

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Luke the Evangelist

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: October 18

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IN BRIEF

Saint Luke the Evangelist

Physician and companion of Saint Paul, author of the third Gospel and of the Acts of the Apostles, patron saint of physicians and artists.

Feast day	October 18
Born	Antioch of Syria, according to tradition
Died	1st century, Boeotia (Greece), according to an ancient tradition
Canonized	pre-congregation (venerated since the early Church)
Era	1st century
Patron saint of	physicians, surgeons, painters, artists

In this booklet

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LIFE

Saint Luke the Evangelist

Saint Luke is the author of the third Gospel and of the Acts of the Apostles, nearly a quarter of the New Testament. A physician of Greek culture, he did not know Jesus during his earthly life, but he accompanied Saint Paul on several of his journeys and carefully gathered the accounts of the first witnesses. We owe him the stories of Christ's childhood, the great parables of mercy and the encounter on the road to Emmaus. His feast day is October 18, and he is the patron saint of physicians and artists.

Who was Saint Luke?

The New Testament names Luke three times, always in the letters of Paul. In the Letter to the Colossians, the apostle sends greetings from "Luke, the beloved physician" (Colossians 4:14); in the Letter to Philemon, he counts him among his "co-workers" (Philemon 24); and in the Second Letter to Timothy, written in a time of trial, he confides: "Luke is the only one with me" (2 Timothy 4:11). These few words sketch a portrait: an educated, faithful man who stayed with Paul when others had left him.

An ancient tradition, reported in particular by Eusebius of Caesarea in the 4th century, makes him a Syrian from Antioch. Commentators deduce from the way Paul distinguishes him from "those of the circumcision" in the Letter to the Colossians that he was probably of pagan, that is Gentile, origin. His elegant Greek, the most polished of the Gospels, confirms that he had received a solid education.



Saint Luke Drawing the Virgin, by Rogier van der Weyden (c. 1435-1440, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston).

Key dates

- **1st century**: Born, according to tradition in Antioch of Syria, in a Greek-speaking milieu.
- **c. 50**: In Acts, the narrative suddenly switches to "we" at Troas, a sign that the author joins Paul for the crossing to Macedonia (Acts 16:10).
- **c. 57-58**: He travels with Paul from Philippi to Jerusalem (Acts 20-21).
- **c. 60-61**: He shares the voyage of Paul, a prisoner, to Rome and the shipwreck off Malta (Acts 27-28).
- **Around the 80s**: The date most often proposed by scholars for the writing of his Gospel and of Acts.
- **Late 1st century**: Dies at the age of eighty-four in Boeotia, according to an ancient prologue.

- **357**: His relics are transferred to Constantinople, to the Church of the Holy Apostles.
- **Middle Ages**: His relics are venerated in Padua, in the abbey of Santa Giustina; the marble tomb that holds them dates from the 14th century.

The evangelist of mercy

Luke opens his Gospel with a short preface, something unique among the Gospels: he explains to a certain Theophilus that he has "investigated everything accurately anew" in order to write an orderly account (Luke 1:1-4). He presents himself as a careful historian who has collected the testimony of eyewitnesses. He takes up much of the Gospel of Mark, but adds many passages found only in his work.

These are often the pages Christians love most: the Annunciation, the Visitation, the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem and the visit of the shepherds, the Presentation in the Temple, the finding of Jesus among the teachers. Only Luke reports the parables of the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son and the lost coin, the meeting with Zacchaeus, the forgiveness granted to the good thief, and the appearance of the risen Lord to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Dante called him "the scribe of the gentleness of Christ." Luke also shows constant attention to the poor, the sick, foreigners and the women who followed Jesus.

His Gospel is, finally, the Gospel of prayer: Jesus prays before every great moment of his life. Luke passed on to us the three canticles the Church sings every day in the Liturgy of the Hours: the *Benedictus* of Zechariah, the *Magnificat* of Mary and the *Nunc dimittis* of the old man Simeon.

The Acts of the Apostles

Luke's second book, also dedicated to Theophilus, tells the birth of the Church: the Ascension, Pentecost, the life of the first community in Jerusalem, the martyrdom of Stephen, the conversion of Paul and the spread of the Gospel as far as Rome. Several passages are written in the first person plural. Tradition sees in them the direct testimony of Luke, present at Paul's side during these journeys, especially during the shipwreck off Malta, told with a sailor's precision.

Why is Saint Luke the patron saint of physicians and artists?

Paul calls him "the beloved physician," and his Gospel shows a doctor's eye: it describes illnesses and healings with care, and tells the parable of the Good Samaritan with the words of a caregiver, oil, wine and bandages. This is why physicians, surgeons and all who care for the sick take him as their patron, and why many hospitals in the English-speaking world bear his name.

From around the 6th century, an Eastern tradition claimed that Luke had painted a portrait of the Virgin Mary. Several venerable icons were attributed to him, such as the *Salus Populi Romani* in the Basilica of Saint Mary Major in Rome. Art historians date these works to much later periods, but the legend says something true: it is to Luke that we owe the stories that have nourished Christian art around Mary. For this reason he became the patron of painters, and the artists' guilds of the late Middle Ages bore his name.

Saint Luke was not an eyewitness, and perhaps that is what makes him so close to us: like us, he received the faith from others, and he took the time to search, to listen and to pass it on faithfully. His holiness is that of the loyal companion, of the physician attentive to bodies and souls, and of the writer who puts his talent at the service of the Gospel.

To pray with him, you can take up the Magnificat, the canticle of Mary handed down by Saint Luke, or follow the novena to Saint Luke from October 9 to 17, finishing on the eve of his feast.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Luke in art

- **An ox or bull, often winged**: this symbol, drawn from the visions of Ezekiel and the Book of Revelation, is linked to his Gospel, which begins in the Temple of Jerusalem, the place of sacrifice, with the priest Zechariah.
- **A book or a pen**: he is shown writing his Gospel, like the other evangelists.
- **A painter's easel or an icon of the Virgin**: in many paintings he is shown drawing or painting Mary and the Child.



The tomb of Saint Luke in the Basilica of Santa Giustina, Padua.

Where to pray to Saint Luke

- **Padua** (Italy): the Basilica of Santa Giustina, which keeps the tomb attributed to the evangelist.
- **Thebes** (Greece): the ancient tomb where tradition placed his burial; a relic was brought there from Padua in 2000.
- **Rome**: the Basilica of Saint Mary Major, where the icon *Salus Populi Romani*, attributed by tradition to Saint Luke, is venerated.
- **Bologna**: the Sanctuary of the Madonna of San Luca, on the Colle della Guardia, which houses an icon of the Virgin also linked to this tradition.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Luke and the Magnificat

There is no prayer composed by Saint Luke himself. But it is thanks to him that the Church has the Magnificat, the canticle of the Virgin Mary, found only in his Gospel and sung every evening at Vespers. This page presents an original prayer by Saintspedia to Saint Luke, then the text of the Magnificat and another passage to meditate on.

Prayer to Saint Luke

Saint Luke, you who carefully sought the truth from the witnesses, and wrote it down so that we might believe, pray for me.

You who made known to us Mary's Magnificat, teach me to give thanks for the wonders God works in the little ones. You who told of the return of the prodigal son and the joy of his father, help me to believe that God's mercy is always waiting for me.

Beloved physician, I entrust to you the sick, those who care for them and those who seek to heal them. Faithful companion of Saint Paul, I entrust to you those who proclaim the Gospel and those who feel alone in their trials. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

On my road, like the disciples of Emmaus, may I recognize Christ walking at my side, and may my heart burn within me when he speaks to me. Amen.

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

The Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55)

At the Visitation, Mary, carrying Jesus, visits her cousin Elizabeth. Greeted by her as "blessed among women," she answers with this song of thanksgiving. Saintspedia translation from the Greek.

> *My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,*
>
> *for he has looked upon the lowliness of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed,*
>
> *for the Mighty One has done great things for me: holy is his name! His mercy extends from age to age on those who fear him.*
>
> *He has shown the strength of his arm, he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly.*
>
> *He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.*
>
> *He has come to the help of Israel his servant, remembering his mercy, as he promised our fathers, to Abraham and his descendants forever.*

Source: Gospel according to Saint Luke, chapter 1, verses 46-55. In the liturgy, the canticle ends with the Glory Be.

Another word to meditate on

> *"Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over."*

Source: Gospel according to Saint Luke, chapter 24, verse 29. This is the request of the two disciples of Emmaus to the unknown traveler, whom they will recognize as the risen Jesus in the breaking of the bread.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Luke's feast day is October 18. You can pray to him especially for doctors, nurses and all caregivers, for someone facing surgery or a diagnosis, and for all who put an artistic talent at the service of beauty. The Magnificat is prayed every day at Evening Prayer. For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Luke, and read the life of Saint Luke.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Luke

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the Gospel according to Saint Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast, begin on October 9; it then ends on October 17, the day before his feast on October 18. You can also pray it at any time of the year, for example for someone who is ill or for a doctor or caregiver you love.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation and, if possible, the Gospel passage indicated, then say the prayer of the day and an Our Father. The small act suggested for each day helps carry the prayer into daily life. Taken together, the nine days walk through Luke's Gospel, from the Annunciation to Emmaus, and end with the journeys of Acts.

Day 1: Searching with care

Luke begins his Gospel by saying that he has carefully investigated everything from the beginning (Luke 1:1-4). Faith is not afraid of questions: it loves to know the one in whom it places its trust. Studying the Scriptures is already a way of loving God with our mind.

Prayer: Lord, give me the desire to know you better, and the patience to learn.

Today: Read slowly the prologue of Luke's Gospel.

Day 2: Mary's yes

At the Annunciation, Mary is astonished, asks a question, then answers: "May it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). Luke shows us a free faith, one that says yes without understanding everything.

Prayer: Virgin Mary, teach me to welcome God's will with trust, even when it surprises me.

Today: Pray a Hail Mary while thinking of a decision you have to make.

Day 3: Singing the wonders of God

In the Magnificat, Mary gives thanks because God has looked upon the lowly. Luke kept this song so that the whole Church could take it up, century after century. Gratitude opens our eyes to what God is already doing.

Prayer: Lord, open my eyes to the great things you do for me, and teach me to praise you.

Today: Write down three reasons for gratitude from the past week.

Day 4: The shepherds of Bethlehem

The first announcement of the Savior's birth is made to shepherds, simple people of little standing (Luke 2:8-20). God chooses to reveal himself first to the little ones. The shepherds then hurry to Bethlehem and go home glorifying God: those who receive good news become its messengers.

Prayer: Jesus, born in poverty, give me a simple heart to recognize you in the humble.

Today: Greet and take time to listen to someone you usually overlook.

Day 5: The Good Samaritan

The priest and the Levite pass by; the foreigner stops and cares for the wounded man (Luke 10:25-37). Luke, the physician, tells this parable with the words of healing: oil, wine and bandages.

Prayer: Lord, make me attentive to whoever suffers along my road, and give me the grace to stop for them.

Today: Visit or call someone who is sick.

Day 6: The father who waits

The parable of the Prodigal Son, which only Luke reports, shows a father watching for his son's return and running to embrace him (Luke 15:11-32). No distance wears out the mercy of God. The father does not even let his son finish his speech of excuses: he calls for the robe, the ring and the feast.

Prayer: Father of mercy, I come back to you. Welcome me as I am.

Today: Prepare for confession, or take a step toward reconciliation.



Praying with Saint Luke the Evangelist.

Day 7: Zacchaeus comes down from his tree

Jesus looks up at Zacchaeus, the despised tax collector, and invites himself to his house (Luke 19:1-10). Being looked at with love changes a life more surely than any reproach.

Prayer: Lord, come into my house today. May your visit make me generous and just.

Today: Repair an injustice, even a small one, or give to someone in need.

Day 8: Emmaus

Two discouraged disciples walk with a stranger who explains the Scriptures to them; they recognize him in the breaking of the bread (Luke 24:13-35). The risen Christ comes to meet those who have lost hope.

Prayer: Stay with us, Lord, for evening is coming. Make my heart burn within me when you speak to me.

Today: Go to Mass, or meditate on the Emmaus story.

Day 9: To the ends of the earth

In Acts, Luke follows the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome, and Paul into captivity. He stays at Paul's side when everyone else has left. Faithfulness is the humblest form of mission. Staying beside a friend in prison or in illness can be as great a witness as preaching to crowds.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena, I give you my intention. Through the intercession of Saint Luke, make me a faithful witness to your Gospel. Amen.

Today: Share with someone a Gospel passage that has touched you.

Closing prayer

Saint Luke, evangelist of mercy, I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. Pray for the sick and those who care for them, for artists and for all who proclaim the Gospel. Obtain for us the grace to give thanks like Mary and to recognize Christ along our roads. Amen.

To go further: the life of Saint Luke and the prayer to Saint Luke with the Magnificat.

PILGRIMAGE

Basilica of Santa Giustina in Padua, Tomb of Saint Luke

The Basilica of Santa Giustina, in Padua in the Veneto, preserves the tomb traditionally attributed to Saint Luke the Evangelist. Less well known than the nearby Basilica of Saint Anthony, this immense Benedictine abbey church is nonetheless one of the few places in the world where one can pray beside the relics of an evangelist.

How Luke's relics came to Padua

According to an ancient tradition, Saint Luke died and was buried in Thebes, in Boeotia. In the 4th century, in 357, Emperor Constantius II had his remains moved to Constantinople, to the Church of the Holy Apostles. How they afterward reached Padua is not known with certainty: transfers connected with the troubles of iconoclasm or with the Crusades have been suggested. What is certain is that devotion to them is attested in the Middle Ages at the Abbey of Santa Giustina.

In the late 1990s, the Bishop of Padua had the bones scientifically studied. The results were judged compatible with those of an elderly man of Syrian origin who lived in antiquity, which is consistent with tradition without, of course, being able to prove it. In 2000, a relic was given to the Orthodox Church of Thebes, where the ancient tomb of the evangelist is found.



Basilica of Santa Giustina in Padua, tomb of Saint Luke.

The basilica and the ark of Saint Luke

The present church, rebuilt beginning in the 16th century, is one of the largest in Italy. It overlooks the Prato della Valle, Padua's great elliptical square. It is dedicated to Saint Justina, a martyr of Padua, and is served by a community of Benedictine monks. The tomb of Saint Luke, a marble ark from the 14th century, is in the left arm of the transept. The basilica also preserves the relics of several saints of Padua and an altarpiece by Veronese depicting the martyrdom of Saint Justina.

Praying at the tomb of Saint Luke

Before your visit, you may wish to reread the life of Saint Luke, or a few pages of his Gospel, for example the account of Emmaus. On site, a time of silence before the ark is a good moment to entrust an intention, especially for a sick

person or a caregiver. The Magnificat, handed down by Saint Luke, suits this moment well. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.



Basilica of Santa Giustina in Padua, tomb of Saint Luke, the interior.

Other places connected with Saint Luke

- **Thebes** (Greece): the ancient tomb attributed to the evangelist, where a relic was brought in 2000.
- **Rome**: the Basilica of Saint Mary Major and the icon *Salus Populi Romani*, which tradition attributes to the brush of Luke.
- **Bologna**: the Sanctuary of the Madonna of San Luca, on the Guardia hill, linked to the city by a very long portico.
- **Antioch** (today Antakya, Turkey): the city tradition makes his hometown, and one of the first Christian communities described in the Acts.

Practical information

Padua is easily reached by train from Venice. The Basilica of Santa Giustina is on the edge of the Prato della Valle, a few minutes' walk from the Basilica of Saint Anthony, which makes it possible to combine the two pilgrimages. Around October 18, the feast of Saint Luke, special celebrations may be held. Check service and visiting hours with the Benedictine abbey before you come.

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