

HILDA OF WHITBY

THE LESSON: A WISE AND DISCERNING MIND

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.”

(1 Corinthians 12:4-6)

Throughout the centuries God has given to the Church men and women of remarkable and diverse gifts. A line from one of the collects in the Prayer Book expresses praise to God for these “gifts of grace” and asks that the Church “may never be destitute of the same”. This year’s lessons are introducing us to a wide range of believers who lived in different places and had very different gifts, but who shared a common faith in the Giver of those gifts. This unit will look at “graciously gifted” saints of the Middle Ages.

“Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest.”

(John 4:35)

Hilda was born into a royal family in seventh century England. It was a turbulent time with many warring kingdoms in the land. Christianity was just beginning to take root again following the collapse of the Roman Empire. This was partly due to the work Patrick had done in nearby Ireland, as well as the result of Pope Gregory the Great sending evangelists and assigning an Archbishop to Canterbury. It was in this setting that Hilda’s story unfolded.

Hilda was baptized with her family at the age of 13, but it was not until she was 33 that she became a nun. She had only been in her community a year when she was asked to become the abbess. Some years later Hilda was chosen to found a new monastic community at Whitby. This was to be a “double community” with both men and women, who would live separately but worship together.

“It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment.”

(Philippians 1:9)

Hilda came to be known for her great wisdom, her energetic spirit and her excellence in overseeing the community at Whitby. During her years as abbess she was sought out by kings for her advice, and when it became necessary to hold a meeting between the Irish Christians and the Roman Christians, Whitby was chosen as the site for the synod.

Not only was Hilda gifted in these ways, but she was also a woman who could see gifts in others and did what was within her power to cultivate them. When it came to Hilda’s attention that a simple herdsman (Caedmon) who lived near her abbey had been given a musical gift, she encouraged him to join the community and put his gift to greater use. In the days that followed, Caedmon put to music much of the story of scripture. Caedmon’s music was special because it was written in the common language (instead of Latin), so it could be understood by all the people. Sadly, most of what he wrote has since been lost, but we can be sure that it was a great blessing to the community at Whitby and beyond.

Hilda was very sick for several years before she died, but she continued to work hard for the wellbeing of the community under her care. She lived to the age of 66, and a record left by The Venerable Bede says of her, “All who knew her called her mother because of her outstanding devotion and grace”.

(SOURCE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: THE VENERABLE BEDE, “THE ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH PEOPLE”, TRANS. A.M. SELLAR | DAVID FARMER, “OXFORD DICTIONARY OF SAINTS” | JUSTO GONZÁLEZ, “THE STORY OF CHRISTIANITY, VOLUME 1” | GERARD SAMPSON, “LAYMAN’S BOOK OF SAINTS” | WIKIPEDIA.ORG, “HILDA OF WHITBY”.)

HILDA OF WHITBY

AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Each morning and evening, follow your own rule of prayer.

(IF YOU DON'T HAVE ONE, TRY SAYING THE MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS FROM THE "FORMS OF PRAYER TO BE USED IN FAMILIES", WHICH BEGINS ON PAGE 728 OF THE BCP. IF YOU DON'T HAVE A COPY, YOU CAN LOOK IT UP HERE: [HTTP://PRAYERBOOK.CA/RESOURCES/BCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER.](http://prayerbook.ca/resources/bcponline/family-prayer))

Review today's lesson. Choose a line of scripture or a phrase from the story of Hilda that you find edifying, inspiring or instructive:

Throughout this week, spend some time prayerfully reflecting on the phrase you've chosen.

Decide on one concrete action you can take this week based on your reflections, *and* share your reflections and your plan of action with a friend.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through the following prayer.

O God, who by thy Holy Spirit hast given unto one man a word of wisdom, and to another a word of knowledge, and to another the gift of tongues: We praise thy Name for the gifts of grace manifested in thy servant Hilda, and we pray that thy Church may never be destitute of the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (SUPPLEMENTARY COLLECT OF A DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH, POET, OR SCHOLAR, P. 317)