

George and the Dragon

St. George's Day – 23rd April

DIFFICULTY:   


The countries within our nation (England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland) have their own patron saint – a person they believe is a protector for a specific area of life. Each of these countries has their own named patron saint and a separate day (named after the saint) is given to celebrate their life and achievements each year. Scotland has St. Andrew as their patron saint – with a thistle as their flower / emblem, Wales has St. David – with a leek or daffodill and Ireland has St. Patrick – with the lucky shamrock as their emblem. Not all patron saints are linked to countries. Some are linked to specific professions, religions, organisations and animals.

Saint (St.) George is the patron saint of England and Saint George's day is celebrated annually on 23rd April nationally. The colour red and English red roses are popular choices of décor for the celebrations as they link to the legend as well as the English flag and the flag of Great Britain. The English flag (a red cross on a white background) is the symbol of St. George's day and was adopted by Richard the Lionheart – the great military leader. He assigned this emblem to the armour and war attire worn by his soldiers.

The legend of St. George became popular in the 12th century. Around this time it was popular to use dragons in stories to represent the Devil and all evil. There are many different versions but this one is the most popular:

St. George was a travelled man. On his travels to Libya, he encountered a hermit who told him of the danger facing the young females of their population against a vicious dragon. When he arrived, he discovered that the dragon was terrorising everyone in the country and that every day, out of desperation, the people would feed him a sheep in the hope he would stop. When the sheep had all perished, the dragon had demanded that the people sacrifice a young girl to him each day instead. Saint George discovered that all the young girls had now been killed and the only girl remaining was the King's daughter. Unless a way could be found of slaying the dragon, the princess would be killed the next day. The King of Egypt had promised his daughter's hand in marriage to the knight who could prevail. Saint George was determined to be victorious, and the next day he rode out to the lake to rescue the damsel in distress. He saw the princess waiting but Saint George sent her home to the palace and attempted his brave task. When the dragon heard him approaching, he came out of his cave and roared at him – George was not afraid! He struck the monster with his spear, but the dragon's scales were so hard that the spear just shattered. He did not give up though. Instead, he raced at the dragon and used his sword to slay it under its wing where there were no scales and it was easier to pierce. The dragon fell dead at Saint George's feet – he was victorious and therefore ended the danger.





Saint George has long been associated with England, bravery and honour, however the real Saint George wasn't English at all! Although the above legend is famous and been told for centuries, the truth is that St. George was actually born in Cappadocia (which is now part of Eastern Turkey) in the 3rd Century (AD270) and because this was so long ago, not much is known about him. It is thought that he was a soldier and part of a Christian family. At the age of just 17 he joined the Roman Army and became well-known for his bravery. History tells us that around that time the emperor (who was a pagan) wanted to kill all Christian people and Saint George being the brave person that he was, begged and pleaded with him to stop. For his efforts to protect his people, he was severely tortured, but well respected by his faith for what he stood for and believed in. He was sadly beheaded on 23rd April AD303 which is why the English national day is celebrated on this date. It became a national feast and day of celebration only in the year 1415.

How do we celebrate St. George's Day?

A red rose has always been the national flower of England and is seen on heritage and tourist signs around the country. On St. George's Day, many people wear a red rose or have red roses as decorations in their home.


At some venues across the country, there are more elaborate celebrations including re-enactments, dressing up and even 'dragon-slaying'!

Street parties, with decorative bunting and flags lining the kerbs have become a more recent way of celebrating as the event is becoming more popular.

Church services for scout troops and some military are held across the country on 23rd April to celebrate Saint George and his links (both historical and modern) to these groups.

The Future

Even though it is a national celebration, it is not an event that is celebrated by all in England. This is the case for various reasons. However, there are many people campaigning to have St. George's day become a national holiday and treated like a Bank Holiday. Many patron saints' days are now national holidays in their countries – for example, Saint Patrick's Day in Ireland and Saint Andrew's Day in Scotland. However in England, Saint George's Day is considered to be a normal working day.



Questions

1. What is a patron saint and why are they celebrated?

2. Why is 23rd April the day St. George's Day is celebrated?

3. Name the 3 other patron saints and their national flowers:

	Patron Saint	National Flower
Ireland		
Wales		
Scotland		

4. How do you think St. George's family felt when he joined the army at just 17?

5. Why was St. George put in prison?

6. Why was St. George considered to be a brave man?

7. What does the word 'emblem' mean?

8. Why do people think it is strange that St. George is the patron saint of England?

9. Describe how you think the King of Egypt was feeling during the legend?

10. Why do you think some people don't celebrate St. George's Day?



Questions – ANSWERS

1. What is a patron saint and why are they celebrated? **A person who is well-respected for a specific country/topic and are celebrated for their achievements in that specific area. They are a protector or guardian for whatever it is they stand for.**

2. Why is 23rd April the day St. George's Day is celebrated? **It was the day that St. George was beheaded**

3. Name the 3 other patron saints and their national flowers:

	Patron Saint	National Flower
Ireland	St Patrick	Shamrock
Wales	St David	Leek or Daffodil
Scotland	St Andrew	Thistle

4. How do you think St. George's family felt when he joined the army at just 17? **Worried at the potential threat to him but very proud of his bravery**

5. Why was St. George put in prison? **Standing up to the emperor and not following orders**

6. Why was St. George considered to be a brave man?

Joined the army at 17, standing up for his beliefs even against the emperor

7. What does the word 'emblem' mean?

It is a symbol that represents something – a person or item is represented in visual form

8. Why do people think it is strange that St. George is the patron saint of England?

He wasn't born in England and therefore wasn't English

9. Describe how you think the King of Egypt was feeling during the legend?

Terrified of the threat to his daughter and distressed about the impact on his country

10. Why do you think some people don't celebrate St. George's Day? **Various answers**

11. Why do you think other people want to have St. George's Day recognised as a national holiday?

Other countries celebrate theirs, he is our national saint

12. Name 2 ways St. George's Day is celebrated. **Wear red roses, red rose decorations, street parties, church services, organised events**

13. Where on the body did St. George manage to slay the dragon – why? **Under the wing – skin was thinner so it was easier for the spear to pierce it.**

14. The emperor was said to be a 'pagan'. What do you think this means and why did it affect St. George?

A non-Christian so because St. George was Christian he was part of the group he wanted to kill.

15. Why do you think the legend of St. George was created and why has it lasted and been told for centuries? **Various answers. Myths and legends were popular at that time. Dragons being linked to death/evil. The real truth is very limited so a legend created instead.**

16. What should be done to fully celebrate and recognise St. George's Day? **Various answers – child's choice.**

