

Suggested Readings: *1 Corinthians 1: 18 – 25; Psalm 66 (67); Luke 5: 1 – 11.*

Wilfrid was born in Northumbria in AD 634: aged fourteen he joined the community founded by the abbot / bishop Aidan on Lindisfarne. After four years he travelled to Rome, spending time in Lyons on the way and when returning. During this time he gained a higher view of a diocesan bishop's office than he had previously experienced. This was to influence the rest of his ministry.

On his return he was made Abbot of Ripon where he introduced Roman practices – including the dating of Easter – and where a crypt built for him survives. The divisions between those who observed Celtic, and those who observed Roman, customs led in 663 to the Synod of Whitby, at which Wilfrid put the Roman case so strongly that the king decided to accept it, commenting, as Bede tells us, that he would not wish to oppose Saint Peter, the gatekeeper of heaven.

In 664 Wilfrid was appointed by the king as bishop for the Northumbrians, and as the see of Canterbury was vacant he went to France for consecration. There followed many years of dispute, which led to exile and appeals to the pope against the king and the archbishop of Canterbury.

On Wilfrid's journey towards Rome in 678, his ship was blown off course, and he landed in Friesland where he spent a year preaching. This was the beginning of the English mission, which would later send Willibrord (7th November), Boniface (5th June) and many others to evangelise the pagans of north and central Europe.

On his return from Rome in 680 Wilfrid was first imprisoned for nine months, and then again expelled from Northumbria by the king. During this exile he spent five years (681 – 686) preaching among the South Saxons, where he established a monastery on the Selsey Peninsular, which would later become an episcopal see, and on the Isle of Wight.

In 686 he returned to the North and regained the see of York, but a further dispute with the king led in 692 to a third exile, this time largely in Mercia, where he founded several monasteries.

In 700 he appealed to Rome against his expulsion from York, and, in a compromise settlement, was restored to his abbeys of Ripon and Hexham, and for the remainder of his life was bishop of Hexham. He died in 709 at his monastery of Oundle. He was buried in the church at Ripon, but, when that was destroyed in 948, his relics were removed to Canterbury Cathedral.