

OUR ROOTS RUN DEEP

The Anglican Church has an unbroken history dating back almost 2,000 years to the arrival in Britain of St. Joseph of Arimathea with the gospel in the first century AD. Gildas the Wise (AD 425-512), an early British historian wrote, "Christ, the True Sun, afforded His light, the knowledge of His precepts to our Island in the last year, as we know, of Tiberius Caesar." That was in AD 37, just a few years after the Resurrection of Christ! William of Malmesbury (AD 1080-1143), the best British historian of his day, says that after the Crucifixion of Christ, St. Joseph of Arimathea came to Britain with eleven missionaries, and that the King gave them twelve hides of land at Glastonbury (De Antiquitate Glastoniae Cap. 1). From that day until now there has never been a break in the life of the English Church.

The English Church was acknowledged by five Western Church Councils (Pisa, 1409; Constance, 1417; Sens, 1418; Sienna, 1424; and Basil, 1434) as the oldest church outside of the

Holy Land; with the Council of Basil declaring, "The Churches of France and Spain must yield in points of antiquity and precedents to that of Britain, as the latter Church was founded by Joseph of Arimathea immediately after the passion of Christ."

The word Anglican comes from the Latin and means English or Anglo-Saxon. The Christian faith was planted in England long before it reached Rome, and the Anglican Church remained completely separate from Roman domination for more than 1,000 years until William the Conqueror, the Duke of Normandy, invaded Britain in AD 1066 and conquered the Island, forcing the people to submit to the jurisdiction of Rome against their will. For the next four and a half centuries, the English Church maintained an uneasy, sometimes beneficial and sometimes stormy, relationship with the See of Rome.

In 1534, the Anglican Church was finally able to renounce papal supremacy and to end centuries of papal control that had been

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uncanonically established by force of arms. Convocation, the governing body of the Church of England, declared that "the Bishop of Rome hath not, by Scripture, any greater authority in England than any other foreign bishop."

It was the Anglican Church under King James that translated and published the Authorized, or King James, Version of the Bible in 1611. And it was the Anglican Church that gave the world the beloved Book of Common Prayer, which is primarily the Psalms and Canticles arranged for worship, with two Bible readings for each day of the year. Faithful Anglicans read the Old Testament (including the Apocrypha) through once, and the New Testament twice each year. There is no more Bible oriented Church in the world!

Not only is the Anglican Church the indigenous Church of the British Isles, but it is also thoroughly American! When the early English explorers and colonists came to North America they brought their Church with them. The Rev. Robert

Wolfall, a chaplain to the expedition of Martin Frobisher, was the first to celebrate the Holy Communion in North America. The place was a remote spot on the barren Arctic coast where Wolfall and the explorers were searching for a shorter passage to the Far East; and the year was 1578.

While there were occasional Anglican Services in what would become the United States prior to the 1600's, the first Communion Service was held on June 16, 1607. On that date, Captain John Smith, of John Smith and Pocahontas fame, and some 104 other colonists, celebrated the Lord's Supper with their chaplain, the Rev. Robert Hunt, to thank God for their safe arrival in Jamestown, Virginia.

Despite the diversity of Christian denominations in Colonial America, the Anglican Church was (by law) the established Church in six of the original thirteen colonies, and was active in all of the others. The Rev. Thomas Duche, an Anglican Minister, was the first clergyman to offer prayer in the Continental

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Congress; and the Rev. William White, another Anglican Minister, was its first regular chaplain. The signal lanterns for Paul Revere were hung in Christ Church, an Anglican parish in Boston; and Paul Revere was a Vestryman (Church Board member) of that congregation.

Two-thirds of the signers of the Declaration of Independence were Anglicans as were two-thirds of the signers of the Constitution of the United States. In fact, it was an Anglican, "Light Horse" Harry Lee, who proposed the Declaration of Independence in the first place. The principle author of that document, Thomas Jefferson, was the son of an Anglican clergyman, and was educated in an Anglican college.

Patrick Henry was a devoted Anglican; and his "Give me liberty or give me death" speech was given in St. John's Anglican Church in Richmond, Virginia. George Washington, the father of our Country, was an active and devout Anglican; as were James Madison, the chief architect of our Constitution, and his wife Dolly.

John Marshall, the father of the Supreme Court, was an active Anglican; as was Edmund Randolph, the first President of the Continental Congress.

Other important founding fathers and early leaders of America who were Anglicans include: Samuel Adams, Benjamin Franklin, John Jay, James Monroe, Francis Scott Key and Zachary Taylor. In addition, many of the leaders of the Confederate States of America during the War Between the States were Anglicans. These men include: President Jefferson Davis, Gen. Robert E. Lee, Gen. Leonidas Polk, and Gen. John Bell Hood. Independence Day, July 4th, is even a religious observance for us, a Holy Day!

This article was written by Father V. E. Novak. For more of his articles visit his Parish website at: www.holycrossomaha.net.