

St David March 1st

St David's Day: Wearing the Leek
Life: (?-601)

Patron saint of Wales, born near St Bride's Bay, Pembrokeshire, south-west Wales, UK. He was Bishop of Moni Judeorum, or Menevia (afterwards St David's), presided over two Welsh Synods, at Brefi and Caerleon, and founded many churches in S Wales. He died at Menevia, which became a shrine in his honour.

The first of March is the anniversary of the death of St David, the patron saint of Wales, in about A.D. 588. On this day, Welshmen all over the world honor his memory. Proudly, they wear leeks or, at times, daffodils. A wealth of traditions, based both on fact and fiction, embellish the story of his life and wondrous achievements.

Born of a noble family, David took up the priesthood. Soon he became renowned for his piety, missionary zeal and austere lifestyle. People came from far and wide to listen to his words and to ask for counsel and material help. Visiting many parts of Wales, he spread his message and established monasteries and churches at numerous places.

Legend tells that, whenever he preached, a snow-white dove sat on his shoulder. On one such occasion the crowd that had come to listen to him was so enormous that his voice could not be heard. Miraculously, the ground on which he stood rose ever higher, till eventually he was standing on top of a hill, where everyone could see and hear him!

David founded Menevia and became its first abbot-bishop. On his passing, it was called after him, St David's. Its cathedral treasures his bones, which were not discovered until 1866.

The association of the leek with the saint and its subsequent adoption as the Welsh national emblem has been variously explained. At the time, the Saxons were fighting the Welsh. In one of the decisive encounters, David advised his countrymen to wear leeks in their caps. Thus identified, they would be able to recognize each other, even in the heat of battle, and more easily pick out the enemy!

The Welsh achieved a resounding victory and were convinced that it was due in no small part to their following St David's suggestion. They therefore made the leek, which had ensured the survival of their nation, their cherished symbol.

Another tradition claims that the leek was a reminder of the saint's simple way of life. He had restricted his diet to water and wild leeks. No wonder that people referred to him as Aquaticus, the "water drinker."

The simple fact that daffodils bloom around the time of St David's Day may account for the wearing of this flower. Its choice may have been influenced as well by its being popularly known as a "daffy." Daffy, a shortened form of Dafydd, was St David's Welsh nickname.