

**Saint Hilda of Whitby**  
**(Hilda of Hartlepool)**  
born 614, West Saxony, England  
died 17 November 680, Whitby, Northumbria, England

When Edwin, king of Northumbria, was baptised a Christian on Easter, 627, he was joined by his exalted family, including his thirteen-year-old niece Hilda, who grew up to be one of the most important Englishwomen of all time.

At thirty-three Hilda became abbess of the monastery at Hartlepool, where kings and princes consulted her. She had been at Hartlepool nine years when King Oswy entrusted his infant daughter, Elflada (18 February), to her care. At the same time, he gave Hilda a grant of land, where she built the monastery later known as Whitby. It was a double monastery, housing both monks and nuns, with the nuns superior to the monks, and all ruled by the abbess Hilda. Whitby became the first great seat of learning in the north of England, and Hilda trained many scholars and five future bishops. The most famous of her monks was Caedmon, who is considered the father of English poetry.

At that time, all the religious houses in the north of England, including Whitby, followed the Celtic traditions, while houses in the south followed the Roman system. This led to bitter debates among rival factions, and in 664 a historic synod convened at Whitby to discuss the division. Hilda had a great influence on its conclusion when all sides agreed to acknowledge the supremacy of Rome.

Hilda is patron saint of education and is venerated on 17 November.

**The Genius of Hilda of Whitby:**

Although Hilda had favoured the Celtic Rule, unity and peace were more important to her than ethnic identity and tradition. Her influence was a decisive factor in uniting the English Church.

**Reflection:**

*"Happy the man who meditates on wisdom,  
and reflects on knowledge...  
He will lean on her and not fall,  
he will trust in her and not be put to shame.*

Sirach 14.20, 15.4

Gallick, Sarah: The Big Book of Women Saints, p. 334