

ouReadings: *Philippians 3:8 – 14; Psalm 1; Matthew 5: 13 – 16.*

Saint David – known in Wales, of which he is the patron saint, as Dewi – has been celebrated in the Church's worship at least since the eighth century, but the earliest existing biography dates from the end of the eleventh century. It may have been written to assert the independence of the Welsh Church from the Province of Canterbury.

Tradition says that David was born between about AD 500 and 520, the son of prince named Sant and Saint Non. It tells that *he grew up full of grace and lovely to behold*, and that he learned the whole of the Divine Office by heart. His fellow students *saw a golden-beaked dove, playing near his lips and teaching him to sing the praise of God.*

He was ordained as a priest, and after several years of study founded twelve monasteries. He eventually settled in one of them, Menevia – now called after him 'Saint Davids'.

David travelled widely – at that time there were close contacts between Wales and the other Celtic areas – Ireland, Cornwall, and Brittany. It is also said that he travelled to Jerusalem, and was consecrated as a bishop there. Another version says that, during a synod of the Welsh Church held in 550, David spoke so powerfully against the heresy of Pelagius that he was acclaimed as archbishop of Wales. In art, for example in his chapel in Westminster Cathedral, David is shown standing on a green mound, with a dove on his shoulder. This refers to a miracle during this synod when the ground David was standing on rose to enable him to be heard by the assembly.

David remained as bishop, with his see at Menevia, until his death in about AD 589, and was buried in his cathedral. The monastery church and other buildings were plundered by Viking invaders in the eleventh century. By the beginning of the twelfth century Wales was increasingly under Norman control, and the cult of Saint David received royal support. A Norman bishop was appointed in 1115. The building of the present cathedral was begun in 1181, and the relics of David and other saints were enshrined in it. In 1123 Pope Calixtus decreed that two pilgrimages to Saint David's were equal to one to Rome, and three were equal to one to Jerusalem. The shrine remained a place of pilgrimage throughout the Middle Ages. Like most others throughout Britain, it was dismantled and plundered under the Tudors, but it was restored in 2012.