The vita of Christina of Stommeln
From The Legend Collection of Markus Biberli, ca. 1347
Transcribed and [very roughly] translated by David Tinsley

In the name of God. Amen. A good and holy work. The vita of a woman called Christina of Stommeln is set forth in what follows and was witnessed by four priests who were her confessors. One was called Master Peter and was Lector of the Order of Preachers in Cologne, the second Sir John of Lupucster, the third was Sir John of the Cloister, the fourth was Sir Adolf. The lords were all her spiritual counselors by the will of God.

The first thing we can document comes after the time of her birth. Her entrance into life was accompanied by a sign on her mother’s body. On her left side was a mark shaped like a hand raised in warning, a blue hand. After that when she was five years old our Lord appeared to her as he had been as a boy. He taught her proper religious conduct, gestures, and prayer. After that in her sixth year she saw in the chalice held by the priest’s hand as he elevated the host a child who was our Lord. And He spoke in this way to her: “See, I am here to show mercy and whoever calls me will receive mercy.” After that in her seventh year she was consumed by rapture and led by an angel into Paradise, where she was filled with joy and pleasure at everything she saw there. Then an angel was sent to her who said: “Christina! Full of grace. You are a blessing to God. Be there for others and for your bridegroom.” The very same angel revealed secretly to her the light of the heavenly kingdom. And then she was transported back down.

So she wrote a poem which reads like this:

To all women of roses and lilies
to other women
My helmsman means everything
To those he gives himself to in divine love

After that during her ninth year in the middle of the night she was brought to the presence of our Blessed Lady. There she learned two Sequences, one about the Holy Spirit and the other about Our Lady. As she sang this song in joy, our Lady Saint Mary said: “Christina, rejoice and be joyful! You will become my daughter and the beloved bride of our Lord. After these words she was brought back to her cell. It was there that our Lord appeared to her as a bridegroom who comes from his bed, praised her and took her fidelity into his heart. Then he said unto her: “As my mother prophesied, you have been given to your mother in Eternal Wisdom. And thus you will be called bride of Christ. But as a result you will suffer terribly in my name and you will work great miracles with your pain, miracles at which heaven and earth will wonder. I now bestow three gifts upon you for guidance, first the faith and humility of the martyrs until the end of time, and cleansed from any sin; then I will give you as a gift the trappings of the angels, a fortress of virtue,

1 Obscure and/or indecipherable passages are underlined in the text and should be read as interpolations. The small images in the text could not be exactly duplicated but represent a kind of sign for the name of Jesus Christ.
and as a third guidepost I will give you a comforting and certain foundation of the eternal 
kingdom. And above all the gift of being tested in this world in order to enjoy the good 
goodness that mortal eyes have never seen and ears have never heard and hearts have 
ever thought, all of this which the bridegroom has ordered for his bride.” Then the 
Virgin Christina was so filled with goodness that she did not have to eat or drink anything 
for three days and three nights. And this was not a miracle, since for the entire time she 
neither came to her senses nor did she say anything.

After this in her thirteenth year she took another virgin with her and travelled in the 
direction of Cologne, where she lived in great poverty. Her mother and her father refused 
to supply her with anything, since she had left without their permission. This was the 
reason, that they preferred that she be given to a man, but she refused to see the sense in 
that. And then she came among the Beguines. Then she began to distance herself from 
pleasure in life and came to like going to church. She liked to listen to sermons eagerly 
and then filled her days with penitential works. Every night she would pray over 200 
prayers of penitence. Her bed was a pile of rough stones and wood, and her skin was 
adorned with a hair shirt, bound with a belt festooned with sharp buttons, which she 
cinched so tightly that the buttons dug wounds in her body. Every Friday she fasted, 
eating and drinking nothing but bread and water and on other days during the week, and 
Saturdays and feast days she spend the entire time in penitent prayer. And yet on Friday 
she always spoke in the manner of the cross, for she had God’s martyrs in her heart at 
every moment. While engaged in these exercises she struggled so hard against the 
temptations of the devil that the blood burst forth out of her nose and mouth. Our Lord 
appeared to her in that moment, as he had appeared on the cross, and ever more 
often after she turned fifteen.

Not only this, but from the time she was fifteen until she turned twenty-five, she suffered 
temptation and agony at the hands of the Devil, yet she was never overcome and she 
resisted in every way she could. The first temptation he inflicted on her was to appear 
before her in the person of St. Bartholomew and to say to her: “You feel great desire to 
come into the eternal kingdom. My advice is to kill yourself so that you become a 
companion of the martyrs.” This temptation came to her so often in the next six months 
that she would have killed herself if God had not comforted her. The second temptation 
was for the Devil to appear before her in order to dispute concerning the articles of 
Christian faith, especially concerning the nature of the body of our Lord. She resisted 
this, too. And once she was beset by doubt right at the moment the priest elevated the 
Host. Then she said: “Oh Lord, if it be Your will, please remove from me all vestiges of 
unbelief, for I would rather die than continue to experience this awful doubt.” Then a 
child suddenly appeared in the priest’s hand, saying to her: “I am your husband, by 
the power of God and by the power of myself as a human as I hung on the cross.” In that 
very hour she was finally free of doubt. On the third occasion when she sat down to 

2 The precise nature of transubstantiation and the exact state of the Host was hugely 
controversial in the 12th century, when Christina actually lived. It continued to be 
disputed in the 14th century, when Christina’s vita was translated into Middle High 
German and incorporated in the legendary of Markus Biberli, one of the few 
contemporaries included among the lives of saints and martyrs that were traditionally part 
of such collections.
enjoy her food and drink, the Devil tested her by throwing hundreds of little worms into it. In order to withstand him she ate the food with the worms anyway. But her nature could not stand it and tried to leave her. Her body would then have perished if God her protector hadn’t been there. Whenever she wanted to drink, the Devil threw worms into the drink. Then a voice said to her: “If you drink the drink, you will take the Devil into your body. And she felt tremendous fear. But immediately our Lady Saint Mary brought her a drink that had such a wonderful flavor that she was free of the Enemy again.

We also are documenting two other things in that year. On the days of the martyrs she cried tears of blood and even more such tears when people could observe it. And she fell into rapture for three days and nights and all without eating and drinking. And when she came down again, she was not tested for a while. Four signs had appeared to her. The first sign was a young boy with a shining face who appeared to her, beautiful on the outside but even more beautiful with divine love and virtues on the inside. The second sign was that she appeared with her face so beautiful and so clear that we could barely look upon her because of the hidden beauty. The third sign was the best smell we had ever smelled. From the smell alone all of the hearts of everyone around were plunged into humility. The fourth sign was that she knew and experienced the mysteries: eternal joy and good grace with these words: and in the presence of witnesses there appeared on her skin on the left side a mark that took the shape of a wedding. At Christmas this mark on her skin became a child and at Easter it took the shape of a little lamb. Was that not proof of true devotion? And of love that poured from her heart?

And even more occurred as the end of her life neared. Every day in her still cell she would mourn the fate of God’s martyrs and even suffered with them. And at that moment she received the treasure that no one can praise enough. And these were the five stigmata of our Lord and as often as she heard preaching on the martyrs, the more of God’s grace she experienced, and this lasted the rest of her life. We also wish to document that she had three crosses on her body that were real. On the night before Maundy Thursday the Devil came with an iron hook and ripped a piece of flesh two spans wide from the breast of the virgin. Then five demons appeared with spears as if they wanted to run her through. Her heart stayed free of care, but the fear that her body experienced was a tremendous shock, because she thought that she was meant to die. She lifted up her heart and her soul to her husband. And her husband sensed the awful pain and sorrow of his beloved wife, and he enveloped the heart of her body with balsamic joy to the most amazing level. The piece of her body that had been ripped from her body he restored to her in miraculous fashion. And the place that the demons had hollowed out in her body was restored and reformed along with beautiful crosses of love. Two crosses were etched and formed into her breast. The third cross was in a place on her left side so that when the virgin was enraptured, that’s how she would receive our Lord. And the body would open itself up in love. The crosses are so created that when the soul of her body became spiritually transformed to her and within her, the crosses opened up just like a window. And when that happens, then the cross remains open until the end of the third day. At other times the piece with the three crosses stays closed. The two crosses on her breast signify true divine love. But around the crosses of love were inscribed in beautiful letters Jesus and Christ, but around the third cross on her side were inscribed marvelously, “my love, since you are often in my will and are dying for the sake of my love, I hereby tell you that you are meant to live with me for eternity.”
Then even more things happened. On the evening of our lady’s annunciation there came the Devil and ripped two pieces of flesh from her body. And the wound refused to heal for six months. And when it was restored to her, it was transparent and pure. After that on the day before Maundy Thursday the Devil came and brought with him a chain of fire. And his demons bound the maid and led her into a distant forest that was sixteen miles wide and thirty miles long. Seven murderers lived in the forest. When they heard them arrive and saw what the demons were doing, they were almost frightened to death. And they ran up to the place where the maid was chained, and saw how the demons hung her on a tall tree. And she was violated and tortured by them and nailed to the tree. And the demons ridiculed her and said, “Where is your husband now?” Then the seven murderers appeared and the demons fled. And the murderers spoke in wonder to her. They asked her whether she was human. And how she wished to live. And she answered: “I am a person who believes in Christ. I want to live so that all things in me are strengthened by Christ.” The murderers nodded and said: “We have been murderers for many years.” She said: “The lands have suffered terribly. but repent of your sins and do not despair and pray to our Lord for mercy. And so he will have mercy upon you, too, for this. From these words they came to see how they were brothers in penitence. The one was called Simon, the other Reinbold. They convinced the others to repent. The asked the maid among other things, “Where are you from?” She answered them with these words: “From a village called Stommeln near Cologne.” They responded, “But it is more than three hundred miles from here to Cologne.” And then the grace that never deceives anyone allowed her to reach them. And the example of this maid finally made them feel such contrition that they threw themselves down on the ground in penitent prayer. And the worst ruffian of all spoke with a loud voice: “Lord, have mercy on us for the sake of your love as you have had mercy on your wife Christina. For we have murdered fifteen priests and fifty pastors, preachers and lectors, and we have brought one hundred women, it mattered not whether they were mothers or daughters, in the sorest need, and we have murdered many other people, pilgrims and merchants beyond count. We did not spare anyone. We have never done good. We have never obeyed a single law.” So they proclaimed and confessed so sincerely, and the maid Christina supported them and said that they were truly penitent for their sins and that she was willing to suffer agony on their behalf and do penance for their deeds. And with this the virgin became so beautiful in their eyes that they could no longer look upon her. And the holy angels came and transported her back to her cell.

After this the murderers felt even greater penance through her advice and teaching. And they felt, as she had demonstrated, that they should go to show themselves to the priests and confessors. And on the way to confession they were captured and brought before the court. And as they were led to the judge they asked for confession. The judge spoke quickly that this should be done. And finally they were convicted and condemned to be impaled alive on thick posts, and in this fashion, like the martyrs, they met their just end. And after this on the very next night, demons returned and took the maid Christina and brought her to the place where the seven murderers were rotting and pulled the post out of the body of each one and impaled the virgin on them. And they thought that they had finally overcome her. But the holy angels took her and brought her back to her cell with great glory. The names of the seven murderers were Reinbold, Volmar, Borelenk,
Constantine, Hermann, and Eckbert, and they were condemned to spend many a year in Purgatory, if only by means of the prayers and penitence of the virgin who was given such a gift of suffering.

We also wish to document here how much she could see into the human heart. She also knew which souls were in heaven and which were in Purgatory. All of these experiences and miracles she saw in the mirror of the Trinity. And whoever knows the truth knows also that this is true.

The most recent agony that she had to suffer came when the Enemy appeared and dismembered her body with a knife just as you filet a fish that you wish to broil over a fire. And she had to suffer horribly in her cell with bleeding wounds that refused to heal for six months or more. She had to be wrapped constantly in cloths rubbed with a healing ointment, and the blood kept flowing through the cloths and making everything around her bloody. But finally our Lord came and healed her completely, as if she had never felt the pain in the first place.

And after that she departed from this exile into the eternal land of the Father where she celebrated endlessly her wedding with her husband in the midst of the heavenly host.

3 Only six names appear here in the manuscript. The murderer Simon, named above, is omitted.