

# Meet St. Kateri Tekakwitha! • Saints for kids

**LIVED:** Tekakwitha was born in about 1656 in the Mohawk village of Ossernenon in New York. Her parents were a Mohawk chief and Tagaskouita, a Christian Algonquin woman captured in a raid. Tekawitha died at age 24 in 1680 in Montreal, Canada.

**MISSION:** “For a long time my decision has been made. I have chosen Jesus for my husband and he alone will take me for wife.”

**STORY:** Growing up, Tekakwitha was the girl who didn't quite fit in. The same smallpox that had taken the lives of her parents and brother when she was four years old had left her face badly scarred and sallow. It also badly damaged her eyes. The name Tekakwitha means “she who bumps into things.” So although she was good at weaving and enjoyed playing with her cornhusk dolls, her poor eyesight made it difficult to plant and weed, and impossible to play chasing games with the other children.

As she grew older, she became more and more interested in her mother's religion. French Jesuit missionaries—“Blackrobes,” as the Mohawks called them—traveled among the villages of the Iroquois Confederacy, teaching the people about Christ. Eventually, Tekawitha asked one of these priests to teach her and baptize her into the faith. She took the name Catherine—or, as the Mohawk said, “Kateri.”

Tekakwitha's interest in Christianity annoyed her uncle, but it was her refusal to marry that scandalized her relatives the most. When Kateri refused the marriage proposal of a young warrior to his face in front of his family, it was the last straw. Her relatives mocked her, calling her names and giving her all the hardest work. Not long after this, she left the

village in a daring escape, traveling with the help of two Huron warriors nearly two hundred miles to a village of Christian Mohawks. There, at last, she fit in.

When she died of an illness four years later, her last words were, "Jesus, Mary, I love you." Fifteen minutes after her death, her face was transformed—no longer scarred, but radiant, an outward sign to all who knew and loved her that she had finally found a true home in heaven.

## **Learn more**

[\*The Life of Catherine Tekakwitha, First Iroquois Virgin\*](#) by Pierre Cholenec, S.J. (1696) is one of the first comprehensive accounts of her life, and a fascinating read; it contains many interesting details about her life that might be of interest to older kids.

[\*A Boy, An Injury, A Recovery, A Miracle?\*](#) tells the story of Jake Finkbonner, a young boy whose sudden recovery from a deadly infection was investigated as part of the process for canonizing Kateri Tekakwitha as a saint. (This story, from NPR, includes audio, and was produced before the healing was determined to be a miracle.)

The story of St. Kateri Tekakwitha