so that the Divine Office never stopped, day or night.

The burning coals

Among the monks, young Asaph stood out for his devotion and obedience. A well-known story tells that one winter day, Kentigern, chilled after praying in the icy water of the river, asked for a fire. Asaph went to fetch burning coals and carried them back in the folds of his garment, which did not catch fire. Kentigern saw in this wonder a sign that the young monk was destined for great things.

Bishop of Llanelwy

When Kentigern was recalled to the kingdom of Strathclyde after the Battle of Arfderydd, around 573, he chose Asaph to succeed him as head of the monastery and of the Christian people of the region. Asaph thus became the first Welsh bishop of the see. Tradition presents him as a gentle and faithful shepherd who led his community in the spirit of his master. Nothing precise is known about his time as bishop or about his death.

Devotion to Saint Asaph

The memory of Asaph gave its name to the city of St Asaph and to its diocese, one of the oldest in Wales. The present cathedral, rebuilt several times since the thirteenth century, is often described as one of the smallest cathedrals in

Britain. Today it belongs to the Church in Wales, of the Anglican tradition. It keeps the memory of Bishop William Morgan, who published the first complete translation of the Bible into Welsh in 1588.

Asaph is honored by the Catholic Church, which commemorates him on May 1, as well as by Anglicans and the Orthodox. Several churches and places in North Wales bear his name.

Why is Saint Asaph the patron saint of St Asaph?

Asaph is the patron of the city and diocese of St Asaph because the place grew out of the monastery he led after Kentigern. The town itself took his name, and the cathedral stands on the traditional site of the monastery of Llanelwy. In Welsh the town is still called Llanelwy, while English speakers know it by the name of its saint.

Asaph is the faithful disciple who receives his master's legacy and makes it bear fruit quietly. The coals carried without burning speak of fervor and trusting obedience. His community, where praise never ceased, recalls the first place of prayer. He can be invoked for vocations, for successors who take over a work begun by others, and for the Christians of Wales.

What Saint Asaph teaches today

Asaph left no writings and no record of great deeds. What remains is the picture of a young man who listened, obeyed and prayed, and who later accepted responsibility when it was handed to him. In a culture that prizes founders and innovators, he is a saint for those who continue: the second pastor of a parish, the teacher who takes over a class, the son or daughter who keeps a family business going. Faithfulness in what we receive is also a path to holiness.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Asaph in art

Saint Asaph is shown as a bishop, with miter and crozier. He is sometimes depicted carrying burning coals in his garment, recalling the story told in the *Life of Kentigern*. In some stained glass windows he appears as a young monk bringing the coals to his master.

Where to pray to Saint Asaph

- **St Asaph** (Denbighshire, Wales): the cathedral that bears his name, on the traditional site of the monastery of Llanelwy.
- **Llanasa** (Flintshire, Wales): a village whose church is dedicated to him.

To pray with him, you can use the prayer to Saint Asaph or the novena to Saint Asaph, prayed from April 23 to May 1.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Asaph, Faithful Disciple

Saint Asaph, the young monk who carried burning coals to his master without being burned, became the first Welsh bishop of Llanelwy, the place that now bears his name. His life speaks of faithful discipleship, unceasing prayer and quiet service. This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia.

Prayer to Saint Asaph

Saint Asaph, faithful disciple of Saint Kentigern,
you learned in the monastery on the Elwy
to pray without ceasing and to obey with a trusting heart.
You carried fire in your hands and were not harmed:
obtain for me a fervent love for God
that warms others without wounding them.

You received the work of your master
and led his people with gentleness.
Help all who take up a task begun by others
to carry it on humbly and faithfully.

Pray for the young who seek their vocation,
for monks and nuns who keep the praise of God alive,
for the people of Wales and for all who live in St Asaph.
May the fire of the Holy Spirit never go out in our hearts.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray this prayer

- On his feast day, May 1, or during the novena from April 23.
- When you take over a job, a ministry or a responsibility from someone else.
- For vocations to the priesthood and religious life.
- When your prayer has grown cold and you want to rekindle it.
- For the Christians of Wales, especially in the north.

A prayer of praise with Saint Asaph

The monks of Llanelwy took turns so that the praise of God never stopped. You can join that spirit with the ancient doxology, the Glory Be, prayed slowly:

> *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.*

To learn more, read the life of Saint Asaph or pray the novena to Saint Asaph.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Asaph

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Asaph, monk and first Welsh bishop of Llanelwy (St Asaph). It is not an official liturgical text. To end on his feast day, begin on April 23: the ninth day then falls on May 1.

We know little for certain about Asaph. Most of his story comes from the twelfth-century *Life of Saint Kentigern*. These meditations draw on that tradition with simplicity, keeping to what it tells.

You can pray this novena for any intention. It is especially suited to young people discerning a vocation, to anyone taking over a responsibility from someone else, to those whose prayer has grown cold, and to the Church in Wales. You may pray it alone, with your family or with a parish group.

How to pray this novena

Each day, place your intention before God, read the short meditation, say the prayer of the day, then pray an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The suggested act helps you carry the prayer into daily life.

You may begin each day with this opening prayer: *Lord God, you made Saint Asaph a faithful disciple and a gentle shepherd. Through his intercession, hear the prayer I bring you today and keep the fire of your love alive in me. Amen.*

If you miss a day, simply continue where you left off.

Day 1: A child of the Old North

The Welsh genealogies say Asaph came from a princely family of the Old North. Whatever his origins, he left status behind to become a monk. God often calls us away from what the world values most.

Prayer: Lord, free me from attachment to rank and reputation. Through Saint Asaph, help me to seek you first. Amen.

Today: Give up one small thing you do to be noticed.

Day 2: Entering the monastery

Young Asaph joined the community at Llanelwy, where hundreds of monks shared prayer, study and work in the fields. He learned the Christian life by living it with others, day after day, in the ordinary rhythm of the bell, the chapel and the field.

Prayer: Father, thank you for the community of the Church. Help me to grow in faith alongside others and not alone. Amen.

Today: Take part in a parish activity or reach out to a fellow parishioner.

Day 3: Praise that never stops

The monks of Llanelwy took turns so that the praise of God never ceased. Asaph's life was carried by that unbroken prayer. No single monk could pray all the time, but together they kept the song going. In the Church, our prayers join those of others across the world.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, teach me to pray always. Let my work and rest become praise to the Father. Amen.

Today: Pray a psalm or part of the Liturgy of the Hours.

Day 4: Learning from a master

Asaph was formed by Kentigern, the bishop of Glasgow in exile. A good teacher shapes not only ideas but a whole way of living.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who have taught me the faith. Bless them, and make me teachable. Amen.

Today: Pray for a teacher, priest or mentor who has helped you.

Day 5: Fire in the hands

When Kentigern asked for fire, Asaph carried burning coals in his garment and it did not burn. The story speaks of a love for God that is ardent yet harmless to others.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you came to bring fire to the earth. Light that fire in me, and make it warm and gentle. Amen.

Today: Light a candle and spend five minutes in silent prayer.

Day 6: Prompt obedience

Asaph did not argue or delay; he went at once to fetch the fire. Obedience, lived with trust, is a way of listening to God.

Prayer: Father, give me a heart that listens and responds quickly to your will. Amen.

Today: Do right away something you have been putting off.

Day 7: Receiving a legacy

When Kentigern was recalled to Strathclyde around 573, he entrusted the monastery and its people to Asaph. Asaph did not start over; he carried on what he had received. It takes humility to build on another person's foundation without needing to make it one's own.

Prayer: Lord, bless all who take up a work begun by others. Give them humility and faithfulness. Amen.

Today: Thank someone whose work you have inherited or continued.

Day 8: A gentle shepherd

Tradition remembers Asaph as a gentle and faithful bishop. His leadership left no famous deeds, only a community that kept praying and a name that endured.

Prayer: Good Shepherd, pray for our bishops and pastors. Make them gentle and faithful, and help me support them. Amen.

Today: Pray for your bishop by name.

Day 9: A name that remains

The city, the cathedral and the diocese of St Asaph carry his name more than fourteen centuries later. A quiet life given to God can leave a lasting mark.

Prayer: Saint Asaph, I place before you the intention of this novena. Present it to the Lord, and help me to live faithfully in small things. Amen.

Today: Pray for the Christians of Wales and for the unity of all Christians.

Closing prayer

Lord God, you gave Saint Asaph a fervent heart, a ready obedience and a gentle way of leading your people. Through his intercession, grant what I have asked during these nine days, if it is your will. Keep the fire of your love burning in me, and make my life a song of praise to you. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

CREDITS

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