

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Wynnebald

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: December 18

IN BRIEF

Saint Wynnebald

Eighth-century Anglo-Saxon monk, companion of Saint Boniface, founder and first abbot of Heidenheim.

Feast day	December 18
Born	c. 701-702, Wessex (England)
Died	December 18, 761, Heidenheim (Bavaria)
Canonized	immemorial cult (translation of relics in 777)
Era	8th century

In this booklet

Life

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Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Wynnebald

Saint Wynnebald, also called Wunibald or Winnebald, was an eighth-century Anglo-Saxon monk, brother of Saint Willibald and Saint Walburga. A pilgrim to Rome, then a companion of Saint Boniface in the evangelization of Germany, he founded the abbey of Heidenheim in Bavaria in 751 and was its first abbot. He died there on December 18, 761. His feast day is December 18.

Who was Saint Wynnebald?

Wynnebald belongs to a family of saints. Born in Wessex, in the south of England, he was the brother of Willibald, the future bishop of Eichstätt, and of Saint Walburga. The family was related to Saint Boniface, the apostle of Germany. We know his life well thanks to Hugeburc, an Anglo-Saxon nun of Heidenheim who, in the 780s, wrote the life of Willibald and that of Wynnebald, partly at Willibald's own dictation. It is one of the rare cases, in the early Middle Ages, of a biography written by a woman, based on the direct testimony of a brother of the saint.

Key dates

- **c. 701-702**: Born in Wessex, in England.
- **720**: He sets out on pilgrimage to Rome with his father and his brother Willibald; his father dies on the way, at Lucca.
- **720s**: Ill in Rome, he stays there and lives in a community of ascetics, while Willibald leaves for the Holy Land.
- **727**: He returns to England, then stays in Rome again.
- **739**: At the call of Boniface, he joins him in Thuringia, where he is ordained a priest and given the care of seven churches.
- **744-747**: He evangelizes the region of the Nordgau, in Bavaria.

- **747-751**: He stays at Mainz with Boniface.
- **751**: With the help of Willibald, he founds the abbey of Heidenheim and becomes its first abbot.
- **December 18, 761**: Dies at Heidenheim, in the presence of his brother Willibald.
- **777**: Willibald has his relics translated.

The pilgrim to Rome

In 720, Wynnebald left England with his father and his brother for a great pilgrimage to Rome. The father, whom twelfth-century tradition calls Richard, died on the way, at Lucca, in Italy. The two brothers reached Rome, but both fell gravely ill there, probably with the plague. Willibald recovered and continued his journey as far as the Holy Land. Wynnebald, more frail, stayed in Rome. There he spent several years leading a life of study and prayer in a community of ascetics. He returned to England for a time in 727, then went back to Rome, where he remained until 739.

Missionary with Boniface

In 739, Boniface, who was organizing the Church in Germany, called Wynnebald to his side. He ordained him a priest and entrusted him with seven churches in Thuringia. The work was hard: the communities were young, paganism was still present, and priests were few. From 744 to 747, Wynnebald went to evangelize the Nordgau, a remote region of Bavaria. He then stayed a few years at Mainz, with Boniface, who had become archbishop.

In 751, with the help of his brother Willibald, by then bishop of Eichstätt, he founded a monastery at Heidenheim, in Franconia, in a region still little Christianized. He became its first abbot and established Benedictine life there. The monastery became a center of prayer, learning and mission.

A family in the service of the Gospel

Wynnebald died at Heidenheim on December 18, 761, in the presence of his brother Willibald. Their sister Walburga succeeded him at the head of the monastery, which had become a double monastery, with a community of monks and a community of nuns. Three children of the same family thus worked together for the evangelization of Germany, each in their own place: the bishop, the abbot and the abbess.

Veneration and iconography

Wynnebald was venerated as a saint very early. On September 24, 777, his brother Willibald had his relics moved into a new, larger church, consecrated the following year. Later, his relics were carried to Eichstätt, beside those of Willibald. Some relics were also given to other churches in southern Germany, such as Scheer, in Swabia, in the early seventeenth century. He is listed in the Roman Martyrology on December 18. He is depicted as a Benedictine abbot, with a crozier and a book, often beside his brother and his sister.

What to remember about Saint Wynnebald

Wynnebald did not have his brother's health nor Boniface's brilliance. Ill in Rome, he had to give up the journey to the Holy Land. But he made his frailty a time of prayer and study, and then he served wherever he was called. His life also shows the strength of a family united in faith: a brother and a sister carried on his work. We can ask his prayers for missionaries, for the sick who must give up their plans, and for Christian families.

Where to pray to Saint Wynnebald

- **Heidenheim** (Middle Franconia, Bavaria): the site of the abbey he founded and where he died.

- **Eichstätt** (Bavaria): the cathedral of Saint Willibald, where his relics were transferred, and the Abbey of Saint Walburga.
- **Mainz** (Rhineland-Palatinate): the city of Boniface, where he stayed.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Wynnebald for Missionaries and Families

Saint Wynnebald, an eighth-century Anglo-Saxon monk, was a pilgrim to Rome, a missionary in Germany with Saint Boniface and the founder of the abbey of Heidenheim. With his brother Willibald and his sister Walburga, he gave his life to the Gospel. This prayer is an original composition inspired by his life, not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to him missionaries, the sick and families.

Prayer to Saint Wynnebald

Saint Wynnebald,
you left your country as a pilgrim
and in Rome you knew illness and a halt on the road.
You did not complain:
you made that time a school of prayer.

Called by Boniface,
you served the churches of Thuringia,
proclaimed Christ in the forests of Bavaria
and founded a house of God at Heidenheim.

Pray for missionaries
who work far from home,
for the sick who must give up their plans,
and for those who begin a new work.

You who served the Gospel with your brother and your sister,
bless our families,
that they may be united in faith and in love.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Wynnebald

- On his feast day, December 18.
- When an illness forces you to change course.
- For a missionary, a priest or a religious sent far away.
- When launching a project in the service of the Church.
- For the unity and faith of brothers and sisters in the same family.

A prayer for the family

You can entrust your brothers and sisters to Saint Wynnebald with these words:

> *Lord, bless my brothers and sisters.*
> *Like Wynnebald, Willibald and Walburga, may we walk together toward you.*
> *Saint Wynnebald, pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Wynnebald from December 10 to 18, and read the life of Saint Wynnebald.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Wynnebald

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Wynnebald, an Anglo-Saxon monk, companion of Saint Boniface and founder of the abbey of Heidenheim in the eighth century. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, December 18, begin on December 10. It also accompanies the season of Advent, and you may pray it at any 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 and say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. Finish with: "Saint Wynnebald, pray for us." The act of the day helps you live the novena in a concrete way.

Day 1: A family of saints

Wynnebald grew up in a family where faith was alive. Three of its children are honored as saints. Holiness is often handed on at home, in shared prayer.

Prayer: Lord, bless our families. Make our homes places of faith and peace.

Today: Pray with a member of your family, or for them.

Day 2: Setting out as a pilgrim

In 720, Wynnebald left England for Rome. The pilgrim knows he is not at home on earth: he is walking toward God.

Prayer: Lord, give me a pilgrim's heart, detached and trusting.

Today: Take a prayerful walk, even a short one.

Day 3: Grief on the road

His father died on the way, at Lucca. Wynnebald and his brother had to go on without him. Grief is part of the road for many.

Prayer: Lord, receive our dead in your peace, and console those who mourn.

Today: Pray for a deceased member of your family.

Day 4: Illness

In Rome, Wynnebald fell gravely ill. He could not follow his brother to the Holy Land. He made this forced halt a time of prayer and study.

Prayer: Lord, when illness stops me, help me live that time with you.

Today: Visit or write to someone who is ill.

Day 5: The call of Boniface

In 739, Boniface called him to Germany. Wynnebald left Rome for a difficult mission. God often calls us through the voice of another.

Prayer: Lord, make me attentive to the calls you send me through others.

Today: Say yes to a service you are asked to do.

Day 6: Seven churches

Ordained a priest, Wynnebald was given the care of seven churches in Thuringia. A pastor gives himself to fragile, scattered communities.

Prayer: Lord, support priests who care for many parishes. Give them strength and joy.

Today: Thank your pastor or offer him your help.

Day 7: Proclaiming far away

In the Nordgau, a remote region, Wynnebald proclaimed the Gospel to people who were still hardly Christian. Mission demands patience and perseverance.

Prayer: Lord, bless today's missionaries and give me the desire to bear witness to you.

Today: Pray for a missionary or support a mission organization.

Day 8: Founding Heidenheim

In 751, Wynnebald founded the abbey of Heidenheim with the help of his brother. A monastery is a light set down in a region: people pray there, work there, are welcomed there.

Prayer: Lord, bless the monasteries and religious communities that pray for the world.

Today: Find out about a monastery near you, or pray for it.

Day 9: A death in company

Wynnebald died on December 18, 761, in the presence of his brother, and his sister Walburga took up his work. His work did not end with him.

Prayer: Lord, may I not die alone, and may what I have received pass on to others. Through the intercession of Saint Wynnebald, grant me the grace I ask in this novena, if it is your will.

Today: Pray for the dying and for those who accompany them.

Living the novena with Saint Wynnebald

This novena falls in the middle of Advent, a time of waiting and of walking toward Christmas. Wynnebald was a pilgrim and a missionary: he can help us live this season as a road toward the Christ who comes. During these nine days,

think also of your brothers and sisters, your loved ones: how could you, like Wynnebald's family, support one another in faith? And if illness has interrupted one of your plans, entrust it to the one who knew how to make his forced halt in Rome a time of grace.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Wynnebald,*
> *pilgrim, missionary and abbot of Heidenheim,*
> *you served the Gospel with your brother and your sister,*
> *in sickness as in work.*
> *Present to God the intention I have carried during these nine days.*
> *Give me a pilgrim's heart,*
> *patience in trial,*
> *and love for my family and for the Church.*
> *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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

CREDITS

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