

THE FIRST OPEN CHURCH, FOLLOWERS OF “THE WAY”

Part Ten, By: Jeffrey Crosby

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This is a continuation of the story of the first Christian church that was founded outside of Jerusalem after Christ was crucified and resurrected. In the previous issues (Parts 1 through 9) we found that those on the British Isles, particularly at the time of our story, are actually in large part of the lost flock of the House of Israel. Like most Anglo/Celtic and Germanic stock of today, they did not realize that the prophecies of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were actually being fulfilled through themselves. It was Joseph of Arimathea, great-uncle of Yahshua (Jesus) Christ, with a band of devout apostles of Christ, who brought the oral Word to the Isles, in particular to Avalon, later known as Glastonbury, where the first above-ground, open church would be built to worship Christ their Saviour. Yahshua did promise to His flock, “I will never leave nor forsake you,” did He not?

We discussed when Joseph first arrived in this tiny haven, met by King Aviragus and an entourage of nobility, and was given a large tract of land where the first apostles could worship and teach the Word, unmolested by the Sanhedrin’s Talmudic power blinded theocracy and the vicious onslaught of the pagan Romans. It was here, as legend goes, that Christ came with his uncle Joseph and sometimes His mother Mary, when he was a younger man, before His ministry and crucifixion in Judea. It is alleged that Joseph built a home there for Yahshua and Mary when they visited, and an altar in this refuge of solitude.

The time period is circa A.D. 36-37 (which predates Paul dedicating the first above ground Christian church in Rome, the Palatium Britanicum, by twenty years). We know this from one of Britain’s foremost historians, Gildas (A.D. 520), where he wrote in *De Exidio Britanniae*: “We certainly know that Christ, the True Son, afforded His Light, the knowledge of His precepts to our Island in the last year of Tiberius Caesar,” and that “Joseph introduced Christianity into Britain in the last year of the reign of Tiberius.”

Tiberius was the Roman Emperor at the time of Christ, and had reigned for twenty two years. The crucifixion took place in the seventeenth year of his reign, or A.D. 31 by our present Gregorian reckoning. So the last year of his reign would be five years after the Passion of Christ, or about A.D. 36 and 37.

We have also been doing a critical review of George F. Jowett’s book, *The Drama of the Lost Disciples* (TDLD). He says very little regarding this first physical

church. He does make a claim which is misleading concerning the sequence of when the original church, built by Joseph, and another protective overlaying, or another church over the place of Mary's residence, were built. He states: "Soon after Joseph and his apostolic company had settled in Avalon painstakingly they began to build their wattle church. It was sixty feet in length and twenty-six feet wide, following the pattern of the Tabernacle [in the Wilderness of Sinai]. The task was completed between A.D. 38 and 39 ... To protect it from dissolution it was encased in lead and over it St. Paulinus, A.D. 630, erected the beautiful chapel of St. Mary's. It remained intact until the year A.D. 1184, when the great fire gutted the whole Abbey to the ground and with it perished the structure of the first Christian Church above ground" (p. 76).

Here I must agree with Jowett when he claims that it was about A.D. 36 when the Word was first brought to the Isles, and the church built two years later. E. Raymond Capt, M.A., of the Archaeological Institute of America, says in *The Traditions of Glastonbury* (TG) that from records and authorities quoted in his extensive research, "both secular and ecclesiastical, it is evident that Christianity (Culdee Church) flourished in Britain approximately A.D. 36-39 and the first Christian Church above ground was erected approximately A.D. 39-41" (pp. 47-48). Although he says "approximately," these dates (concerning the first church) seem to be two years later than others have cited, and I attribute this to Capt placing Christ's crucifixion in A.D. 33, which is two years late by present reckoning.

Contrary to what Jowett said about the first church "following the pattern of the Tabernacle," Capt correctly states, on page 42: "Having gained legal title to the land from King Aviragus, Joseph and his companions proceeded to build huts for themselves and for Mary [mother of Christ] who accompanied Joseph to Britain. They then erected what must have been the first Christian church above ground. These early hutments would have been made from wattle daubed with mud and built in a circular form."

From studies made from the late F. Bligh Bond, F.R.I.B.A., member of the Somerset Archaeological Society and formerly director of excavations at Glastonbury Abbey, he affirms that the first church was circular, "having a diameter of 25 feet, with the twelve huts of the other disciples forming a circle around it. All the buildings were enclosed in a circular stockade to keep out wild animals. It was the center building that may have incorporated or covered the earlier structure built by the hands of Christ Himself" (pp. 42-43).

British historian William of Malmsebury, quoting from the Abbey records said: "These holy men built a chapel of the form that had been shown them. The walls were of osiers wattled together," and describes this church as "rude and misshapen." By "the form that had been shown them," it was likely relating to the process of making wattle buildings.

From the *Ensign Message*, Vol. 11 No. 4, October/December issue, 2009, p. 31, they state: "The refugee missionaries proceeded with the full consent of the King and the Druidic hierarchy to introduce the Gospel of Christ by building a church, a wattle church, to the precise dimensions of the tabernacle of old. The wattle church at Glastonbury was built of timber pillars and framework doubly wattled inside and out and

thatched with reeds, as the mode then was.... A model of the Glastonbury wattle church may be seen at the British Museum.”

To set the record straight and to remove any confusion as to this early church, whether it be “round” in one account, or one built “in the pattern of the Tabernacle” (26' by 60'), we will discuss this, a second church, momentarily.

The Angles called this first church the “Ealde Chyrche” (Old Church). St. Paulinus, who later encased the original with boards and covered it with lead, was Archbishop of York and later Bishop of Rochester from A.D. 625-644. This original wattle “Ealde Church” became known as the “Culdee Church” or “Church of the Refugees.” As mentioned in previous lessons of our story, “Culdees” means “Judean Refugees.” There is an ancient poem which goes like this: “The pure Culdees were Alby’s (Albion) earliest priests of God, ere yet an island of her seas by foot of Saxon monk was trod” (Reullura by Campbell).

Although Mary, mother of our beloved Saviour, was erroneously and shamelessly deified by the pagan Roman Papacy approximately six hundred years after Christ was crucified (the British Church never deified Mary, but holds her in affectionate memory), it does not take away from the fact that she was, without argument, the most faithful, honored and humble woman that ever walked this planet. Imagine! The mother of Christ, the only begotten Son of The Almighty Creator. Although it may not be that obvious in our sacred scriptures, there was a loving bond between mother and Son that is beyond words. Here, I will quote parts from Capt’s TDLD.

“The most hallowed of all the Traditions of Glastonbury is the story of Mary, the mother of Jesus, ending her last days on earth in Glastonbury. She is said to have been interred in its sacred ground, to become the first of a long list of saints buried at Glastonbury” (p. 49) Regarding the church, Capt goes on to say, on pages 50 and 51: “According to one tradition of Glastonbury, after Mary’s death, a building of wattle construction, sixty feet in length and twenty-six feet wide (following the pattern of the Wilderness Tabernacle) was built over her home. This building became known as the ‘Lignea Basilica’ or the ‘Vetusta Ecclesia’ and the ‘Ealdechurche’ or ‘Old Church’ ... The existence of a mud and wattle church at Glastonbury is historically proven by two royal Charters which are still extant. Both were actually signed in the ‘Lignea Basilica’, one by King Ina, in A.D. 704, and the other by King Cnut in A.D. 1032.” In other words, the rectangular church, known as “Mary’s Chapel” as well as “St. Joseph’s Chapel”, following the pattern of the Wilderness Tabernacle, was in all probability not built until A.D. 48, fifteen years after Joseph was attributed the title and position of kinsman guardian (“paranymphos”) over Mary (which would have been about A.D. 33, after the disciple John [“the Beloved”] was guardian), and it was built after the original round, crude wattle hut church, which was very possibly built by the hands of Yahshua Christ Himself when He was in Avalon with His uncle Joseph (and possibly Mary), as a younger man. Mary, and many other Saints throughout history since, are buried here. In fact, Mary’s Chapel, with its old cemetery, is called “the most holiest ground on earth,” “the most hallowed spot in Christendom,” and “the burial place of the Saints.”

Capt later states: "In A.D. 708, King Ina (or Ine, the son of Kendred), of Wessex, presented his famous charter to the 'Lignea Basilica,' which reads in part: 'To the ancient church, situate in the place called Glastonbury, which church the Great High Priest and Chiefest Minister, formerly through His own Ministry and that of angels, sanctified by many an unheard of miracle to Himself and the ever Virgin Mary, as was formerly revealed to St. David, do grant ...'." (TG, p. 56). [Note: A careful study of Matt. 13:55 & Mark 6:3 will show that Mary had other children after Christ, namely James, Joses, Judah & Simon. See William Finck on 'The Epistle of James', (Talkshoe 1-6-2012)]

It must be noted that Ina was referring to Christ Himself when he called Him the "Great High Priest" and "Chiefest Minister." It also suggests that Christ personally ministered there at one time. It also confirms Gildas' statement that "Christ afforded His light, the knowledge of His precepts" by bringing the Word to the isles personally. Of course, the ancient church referred to is the original little wattle church, likely built by Joseph of Arimathea and the apostles with him. Since the first, there have been many other chapels on and around this very sacred spot (which we will address at a later date). Presently, the ruins of the twelfth century Church of Saint Mary's, also called "Mary's" or the "Lady's Chapel," protectively lie above (like a mother protecting her most precious loved one) what remains of the original wattle church.

Capt points out that past records from the Old Church at Glastonbury, confirmed by other records from antiquity, such as the Cotton MS and Titus, and the Novo Legend Anglo, by John Capgrave (the Principle of the Augustine Friars in England, A.D. 1466), say that the Virgin Mary passed on in A.D. 48. Quoting Capt, he states "... the old Glastonbury Abbey records officially declare that St. Mary's Chapel (later erected over the Wattle Church) built by St. David, was raised over her remains." Furthermore, Melchinus, the Celtic bard, historian and philosopher known as 'Maelgwyn' of Avalon and uncle of St. David, wrote (about A.D. 540): 'Ye ealde chyrche was built over the grave of the Blessed Mary.' Maelgwyn also wrote, in his *Historia de Rebus Britannicis*: 'In this church they worshipped and taught the people the true Christian faith. After about fifteen years Mary died and was buried at Glastonbury. The disciples died in succession and were buried in the cemetery'."

The noted twelfth century British historian William of Malmesbury says that this most sacred ground is "... held in great reverence, on account of the number of Saints, Martyrs and Confessors, who had found a resting place, either by ending their days here, or whose bones, owing to its character for superior sanctity, had been translated hither ... For it seems to have been the custom at Glastonbury, in early ages, to place the relics of some saint in a magnificent shrine, to attract a multitude of worshippers ... It, with the venerated *Vetusta Ecclesia*, was called the 'Tomb of the Saints'."

Excavations at the sight reveal slab-lined graves of antiquity packed closely together, each vying for a resting place closest to the oratories and tombs of the saints.

Besides St. Joseph of Arimathea, and those apostles with him, and Mary being interred here, the historian Gildas spent his last days here, as did King Coel (or Hoel), the father of Queen Helena and grandfather of Constantine is laid to rest here. Twelve disciples of St. Philip are said to be buried here, as is the renowned fifth and sixth

century King Arthur, and Queen Guinevere. Clifton Emahiser has pointed out to us in one of his past *Watchman's Teaching Letters* that St. Paul and other apostles to our Saviour, whose bones were entombed in Rome, were finally moved to Glastonbury cemetery centuries after their burial in Rome, to rest in this "most hallowed spot in Christendom."

Referring to the resting place of both Mary and the other saints buried here, Maelgwyn furthermore wrote: "The isle of Avalon greedy for burials ... received thousands of sleepers, among whom Joseph de Marmore from Arimathea by name, entered his perpetual sleep. And he lies in a bifurcated line next to the southern angle of the oratory made of circular wattles by 13 inhabitants of the place over the powerful adorable Virgin." He refers to the saints at Glastonbury "... who there awaited the day of resurrection under the protection of the Mother of God." This implies that Joseph, the apostles, and Mary are buried under the wattle church, and the reason why the Old Church is also called "Mary's" or "St. Joseph's Chapel."

In A.D. 1135, regarding Mary's Chapel, it was written: "The very floor, inlaid with polished stone, and the side of the altar itself above and beneath, are laden with the multitude of relics ... where also one can notice in the pavement stones are carefully set side by side, either in triangularly or squarely and sealed with lead, under which I believe some sacred secret to be contained. I shall not be an injury to religion" (translated from Malmesbury's *Acts of the Kings*). Is the "secret" spoken of the legendary burial place of the prophesied and chosen Virgin of our Saviour?

As earlier alluded to, Mary was not deified by the Roman Catholic Church until A.D. 600. Furthermore, and unlike the British Church who does not practice that rite, the Roman Church did not dedicate anything to Mary until after the year A.D. 1130, except for Mary's Chapel at Glastonbury over a millennia before. The late Vicar of Glastonbury, Rev Lionel Smithett Lewis, dedicated years to researching the traditions of Yahshua and His mother Mary in Britain. He acknowledges the honor that the Roman Catholic Church has placed on Mary and her place in Glastonbury. Rev. Lewis stated: "No one better than [the Roman Catholic Church] know the facts of [Mary's] life, and no one better than they espouse them. And over the ages the holy ground at Glastonbury has been constantly referred to by them as 'Our Lady's Dowry.' As such it has always been recognized by the Roman Catholic Sisterhood, who never ceased to pray daily for this hallowed spot at Glastonbury – Our Lady's Dowry." As E. Raymond Capt notes (where almost all of the foregoing information has come from), Lewis could have been responding to the French convent in Alexandria, conducted by nuns who were members of the old royal French nobility, who taught that St. Joseph of Arimathea took Mary, mother of Christ, with him to Britain and that she died there.

Soon after Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press, Wynken de Worde and Richard Pynson (A.D. 1516-1520) each printed versions of the Arimathean story from older documents. In one account was stated: "Now here how Joseph came into Englande; But at that tyme it was called Brytayne. Then XV yere with our lady, as I understande, Joseph wayted styll to serve hyr he was fayne." What is interesting to note here is the length of time that "Joseph came into Englande ... XV yere (15 years)

with our lady” This seems to refer to the length of time that Joseph was kinsman guardian, “paranympnos” over Mary, from about A.D. 32 to 48.

Over time there have been other allegations of the burial place of Mary. In the fourth century, Gnostics claimed that after she died in Bethlehem, an angel forewarned of her impending death, that she was borne in a cloud to Jerusalem and then carried by the Apostles to Gethsemane, where her soul was received by the angel Gabriel and carried to Paradise. Her body was then carried by the Apostles to the valley of Jehosaphat and placed in a tomb, that Christ appeared and ordered the archangel Michael to bring her soul from Paradise, where it was re-united with her body, which was carried by angels to heaven. But St. Epiphanius (A.D. 31-402), Bishop of Constantia or Salamis, claimed the whole story as “foolish and strange ... a device and deceit of the devil” (Haer 89). And although Pope Gelasius condemned this assumption as heretical in A.D. 494, the “Festival of the Assumption” was instituted in the seventh century, rejected, and accepted again in A.D. 818. Today it is recognized on August 15th by Roman Catholics in their breviary.

Today, the Roman Catholic Church (who claim Jerusalem as the Holy City of Roman Catholicism and the Pope as God on Earth) named the Chapel of the Dormition, near Jerusalem, as the site. Yet there is absolutely not one shred of evidence to substantiate this fallacy. None of the Disciples ever mentioned her death and burial, and even the renowned Roman Catholic St. Jerome, when recording sacred places and events in the East makes no mention of Mary’s burial place, in either Judea or in Rome. The reason for this is because she was laid to rest in Avalon, known as Glastonbury in the British Isles, where she is with her own kindred people, Joseph and the apostles, and the multitude of Saints to follow who are without doubt the Anglo-Saxon and Celtic seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/Israel.