

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Stephen the Sabaite

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: March 31

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IN BRIEF

Saint Stephen the Sabaite

8th-century monk of the Mar Saba monastery in Palestine, nephew of Saint John Damascene, hermit and spiritual father.

Feast day	March 31, July 13
Born	725
Died	794, Mar Saba monastery (Judea)
Canonized	immemorial cult
Era	8th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Stephen the Sabaite for Peace of Heart

Novena to Saint Stephen the Sabaite

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Stephen the Sabaite

Saint Stephen the Sabaite was an eighth-century monk, the nephew of Saint John Damascene. He entered the monastery of Saint Sabas, or Mar Saba, in the Judean desert as a child and spent his whole life there, first serving his brothers, then as a hermit and spiritual father. He died in 794. His feast day is March 31, and some calendars also commemorate him on July 13.

Who was Saint Stephen the Sabaite?

Stephen was born in 725 into the family of Saint John Damascene, in a Near East then under Arab rule. Orphaned very young, he was entrusted to his uncle, the monk and theologian John Damascene, who brought him at the age of ten into the great laura founded by Saint Sabas in the fifth century.

We know his life thanks to his disciple Leontius, who wrote his biography shortly after his death; it has come down to us in Greek and in early translations, notably Arabic and Georgian.

He should not be confused with another monk of Mar Saba of the same name, Stephen the Melodist, a poet and author of liturgical hymns who died in the early ninth century. The two are often mixed up in reference works, to the point that some attribute to him hymns and dates that belong rather to the other.

Key dates

- **725**: Born into the family of Saint John Damascene.
- **c. 735**: At about ten years old, he enters the monastery of Mar Saba, where his uncle John Damascene lives.
- **735-750**: As a young monk, he serves the community in various offices.

- **Mid-eighth century**: He is allowed to live as a hermit, while remaining available to welcome and counsel those who come to him.
- **794**: Dies at the monastery of Mar Saba, aged nearly seventy.
- **Shortly after**: His disciple Leontius writes his Life.

A child in the desert

The monastery of Mar Saba clings to the cliffs of the Kidron Valley, between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea. Founded by Saint Sabas in 483, it was in the eighth century one of the great centers of monastic life and Christian thought in the East. It was there that John Damascene wrote his great works of theology and defended the holy images.

Young Stephen grew up in the shadow of his uncle. He learned prayer, the chanting of the psalms, work and obedience. For many years he served his brothers in the tasks of the community. This school of humility and service prepared him for what followed.

The hermit with an open door

As an adult, Stephen longed for a more solitary life. According to the account of his life, the hegumen, that is, the abbot, allowed him to live as a hermit part of the week, on condition that on the other days he received and counseled those who came to see him. It is said that he posted a note on the door of his cell asking not to be disturbed, except on the days set aside for visits.

This balance between solitude and welcome became the mark of his holiness. Monks and lay people came to ask him for advice, comfort or prayer. His biographer says that he gave the help people asked of him, and that he owned nothing while having everything. He was known for his miracles, which earned him in the East the title of Thaumaturge, that is, "wonderworker."

Devotion to Saint Stephen the Sabaite

Stephen died in 794 at the monastery of Mar Saba, where he had spent nearly sixty years. He is honored as a saint by the Catholic Church as well as by the Orthodox Churches, without a canonization process, according to the custom of the early centuries. In the Catholic calendar he is celebrated on March 31, the day of his death; some calendars commemorate him on July 13. The Orthodox celebrate him on October 28.

Why pray to Saint Stephen the Sabaite?

Stephen lived his whole life in the same monastery, without journeys or fame. His holiness was made of faithfulness, prayer and availability. He knew how to protect his time of silence while remaining open to those who needed him. He is a model for our time, when it is so hard to find a balance between rest, prayer and service. He has no official patronage, but Christians can pray to him:

- to find inner peace again;
- for spiritual directors;
- for the Christians of the Holy Land.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Stephen the Sabaite in art

In Eastern iconography, he is shown as a monk, still young, with a pointed beard.

Where to pray to Saint Stephen the Sabaite

- **Judean desert**: the monastery of Mar Saba, where he lived and died, still inhabited by Orthodox monks (entry inside is reserved for men).
- **Jerusalem**: the shrines of the Holy City, close to the desert where he lived.
- **Anywhere**: in the silence of your room, as he did in his cell.

To pray with him at home, you can use the prayer to Saint Stephen the Sabaite or the novena to Saint Stephen the Sabaite.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Stephen the Sabaite for Peace of Heart

Saint Stephen the Sabaite, nephew of Saint John Damascene, entered the monastery of Mar Saba in the Judean desert as a child and lived there until his death in 794. A hermit part of the week, on the other days he welcomed and counseled those who came to him. This prayer is an original composition inspired by his life; it is not an official liturgical text. It asks for inner peace and a balance between prayer and service.

Prayer to Saint Stephen the Sabaite

Saint Stephen,
child of the desert and monk of Mar Saba,
you learned from your earliest years
to seek God in silence and prayer.
You served your brothers with humility
before withdrawing into solitude.

In your cell, you listened to God;
at your door, you welcomed those who suffered.
You owned nothing,
and yet you gave each one what they needed.

Teach me to keep a time of silence for God
in the middle of my busy days.
Teach me also to open my door
to those who need a listening ear and comfort.
Give me peace of heart,
detachment and charity.

Pray for monks and hermits,
for spiritual directors,
and for the Christians of the Holy Land.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Stephen the Sabaite

- On his feast day, March 31.
- When you are overwhelmed and struggle to find time for God.
- Before listening to or advising someone in difficulty.
- During Lent, a season of desert and prayer.

- For the Christians of the Holy Land and the Middle East.

A short prayer

You can repeat, in the middle of your day:

> *Lord, keep my heart in your peace.*
> *Saint Stephen, pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Stephen the Sabaite from March 23 to 31, and discover the life of Saint Stephen the Sabaite.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Stephen the Sabaite

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Stephen the Sabaite, monk and hermit of the monastery of Mar Saba, who died in 794. It is not an official liturgical text. To end it on his feast day, March 31, begin on March 23. It often falls during Lent, and you can pray it at any time of the year.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with the Sign of the Cross and present 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 Stephen, pray for us." The small act proposed each day helps you live the novena concretely.

Day 1: An orphan taken in

Orphaned very young, Stephen was entrusted to his uncle, John Damascene. God did not leave him alone: he gave him a family in the community of monks.

Prayer: Lord, watch over orphaned children and over those who take them in.

Today: Pray for children in care and foster families, or support an organization that helps them.

Day 2: A child in the monastery

At ten, Stephen entered Mar Saba. He learned to pray from childhood. What we receive when young shapes a whole life.

Prayer: Lord, help children learn to pray to you. Bless those who help them.

Today: Teach a prayer to a child, or pray with one.

Day 3: Serving his brothers

For many years, Stephen served the community in ordinary tasks. Humble service is a school of holiness.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to serve without seeking to be seen.

Today: Do a quiet service at home or at work.

Day 4: The example of a master

Stephen grew up beside John Damascene, a great theologian and man of prayer. Saints draw one another along.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who have shown me the way. May I in turn be an example for others.

Today: Read a few lines from a spiritual writer.

Day 5: The desire for solitude

Stephen longed to live as a hermit so as to belong entirely to God. Silence is not an escape: it is a space where God can speak.

Prayer: Lord, give me a love of silence. Quiet in me whatever keeps me from hearing you.

Today: Turn off your phone and screens for an hour to pray or read the Word.

Day 6: An open door

The abbot asked Stephen to welcome and counsel visitors on certain days. The hermit agreed: his solitude was not to close him off from others.

Prayer: Lord, keep my heart open to those who need me, even when I would rather be left in peace.

Today: Take time to truly listen to someone who needs it.

Day 7: Owning nothing

His biographer says that Stephen owned nothing, and yet had everything. Chosen poverty frees the heart for God and for others.

Prayer: Lord, detach me from what I own. May you be my only treasure.

Today: Give an object or some money to a person in need.

Day 8: The counselor

Many came to Stephen for advice and comfort. He gave each one the help they asked for. The word of a man of prayer can heal.

Prayer: Lord, bless the priests, religious and lay people who accompany others. Give them wisdom.

Today: Encourage someone with a kind word.

Day 9: A lifetime of faithfulness

Stephen died in 794 in the monastery he had entered as a child nearly sixty years before. His life was a long faithfulness, without fame, but full of God.

Prayer: Lord, keep me faithful all the days of my life. Through the intercession of Saint Stephen the Sabaite, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Today: Pray for the monks of Mar Saba and for peace in the Holy Land.

Living the novena with Saint Stephen the Sabaite

Saint Stephen found a balance between solitude and welcome. During these nine days, try each day to protect a time of silence for God, as he protected his days of retreat, while staying available to those who need you. This novena often falls during Lent: it can become a small inner desert, lived in the midst of your ordinary life.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Stephen the Sabaite,*
> *monk of the desert and friend of the poor,*
> *you sought God in silence*
> *and welcomed those who knocked at your door.*
> *Present to God the intention I have carried during these nine days.*
> *Give me peace of heart,*
> *a love of prayer*
> *and generosity in service.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Stephen the Sabaite at any time, and discover the life of Saint Stephen the Sabaite.

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