

Many Christian parents will call their children by Biblical names because the name has a positive connotation. So, when my local window cleaner said he had named their new-born daughter Lydia, I thought, yes it's Biblical but I could not quite remember her story. This is an attempt to explore her more carefully and realise how significant she is in the history of Christianity. Whilst the Biblical information is sketchy, it is worth exploring further.

Paul is on his Second Missionary journey and arrives in Philippi in Macedonia. (Philippi was a new city established by the Romans in which ex-soldiers were based to promote and preserve Roman culture and practices.) It was the Sabbath day and Paul went looking for fellow Christians by the river. (Remember that church buildings did not really exist until the Emperor Constantine became a Christian in 312CE.) At the river, Paul meets some women who are praying, including Lydia, a dealer in purple. Lydia becomes the first recorded Christian believer in Europe! The nature of her occupation (Purple seller) would indicate she was at the top-end of society. The purple dye was derived from a shell-fish and today it would cost hundreds of pounds to dye just one pound of wool. Indeed, purple-dyed goods were part of a high value industry and were used by emperors, high government officials, and priests of the pagan religions.

Though Lydia was sympathetic to Judaism, hence meeting by the river (as the Jews were not allowed to build a synagogue, because Philippi was a Roman city), she was not Jewish rather a Greek Macedonian. When Paul and Silas came and preached, she was converted to faith in Jesus, and she and all her family were immediately baptised. The only other reference to Lydia is after Paul and Silas were falsely arrested and imprisoned. When they were released without charge, they met up again with Lydia who gave them hospitality before they continued on their missionary journey.

Saint and feast days of St Lydia (online information)

Many Christian denominations recognize Lydia of Thyatira as a saint, though her feast day varies greatly. In the Catholic Church, her feast day is 3rd August. The Episcopal Church honors Saint Lydia along with Saints Dorcas and Phoebe with a feast day in its liturgical calendar on 27th January. Eastern Orthodox Churches remember Lydia on various days, with some jurisdictions remembering her twice during a liturgical year. Many Eastern Orthodox churches, including the Self-Ruled Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, remember Saint Lydia on 20th May. However, some divisions of the Russian Orthodox Church (other than the Orthodox Church in America) observe both 25th June and 27th March as her feast days. The Lutheran community is also divided. The ELCA commemorates Saints Lydia, Dorcas and Phoebe on 27th January, while the LCMS celebrates the three women on 25th October.

What is the legacy of Lydia for today?

As noted above, several Christian denominations have recognised Lydia as a saint. She is regularly known as "Saint Lydia" or simply "The Woman of Purple." She was commonly identified as a dealer of purple cloth, which is the probable basis for the Catholic Church describing her as the "patroness of dyers."

However, for us her most notable legacy is seen in her practice of hospitality to help enable the early church to flourish and develop. This practice of hospitality is encouraged elsewhere in the New Testament though current political ideologies dampen such enthusiasm. It is significant that in its practice you may be offering hospitality to an angel! (Hebrews 13 v2 states 'do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares'.)

A second significant point to mention is that often the Bible is perceived as male dominated yet there are glimpses in both the Old Testament and New Testament to the powerful influence of Godly women and how they worked in His service. Lydia is a fine example of how receptive women were to the call of God and how much is owed to their openness and trusting acceptance of that Word and the way they drew people into the Church by their warmth, fervor, and holiness.

***'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.'* Lydia**

Prayer: Father
Thank you for the fine example of living the Christian life set by so many in the past.
Please help each one of us to thank God for each other and support all who quietly live their lives for you.
Amen