

Life of St. Hilda/Hild



St. Hilda/Hild (this being her Anglo-Saxon name) was born in 614 AD.

Her father was Hereric nephew of Edwin of Diera (the Kingdoms of Diera and Bernicia were to become Northumbria later on), her mother Breguswith who had a vision concerning her daughter. Hereric who was in exile with his family in this ancient British kingdom of Sherburn in Elmet, under the protection of the king, unfortunately he was later poisoned.

It is generally thought Hild and her family were brought up in King Edwin's court, who was baptised with his court at Easter on the 12th April 627 by the monk-bishop Paulinus, who had come up with Athelburg the future Queen. (She was the daughter of King Ethelbert and Queen Bertha of Kent). Queen Athelburg and her court returned to Kent after the slaying of Edwin at the Battle of Hatfield.

Nothing is heard of Hild until 647 when she called by St. Aidan 'Bishop of Lindisfarne' to join him. She was about to journey with her sister who was a widowed Queen of East Anglia to Chelles Abbey in Gaul, but her whole life was changed as she studied under St Aidan, learning the traditions and monastic system of the Celtic/Coptic church, becoming second Abbess of Hartlepool Abbey.

In 657 Hild became the founding Abbess of the new Celtic/Coptic monastery at Whitby (viking name) Streonshalh (Anglo-saxon name). Here its members lived in small houses, with two/three people. The monastery was a double one with both men and women living separately, but worshipping together in the monastery church.

King Oswy of Bernicia also Diera 642-670, was a Celtic/Coptic Christian, becoming this on his exile with his brother Oswald in the North possibly Iona, whereas his wife Eanflaed, daughter of Edwin was a Christian of the Roman persuasion 'Western rite', because of the differences, like the date of Easter, thus causing problems in his court, so he determined to resolve this with a Synod which would be held at Whitby Abbey.

King Oswy presided over the Synod. Colman, Bishop of Northumbria presided over the Celtic/Coptic delegation, whilst Wilfred, Abbot of Ripon, a former Celtic Christian who was now of the Roman persuasion after a visit to Rome, presided over the Roman delegation.

After much debate with Wilfred becoming very arrogant towards his Celtic brothers, King Oswy reluctantly held sway with Rome and sadly the Celtic delegation returned to Iona and with this the slow death of the Celtic church.

Caedman was a laybrother working as a herdsman at the Abbey, who did not like 'taking up the harp' doing a party piece after a meal, so he would slip off, but one night whilst sleeping, he dreamed of someone asking him to sing 'The beginning of created things', on waking he remembered his dream and also added to this. Abbess Hild heard of this and after talking and asking for a commission as a test, was satisfied this as a gift from God. Caedman then took monastic vows, becoming a religious poet.

Abbess Hild was a princess in her own right, and with this status she was a powerful woman, with great energy, being held in deep respect by kings and princes, who sought out her wisdom and guidance. she was also a skilled teacher and administrator.

At Hackness being on the southern edge of the moors near Scarborough, Hild had a small monastery built, a year before her passing who during the last six years suffered with a 'fever' after taking communion at Whitby Abbey passed on, this was on 17th November 680, at this time a nun called Brega who was at Hackness, said she witnessed Hild's soul being accompanied with Angels on her way to Heaven.

At Hackness there now stands a Church of St Peter's dating back to the Anglo-saxon times, with certain features dating to this time, also inside the church is the 'Hackness Cross' of the 7th Century, with latin inscriptions referring to Abbess Oeddilburga, possibly Ethelburga, great niece of Hild who became Saint Hilda/Hild sometime after.

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