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## BIRINUS – AN APOSTLE TO THE ENGLISH

Thousands of our churches are currently involved in various mission initiatives across the UK. If it is tough going at times, we should spare a thought for poor Birinus, a priest from Lombard, who was sent here on his own 14 centuries ago. Pope Honorius I gave him the daunting task of being the apostle to Wessex.

It was about 635 that Birinus first sailed across the Channel. He planned to convert all of Wessex, and then press on into the Midlands, where no Christian preacher had ever yet been. But once he began ministry in Wessex, Birinus found

the West Saxons so pagan that he decided he better just stay among them.

So Birinus began his ministry, endlessly travelling around Wessex, and preaching to whomever he encountered. Gradually he became known, and his message began to seep through.

Then a great breakthrough occurred: the King of Wessex, Cynegils, asked Birinus for instruction in the Christian faith. His daughter was going to marry Oswald, the Christian king of Northumbria, and for political reasons Cynegils now wanted to convert. So Birinus taught and baptised Cynegils and his family, and in return they gave him the Romano-

British town of  
Dorchester as his see,  
and Birinus became the  
first bishop of  
Dorchester.

It was an excellent  
strategic move:  
Dorchester was on a  
main road and river in  
the centre of an area of  
dense Anglo-Saxon  
settlement. From his  
new 'headquarters',  
Birinus spent his last 15  
years going on to build  
many churches around  
Wessex, and to baptise  
many people. Towards  
the end of his life Birinus  
dedicated a church at  
Winchester, which later  
became the ecclesiastical  
centre of the kingdom.  
(There is no record of  
Wessex bishops at  
Dorchester after 660.)

Any lesson in all this?  
Bloom where God plants

you, and be faithful to  
your calling, however  
tough things may look at  
first, and however  
obscure the place.  
Birinus' obedience and  
faith planted Christianity  
in a key part of Britain,  
and so helped shape  
British history for  
centuries to come.

