

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Wiro

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: May 8

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IN BRIEF

Saint Wiro

Eighth-century missionary bishop from the British Isles, founder of Sint-Odiliënberg near Roermond in the Netherlands.

Feast day	May 8
Born	late 7th century, British Isles (Ireland, according to tradition)
Died	mid-8th century, Sint-Odiliënberg, Limburg, Netherlands
Canonized	immemorial cult (no formal canonization)
Era	8th century
Patron saint of	Sint-Odiliënberg

In this booklet

Life

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Novena to Saint Wiro

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Wiro

Saint Wiro was an eighth-century missionary bishop who came from the British Isles to preach the Gospel in the valleys of the Meuse and the Roer, in what is now Dutch Limburg. With his companions Saint Plechelm, a bishop, and Saint Otger, a deacon, he founded a church and a small community on a hill near Roermond, today's Sint-Odiliënberg. He is counted among the apostles of the Netherlands. His feast day is May 8.

Who was Saint Wiro?

Wiro belongs to the great movement of monks and bishops from Ireland and England who, in the seventh and eighth centuries, carried the Gospel to the peoples of northern Gaul, Frisia and Germany. English-speaking Catholics will recognize the same missionary wave that produced Saint Willibrord and Saint Boniface.

His life is poorly documented. The main source is a *Life* written much later, probably in the tenth century in the circle of Utrecht, and its historical value is debated. The sources even disagree about his origins: Dutch tradition makes him an Irishman, while other historians think he was more likely an Anglo-Saxon from Northumbria.

What seems certain is that a group of missionaries, Wiro, Plechelm and Otger, settled in the eighth century on a height overlooking the Roer River with the support of the Carolingian mayors of the palace, and that a very ancient cult was paid to them at that place.



The Basilica of Saints Wiro, Plechelm and Otger at Sint-Odiliënberg.

Key dates in the life of Saint Wiro

- **Late 7th century**: Born in the British Isles, in Ireland according to tradition; no date is known.
- **Early 8th century**: According to his *Life*, he travels to Rome with Plechelm, and both are consecrated bishops there.
- **Around the first third of the 8th century**: Arrival on the continent; Pepin of Herstal, mayor of the palace, gives them a hill near the Roer, called Saint Peter's Mount, the future Sint-Odiliënberg.
- **8th century**: Preaching in the region of the Meuse and the Roer; founding of a church and a small community.
- **Mid-8th century**: Death of Wiro, who is buried in his church; the exact date is unknown.

- **20th century**: The church of Sint-Odiliënberg, shrine of the three saints, receives the title of minor basilica.

A missionary bishop

According to tradition, Wiro and Plechelm, after being consecrated bishops in Rome, set out for the still pagan regions of northern Europe, accompanied by the deacon Otger. They settled in the Meuse valley, on the border between Frankish and Frisian lands, in a region where Christianity was still fragile.

They were active in the same period as Saint Willibrord, the apostle of the Frisians, based in Utrecht, and as Saint Lambert and his successors in Maastricht and Liège.

Confessor of Pepin of Herstal

Wiro's *Life* reports that Pepin of Herstal, the powerful mayor of the palace, held him in such esteem that he chose him as his confessor and came to him barefoot to confess his sins. Pepin is said to have given him the hill then called Saint Peter's Mount, near the Roer, where the three missionaries built a church dedicated to Saint Peter and a dwelling. The place later took the name of Saint Odile, hence its present name, Sint-Odiliënberg.

Cult and relics

After their deaths, Wiro, Plechelm and Otger were buried in their church, which became a place of pilgrimage. A community of canons settled there in the Middle Ages before being transferred to Roermond toward the end of the medieval period. The relics of the three saints were moved several times over the centuries, notably to Utrecht and Roermond. Their cult has remained alive in Limburg. Plechelm is especially venerated in Oldenzaal, whose basilica bears his name.

The Romanesque church of Sint-Odiliënberg, restored several times, remains the main shrine of Saint Wiro and his companions. It was raised to the rank of minor basilica in the twentieth century.

Why is Saint Wiro the patron saint of Sint-Odiliënberg?

Saint Wiro is the patron of Sint-Odiliënberg because it was there, according to tradition, that he and his companions built the first church and lived out their mission. Their tomb made the hill a place of prayer, and the village grew around their shrine. For more than twelve centuries, local Catholics have honored the three missionaries as the founders of their faith.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Wiro in art

Saint Wiro is shown as a bishop, wearing a miter and holding a crozier. He usually appears together with Saint Plechelm, also vested as a bishop, and Saint Otger, dressed as a deacon. This trio is the surest way to identify him, especially in the basilica of Sint-Odiliënberg.

What can we learn from Saint Wiro?

Saint Wiro reminds us that the faith of the Netherlands and the Meuse valley was born from the courage of foreign missionaries who left their island to serve peoples they did not know. We know little about him, but his name remains tied to a hill where people have prayed for more than twelve centuries. We can pray to him for missionaries, for the Church in the Netherlands, and for all who proclaim the Gospel in lands that have grown indifferent to it.

His story also shows the strength of working together. Wiro is almost never remembered alone: a bishop, a second bishop and a deacon formed one missionary team, and the faithful have honored them together ever since. It is a quiet lesson for parishes and communities today, where mission is always a shared task.

To pray with him, read the prayer to Saint Wiro or follow the novena to Saint Wiro, which ends on May 8.

Where to pray to Saint Wiro

- **Sint-Odiliënberg** (Roerdalen, Limburg, Netherlands): the Basilica of Saints Wiro, Plechelm and Otger.
- **Roermond** (Limburg): the neighboring town, where the chapter of canons moved in the Middle Ages.
- **Oldenzaal** (Overijssel): the Basilica of Saint Plechelm, dedicated to his companion.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Wiro for Missionaries

Saint Wiro left the British Isles in the eighth century to bring the Gospel to the people of the Meuse and Roer valleys, in today's Netherlands. With his companions Plechelm and Otger, he built a church on a hill where Christians still pray today. No traditional prayer to Saint Wiro is widely used in English, so this page offers an original prayer inspired by his mission. This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia.

Prayer to Saint Wiro

Saint Wiro, bishop and missionary, you left your homeland and your people to carry the light of Christ to those who did not know him. Give me a heart that is not afraid to go out toward others.

You did not work alone, but with Plechelm and Otger, as brothers in the same mission. Teach me to serve the Gospel with others, in friendship and patience, without seeking my own glory.

You were a confessor to the powerful and a shepherd to the humble. Pray for those who govern, that they may seek justice and mercy, and for all who need to hear the forgiveness of God.

Watch over missionaries throughout the world, over the Church in the Netherlands and Limburg, and over all the lands where faith has grown cold. May the seed you planted bear fruit again.

I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence). Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

A short invocation

Saint Wiro, Saint Plechelm and Saint Otger, apostles of the Meuse and the Roer, pray for us.

Intentions to entrust to Saint Wiro

- Missionaries and all who leave their country to serve the Gospel.
- The Church in the Netherlands and Belgium.
- Parish teams and those who work together in ministry.
- Leaders and those in positions of power.
- Those who are preparing for the sacrament of Reconciliation.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Wiro is celebrated on May 8. You can also pray to him before a journey or a move to another country, when you begin a new mission, or before going to confession. For nine days of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Wiro, and read the life of Saint Wiro.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Wiro

This novena to Saint Wiro is an original composition by Saintspedia. It follows the missionary bishop who came from the British Isles in the eighth century to preach in the valleys of the Meuse and the Roer, and who founded with Saints Plechelm and Otger the church of Sint-Odiliënberg, in the Netherlands. To end on May 8, his feast day, begin it on April 30. You can also pray it at any other time, for example before a mission trip or a move abroad.

Little is known for certain about Wiro's life, and his medieval biography mixes history and pious tradition. This novena does not add anything to the facts: it simply invites you to meditate on the main stages of a missionary vocation, as his story has been handed down.

How to pray this novena

Each day, find a quiet moment. Begin with the Sign of the Cross, read the meditation, then say the prayer of the day, followed by an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. Finish with the small act proposed for the day. If you miss a day, just pick it up again: what matters is trust.

Day 1: Born on an island of saints

Wiro was born in the British Isles, in Ireland according to tradition, in a time when monasteries there were sending missionaries all over Europe. Faith received is meant to be shared.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the faith I have received. Make me grateful for those who passed it on to me. Amen.

Today: Pray for the parish or the people where you first learned to pray.

Day 2: Leaving home

Wiro left his homeland, like Abraham, without knowing all that awaited him. Every missionary journey begins with a departure.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to leave my comfort when you call me to serve. Amen.

Today: Pray for missionaries far from their families, and for migrants who have left their country.

Day 3: In Rome, with the successor of Peter

According to his *Life*, Wiro was consecrated bishop in Rome with Plechelm. His mission was rooted in communion with the whole Church.

Prayer: Lord, bless the Pope and the bishops, and keep your Church united in faith and love. Amen.

Today: Pray an Our Father for the Pope and for your own bishop.

Day 4: Companions in mission

Wiro did not set out alone. Plechelm, a bishop, and Otger, a deacon, were at his side. The Gospel is proclaimed by communities, not by heroes in isolation.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the friends who walk with me in faith. Strengthen our bonds. Amen.

Today: Contact a friend in faith and tell him or her you are praying for them.

Day 5: A fragile land

Wiro arrived in a region where Christianity was still fragile, on the border between Frankish and Frisian peoples. He did not choose an easy field.

Prayer: Lord, I pray for the places where faith is weak or forgotten. Send workers into your harvest. Amen.

Today: Pray for a person close to you who has drifted away from the Church.

Day 6: The confessor of the powerful

Tradition says that Pepin of Herstal, the mighty mayor of the palace, came barefoot to confess his sins to Wiro. Before God, the powerful and the poor are equal.

Prayer: Lord, give me a humble heart that recognizes its faults. Grant your mercy to all who govern. Amen.

Today: Make an examination of conscience, and if you can, plan to go to confession.

Day 7: A church on the hill

On Saint Peter's Mount, the three missionaries built a church and a home. A place of prayer was born that has lasted for more than twelve centuries.

Prayer: Lord, bless the churches where your people gather, and make my heart a dwelling for you. Amen.

Today: Visit a church, even for a few minutes, and pray there.

Day 8: Sowing without seeing the harvest

Wiro died in the middle of the eighth century, without seeing all the fruits of his work. The faith of a whole region grew from what he and his companions sowed.

Prayer: Lord, help me to do good patiently, even when I do not see the results. Amen.

Today: Do something good for someone who will not be able to thank you.

Day 9: Feast of Saint Wiro

Today the Church in Limburg honors Saint Wiro and his companions. Their tomb became a place of pilgrimage, and their memory is still a call to mission.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena, I entrust my intention to you. Through the prayer of Saint Wiro, make me a joyful witness of your Gospel wherever I live. Amen.

Today: Share with someone, simply, why your faith matters to you.

Closing prayer

Saint Wiro, missionary bishop, with Saint Plechelm and Saint Otger, I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. Pray for missionaries, for the Church in the Netherlands, for those who have lost their faith and for all who are called to leave home for the sake of the Gospel. Help me to carry the light of Christ into my own world, with courage and gentleness. Like you, may I be ready to go where I am sent and to sow the Word of God with patience, trusting that he alone gives the growth. Amen.

To go further, read the life of Saint Wiro and the prayer to Saint Wiro.

Credits and sources

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