

# St. George's Day

Saint George is the patron saint of many countries around the world, including England.

St. George's Day is celebrated on 23<sup>rd</sup> 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. In AD 303, the emperor began to **persecute** Christian people, forcing them to give up all of their possessions and jobs. He also stated 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. Saint George was imprisoned and tortured but didn't deny his faith and carried on spreading the word of Christianity until his death on 23<sup>rd</sup> April in AD 303. His body was returned to Lydda where it was buried - Christians soon came to honour him as a **martyr**.

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

## What Is the Legend of Saint George?

There is a famous legend about Saint George slaying a dragon to rescue a princess, although these stories were only told for the first time in the 11<sup>th</sup> century – seven hundred years after Saint George's death. The legend describes Saint George travelling to Libya, where a poison-spewing dragon was living in a lake, terrorising the local people, taking young girls chosen by lottery as sacrifices. When it fell upon the king's daughter to be sacrificed, Saint George arrived, saved her and 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 despite facing punishment.



### 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

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. 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 are given to loved ones.

### Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, St. George's Day is celebrated on 6<sup>th</sup> May and is also known as Army Day. Many people 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 Durđevdan) 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

**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.

# Questions

1. Which of these are **facts** about Saint George? Tick two.

- He slayed a dragon.
- He was a soldier.
- He was a Christian.
- He rescued a princess.

2. Draw a line to match the activity with the country it takes place within.

Morris Dancers perform on St. George's Day.

Croatia

People wash their faces in the early morning dew.

Bulgaria

Girls dress as goddesses and sing for locals.

England

3. When was St. George's Day first celebrated?

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4. Fill in the missing words from this sentence:

Many people see the legend of Saint George \_\_\_\_\_ the dragon as symbolic of his \_\_\_\_\_ when he refused to give up his \_\_\_\_\_ despite facing punishment.

5. Find and copy a phrase from the text which tells you that **the emperor treated Christian people badly**.

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6. Why is 23<sup>rd</sup> April named as St. George's Day?

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7. Why do you think that Saint George decided to join the army?

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# Questions

8. Why did Christians honour Saint George after his death?

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9. Why do you think the legend of Saint George slaying the dragon has been told for centuries? Explain your answer.

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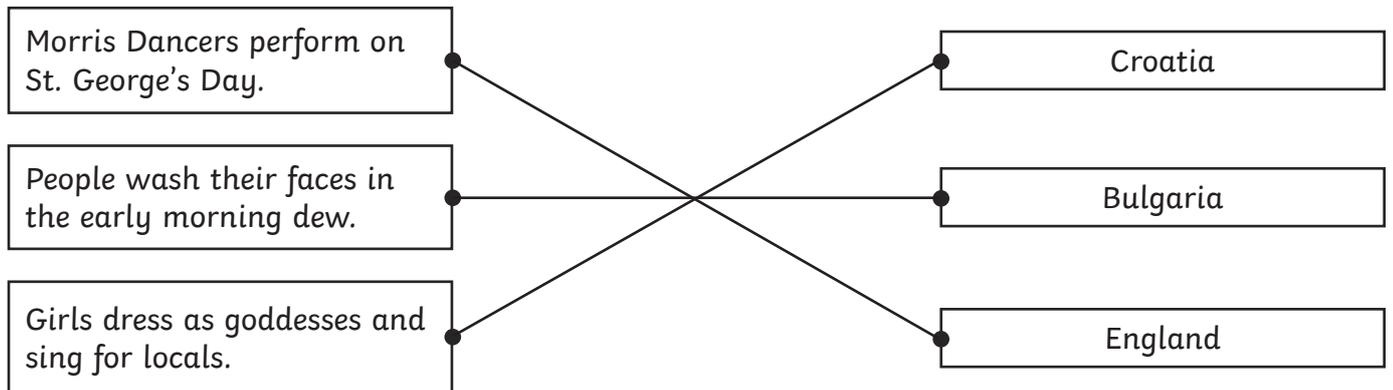
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# Answers

1. Which of these are **facts** about Saint George? Tick two.

- He slayed a dragon.
- He was a soldier.**
- He was a Christian.**
- He rescued a princess.

2. Draw a line to match the activity with the country it takes place within.



3. When was St. George's Day first celebrated?

**Accept: '(23<sup>rd</sup> April) 1415'.**

4. Fill in the missing words from this sentence:

Many people see the legend of Saint George **slaying** the dragon as symbolic of his **triumph over evil** when he refused to give up his **Christian faith** despite facing punishment.

5. Find and copy a phrase from the text which tells you that **the emperor treated Christian people badly**.

**Accept: 'the emperor began to persecute Christian people' or 'Saint George was imprisoned and tortured'.**

6. Why is 23<sup>rd</sup> April named as St. George's Day?

**Child's own response, such as: This was the day that Saint George died on in AD 303.**

7. Why do you think that Saint George decided to join the army?

**Child's own response, such as: As his father had died, he wanted to follow in his footsteps.**

8. Why did Christians honour Saint George after his death?

**Child's own response, such as: Despite being imprisoned and tortured, Saint George continued to stand up for his Christian beliefs until his death. Christians honour this strength of faith.**

9. Why do you think the legend of Saint George slaying the dragon has been told for centuries? Explain your answer.

**Child's own response, such as: The legend of the dragon being slain is an effective metaphor to describe good overcoming evil - children enjoy stories about dragons and the message in this story is a positive one to share.**