

Readings for Today: 2 Corinthians 5: 1 – 10; Psalm 21; Matthew 24: 42 – 46.

*Saint Dunstan is one of the best known of English Saints, and is said to have been **the** favourite of the English until displaced by Saint Thomas Becket. You can find a drawing of Dunstan at the feet of Christ in the Wikipedia entry for Dunstan. It is believed that he himself was the artist.*

Dunstan was born in Somerset about AD 909, the son of a nobleman of the Kingdom of Wessex.

He was a devout and studious boy, and at an early age received minor orders, serving in the ancient church of Saint Mary in Glastonbury. After a time attached to the households, first of his uncle, the archbishop of Canterbury, and then of Athelstan, the first king of all England, Dunstan fell out of favour. He thought about getting married, but instead was ordained priest and returned to Glastonbury, where he lived as a hermit and became skilled as a musician and metalworker.

In 940 he was appointed abbot of Glastonbury and set about restoring monastic life, which had been all-but extinguished by the Viking invasions. In 957, after a further period of royal disfavour, he was recalled by King Edgar and consecrated as bishop of Worcester. In 959 he became bishop of London, and in 960 archbishop of Canterbury. [At this time King Edgar gave the manor of Plumstead to Canterbury, and Dunstan founded the parish church of Saint Nicholas in that manor.] For fifteen years Dunstan acted as the king's chief counsellor. They collaborated in re-establishing monasteries, including Westminster, according to the rule of Saint Benedict. These monasteries became centres of learning and of arts, including book production. One example of such books is the Benedictional of Saint Aethelwold (illustrations in Wikipedia).

In 973, after a period in which he placed the king under discipline because of a serious crime, Dunstan arranged a formal coronation service for Edgar at Bath. The order of service he drew up has remained the pattern for all English coronations. On Edgar's death in 975 Dunstan was caught up in the dynastic struggles which included the murder of King Edward (the Martyr), the accession of Ethelred (the 'Unready'), and an anti-monastic reaction to Dunstan's work.

As he grew older Dunstan spent more and more time with the cathedral community of Canterbury, in prayer and worship. At mass on Ascension Day 988 he preached three times, and announced his impending death, which followed three days later.

He was canonised in 1029 and his body enshrined beside the high altar of his cathedral. The shrine was destroyed during the robbing of the church by the agents of Henry VIII.