BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Cuthburh

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: August 31

IN BRIEF

Saint Cuthburh

Anglo-Saxon princess, queen of Northumbria, then founder and first abbess of Wimborne.

Feast day	August 31
Born	second half of the 7th century, kingdom of Wessex
Died	Wimborne (Dorset), probably
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	8th century
Patron saint of	Wimborne

In this booklet

Life

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Novena to Saint Cuthburh

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Cuthburh

Saint Cuthburh (or Cuthburga) was an Anglo-Saxon princess of the late 7th and early 8th centuries. Sister of King Ine of Wessex and wife of King Aldfrith of Northumbria, she left the court for religious life and founded the abbey of Wimborne, in Dorset, of which she was the first abbess. The sources on her life are scarce. Her feast day is August 31.

Who was Saint Cuthburh?

Cuthburh belongs to the generation of royal women who gave Anglo-Saxon England its great monasteries for women, like Hilda at Whitby or Etheldreda at Ely. We know her from a few lines in the Anglo-Saxon chronicles and from the work of modern historians, who have gathered these slender clues. No ancient Life tells her story in detail, and neither the date of her birth nor that of her death is known. Yet we know what matters most: she gave up the rank of queen to devote herself to God, and the monastery she founded became one of the most fruitful spiritual centers of its time.

Key dates in the life of Cuthburh

- **Second half of the 7th century**: Born into the royal family of the West Saxons; she is the daughter of Cenred and the sister of the future King Ine.
- **685**: Aldfrith becomes king of Northumbria; at an unknown date, Cuthburh marries him.
- **Before 705**: While her husband is still alive, she separates from him to enter religious life.
- **Late 7th century**: She may first have been a nun at Barking, where Bishop Aldhelm dedicates a treatise to a nun named Cuthburga.
- **704 or 705**: Death of King Aldfrith.

- **Early 8th century**: She founds the abbey of Wimborne, in Dorset, and becomes its first abbess.
- **Unknown date**: She dies at Wimborne; her sister Cwenburh succeeds her.
- **8th century**: Wimborne trains Saint Lioba and other nuns who go to help Saint Boniface in Germany.

A princess of Wessex who became a queen

Cuthburh was born into the royal house of Wessex, at the time when this kingdom of southern England was completing its conversion to Christianity. Her brother Ine, king from 688 to 726, is known for his laws and for ending his life as a pilgrim in Rome. She married Aldfrith, king of Northumbria, a learned ruler trained in the Irish world, whom the sources praise for his culture. Some historians think she was the mother of his son Osred, who succeeded him, but no text says so clearly.

From the throne to the cloister

The chronicles report that Cuthburh and Aldfrith separated during their lifetime. This separation is not presented as a break-up: in the England of that time, a king and queen sometimes agreed that one of them would enter monastic life. Cuthburh may first have lived at the abbey of Barking, near London: Saint Aldhelm, abbot of Malmesbury, addressed his treatise on virginity to a group of nuns at Barking, among whom was a Cuthburga. Nothing, however, allows us to say for certain that it was her.

The founder of Wimborne

Cuthburh then founded, on her family's lands, the monastery of Wimborne in Dorset, probably with the support of her brother. She was its first abbess. Like other great houses of the time, Wimborne was a double monastery: a community of women and a community of men, under the authority of the

abbess. After her death, her sister Cwenburh took her place. A few decades later, under Abbess Tetta, Wimborne had many nuns and trained Saint Lioba, who would leave with other sisters to support the mission of Saint Boniface in Germany. Cuthburh's work thus bore fruit far beyond England.

Devotion and memory

Cuthburh was honored as a saint from Anglo-Saxon times. Her feast is August 31, and her sister Cwenburh was commemorated with her. The monastery of Wimborne disappeared, according to tradition during the Danish invasions; in its place a collegiate church was later built, now known as Wimborne Minster and placed under her patronage. It now belongs to the Church of England and keeps no known relics of the saint. No distinctive ancient iconography has become established: when she is depicted, it is as an abbess, recalling both her rank and her foundation.

What can we learn from Saint Cuthburh?

We know little about Saint Cuthburh, but that little speaks volumes. She left the highest rank of her time for a life of prayer, and she built a house where generations of women sought God and were formed for mission. Her example speaks to those who must make difficult life choices, to founders of works whose fruits they will not all see, and to religious communities. You can pray to her for consecrated life, for couples going through a separation, and for England.

To pray with her, see the prayer to Saint Cuthburh and the novena to Saint Cuthburh.

Where to pray to Saint Cuthburh

- **Wimborne Minster** (Dorset, England): the church that succeeded her monastery and bears her name, now Anglican.

- **Barking** (London): the site of the former abbey where she may have begun her religious life.
- In any church or chapel on August 31, her feast day.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Cuthburh for Life Choices and Consecrated Life

Saint Cuthburh, princess of Wessex and queen of Northumbria, left the court for religious life and founded the abbey of Wimborne, in Dorset, in the early 8th century. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It entrusts to her those who seek God's will, consecrated life and the works that bear fruit after us.

Prayer to Saint Cuthburh

Saint Cuthburh,
daughter of kings and queen of Northumbria,
you left the honors of the court
to seek God in prayer and community life.
Teach me to prefer Christ to all greatness
and to choose what leads to him.

You who founded at Wimborne a house of prayer,
where so many women learned to serve God,
bless the religious communities of our time,
give the Church generous vocations,
and support those who begin a work
whose fruits they will not all see.

Watch over couples and families
going through difficult choices,
and keep them in peace and faithfulness to God.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Cuthburh

- On her feast day, August 31.
- When you must make a costly life choice.
- For nuns, sisters and vocations to consecrated life.
- When founding a work, an association or a community.
- For the Church in England and for Christian unity.

A short invocation

> *Saint Cuthburh, who left everything for God,*
> *help me to seek him with all my heart and pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for her feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Cuthburh from August 23 to 31, and read the life of Saint Cuthburh.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Cuthburh

Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is inspired by the little we know of Saint Cuthburh, Anglo-Saxon princess and founder of the abbey of Wimborne. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on her feast day, August 31, begin on August 23. You can also pray it at any other time of the year.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with the Sign of the Cross and entrust your intention to God. Read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. End with: "Saint Cuthburh, pray for us." The act of the day helps you live the novena concretely. The sources on her life are scarce: these meditations keep to what matters most.

Day 1: Born into a royal family

Cuthburh was born into the royal house of Wessex, at the time this kingdom was becoming Christian. She received the faith in a family where power and the service of God were intertwined.

Prayer: Lord, bless my family and those who handed on the faith to me. Keep us faithful to you.

Act of the day: Pray for your parents and grandparents, living or departed.

Day 2: Queen of Northumbria

She married King Aldfrith, a cultivated prince. She knew court life, its honors and its responsibilities.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you those who hold power. Give them wisdom and care for the common good.

Act of the day: Pray for the leaders of your country and your town.

Day 3: A costly choice

While her husband was still alive, Cuthburh chose religious life. This rare and surely painful choice shows that she placed God above everything.

Prayer: Lord, enlighten me in difficult choices and give me the courage to follow you.

Act of the day: Entrust to God a decision you are carrying, and ask advice from a wise person.

Day 4: Learning in the school of prayer

She may first have lived among the nuns of Barking, to whom Saint Aldhelm addressed his writings. No one founds anything without first having learned.

Prayer: Lord, give me a teachable heart, ready to receive the teaching of those who went before me.

Act of the day: Read a passage from a spiritual author and meditate on it for a few minutes.

Day 5: Founding a house of God

At Wimborne, Cuthburh built a monastery. She offered what she had received from her family so that others could pray.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to place my goods and talents at the service of your Kingdom.

Act of the day: Support a monastery or religious community with a gift or a prayer.

Day 6: Leading by serving

As abbess, she guided a community of men and women. In the monastery, authority is a service rendered to all.

Prayer: Lord, make me a servant in the responsibilities you entrust to me.

Act of the day: Do a quiet service for someone in your care.

Day 7: A sister to succeed her

After her, her sister Cwenburh led Wimborne. Cuthburh's work continued thanks to those who received it and carried it on.

Prayer: Lord, bless those who continue works begun by others, and give them faithfulness.

Act of the day: Thank someone who took over a commitment you left behind.

Day 8: Fruit far away

A few decades later, Wimborne trained Saint Lioba, who left to help Saint Boniface in Germany. A faithful foundation can bear fruit far beyond what we imagine.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you missionaries and those who proclaim the Gospel far from home.

Act of the day: Pray for a missionary or support a missionary work.

Day 9: A life given back to God

We do not know when Cuthburh died. Her life, largely hidden, is known to God alone. That is what matters.

Prayer: Lord, may my life be hidden in you. Through the intercession of Saint Cuthburh, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Attend Mass if possible, and pray for religious communities.

Living the novena with Saint Cuthburh

Saint Cuthburh is known to us from only a few lines, but they sketch a life given away: a queen who became a nun, a founder whose work formed saints and missionaries. During these nine days, you can entrust to her your difficult choices, consecrated life and the works you have begun.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Cuthburh,*
> *princess of Wessex and abbess of Wimborne,*
> *you left the court for prayer*
> *and built a house for God.*
> *Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.*
> *Help me to choose what leads to Christ,*
> *and bless those who give themselves to him.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Cuthburh at any time, and read the life of Saint Cuthburh.

Credits and sources

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