



“Joy of All Who Sorrow”

No. 95 October 2016

Good King Wenceslas



The medieval Czech ruler of the duchy of Bohemia, St Wenceslas (ca. 903-935) is best known to the English-speaking world as the pious and kind leader immortalized in the English Christmas carol "Good King Wenceslas." He is one of the Slavic peoples' fabled early Christian rulers, and remains the patron saint of Bohemia. Wenceslas was barely out of his teens when he ruled Bohemia and fought bitter opposition from within his own family because of his pro-Christian policies. He was murdered by his brother on 28 September 935.

Wenceslas was a descendant of the Premysl family that rose to power in Bohemia. This part of Europe lies in the western area of the present-day Czech Republic. Bohemia's name derives from its first settlers, a Celtic tribe known as the Boii, who were replaced by Slavic tribes from the east who likely arrived there in the sixth century AD. Christianity was introduced there by St Methodius. His most important ally was the prince of the Premysl dynasty, Borivoy, the first historically documented ruler of Bohemia; Methodius baptized both him and his wife, Ludmilla. Their son Wratislav became the duke of Bohemia, and was a committed Christian. His wife Dragomir was descended from a Slavic tribe in the north called the Veletians, and had accepted Christianity in name only. In the line of succession was their first son, Wenceslas. Wenceslas was born in the early years of the tenth century, likely between 903 and 907. His grandmother, Ludmilla, arranged with

the parents to raise him at her castle at Tetin. There her personal chaplain, a follower of Methodius, baptized Wenceslas. In addition to ensuring that her grandson received instruction in Christian catechism, Ludmilla also made certain that he was educated in other subjects, including literacy in both the Slavonic and Latin languages.

Bohemia was thrown into turmoil by a 906 AD invasion by the Magyars. Wenceslas's father Wratislav died in this conflict and his mother Dragomir then became regent of the duchy. She attempted to regress to a more secular political rule. Her advisors, culled from Bohemian nobles who still adhered to the Slavs' former non-Christian religion, fomented discord between her and her mother-in-law. They suggested that her pious son was better suited for the priesthood than the duties of a duke. In response, the grandmother Ludmilla and pro-Christian factions convinced Wenceslas to attempt to usurp his mother's power. When Dragomir learned of this, Ludmilla was strangled by nobles at her castle, allegedly upon orders of her daughter-in-law. Rather than advance her own cause, this act of treachery backfired on Dragomir, for it helped rally support around Wenceslas. By 922, he had taken control of the duchy and proclaimed Christian law in Bohemia. His mother, exiled at Budech, was recalled to his court and their relations were unaffected by past tensions.

To help maintain peace in the land, Wenceslas asked neighbouring Germany for protection. These lands to the west of Bohemia were ruled by another Christian leader, Emperor Henry I (the Fowler) of Germany, the first of the Saxon line of kings. Wenceslas was eager to ally with the West and the rest of Christian Europe, and considered Henry the direct successor to Charlemagne. The German emperor offered to grant the duke whatever he would like, and so Wenceslas asked for the arm of Saint Vitus, one of the oldest of Christian saints, whose remains were in Germany. In Prague, Wenceslas began building a church to house the relic.

At some point in the 920s Wenceslas married and became the father of a son. This effectively shut out his younger brother Boleslaw from the line of succession. Dragomir, the mother of both, allegedly urged Boleslaw to murder his own brother. Though the year of his death is vague, the circumstances surrounding the deed are better known. In the year 929 or 935, Boleslaw invited Wenceslas to join him at a site outside Prague to celebrate the feast day of Saints Cosmas and Damian. While there, Wenceslas was advised that his life was in danger, but ignored the warning. On his way to church in the morning of the second day, he met Boleslaw and thanked him for his hospitality. Boleslaw purportedly replied, "Yesterday, I did my best to serve you fittingly, but this must be my service today," and struck him. A struggle ensued, and a group of nobles loyal to Boleslaw finished the task. Legend has it that Wenceslas's final words were, "May God forgive you, brother." The body of Wenceslas was then dismembered and buried at the site of the crime, to which the faithful began making pilgrimages. The reported incidents of miracles there were said to have greatly unnerved Boleslaw, now duke of Bohemia. He made a genuine repentance. Three years after the murder, he ordered the removal of his brother's remains to the church of St. Vitus.

The English Christmas carol "Good King Wenceslas" dates from the nineteenth century, though the melody itself is much older. Its verses recount the journey of the duke and a servant of his, who take food and pine logs to a peasant home on Saint Stephen's Day, the day after Christmas. It is a cold and arduous forest trek, and the page fears he will not make it. Wenceslas tells him to follow in his footsteps, which miraculously warm him.

Notes & Jottings

SAINT HERMAN CALENDAR 2017

The 2017 has now been published and we have placed our usual order. The theme is *Saints of the Iberian Peninsula*. The price (\$10) works out at £7.75 per copy, due to the present unfavourable exchange rate. Please reserve your copy now.

FOUNDER'S DAY

This year, Founder's Day will be the 6th anniversary of the repose of the foundress, Mary Bond. Details of the programme are published in this bulletin.

PATRONAL FESTIVAL

There will be a Vigil service at 7.30pm on 5 November, followed by a Divine Liturgy at 10.30am on 6 November, in honour of the Joy of All Who Sorrow ikon. All are welcome!

CYCLE DAY

Suffolk Historic Churches 35th annual Cycle Day event took place on Saturday 10 September. Our impression is that this event is not as popular as it was once but a dozen, or so, intrepid cyclists did find their way here.

BENCH FOR CHURCH

A wooden bench has been donated to the church by John and Anthea Barry. We thank them for their generosity.

NAMEDAYS

We send congratulations to everyone who is celebrating a nameday at this time and wish them

MANY YEARS!

3 October – **St Oleg of Briansk** – Oleg Myslov

5 October – **St Peter the Tax Collector** – Archpriest Peter Baulk

8 October – **St Sergei of Radonezh** – Igumen Sergei

9 October – **Repose of St John the Theologian** – Fr John Palmer, John Harwood



COLLEGE OF OUR LADY OF METTINGHAM

METTINGHAM ORTHODOX TRUST

FOUNDER'S DAY

6th Anniversary of the repose of the Foundress

Tuesday 15 November 2016

7.30pm Vigil (Monday evening)

10.30am Requiem Liturgy in THE COLLEGIATE CHURCH

FOLLOWED BY Procession to THE tomb OF THE FOUNDRESS where prayers will be said

AFTERwards, the Memorial lunch will be served in the college dining room

Venue:

The White House,

Low Rd, Mettingham

Suffolk, NR35 1TP

01986 895176

RSVP



**COLLEGIATE CHURCH OF THE MOTHER OF GOD
JOY OF ALL WHO SORROW**

OCTOBER 2016

Saturday 1 October

7.30pm ~ Vigil

Sunday 2 October

10.10am ~ Hours and Divine Liturgy (Sunday after the Exaltation of the Cross)

Saturday 8 October

7.30pm ~ Vigil

Sunday 9 October

10.10am ~ Hours and Divine Liturgy (Repose of St John the Theologian)

Saturday 15 October

7.30pm ~ Vigil

Sunday 16 October

10.10am ~ Hours and Divine Liturgy (Hieromartyrs Dionysius the Areopagite and his companions)

Saturday 22 October

7.30pm ~ Vigil

Sunday 23 October

10.10am ~ Hours and Divine Liturgy (Holy Fathers of the 7th Oecumenical Council)

Saturday 29 October

7.30pm ~ Vigil

Sunday 30 October

10.10am ~ Hours and Divine Liturgy (Prophet Hosea)



Trust in God is an ongoing secret prayer.

St Paisios of Mount Athos

Collegiate Church of the Ikon of the Mother of God: Joy of All Who Sorrow

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