

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Eanflæd

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: November 24

IN BRIEF

Saint Eanflæd

Queen of Northumbria and later abbess of Whitby in the seventh century.

Feast day	November 24
Born	April 19, 626, Deira, Northumbria
Died	after 685, perhaps c. 704, Whitby Abbey, England
Era	8th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Eanflæd, Queen and Abbess

Novena to Saint Eanflæd

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Eanflæd

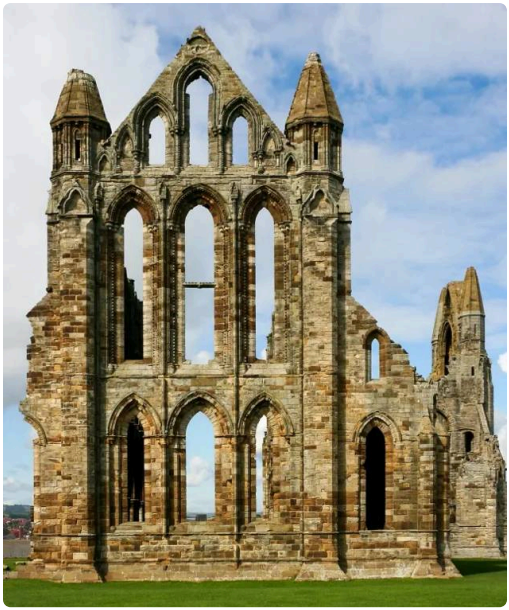
Saint Eanflæd (also spelled Eanfled) was a seventh-century Anglo-Saxon princess, daughter of the first Christian king of Northumbria and granddaughter of Æthelberht of Kent, the king who welcomed Saint Augustine of Canterbury. As queen of Northumbria beside King Oswiu, she supported the young Wilfrid and stayed faithful to the customs of the Church of Rome. As a widow she withdrew to Whitby Abbey, which she later governed with her daughter Ælfflæd. Her feast day is November 24.

Who was Saint Eanflæd?

Eanflæd is one of the very few people of Anglo-Saxon England whose exact birthday is known. Saint Bede the Venerable, in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, reports that she was born on the night of Easter 626, on April 19, at a royal residence by the River Derwent. Her father, Edwin, ruled Deira and Bernicia in the north of England and was still a pagan. Her mother, Æthelburg, a princess of Kent, was a Christian and had brought the missionary Paulinus with her to the north.

On that same day, Bede tells us, Edwin escaped an assassin sent by Cwichelm, king of the West Saxons. On the advice of Paulinus, he agreed that his newborn daughter should be baptized, and he promised to become a Christian himself if God gave him victory over his enemy. Eanflæd was baptized on Pentecost, June 8, 626, together with eleven other members of the royal household. According to Bede, she was the first person in Northumbria to receive baptism. Edwin won his campaign and was baptized the following year.

Her life is a small window onto the conversion of England: the Roman mission from Kent, the Irish mission from Iona and Lindisfarne, the rivalries between royal families, and the slow work of the Gospel in a warrior society.



The ruins of Whitby Abbey, where Eanflæd ended her life.

Key dates

- **April 19, 626**: Born in Deira on the night of Easter.
- **June 8, 626**: Baptized on Pentecost, according to Bede.
- **633**: Her father is killed at the battle of Hatfield Chase; she goes into exile in Kent with her mother.
- **c. 642-643**: Marries Oswiu, king of Bernicia and later of all Northumbria.
- **651**: After the murder of King Oswine, she obtains the founding of the monastery of Gilling.
- **664**: The Synod of Whitby adopts the Roman customs she had always kept.
- **After 680**: Abbess of Whitby with her daughter Ælfflæd, after the death of Saint Hilda.
- **After 685, perhaps c. 704**: Dies at Whitby.

A childhood in exile

In 633 Edwin was killed at the battle of Hatfield Chase, and paganism returned in force to Northumbria. Æthelburg fled south to Kent, where her brother Eadbald was king, taking with her Bishop Paulinus and the children. She sent Edwin's male heirs on to Francia for safety but kept Eanflæd with her.

The princess therefore grew up in Kent, the cradle of the mission sent by Pope Saint Gregory the Great. There she lived in daily contact with the customs of the Roman Church, including its way of calculating the date of Easter. This upbringing would shape the rest of her life.

Queen of Northumbria

Around 642, Oswiu, king of Bernicia and member of a dynasty that had long been the rival of Edwin's family, sent the priest Utta to Kent to ask for her hand. The marriage united the two royal houses of Northumbria. Eanflæd and Oswiu had four children, among them the future king Ecgfrith and Ælfflæd, who would become abbess of Whitby.

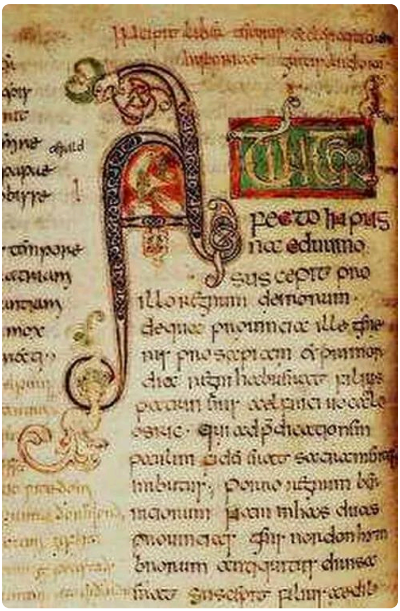
Prayer for the victim and the murderer

The queen did not settle for a silent role. In 651 Oswiu had Oswine, king of Deira and a relative of Eanflæd, put to death. As reparation, she obtained from her husband the founding of a monastery at Gilling, where the monks would pray for both kings: the victim and the one who had killed him. It is a striking choice. Rather than demand revenge, she asked for prayer, and for a place where that prayer would continue day after day.

Two Easters in one palace

With her chaplain Romanus, Eanflæd kept the customs of the Church of Rome, especially for the date of Easter. Oswiu, formed by the Irish monks of Iona and Lindisfarne, followed a different reckoning. As a result, the king and

the queen sometimes did not celebrate Easter on the same day: while one household was already rejoicing in the Resurrection, the other was still keeping the fast of Lent.



Bede's Ecclesiastical History, the main source for the life of Eanflæd.

Protector of Wilfrid

Eanflæd was also the first patron of Wilfrid, a young nobleman whom she recommended to the king of Kent when he set out on pilgrimage to Rome. In 664 it was Wilfrid who argued for the Roman customs at the Synod of Whitby, and the synod adopted them for Northumbria. The queen's quiet fidelity had prepared the ground for that decision.

Abbess of Whitby

Oswiu died in 670. Some years later, Eanflæd entered Whitby Abbey, the double monastery of men and women founded by Saint Hilda, where her daughter Ælfflæd had lived since childhood. After Hilda's death in 680, mother and daughter governed the house together.

Eanflæd had the body of her father, Edwin, brought to Whitby, so that he rested near Oswiu and Hilda. She died there after 685, perhaps around 704, and was buried in the abbey.

No trace of her cult is known before the Norman Conquest, perhaps because Whitby was destroyed by the Vikings in the ninth century. In the twelfth century, William of Malmesbury believed that her relics had been taken to Glastonbury Abbey. The English martyrology of John Wilson, published in 1640, set her feast on November 24.

Why is Saint Eanflæd a model for families?

Eanflæd is not the official patron saint of any particular cause, but her life speaks to many situations. She knew exile as a child and the violent death of people close to her. She turned a murder into a foundation of prayer. She kept her loyalty to the Church without breaking with her husband, even when they did not keep the same feast on the same day. And she ended her life in the service of a religious community.

For these reasons she can be prayed to for divided families, for widows, for refugees and for those who carry responsibility without being able to decide everything themselves. To pray with her, see the prayer to Saint Eanflæd and the novena to Saint Eanflæd.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Eanflæd in art

No early image of Eanflæd survives. In modern representations, such as stained glass, she usually appears in one of two roles: as an Anglo-Saxon queen with a crown, or as an abbess wearing a veil and holding a crozier. The ruins of Whitby on their clifftop are the place most closely tied to her memory.

Where to pray to Saint Eanflæd

- **Whitby** (North Yorkshire, England): the ruins of the abbey stand on the site of the monastery where she was abbess and where she was buried.
- **Glastonbury** (Somerset, England): the ruins of the abbey where, according to William of Malmesbury, her relics were transferred.



Glastonbury Abbey, where her relics are said to have been transferred.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Eanflæd, Queen and Abbess

No traditional prayer to Saint Eanflæd has come down to us, and she left no writings. Saintspedia offers an original prayer, inspired by what Saint Bede the Venerable tells us of her life: a baptism on the day of Pentecost, years of exile, a calm fidelity to the Church and the end of her life given to God at Whitby.

Prayer to Saint Eanflæd, queen and abbess

Saint Eanflæd, you received baptism in the first weeks of your life, on the feast of Pentecost: help me to live from the grace of my own baptism and to let it grow each day.

You knew exile and the loss of your father: support children torn from their homeland and families struck by war.

You asked that prayer be offered for the victim and for the murderer alike: teach me to seek justice without hatred and to entrust to God those who have wounded me.

You stayed faithful to the Church without breaking with your own: help me to live my faith with constancy and gentleness, even when those closest to me do not share it.

You ended your life in prayer at Whitby: I entrust to you widows, the elderly, and my own intention (name it in silence).

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Eanflæd's feast day is November 24, the date given by the English martyrology of John Wilson in 1640. It is a natural day to pray to her, alone or with a parish or prayer group.

You can also pray to her at Pentecost, the anniversary of her baptism in 626, and on the anniversary of your own baptism. Her story makes this prayer especially fitting:

- for a family divided by conflict, distance or differences of faith;
- for refugees and for children growing up far from their homeland;
- for widows and for those entering a new stage of life after a loss;
- for anyone struggling to forgive a serious injury;
- for those who hold responsibility in a community but cannot decide everything alone.

A short prayer for every day

> *Saint Eanflæd, faithful in exile and peacemaker in your household, pray for us, that we may keep our baptismal promises and bring peace where there is division. Amen.*

Original text by Saintspedia.

To learn more about her life, read the life of Saint Eanflæd, or pray the novena to Saint Eanflæd over nine days.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Eanflæd

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Eanflæd as Saint Bede the Venerable tells it. It is not an official liturgical text. To end it on her feast day, November 24, begin on November 16. You can also pray it at any time of year: before Pentecost, the anniversary of her baptism, or whenever you carry a family worry, a grief or a conflict that seems impossible to heal.

Eanflæd's life followed the great turns of a human life: birth and baptism, exile, marriage, conflict, widowhood and the last years spent in prayer. These nine days follow her path, step by step.

How to pray this novena

Each day, place your intention before God, read the short meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for the day helps you carry the prayer into ordinary life. If you miss a day, simply continue: a novena is a path of trust, not a test.

Day 1: Born on Easter night

Eanflæd was born on the night of Easter 626, in a pagan royal household where her mother prayed as a Christian. Her life began at the feast of the Resurrection, before she could know anything of it. Every life is a gift that comes before our understanding.

Prayer: Lord, I thank you for the gift of life, mine and that of everyone I love. Through the intercession of Saint Eanflæd, help me to receive each day as a new beginning in the light of Easter. Amen.

Today: Thank God by name for three people who gave you life, faith or care.

Day 2: The grace of baptism

At a few weeks old, on Pentecost, Eanflæd was baptized with eleven members of the royal household, the first in Northumbria to receive this sacrament. She did not choose it, yet it shaped her whole life. Baptism is the root of every Christian vocation.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, who came upon Eanflæd on the day of Pentecost, renew in me the grace of my baptism. Make me a living member of the Church, faithful to the promises made in my name. Amen.

Today: Find out the date of your baptism, or renew your baptismal promises with the sign of the cross and a little holy water.

Day 3: Exile and loss

When she was seven, her father was killed in battle and her mother fled with her to Kent. Eanflæd grew up far from her homeland, in the shadow of a violent death. God did not spare her suffering, but he did not abandon her in it.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you all who live in exile: refugees, displaced families, children who have lost a parent. Through the prayer of Saint Eanflæd, be their shelter and give them people who will welcome them. Amen.

Today: Pray for a refugee family, or support an organization that welcomes them.

Day 4: Rooted in the Church

In Kent, the cradle of the mission sent by Pope Gregory the Great, Eanflæd learned the customs of the Roman Church. Her faith was not a vague feeling but a life shaped by the liturgy, the feasts and the teaching of the Church.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for those who passed on the faith to me. Help me to love your Church, to learn from her and to live her seasons and feasts with a grateful heart. Amen.

Today: Read the Gospel of today's Mass, or plan to attend a weekday Mass this week.

Day 5: Marriage and family

Eanflæd married Oswiu, a king from a rival dynasty, and their union joined two families that had long been enemies. She raised four children and shared in the life of a royal court with its burdens and dangers.

Prayer: Lord, bless married couples, especially those who come from different backgrounds or carry old family wounds. Through the intercession of Saint Eanflæd, make their homes places of peace and faith. Amen.

Today: Do a small act of kindness for your spouse or a member of your family, without saying anything about it.

Day 6: Prayer for victim and murderer

When her husband had her kinsman Oswine killed, Eanflæd did not ask for revenge. She asked for a monastery at Gilling where monks would pray for both men. Her response to a crime was intercession.

Prayer: Lord, you know the injuries I carry. Give me the courage to seek justice without hatred, and to pray even for those who have hurt me. Heal what I cannot heal on my own. Amen.

Today: Pray by name for someone who has wounded you, even if it costs you.

Day 7: Faithful with gentleness

Eanflæd kept the Roman date of Easter while her husband followed another, so that the king and queen sometimes celebrated the feast on different days. She stayed faithful without breaking her household apart, and her quiet fidelity prepared the Synod of Whitby.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you the members of my family who do not share my faith. Give me constancy without harshness and patience without compromise, so that my life may speak of you. Amen.

Today: Avoid a useless argument today, and pray instead for the person you disagree with.

Day 8: Widowhood and a new beginning

After the death of Oswiu, Eanflæd chose to enter Whitby Abbey, where her daughter lived. Widowhood did not close her life: it opened a new chapter, given entirely to God and to a community.

Prayer: Lord, comfort widows and widowers and all who grieve. Through the prayer of Saint Eanflæd, help them to find a new path, surrounded by friends and sustained by your love. Amen.

Today: Call or visit someone who lives alone after the death of a spouse.

Day 9: Serving to the end at Whitby

With her daughter Ælfflæd, Eanflæd governed Whitby after the death of Saint Hilda. She brought her father's body to rest there and died in the abbey, after a life that began on Easter night and ended in the service of prayer.

Prayer: Lord, grant me to serve you to the end of my days, in whatever place you give me. Through the intercession of Saint Eanflæd, may I one day share in the joy of your Resurrection. Amen.

Today: Offer an hour of your time to a parish or community that needs help.

Closing prayer

> *Saint Eanflæd, child of Easter and Pentecost, exile and queen, peacemaker and abbess, you knew the joys and sorrows of family life and kept your faith through them all. Present to the Lord the intention I have carried during these nine days. Obtain for me the grace to live my baptism faithfully, to forgive from the heart and to serve God until the end. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

This novena is an original text by Saintspedia. To learn more, read the life of Saint Eanflæd or pray the prayer to Saint Eanflæd.

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