**WHEN THE SAINTS …**

1ST MARCH DAVID

2ND MARCH CHAD

DAVID [6TH century – suggested 522-89] PATRON SAINT of WALES – We know practically nothing about David: his hagiography is a classic waffle that does nothing to dispel the Welsh national stereotype. It was probably written around 1090, and his immemorial cult was authenticated by Pope Callixtus II in 1120. He appears in the catalogue of the saints of Ireland, and the martyrology of Tallaght, which reports his death as being on 1st March.

According to tradition, then, he was born in Pembrokeshire, studied under St Paulinus of Wales, and possibly founded, and became abbot, of a monastery at Mynyw [Latin Menevia]. It seems likely that he also set up some sort of foundation for learning in wales of which, however, we have no evidence either. The very fact that people remembered David and his good works, and that his memorial came down the generations before there was written testimony probably carries more moral weight than whatever the English thought St George had achieved for us. Saints such as Anskar of Scandinavia or Alban, for that matter, left no achievements to speak of, but it is not the achievements of the saint that are under consideration here.

There were 50 churches in South Wales dedicated to David before the reformation, and his shrine became an important pilgrimage site, of which it was said that two visits earned as much merit as one pilgrimage to Rome!

Of course the life and achievements of a patron saint get caught up in all kinds of other traditions and sentiments, but so do the lives of most saints, and the very fact that they are chosen as saints usually has a significance well beyond and above the person’s life and achievements.

It is as well to understand that all of our lives are of equal value to God, and that our achievements, whether they be in holiness or anything more tangible, are actually beyond our judgement, but that saints are chosen and celebrated to inspire the people for whom they are appointed, and on that basis David is loved, cherished and honoured by the Welsh people, and that in itself enables us to share their pride and joy.

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CHAD [D 672] – Chad was a very holy and dutiful monk and bishop who was unlucky enough to become a casualty in the struggle between the Celtic and Roman traditions, and with the additional mischance that he was consecrated on a make-do basis because of an interregnum between two archbishops of Canterbury.

The king of Northumbria wished to have Wilfrid consecrated as Archbishop of York, but the latter went off to France and got distracted and stayed away for three years. The king lost patience and decided to have Chad consecrated instead. Chad travelled to London, but when he got there he discovered that Archbishop Deusdedit of Canterbury had died, and in the absence of a replacement Chad was consecrated at Winchester by three other bishops. In his own good time Wilfrid returned, only to find Chad in his place, so he appealed to Rome.

Meanwhile Theodore of Tarsus arrived to take up the Canterbury post and ruled that Wilfrid was the duly appointed Archbishop and saw to his consecration. Chad accepted this reverse with perfect humility and equanimity, stating that he had never felt himself to be worthy of being a bishop, and retired to his monastery at Lastingham.

While he was waiting for a decision about York, Wilfrid had been ‘squatting’ as bishop for the king of Mercia, and in due course, once he had been translated to York, the Mercian king asked Theodore for a bishop, and Chad was recalled to serve: Theodore, whilst having to rule that Chad’s authorisation and consecration to York had been uncanonical, understood, on meeting Chad, that he was a very holy and humble man.

Among other matters Theodore insisted that Chad ride a horse, since his new diocese was enormous. Chad insisted that he had always travelled on foot in order to preach the Gospel; it is better to hear such teaching face to face than from the saddle of a horse: but the story goes that Theodore hoisted Chad bodily onto a horse – unlikely but just possible! The point was a purely practical one: Chad was never going to be able to visit the whole of his diocese by travelling on foot; the gesture may have simply been to illustrate the difference in emphasis and dimension between being a competent abbot and a successful bishop.

The king of Mercia gave Chad a plot of land at Lichfield, which then became the new cathedral city for the diocese. Chad was a very successful bishop and died at Lichfield.

There are two differing accounts of these events; one by Bede writing a general history of the church; the other by Eddius Stephanus, who was commissioned to write a biography/hagiography of Wilfrid. Stephanus seems to put Wilfrid wholly in the right, and speaks of the evil of Chad’s consecration, whereas Bede is more even-handed. Both agree, however, as to the holiness and humility of Chad’s actions and character.

It is rather difficult to follow everything that went on in the later 7th century and to get the bigger picture when we deal with half a dozen individuals at different times of the church year. We are asked to celebrate Columba, Aidan, Cuthbert, Wilfrid and Hilda, together with bit parts from warlords with often unpronounceable and usually unmemorable names, then supporting actors like Benedict Biscop, Chad and his brother Cedd appear, and that is just the north: stuff happened in the South and Midlands – Mercia – as well. Bede is often prolix and does not always cut to the chase, and alternative sources do exist, for example, on the life of Wilfrid, so a brief history and background will appear on this website in due course, but separately from these articles so that anybody who wishes can try to get a handle on pre-Norman – Anglo-Saxon church history.