Meet St. Josephine Bakhita! • Saints for kids

LIVED: Bakhita was born in 1869 in Sudan. She was kidnapped by slave traders at the age of seven; they gave her the name Bakhita, which means “lucky.” She died in 1947 in Italy.

MISSION: As a girl, Bakhita would look up at the moon and stars, resolving to serve their Master. Later in life, she devoted herself to promoting Catholic missions to Africa.

ADVENTURES: Many weeks after being kidnapped, Bakhita found herself at a slave market, chained to another girl her age. The girls passed long hours telling one another about their families and how they had been kidnapped. Before long, they were planning an escape.

Their chance came one day when the overseer carelessly left them unchained and alone. Seeing no one around, they linked hands and ran into the countryside as fast as their legs could go. They ran through the wilderness all night, terrified of being caught and even more terrified of the roars of wild beasts; whenever the animals came too close, they took shelter in a tree. Once, they hid behind a thorn hedge for two hours while a long caravan passed nearby.

But the girls had no idea where they were going. It wasn’t long before Bakhita realized they were lost. Bakhita was not a Christian, but she had always looked to the night sky and wanted to know the One who had created the moon and stars. Now she looked to the sky for guidance once more—but this time, to her surprise, she saw a beautiful figure, bathed in light and smiling at her. The figure pointed the way to go, and Bakhita led her companion in that direction.

Although the figure led Bakhita and her friend safely out of the wilderness, the girls were caught by another slaver late

the next day and sold on. It seemed that Bakhita had failed in her quest for freedom. Indeed, she spent twelve years in cruel slavery. But that was not the end of her story. With the help of the Canossian Sisters, she won her freedom, became a Christian, and joined their order. She even received a new name at her baptism: Josephine Margaret Bakhita.

And the shining figure in the night? Bakhita came to believe it was her guardian angel, who stayed with her all along, guiding her to God. As she said: “If I were to meet those who kidnapped me, or even those who tortured me, I would kneel down and kiss their hands. Because, if those things had not happened, I would not have become a Christian and would not be a Sister today.”

Learn more

Watch Two Suitcases: The Story of St. Josephine Bakhita, available to stream or on DVD from Amazon.