

## WORKSHEET 5

### The life of the Abbess Hilda of Whitby

In the year AD 680, Hilda of Whitby died at the age of 66, after serving as Abbess of Whitby Abbey for many years. She had been born into a noble family, but after becoming a Christian, Hilda decided to become a nun at the age of 33. At first, she planned to leave England and live with her sister at a monastery in France. However, Bishop Aidan had other ideas and found her another house to stay in on the banks of the river Wear, where she lived with some friends as a nun for one year.

After this, she was made Abbess of Hereteu, where there were some serious problems with the monks living there. Hilda organised it so that everyone had to pray, work and rest according to a clear timetable. This made a big difference. Bishop Aidan visited her often to see how things were going, and to offer advice, because he respected her wisdom and saw her serious wish to serve God.



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After that, she took on the monastery at Whitby. Just like before, she gave the monks and nuns a strict timetable. She also taught them about being fair to everyone, about taking their promises to God seriously (especially the promise about not having any girlfriends!) and about living a peaceful life caring for other people. Under her rule, no person there was rich or poor, because they had no personal property, but shared things like the first Christians.

Hilda's wisdom became so famous that kings and princes came to ask and receive her advice when they had a serious problem that needed sorting out. She told everyone who listened to spend more time reading the Bible, and to make life as fair as possible for everybody.

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That way, she thought, some of these important people might be good enough, one day, to serve God in a monastery.

She certainly had an effect. Five of the men she taught and trained were eventually made bishops, because of their learning and love of God. (One of them was Wilfred, who made a journey to visit Rome. This experience made him a powerful preacher and teacher when he came back.) Everyone who knew Hilda called her 'Mother', because her own lifestyle helped so many to live better lives.

Many years before, Hilda's own mother had a dream in which she was frantically looking everywhere for her husband. Suddenly, she found a highly precious jewel shining under her clothes. In the dream, she took it out to look at it closely - and the light spread out across the whole land of Britain. Hilda was that jewel. Her life was a bright example to all who wanted to live well.

After ruling the monastery at Whitby for many years, Hilda had a long sickness lasting six years. But she remained cheerful, and continued teaching and encouraging others, telling them all to serve God as much as possible while they had good health, and to be thankful to God anyway. On her very last day, she was teaching some monks, urging them to make peace with each other, when she finally died peacefully. She had joyfully passed from death to life.

That same night, a nun called Bega in a monastery 13 miles away dreamed she heard the sound of a bell, and woke up. Opening her eyes, as she thought, she saw the top of the house open and a strong light pouring in from above. Looking closer, she saw the soul of Hilda in that same light being carried and led up to heaven by angels.