

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Christopher

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: July 25

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IN BRIEF

Saint Christopher

Early Christian martyr, bearer of Christ according to legend, patron saint of travelers.

Feast day	July 25
Died	mid-3rd century, according to tradition, Lycia (Asia Minor), according to tradition
Canonized	pre-congregation (immemorial veneration)
Era	3rd century
Patron saint of	travelers, drivers, motorists, boatmen

In this booklet

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Prayer to Saint Christopher for Travelers and Drivers

Novena to Saint Christopher

Church of Saint-Christophe-de-Javel in Paris, the Motorists' Church

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Christopher

Saint Christopher is one of the most popular saints in Christendom, even though almost nothing is known about his real life. History remembers a martyr from Asia Minor who, according to tradition, died around the middle of the third century. Legend made him a giant who carried travelers across a river, until the day he carried the Child Jesus on his shoulders. The patron saint of travelers and drivers, he is celebrated on July 25 wherever his feast is kept.

Who was Saint Christopher?

The oldest accounts, written in Greek, speak of a Christian martyred in Lycia, in the south of present-day Turkey, during the persecutions, which tradition most often places under the Emperor Decius, around 250. These texts, called "passions," are already full of marvels and offer few verifiable details.

What is certain is that devotion to Saint Christopher is very old: from the fifth century, churches were dedicated to him in the East, and his memory then spread throughout Europe. His Greek name, *Christophoros*, means "the one who carries Christ." It first had a spiritual meaning: every baptized person carries Christ within. This name inspired the legend of the ferryman.

Key dates

- **c. 250**: Martyrdom in Lycia under the Emperor Decius, according to tradition.
- **5th century**: First churches dedicated to Saint Christopher in the East.
- **Early Middle Ages**: His cult spreads in the West; his name enters the Latin martyrologies on July 25.

- **c. 1260**: Jacobus de Voragine sets down the ferryman legend in the *Golden Legend*.
- **14th-15th centuries**: Giant images of him multiply on church walls; he is counted among the Fourteen Holy Helpers.
- **Early 20th century**: He becomes the patron of motorists, and blessings of cars spread.
- **1969**: The reform of the Roman calendar removes his memorial from the universal calendar; he remains in the Roman Martyrology.

The legend of the ferryman

The best-known version comes from the *Golden Legend*, a collection of lives of the saints compiled around 1260 by the Dominican Jacobus de Voragine, archbishop of Genoa. According to this account, Christopher was first called Reprobus. He was a giant from the land of Canaan who wanted to serve the most powerful master in the world. He entered the service of a king, then discovered that the king was afraid of the devil; so he served the devil, until the day he saw him tremble before a cross set up by the roadside. He then went in search of Christ.

A hermit advised him to serve Christ by helping others: since he was tall and strong, he could carry travelers across a dangerous river. One night, a small child asked to be carried across. In the middle of the current, the child became so heavy that the giant nearly drowned. When he reached the other bank, he said he felt as if he had carried the whole world. The child answered that he had carried more than the world: he had carried its Creator. It was Christ. As a sign, Christopher's staff, planted in the ground, burst into flower the next day. The legend ends with his preaching and his martyrdom in Lycia.



Saint Christopher, by Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1490-1500, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam).

Legend and history: what we can say

This story should be read for what it is: a beautiful Christian parable rather than a biography. The giant who seeks the most powerful master, then discovers that the greatest of all makes himself a little child, expresses the heart of the Gospel. The river stands for the dangers of life, and his service to travelers shows that we meet Christ by helping others. In the East, another tradition sometimes depicts Christopher with the head of a dog, an image of a man from a distant people considered "wild," transformed by faith.

The Church has never regarded the ferryman legend as historical fact. It does, however, recognize the antiquity of devotion to a martyr named Christopher, attested since late antiquity.

The 1969 calendar reform

In the reform of the liturgical calendar that followed the Second Vatican Council, in 1969, the memorial of Saint Christopher was removed from the universal Roman calendar for lack of reliable historical information. This does not mean that the Church "abolished" the saint, as is sometimes said: he remains listed in the Roman Martyrology on July 25, and his feast may be freely celebrated in parishes, dioceses and places dedicated to him. In the universal calendar, July 25 is also the feast of Saint James the Greater.



Saint Christopher, fresco by Titian in the Doge's Palace, Venice (1523-1524).

Why is Saint Christopher the patron saint of travelers?

In the Middle Ages, people believed that anyone who looked at an image of Saint Christopher would not die a sudden death that day, that is, without having been able to go to confession. This is why he was painted very large on

church walls, often facing the door, so that passersby could see him from afar. He was counted among the Fourteen Holy Helpers, invoked in times of danger.

As patron of ferrymen, boatmen and pilgrims, he naturally became the patron of motorists and drivers with the rise of the automobile in the early twentieth century. Many Catholics still keep a Saint Christopher medal in their car or wear one on a chain, and blessings of vehicles take place each year around July 25. Beyond the legend, Saint Christopher reminds us of two simple things: to seek God with all our heart, and to serve him by carrying others. Each of us, in our own way, can be a "Christ-bearer" to the people we meet.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Christopher in art

- **A giant wading through a river**, leaning on a staff.
- **The Child Jesus on his shoulders**, sometimes holding a globe: the one who carries the world.
- **A staff that blossoms** or sprouts leaves: the sign given to him after the crossing.
- **A dog's head**, in some Eastern icons.



The Church of Saint-Christophe-de-Javel in Paris, dedicated to the patron saint of motorists.

Where to pray to Saint Christopher

- **Paris**: the Church of Saint-Christophe-de-Javel, in the 15th arrondissement, dedicated to the patron of motorists.
- **Saint-Christophe-le-Jajolet** (Normandy, France): a village bearing his name, known for its motorists' pilgrimage.
- **Venice**: the Doge's Palace and Titian's fresco.
- **Throughout Europe**: many medieval churches still have large wall paintings of Saint Christopher, often near the entrance.

To pray with him, you can say the prayer to Saint Christopher for travelers, or follow the novena to Saint Christopher from July 17 to 25, or before a long journey.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Christopher for Travelers and Drivers

There is no prayer written by Saint Christopher: we know only his name, his martyrdom and a much-loved legend. The many "motorist's prayers" that circulate under his patronage are recent compositions, in countless versions. This page therefore offers a psalm that Christian tradition associates with the protection of travelers, followed by an original prayer to Saint Christopher for travelers and drivers.

A psalm for the road: Psalm 91

This psalm, prayed at Night Prayer (Compline) on Sundays, has always been the psalm of trust in danger. A few verses, translated by Saintspedia:

> *You who dwell in the shelter of the Most High and rest in the shadow of the Almighty, say to the Lord: "My refuge, my fortress, my God in whom I trust."*
>
> *He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you in all your ways. They will bear you up in their hands, so that you do not strike your foot against a stone.*

Source: Psalm 91 (90 in the Greek and Latin numbering), verses 1-2 and 11-12.

Prayer to Saint Christopher for travelers

Saint Christopher, whose name means "Christ-bearer," protect all who set out on the road today.

Keep drivers alert and patient, passengers at peace, and all who travel far from home. Keep us from accidents, from fatigue and from anger behind the wheel. Watch over those whose work keeps them on the move: drivers, truckers, sailors and pilots.

You sought the greatest master and found him in a little child: teach me to seek God with all my heart and to serve him by helping those in need.

I entrust to you my journey and my intention: (name it in silence). Like you, may I carry Christ to those I meet, and arrive in peace where God is waiting for me. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Christopher is celebrated on July 25 wherever his feast is kept, often with blessings of vehicles at the start of summer. His memorial has not been on the universal calendar since 1969, but he remains in the Roman Martyrology. You can pray to him before leaving on vacation, before a long drive or a flight, before a first day behind the wheel, or each morning on your commute. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Christopher, and read about the history and legend of Saint Christopher.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Christopher

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia. It is inspired by the legend of Saint Christopher as told in the *Golden Legend*, read as a parable of the Christian life rather than as a historical account. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, begin on July 17; it ends on July 25. You can also pray it before a long journey, a move or a new job that will keep you on the road.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, and say the prayer of the day, followed by an Our Father. The small act suggested for each day helps you carry the prayer into your daily life. If you are traveling, you can pray it in the car before setting off, or in a quiet moment along the way.

Day 1: Seeking the greatest

According to the legend, the giant wanted to serve the most powerful master in the world. This desire was not wrong: without knowing it, he was looking for God himself.

Prayer: Lord, you know my desire for greatness. Turn it toward you, the only one who is truly great.

Today: Ask yourself whom or what you really serve in your life.

Day 2: False masters

The king was afraid of the devil, and the devil was afraid of the cross. Christopher discovered that the powers of this world are not the strongest. Only the love of Christ does not tremble. Fear loses its hold on those who

belong to him.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, free me from the masters that hold me through fear. Let your cross be my strength.

Today: Make the sign of the cross slowly as you begin your day.

Day 3: Listening to advice

The hermit did not ask the giant for long fasts: he offered him a service suited to his strength. God often calls us starting from who we already are.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, show me the service I can offer with the strength you have given me.

Today: Ask a wise person for advice on how to be useful to others.

Day 4: On the riverbank

Christopher settled beside a dangerous river to carry travelers across. He chose a crossing point, a place where people needed him. Holiness often begins by staying where others need us, rather than where we would prefer to be.

Prayer: Lord, make me attentive to those who must cross through a trial. May I be there for them.

Today: Offer concrete help to someone who is struggling.

Day 5: Carrying others

Day after day, the giant carried travelers on his shoulders. The service was humble, repetitive and often tiring. Yet this is where he would meet Christ. Faithfulness in small, repeated services prepares the heart for great encounters.

Prayer: Lord, give me the patience to carry others, even when it weighs on me.

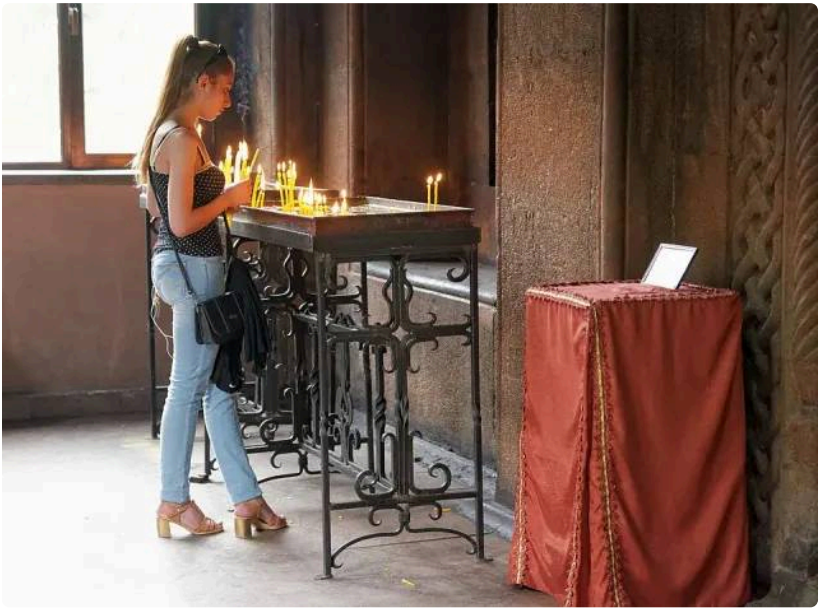
Today: Accept a tiring task for your family without complaining.

Day 6: The child in the night

A child called out in the night. Christopher got up, even though he could have ignored the call. God often comes in the form of the smallest, and at the least convenient moment.

Prayer: Jesus, you who come as a child, teach me to answer when the weakest call to me.

Today: Pray for children in danger, and if you can, support a charity that helps them.



Praying with Saint Christopher.

Day 7: The weight of the world

In the middle of the river, the child grew as heavy as the world. To carry Christ is also to carry the weight of those he loves. The current was strong, but the ferryman did not let go.

Prayer: Lord, when life becomes too heavy, keep me standing in the middle of the current.

Today: Entrust to God a burden that seems too heavy for you.

Day 8: Reaching the other bank

Christopher reached the other bank and discovered whom he had carried. The road may be long and dangerous; God is waiting for us at the end of the journey. Every trip we take can remind us that our whole life is a journey toward him.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you all who are traveling today. Lead them in peace to the end of their road.

Today: Drive or travel with special care and courtesy.

Day 9: Christ-bearer

The giant received a new name: Christopher, the one who carries Christ. Every baptized person is called to carry Christ within and to give him to others.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena, I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Christopher, make me a bearer of your presence wherever I go. Amen.

Today: Have your car blessed, or place a Saint Christopher medal in it.

Closing prayer

Saint Christopher, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you the intention I have presented. Protect travelers, drivers and all who are on the road. Obtain for us the grace to seek God with all our heart and to serve him by carrying our brothers and sisters. Amen.

To go further, read about the history and legend of Saint Christopher and pray the prayer to Saint Christopher for travelers.

PILGRIMAGE

Church of Saint-Christophe-de-Javel in Paris, the Motorists' Church

The Church of Saint-Christophe-de-Javel, in the 15th arrondissement of Paris, is one of the few large French churches dedicated to Saint Christopher. Built in the late 1920s in what was then a working-class neighborhood, near the automobile factories along the Quai de Javel, it was placed under the patronage of the protector of travelers and motorists.

A Church for a Working-Class Neighborhood

In the early 20th century the Javel neighborhood was transformed: the factories, including the automobile plants, attracted a large working population, and churches were in short supply. A new parish was created, and the church was built between 1926 and about 1930. The choice of Saint Christopher as patron echoes the nearby automobile industry and the saint's popularity among drivers at that time.



The Church of Saint-Christophe-de-Javel in Paris, the motorists' church.

Innovative Architecture

The church, designed by the architect Charles-Henri Besnard, is known for its use of molded reinforced concrete: many elements were cast in a workshop and then assembled, a technique that was still experimental for a religious building. Inside, murals evoke the figure of Saint Christopher and the modern world of travel and work.

Praying to Saint Christopher at Javel

Before your visit, you might read the history and legend of Saint Christopher. Once there, a time of prayer for those who travel, for those who work on the roads and for accident victims finds a natural place. The prayer to Saint Christopher for travelers can accompany this moment. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia for a personal visit.

Other Places Associated with Saint Christopher

- **Saint-Christophe-le-Jajolet** (Orne): a village that bears his name, known for its annual pilgrimage of motorists.
- **Venice**: the Doge's Palace, where a fresco by Titian shows the saint crossing the lagoon.
- **Medieval churches of Europe**: many churches in France, Italy, Germany and Switzerland keep large wall paintings of Saint Christopher, often near the entrance.
- **Lycia** (Turkey): the region where tradition places his martyrdom.

Practical Information

The church is in the 15th arrondissement, not far from the Seine and the Parc André-Citroën. It is served by Paris public transit. Around July 25, parishes dedicated to Saint Christopher sometimes offer a blessing of vehicles: check directly with the parish for Mass and celebration times.

CREDITS

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