

CHRISTINA'S STORY: A GIRL ESCAPES FORCED MARRIAGE IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

(Christina of Markyate lived in England during the 12th. century A.D.)



When Christina was a young girl, she took a vow of chastity at St. Alban's Abbey, promising to become a nun when she became an adult. She planned to live a life devoted to study, teaching others, and prayer and meditation.

One day when Christina was a teenager, a bishop visited her family's home. He tried to seduce her but she refused his advances and locked him in a bedroom by himself. The bishop was angry that he'd been humiliated by a teenage girl so he connived with her parents to marry her to a man he chose, named Burthred.

Christina refused. She stood firm in her plan to enter a monastery. But her parents were determined to carry out the bishop's scheme.

Although they managed to force the marriage upon her, Christina refused to consummate it. Her parents beat her, stripped her and tried getting her drunk. When all their plots had failed, they encouraged Burthred to rape her. Christina fled and spent many years running from both her parents and Burthred.

She was helped by a nun named Alfwen, and later took refuge with an elderly hermit named Roger, who protected her and instructed her in holy living.

Finally, after years of deprivation and suffering, her marriage was annulled by the archbishop of York, in part, because it was undertaken under duress from her parents.

When Roger died, he left his hermit's hut to Christina and she began on her life of study, teaching and prayer. Christina reported seeing visions of Jesus, Mary and Saint Margaret. These visions often helped her with difficult questions she had, or that were brought to her by others.

Her fame spread far and wide, and she gained a reputation as a person of great holiness. The wealthy landowner Geoffrey of Dunstable considered her his teacher and friend. Because he believed in the work she was doing, he assisted her in founding a priory in Maryate which attracted many girls and women who came to study with her.

Christina was a girl who never gave in and never gave up. In the end she achieved peace, happiness, the love and respect of others and the opportunity to live her life as she chose.

You can still see Markyate Priory if you visit the town of Markyate in Hertfordshire, England. It's a living memorial to the girl who escaped from a forced marriage and went on to bring hope, love and learning to the world.



Markyate Priory