

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Lydia

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: May 20

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IN BRIEF

Saint Lydia

Seller of purple at Philippi, baptized by Saint Paul, first known convert in Europe.

Feast day	May 20, August 3 (Eastern Churches)
Born	Thyatira (Asia Minor)
Died	1st century
Canonized	Pre-Congregation (venerated since the early Church)
Era	1st century
Patron saint of	dyers

In this booklet

Life

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Novena to Saint Lydia

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Lydia

Saint Lydia was a merchant of purple cloth from Thyatira, in Asia Minor, who had settled in Philippi, in Macedonia. The Acts of the Apostles tell how she listened to Saint Paul beside a river, was baptized with her whole household and opened her home to the missionaries. She is often regarded as the first person on European soil whose conversion to Christ is recorded by name. She is celebrated on May 20 in the West and on August 3 in the Eastern Churches.

Who was Saint Lydia?

Everything we know about Lydia comes from a few verses in chapter 16 of the Acts of the Apostles, written by Saint Luke, who was then traveling with Paul and tells the story in the first person plural ("we"). Lydia came from Thyatira, a city in the region of Lydia, in the west of present-day Turkey, known for the dyeing of purple. She herself carried on this luxury trade in Philippi. Her name may in fact mean "the Lydian," that is, the woman from Lydia.

Luke describes her as a woman "that worshipped God." The expression usually refers to a person of pagan origin who was drawn to the faith of Israel and prayed to the one God without being Jewish. She was the head of a household, probably a family and servants, and had a house large enough to welcome guests.

Key dates

- **First century**: Born in Thyatira, in Asia Minor.
- **c. 49-50**: A merchant of purple in Philippi, she meets Saint Paul during his second missionary journey.
- **Shortly after**: She is baptized with her household and welcomes Paul and his companions.

- **Afterward**: Her house becomes the meeting place of the first Christians of Philippi.
- **Date and place of death unknown.**

The meeting by the river

During his second missionary journey, Paul saw in a dream a man of Macedonia calling to him: "Pass over into Macedonia, and help us" (Acts 16:9, Douay-Rheims). So he crossed the sea with his companions, Silas, Timothy and Luke, and came to Philippi, a Roman colony and an important city of the region.

On the Sabbath, the missionaries went out of the city to the bank of a river, where they expected to find a place of prayer. They sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. Lydia was among them. Luke writes that "the Lord opened" her heart "to attend to those things which were said by Paul" (Acts 16:14). Her conversion is presented both as the work of God, who touches the heart, and as the free response of a woman who listens.

An open house

Lydia was baptized, together with her whole household. At once she invited the missionaries: "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there." And Luke adds: "she constrained us" (Acts 16:15). Hospitality was the first fruit of her faith.

Soon afterward, Paul and Silas were beaten with rods and thrown into prison in Philippi, after freeing a young slave girl from a spirit of divination. Once released, they went to Lydia's house before leaving the city. There they saw the brethren, encouraged them and departed (Acts 16:40). Lydia's house had become the place where the young Church of Philippi gathered, the community to whom Paul would later write a letter full of affection, the Letter to the Philippians.

A figure of the early Church

Lydia stands for the many women who played an important role at the beginnings of Christianity: Tabitha in Joppa, Priscilla in Corinth and Ephesus, Phoebe in Cenchreae. Independent, active and at the head of a household, she put her goods and her home at the service of the Gospel.

She is not mentioned again in the New Testament, and nothing is known of the end of her life. The traditions about her are late. What remains is enough: a heart opened by God, a baptism, and a house that became a church.

Why is Saint Lydia a patron saint?

Because of her trade, Saint Lydia is often regarded as the patron of dyers and of those who work with cloth. More broadly, she is a natural intercessor for businesswomen and for all who work in commerce, for people searching for God, for families who practice hospitality, and for converts preparing for baptism.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Lydia in art

In icons, Lydia is usually shown wearing a purple cloak, a reminder of the costly cloth she sold, and holding a cross, the sign of the faith she received. She sometimes appears in scenes of her baptism by the river at Philippi, with Paul and his companions.

What can we learn from Saint Lydia?

Saint Lydia is the woman with an open heart. She prays, she listens, she lets God open her heart, and that open heart at once becomes an open house. Her faith shows itself in hospitality and service. She also reminds us that the Gospel entered Europe through the prayer of a small group of women beside a river. We can pray to her for people seeking God, for those who work in trade and business, and for families who welcome others.

Where to pray to Saint Lydia

- **Philippi** (Greece): near the ancient site, beside the river, a modern baptistery is dedicated to her, in the village that bears her name today.
- **Philippi**: the archaeological site of the ancient city, with its early Christian basilicas.
- In any church on May 20, or on August 3 in the Eastern calendar.

To pray with her, use the prayer to Saint Lydia for an open heart or the novena to Saint Lydia.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Lydia for an Open Heart

Saint Lydia, the seller of purple from Thyatira, listened to Saint Paul beside a river at Philippi, was baptized with her household and opened her home to the apostles (Acts 16:14-15). There is no ancient prayer to her in common use, but her story is a prayer in itself: "the Lord opened her heart." Here is an original prayer inspired by it.

Prayer to Saint Lydia for an open heart

Saint Lydia, woman of prayer, you went down to the river on the Sabbath to seek God, and there you heard the Good News of Jesus Christ. Pray for all who are searching for God, that they may find him.

The Lord opened your heart to attend to the words of Paul: ask him to open my heart too, so that I may truly listen to his Word and let it change my life.

You were baptized with your whole household: pray for my family, that we may all walk together in faith.

As soon as you believed, you opened your home to the apostles and to the young Church of Philippi: teach me generous hospitality, so that my home may be a place of welcome, peace and prayer.

You worked honestly in your trade: bless all who work in business and commerce, and help them to serve the common good. I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

When to pray this prayer

Saint Lydia is celebrated on May 20 in the West and on August 3 in the Eastern Churches. You can pray this prayer for a friend or family member who is seeking God, for catechumens preparing for baptism at Easter, before welcoming guests into your home, or at the start of a working day if you are in business. Parish hospitality ministries may also adopt it as their prayer.

Praying with the Word of God

You can also pray slowly with the passage of her conversion, Acts 16:11-15, and repeat in your heart the short invocation: "Lord, open my heart to your Word."

For nine days of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Lydia, and read the life of Saint Lydia.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Lydia

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the story of Saint Lydia in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 16). It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on her feast day, May 20, begin it on May 12. It can also be prayed at any time, for a person seeking God, for a catechumen, or for the grace of an open heart and an open home.

How to pray this novena

Each day, place your intention before God, read the short meditation, then say the prayer of the day followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. If you can, read Acts 16:9-15 and 16:40 at the start of the novena. The small act suggested for the day helps you live Lydia's faith in concrete ways.

Day 1: A woman far from home

Lydia came from Thyatira, in Asia Minor, and had settled in Philippi, in Macedonia. Like many people today, she lived far from the place of her birth. God met her there, in a foreign city, in the middle of her work. Her story reminds us that no place is too far for God's grace, and that a new beginning is always possible.

Prayer: Lord, you know all who live far from home. Be their companion and let them find a family in your Church.

Today: Greet or help someone who has come from another country.

Day 2: A seeker of God

Luke describes Lydia as a woman "that worshipped God." She was not Jewish by birth, but she had come to pray to the one God of Israel. Her heart was already searching before she heard of Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, bless all who seek you with a sincere heart, and lead them to the fullness of truth in Christ.

Today: Pray by name for a friend or relative who is searching for God.

Day 3: The place of prayer

On the Sabbath, Lydia went out of the city to a place of prayer by the river, with other women. Paul found her there. God often speaks to us when we make room for him in a faithful habit of prayer. Lydia did not know that this Sabbath would change her life; she simply kept her appointment with God.

Prayer: Lord, teach me faithfulness in prayer, so that you may find me waiting for you.

Today: Choose a fixed time and place for daily prayer, and keep it today.

Day 4: Listening

Paul and his companions sat down and spoke to the women. Lydia listened. Before anything else, faith begins with attentive listening to the Word of God.

Prayer: Lord, give me a listening heart. Let your Word find good soil in me.

Today: Read the Gospel of the day slowly, twice.

Day 5: The Lord opened her heart

Luke writes that "the Lord opened" Lydia's heart to attend to Paul's words. Conversion is first the work of God. We cannot force it, in ourselves or in others; we can only ask for it and welcome it.

Prayer: Lord, open my heart where it is closed, hardened or afraid. Open the hearts of those I love.

Today: Ask God to open your heart in one area where you resist him.

Day 6: Baptized with her household

Lydia was baptized together with her whole household. Faith is personal, but it is never private: it spreads to those around us and shapes a whole home.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the grace of my baptism. Let it bear fruit in my family.

Today: Find out the date of your baptism, or give thanks for it with a short prayer.

Day 7: "Come into my house"

As soon as she was baptized, Lydia insisted that the missionaries stay with her. Hospitality was the first fruit of her faith. An open heart becomes an open home. She did not wait to be perfect or to know everything about the faith: she gave what she had, right away.

Prayer: Lord, make my home a place of welcome, where others can feel your love.

Today: Invite someone for a meal or a coffee, or call someone who is lonely.

Day 8: A refuge after the prison

After Paul and Silas were beaten and imprisoned in Philippi, they went to Lydia's house once they were released. There they found the brethren and encouraged them. Her home had become a refuge and a church.

Prayer: Lord, bless all Christians who are persecuted, and those who shelter and support them.

Today: Pray for persecuted Christians, or support an organization that helps them.

Day 9: The first fruits of Europe

Lydia is often seen as the first known convert on European soil. From a small prayer meeting by a river, the Gospel spread across a continent. God does great things through small beginnings and faithful people.

Prayer: Lord, renew the faith in Europe and in every land where it has grown cold. Make me a humble witness of your love.

Today: Share a word of faith or hope with someone, simply and kindly.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Lydia, woman of prayer and hospitality, you let the Lord open your heart and you opened your home to his apostles. Present to God the intentions I have carried during these nine days. Obtain for those who seek God the grace to find him, for families the gift of faith, and for me an open heart and an open door. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Continue with the prayer to Saint Lydia, and read the life of Saint Lydia.

CREDITS

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