

SAINTS

Matthew – Apostle and Evangelist

21st September

Matthew was a Jew who collected taxes for the Romans. The tax collectors were not liked because they worked for the occupying power. When Jesus asked Matthew to follow him, Matthew prepared a great banquet for Jesus at his house where he invited other tax collectors and sinners. The Pharisees were outraged that Jesus would mix with such outcasts. Jesus used this occasion to show that he came to call on even the most unpopular as well as the righteous. The Gospel according to Matthew was written in the second half of the first century. Matthew is often depicted with a money-box, and sometimes with spectacles which he presumably needed for his account books!

Michael – Archangel

29th September

Michael is described as one of the seven angels who stand before the throne of God. He is also known as the leader of the heavenly armies in their battle against evil. Michael is depicted in full armour brandishing a sword and a pair of scales, and piercing a dragon or devil with his lance.

Francis of Assisi

4th October

One of the best known and loved of saints. Francis was born of rich parents in Assisi and spent most of his time enjoying the pleasures of life until a series of providential happenings led him to found an order of friars whose lives were devoted to poverty and prayer. Francis is usually depicted in the grey or brown habit of his order, preaching to the birds and animals.

Luke – Evangelist

18th October

A Greek and physician by profession, Luke became a fellow worker of St Paul and remained with him until Paul's martyrdom. Luke wrote the third Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles and is often depicted in art as a bishop or a doctor of medicine, and often accompanied by a winged ox. He may also be represented painting an icon of the Virgin Mary.

Simon & Jude – Apostles

28th October

Simon is referred to as the Zealot (because he may have belonged to a strict, fanatical, Jewish sect called the Zealots before he joined the apostles), so that he can be distinguished from Simon Peter. Simon is thought to have been martyred along with St Jude in Persia. Simon is normally depicted holding a fish or fishes to show that he was a fisherman, but he may also be seen to hold an oar or even an axe.

Jude, sometimes known as Thaddeus, was the brother of James the Less and one of the apostles who play no individual part in the Gospel story. Jude preached in Mesopotamia and then travelled to Persia with Simon where they were both martyred for preaching against idol-worship. Jude usually holds a boat and bears an emblem such as a club or carpenter's square. He is also said to be the patron saint of lost causes.

Andrew – Apostle

30th November

Andrew was the elder brother of Simon Peter and was also a fisherman. He was also a follower of John the Baptist and was present when John baptised Jesus. He is said to have evangelised Asia Minor and was crucified in Patras in Achaia. It is alleged that his relics were stolen from Constantinople and now rest in Amalfi in Southern Italy. Andrew is the patron saint of Russia, Scotland and Greece and most notably is recognised by his cross which is shaped like an 'X'. He is also depicted sometimes holding a fish.

Nicholas

6th December

Nicholas must be one of the most popular saints in the Christian world. Nicholas was Bishop of Myra, in Asia Minor during the first half of the fourteenth century. Today children know him as Santa Claus. Nicholas is best known for his charitable works which included the gift of three bags of gold given to a man who had lost all his money and whose three daughters were doomed to a life of poverty because they had no dowry in order to marry. Today St Nicholas is the patron saint of pawnbrokers who adopted the sign of three golden balls commemorating the three bags of gold. Nicholas is also a patron saint of Russia and of sailors in the Eastern Orthodox Church. In the Roman Catholic Church he is the patron saint of children. The association with Christmas comes from a Protestant custom in the Low Countries, which Dutch immigrants took to New Amsterdam before it became New York.

Lucy

13th December

Lucy is a famous martyr who suffered in the persecution of the Emperor Diocletian around AD 303. Lucy's name has connotations of light and purity. Her feast day, especially in Sweden, is celebrated as a festival of light, where there are few hours of daylight in December. Young girls, dressed in white and crowned with lighted candles, traditionally process to church to honour Lucy.

David – Patron Saint of Wales

1st March

David was born in Pembrokeshire in Wales of a rich family but entered an austere order of monks. In later years he founded a monastery in the north of Dyfed now called St David's. David is often depicted in art as a bishop with a dove near him or touching his mouth with its beak; he often stands on a small hill. The leek and daffodil are also associated with him the latter, perhaps because his name in Welsh is Dafydd. In Welsh he is known as 'Dewi Sant'.

Patrick – Patron Saint of Ireland

17th March

Patrick was a Romano-Briton by origin; at sixteen he was captured and taken to Ireland as a slave. After six years he escaped. Years later after he became a bishop, he returned to Ireland as a missionary. Patrick and his companions established the Catholic Church throughout Ireland. Patrick is also known by the legend that he banished all poisonous snakes and animals from Ireland. He is usually depicted driving or trampling on snakes

Joseph of Nazareth

19th March

Joseph is more widely known as the husband of the Virgin Mary. Joseph, who was much older than Mary, was, at first, reluctant to marry her as she was pregnant, which in those days brought disgrace upon families of young girls who were not virgins when they married. After the flight into Egypt and their return to Nazareth, Joseph continued to work as a carpenter but, on reaching the age of one hundred and eleven, he received a warning that his death was at hand. It is said that Joseph became terror-stricken and Jesus comforted him; it is also said that Jesus entrusted his soul to the Archangels Gabriel and Michael. Joseph is shown carrying some symbol of carpentry such as a setsquare: or the Holy Infant.

Cuthbert**20th March**

Cuthbert was a shepherd until he entered the monastery in Melrose and became a monk. In later years he became prior of the abbey at Lindisfarne in Northumbria. Cuthbert stayed at Lindisfarne for many years but in later life he became a hermit on one of the solitary Farne Islands where he lived an austere existence and lived off barley bread and water. When he died his monks took him to Durham Cathedral where his shrine is today. His shrine has been opened many times throughout the centuries and each time it is said that his body was incorrupt. Cuthbert is shown in art as a bishop holding the crowned head of Saint Oswald, and sometimes is accompanied by swans and otters.

George – Patron Saint of England**23rd April**

Tradition claims that George was a soldier of Lydda in Palestine. Legend has it that George saved the life of a princess who was about to be handed over as an offering to a dragon which was plaguing her city. As the princess was being led towards the sacrifice, George, protected by the sign of the cross, arrived and disabled the dragon with his spear. The dragon was then led back to the city and its head was cut off, whereupon, it is said, that fifteen thousand men were baptised into the Christian faith. George was later tortured and put to death for refusing to sacrifice to idols. George became patron saint of England as a result of the Crusades in which Richard the Lionheart is said to have had a vision assuring him of the saint's protection. Mediaeval artists' often depicted George wearing armour and either piercing the dragon with his spear or slashing it with his sword. His shield had a red cross on a white background, which today is the emblem of the English flag.

Mark - Evangelist**24th April**

Mark is thought to be the young man who ran away when Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. He accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey and afterwards followed St Peter to Rome. He was known as the disciple and interpreter of Peter whose preaching he set out in his Gospel. Afterwards Mark travelled to Alexandria where he established the church and later was martyred. His remains are now housed in the Basilica of San Marco in Venice. Mark's main emblem is a winged lion; he is often shown writing or holding his Gospel.

Philip and James - Apostles

1st May

Philip, a native of Galilee, is said to have received his call to follow Jesus by the preaching of John the Baptist. It is also said that he was present when the miracle of the loaves and fishes took place. It is believed that after the Ascension Philip preached in Asia Minor and was martyred in Hieropolis in Phrygia. It is said that he was crucified at the age of eighty-seven by his pagan opponents. Philip is often depicted as a bearded, old man holding a basket of loaves and a cross, sometimes T-shaped to commemorate the manner of his death.

James, known as 'The Less' or 'The Just', was a cousin of Jesus. After the Resurrection he became the first Bishop of Jerusalem. He was martyred in Jerusalem by being thrown from a pinnacle of the Temple. He survived this fall but was then clubbed to death with a fuller's club, by the priests and Pharisees. His emblem is a fuller's club but he occasionally holds a book.

Matthias – Apostle

14th May

Matthias was chosen as a disciple to replace Judas Iscariot. Nothing certain is known about his missionary work. It is thought that after working miraculous cures in Jerusalem, he was arrested by the Jews, stoned and finally beheaded with an axe. Therefore, Matthias is usually depicted holding an axe or halberd, but it may also be a sword or a scimitar.

Barnabas – Apostle

11th June

Barnabas was not one of the twelve apostles but has always been honoured as an apostle. It was Barnabas who introduced Paul to the apostles and thus to the church. Barnabas accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey; he was thought by some to be Jupiter, a Greek God, because of his dignity and stature. In later years Barnabas travelled with John and Mark to Cyprus; there it is thought that he was stoned or burned to death by the Jews. Barnabas is represented standing on a pile of stone, holding a book.

Alban – Martyr

22nd June

Alban is reputed to be the first martyr of Britain. He was a citizen of the Roman City of Verulamium (St Albans). A Welshman called Amphibalus, a priest on the run from the Romans, converted him to Christianity. Alban sheltered the priest in his house and later took Amphibalus' place. Alban refused to make sacrifices to the pagan Roman gods and was executed on Holmhurst Hill, where it is said that rose bushes sprang up from the ground where his blood was spilled, and on this site King Offa erected the Benedictine Abbey of St Alban, by which name Verulamium has since been known. In art Alban is shown with a very tall cross and a sword; or decapitated, with his head in a holly bush nearby.

John the Baptist

24th June

John, a cousin of Jesus, 'prepared the way for Jesus'. John was a prophet who travelled the country, telling people to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. As he travelled he preached to the people and baptised them in the river Jordan. It was also John who baptised Jesus. King Herod beheaded John. He is one of the most popular of saints today and has always been a major patron of the monastic orders. Because he spent most of his life in the desert, John is normally depicted as being lean, wearing a rough robe and carrying a lamb. Sometimes he is depicted carrying his own head.

Peter and Paul - Apostles

29th June

Simon was a Galilean fisherman, a married man, living at Bethsaida. He was a disciple of John the Baptist before being called by Jesus. Peter was with Jesus at such special times as the Transfiguration and in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested. Jesus told Peter, 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church. I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of Heaven'. After Jesus ascended into Heaven, Peter presided over the Church in Jerusalem. Peter, it is said, became Bishop of Antioch and finally presided over the Church in Rome where he was martyred, head downwards, as was the tradition in Rome. His remains are enshrined under the High Altar of St Peter's Basilica in Rome. In art he is portrayed as elderly, with curly hair and a square cut beard. He holds a key or keys and a book, or robed as a pope with keys and a double barred cross.

Paul was born in Tarsus; he was a Pharisee and also a Roman citizen. He was originally called Saul until his conversion on the road to Damascus whereupon he became Paul. He travelled far and wide preaching about Jesus, even as far south as Spain, and establishing churches wherever he went. According to very old tradition he was beheaded in Rome near the Ostian Way. He is honoured with St Peter as the co-founder of the Roman church. Paul is depicted as a thin faced, elderly man with a high forehead, receding hair, and a long pointed beard. He holds a sword and a book.

Thomas – Apostle

3rd July

Thomas, nick-named 'Didymus' (the twin), is best known for when Jesus appeared to the disciples in the upper room. Because Thomas had not seen Jesus for himself, he did not believe that Jesus had risen. Not until Jesus appeared a second time and showed Thomas the marks on his hands, feet and side did Thomas believe. According to ancient tradition he is said to have travelled to India where he preached and cured people of disease, and performed miracles. He caused such a disturbance that he was arrested and run through with spears. Therefore Thomas bears a spear as his emblem, or he is depicted kneeling before Jesus placing his fingers in His side.

James – Apostle

22nd July

James, son of Zebedee and brother of St John, was one of the three privileged apostles to be with Jesus at the Transfiguration and the Garden of Gethsemane. He was the first of the twelve apostles to be martyred under King Herod Agrippa. Tradition says that James' disciples placed his body in a ship without a sail or rudder and, committing themselves to the seas, arrived on the Spanish coast. He therefore became the patron saint of Spain, and his shrine in Compostella is, even today, the most famous place of pilgrimage after Jerusalem and Rome. James is closely linked with the idea of pilgrimages and regularly appears dressed as a pilgrim with staff, wallet and a scallop-shell in his hat. The scallop-shell is traditionally known as the sign of pilgrimage.

REFERENCES

“Saints and their Emblems in English Churches” by Robert Milburn

“The Saints of the Anglican Calendar” by Kathleen Jones

“The Book of Saints” compiled by the Benedictine Monks of St Augustine’s Abbey, Ramsgate

OTHER RECOMMENDED BOOKS

“Butler’s Lives of the Saints”, edited by Michael Walsh

“Friends of Jesus” by Victoria Hummell

“More Friends of Jesus” by Victoria Hummell

“The Life of St Andrew, St David, St Francis, St George, St Patrick” by Anita Ganeri

“Saints and Feast Days”, adapted from Christ of Our Life series

“Stories of the Saints” by Joyce Denham

VIDEOS

Bernadette - Princess of Lourdes

Animation – 30 minutes

Nicholas – The Boy who became Santa

Animation – 30 minutes

Francis – Knight of Assisi

Animation – 30 Minutes

Brother Son, Sister Moon

116 minutes

Paul

Approx 30 minutes

The Bible – St Paul

Parts 1 and 2

The Miracle of our Lady of Fatima

Approx 102 minutes

The Story of St Cuthbert