

Festivals and Saints' Days (w/c 21st June)

22nd June

Saint Alban - *martyr (proto-martyr of Britain)*



Saint Alban is believed to be the first person to be martyred in Britain (hence *proto-martyr*). It is said that he was beheaded sometime in the third or fourth century. There are some, however, who suggest that he might have been an invention: there are no contemporaneous or even near contemporaneous accounts of his martyrdom. So, the tradition has it, Alban was living in the town of Verulanium (now S Albans, named after its famous saint) when persecutions of Christians started. Alban sheltered a priest, whose example so impressed him that he converted to the Faith. When his house was raided, he took the priest's place and was arrested and executed. The date of this is estimated to have fallen anywhere between AD209 - 305. S Albans Cathedral is built over the site of his supposed execution.

23rd June

Saint Ethedreda - *religious*

Etheldreda was born in the early AD630s to the King of East Anglia. Her father was energetic in spreading the Christian Faith. Whilst married to the King of Northumbria she was a friend and patron of both S Wilfrid and S Cuthbert. In due course, she fled from her marriage and became a nun at Coldingham. Anxious that her husband would come and collect her, she fled South disguised as a beggar and accompanied by two other nuns. Her eventful journey ended at the Isle of Ely, land she had received as a dowry from an earlier marriage. Here, she established a "double monastery" (ie for men and women, living separately, by praying and working together) of which she was the first abbess. Ely Cathedral now sits on the site of the monastery. Etheldreda was renowned for her piety and asceticism. After six years as abbess, she died in AD679 and quickly came to be revered as a saint.

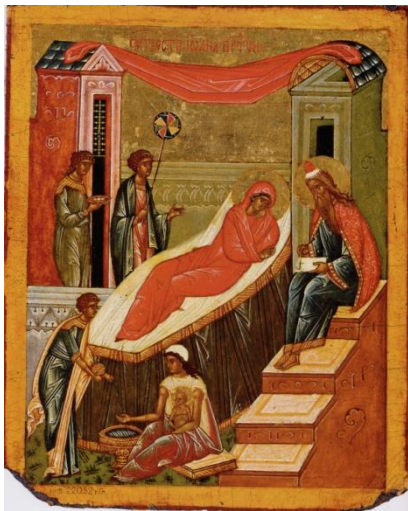


24th June

Nativity of Saint John the Baptist

This feast commemorates the events recorded in Saint Luke's Gospel:

The time came for Elizabeth to be delivered, and she gave birth to a son. And her neighbours and kinsfolk heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they would have named him Zechari'ah after his father, but his mother said, "Not so; he shall be called John." And they



said to her, "None of your kindred is called by this name." And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he would have him called. And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, "His name is John." And they all marvelled. And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God.* And fear came on all their neighbours. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea; and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, "What then will this child be?" For the hand of the Lord was with him.

(Luke 1: 57 - 66)

* *Zechariah had been struck dumb for disbelieving a message from an angel foretelling the birth of his son and instructing him to call the boy John.*

27th June

Saint Cyril of Alexandria - *Doctor of the Church, bishop*



Cyril was born in Egypt around the year AD376. When he was still young his uncle became Patriarch of Alexandria - at that time a very powerful position. Cyril received both Christian and secular educations and proved very able. He accompanied his uncle to the synod, which deposed John Chrysostom from his see of Constantinople. When his uncle died, Cyril was elected to replace him, though it was a contentious appointment accompanied by riots. During his adult life, he wrote prolifically and participated in the literally Byzantine politics of the later fourth and fifth centuries, which often interwove secular politics with religious debate. He is remembered, inter alia, for his robust defence of the designation of Mary as *theotokos* - bearer of God. He died around AD444. The reviews of his contemporaries were mixed; and it may be that a lingering suspicion saw him excluded from the Western calendar until the nineteenth century.