

ST THEODORE OF TARSUS AND CANTERBURY

The “Gift of God” to the Church in Seventh-Century Britain

1.	AD 602	Theodore is born in Tarsus, Cilicia, in the north-east corner of the Mediterranean, only 100 miles along a Roman road from Antioch. Tarsus is then in the Church of Antioch.
2.	613	He is 11/12 yrs old. The Persians conquer Antioch and then Tarsus — in later writings Theodore refers to Persian customs.
3.	614	The Persians conquer Damascus and Jerusalem. This is the earliest possible date for his flight to Constantinople.
4.	610/ 630	No higher education appears to have existed in Tarsus at this time: probably Theodore receives his in the renowned schools in Antioch. Certainly the Antiochian biblical ‘literalist’ method of interpretation is clear in Theodore’s Biblical commentaries, and he quotes Antiochian authorities, particularly St John Chrysostom.
5.	610/ 630	He seems to have studied for a period in Edessa, the important Syriac-speaking Christian centre further east in Syria, and he quotes St Ephrem the Syrian.
6.	627	The Byzantines defeat the Persians at Nineveh and the Empire enjoys a brief revival.
7.	early 630s	While Theodore is in Constantinople, St John Moschos certainly, and St Maximos the Confessor possibly, were there: it would be likely at least for them to have met.
8.	637	Arabs conquer Jerusalem and Antioch, and Tarsus soon after.
9.	637	At some point in these various invasions Theodore flees to Constantinople, a great city, with wonderful buildings and fine schools, where he can study widely in many subjects – philosophy, rhetoric, medicine, calculus, astronomy, astrology, etc. He is now aged 35, and may already be a monk. This is the latest date for his flight to Constantinople.
10.	640s	At some point he probably goes on to Athens and spends time there,
11.	640s	Then he goes on to Rome, and joins an eastern Monastery there - <i>possibly</i> St Sabas Palestinian Monastery, but <i>more likely</i> , with his being Cilician, the St Anastasius Magundar Cilician Monastery. St Anastasius Magundar has been martyred by the Persians only in 628, and Theodore will be well aware of him. It is noticeable that a copy of the <i>Acts</i> of St Anastasius Magundar circulates in England after the time of Theodore’s coming to England: it is very likely that he is its translator from the Greek to (rather poor) Latin.
12.	649 Oct	A Lateran Council under Pope St Martin takes place in Rome. It condemns the heresy of Monothelitism. Those present include George, Abbot of the Cilicians, and “Theodore the monk”.
13.	664	The Synod of Whitby takes place in England (Yorkshire), trying to reconcile Roman and local Celtic Christianity, especially on the date of Easter. Shortly afterwards, 14 July, St Deusdedit, Archbishop of Canterbury, dies of the plague,
14.	668	After four years’ vacancy in the Archbishopric, Egberht, King of Kent, appoints Wighard. For its status he sends him to be consecrated by Pope St Vitalian in Rome, but arriving there Wighard dies of the plague. The Pope asks St Adrian, Abbot of a Monastery near Naples to go to Canterbury in his place, but he declines and recommends Andrew, another Abbot, but he also declines. Adrian then proposes Theodore, now aged 66. The Pope appoints him, and immediately ordains him subdeacon, but waits four months before the consecration for Theodore’s hair to grow, so that he can be given a western tonsure in place of his eastern one.
15.	668 26 Mar	Theodore is consecrated Archbishop of Canterbury in Rome by the Pope, who throughout his reign is very mindful both of the Eastern Church and of the Anglo-Saxon Church. He says that Theodore must be accompanied by St Adrian and St Benedict Biscop (an Englishman, who was to be his interpreter): they were to ensure that Theodore did not bring in Greek practices.

16.	668 27 May	Theodore sets out the day after the feast of St Augustine of Canterbury, taking the sea-route to Marseilles, and continuing to Arles with a Papal commendation to the Metropolitan. He continues to Paris, where he stays with the Bishop, St Agilberht, who was formerly Bishop of Dorchester in England, and was present at the Synod of Whitby. King Egberht sends a representative to Paris to fetch Theodore. Theodore goes via Brittany (presumably to find out about the Britons in Great Britain), but falls ill at Etaples.
17.	669 27 May	Theodore arrives in England, aged 67, exactly a year after leaving Rome and after a five-year vacancy at Canterbury.
18.	669	Theodore immediately sets about reorganising the Church in Britain: he makes a fact-finding tour of England with Adrian, he appoints Bishops in vacant sees; he founds the school at Canterbury under Adrian, which becomes highly influential. He and Adrian teach a wide range of subjects, including Latin and Greek, the Scriptures, the Greek Fathers, canon law, penitential discipline, astronomy, calculus. From the Church of Antioch he introduces the Litany of the Saints to England and indeed to the Western Church.
19.	669	Theodore reinstates St Wilfred to the Bishopric of York, removing the intruder St Chad, but sends Chad (after re-ordination) to be Bishop of Lichfield in the kingdom of Mercia.
20.	670	Theodore signs the foundation charter for Minster Abbey in Thanet and consecrates the Monastery, for Abbess St Ermenburga (Domneva).
21.	672/3 24 Sept	He calls the first national Synod of the English Bishops at Hertford: he proposes 10 canons for the whole Church in Britain. This begins a process of unifying the peoples of England, so that Theodore may be regarded as Father of the English Nation. The Canons are all passed unanimously, except those proposing the dividing up of dioceses.
22.	677/8	Theodore deposes St Wilfred from York and divides Northumbria into three dioceses with new Bishops.
23.	679 17 Sept	At the request of Pope St Agatho, Theodore calls the Council of Hatfield (Yorkshire), which declares the English Church's Orthodoxy in regard to Monothelism,
24.	679	Theodore reconciles Eadfrid King of Northumbria and Ealfrid King of Mercia
25.	680	Theodore, aged 78, visits Monkwearmouth or Jarrow and almost certainly meets the 7 year-old St Bede, and clearly becomes Bede's hero ever after.
26.	680	Theodore Archbishop of Britain is mentioned by Pope St Agatho to the Emperor as the only one who has ever really mastered the question of Monothelism. Theodore feels too old (he is 78) to travel to Rome and on to Constantinople. The Sixth Ecumenical Council meets in Constantinople and condemns Monothelism
27.	687	Theodore consecrates as Bishop of Hexham St John of Beverley, who later ordains St Bede deacon and priest.
28.	c. 690	Theodore installs St Mildred as Abbess at Minster-in-Thalet
29.	690 19 Sept	He dies aged 88 in Canterbury, and is buried alongside the earlier Archbishops in the SS Peter and Paul Monastery (now called St Augustine's), outside the walls of Canterbury. He has been "the first Archbishop whom all Britain obeyed", and his time as chief Pastor was, says Bede, "the happiest time of the English people since they came to Britain." [At a later period (1091) a new tomb is made for his relics. At the Reformation (16c) his relics are doubtless destroyed.]
30.	731	Bede completes his <i>History of the English Church and People</i> , and becomes the principal source of our knowledge of Theodore. [Bede dies four years later.]

Feasts of St Theodore observed in Canterbury:

19 September This is the date of his Repose
26 March This is the date of his Ordination

This summary owes much to Michael Lapidge's important book Archbishop Theodore.