



**St Hilda of Whitby
Schools and Churches Resource Pack**

Introduction

From 27th-31st July 2016 we had the fantastic opportunity to enter into the story of an extraordinary woman, walking in the footsteps of St Hilda of Whitby, who played a key role in our church history. With the option to walk the 40 mile pilgrimage over five days, or just join in for a few miles, 30 adults and 23 young people took part on this journey with God and each other. Each day was framed by prayer and worship, with a simple service at the beginning and a 'messy pilgrimage' and 'all-age' style service reflecting on the themes from St. Hilda's life at the end. The pilgrims stopped for lunch, which was made by the Whitby Mission to Seafarers and brought to



them by the support team - Andy & Jo Bowden, Cleveland's Children & Youth Advisers. Meeting in church and village halls at the end of each section, volunteers from every Deanery in Cleveland Archdeaconry helped provide a wonderful welcome, cakes and a meal for the pilgrims as well as the craft activities and worship for 'messy pilgrimage' with numbers swelled by the local community. The pilgrims also reflected on their day by creating felt footprints to adorn five beautiful banners, designed and made by Vivienne Chapman. The combined 726 miles walked by all the pilgrims were safe and never too challenging for anyone. The Pilgrimage ended with a final act of Worship and lunch together at Whitby Abbey, led by the Bishop of Whitby, where all five banners were unveiled.



See more about the pilgrimage on our Facebook page

<https://www.facebook.com/StHildasWayPilgrimage/>

This resource for schools and churches builds on the story of St Hilda and the themes explored as part of the pilgrimage.

The Story of St Hilda

In this section we have provided the story of St Hilda broken down in to 5 'chapters' that you can use to support collective worship or a curriculum project

The Story of Hild, Day 1 - Baptism and Belonging

Long, long ago...about 1400years ago, in a place not so very far away from here, there was a young girl who lived with her mother in an Anglo-Saxon royal family. She was a Yorkshire lass born and bred in a place called Deira where York and the eastern side of Yorkshire are now. Her name was Hild and she was the grand-niece of King Edwin, ruler of Deira who, after fighting many battles with other tribal leaders, had now become High King of Northumbria as well. King Edwin had married a new wife, Ethelburga, who came from Kent and was a Christian. When she made the long journey to the north to be Queen of Northumbria, she brought with her a priest, called Paulinus, who had come all the way from Rome. Ethelburga and Paulinus wanted to see Christianity brought to these people of the north and convinced Edwin to take the lead by having the royal family baptised.

Christianity was a new religion, a new way of living. Up until now, the people of Deira and Northumbria had worshipped the pagan gods with names like Woden, Thor and Freya(from where we get the names of three days of our week – Wednesday, Thursday and Friday !). They had many superstitions and took their fears to these gods. To turn to just one God and his Son Jesus who died on a cross then came back to life, a story brought to them from far away, would seem very strange to begin with. Having said that, there were travelling Celtic priests who also brought the Christian story mingled with more local ways of understanding things. They were sure to have visited the royal family's community too at times telling their stories.

Daily life, even for the royal family was hard work and Hild would have many duties, even at 13years old. She would be learning how to use wool to make clothes, food and cooking skills, even using more than one language to talk to the different types of people who came and went in the community. She would work with different kinds of people from servants to leaders. All the time, Hild would watch, listen, learn.

So – what would Hild be thinking as the whole royal household came to the priest Paulinus in turn and were dipped three times into water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit? From the High King to the lowliest servant. What would be going through her mind as she came out from the water and watched the burning of the old pagan temple as a sign that they were leaving the old behind and making a fresh beginning with this new God who made promises to take care of them and to provide a new way of living.

Hild may not have really understood what was happening but she would know that this was a new beginning and that she was becoming a member of this new God's family. Little did she know that she was at the beginning of a journey that would take her into a life she could never have imagined as a famous and wise leader, serving God and serving many others...

The Story of Hild, Day 2 - Calling and Decisions

It is nearly twenty years after Hild was baptised with the royal family when she was 13, before we meet with her again and life during that time has been very, very hard. King Edwin has been killed in battle, her mother, Breguswith, has probably died, her sister, Hereswith, had long since moved to East Anglia, many miles away, to marry the king of that region. We don't know very much about what she did in those years. She may have got married...or maybe not. She may have had to escape from the fighting in Northumbria to live with her sister until it was safe to return.

What we do know, as kings came and went in Northumbria after Edwin, is that one of them was King Oswald. Oswald had become a Christian whilst he too had been in hiding before he became king. He had met monks who came from a monastery on the island of Iona who were like the Celtic priests who moved around many northern tribes preaching and serving people. Once he was in charge, Oswald saw that many of the people he ruled had fallen back into their old pagan ways. So he sent a messenger to Iona to ask the monks to send someone to help him bring his kingdom back to Christianity. The monks sent a man called Aidan. Aidan brought with him a very different way of being Christian to the one Paulinus had brought to Northumbria many years before. It was much more simple, it included a love of and ordinary people could live it more easily from day to day.

During this time, now a grown woman, Hild may have met Aidan and his way of living as a member of God's family in ordinary daily life. Oswald brought a short time of peace which would mean she could come home to Yorkshire. She would see how he set up monasteries which were not the big impressive buildings we think of but were known as 'villages of God' led by not only men but also women who were skilled people of faith.

When Oswald was also killed in battle by invaders, Hild returned once more to her sister Hereswith in East Anglia. Then Hereswith's husband, the king of East Anglia, also died and it was time for the two women to make a big decision – what should they do now? Widows in royal families often went to live in monasteries and this is what Hild and Hereswith chose to do. They were all ready to go to one in Frankia (called France today) when Aidan heard of their plans. He had met Hild and knew she had many of the skills he wanted for the leaders of his new 'villages of God' in the north. So – he sent a message to challenge her : “Don't go to Frankia”, he said, “Your country needs you to help us set up monasteries here that can be places of learning and encouraging English men and women.” What should Hild do? Stay with her sister and start a life of quiet prayer in Frankia or...go back to Northumbria and a new challenge of leading others in a community of prayer, of learning and of serving others. What was God calling her to do? How would she decide? Who had God made her to be, what gifts had God given her and how should she use those gifts in the world she lived in?

The Story of Hild, Day 3 - Learning and Awakening your Song

Hild answered the challenge that Aidan set her and decided to use her gifts to lead the 'village of God' at Hartlepool. She discovered that the skills she had learned as a girl in the royal family of High King Edwin of Northumbria all those years ago and her experience of working with people from all walks of life from servants to nobles to kings and queens meant she was able to put those gifts to good use.

She went on to lead other monasteries too and, in those days, they had both men and women in them. They really were like villages with monks and nuns looking after not only religious life but also farming, clothing, teaching amongst other things. The monastery would have lots of other people working there, looking after the fields, the animals, healing, cooking and looking after the refectory where everyone came to eat as well as making things needed for day to day living. There would also be a library and a place called a 'scriptorium' where people would learn to write and create beautiful books with stories from the Bible in them. Hild would be in charge of all of this, making sure it all ran as smoothly as possible and taking care of each and everyone of the people in the community.

By the time Hild became the leader of the community at Whitby (and did you know that the name of Whitby at the time meant 'the Bay of Light'?) she was known far and wide for her wisdom and was known as 'Mother Hild'. One of the things she was really good at was seeing when other people had special gifts and skills. She would help and encourage them to find out what God was doing in their lives. One of the people she is most famous for encouraging was a lowly worker who looked after the animals at the monastery. He couldn't read, he had never had any learning, he was very shy and his name was Caedmon.

One night Caedmon had a dream in which he heard a beautiful song of praise to God. The next morning he told the man he worked for who took him straightaway to 'Mother Hild'. Hild listened to Caedmon as he sang the song to her from his dream. She could have just told him "that was very nice" and sent him back to the animals but instead, she asked him to go and see if he could create any more songs to God. Caedmon did exactly that and eventually he gave up being a cowherd altogether and Hild asked him to use his creative gift to lead others in the community in worship. We still know of Caedmon today and at least one school in the area is named after him.

He wasn't the only one that Hild encouraged and taught to use their gifts. In her time at Whitby, five men from the monastery went on to become bishops in other parts of the country – and they're just the ones we know about.

'Mother Hild' knew how to help other people find the best in themselves and how they could best serve God. She encouraged Caedmon to allow the song inside of him to be heard and he was able to bring blessings to many others as a result.

I wonder what songs we have inside of us ...?



The Story of Hild, Day 4 - Wise leadership

In Hild's day it was normal for there to be women leaders as well as men. By the time she was Abbess of Whitby, Hild had created the 'village of God' true to the vision of Aidan of Iona when he first challenged her to lead one of the communities he wanted to see started in the north of England. Her job as the Abbess was to look after the day to day running of the whole community of God's people in the abbey's community as well as teaching them about God, prayer and worship. She was known for working very hard, being good at teaching others, and helping them to grow into people who could love God and love one another. Those who worked with her always felt encouraged, whoever they were. But she was also famous for miles around for something else...

It was because she was so trusted and so able to pay attention to everyone she met, listening to them carefully even if they did not always agree, that other leaders, even kings, would come to her for advice. Some kings even chose to be buried on land belonging to the Abbey seeing it as a very special and holy place. One king in particular, King Oswy, came to her with a bit of a problem...

King Oswy, like most kings, had married the daughter of another king from far away. By this time, Christianity was spreading all across Britain. In the south it was mainly spread by priests who had come from Rome or who had been taught by them, like Paulinus who originally came from Kent with Queen Ethelburga when she married High King Edwin when Hild was just a girl. In the north, Christianity was brought mainly by Celtic priests who came particularly from Ireland and Scotland. Each group had different ways of doing things when it came to **how** they worshipped together and also **when** they had special celebrations. In her lifetime Hild had experienced both ways although she usually followed the Celtic way.

King Oswy, a northerner, followed Celtic ways, his wife, from the south, followed the Roman way. They managed to just about get along with their different ways until it came to Easter. Easter, as it still is today, was a big deal in the Christian year. Even back then, they used to have the six weeks of Lent before the feasting and celebrations of Easter. The trouble was, the Roman-style Christians and the Celtic-style Christians were having Lent and Easter at different times (it is all to do with the moon!) so whilst the queen and her court were feasting and celebrating, the rest of the court were still fasting, that is NOT eating, and wearing their special Lent clothes. Not the best arrangement for a King to be dealing with. And so, Oswy came to just the person he thought could help him – Hild. They both talked for a long time and in the end, a special meeting, called a Synod, was held at Whitby at the request of the king to settle once and for all which pattern of worship would be followed from then on – Roman or Celtic. Hild and the community of Whitby Abbey hosted this meeting and leaders came from all around, religious and political. There were some strong characters and some strong arguments around the table until eventually a vote was taken and those who argued for Roman ways were the winners. We are not sure which side Hild favoured or agreed with most but we do know what she wanted most was to serve God and the community God had called her to. If that meant following what had been decided in order to live in love and peace with all, then that is what she would do. God had called her to be a leader, everyone around her could see that. Being a leader can be very rewarding but also very hard...

Are there times when we can give the things that have happened to us in our lives to God and ask for them to be turned into wisdom, courage and strength, especially when helping others...?

The Story of Hild, day 5 - Sharing our Story

Hild, or 'Mother Hild' as she was known by now, led the community at Whitby Abbey for a long time. She earned the praise and respect of all around her and of others far and wide for her wisdom and skill. The 'village of God' at Whitby was a place of learning, and everybody who lived or came there was well looked after and blessed. As Hild grew older, she was always busy, always interested in the people she worked with from day to day and helping them to be the best that they could be. She treated everyone the same whether prince or peasant, bishop or novice. She was an extraordinary leader who had lots of energy, ability and managed people with love and kindness. She had a big heart but she wasn't a fool ! However, even amazing people like Hild are, in the end, only human. In the last few years of her life she struggled with an illness that would go away and then keep coming back again. So she wanted to retire to the new, smaller house she had created at Hackness, handing over the leadership of Whitby to Enfled who had once been a princess, the daughter of King Oswy who was now dead. But Hild never made it to Hackness,, she died, in the end, at Whitby.

As she lay dying, looked after by her community, these were her last words :

"Preserve the peace of the Gospel among yourselves and also with ALL others."

So many things Hild had learned herself during her lifetime had come through very difficult experiences in life – she never had it easy. Kings and wars had come and gone, she often had to hide or escape from them, family killed or lost, starting new communities from scratch, religious leaders arguing over church matters. Yet her very last words tell you what her whole life was about :

"Preserve the peace of the Gospel among yourselves and also with ALL others."

Hild was known for being a great, wise leader and teacher of both women and of men. She helped each one she met to live well and to serve God as fully as they could, whoever they were. And through it all, she called on God for wisdom, courage and strength to continually live out the good news, the 'godspel' of peace and share it with all others.

"Preserve the peace of the Gospel among yourselves and also with ALL others

I wonder what words would tell others what my life was about...and yours...?

The Ammonite Symbol

Receive or take out ammonite followed by everyone saying these words :

**ALL : The hand of God keeping me,
The love of Christ in my veins.
The strong Spirit bathing me,
The Three shielding and aiding me.**
(Carmina Gadelica – ancient Celtic prayer)



Here are some words that it is possible St.Hild herself is thought to have spoken :

Trade with the gifts God has given you,
Bend your minds to holy learning,
That you may escape the fretting moth
Of littleness of mind that would wear out your souls.
Brace your wills to action
That they may be the spoils of weak desires.
Train your hearts and lips to song
Which gives courage to the soul,
Being buffeted by trials, learn to laugh,
Being reproved, give thanks,
Having failed, determine to succeed.
(from The Order of the Holy Paraclete, Sneaton 2011)

(Because it's a bit like poetry we don't always understand all the words...but maybe you can still work out what she seems to be telling us now...)

A Collection of Prayers and Responses

In this section are prayers and responses used as part of the St Hilda's Pilgrimage for children and young people that you could use for collective worship and for display.

*May the Son of God
be at the outset of our journey.
May the Son of God be sure to aid us;
May the Son of God make clear our way,
May the Son of God be at the end of our seeking
(Carmina Gadelica- ancient Celtic Prayer)*

Leader : God of Hild, our God
All : May we walk your path, as she did
Leader : The Lord be with you
All : And also with you

God our beginning
God our goal
God our journey
God in our soul
God our pathway
God our light
God our guidance
God our might
God our yearning
God our friend
God our hope
God at the end.
(David Adam)

Caedmon's Hymn(from his dream) :
(Translation from Ray Simpson)

Now we must honour the guardian of
heaven,
the might of the architect and his
purpose;
the work of the father of glory,
as he, the eternal lord, established the
beginning of wonders;
He, the holy creator, first made
heaven
as a roof for mortal people.
Then the guardian of humankind,
the eternal lord, afterwards appointed
the middle earth,
the lands for humans, the lord
almighty.

From the community of Aidan and
Hilda in the USA :

Hild of Whitby,
Firm leader of both men and women
Renowned for your counsel and
insight,
Releasing others in their giftedness;
Hild, woman of courage and faith,
Pray with us.