

St. George's Day

Saint George is the patron saint of many countries around the world, including Bulgaria, Croatia and England. St. George's Day is celebrated on 23rd April every year. The symbol of Saint George is a red cross on a white background, which is also the flag of England and a part of the flag of Great Britain.

Who Was the Real Saint George?

Saint George was a soldier who was born in the year AD 270 in Cappadocia, which is now in Eastern Turkey. He and his family were Christian and lived their lives following Christian values. When he was 17 years old, following the deaths of his father and mother, he joined the Roman army just as his father had before him.



By the age of thirty, Saint George was promoted to a higher rank and became an imperial guard of the Emperor, Diocletian. There are stories of him travelling to Britain, where he visited Glastonbury and Caerleon. In AD 303, the emperor began to **persecute** Christian people, forcing them to give up all of their possessions and jobs and stating that all Roman soldiers must worship Roman gods. Saint George pleaded with him to stop but Diocletian refused and even tried to bribe Saint George to give up his Christian beliefs. Despite being imprisoned and tortured, Saint George didn't deny his faith, so people thought of him as extremely brave.

Sadly, he was beheaded near Lydda in Palestine on 23rd April in AD 303. His body was returned to Lydda where it was buried - Christians soon came to honour him as a **martyr**.

23rd April was named St. George's Day in 1415 when it became a national feast day.

What Is the Legend of Saint George?

Told for the first time in the 11th century (seven hundred years after Saint George's death), there is a famous legend about Saint George slaying a dragon to rescue a princess. The legend describes Saint George travelling to Libya, where a poison-spewing dragon was living in a lake, terrorising the local people. Young girls were being sacrificed to stop the dragon from attacking the city of Silene. When one day it fell upon the king's daughter, the king offered his people all of his riches to have his daughter spared but the people refused and the princess was sent out to the lake.

At this point, Saint George arrived and promised to stay with the princess. When the dragon emerged from the water, Saint George charged at the dragon on his horse, wounding it with his **lance** before leashing the dragon.

Upon returning to Silene, Saint George offered to kill the dragon if the people would all become Christians. The city agreed so fifteen thousand men, including the king, converted to Christianity and Saint George killed the dragon.

Many people believe this legend to be symbolic of Saint George's triumph over evil (the dragon) by refusing to give up his Christian faith.



Did You Know...?

Saint George is also the patron saint of scouts, farmers, shepherds, soldiers and archers.

St. George's Day around the World England

In the past, St. George's Day was seen as being as important as Christmas but, following the union of Scotland and England in the early 15th century, the celebrations waned. One custom, which many people no longer observe, is to wear a red rose on your **lapel**. Church services are held during which the hymn Jerusalem is usually sung and Morris Dancers are often seen at celebrations.

Catalonia, Spain

In Catalonia, Spain, there is a similar legend about Saint George (Sant Jordi) slaying a dragon. From the blood that flowed from the lifeless body of the dragon, a red rose appeared, which Saint George handed to the princess he had saved. A public holiday, with similarities to Valentine's Day, is held - roses and books are exchanged by people in love.

Bulgaria

Also known as Army Day in Bulgaria, St. George's Day is celebrated on 6th May. Traditionally, rural families roast a whole lamb as Saint George is also the patron saint of shepherds and farmers. Many people also walk in the early morning, washing their faces in the fresh dew, which has been blessed by Saint George at the beginning of spring.

Croatia

Saint George is one of the most important saints in Croatia as the patron saint of the military. This holiday (known as Durdëvdan) is also a time to celebrate the return of spring, decorating homes with twigs and flowers, lighting fires and girls dressing as goddesses, singing for locals.

Glossary

lance: A long weapon with a wooden shaft and a pointed steel head.

lapel: The part on each side of a jacket immediately below the collar which is folded back on either side of the front opening.

martyr: A person who is killed because of their religious or other beliefs.

persecute: Subject someone to ill-treatment, especially because of their race or political or religious beliefs.