

Grapevine Prayer Diary Integrated Notes for December

As the new Christian Year of the Church's calendar begins again with the Advent Season and we recall once more the history of humanity and the whole creation awaiting the Birth of God the Son Incarnate as Baby Jesus, it is appropriate that many of the prophets by whom God the Holy Ghost spoke are commemorated: Nahum (1), Habakkuk (2), Zephaniah (3), Haggai (16), Malachi and also Daniel together with the three young men, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (18), and Micah (21). Similarly, all the Holy Ancestors of Christ our God are commemorated together on Christmas Eve.

In further preparation for the Feast of Christ's Nativity, the Diocesan Prayer Diary (17) follows the *Book of Common Prayer* (16) in noting "O Sapientia", the first of a series of daily Latin Antiphon prayers to Christ to come to enlighten and save, each addressing Him by a Title: Wisdom, Adonai, Root of Jesse, Key of David, Dayspring, King of the Nations, Emmanuel. The first letters of the tradition seven prayers in Latin form a reverse anagram, summing them up with an eye to Christmas Night with the answer "ero creas" – "I will be there tomorrow!" The hymn "O Come, O come Emmanuel" reworks them into one song. (And an Old English adaptive verse translation of the prayers in the *Exeter Book* manuscript contains, with its 'Dayspring' version "Eala Earendel", the seed of Tolkien's mythic history, best known from *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, but first expressed in a poem written over 100 years ago, in 1914.)*

1: Eligius (French, 'Eloi': 660), apprenticed to the master of the mint at Limoges, became a goldsmith under royal patronage, making two thrones for Chlotar II (629) from the gold allotted for one. He was made master of the mint at Marseilles and commissioned to decorate tombs and shrines and make chalices, crosses, and plaques. When Dagobert I made him chief counsellor as well, he obtained alms for the poor, and ransomed captives, while using his earnings to build and endow monasteries, convents, and churches – and induced the Breton King St. Judicael (c. 658: 16 Dec.) to accept Frankish suzerainty. On the death of Dagobert, he became a priest, and was soon made Bishop of Noyon-Tournai/Dornik, becoming a pioneer apostle in much of Flanders and among the pagan Frisians. In his last years, he was counsellor to Queen St. Bathild (680: 30 Jan.), an Anglo-Saxon ex-slave: together, they influenced the Council of Chalons to forbid the sale of slaves out of the kingdom and insist on their freedom to rest on Sundays and holy days.

4: John of Damascus (c. 749), son of a Christian official at the court of the Caliph, was thus out of reach of the Iconoclast Emperor Leo III when he wrote in defence of Holy Images. As a monk at the monastery of St. Sabas near Jerusalem he wrote *The Orthodox Faith*, a summary of the teaching of the Greek Fathers which became influential in Latin translation as well. Like his foster-brother, St. Cosmas (12 October), he also wrote hymns, still sung today (including in English translation).

Also, Deacon Nicholas Ferrar (1637), who travelled widely – and learnt Dutch – after accompanying Princess Elizabeth to the Court of the Elector Palatine for her marriage, and served as an MP, before moving with his extended family to Little Gidding, where their local vicar was an 'absentee' and the community relied on a neighbouring priest for a monthly Eucharist. He also published George Herbert's poetry.

Also, Osmund (1099) (son of the Norman Count Henry) became chaplain to William the Conqueror, who made him chancellor in 1072. In 1078, he became the second Bishop of Salisbury, completing its new cathedral within the same enclosure as the royal castle at Old Sarum: its chapter of canons with its own constitution became a model for other cathedrals. He contributed to the adaptation of that variant of the Roman rite called the Use of Rouen into the Use of Sarum, eventually followed in most

English and Irish dioceses. He translated St. Aldhelm's relics (3 Oct. 1078), ending the opposition to his recognition by the Blessed Archbishop Lanfranc (1089: 28 May). A book lover, he copied and bound them himself. He was involved in the preparation of the Domesday Book and its presentation to William at the council of Sarum (1086), and probably also in the education of Henry I. In the disputes between William II and St. Anselm (1109: 21 Apr.), he first favoured the king, but later asked and received Anselm's forgiveness. On 16 July 1226, his body was translated to the new Salisbury Cathedral at New Sarum, but the cause for his canonization begun in 1228 did not succeed until 1456: the last English one before the Reformation.

Also, Ambrose (397: whose death on 4 April is noted in the *Book of Common Prayer* calendar), was born in Trier as son of the Praetorian Prefect of Gaul, had, in 374, been for four years Governor of Aemilia and Liguria with his seat at Milan, when, appealing for peace at the assembly convoked to elect the successor to the recently deceased occupant of the see, an Arian, he was himself acclaimed bishop, though not yet baptized – and all was sorted out within a week (with 7 Dec., the day of his consecration, thus being his feast in the Roman and Eastern calendars). He defended orthodoxy against influential pagans and Arians alike, and was a great influence on St. Augustine (430: 28 Aug.), whom he baptized in 386. In 390, the Emperor Theodosius I submitted to his call to do public penance for the deaths of thousands in reprisal for the murder of the Governor of Salonika during rioting. He taught his people to sing hymns which he wrote himself, some of which are still sung today, and Attwater says, 'He was the first teacher in the West successfully to make extensive use of hymns as a popular means of divine praise and of fostering right belief.'

5: Sabas (532), coming from Cappadocia to the Holy Land, he lived as a hermit and in various ascetical settlements, before founding his own 'laura' or semi-eremical monastery, which still exists. He was later given oversight of all monks in the land living a similar life. The companion of St. Nicholas was named after him in some parts of the Netherlands before the generic 'Piet' became universal.

6: Nicholas, Bishop of Myra in Lycia in the Fourth century, was famed as both secretly charitable and a 'wonderworker' during his lifetime, according to the earliest surviving Life. His fame in the west increased when the majority of his relics were carried off to Bari in 1087. One of the earliest English songs to survive with its musical notation is the hymn to St. Nicholas by St. Godric (1170: 21 May).

8: The Conception of the Virgin Mary; going back to at least the Seventh century, it is one of only three Feasts of a conception, the others being of our Lord (the Annunciation: 25 March) and of St. John the Baptist (23/24 Sept.). St. John of Damascus writes that the Son of God "became man from her pure and immaculate flesh and blood" (*The Orthodox Faith*, IV, 14), but in the Twelfth century it became a matter of controversy whether or not she was immaculate from the moment of her conception. In 1483, Pope Sixtus IV explicitly left the matter undecided, protecting those of either opinion from attack, and so it remained in the Roman west until in 1854 Pope Pius IX declared the immaculate conception of the Virgin a doctrine necessary to be believed by all "as has been defined by us".

11: Damasus I (384), in nearly 20 years as Pope, opposed heretics, saw Christianity proclaimed the official religion of the State by Theodosius, saw the collection and housing of papal archives, built churches, and, most notably, encouraged St. Jerome (420: 30 Sept.) in his Biblical work, and worked to restore the catacombs and care for martyrs' burial places, collecting inscriptions and epigrams in their honour, mainly composed in verse by himself.

Also, St. Daniel the Stylite (493), who, during his many years as a monk, had visited St. Simeon the Stylite (459: 5 Jan.) twice: after his death, he decided to carry on his way of life – in Constantinople. He lived on a platform with a shelter, atop two conjoined pillars, was there ordained a priest, and celebrated the Eucharist, coming down only once in the next 33 years – to convince Emperor Basiliscus to abandon the Monophysite heresy. The Emperors Leo I and Zeno often consulted him, as did the patriarchs of the city, and many other people – to whom he gave practical advice and preached simple, clear sermons.

13: Lucy (304?), virgin martyr of Syracuse. Also St. Odilia (c. 720), founder and abbess of a nunnery in the Vosges and patroness of the Alsace. Also, Dr. Samuel Johnson (1784), lexicographer, editor, poet, novelist, who began memorizing the *Book of Common Prayer* at three, and as journalist prayed "that in this undertaking thy Holy Spirit may not be withheld from me, but that I may promote thy glory, and the salvation of myself and others."

16: Adelaide of Burgundy (999), after the death of her husband, King Lothair of Italy, married King Otto of Germany (son of St. Mathilda (968: 14 Mar.) and widower of the Anglo-Saxon Edith) in 950: in 962, they were crowned Holy Roman Emperor and Empress. Their son, Otto II, was made co-emperor on Christmas 967, and, at 16 married the Byzantine Princess Theophanu (then 12) in 972. But, after Otto I died in 973, St. Adelaide's life was (in the words of Attwater) 'a turmoil of family and political troubles' for the next 20 years. Happily, she profited from the friendship and advice of Sts. Adalbert of Magdeburg (981: 20 June), Willigis of Mainz (1011: 23 Feb.), and Mayeul (994: 11 May) and (her biographer) Odilo (1048: 1 Jan.) of Cluny. She became regent for her grandson, Otto III, from 991-94, then retired to the convent she had founded in Seltz in Alsace.

18: Winnibald (761) stayed on studying in Rome for seven years after going there as a pilgrim together with his brother, St. Willibald (786: 7 July), and sister, St. Walburga (779: 25 Feb.). Returning to England, he collected companions and in 739 joined St. Boniface (754: 5 June) in the mission field. Later, he rejoined his brother to co-found the double monastery of Heidenheim, the only one in Germany in that era. Their sister ruled it after his death, while the nun Hugeburc there soon wrote his Life.

21: Thomas the Apostle, to whom the Syrian Christians of India look as their evangelizer – something recognized by King Alfred who sent alms "to India to St. Thomas" as well as to Rome, and whose tomb the Portuguese were shown when they arrived in Mylapore in 1522 – an area which came under Dutch control for most of the period 1610-1825.

23: Thorlac (1193), as a young priest, left Iceland to study in Paris and Lincoln, returning to start a house of Canons Regular. In 1178, he was made Bishop of Skalholt and initiated a reformation, supported by his metropolitan, St. Eystein (1188: 26 Jan.), with whom he drew up a code of law for both clergy and laity. A saga was written about him.

26: Stephen, the first martyr after the Resurrection and Ascension (Acts ch. 6-7).

27: John the Apostle and Evangelist, whose disciple, St. Polycarp (c. 155: 26 Jan., 23 Feb.), told the young St. Irenaeus (200: 28 June, 23 Aug.) reminiscences of him, and whose tomb is shown in Ephesus. Also, Fabiola (399), a patrician and Christian, who married a man about whom St. Jerome said, so terrible were the faults imputed to him "that not even a prostitute [...] could have put up with them": she separated from him, and civilly divorced him. St. Jerome also said, she thought "she was free to marry again. She did not know that the rigour of the gospel takes away from women all

pretexts for re-marriage so long as their former husbands are alive” – and acted on that thought. But then she became convinced of this, and, “after the death of her second husband”, came to the Lateran basilica and, “in the presence of all Rome”, weeping, did public penance. “Restored to communion before the eyes of the whole church,” he continues, she dedicated her wealth to “the benefit of the poor”, adding, “She was the first person to found a hospital, into which she might gather sufferers out of the streets,” and worked in it nursing them herself. Later, she travelled to Bethlehem to study with St. Jerome, but returned to Rome, working with St. Pammachius (410: 30 Aug.) to found and run a hospice and hospital for travellers at Porto.

28: The Holy Innocents (St. Matthew ch. 2) whose Feast is also called ‘Childermas’, dying as martyrs not consciously for Christ but in his stead, were hailed as “young warriors” in a Tenth-century sermon by Aelfric.

29: King David. Also, St. Thomas, Archbishop of Canterbury (1170), murdered, in his cathedral, died “willingly for the name of Christ and in defence of the Church” (his last words), when four barons acted on what they took to be King Henry II intention in asking aloud “who will rid me of this turbulent priest” – for which he did public penance.

31: Pope Sylvester I (335) came to his See on 31 January 314, not long after the Edict of Milan allowed the Church to become fully public. It is unclear exactly how involved he was in the building of churches in Rome promoted by the Emperor Constantine. He sent legates to the Council of Nicea. His history was long overshadowed by later legends and forgeries, most notably that of the ‘Donation of Constantine’ supposedly conferring on his successors primacy over all other bishops and temporal dominion over Italy.

Also, Melania the Younger (439) (granddaughter of the ascetic and philanthropic Melania the Elder (410: 8 June)) married St. Pinianus (c. 432: also 31 Dec.) at 13: each of their two children died young, and she won him over to devoting their great wealth to benefitting the poor, founding monasteries, and, later, a church. Their large-scale sales of property and emancipation of their slaves (Butler says, 8000) was met by an appeal by part of the family to the Emperor Honorius – who supported the couple’s charitable decisions. They continued their beneficent life in Sicily (sharing a monastic existence with some former slaves), in Thagaste in North Africa, where they became acquainted with St. Augustine, and in Jerusalem, where they got to know St. Jerome (as her grandmother had, decades before), establishing monasteries and convents as they went. After the death of her husband, she established a convent on the Mount of Olives, living there herself (though not as its superior) and copying books. She kept her last Christmas in Bethlehem.

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[*Much more about the ‘O Antiphons’ may be found at Wikipedia and, for example: www.wdtprs.com/JTZ/o_antiphons/ www.hymnsandcarolsofchristmas.com/Hymns_and_Carols/Notes_On_Carols/O_Antiphons/notes_on_veni_veni_emmanuel.htm]