

Readings: 1 Peter 3:14 – 17; Psalm 126 (125); Matthew 10:34 – 39. *As for Wenceslaus 28th Sept.*

Edmund was born in about AD 840, presumably of royal descent, in East Anglia, which had a tradition of Christian monarchs going back to the time of Augustine. In 855, aged fifteen, he was elected as king of Norfolk, and in 856 as king of Suffolk.

During his early years as king there had been sporadic Danish raids on settlements near the coast of England. But in the autumn of 865 a change in Viking strategy took place which would transform society in England. A huge Danish army landed, prepared to settle indefinitely in the country and to take from it all they could. Four years later, having taken York, they marched south into East Anglia and set up their winter headquarters at Thetford. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle tells us: *“In the winter Edmund fought against them, and the Danish men gained the victory and killed the king, and overran all that land, and destroyed all the monasteries to which they came.”*

That is all that is recorded in contemporary sources: but more detail is provided by a later biography. It tells that when Edmund was captured the Danish ruler offered him a share in the kingdom, but Edmund was unwilling either to renounce his faith or to be the vassal of a pagan king. So he was died to a tree, scourged, shot with arrows, taken down alive and beheaded. When his followers came back to look for him, they found his head guarded by a wolf.

Edmund immediately became the object of veneration as a Christian martyr-king. He was buried in a small Suffolk church, either Hoxne or Hellesdon. A hundred or so years later his body was found to be incorrupt, and was transferred to a church in a township which now bears his name – Bury St Edmunds. At the same time coins were minted with an inscription *O Holy Edmund* – a request for his intercession. This veneration led to his position as a national patron saint – a position he held, jointly with Saint Edward the Confessor (13th October), until they were replaced by Saint George. Edmund and Edward can be seen in the late 14th century *Wilton Diptych* (in the National Gallery, and visible online) presenting Richard II to the Virgin and Child.

There is little left of the eleventh century abbey, with its shrine of the martyr-king, but a statue of him has been placed outside the west front, and a short distance away the cathedral, originally dedicated to Saint James, has Saint Edmund added to its dedication, and contains a statue of him.