

Saint for December 26 - Samuel Ajayi Crowther (1809-1891)

*Observed 31 December*



In 1821 a Yoruba village was destroyed and those of its inhabitants not slain were carried off into slavery by the Fulani raiders. Among those captured was a 12-year-old boy, Ajayi. The slaves were eventually sold to Portuguese slavers for shipment overseas, but a British ship captured the slave ship, freed the captives, and took them to the British colony of Sierra Leone, which was specifically established as a refuge for freed African slaves. Ajayi was an eager and apt pupil, who advanced quickly in his studies and was baptized taking the name of Samuel Crowther. He became an accomplished carpenter, but also pursued academic studies, eventually

teaching at the college. He married a girl who was also a freed slave and together they taught and conceived a desire to return to their native area to bring the Gospel to others. In 1841 when England decided to explore the Niger area, to bring education and development to the population and to end the native slave trade, Crowther was chosen to be part of the missionary team, partly due to his gift for languages. The members of the expedition spoke extensively with tribal and village leaders about the evils of the slave trade and were hopeful of progress when their group was decimated by disease. The survivors had to flee for their lives. Soon after, Crowther was taken to England for further training and ordination. When he returned to Africa, it was to Nigeria where he did extensive work translating the Book of Common Prayer and the Bible into various native languages, as well as creating language texts (grammars and dictionaries). In 1864 Crowther was made bishop and continued his tireless work for the people of Nigeria until his death due to a stroke. He not only worked for the conversion of the people to Christianity, but also for their peaceful development, teaching agricultural practices and trades that could replace the slave trade as an economic base.

If you wish to learn more about Bishop Crowther, you can go to <http://anglicanhistory.org/africa/crowther/page1892/> to find the 1892 biography *Samuel Crowther, the Slave Boy who Became Bishop of the Niger* by Jesse Page, thanks to Project Canterbury, Project Canterbury (anglicanhistory.org) is a wonderful, ever-expanding collection of documents from worldwide Anglicanism throughout its history. At this site one is able to read articles, tracts, and books that one might never be able to find in physical form.

In concluding his biography, Page writes “The lives of other servants of God may seem more heroic, but his was conscientious and faithful well-doing; so unobtrusive was his character that the worker is always lost in the work. He was unspoiled by an office which often proves a giddy pinnacle for many men; his humility was perhaps his chief characteristic.”

*Lessons* Isaiah 60:4-9; Psalm 119:57-64; Romans 8:15-23; Matthew 9:35-38

*Collect* Almighty God, you rescued Samuel Ajayi Crowther from slavery, sent him to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ to his people in Nigeria, and made him the first bishop from the people of West Africa: Grant that those who follow in his steps may reap what he has sown and find abundant help for the harvest; through him who took upon himself the form of a slave that we might be free, the same Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.