



Alfred of Wessex

Frank Morriss

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“Here is one set aside for greatness!” With these prophetic words did Pope Leo IV anoint the four-year-old Prince Alfred, youngest son of Ethelwulf, King of Wessex in England. Deeply influenced from childhood by his brother Ethelred and their wise tutor Bishop Swithin, Alfred became both a scholar and visionary, with the sure heart and skill of a warrior. First as prince, later as king, his life was committed to the protection of Wessex—its people and its Christian faith—from the ravaging onslaughts of the heathen Danes. His dependence on Christ, his love for the Church and its people, coupled with his humor, and the humility he learned through his errors marked Alfred’s life.

As the last Christian kingdom standing against the Danes, Wessex and its King faced many defeats and discouragements. Nevertheless, Alfred—one who “set men’s hearts afire”—eventually united all the kingdoms of ninth century England, defeating the Danes in battle, but also, in the end, welcoming them to the Christian faith.

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