

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Dagobert II

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: December 23

IN BRIEF

Saint Dagobert II

Merovingian king of Austrasia from 676 to 679, exiled as a child and later murdered, honored as a martyr in Stenay.

Feast day	December 23
Born	c. 652
Died	679, Near Mouzay, forest of Woëvre, France (according to tradition)
Canonized	Pre-Congregation (venerated as a martyr since the 9th century)
Era	7th century

In this booklet

Life

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Novena to Saint Dagobert

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Dagobert II

Saint Dagobert II was a Merovingian king who reigned over Austrasia, the eastern part of the Frankish kingdom, from 676 to 679. Removed from the throne as a child and sent into exile in Ireland, he returned to power twenty years later with the help of an English bishop, then was murdered at the end of 679. Honored as a martyr in the Ardennes region from the 9th century, he has kept a local cult around Stenay, in the Meuse region of France. His feast day is December 23.

Who was Saint Dagobert II?

Dagobert was the son of King Sigebert III and Queen Chimnechild. He bore the name of his grandfather, Dagobert I.

His life is known only in fragments. No chronicler of his time told the story of his reign, and historians piece it together from scattered and sometimes contradictory sources. Two texts matter most: the *Book of the History of the Franks* (*Liber Historiae Francorum*), which tells of his exile, and the *Life of Saint Wilfrid*, written by Stephen of Ripon in the early 8th century, which tells of his return and his death.

Key dates in the life of Saint Dagobert II

- **Around 652**: Born.
- **656**: Death of Sigebert III; the mayor of the palace Grimoald has the child tonsured and sends him to a monastery in Ireland.
- **676**: Recalled to Austrasia with the help of Wilfrid, bishop of York, he takes the throne.
- **677-679**: War against Neustria, ruled by his cousin Theuderic III.

- **Late 679**: Murdered, according to tradition on December 23, near Mouzay, in the forest of Woëvre.
- **September 10, 872**: Elevation of his relics in the presence of Charles the Bald.
- **1608**: His cult is restored in Stenay after the Wars of Religion.

A child removed from the throne

Around 650, Sigebert III, who still had no children, adopted Childebert, the son of his mayor of the palace, Grimoald. The birth of Dagobert changed everything.

When the king died in 656, Grimoald had the little boy's hair cut. Among the Franks, long hair was the sign of royal blood, and this tonsure deprived him of his rights to the crown. Grimoald then entrusted him to Dido, bishop of Poitiers, who took him to a monastery in Ireland.

No text describes his stay in Ireland. The idea that he lived at the monastery of Slane, in County Meath, rests on an oral tradition reported in the 18th century. What is certain is that the young prince grew up far from his own people, among the monks of a land that was then one of the great centers of Christian learning in Europe.

A brief and contested reign

In 675, the murder of King Childeric II plunged the kingdom into disorder. "Friends" and "relatives" of Dagobert, whom the sources do not name, learned that he was still alive and asked Wilfrid, bishop of York, to bring him back. The young king was restored in 676.

Little is known of his reign: a war with Neustria, a peace with the Lombards, a charter in favor of the monastery of Stavelot-Malmedy and the last Merovingian gold coins.

The *Life of Saint Wilfrid* is hostile to him. It presents him as a king who raised new taxes and despised the bishops. It reports that "treacherous dukes" had him killed, with the consent of some bishops. The account of an ambush near Mouzay comes from a later source, written around 890.



Stenay, in the Meuse region, the cradle of the cult of Saint Dagobert.

From murdered king to holy martyr

What makes Dagobert a saint is not an account of virtues, but the memory of a violent death suffered by a Christian king. Before the end of the 9th century, he was already venerated as a martyr in the Ardennes.

According to a local tradition, his epitaph was found in 872 in the church of Saint Remigius in Stenay. On September 10 of that year, in the presence of Charles the Bald, Archbishop Hincmar of Reims and other bishops carried out the elevation of his relics, and the church took the name of Saint Dagobert.

The feast of December 23 is recorded in several medieval calendars and martyrologies of the regions of Liège and Verdun. It never spread beyond the area around Stenay. Ruined during the Wars of Religion, the cult was restored in Stenay in 1608. A skull attributed to him is kept in the collegiate church of Sainte-Waudru in Mons, Belgium, but recent dating has placed it in the 13th century.

In the 20th century, his name was caught up in the forged documents of the so-called "Priory of Sion," which were fabricated from start to finish, as their author admitted. These modern inventions have nothing to do with the history of the king or with his cult.

Why is Saint Dagobert II prayed to for exiles and victims of injustice?

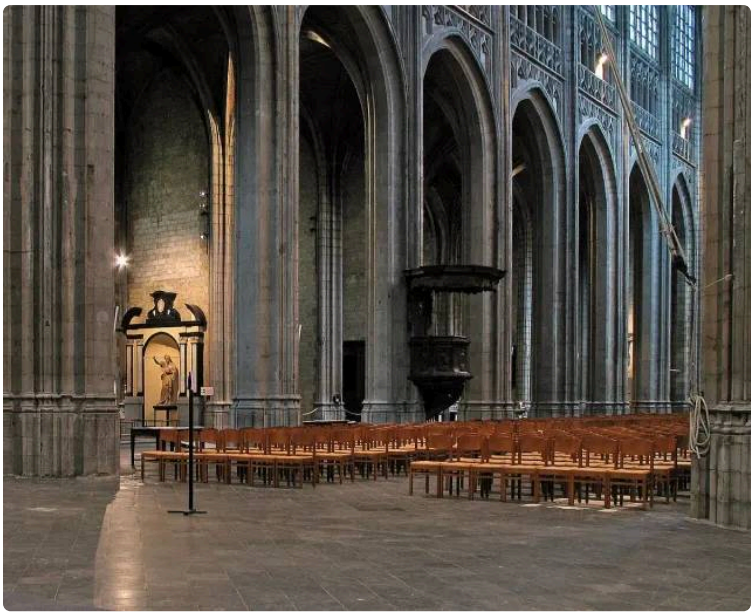
Saint Dagobert has no official patronage. His story, however, speaks for itself. He was torn from his family and his rights as a child, sent to live in a foreign land, brought back after long years of waiting, and finally killed by those who should have served him. This is why he is prayed to for those who are pushed aside or exiled, for children separated from their families, and for victims of betrayal and political violence.

His Irish exile and the role of Wilfrid of York also make him a figure who links the Frankish Church with the Christian world of Ireland and England in the 7th century.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Dagobert II in art

- **A crown and royal robes**, signs of his kingship.
- **The palm of martyrdom**, recalling his violent death.
- **A scepter**, in some later images.

No portrait from his time has survived: all images of Dagobert II are imaginary representations made long after his death.



The collegiate church of Sainte-Waudru in Mons, where a skull attributed to Dagobert is kept.

What his holiness teaches us

Saint Dagobert remains a discreet figure, whose history is more certain than his legend. His memory reminds us that the early Church sometimes honored as martyrs Christians who had been unjustly killed, even when their lives had been marked by struggles for power.

To pray to him, read the prayer to Saint Dagobert or follow the novena to Saint Dagobert.

Where to pray to Saint Dagobert II

The town of Stenay, in the Meuse region of northeastern France, is the center of his cult; its church took his name after the elevation of his relics in 872. The village of Mouzay and the forest of Woëvre are linked by tradition to his death. In Belgium, the collegiate church of Sainte-Waudru in Mons keeps a skull attributed to him.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Dagobert for Exiles and Victims of Injustice

No ancient prayer to Saint Dagobert has come down to us, and he left no writings. His cult, born in the Ardennes and in Stenay, honors above all a Christian king who died a violent death. Here is an original prayer inspired by his story: a childhood torn away, exile, return and an unjust death.

Prayer to Saint Dagobert

Saint Dagobert, you were removed from the throne as a child and sent far from your family: remember those who are deprived of their place, their family or their country.

You lived long years in exile without knowing whether you would ever return: support those who are waiting for a homecoming, a reconciliation or a justice that is slow to come.

You were killed by those who should have served you: pray for the victims of betrayal and violence, and teach us never to repay evil with evil.

I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence). Obtain for me from God peace of heart and faithfulness to Christ, the King who gave his life for us. Amen.

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

A prayer for children separated from their families

> *Lord Jesus, you were carried into exile in Egypt as a little child. Through the intercession of Saint Dagobert, who grew up far from his own people, protect the children who are separated from their parents by war, poverty or injustice. Give them people who will care for them, and lead them one day back to those who love them. Amen.*

This prayer is also an original text by Saintspedia.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Dagobert is celebrated on December 23, the traditional date of his death, mainly in Stenay and the surrounding area. His feast falls in the last days of Advent, as the Church prepares to welcome Christ the King born in poverty.

You can pray to him for refugees and exiles, for children separated from their families, for those who have been betrayed, and for anyone waiting for justice. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Dagobert, and read the life of Saint Dagobert II.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Dagobert

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the story of Saint Dagobert II, king of Austrasia, exiled as a child and murdered in 679. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, December 23, begin on December 15. It falls in the last days of Advent, as we prepare for the coming of Christ the King.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the short meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The suggested act helps carry the prayer into your day.

This novena is especially suited to those who pray for refugees and exiles, for children separated from their families, for victims of injustice and violence, and for anyone waiting for a homecoming or a reconciliation.



Stenay, where Saint Dagobert has been honored since the 9th century.

Day 1: A child's place taken

When his father died, the little Dagobert was pushed aside so that another child could reign. His hair was cut, and with it his rights. Many children today are deprived of what belongs to them: a family, a home, a future.

Prayer: Lord, protect children who are deprived of their rights, and give them people who will defend them.

Today: Support a work that helps children in difficulty.

Day 2: Sent far away

Dagobert was taken to Ireland, far from his mother and his people. The Child Jesus also knew exile in Egypt. God is close to those who must live far from home, and he walks with them on every road.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, exiled as a child, be close to all refugees and exiles.

Today: Pray for a refugee family, or welcome kindly someone who has come from elsewhere.

Day 3: Growing up among monks

We do not know the details of his life in Ireland, but he grew up in a land of monasteries, prayer and learning. God can bring good out of the most painful situations, and even exile can become a school.

Prayer: Lord, help me to see how you have been at work even in the hard times of my life.

Today: Thank God for something good that came out of a difficult period.

Day 4: The long wait

For twenty years, Dagobert lived without knowing whether he would ever return. Waiting is hard, especially when it seems endless. Advent teaches us that waiting can be filled with hope, because the One we wait for is faithful.

Prayer: Lord, sustain those who are waiting for justice, for healing or for a return.

Today: Call or write to someone who is going through a long wait.

Day 5: Friends who did not forget

Friends and relatives of Dagobert learned that he was still alive and sought help from Wilfrid, bishop of York, to bring him back. Those who are forgotten by the world are not forgotten by everyone, and never by God.

Prayer: Lord, make me a faithful friend to those whom others have forgotten.

Today: Reach out to someone you have lost touch with.

Day 6: The burden of power

Back on the throne, Dagobert found a divided kingdom and enemies on every side. The sources are not kind to him. Power is a heavy burden and a great temptation, and those who hold it need our prayers rather than only our criticism.

Prayer: Lord, give wisdom and integrity to those who govern, and make them servants of the common good.

Today: Pray for the leaders of your country by name.

Day 7: Betrayed

According to the *Life of Saint Wilfrid*, Dagobert was killed by "treacherous dukes." Betrayal by those who should be faithful is one of the deepest wounds. Jesus himself was betrayed by one of his own. He did not answer with hatred, but with forgiveness.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, betrayed by a friend, heal the hearts of those who have been betrayed, and keep me from betraying anyone.

Today: Keep a promise you have made, even a small one.

Day 8: Not repaying evil with evil

The memory of Dagobert invites us to break the chain of violence. In the struggles for power of his time, murder answered murder. The Gospel asks us to repay evil with good and to pray for our enemies.

Prayer: Lord, free my heart from resentment and the desire for revenge.

Today: Pray for someone who has hurt you.

Day 9: Remembered by the Church

The people of the Ardennes did not forget the murdered king. Two centuries later, they honored him as a martyr. God does not forget the victims of injustice: in him, every life finds its meaning and every tear is wiped away.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena, I place my intention in your hands. Through the intercession of Saint Dagobert, grant justice to the victims, peace to the exiles and faithfulness to us all. Amen.

Today: Pray for all victims of violence in the world today.

Closing prayer

Saint Dagobert, king exiled as a child and killed unjustly, I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. Pray for exiles and refugees, for children separated from their families, for victims of betrayal and violence. Obtain for us a heart free of hatred and a firm hope in Christ, the King who comes. Amen.

To go further: the life of Saint Dagobert II and the prayer to Saint Dagobert.

Credits and sources

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