

Meet St. Catherine of Alexandria | Saints for Kids

As a young girl, Catherine always had her nose in a book. If she didn't have her nose in a book, she was asking the wisest men and women of the land all sorts of questions. There were plenty of books and plenty of wise people around, because Catherine lived in the great port city of Alexandria, Egypt—home of the biggest library in the world—and her father was the governor.

It was through some of these books and wise people that Catherine first learned about Christianity. While her studies sparked her curiosity about the Christian faith, it was a vision of the Blessed Mother and the child Jesus that fanned it into a roaring, passionate fire. Catherine began to study the faith with great zeal, proclaiming it to all she met.

When the Roman emperor, Maxentius, began persecuting Christians, Catherine traveled to Rome to rebuke him for his cruelty. At first, Maxentius was merely amused by this beautiful, hot-headed girl (she was only eighteen at the time). He didn't really want to put her in prison or kill her, so he summoned fifty of his greatest philosophers to persuade her to give up her faith. Instead, *she* persuaded *them*, one by one, until all fifty had converted to Christianity!

Now the emperor was really angry. He had the wise philosophers killed and Catherine flogged. Then he threw her into the dungeon and left on a trip. (Emperors in those days were always going on trips, usually to fight in battles.)

While he was gone, his wife the empress went to visit Catherine; she was curious about this wise young woman. Before long, Catherine had used her great learning to persuade the empress to follow the way of Christ—along with two hundred of

the emperor's best soldiers!

When the emperor returned from his trip, he turned twenty shades of purple and had all those people, even his wife, killed as well. (Emperors did not have very good tempers back in those days.)

Maxentius still didn't want to kill Catherine, so he offered to marry her and make her empress if only she would deny her faith. (He needed a new empress anyway, since he had killed the last one.)

"No," said Catherine. "My heart belongs only to Christ."

That was the last straw. The emperor ordered Catherine to be tied to a large wheel with sharp spikes on it. He thought this would surely silence this wise and stubborn young woman; but instead, the ropes miraculously fell off of Catherine, and the wheel flew apart in all directions.

Finally, Maxentius had Catherine beheaded, and it is said that angels took Catherine's body from Alexandria to Mount Sinai where they were held and venerated. Then the angels accompanied Catherine's soul to heaven, where she was finally united with her only love, Christ—and where she undoubtedly continues to have many wonderful conversations about all manner of things with the wisest philosophers who ever lived.

Catherine of Alexandria facts

Catherine of Alexandria would have lived in the early part of the fourth century (around 320 AD). Although the legend her probably had its beginnings with a real young woman, scholars and historians tell us that much of her story as we know it today was invented by storytellers over the centuries. That's okay, though, because even the imaginary parts of her story offer a wonderful example of wit, bravery, and wisdom for Christians to imitate today.

Catherine is the patron saint of philosophers, young maidens, and female scholars. She is also known as one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers.

Her feast day is November 25th.