

# **Advent Thought for the Day 2021: Saints Advent Days 8-13 by Rev. Bill Church**

## **ADVENT Day 8 Sunday 5 December Cedd**

Cedd was part of the pincer movement to bring Christianity back to Britain – from Rome via Canterbury and from Iona via Northumbria.

Cedd was born in Northumbria some time around 600; one of four brothers, all of whom became priests and two became bishops (the other being Chad Bishop of the Mercians in the West Midlands).



Cedd became a monk of Lindisfarne. He was sent as a missionary to the English east midlands and then to Essex, which was wavering between Christianity and paganism. He built a monastery at Bradwell-on-Sea, using the site and materials of the Roman coastal fort of Othona. The monastery remains as the church of St Peter's-on-the-wall, next to the Othona Community, founded in 1946.

Cedd is sometimes described as Bishop of London (because London was in the kingdom of Essex), but in the Iona tradition, bishops were missionaries based on monasteries, so it is better to call him Bishop of the East Saxons.

Cedd also founded the monastery at Lastingham in Yorkshire, where he died in 664.

Cedd acted as a translator at the Synod of Whitby and I like to think he did his best to promote understanding between people at a time of sharp controversy.

I also admire him for boldly going to new territory in turbulent and dangerous times; and for building a lasting church on the remains of an abandoned foundation.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:St\\_Peters\\_Chapel.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:St_Peters_Chapel.jpg)

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## **ADVENT Day 9**

### **Monday 5 December**

### **Nicholas**



Nicholas shares with Valentine the misfortune to be remembered and celebrated and commercialised for things rather distant from his real life.

Nicholas was the Bishop of Myra (now in Turkey) in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, and that is about all that is known for certain, except that he had been accepted as a saint by the 6<sup>th</sup> Century.

An enduring tale had him saving three girls from a future of prostitution by paying their dowries to allow them to be lawfully married, throwing the money anonymously into the house in three money bags.

True or false, it reminds us of the continuing scandal of families crippled by burdensome dowries and of young women being trafficked for forced marriage, prostitution or domestic servitude.

And the three money bags became the three golden balls which are Nicholas' emblem and the emblem of pawnbrokers of whom he is the patron saint.

Moneylending carries with it great responsibility. We do not need to share Dickens' extreme distaste for moneylenders (Quilp, Ralph Nickleby, Fledgeby etc) to realise that it is a system needing careful scrutiny. Remember the Archbishop of Canterbury's bold denunciation of Wonga.

So, mythical or not, Nicholas has a very current message.

And it is not Ho, Ho, Ho.

In Holland the custom was to give presents not on Christmas day but today, St Nicholas' Day. When Dutch emigrants went to America they took "Sinkte Klaas" with them and he became "Santa Claus" with all the trimmings.

PS. When Hertford was founded, the church serving the town south of the ford was dedicated to St Nicholas. When it decayed, the parish was eventually merged with St Andrew's, hence St Nicholas in the east window.

PPS. I was married in a St Nicholas church.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Saint\\_Nicholas\\_icon,\\_Lebanon\\_\(14th\\_Century\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Saint_Nicholas_icon,_Lebanon_(14th_Century).jpg)

*Basilian Salvatorian Order, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons*

## **ADVENT Day 10**

### **Tuesday 7 December**

### **Margaret of Scotland**



Most female saints were either nuns or martyrs. Margaret was neither.

She was born in about 1045, the grand-daughter of the English king Edmund Ironside and thus a member of the Anglo-Saxon royal house. After the Norman invasion of 1066, it was unsafe for her to stay in England and she found refuge in Scotland. There, in 1070, she married King Malcolm Canmore. They had eight children, one of whom, Matilda, married King Henry I of England.

Margaret was strong-willed and promoted reform in the church in Scotland and founded abbeys including Dunfermline, as well as working for the welfare of orphans and of the poor.

Margaret used for good what limited opportunities there then were for women, bringing a brighter light to the Christian faith in her adopted land.

PS. Not to be confused with Margaret of Antioch, an early martyr, who is said to have survived being swallowed by a dragon.

PS.2 For some years, Marks and Spencer branded children's and women's clothing as "St Margaret".

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Edinburgh,\\_Saint\\_Giles\\_cathedral\\_-\\_Stained-glass\\_windows\\_-\\_Saint\\_Margaret\\_of\\_Scotland.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Edinburgh,_Saint_Giles_cathedral_-_Stained-glass_windows_-_Saint_Margaret_of_Scotland.jpg)

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## **ADVENT Day 11**

### **Wednesday 8 December**

## **Ini Kopuria, founder of the Melanesian Brotherhood**

Melanesia consists of the many islands east of Papua New Guinea. The largest group is the Solomon Islands. The Anglican church first reached Melanesia in 1849 and in 1861 John Coleridge Patteson became its first Bishop.

The islands were plagued by "blackbirding" – kidnapping Melanesians to work on plantations in Queensland and elsewhere. Bishop Patteson, on a missionary voyage, was mistaken for a blackbirder and killed in 1871 and is now revered as a martyr.

Ini Kopuria was born into a Christian family on Guadalcanal in the Solomons and while working as a policeman he had a vision of Jesus which led him to a life of evangelism, taking the light of the Gospel to the remotest islands.

In 1925, he founded the Melanesian Brotherhood as a religious order for men.

Brothers make the threefold monastic vows, but only for five years at a time.



Melanesia was occupied by the Japanese during the war and was the site of fierce battles. The various groups of islands became independent in the 1970s.

Ini Kopuria died in 1945 and is remembered in the calendar on 6 June.

The Melanesian Brotherhood flourishes and is now the largest religious order for men in the Anglican Communion.

Seven Melanesian Brothers were martyred in 2003 while trying to mediate in a violent conflict on Guadalcanal; they are honoured by an icon in Canterbury Cathedral.

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## **ADVENT Day 12**

### **Thursday 9 December**

### **Gregory and Macrina**

We tend to forget that for many centuries the centre of Christian study and theology was in the eastern Mediterranean.

Gregory and Macrina were brother and sister, born in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century into a remarkable Christian family in Cappadocia (in modern day Turkey) where their grandmother, father and mother and two brothers are also counted among the saints.

I believe this is the only case where brother and sister saints are remembered on the same day – 19 July, which not only balances the overwhelmingly male calendar, but also reminds us of the strong bond which can exist between siblings.



Macrina was the older and she did much to guide Gregory towards the spiritual life. The man to whom Macrina was betrothed died and she then, with her mother, led a monastic community on one of their estates. One of Gregory's main writings "On the soul and resurrection" is in the form of a dialogue between himself and Macrina, with Gregory taking the role of a pupil and Macrina the role of teacher. Was she also co-author? Gregory was grief-stricken when Macrina died in 379.

Gregory became Bishop of Nyssa in 371 and was, perhaps, better at theology than administration. He was an upholder of orthodoxy against Arianism (which claimed, roughly, that Christ was not divine but created).



Since the beginning of time, mankind has wondered whether there is a God, what God is like and what God wants for us. Theology can be dry – and can be divisive – but is one part of bringing us into the light. Pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to inspire those who seek a deeper understanding of God.

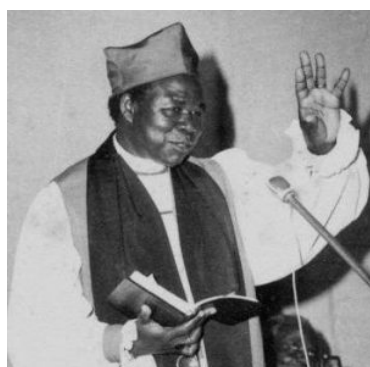
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## **ADVENT Day 13**

### **Friday 10 December**

### **Janani Luwum**



Janani Luwum was born in 1922 in the Acholi country of northern Uganda. Like the young King David, as a boy he herded his father's flocks. But he also studied and became a teacher. At 26 he had a profound spiritual conversion which led him towards ordination in 1956. He became Bishop of Northern Uganda in 1969 and was noted for his encouragement of what would now be called sustainability and for communities to live together in harmony.

In 1974, three years after Idi Amin had become president in a military coup, he was elected Archbishop of the Province of Uganda. At first, he worked with the regime to protect those who had fallen foul of Amin, but in 1977 there were mass killings following an army mutiny. The Archbishop delivered to Amin a letter of protest signed by all the Bishops. He was promptly arrested, put before a military tribunal and then declared to have died in a car accident. In fact, he had been shot, and probably tortured.

Janani Luwum was buried in his Cathedral in Kampala alongside James Hannington, the first Bishop in Uganda and also a martyr.

Saints also shine in the darkness.

Janani Luwum's courage and sacrifice was inspiring to the Ugandan church during the remaining years of Amin's rule and beyond the borders of Uganda. He is honoured by a statue on the west front of Westminster Abbey and is remembered in our calendar on 17 February.

IMAGE: Church of Uganda