

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Dunstan

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: May 19

Saintspedia · saintspedia.com

IN BRIEF

Saint Dunstan

Abbot of Glastonbury and Archbishop of Canterbury, leader of the English monastic reform.

Feast day	May 19
Born	c. 909, Baltonsborough, near Glastonbury, England
Died	May 19, 988, Canterbury, England
Era	10th century
Patron saint of	goldsmiths, blacksmiths, metalworkers

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Dunstan for Craftsmen and Workers

Novena to Saint Dunstan

Credits and sources

Booklet offered by Saintspedia, the directory of Catholic saints: lives of the saints, prayers, novenas and places of pilgrimage, at saintspedia.com. Texts written by Saintspedia, except traditional prayers marked as such. Original prayers and novenas are not official liturgical texts. Free booklet, to print and share for personal, family or parish use; please do not sell it.

LIFE

Saint Dunstan

Saint Dunstan was an Anglo-Saxon monk and prelate of the tenth century, abbot of Glastonbury and then Archbishop of Canterbury from 959 until his death on May 19, 988. Counselor to several kings, he was one of the architects of the great English monastic reform, which brought new life to abbeys ruined by the Viking invasions. A musician, scribe and goldsmith according to his biographers, he became the hero of a popular legend in which he shoes the devil's hooves. His feast day is May 19.

Who was Saint Dunstan?

Dunstan was born around 909 at Baltonsborough, near Glastonbury in Somerset, into a noble family related to the royal house of Wessex. He received his first lessons from Irish monks living at Glastonbury, then was sent as a page to the court of King Æthelstan. Torn between marriage and religious life, he fell seriously ill with a skin disease he believed was leprosy. He saw his recovery as a sign and chose to consecrate himself to God.

Ordained a priest around 939, he returned to Glastonbury and first lived there as a hermit, in a small cell built against the church. His biographers describe days divided between prayer, study, manual work, painting and music. These craftsman's skills, especially in metalwork, are the origin of his traditional patronage of goldsmiths and blacksmiths.



The ruins of Glastonbury Abbey, where Dunstan was abbot.

Key dates in the life of Saint Dunstan

- **c. 909**: Born at Baltonsborough, near Glastonbury.
- **c. 939**: Ordained a priest; returns to Glastonbury.
- **943**: King Edmund names him abbot of Glastonbury.
- **956**: Disgraced by King Eadwig, he goes into exile at Ghent, in Flanders.
- **957**: Recalled by Edgar, he becomes bishop of Worcester, then of London.
- **959**: Archbishop of Canterbury.
- **c. 970**: The *Regularis Concordia*, a common rule for English monasteries, is drawn up.
- **973**: Solemnly crowns King Edgar at Bath.
- **978**: Murder of the young King Edward; Dunstan withdraws from political life.
- **May 19, 988**: Dies at Canterbury.

The reformer of Glastonbury

In 943 King Edmund made Dunstan abbot of Glastonbury and gave him the means to restore the abbey. The young abbot did more than rebuild: he reestablished a true monastic life according to the Rule of Saint Benedict and made Glastonbury a renowned center of learning. As counselor to King Eadred, he did not hesitate to rebuke the aristocracy of Wessex for their loose morals.

This frankness cost him dearly. On the very day of his coronation, around 956, the young King Eadwig left the banquet, and Dunstan went to fetch him back to his duties. Disgraced and stripped of his property, he had to go into exile. He found refuge in Flanders, at Ghent, where he discovered the monastic reform of the Continent, inspired by Gerard of Brogne and by the movement that came from Cluny.

Archbishop of Canterbury

Recalled by Edgar, he became bishop of Worcester and then of London. When Edgar came to rule all of England in 959, he named him Archbishop of Canterbury; the pope later made him his legate. A close collaboration between king and archbishop followed. With two other Benedictine bishops, Æthelwold of Winchester and Oswald of Worcester, Dunstan restored or founded many monasteries, replaced clergy judged unworthy with monks and promoted learning. Around 970 the *Regularis Concordia* set out common customs for the monasteries of the kingdom.

His biographers report that he imposed a long penance on the king himself for his conduct. In 973, at Bath, he presided over the solemn coronation of Edgar. After Edgar's death he supported his son Edward, whose murder in 978 affected him deeply. He spent his last ten years at Canterbury in prayer and teaching, and died on May 19, 988, shortly after the feast of the Ascension.

Why is Saint Dunstan the patron saint of goldsmiths and blacksmiths?

His early biographers describe Dunstan as a skilled craftsman who worked with metal, as well as a painter, scribe and musician. This is why goldsmiths, blacksmiths and metalworkers have long taken him as their patron.

English popular tradition went further and made Dunstan a blacksmith and farrier. According to the legend, the devil once came and asked him to shoe his cloven hooves. Dunstan recognized him, chained him to the wall and nailed on the shoes so painfully that the devil begged for mercy. He was released only after swearing never to enter a house with a horseshoe over the door. This story, which has no historical basis, partly explains the custom of hanging a horseshoe above the door, and it added to the saint's popularity among metalworkers.

Dunstan joined the contemplative life with public responsibility. A monk at heart, he agreed to advise kings and govern the Church without giving up telling the truth to the powerful, even at the price of exile. His main work remains the renewal of Benedictine life in England, whose legacy shaped the following centuries. People pray to him for craftsmen and goldsmiths, for musicians, and for those who must balance prayer and responsibility.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Dunstan in art

- **Archbishop's vestments**: miter and crozier, as Archbishop of Canterbury.
- **A pair of tongs**: often shown in his hand, recalling the legend of the devil and his metalwork.
- **The devil**: sometimes depicted being seized by the nose with the tongs or being shod.
- **Kneeling before Christ**: a famous tenth-century drawing, attributed to him, shows a monk at the feet of Christ.



Canterbury Cathedral, Saint Dunstan's see.

Where to pray to Saint Dunstan

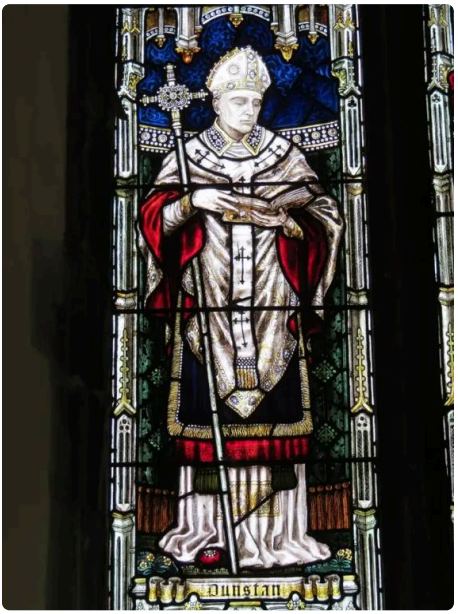
- **Canterbury**: Canterbury Cathedral, his archiepiscopal see, where he was buried; his medieval tomb no longer exists.
- **Glastonbury**: the ruins of Glastonbury Abbey, where he was abbot and reformer.
- **Baltonsborough, Somerset**: his native village, whose church is dedicated to him.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Dunstan and the novena to Saint Dunstan.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Dunstan for Craftsmen and Workers

Saint Dunstan did not leave a prayer that passed into common use, and the texts attributed to him are still debated by historians. Below you will find an original prayer to Saint Dunstan, inspired by his life as a monk, a craftsman and a counselor of kings.



Saint Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury, in prayer.

Prayer to Saint Dunstan for Craftsmen and Workers

Saint Dunstan, monk of Glastonbury, you divided your days between prayer, study and the work of your hands: teach me to make my work an offering and to serve God with the talents he has given me.

You raised up monasteries that lay in ruins: help us to rebuild what is broken in our lives, our communities and our parishes.

You spoke the truth to kings, even at the price of exile: give the courage of honesty to those who advise the powerful, and the humility to listen to those who govern.

I entrust to you craftsmen, goldsmiths, blacksmiths, musicians, and my intention: (name it in silence).

Keep me firm against evil, as your legend tells, and faithful to Christ to the end. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Dunstan's feast day is May 19, the anniversary of his death in 988. You can pray to him:

- for craftsmen and all who work with metal, whose traditional patron he is;
- for musicians, artists and those who serve the beauty of the liturgy;
- for people in public life who must speak the truth to those in power;
- for the renewal of religious life and of parishes that are struggling.

A short invocation

> *Saint Dunstan, faithful monk and fearless shepherd, bless the work of our hands and keep us from all evil. Amen.*

To know him better, read the life of Saint Dunstan, or pray the novena to Saint Dunstan.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Dunstan

This novena to Saint Dunstan is an original composition by Saintspedia. For nine days, it follows the monk of Glastonbury who became Archbishop of Canterbury, renewed monastic life in England and, according to his biographers, served God as a musician, scribe and goldsmith. To end on his feast day, May 19, begin it on May 11. It is especially suited to craftsmen, musicians and all who seek to unite prayer and work, and to anyone praying for the renewal of a parish or community.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with the Sign of the Cross. Read the meditation, pray the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. End with the small concrete act suggested. If you can, pray near your place of work, to place it under God's blessing. A workshop, a kitchen, an office or a music stand can all become places of prayer, as Dunstan's small cell at Glastonbury was for him.

Opening prayer for each day

Lord God, you called Saint Dunstan to serve you as a monk, a craftsman and a shepherd of your Church. He prayed and worked with his hands, he rebuilt monasteries in ruins, and he spoke the truth to kings even at the price of exile. Through his intercession, I come before you with my work, my responsibilities and my struggles. Bless the work of my hands, give me courage to be honest and humble, and keep me firm against every evil. Help me to rebuild what is broken in my life and in my community. Receive the intention I place before you during these nine days. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Saint Dunstan, pray for us.

Day 1: Taught by monks

As a boy, Dunstan received his first lessons from Irish monks at Glastonbury. The faith is often handed on by teachers who pass quietly through our lives.

Prayer: Saint Dunstan, bless all who teach the young, and help me to be grateful for those who taught me. Amen.

Today: Pray by name for a teacher who shaped your life.

Day 2: Illness as a turning point

Torn between marriage and religious life, Dunstan fell gravely ill. He saw his recovery as a sign and gave himself to God.

Prayer: Lord, in times of illness or trial, help me to hear what you are saying to me. Amen.

Today: Pray for someone who is sick and facing a hard decision.

Day 3: Prayer and the work of the hands

In his little cell at Glastonbury, Dunstan divided his days between prayer, study, metalwork, painting and music. Work done for God becomes prayer.

Prayer: Saint Dunstan, teach me to offer my work to God and to do it carefully and honestly. Amen.

Today: Begin your work with a short prayer of offering.

Day 4: Rebuilding what is ruined

As abbot, Dunstan restored a monastery damaged by the Viking invasions and brought back the Rule of Saint Benedict. God can rebuild what seems lost.

Prayer: Lord, rebuild what is broken in my life, my family and my parish. Amen.

Today: Repair something, a relationship or an object, that you have neglected.

Day 5: Telling the truth to the powerful

Dunstan rebuked the nobles of Wessex and went to bring King Eadwig back to his duties. His frankness cost him his property and sent him into exile.

Prayer: Saint Dunstan, give me the courage to speak the truth with charity, even when it costs me. Amen.

Today: Pray for leaders in your country, and for those who advise them.

Day 6: Fruitful exile

At Ghent, Dunstan discovered the monastic reform of the Continent. What looked like failure prepared his greatest work.

Prayer: Lord, help me to trust you when my plans fall apart, and to learn from every trial. Amen.

Today: Pray for refugees and exiles, and for those who have lost their work.

Day 7: A shepherd for the Church

As Archbishop of Canterbury, with Æthelwold and Oswald, Dunstan restored or founded many monasteries and promoted learning.

Prayer: Saint Dunstan, pray for our bishops, for monks and nuns, and for new vocations to religious life. Amen.

Today: Pray for a monastery or religious community you know.

Day 8: Sorrow over violence

Dunstan supported the young King Edward, and his murder in 978 affected him deeply. He then withdrew from political life.

Prayer: Lord, comfort those who mourn a violent death, and bring peace where there is hatred. Amen.

Today: Pray for the victims of violence in your city or country.

Day 9: Firm against evil

The legend tells how Dunstan overcame the devil at his forge. Beyond the tale, it reminds us that evil does not have the last word for those who stay close to God.

Prayer: Saint Dunstan, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Keep me firm against evil and faithful to Christ to the end. Amen.

Today: Go to confession, or make a careful examination of conscience tonight.

Closing prayer

Lord God, you gave Saint Dunstan the grace to unite prayer and work, contemplation and the care of your Church. Through his intercession, bless the work of our hands, give courage to those who speak the truth, and renew the life of your Church. Hear the intention I entrust to you in this novena. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

To learn more, read the life of Saint Dunstan and the prayer to Saint Dunstan.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

Texts: Saintspedia (saintspedia.com). The sources cited in each part are those of the corresponding page of the website. Biographical data partly from Wikidata (CC0). Font: EB Garamond (SIL Open Font License).

Images

- Cover: Randy OHC, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License
- The ruins of Glastonbury Abbey, where Dunstan was abbot.: Image: Percy Benzie Abery, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License
- Canterbury Cathedral, Saint Dunstan's see.: Image: No Swan So Fine, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License
- Saint Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury, in prayer.: Image: Giogo, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Source · License

More free booklets

Lives of the saints, prayers, novenas and places of pilgrimage: find all the booklets to print at

saintspedia.com