BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Milburga

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: February 23

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IN BRIEF

Saint Milburga

Anglo-Saxon princess of the 7th century, abbess of the double monastery of Wenlock in Shropshire.

Feast day	February 23
Born	mid-7th century, kingdom of the Magonsæte (western Midlands, England)
Died	February 23, c. 715, Wenlock (Shropshire, England)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	8th century

In this booklet

Life

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Novena to Saint Milburga

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Milburga

Saint Milburga (Mildburh in Old English, also called Milburgh or Mildburg) was an Anglo-Saxon princess of the 7th century who became abbess of the monastery of Wenlock, in present-day Shropshire, England. The daughter of a king of the Magonsæte and sister of Saint Mildred, she is said to have died around 715. Her relics, rediscovered at the end of the 11th century, made Wenlock a place of pilgrimage. Her feast day is February 23.

Who was Saint Milburga?

Milburga belonged to the Anglo-Saxon royal families that gave the Church many nuns and abbesses, one or two generations after the conversion of England. Her father, Merewalh, ruled the Magonsæte, a people of the western Midlands subject to the kingdom of Mercia. Her mother, Eormenburh, also called Domne Eafe, descended from the kings of Kent. Two of her sisters, Mildred and Mildgyth, are also venerated as saints.

The sources are few. The main account of her life was written at the end of the 11th century by the monk Goscelin, more than three and a half centuries after her death, just after her relics had been found. There are also extracts from early charters, gathered in a text known as the "Testament of Milburga". What we know of her is therefore limited, and some dates remain uncertain.

Key dates in the life of Milburga

- **Mid-7th century**: Born into the royal family of the Magonsæte, daughter of King Merewalh and Eormenburh.
- **c. 670-680**: Her father founds the monastery of Wenlock, a double monastery on the Frankish model.
- **670s-680s**: Milburga becomes its abbess.

- **Late 7th and early 8th centuries**: She obtains grants of land for her abbey from the Mercian nobility, recorded in the "Testament of Milburga".
- **February 23, c. 715**: Dies at Wenlock; some historians place her death in 716 or a little later.
- **1079**: Around the time Wenlock becomes a Cluniac priory, her relics are rediscovered.
- **Late 11th century**: The monk Goscelin writes her Life.
- **1539**: The priory is closed during the dissolution of the monasteries in England.

Abbess of Wenlock

Around 670 or 680, Merewalh founded at Wenlock a double monastery, that is, a community of men and women under the authority of an abbess. This model, which came from Gaul, was widespread in the England of that time: it is found at Whitby, at Ely and at Minster-in-Thanet. Milburga took charge of it. She had to govern both monks and nuns, organize prayer, the welcome of the poor and travelers, and the management of the lands.

The charter extracts preserved in the "Testament of Milburga" show an abbess attentive to the future of her community: she obtained from the nobles of Mercia gifts of land that ensured the monastery's livelihood. Behind these legal acts, we glimpse a woman of authority, able to deal with the powerful for the good of her brothers and sisters. Tradition also credits her with miracles and great charity, but the accounts that report them are late.

A family of saints

Milburga was not the only one in her family to choose consecrated life. Her sister Mildred became abbess of Minster-in-Thanet, in Kent, and her sister Mildgyth is also honored as a saint. Their mother, Eormenburh, also founded

a monastery. This family shows how the Christian faith took root in Anglo-Saxon England: through princesses who turned their estates into houses of prayer.

The cult of Saint Milburga

After her death, the memory of Milburga remained at Wenlock. The monastery then went through difficult times. At the end of the 11th century, it was refounded as a priory of the order of Cluny. It was then, in 1079 according to tradition, that her relics were found; they drew many pilgrims, and Goscelin wrote her Life at that time. The priory lasted until 1539, when it was closed during the dissolution of the monasteries ordered by Henry VIII.

Saint Milburga is celebrated on February 23, the day of her death. The translation of her relics was also celebrated on June 25. Several churches in England bear her name, especially in Shropshire and neighboring areas. She is shown as an abbess, with a crozier.

What can we learn from Saint Milburga?

Milburga put what she had received at the service of God: her rank, her authority, her gift for organization. She turned a royal estate into a house of prayer and made sure, with realism, that her community could live. She can inspire those who hold responsibilities and must reconcile spiritual life with the management of material things. You can pray to her for the leaders of communities, for Christian families and for vocations.

To pray with her, see the prayer to Saint Milburga and the novena to Saint Milburga.

Where to pray to Saint Milburga

- **Much Wenlock** (Shropshire, England): the ruins of the priory, built on the site of the monastery she governed.
- **The churches of Saint Milburga** in Shropshire and neighboring areas, which keep her memory.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Milburga for Those Who Hold Responsibility

Saint Milburga, an Anglo-Saxon princess of the 7th century, governed the double monastery of Wenlock, in Shropshire, and kept it alive through her wisdom and sense of responsibility. Prayer composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to her those who exercise authority, families and religious communities.

Prayer to Saint Milburga

Saint Milburga,
king's daughter who became a servant of Christ,
you turned a royal estate
into a house of prayer for your brothers and sisters.
Teach me to place at God's service
all that I have received.

You governed with wisdom
and made sure your community lacked nothing.
Inspire those who have charge of others,
in families, parishes and the workplace:
may they serve with justice and gentleness.

You who grew up in a family of saints,
watch over our families,
raise up vocations among our children,
and keep us faithful to the end.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Milburga

- On her feast day, February 23, or on June 25, anniversary of the translation of her relics.
- When you receive a responsibility, in your family, your work or your parish.
- For superiors and members of religious communities.
- For Christian families and the handing on of the faith.
- For vocations to consecrated life.

A short invocation

> *Saint Milburga, abbess of Wenlock,*
> *teach us to serve with wisdom,*
> *and pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for her feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Milburga from February 15 to 23, and read the life of Saint Milburga.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Milburga

This novena is an original composition inspired by the life of Saint Milburga, Anglo-Saxon princess and abbess of Wenlock in the 7th century. Novena composed for Saintspedia, in the spirit of Church tradition. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on her feast day, February 23, begin on February 15. 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 Milburga, pray for us." The act of the day helps you live the novena concretely. What we know of her life is limited; the meditations rely on the best established facts.

Day 1: Born into a royal family

Milburga was the daughter of King Merewalh and Queen Eormenburh. She could have sought worldly honors; she chose to serve God.

Prayer: Lord, free me from seeking honors. Teach me to find my greatness in your service.

Act of the day: Choose not to put yourself forward in a conversation or a decision.

Day 2: A family of saints

Her sisters Mildred and Mildgyth are also honored as saints, and their mother founded a monastery. Faith was handed on in this family like an inheritance.

Prayer: Lord, make our families places where we learn to love you. Bless brothers and sisters who support one another in faith.

Act of the day: Pray for each member of your family, naming them one by one.

Day 3: An estate turned into a monastery

Her father founded a monastery at Wenlock. Royal land became a house of prayer where men and women sought God together.

Prayer: Lord, may everything I own serve your Kingdom. Show me what I can offer you.

Act of the day: Make a gift to a religious community or a Church charity.

Day 4: Accepting the task

Milburga became abbess. Governing monks and nuns requires prayer, patience and discernment.

Prayer: Lord, give wisdom to those who have charge of others. Help me to carry my responsibilities with humility.

Act of the day: Pray for a person who exercises authority over you.

Day 5: Common prayer

The heart of the monastery is the office sung each day. Under Milburga's guidance, the community of Wenlock prayed for the whole region.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to pray with the Church. May my prayer join that of all your children.

Act of the day: Pray a psalm or an hour of the Divine Office, even a short one.

Day 6: Providing for the future

The Wenlock charters show an abbess who obtained lands to support her community. Holiness does not exclude practical sense.

Prayer: Lord, help me to use material goods wisely, for the good of those entrusted to me.

Act of the day: Settle a practical matter you have been putting off for a long time.

Day 7: Serving the poor

Like all great monasteries, Wenlock welcomed the poor and travelers. Tradition remembers Milburga for her great charity.

Prayer: Lord, open my heart and my door to those in need.

Act of the day: Do something concrete for a poor or lonely person.

Day 8: A memory that endures

Centuries after her death, her relics were found and Wenlock became a place of pilgrimage. Good done in faithfulness bears fruit for a long time.

Prayer: Lord, may my life leave behind a trace of your love.

Act of the day: Thank God for someone who has died and whose example still helps you.

Day 9: Entering into joy

Milburga died around 715, after a life given to God. She goes before us into the Father's house.

Prayer: Lord, keep me faithful to the end. Through the intercession of Saint Milburga, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Act of the day: Attend Mass if possible, and pray for the departed.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Milburga,*
> *abbess of Wenlock and servant of the poor,*
> *you led your community with wisdom.*
> *Present to the Lord the intention I have entrusted to you.*
> *Keep our families in the faith*
> *and teach us to serve.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

PILGRIMAGE

Much Wenlock Priory

Much Wenlock Priory stands in Shropshire, England, in the small town of Much Wenlock, on the road from Shrewsbury to Bridgnorth. It was here that in the 7th century King Merewalh founded a double monastery, of which his daughter, Saint Milburga, became abbess. The medieval monastery, refounded by Cluniac monks, has left extensive ruins that can be visited today.

A long monastic history

Around 670 or 680, Merewalh, king of the Magonsæte, founded at Wenlock a community of men and women under the authority of an abbess, following a model that came from Gaul. Milburga governed it for several decades and died around 715. The town of Much Wenlock grew up around this monastery.

After centuries of difficulty, the house was refounded at the end of the 11th century as a priory of the order of Cluny. It was then, in 1079 according to tradition, that the relics of Saint Milburga were found. They drew pilgrims, and the monk Goscelin wrote her Life. The priory lasted until 1539, when it was closed, like all the monasteries of England, during the dissolution ordered by Henry VIII.

What you can see

The ruins of the great medieval priory church give an idea of the importance the house had reached. Tall sections of wall and arches still stand, along with the remains of the chapter house, where the monks met each day. The quiet, green site invites meditation. In the town, other old buildings recall the monastic past of Much Wenlock.

Praying on site

Before you come, you can read the life of Saint Milburga. As you walk among the ruins, remember the monks and nuns who prayed here for centuries, and entrust to Saint Milburga those who hold responsibilities, families and religious communities. You can say the prayer to Saint Milburga or simply an Our Father. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Practical information

Much Wenlock lies in Shropshire, between Shrewsbury and Bridgnorth. The priory site is now a historic monument open to visitors. Opening days, hours and access conditions may vary by season: check with the organization that manages the site or the local tourist office before you come. To attend Mass, ask at the nearest Catholic parish.

Credits and sources

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