

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Illuminata

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: November 29

IN BRIEF

Saint Illuminata

Early martyr venerated in umbria, especially at todi and massa martana.

Feast day	November 29
Born	3rd century (according to tradition), region of Ravenna (according to tradition)
Died	c. 303 (according to tradition), Massa Martana, Umbria (according to tradition)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	4th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Illuminata to Receive the Light of Faith

Novena to Saint Illuminata

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Illuminata

Saint Illuminata (Italian: *Santa Illuminata*) is a Christian martyr of antiquity, venerated since the early Middle Ages in Umbria, in central Italy, around Todi, Massa Martana and Montefalco. Her life is very poorly known, and the account that tradition gives of it is largely legend. According to this tradition, she was martyred with her family in the early fourth century, during the persecution of Diocletian. Her feast day is November 29.

Who was Saint Illuminata?

The first written traces of her cult date only from the tenth century, and the story of her life resembles the pious legends of that period. Scholars remain cautious: some think she may be confused with another martyr of the region, Saint Firmina of Amelia or Saint Felicissima of Perugia; others note that her name, "Illuminata," translates the Greek *Photine*, and wonder whether there is a link with Saint Photina, the Samaritan woman of the Gospel. It is also possible that she was simply a local martyr. Her cult, in any case, is well attested, and the Roman Martyrology remembers her.

Key dates

- **3rd century**: Born, according to tradition, under the name Caesarea, in the region of Ravenna.
- **Late 3rd century**: She discovers the Christian faith and is baptized; she takes the name Illuminata.
- **c. 300**: Denounced by her father, she is imprisoned in Ravenna, then, according to the story, freed by an angel.
- **c. 303**: Having taken refuge in Umbria, at Massa Martana, she is martyred there with her parents, who have in turn converted.

- **10th century**: First written mentions of her cult.
- **1037**: Emperor Conrad II entrusts the site of the church of Santa Illuminata in Massa Martana to Camaldolese monks.

The tradition's account

According to the legend, the girl was first named Caesarea. When she discovers the Christian faith, she is as if "illuminated" by it, and at her baptism she receives the name Illuminata. In the early Church, baptism was indeed called "illumination." Her father, a pagan, learns of her conversion and himself denounces her to the prefect of Ravenna, who has her thrown into prison.

The story tells that an angel frees her and leads her onto the Via Salaria. She thus reaches Umbria and stops at Massa Martana, where she leads a secluded life and works several miracles. Her parents, who have set out to find her, locate her, and in turn convert. The prefect then has the whole family arrested, and they die as martyrs around 303, in the time of Diocletian's great persecution. They are buried two miles from the town, in a place called Bagno di Papino.

What we can take from it

This account contains elements found in many lives of martyrs: conversion against the father's will, prison, miraculous rescue, final martyrdom. Its details cannot be verified. But it preserves the memory of a Christian woman of the early centuries, dead for her faith, whose memory the faithful of Umbria have piously kept. The very name they gave her says the essential: faith is a light that transforms a life.

Devotion and iconography

Tradition places her burial near Massa Martana, where a church was dedicated to her. In the eleventh century, Camaldolese monks built a Romanesque church and a monastery there; it was suppressed in 1260 and later attached to

the cathedral of Todi, and the building is now private property. Part of her relics was carried to a monastery in Todi, where it is venerated. In Montefalco, a church of Santa Illuminata, linked to a women's monastery, keeps frescoes from the early sixteenth century, including a figure of the saint dated 1507, between Saint Nicholas of Tolentino and Saint Vincent. She is shown as a young woman, often with the palm of martyrdom.

What can we learn from Saint Illuminata?

Little is known of Saint Illuminata, and the Church does not ask anyone to believe every detail of her legend. Yet she offers a beautiful image: a young woman so lit up by meeting Christ that she risked everything for him, and whose faith in the end won her own family. We can pray to her to receive the light of faith, for the newly baptized, and for the conversion of our loved ones.

Where to pray to Saint Illuminata

- **Todi** (Umbria, Italy): the town where her cult is best established.
- **Montefalco** (Umbria): the church of Santa Illuminata and its frescoes.
- **Massa Martana** (Umbria): the place of her martyrdom according to tradition, and the old abbey that bears her name.
- **Alviano** (Umbria): another town where she is honored.

To pray with her at home, you can use the prayer to Saint Illuminata or the novena to Saint Illuminata.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Illuminata to Receive the Light of Faith

Saint Illuminata is a martyr of the early centuries, venerated in Umbria. According to tradition, the young Caesarea was so "illuminated" by faith that she received her name from it, and she died a martyr with her parents, who were converted by her example. Her life is poorly known, but her name says the essential. This prayer is an original composition inspired by her life; it is not an official liturgical text. It asks for the light of faith for ourselves and our loved ones.

Prayer to Saint Illuminata

Saint Illuminata,
you whom the meeting with Christ enlightened
so much that it changed your name and your life,
you kept that light in prison
and even in martyrdom.

Your faith touched those who rejected you,
and your parents became your brothers in Christ.
Obtain for me the same inner light,
the same faithfulness and the same gentleness.

Pray for those who walk in the night of doubt,
for catechumens and the newly baptized,
for families divided by faith,
and for persecuted Christians today.
May the light of Christ shine in our lives.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Illuminata

- On her feast day, November 29, at the threshold of Advent.
- For a catechumen, a newly baptized person or someone being confirmed.
- When a loved one does not share your faith.
- In a time of doubt or inner darkness.
- For persecuted Christians.

A short prayer of light

> *Jesus, light of the world, enlighten my darkness.*
> *Saint Illuminata, pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for her feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Illuminata from November 21 to 29, and read the life of Saint Illuminata.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Illuminata

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by what tradition reports of Saint Illuminata, a martyr venerated in Umbria. It is not an official liturgical text. Her life is poorly known, and the meditations rely on the traditional account without guaranteeing its details. To end the novena on her feast day, November 29, begin on November 21. You can also pray it at any 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 Illuminata, pray for us." The small act proposed each day helps you live the novena concretely.

Day 1: A girl named Caesarea

Before she was Illuminata, she was named Caesarea. She lived like many young people of her time, without knowing Christ. God comes to meet each of us where we are.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for coming to find me. Come also to meet those who do not know you.

Today: Pray for someone around you who is far from the faith.

Day 2: Illuminated

On discovering Christ, Caesarea is as if illuminated. In the early Church, baptism was called illumination. Faith is a light that shines on the whole of life.

Prayer: Lord, revive in me the grace of my baptism. Let your light shine on my choices.

Today: Light a candle and give thanks for your baptism.

Day 3: Rejected by her own

According to the story, her own father denounces her. Following Christ can cost dearly, even within one's family. Jesus had foretold it.

Prayer: Lord, console those who suffer from being misunderstood by their families because of their faith.

Today: Pray for a family member with whom your relationship is difficult.

Day 4: In prison

Illuminata is thrown into prison in Ravenna. Even shut in, she keeps the inner light. No prison can extinguish the presence of God.

Prayer: Lord, be with prisoners, and with all who feel shut in.

Today: Pray for inmates and for those who visit them.

Day 5: Freed by an angel

Tradition tells that an angel frees her and sets her on the road. God opens paths where we see none.

Prayer: Lord, open a way in the situation that seems to have no exit.

Today: Entrust a specific difficulty to your guardian angel.

Day 6: On the roads of Umbria

Illuminata reaches Umbria and settles at Massa Martana. She lives there in prayer and does good around her. Exile becomes a place of witness.

Prayer: Lord, where I am, make me a witness of your goodness.

Today: Do a kind deed for a neighbor or a stranger.

Day 7: The conversion of her parents

Her parents find her and in turn convert. Illuminata's faith, lived faithfully, finally touched those who had rejected her.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you the conversion of my loved ones. Give me the patience and love that persuade more than words.

Today: Make a gesture of reconciliation in your family.

Day 8: Martyred with her family

Arrested with her whole family, Illuminata dies with them for Christ. Those whom faith had divided are reunited in the same witness.

Prayer: Lord, support persecuted Christians. Let nothing separate us from your love.

Today: Pray, or make a donation, for persecuted Christians.

Day 9: A light that remains

Sixteen centuries later, Saint Illuminata is still prayed to in Umbria. Her light has not gone out. Holiness is a light that God makes endure.

Prayer: Lord, make me a light for others. Through the intercession of Saint Illuminata, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Today: Share with someone a reason for your hope.

Living the novena with Saint Illuminata

This novena falls at the end of the liturgical year, just before Advent, the season when the Church awaits the light of Christmas. It can accompany preparation for a baptism or a confirmation, a time of doubt, or prayer for a loved one far from the faith. The little we know of Saint Illuminata leaves all the room for the essential: letting Christ enlighten us.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Illuminata,*
> *you who received the light of Christ*
> *and kept it to martyrdom,*
> *present to God the intention I have carried during these nine days.*
> *Obtain for me a bright and peaceful faith,*
> *and the joy of seeing my loved ones walk in the light.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

Credits and sources

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