



# Christina of Markyate

## who spent her days praying and helping people to meet God

born into a rich merchant family; suffered for her desire to be a nun; had many visions and messages in prayer; people came to her for advice and for prayer for healing

### Possible Activities

#### Prayer using feathers

Some of Christina's visions were of the Holy Spirit as a dove. You could glue coloured feathers onto a dove outline (see extra resources).

Encourage the children to hold their feather for a moment while they think of whom they would like to pray for.

Alternatively, push the feathers into a piece of plastic netting or loose-weave fabric such as hessian.

#### Decorating Illuminated initials

There were many beautiful illuminated manuscripts at the time of Christina. Add your own decoration to the sheet "Christina, set apart for God" (see extra resources) or create your own sheets. Try gold and silver pens, and strong blues and reds to create striking effects, or stick down the foil wrappers from sweets to mimic gold leaf.

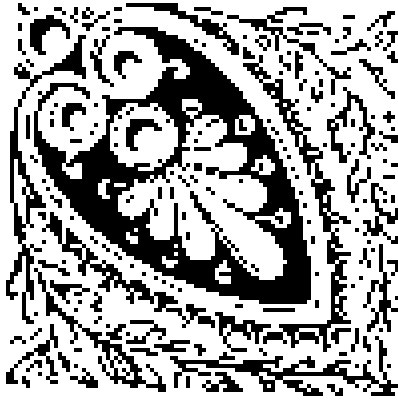
Christina was not always called Christina. Her parents called her Theodora. Theodora means "God's gift". Christina means "anointed, set apart for God". Theodora changed her name to Christina, and in that change, her whole story begins.

She was born into a rich merchant family in Huntingdon in the 1090's. Her parents felt that she was God's gift to them and they were very happy. But they also felt, since she was God's gift to them, that they could decide how she would live her life. When she grew up, they told her that it was time to get married and that she was going to marry a man called Burthred.

But Christina did not want to marry anyone. She wanted to give her whole life to God in prayer as a nun. Her parents saw her as a gift from God, but she saw herself as called by God and set apart by God for a different kind of life. Even when she was a young girl, she felt that God was calling her. Once she visited St Alban's Abbey and she was so sure that God was asking her to be a nun that she made a solemn promise 'I will.'. She scratched a cross on a door in the Abbey and gave a penny as a special offering. These were signs that she would keep her promise, come what may.

Christina needed all the strength that God could give her. When her parents heard that she wanted to be a nun and that she would not marry Burthred, they stopped her going to church. They locked her in the house, they shouted at her, they even hit her and hurt her badly. They felt that she had no right to choose a life of prayer instead of marriage. They even sent Burthred and his friends into her room to kidnap her, but she held onto a nail on the wall and managed to hide up behind the bed curtains so that they could not find her.

Christina tried to escape from her home and go somewhere where she would be safe. She tried again and again, but her parents always found her and dragged her home. Christina



felt so alone and frightened. One night, in a dream, she saw Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary told Christina to be brave because, in the end, she would be able to live as a nun. When Christina awoke, her pillow was wet with tears but she felt strong now and sure that God would help her.

Christina had several helpers who prayed for her and gave her advice when they could. Her parents tried to stop them meeting or talking, but sometimes they were able to meet for a moment or pass a secret message. She managed to contact a local hermit called Eadwine. (A hermit is someone who lives alone to talk to God). Eadwine was able to go the Archbishop of Canterbury and tell him the sad story of what was happening to Christina. The Archbishop told Eadwine to help Christina in any way that he could. Eadwine made a plan. He smuggled Christina out of Huntingdon disguised as a man and took her to stay with a nun called Alfwen.



Christina still had to hide because her family kept looking for her. She hid in a tiny dark secret room in Alfwen's house. Burthred turned up one day, but Alfwen managed to get rid of him. Christina spent long hours alone while she was hiding, and she spent this time praying and reading the Bible when there was enough light. It was frightening but, in a strange kind of way, her life of prayer had begun. Later, she also hid in a tiny room in the house of a Benedictine monk called Roger. Here her room was even smaller than the room at Alfwen's - it was only a span and a half deep. (A span is from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the little finger when the hand is stretched out). This 'room' was really the space between the panelling and the outer wall of Roger's chapel. She stayed there for four years. She could only come out to eat or go to the toilet in the middle of the night. It was freezing cold in winter and boiling hot in summer. Christina spent all the time she could praying and she had many visions when she felt that God came close to her and spoke to her and comforted her.



Finally, after many dangerous days, it was safe for Christina to come out of hiding and live in a small hut. She spent her days praying and serving God in the way that she had always longed to do. When people heard how wise and close to God she was, they came to her for advice and help. She prayed for many people and they were cured of their illnesses. She gave advice to many people so that they were able to make better choices. In 1145, she became the leader of a community of nuns who lived together in a new Priory at Markyate. Her life was set apart for God, and she truly lived up to her new name, Christina.