



Edwardtide factsheet

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For teachers:

This factsheet is designed to act as a case study that can be reviewed within classroom lessons on pilgrimage. It covers Edwardtide, a national pilgrimage to the Shrine of St Edward the Confessor in Westminster Abbey, exploring who St Edward was and what happens during a pilgrimage.

You may choose to use this factsheet to kickstart a lesson on pilgrimage, or to integrate it within an existing lesson.

Discussion or essay questions could include:

- Why do you think Christians choose to go on pilgrimage to Westminster Abbey?
- What are the similarities and differences between the pilgrimage site at Westminster Abbey and other pilgrimage sites you have studied?
- The journey of pilgrimage means more to Christians than the destination. Discuss.

If you only have five minutes, this [short and engaging film](#) covers the key information your students will need on pilgrimage into a three-minute film.

If you are looking for a whole lesson, take a look at the [Examples of Christian pilgrimage](#) resource, which takes a comprehensive look at the major Christian pilgrimage sites around the world. Equally, [The role and importance of pilgrimage](#) resource can be used to investigate why Christians may choose to go on pilgrimage, and what that means for individuals and communities. These lessons do not need to be taught chronologically but do complement each other.

If you are looking to spark discussion, review this [opinion piece](#) which examines the significance of pilgrimage for Christians, both considering the journey itself and the final destination.

If you are looking for images to build your own resource, explore our [image bank](#). Each high-quality image comes from the Westminster Abbey image library and is freely available for use in your classroom.

Westminster Abbey

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Edwardtide is the name given to the national pilgrimage to the Shrine of St Edward the Confessor in Westminster Abbey. This pilgrimage is part of the Abbey's annual celebration of St Edward the Confessor.

Who was St Edward the Confessor?

He was one of the last Anglo-Saxon kings, who was born sometime between 1002 and 1005. He ruled from 1042 to 1066. He was made a saint (canonised) in 1161.

Why is he so important to Westminster Abbey?

Without St Edward the Confessor, it's possible that there would be no Westminster Abbey. He had promised the Pope that he would make his own pilgrimage to St Peter's Basilica in Rome. However, once he became king, he found it was impossible to leave the country. The Pope released him from his promise on the condition he build his own church, dedicated to St Peter. This became Westminster Abbey and was completed only a week before Edward died.



Why do we call him 'Confessor'?

This term was given to Edward after his death, to reflect his life of great holiness and piety, and to indicate that he was a saint who did not die for his faith (known as martyrdom).

How did King Edward become St Edward the Confessor?

There are many stories about Edward's journey to sainthood. Some of these stories tell us how important his Christian faith was to him during his lifetime. Other stories tell us about miracles associated with him, for example the time he gave a precious ring to a beggar (who turned out to be St John the Evangelist), or when he healed a leper. He was also said to have the gift of prophecy.

When is Edwardtide?

Each year, the Abbey celebrates the life of St Edward the Confessor with a week of special services, sermons, festivities and prayer, known as the Octave of St Edward. This includes the National Day of Pilgrimage, which falls on the Saturday closest to the 13th October, the date of Edward's Feast Day when his body was moved to its current resting place.

What happens at Edwardtide?

Throughout this week, candles are lit and incense is burnt, and pilgrims make their journey to visit Edward's shrine. Pilgrims and worshippers may come to renew their baptism vows, have their feet washed as a sign of welcome (a tradition stemming from the time when Christ washed the feet of his

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disciples to indicate that he was their servant), or visiting dedicated prayer stations, set up throughout the Abbey. Following the National Day of Pilgrimage on the Saturday, when the Abbey opens its doors for everyone, there is a Eucharist service on the Sunday. The heart of the national pilgrimage day is a festival Eucharist for all pilgrims.

Is pilgrimage important to Edwardtide?

Pilgrimage is central to Edwardtide and has been for hundreds of years. Though there are celebrations taking place inside Westminster Abbey, the focus for those pilgrims visiting the Shrine of St Edward will be on their own personal journey to this special place.

Why is Edwardtide so special?

For many people, particularly pilgrims, Edwardtide marks the end of their journey to Westminster Abbey. Many of those pilgrims will have travelled hundreds of miles to pray at the shrine of the saint and Edwardtide is the culmination of their pilgrimage – a small yet important part of it.

What is a shrine?

Shrines can take many forms but they are always considered to be a sacred space or construction. They can be found all over the world and are usually associated with relics, events, deities or, in the case of St Edward, a person. King Henry III, a devotee of St Edward, ordered the building of an impressive and costly shrine which was completed in 1269. Since then the Shrine, which still contains the body of St Edward, has been a focal point for pilgrims and worshippers.

Who visits the Shrine?

Christian worshippers are welcome to visit and pray at the Shrine but, during Edwardtide, we are often visited by worshippers with a particular connection to St Edward. That may be due to the church they attend, or the community group they are members of.

