

Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> November 2025; St Hilda patronal Benefice Holy Communion service Ampleforth

Today we pay tribute to Hild, St Hilda, even though strictly speaking her day is next Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup>, but this is the nearest Sunday. When I researched my material for my talk on the northern saints last month I was particularly struck again by the influence of St Hilda, not just during her time, but also, possibly more significantly since right up to today, Hilda remains to be a constant source of inspiration and mission. How so?

Firstly, her encouragement and nurturing of learning and faith. Hilda of Whitby is best known as the founder and abbess of the monastery at Whitby. She was born in 613, a Northumbrian princess who converted to [Christianity](#) and at the age of 33 became an adherent of Irish or [Celtic](#) Christianity, tutored by Aidan of the monastery of Lindisfarne. She was appointed by Aidan as abbess at Hartlepool Abbey before founding the monastery at Whitby. She was highly educated, and her wisdom was so legendary that her counsel was sought by nobility and commoners alike. She had an eye for gifted people none more so than the shepherd Caedmon. Hilda encouraged him to share the famous hymn which came to him in a vision, Caedmon's Hymn, the oldest poem in Old English. Hilda is honoured as patron saint of poetry in addition to her honour as patron saint of [culture](#), literacy, and learning. As well as the many churches named St Hilda (including Ampleforth) a community of [Anglican](#) sisters, the [Order of the Holy Paraclete](#) was founded in 1915 at St Hilda's Priory, on the western edge of Whitby. More recently, the Community of St Aidan and St Hilda has been founded on [Lindisfarne](#), keeping her legacy and

teaching very much alive and relevant today. Places of learning where she is patron are global; on the upper west side of Manhattan in New York City is St. Hilda's and St. Hugh's School, an independent Episcopal day school that opened its doors in 1950. The school is coeducational and includes toddlers through grade eight. St. Hilda's College at the University of Melbourne Australia was founded in 1964 as the college for women associated with the then exclusively male colleges Ormond (Presbyterian) and Queens (Methodist), becoming co-educational in 1973. St. Hilda's College, University of Toronto is the women's college of University of Trinity College. Although the schools have long been merged, only recently has the formerly women-only residence been made co-educational. Saint Hilda is honoured as co-patron (with The Virgin Mary) of the Lady Chapel where daily services are held by Trinity's Faculty of Divinity. St. Hilda is the patron saint of the National Cathedral School for Girls in Washington, D.C. St. Hilda also is famous in Singapore, being honoured in St. Hilda's Primary and Secondary schools. St. Hilda's Diocesan High School is an Anglican boarding school for girls in Brown's Town, St. Ann, Jamaica. The grade levels go up to Fifth Form.

The training I undertook then known as the Yorkshire Ministry Course has now become St Hild. Her names and symbols are on the emblems and shields of many places of learning and culture across the world, affirming the words of St Bede who said of her, "All who knew her, called her mother, because of her outstanding devotion and grace." Hilda was more than an abbess; she was a teacher, a guide, and a beacon of wisdom. Her commitment to education and unity didn't just shape her monastery—it left a mark on world culture today.

Then we have given to us Hilda's spiritual leadership. Whitby Abbey became a model for monastic communities, drawing scholars and theologians, and fostering a tradition of learning and [spiritual growth](#) that continues to inspire today. Her role in overseeing the Synod of Whitby steered the church in England to an international future. Five men from her monastery later became bishops. Two, John of Beverley, Bishop of Hexham and Wilfrid, Bishop of York, were canonized for their service to the Christian church.

Hilda's image in icons reflects her role as a spiritual leader, educator and protector of the faith, so much so she is venerated in all three of the major Christian traditions; Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Eastern Orthodox.

So today we give thanks pay tribute to Saint Hilda whose life was one of service, wisdom, and spiritual leadership. As a woman of deep faith and profound influence, she helped shape Christianity in England and left behind a legacy that continues to inspire. For artists and iconographers, her image offers a rich tapestry of symbolism and meaning. Whether holding a crozier, a book, or standing among the stones of Whitby, Saint Hilda's icon is a beautiful testament to her enduring presence in Christian tradition.

I will end with a prayer to St Hilda from the Greek Orthodox, "The image of God, was faithfully preserved in you, O Mother. For you took up the Cross and followed Christ. By your actions you taught us to look beyond the flesh for it passes, rather to be concerned about the soul which is immortal. Wherefore, O Holy Hilda, your soul rejoices with the angels."

Thanks be to God. Amen.

