

Saint George (and the Dragon)

Saint George is the patron saint of England and his Saints Day is on April 23rd.

Saint George isn't English though, it is thought that he actually came from Palestine.

Saint George's legend is an ancient one, this is his story:

There was a city called Silene, which had a large lake where a dragon lived. This dragon breathed fire and disease and poisoned all of the countryside around it. The people of Silene were very scared and to keep the dragon happy, gave it a sheep every day for food. When there were no more sheep to give, the people gave their children to the dragon. The children were chosen by lottery.

However, one day the King's daughter was chosen, and the King said that he would give all of his silver, gold and half of his lands if his daughter, the Princess, could be saved and someone else sent instead. But his people said no, and the Princess was sent to the lake to be a fine meal for the dragon.

On the same day, George (he wasn't yet a saint) was riding past the lake at the time the Princess was going to the dragon. The Princess tried to send him away even though she was terrified and trembling with fear. But George said he would stay and protect her.

Suddenly, the dragon came out of the lake. George made the sign of the cross, jumped on his horse and went towards the dragon. He used his spear which he had with him to badly hurt the creature. George then asked the Princess to throw him her silken belt, and he put it around the creature's neck like a lead, and the dragon followed the Princess like a dog follows its master.

The Princess and George took the dragon back to Silene; the people were terrified, but George said that if the people all became Christians and they were all baptized, then he would kill the dragon immediately.

The King and all his people became Christians and George killed the dragon, as he promised.

It is said that fifteen thousand men were baptized, and the King built a church in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint George, on the spot where the dragon was killed.

It is said that a fountain of holy water sprang from the altar of the church which could cure any disease known to man.

Why is Saint George Patron Saint Of England?

Saint George is not only patron saint of England, but also of Greece, Palestine (which is where he is from), Lithuania, Portugal, Germany, Catalonia (in Spain), Georgia, Moscow (in Russia), Istanbul (in Turkey), and Genoa (in Italy). He is also the patron saint of the boy scouts of America!

But why is he ENGLAND'S saint?

Although the story of George and the Dragon is a popular one, it is a legend.

In fact, it is thought that George was a soldier in the Roman army, but he was a devout Christian, and he refused to give up believing in God.

He refused to obey the Roman Emperor's orders that the soldiers should make sacrifices to the pagan gods. George was tortured for seven years, but he refused to give up his religion. Eventually, in 303AD, he was beheaded.

He was made a Saint in 494AD by Pope Gelasius I.

He never came to England, but the tales of his bravery in the face of great suffering and torture were known here, and he was chosen to be England's patron saint by King Edward III in 1350. He was admired by many military men and European Knights of the time, because he was so brave.

Even though Saint George wasn't English and didn't come to England, it is thought that King Edward chose him as Saint of England because of this – he wasn't linked to any one area of the country, so everyone could unite behind Saint George.

So did Saint George really slay a dragon?

The story/legend of Saint George is said to be more than 1,000 years old, so we don't know where it came from.

And we know now that there are no such things as dragons, but people in ancient times might have called a large snake, or alligator or crocodile a 'dragon', but we will never know.

The story of Saint George and the Dragon is a story of good overcoming evil, bravery and triumph, and it is one that teaches us to do the brave and right thing.

Happy Saint George's Day!