

November 19

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Mechthild of Magdeburg (ca.1208-ca.1283) witness

In the thirteenth century, the monastery of Helfta was a respected spiritual center and a gathering place for great women mystics who found nourishment for their lives in daily meditation of Scripture. Many of them were not traditional nuns, but Beguines who had sought refuge at Helfta when their Beguignages were persecuted by Dominican friars and others.

The most famous of these women was undoubtedly Mechthild of Magdeburg, although little is known about her life. Born around the year 1208 into a noble family in the diocese of Magdeburg, she decided at a young age to join a community of Beguines, women who rejected traditional forms of religious life and lived in small groups on the outskirts of villages, where they led intense lives of prayer.

For thirty years Mechthild experienced deep communion with God in prayer. As soon as her confessor asked her to write about her experiences, however, her troubles began, especially because she was very outspoken in denouncing the corruption of the clergy.

In 1261, after a Dominican synod at Magdeburg condemned the Beguines, Mechthild sought refuge at Helfta, where she became a sister of Mechthild of Hackeborn and the spiritual director of Gertrude of Helfta. In the peace of the Helfta community and in the company of extraordinary women, Mechthild completed her literary masterpiece, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*. In this work, she uses some of the most beautiful images in medieval literature to describe the outpouring of divine light in a heart that has spent a lifetime meditating God's word.

Mechthild died around the year 1283, completely blind but with a vivid light in the eyes of her heart.

Her memorial is celebrated today by the Church of England, and on this same day the monastic calendar commemorates Mechthild of Hackeborn.

BIBLICAL READINGS

Eccl 8,6-7; Rev 19:1.5-9; Mic 11:25-30

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

ANGLICANS:

Hilda (d. 680), abbess of Whitby

Mechthild, beguine of Magdeburg, mystic

WESTERN CATHOLICS:

Mechthild (of Hackeborn; d. 1299), virgin (Monastic calendar)

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (10 hatúr/hedai-):

Sophia and 50 copanions of Edessa (d. ca. 361), martyrs (Coptic Church)

LUTHERANS:

Elizabeth of Thuringia (d. 1231), benefactress in Hesse

MARONITES:

Pontian (3rd cent.), pope

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:

Obadiah (6th cent. BC), prophet

Barlaam of Antioch (d. ca. 304), martyr

Synaxis of the saints of Karelia

Barlaam of Chutyn (d. 1192), monk (Russian Church)

OLD CATHOLICS:

Elizabeth of Thuringia, widow