

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Ludmila

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: September 16

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IN BRIEF

Saint Ludmila

Duchess of Bohemia, grandmother of Saint Wenceslas, murdered in 921 and honored as a martyr.

Feast day	September 16
Born	c. 860, Mělník region, Bohemia
Died	September 15, 921, Tetín, Bohemia
Era	10th century
Patron saint of	Bohemia, grandparents

In this booklet

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Basilica of Saint George at Prague Castle

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Ludmila

Saint Ludmila is the first saint of the Czech people. A Slavic princess born around 860 and the wife of the first Christian duke of Bohemia, she helped bring her country into the Christian faith and raised her grandson, the future Saint Wenceslas, in the faith. Murdered in 921 at Tetín Castle on the orders of her daughter-in-law, she is honored as a martyr and as a patron saint of Bohemia. Her feast day is September 16.

Who was Saint Ludmila?

Ludmila was born around 860, the daughter of Slavibor, chief of a Slavic tribe settled around Pšov, today's Mělník, where the Elbe and Vltava rivers meet. She grew up in the pagan religion of her people. Around 874 she married Bořivoj, of the Přemyslid family, who was then establishing his authority over central Bohemia. The couple had several children, including Spytihněv and Vratislav, who would both rule after their father.

At that time Bohemia stood between two worlds: the Frankish empire to the west, and Great Moravia to the east, where Saints Cyril and Methodius had introduced a liturgy in the Slavic language. Bořivoj was baptized in Moravia, by Methodius himself according to tradition. Ludmila was baptized in turn, though the exact date is unknown; legend also credits Methodius with her baptism.

English-speaking Catholics often know her without realizing it. Her grandson Wenceslas is the "Good King Wenceslas" of the Christmas carol, and it was Ludmila who taught him the faith and the love of the poor that the song celebrates.



Saint Ludmila and the child Wenceslas, statue on Charles Bridge, Prague.

Key dates

- **c. 860**: Born in the region of Mělník.
- **c. 874**: Marries Bořivoj, Duke of Bohemia.
- **Late 9th century**: The couple is baptized, by Saint Methodius according to tradition.
- **c. 907**: Birth of her grandson Wenceslas, whom she raises.
- **c. 921**: Death of her son Vratislav; conflict with her daughter-in-law Drahomíra over the regency.
- **September 15, 921**: Ludmila is murdered at Tetín Castle.
- **c. 925**: According to tradition, Wenceslas has her body moved to Saint George's Basilica in Prague.
- **1886**: Antonín Dvořák composes the oratorio *Saint Ludmila*.

A grandmother who passed on the faith

After the death of Bořivoj, and then of their elder son Spytihněv, the younger son Vratislav came to power. Ludmila was entrusted with the education of her grandsons, Wenceslas and Boleslav. The ancient accounts, especially the *Legend of Christian*, show her teaching Wenceslas the faith, prayer and letters. According to the same accounts, she also devoted herself to the poor and to works of charity.

When Vratislav died, Wenceslas was still too young to rule. Vratislav's widow, Drahomíra, became regent. The conflict between the two women was both political and religious: it concerned power, influence over the young duke, and the place of Christianity at court.

The martyrdom at Tetín

Ludmila withdrew to Tetín Castle, southwest of Prague. During the night of September 15 to 16, 921, two men sent by Drahomíra broke into her home and strangled her, according to tradition with her own veil. That veil became her emblem in Christian art.

Strictly speaking, Ludmila did not die for refusing to deny her faith. But tradition saw in her death that of an innocent Christian woman struck down for defending the Christian upbringing of her grandson, and honored her as a martyr. A few years later Wenceslas, now duke, had her body brought to Prague. He himself would be murdered by his brother Boleslav, in 935 according to the most commonly accepted date.

A cult at the heart of Bohemia

Devotion to Ludmila grew above all around the Benedictine convent of Saint George, founded at Prague Castle by Mlada, her great-granddaughter, who became its first abbess. Historians point out that this devotion also had a

dynastic side: the Přemyslid family gained prestige by counting saints among its members. But popular love for the grandmother of Wenceslas took deep and lasting root.

Ludmila became one of the patron saints of Bohemia, alongside Saint Wenceslas. Her image appears on Charles Bridge, on the Wenceslas monument in Wenceslas Square in Prague, and in countless Czech churches. In the nineteenth century, Dvořák dedicated a great oratorio to her.

Why is Saint Ludmila the patron saint of Bohemia and of grandparents?

Ludmila is the saint of handing on the faith. She became a Christian as an adult and wanted the faith she had received to pass to the next generation, and it was through her that Bohemia received its greatest saint. For this reason she is honored as a patron of Bohemia, with her grandson, and Catholics willingly pray to her for grandparents, for the Christian education of children, for divided families and for those who have come to the faith as adults.

Her story speaks especially to grandmothers who pray for grandchildren growing up far from the Church. Ludmila sowed without seeing the harvest: she died before Wenceslas ruled, yet her teaching bore fruit in his holiness.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Ludmila in art

- **A veil or a cord** in her hand or around her neck, recalling the way she was killed.
- **Princely or ducal dress**, often with a crown or a veil over her head.
- **The child Wenceslas** at her side, whom she is teaching, as on Charles Bridge in Prague.
- **Her place beside Saint Wenceslas** among the patron saints of Bohemia, as on the Wenceslas monument in Prague.

Where to pray to Saint Ludmila

- **Prague**: her tomb, in the Chapel of Saint Ludmila in Saint George's Basilica at Prague Castle, and the Church of Saint Ludmila in the Vinohrady district.
- **Tetín** (Central Bohemia): the place of her martyrdom, where a church is dedicated to her.
- **Mělník**: the region of her birth.

Wherever you are, you can pray the prayer to Saint Ludmila for grandparents and families, or the novena to Saint Ludmila.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Ludmila for Grandparents and Families

Saint Ludmila left no writings, and no traditional prayer to her has become widespread in English. Her life, centered on passing on the faith to her grandson Wenceslas, inspires the prayer of grandparents, parents and all who teach children. Here is a prayer in that spirit.

The veil of Saint Ludmila

In Christian art, Ludmila is often shown holding a veil, the one with which, according to tradition, she was strangled at Tetín in 921. This sign of her death has become a sign of her faithfulness: she preferred to lose her life rather than give up her role beside the child she was raising in the faith.



Saint Ludmila in prayer.

Prayer to Saint Ludmila for grandparents and families

Saint Ludmila, you welcomed the faith as an adult and passed it on to your children and grandchildren: teach me to give thanks for the gift of baptism.

You raised the young Wenceslas in prayer and charity: bless grandparents, parents, godparents and all who hand on the faith to children.

You were struck down by jealousy within your own family: pray for divided families, calm rivalries and heal old wounds.

I entrust to you those I love, especially: (name them in silence).

Obtain for me the patience to sow without seeing the harvest, and the peace to place in God's hands the people I love. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

- On her feast day, **September 16**, the day after her death during the night of September 15 to 16, 921.
- On Grandparents' Day, or on July 26, the feast of Saints Joachim and Anne, when the Church prays for grandparents.
- When a child or grandchild is preparing for baptism, First Communion or confirmation.
- When you worry about a grandchild who has drifted away from the faith.
- When tensions between in-laws or generations divide a family.

A prayer for grandchildren

> *Lord Jesus, through the intercession of Saint Ludmila, watch over my grandchildren. Keep them safe in body and soul, let them come to know and love you, and give me the right words and the right silences to bear witness to you before them. Amen.*

This short prayer is also an original text by Saintspedia.

To know her better, read the life of Saint Ludmila, or pray the novena to Saint Ludmila from September 7 to September 15.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Ludmila

This novena to Saint Ludmila is an original composition by Saintspedia. Over nine days it follows the life of the first saint of Bohemia, from her pagan childhood to her death at Tetín, and asks her help for families, grandparents and the passing on of faith. To end on the eve of her feast, September 16, begin it on September 7. It can be prayed at any time, especially by grandparents praying for their grandchildren.

How to pray this novena

Each day, set aside a quiet moment. Begin with the Sign of the Cross, read the meditation, then say the prayer of the day. Add an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. Close with the small act proposed for the day. If you are praying for a particular child or family, name them each day.

Day 1: A childhood far from the Gospel

Ludmila grew up in the pagan religion of her people, near the meeting of the Elbe and the Vltava. God was already preparing her, long before she knew him.

Prayer: Saint Ludmila, you did not know Christ as a child, yet he was seeking you. Pray for all who do not yet know him, and for those I love who live far from God. Amen.

Today: Pray by name for someone who does not share your faith.

Day 2: Marriage and a shared journey

Ludmila married Bořivoj, and the two came to the faith in the same years. A couple can help each other along the road to God.

Prayer: Saint Ludmila, bless married couples. Help husbands and wives to support each other in faith, and to grow together in love. Amen.

Today: Pray for a married couple you know, or thank God for your own spouse.

Day 3: The grace of baptism

Ludmila was baptized as an adult, by Saint Methodius according to tradition. For her, baptism was a choice and a new beginning.

Prayer: Saint Ludmila, help me to rediscover the gift of my baptism. Pray for adults preparing to enter the Church, that they may persevere with joy. Amen.

Today: Find out the date of your baptism, or pray for those preparing for baptism this year.

Day 4: A grandmother who teaches

Ludmila taught the young Wenceslas to pray and to read. She gave him time, patience and her example.

Prayer: Saint Ludmila, bless all grandparents. Give them wisdom and tenderness to pass on the faith to their grandchildren, and the joy of seeing it grow. Amen.

Today: Call or visit a grandparent or an elderly person, or pray with a child.

Day 5: Charity toward the poor

The ancient accounts say that Ludmila cared for the poor. Wenceslas, the "Good King" of the carol, learned his generosity at her side.

Prayer: Saint Ludmila, teach me to share what I have with the poor, and to teach children by my example that love is shown in deeds. Amen.

Today: Do an act of charity together with a child, if you can.

Day 6: When families are divided

Ludmila suffered from conflict within her own family, with her daughter-in-law Drahomíra. Jealousy and rivalry can wound even those closest to us.

Prayer: Saint Ludmila, you know the pain of a divided family. Pray for families torn by conflict, for strained relationships between in-laws, and for all who no longer speak to one another. Amen.

Today: Take one small step toward reconciliation with a family member.

Day 7: Faithful to the end

Ludmila withdrew to Tetín, and there, in the night, she was killed. She did not give up her responsibility toward the grandson she had raised in the faith.

Prayer: Saint Ludmila, give me courage to remain faithful when it costs me something. Pray for Christians who suffer violence, and for all victims of family violence. Amen.

Today: Pray for persecuted Christians and for victims of violence in the home.

Day 8: Sowing without seeing the harvest

Ludmila died before Wenceslas ruled. She did not see the fruit of her teaching, yet he became the greatest saint of Bohemia.

Prayer: Saint Ludmila, when I do not see the fruit of my efforts, teach me to trust. Help parents and grandparents who worry about children far from the Church to keep hoping and praying. Amen.

Today: Entrust to God a child or young person you worry about, and let go of your anxiety.

Day 9: A saint for a whole people

Ludmila became a patron saint of Bohemia. Through one family, the faith reached a whole nation.

Prayer: Saint Ludmila, pray for the Czech people and for every nation that has forgotten its Christian roots. Pray for my family, that faith may be passed on from generation to generation. Amen.

Today: Thank God for those who passed on the faith to you, and pray for them.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Ludmila, grandmother of Saint Wenceslas and first saint of Bohemia, thank you for walking with me these nine days. I place in your care my family, my children and grandchildren, and all the intentions I carry. Obtain for us the grace of a living faith, handed on with love and patience. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

You may also repeat during the day this short invocation, inspired by the life of the saint, "Saint Ludmila, who taught Wenceslas to pray, teach our children to know and love Jesus." Grandparents can pray it while thinking of each grandchild in turn, or teach it to the children themselves.

To continue, pray the prayer to Saint Ludmila or read her life.

PILGRIMAGE

Basilica of Saint George at Prague Castle

The Basilica of Saint George stands within the grounds of Prague Castle, a few steps from Saint Vitus Cathedral. It is one of the oldest religious buildings in the castle and one of the best-preserved Romanesque churches in Prague. It houses the tomb of Saint Ludmila, the first saint of Bohemia, whose body was transferred there in the 10th century.

A church born with Christian Bohemia

The church was founded around 920 by Duke Vratislav I, Ludmila's son. According to tradition, it was here that Duke Wenceslas had the body of his grandmother, murdered at Tetín, laid a few years later. In 973, a Benedictine convent was established there, the first convent in Bohemia; its first abbess, Mlada, was a great-granddaughter of Ludmila, and it was around this community that the saint's veneration developed.

Rebuilt after a fire in the 12th century, the basilica keeps its Romanesque nave, its two pale towers, and its crypt. A bright red Baroque facade was added in the late 17th century. The convent, suppressed in the late 18th century under Joseph II, later served other uses.

The Chapel of Saint Ludmila

To the right of the choir opens the Chapel of Saint Ludmila, decorated with paintings. The saint's tomb is venerated there. Several members of the Přemyslid dynasty also rest in the basilica. The bare interior, with its pale stone walls, invites recollection.

Visiting the basilica

The basilica is part of the Prague Castle visitor circuit and is visited along with the castle's other monuments. It also regularly hosts concerts. The nearby Saint Vitus Cathedral houses the chapel of Saint Wenceslas, Ludmila's grandson, and the tomb of Saint John Nepomucene.



The interior of the Basilica of Saint George and the Chapel of Saint Ludmila.

Praying on site

Before your visit, you can read the life of Saint Ludmila. At her tomb, you can entrust to the saint your children and grandchildren, then pray the prayer to Saint Ludmila. The visit can continue at Saint Vitus Cathedral, before the chapel of Saint Wenceslas, to pray for grandmother and grandson together. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Ludmila

- **Tetín** (central Bohemia): the place of her martyrdom, with a church dedicated to her.
- **Prague-Vinohrady**: the Neo-Gothic Church of Saint Ludmila, on Náměstí Míru (Peace Square).
- **Charles Bridge** (Prague): the Baroque statue of Saint Ludmila teaching the child Wenceslas.
- **Mělník**: the region of her birth, at the confluence of the Elbe and the Vltava.

Practical information

Access to Prague Castle goes through security checks, and crowds are heavy in high season: come early in the day. Admission to the basilica is included in some castle tickets. For hours, prices, and any closures, check the official website of Prague Castle before you come.

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