

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Bathild

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: January 30

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IN BRIEF

Saint Bathild

Saxon slave who became queen and regent of the Franks, founder of the abbeys of Corbie and Chelles.

Feast day	January 30
Born	c. 630, probably Britain
Died	January 30, 680, Chelles, France
Canonized	pre-congregation (immemorial veneration)
Era	7th century

In this booklet

Life

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Novena to Saint Bathild

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Bathild

Saint Bathild (also spelled Balthild or Bathilda) was a young Saxon woman sold as a slave in Gaul who became queen of the Franks through her marriage to King Clovis II, then regent of the kingdom during her son's childhood. She fought the trade in captives, supported many monasteries and founded the abbeys of Corbie and Chelles, where she ended her life among the nuns. She died on January 30, 680, and her feast day is January 30.

Who was Saint Bathild?

Bathild was born around 630. Her main biography, a Latin *Life* written shortly after her death, says that she came "from across the sea" and was "of the race of the Saxons." She most likely came from the parts of Britain settled by the Saxons.

She arrived in Gaul as a slave, sold "at a cheap price." Her biographer saw in this the hand of God, who lifts up the lowly. A later version of her story gives her a noble origin, but without any details.

Bathild was bought by Erchinoald, mayor of the palace of Neustria, who took her into his household. Erchinoald presented her to the young king Clovis II, son of King Dagobert, who married her shortly after 648. A chronicle of the time calls her a "wise and refined queen."

Key dates in the life of Saint Bathild

- **c. 630**: Birth, probably in Britain, into a Saxon family.
- **Youth**: Sold as a slave in Gaul, she enters the household of Erchinoald.
- **Shortly after 648**: Marriage to King Clovis II.
- **657**: Death of Clovis II; she becomes regent for her son Clotaire III.

- **During her regency**: Foundation of the abbey of Corbie and support of the abbey of Chelles.
- **664 or 665**: She withdraws to the abbey of Chelles.
- **January 30, 680**: Death at Chelles.
- **March 17, 833**: Translation of her remains to a new chapel.

Queen and regent of the Franks

Clovis II and Bathild had several children, including three future kings: Clotaire III, Childeric II and Theuderic III. When Clovis II died in 657, his sons were still small children. Bathild fought to keep the throne for the eldest, Clotaire III, and became regent of the kingdom of Neustria and Burgundy.

She governed surrounded by bishops, such as Saint Ouen of Rouen and Saint Eligius of Noyon, and in 662 she succeeded in having her son Childeric II recognized as king of Austrasia.

A debated reputation

Her rule did not escape the harshness of the age. Anglo-Saxon sources, the *Life of Saint Wilfrid* and Saint Bede the Venerable, accuse her of having several bishops put to death, among them Aunemund, bishop of Lyon. Modern historians consider these accusations hard to prove and tend to attribute such violence to the mayor of the palace Ebroin, known for his brutality. Bathild remains a debated figure, and it is more honest to say so than to hide it.

A former slave against the slave trade

Having been a slave herself, Bathild acted on behalf of captives. At the request of the pope, she forbade the sale of Christian captives within the kingdom. With her own money she bought the freedom of many captives, whom she set free or placed in monasteries. The Council of Chalon-sur-Saône gave these measures the force of Church law.

She also freed heads of families imprisoned for tax debts and fought against a head tax that reportedly drove some families to let their newborn children die.

Reformer and founder of abbeys

Bathild also fought simony, the buying and selling of Church offices, in the spirit of the reform of Saint Gregory the Great. She showered gifts on the great abbeys of the kingdom, such as Saint-Denis, Saint-Martin of Tours, Jumièges, Saint-Wandrille, Luxeuil and Jouarre. She herself founded the abbey of Corbie, in Picardy, and the abbey of Chelles, near Paris.

The nun of Chelles

In 664 her son Clotaire III came of age, and the great nobles of the kingdom reclaimed their independence. Violence grew around the queen: around 665 the bishop of Paris, one of her advisers, was murdered. Refusing open conflict, Bathild withdrew to the abbey of Chelles, which she had placed under the direction of Abbess Bertilla. There she lived humbly among the nuns, without any political role, perhaps without ever taking vows.

She died on January 30, 680, at about fifty years of age. Her funeral was nothing more than a simple office sung by the nuns. Her cult spread quickly and her tomb became a place of veneration. On March 17, 833, her remains were moved to a new chapel. The Alfred-Bonno museum in Chelles still keeps garments that belonged to her, including an embroidered tunic.

Why is Saint Bathild invoked for victims of trafficking?

Bathild knew both extremes of the human condition: slavery and the crown. Once she held power, she remembered those who were being sold as she had been, and she put her authority at the service of captives, the poor and the Church. In the end she gave up power for prayer.

For this reason she is prayed to today for victims of human trafficking and modern slavery, for people who hold positions of responsibility, and for those who must step down from power. Her story echoes that of Saint Josephine Bakhita, the Sudanese former slave who has become the Church's great intercessor for trafficking victims.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Bathild in art

- **The crown**: she is usually shown as a crowned queen, as in the Chronicles of Saint-Denis or the marble statue in the Luxembourg Garden in Paris.
- **The abbess's habit and the book**: other images show her in monastic dress, holding a book, recalling her last years at Chelles.
- **The ladder**: the *Golden Legend* reports that at her death she saw a ladder set up before the altar of the Virgin Mary and rising to heaven. It is only a legend, but the ladder appears today on the coat of arms of the town of Chelles.
- **The young slave**: some paintings show the scene of her sale, such as *Saint Bathild Sold to Erchinoald* by Guy-Louis Vernansal (1700).

Where to pray to Saint Bathild

- **Chelles** (east of Paris): the church of Saint-André and the Alfred-Bonno museum, which keep her memory and objects that belonged to her.
- **Corbie** (Picardy): the abbey church of Saint-Pierre, which she founded, with a 14th-century statue of the queen.
- **Vanves** (near Paris): the priory of the Benedictine Sisters of Saint Bathild.
- **Paris**: her statue in the chapel of the queens of France in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart (Sacré-Cœur), and another in the Luxembourg Garden.

To pray with her, read the prayer to Saint Bathild or follow the novena to Saint Bathild.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Bathild for Victims of Trafficking

There is no widely used traditional prayer to Saint Bathild in English, although the monastic liturgy of Chelles sang her memory for centuries. Saintspedia offers here an original prayer inspired by her life: the slave who became queen, the regent who bought back captives, the nun of Chelles.

From slavery to the crown

Bathild arrived in Gaul sold as a slave. Once queen of the Franks, and then regent, she forbade the sale of Christian captives, bought the freedom of many of them and set them free. She founded the abbeys of Corbie and Chelles. At the end of her life she gave up power to live humbly among the nuns. An antiphon of Chelles sang that "at the end of her glorious deeds in the world, she sought the perfection of the Gospel."

Prayer to Saint Bathild for Victims of Trafficking

Saint Bathild, you who knew slavery and whom God lifted up, pray for all victims of trafficking and exploitation, and obtain for them freedom and dignity.

You who, once a queen, did not forget the captives, teach me to remember the least of my brothers and sisters, above all when I am in a position of strength.

You who governed in times of violence, pray for those who hold authority, that they may serve justice and protect the weak.

You who left power behind for prayer at Chelles, help me to let go and to seek God first.

I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence). Saint Bathild, pray for us. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Bathild's feast day is January 30. You can pray to her:

- for victims of human trafficking and modern slavery, and for those who work to free them;
- for exploited migrants and workers;
- for political leaders and anyone who holds responsibility over others;
- when you are about to leave a position, retire or hand over authority to someone else.

Her prayer fits naturally close to February 8, the feast of Saint Josephine Bakhita and the International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking.

To go further, read the life of Saint Bathild or pray the novena to Saint Bathild.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Bathild

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Bathild, the Saxon slave who became queen of the Franks and ended her days as a nun at Chelles. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on her feast day, January 30, begin on January 22. You can also pray it at any time of the year, especially for victims of human trafficking, for people in authority, or when you face a major change in your own life.

How to pray this novena

Each day, place your intention before God, read the short meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for each day helps carry the prayer into ordinary life. If you miss a day, simply pick up again the next day.

Day 1: Sold at a cheap price

Bathild's biographer says she was sold in Gaul "at a cheap price." The world measured her worth in coins, but God saw her otherwise. Every human being, whatever the world thinks of them, carries a dignity that no one can buy or sell.

Prayer: Lord, open my eyes to the dignity of every person you place on my path.

Today: Learn the name and something of the story of someone you usually pass without noticing.

Day 2: God lifts up the lowly

The young slave became queen. Her biographer saw in this the action of God, who "has cast down the mighty from their thrones and lifted up the lowly," as Mary sings in the Magnificat. Our own humiliations are never the last word on our lives.

Prayer: Lord, when I feel small or forgotten, remind me that you look upon the humble.

Today: Pray the Magnificat slowly.

Day 3: A wise queen

A chronicle of her time calls Bathild a "wise and refined queen." Wisdom is not the same as cleverness. It is the art of seeing things as God sees them and acting accordingly, in the family, at work and in public life.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give me the gift of wisdom in the decisions I must make.

Today: Before an important choice, take five minutes of silence to ask for light.

Day 4: Remembering the captives

Once in power, Bathild did not forget where she came from. She forbade the sale of Christian captives in the kingdom and bought the freedom of many. Millions of people are still enslaved today, through forced labor, sexual exploitation or debt bondage.

Prayer: Lord, break the chains of all who are bought and sold, and give courage to those who work to free them.

Today: Find out about an organization that helps victims of trafficking, and support it if you can.

Day 5: Freeing those crushed by debt

Bathild freed heads of families imprisoned for tax debts, and opposed a head tax that reportedly pushed poor families to abandon their newborns. Poverty can crush families and lead to desperate choices. Justice in economic life is also a work of mercy.

Prayer: Lord, comfort families weighed down by debt, and protect every child from conception onward.

Today: Help a family in difficulty, discreetly, in a concrete way.

Day 6: Serving the Church without buying it

The queen fought simony, the trade in Church offices. Gifts of God cannot be bought, and service in the Church is not a career to be purchased. Bathild wanted pastors chosen for their faith, not for their wealth.

Prayer: Lord, give your Church humble and faithful pastors, and keep my own heart free from ambition.

Today: Pray for your bishop and your parish priest by name.

Day 7: Building houses of prayer

Bathild supported many abbeys and founded Corbie and Chelles. She knew that a kingdom needs places where people pray, study and welcome the poor. Our parishes and communities are such places today.

Prayer: Lord, bless the monasteries and communities that pray for the world.

Today: Give some time or help to your parish, or write to a monastery to ask for its prayers.

Day 8: Letting go of power

When violence grew around her, Bathild did not fight to keep her place. She withdrew to Chelles and lived there humbly among the nuns. Knowing when to step aside is a rare and precious form of humility, at every level of responsibility.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to hold my responsibilities with an open hand, and to let go when the time comes.

Today: Let someone else have the last word, or the place of honor.

Day 9: The ladder to heaven

The *Golden Legend* says that at her death Bathild saw a ladder rising from the altar of the Virgin Mary to heaven. Whatever the legend, it speaks a truth: our whole life, with its ups and downs, can become a path toward God, one step at a time.

Prayer: Lord, through the intercession of Saint Bathild and of the Virgin Mary, lead me step by step to you.

Today: Go to Mass if you can, or spend a moment before a statue or image of Mary.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Bathild, slave raised up by God, queen who remembered the captives, nun who chose prayer over power, I entrust to you the intention of this novena. Pray for all those who are bought, sold and exploited, that they may find freedom. Pray for those who govern, that they may serve justice and protect the weak. And pray for me, that I may use whatever power I have to serve, and that I may seek God above all things. Amen.*

To learn more about her, read the life of Saint Bathild or pray the prayer to Saint Bathild.

CREDITS

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