

The Early Medieval North: Crucible of Faith

Professor Michelle Brown offers rich insights into the story and significance of the Lindisfarne Gospels which have become a rallying point for the regional identity of the North East. In this third address, we discover that this remarkable book was made single-handedly between 715-722 by Eadfrith, the busy bishop of Holy Island, and represents a fusion of ingredients drawn from the rich melting-pot of peoples and cultures in the North. It is a dynamic conduit of the Word and of the successful attempt of peoples to keep the flame of faith alive through the darkest of times. Each of the Gospels is introduced by a carpet-page. Embedded in each is a different type of cross: Matthew has the Latin cross, Mark the Celtic ring-head, Luke the Greek cross, and John the Coptic and Ethiopic tau cross. Four acts of witness, four traditions of churchmanship, united in harmony. We no longer think of the 5th to the 8th century as the dark age, but as one illuminated by tremendous spiritual and cultural achievement in which new economic and political models emerged and the identities of many of our modern states were born. What made the difference was the faith, risk taking, and sheer graft of individual men and women living in community, and doing the Lord's work in the world, or in solitary retreat for a season or a lifetime of intense prayer. Can we do likewise?

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