

**St George**  
**Martyr, Patron of England, c304**

24 4 16

God of hosts,  
who so kindled the flame of love  
in the heart of your servant George  
that he bore witness to the risen Lord  
by his life and his death:  
give us the same faith and power of love  
that we who rejoice in his triumphs  
may come to share with him in the fullness of the resurrection.

Our text may be found in the book of Revelation, chapter 12, verses 7 and 8:

‘And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon.

The dragon and his angels fought back but they were defeated.’

So what do you think about dragons ? Scaly, reptilian, bewinged, able to fly, breathe fire, bad breath, noxious, poisonous, not nice.

Well, dragons are the stuff of legend, the embodiment of evil and, in our text today which is from the last book of the Bible, the Revelation to St John, a picture of the last times, the end times, we have this extraordinary story of war in heaven. Lucifer, the devil, here pictured in the form of a dragon, rebels against God and loses big time. He and his followers are thrown out of heaven and for several

millennia are around on earth to give us grief. It's a great story to account for the existence of evil on earth, wrong-doing, badness. And the baddy is here pictured as a dragon.

About an hour's drive from where I live and work in France is Mt St Michel. This small, rocky island just off the Normandy shore is topped by an Abbey. Legend has it that the monks were being bothered by the devil so they prayed to their patron, St Michael the Archangel, who flies over, fights the devil and unceremoniously ejects him from the abbey, tossing him across the bay of Mt St Michel to land without grace on his bottom on the slopes of Mt Dol. Once again, the dragon is overcome, defeated if not in this instance actually killed.

So when did you first come across the idea of dragons? Well, I'm not sure when I did but I do remember reading 'The Hobbit' as a boy and being well impressed by Smaug. And, not that long ago, I did see the three films Peter Jackson made of Tolkien's book and the dragon is equally well impressive but Smaug is eventually taken down by a well aimed iron arrow shot from a very large crossbow.

So if dragons are the embodiment of evil and the stuff of legend, it should come as no surprise that there is a great story attached to our soldier saint - George, martyr, patron saint of England. The book that tells us about George, a courteous, handsome, Roman soldier, who rescues the king's daughter from a hungry dragon, can be found in 'The Golden Legend'. Essentially, a city, oppressed by a hungry dragon, is saved by a knight in shining armour, our St George and the grateful population immediately convert to Christianity and are

baptised. George then continues his journey on to see the Roman Emperor, Diocletian, who has him executed because George is a Christian and George, therefore, refuses to worship pagan deities.

So why is George our patron saint ? Because in the Middle Ages, at the time of the Crusades and during the Hundred Years War against France, George offered us an example of manly virtue, of standing up against evil and fighting for what is right. In Shakespeare's play, 'Henry V' (Act 3 scene 1), at the siege of Harfleur, the king encourages his soldiers to redouble their efforts with the famous speech 'Once more unto the breach dear friends, once more', a speech which ends with the rousing words 'God for Harry, England, and Saint George'.

So can George still be a useful role model for you guys today ? I think so in that George gives us an example that it is right to stand up for what we believe; to fight against what's bad and what's wrong; and to try to make the world a better place by what we are prepared to do for others.

What do you think ?

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

*Preached at the St George's Day service*

*St Mary the Virgin and All Saints, Potters Bar*

*24<sup>th</sup> April, 2016*

