

# Saint Francis of Assisi

By Beth Beall



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Saint Francis was born in Italy in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and became a faithful follower of Jesus. We remember Francis for his poverty, simplicity, and love of all of God's creation. Learn about Francis and then choose one or two activities to help you further explore his life.

## For

Just for Kids

## Season

Fall

## Needed

Story of Saint Francis (on page 3, below), internet connection (optional), pictures of Saint Francis (on page 4, below), paper, pen/pencil/markers

## Activity Plan

1. Begin this activity with a prayer. You might use the words below, or speak some words from your own heart, or simply be quiet for a moment.

*Loving God, thank you for your servant Francis. Thank you for what he taught about living in your love. Help me to learn from him today. Amen.*

2. On your own or with someone else, read the story of Saint Francis on page 3 below.
3. Pick one or more of the following questions to think about on your own or with someone else:
  - I wonder which part of Francis' story you like best?
  - I wonder why Francis was singing and dancing for joy when he walked away from his father and the bishop? (This was when he wore only a flimsy cloth around his waist!)
  - I wonder why Francis made it a rule that he and the Franciscans could not own any possessions? How would your life be better if you didn't own any possessions? How would it be worse?
4. Choose one or more of the following activities to help you further explore the story of Saint Francis:

- Watch this [cartoon story of Saint Francis](#) on YouTube. The story is set to rhyme, and shows a day in the life of Saint Francis when he and one of the Franciscans set out to preach the good news of God's love.
- Enjoy this video based on the song Saint Francis wrote near the end of his life, [Canticle to Brother Sun](#). Perhaps you'd like to make a drawing that shows the beauty of God's creation. Or maybe you want to make a drawing that emphasizes the glory of just one part of God's creation, such as the wind, or water, or fire, or sun.
- Look at the two pictures of Saint Francis on page 4, below. Each picture shows a different artist's depiction of Francis. Which picture do you prefer? Why? If you'd like, write a story from your imagination about Francis based on what you feel or think as you look at one of the pictures.
- One of the questions above asked which part of Francis' story you like best. Draw that part of the story.
- Next time you are at the library, look for a copy of the book called *Saint Francis*, written and illustrated by Brian Wildsmith. The illustrations do a wonderful job of bringing the story to life.



## The Story of Saint Francis of Assisi

My name is Francis. I was born in the year 1181 in the city of Assisi, Italy. I had a very happy and carefree life growing up. My father was a wealthy businessman who bought and sold fancy cloth, and he let me have lots of free time. I loved to have fun with my friends. We dressed up in fancy clothes, told jokes, played musical instruments, and danced, danced, danced.

I wanted more than anything to win fame and glory by being a knight in shining armor. One day I got my chance! The city of Perugia was coming to attack Assisi. But Assisi lost to Perugia, and I was taken prisoner. Even in prison I laughed and told jokes to my fellow prisoners. I was very glad, though, when my father paid money so that I could be released.

I wanted to fight in war again. But one day God spoke in my heart as I prayed in the church of San Damiano. (San Damiano was very close to Assisi.) I was busy telling God about what I wanted to do in my life, when God said, "Francis, look around you. My church is falling apart. Repair it for me."

Immediately I was filled with an indescribable joy. Instead of being a knight, I would rebuild God's church! But how would I get money to buy the necessary materials to repair the church in San Damiano? Ah! Do you know what I did? I stole some of my father's expensive fabric and sold it.

My father was furious. He took me before the bishop (the head religious leader in our city) and told him what I'd done. The bishop said, "Francis, you need to repay your father." "Here," I said gently, as I gave my father his money. "You may have your money, and you may also have all of the fancy clothes you've given me. I love you, Father, but more than anything I love my Father in heaven." And then I stepped out of my clothes, and stood almost completely naked on the street! With just a small flimsy cloth covering my waist, I walked away, singing and dancing with joy.

From that time on, I wanted to live the life that Jesus had lived. I felt especially close to God when I spent time with poor people or with parts of the world that get taken for granted, such as animals, trees, the wind and the sun. I began to preach to everyone about how much God loved them and how beautiful God's world was.

Gradually, other people wanted to live the simple and poor life of Jesus that I was living. (I say "poor" but it was very rich in ways that many people never understood.) These people started to call themselves the "Franciscans." I told the Franciscans that we had a couple of rules to follow: 1) we owned no possessions, and 2) we shared God's love with everyone (including the birds, the rich people, the grass of the field, the poor people...everyone!). And that's what we did. Sometimes we preached the good news of God's love by talking about it. Other times we preached that good news through the example of how we treated other people and God's creation.

Living in poverty as I did can make life very difficult, and I grew quite sick around the age of 45. Some of my companions carried me to the palace of the Bishop. But I wanted to go back to the small, humble church of San Damiano. As the people carried me there, I sang for them a song I'd written called "The Canticle of Brother Sun." On October 4, 1226, I died. Today, all these years after my death, there are still people called Franciscans around the world who try to follow Jesus by living lives of simplicity and joy.



## Two Pictures of Saint Francis



This picture, which is a wood carving, shows Francis looking sad or maybe serious. I wonder what is going on here, since Francis was known for being a man of laughter and joy?

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I wonder what Francis is saying to the birds here?  
I wonder what the birds are saying to Francis?

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