BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint John Maron

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: March 2

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IN BRIEF

Saint John Maron

Syrian monk and bishop of the 7th century, honored as the first patriarch of the Maronite Church.

Feast day	March 2
Born	7th century, near Antioch, according to tradition
Died	707, according to tradition, Kfarhay, near Batroun (Lebanon), according to tradition
Canonized	immemorial cult in the Maronite Church
Era	8th century
Patron saint of	the Maronite Church

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint John Maron for Lebanon and the Christians of the East

Novena to Saint John Maron

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint John Maron

Saint John Maron was a Syrian monk and bishop of the late 7th century, whom Maronite tradition honors as the first patriarch of Antioch of its Church. He is said to have died in 707 and to have been buried at Kfarhay, near Batroun, in Lebanon. His story is poorly known and rests on late sources, but he remains a reference figure for the Maronites, Catholics of the Syriac rite. His feast day is March 2.

Who was Saint John Maron?

John Maron is one of the great founding figures of the Maronite Church, an Eastern Church in full communion with Rome, present mainly in Lebanon and in the diaspora. He should not be confused with Saint Maron, a hermit of the early 5th century, from whom the Church takes its name and over whose tomb the monastery of Saint Maron was built, on the banks of the Orontes. Historians find John Maron hard to pin down: his Life is known only through texts published at the end of the 15th century, and several of its details raise problems. We must therefore distinguish the traditional account, venerable for the Maronites, from what history can establish with certainty.

Key dates in the life of John Maron

- **7th century**: According to tradition, born near Antioch; he studies in Antioch and then in Constantinople.
- **Later**: He becomes a monk at the monastery of Saint Maron, near Hama, and takes the name Maron there.
- **Following years**: He teaches and writes to defend the faith of the Council of Chalcedon against the Monophysite and Nestorian currents.

- **c. 677**: According to the traditional account, he is consecrated bishop of Botrys, present-day Batroun.
- **c. 686**: He becomes patriarch of Antioch for the Maronites; tradition reports that he was recognized by Pope Sergius I.
- **707**: Dies, according to tradition on February 5; he is buried at Kfarhay, near Batroun.
- **1495**: His Life is made known by the Lebanese Franciscan Gabriel ibn al-Qilai, from an old Arabic manuscript.
- **1639**: The Franciscan Francesco Quaresmio publishes a Latin version of it.

The account of Maronite tradition

According to the traditional account, John was born near Antioch and studied in that city, then in Constantinople. He then entered the monastery of Saint Maron, near Hama, in Syria, and took the name of its holy founder. He became known for his teaching, spoken and written, in favor of the faith defined at the Council of Chalcedon: Christ is one person, truly God and truly man. In this way he opposed two currents widespread in the region, Monophysitism and Nestorianism.

The account then has him consecrated bishop of Botrys, present-day Batroun, on the Lebanese coast, by a vicar of the Holy See in the East. Around 686, he became patriarch of Antioch, and Pope Sergius I is said to have recognized him. Traditional Maronite historians link his life to that of the Mardaites, Christians of the Lebanese mountains who defended their freedom between the Muslim caliphate and the Byzantine Empire. During his patriarchate, the old monastery of Saint Maron on the Orontes is said to have been destroyed by the troops of Emperor Justinian II. John Maron is said to have died in 707 and to have been buried at Kfarhay, near Batroun.

What historians say

The sources of this account are very late. The Life of John Maron appears only in 1495, when Gabriel ibn al-Qilai, a Franciscan of Lebanese origin, presented it as taken from a very old Arabic manuscript, without further detail. Historians also point out several problems with dates: Bishop John of Philadelphia, the pope's vicar in the East, had been appointed in 649, which makes his role thirty years later unlikely; and the name of John Maron does not appear in the known lists of patriarchs of Antioch for that period.

Yet three theological treatises in Syriac have come down to us, attributed by the manuscripts to "John Maron, patriarch of Antioch": an exposition of the faith and two treatises, one against the Monophysites, the other against the Nestorians. They were published in 1899 by Abbé François Nau, then in 1988 by Michel Breydy. Their content links them to the Chalcedonian tradition. Whatever the exact date of their writing, these texts show that the figure of a pastor and theologian truly lies at the origin of the memory of John Maron.

Devotion and memory

The Maronite Church honors Saint John Maron on March 2. For the Maronites he is the father who gave the community its patriarchal organization, and his name is borne by many priests and lay people. At Kfarhay, near Batroun, a shrine is dedicated to him at the place where tradition locates his tomb. He is shown as an Eastern patriarch, with the crozier and the liturgical vestments of his rite. Through him, the Maronites give thanks for centuries of fidelity to the Catholic faith and to the Church of Rome, kept in often difficult conditions.

What can we learn from Saint John Maron?

Even if his life remains partly in shadow, John Maron recalls the face of a pastor who wanted to keep his people in the true faith in Christ, God and man. He is the witness of a Church that managed to endure in the mountains of Lebanon, united with Rome without giving up its language and traditions. You can pray to him for the Maronites, for Lebanon, for the Christians of the East and for the unity of the Church.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint John Maron and the novena to Saint John Maron.

Where to pray to Saint John Maron

- **Kfarhay**, near Batroun (Lebanon): the shrine built where tradition locates his tomb.
- **Maronite parishes** in Lebanon and in the diaspora, especially on March 2.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint John Maron for Lebanon and the Christians of the East

Saint John Maron, a monk and bishop of the 7th century, is honored by the Maronite Church as its first patriarch. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to him Lebanon, the Christians of the East and all who want to remain faithful to Christ in times of trial.

Prayer to Saint John Maron

Saint John Maron,
monk of Syria and shepherd of your people,
you sought God in the prayer of the monastery
and defended the true faith in Christ,
true God and true man.
Strengthen my faith in the Son of God made flesh.

You whom the Maronites call their father,
watch over your Church,
over its bishops, priests, monks and families.
Keep Lebanon in peace,
and sustain the Christians of the East
who live their faith in the midst of trials.

Teach us to love the unity of the Church,
faithful to Peter and to our traditions,
and give us a courageous and humble heart.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint John Maron

- On his feast day, March 2.
- For Lebanon and for peace in the Middle East.
- For the Maronite Church, its pastors and its faithful throughout the world.
- For the Christians of the East who suffer or must leave their country.
- When your faith is tested or challenged.

A prayer for Lebanon

> *Lord, keep Lebanon and all its people in your peace.*
> *Saint John Maron, pray for your people. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint John Maron from February 22 to March 2, and discover the life of Saint John Maron.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint John Maron

This novena is inspired by the figure of Saint John Maron, a monk and bishop of the 7th century, honored as the first patriarch of the Maronite Church. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, March 2, begin on February 22 (February 23 in leap years). 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 John Maron, pray for us." The act suggested each day helps you live the novena concretely. The episodes recounted come from Maronite tradition, known through late sources.

Day 1: A land of the Gospel

According to tradition, John was born near Antioch, the city where the disciples were first called Christians. He grew up in a land where the Gospel had been proclaimed since the apostles.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the Churches of the East, which have kept the faith since the beginning. Bless and protect them.

Act of the day: Read the passage in the Acts of the Apostles about the Church of Antioch (Acts 11:19-26).

Day 2: Loving study

John studied in Antioch and then in Constantinople. Knowing our faith helps us to live it better and to give a better account of it.

Prayer: Lord, give me the desire to know you better, so as to love you and serve you better.

Act of the day: Take a moment to read a page of the Catechism or of Scripture.

Day 3: Choosing the monastery

John entered the monastery of Saint Maron, near Hama, and took the name of the holy hermit. He chose prayer, silence and community life.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to keep silence so as to meet you, in the midst of my occupations.

Act of the day: Spend ten minutes in silence before God.

Day 4: Christ, true God and true man

John defended the faith of the Council of Chalcedon: Jesus is one person, truly God and truly man. This is the heart of our faith.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, Son of God made man, I believe in you. Increase my faith.

Act of the day: Say the Creed slowly, meditating on each phrase.

Day 5: Shepherd of his people

Having become bishop and then patriarch according to tradition, John cared for a mountain people attached to their faith. The shepherd gives his life for his sheep.

Prayer: Lord, bless our bishops and our priests. Give them the heart of a shepherd.

Act of the day: Pray for your bishop and your parish priest, and thank them if you can.

Day 6: Unity with Peter

Tradition reports that John Maron was recognized by the pope. The Maronite Church has remained united with Rome through the centuries, while keeping its language and rites.

Prayer: Lord, keep your Church in unity, around the successor of Peter.

Act of the day: Pray for the pope and for Christian unity.

Day 7: Standing firm in trials

The account says that in his time the monastery of Saint Maron was destroyed. The Maronites have often known trials, without giving up their faith.

Prayer: Lord, sustain those who suffer for their faith, and help me to remain faithful when everything seems to collapse.

Act of the day: Pray for the Christians of the East, or support a work that helps them.

Day 8: A Church in the mountains

The Maronites found refuge in the mountains of Lebanon, where they built churches and monasteries. Faith takes root in a land and in a people.

Prayer: Lord, bless Lebanon and give it peace. Keep its people in hope.

Act of the day: Pray for a country at war or in crisis.

Day 9: At rest in Kfarhay

According to tradition, John Maron died in 707 and rests at Kfarhay, near Batroun. His people still honor him as their father.

Prayer: Lord, welcome into your peace those who handed on the faith to us. Through the intercession of Saint John Maron, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Pray for your departed and, if possible, attend Mass.

Living the novena with Saint John Maron

John Maron is a founding figure: a monk who became a shepherd and wanted to keep his people in the faith in Christ. During these nine days, you can carry Lebanon, the Maronite Church, the Christians of the East and all who have had to leave their country. If you can, attend Mass in a Maronite parish.

Closing prayer

> *Saint John Maron,*
> *monk, bishop and father of your people,*
> *you kept the true faith in Christ.*
> *Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.*
> *Watch over Lebanon and the Christians of the East,*
> *and keep us in the unity of the Church.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

Credits and sources

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