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Christmas

Most Elizabethans celebrated Christmas with enthusiasm, but during the 16th century, most holidays were changing rapidly as a result of the Reformation. Church reformers throughout the reigns of Edward VI and Elizabeth were zealous in working to get rid of "popish" and even "pagan" customs in the observance of holidays, and successfully removed a great number of holy days from the calendar. Many traditional customs were made illegal, such as the holding of church ales to raise money for the parish, which had disappeared by the late 1570s. This pressure to remove old customs came mainly from above, from the educated urban elite, and was not popular with the lower classes.

All that being said, Christmas was still a very popular holiday, not least because of its timing at the beginning of a period of privation. It was the last bash before winter, when food was generally scarcer, and less likely to be fresh. The typical Tudor Christmas celebration consisted of feasting, singing Christmas songs (a book of Christmas carols was published by Wynkyn de Worde in 1521), plays, dancing, wassailing, mumming & guising, and the decoration of houses and churches with evergreens, particularly holly and ivy (though other greens were used). The Yule log was a common tradition, and

there was a certain amount of competition between households as to who could get the biggest one. It was a widespread tradition to keep a bit of this year's log to kindle next year's with, which was held to bring good luck to the household. The custom of decorating churches with greenery was falling into disuse, however, and by 1570 it had disappeared from all but the two churches flanking the palace of Whitehall, where the influence of the Queen and Court was strong. An older courtier might be overheard to say in St. Margaret's Westminster that when he was a lad, all churches were decorated this way.

In fact, anybody who was older than, say, eight or ten when the Reformation began, would remember most holidays being much more elaborate celebrations (not to mention *lots* more holidays). Many seasonal customs were legislated against by the Edwardian government, and while these customs came back fairly enthusiastically under Mary, they faded out again under Elizabeth as Protestantism became the norm for an increasing proportion of the population.

So what did people remember? The pre-Reformation Christmas came at the end of a period of four weeks of fasting, during Advent, which explains a great deal of its exuberance. Homes and churches were decorated with holly and ivy just before Christmas eve. (Mistletoe is an 18th century addition.) Christmas eve itself was observed as a strict fast; meat, cheese, and eggs were forbidden. Church services were attended on Christmas morning, and then home to a big Christmas dinner, the first good meal since November. In large households there would be music and other entertainment; the custom of wassailing was well established by 1600. Mummers or guisers, disguised neighborhood boys or men, would go around performing at houses in their area, as a form of ritual begging, but there is no record of the traditional mummer's play until the eighteenth century. Both wassailing and mumming were basically fund-raisers for local poor folk. Morris dancing was also a traditional Christmas entertainment.

Other forms of entertainment were popular in some areas; a very frequent one was the election of a Lord of Misrule who directed the merriment, assigning forfeits and silly tasks to members of the household. This was particularly persistent in noble households. In towns which were the seats of bishops, it was common to elect a "Boy Bishop" from among the choristers, who was robed and paraded, and performed all functions of the office except mass, including delivering sermons. Both the Lord of Misrule and the Boy Bishop came under Puritan displeasure (disrespectful, you know), and while the first survived through much of Elizabeth's reign, the second disappeared.

A contemporary writer described the holiday:

"It is now Christmas, and not a cup of drink must pass without a carol; the beasts, fowl, and fish come to a general execution; and the corn is ground to dust for the bakehouse, and the pastry. Cards and dice purge many a purse, and the youth show their agility in shoeing of the wild mare. Now "Good cheer" and "Welcome," and "God be with you," and "I thank you," and "Against the new year," provide for the presents. The Lord of Misrule is no mean man for his time, and the guests of the high table must lack no wine. The lusty bloods must look about them like men, and piping and dancing puts away much melancholy. Stolen venison is sweet, and a fat coney is worth money. Pit-falls are now set for small birds, and a woodcock hangs himself in a gin. A good fire heats all the house, and a full alms-basket makes the beggars prayers. The masquers and mummers make the merry sport; but if they lose their money, their drum goes dead. Swearers and swaggerers are sent away to the ale-house, and unruly wenches go in danger of judgment. Musicians now make their instruments speak out, and a good song is worth the hearing. In sum, it is a holy time, a duty in Christians for the remembrance of Christ, and the custom among friends for the maintenance of good fellowship. In brief, I thus conclude of it: I hold it a memory of the Heaven's love and the world's peace, the mirth of the honest, and the meeting of the friendly." (Nicholas Breton: Fantastickes)

At Court, Christmas was one of the two most festive times of the year. Under Elizabeth, there were regularly plays, masques and dancing during the Twelve Days of Christmas, the palace was decorated with holly and ivy, paid for by Her Grace, and she also regularly hired hobby-horses as entertainment.

The day after Christmas, the feast of **St. Stephen Martyr**, was one of the few saints' days that survived the legislation of the Reformation. In 1552 a statute was enacted abolishing all saints' days except those of the apostles, evangelists, Stephen the first martyr, and the archangel Michael. Also "approved" holy days were Sundays, New Year's Day, Twelfth Day, Candlemas, the Annunciation, Ascension Day, Midsummer Day, All Saints, Holy Innocents, and the two days after Easter and Whitsun. On these days people attended church services and did not have to work. (More on these holidays later.)

Getting back to St. Stephen, and Boxing Day. During the early Stuart period, it became customary to drop money at Christmas into an earthenware box kept by an apprentice, who when it was full, could break it and buy himself a treat. This custom later grew to include servants in general, and by the 1660's, had widened to include cash gifts, euphemistically called "boxes," to tradespeople the customer had patronized during the year. After a while it rather got out of hand; in 1756 Sir John Fielding complained that everybody who did anybody else the slightest service in the year now demanded a box at Christmas, so that the total cost to some families was up to 30 pounds. However, the custom continued, and during the reign of Victoria, the 26th of December became generally known as Boxing Day. During the Elizabethan period, the feast of St. Stephen was celebrated only with church services and a day off from work.

Hard on the heels of St. Stephen follows the feast of **St. John the Evangelist** on the 27th, and the Feast of the Holy Innocents on the 28th, two more official holidays, with church services and time off from work. Holy Innocents celebrates the anniversary of Herod's massacre of infants in order to eliminate the threat of a king foretold to be greater than himself: Jesus Christ. Having had four days off at Christmas (the day itself, and the feasts of St. Stephen, St. John the Evangelist, and the Holy Innocents), it's back to work for the Elizabethan common man on the 29th, but as you might expect, not very hard.

New Year's eve was another popular day for wassailing (which could take place at any time during the Twelve Days of Christmas). Wassailing might also take the form of blessing the crops, orchards and animals. Another widespread custom was the hunting of the wren, another form of ritualized begging; boys and young men would kill a wren, and carry it on a bier decorated with ribbons around the village singing and asking for money "for the funeral." This was another "floating" custom, that could take place on St. Stephen's Day, at New Year's or at Twelfth Night, depending on the location. Two of the songs have survived, both known as "the wren song:" the English version beginning "Our king is well dressed" which some may remember from Dickens *Faire*, and the more vigorous Irish version "The wren, the wren, the king of all birds."

New Year's Day, also known as the Feast of the Circumcision (an official holiday with church service), was another day off. This was celebrated with bells, New Year's gifts, and general merriment. In great houses the lord would be awakened with music and great feasts were held. At court, the festivities continue, with plays and masques, hobby-horses (a comic entertainment that required some skill), feasting, etc.

The custom of giving New Year's gifts began in Roman times, and was taken over by early Christians in memory of the gifts given by the Three Magi to the Christ Child. The giving of Christmas gifts did not begin until the seventeenth century and did not become general until the nineteenth century. Queen Victoria was still giving New Year's gifts in 1900.

The choosing of a Lord of Misrule was widespread during the early part of the 16th century, and peaked during the reign of Edward VI; after his time no royal Lord of Misrule was chosen, though they continued to be common in private homes. The Inns of Court had very elaborate Christmas revels, of which we still have records; the celebrations of Gray's Inn in 1594 went on for nearly two months, with an elaborate spoof of court life in which many courtiers were involved. They ended with the presentation of the "court" of the Prince of Purpool being presented to Her Grace in February of 1595. One year the Inner Temple invited Robert Dudley to be their Lord of Misrule.

The most confusing thing about New Year's is that it wasn't. The year number did not change in the sixteenth century until March 25, the Feast of the Annunciation. The Roman year began in January, but in 1155, the English Crown decided to change the beginning of the year to the presumed anniversary of the creation of the world and of the conception of Christ. This remained the official beginning of the year until the calendar reform of 1752, at which time it was returned to 1 January. In spite of this, everybody still celebrated New Year's at the beginning of January throughout the period.

Twelfth Night - the Revelry Continues

Twelfth Night, or Epiphany (Jan. 6), celebrates the visit of the Three Magi to the Christ Child. In the sixteenth century, the day got off to its start with a big church service (not so big after the Reformation). The monarch presented a gift of gold, frankincense and myrrh at the Chapel Royal, symbolizing his/her spiritual kinship with the Three Magi. (This custom still continues, though the monarch has not presented the gifts in person since King George III lost his reason and was not able to do the job himself.) In some parishes, especially urban ones, a brass or gilded star of Bethlehem would be put up in the church, hung from the rood loft, but this custom faded out during the reign of Elizabeth, especially after legislation started under Edward required rood lofts to be pulled down.

After church, there was a great feast with all sorts of entertainment: masques, plays, music and dancing, wassailing, morris dancing, and hobby-horses. The festivities of Twelfth Night were the most lavish of the whole year, the climax of the Christmas season. At court, Queen Elizabeth would each year draw up a list of those who would dine with her, and the music would be opened by a carol sung by the Children of the Chapel Royal.

Plough Monday

The first Sunday after Twelfth Night was Plough Sunday, followed by Plough Monday. On the Sunday, the ploughs of the local farms would be blessed, as the ploughing season was about to start. On Plough Monday, the communal plough decorated with ribbons was carried around the village by young men with ritualized begging, to raise funds for the parish (this was called "drawing the plough"), and games were played. One such game was referred to by Tusser: a competition where the ploughmen of a farm would try to leave some object at the fireside, such as a whip or hatchet, before the housemaids could get the kettle boiling in the morning.

This holiday was banned by legislation in 1547 and 1548, on the grounds that it caused drunkenness and brawling. It was reinstated during Mary's reign, and banned again under Elizabeth, but persisted for a long time in many areas, finally disappearing as a public function in the 1590s. The Plough Monday celebrations among other holidays fell victim to the tendency for parish finances to be separated from communal merry-making; fundraisers were replaced by rates (rentals charged for church pews) as the main source of church income.

While the Plough Monday celebrations disappeared as an official function in the 1590's, the habit of rowdiness and games on that day continued well into the nineteenth century, and the ritualized begging was no longer in aid of the church, but for the private benefit of the participants. It took on the character of a sort of "trick or treat," where if money was not given, property was destroyed: the ploughing up of the ungenerous person's garden being a favorite trick.

Candlemas - February 2

Candlemas celebrates the feast of the Purification of the Virgin, that is, Mary's churching 40 days after the birth of her baby. It also marks the formal beginning of spring: after Candlemas, peasants began to drive their cattle from fallow fields in preparation for sowing. Before the Reformation, Candlemas was celebrated by fasting the day before, and then with a candlelight procession on the day itself. Every parishioner was required to bring a candle, and offer it to the priest to be blessed, giving a penny to the church. The candles were carried around the church again after mass; some were left in the church, before a statue of the Virgin, and others were taken home to be kept as good luck charms and lighted in times of storm or sickness. After the service, a feast!

In 1548, Protector Somerset's legislation abolished the ritual of Candlemas; it remained an official holiday, but celebrating Christ, not the Virgin. According to the Bible, it was at Mary's churching that Jesus was first recognized as the Messiah, by Simeon. Candlemas was reinstated as compulsory under Mary, and forbidden again under Elizabeth. Older courtiers might reminisce about how pretty the lights were, and younger ones would remember their parents talking about it.

St. Valentine's Day - February 14

Valentine was a priest in Rome, who assisted the martyrs persecuted under Claudius II. He was arrested, and when it was found that all attempts to make him renounce his faith had failed, he was condemned to be beaten with clubs, and afterwards beheaded on February 14, in about the year 270. He is the patron saint of engaged couples, lovers, young people in general, birds, and beekeepers, and is invoked against epilepsy, fainting, and plague.

Valentine's Day was celebrated in the sixteenth century much as it is today, as a kind of non-official, non-religious holiday. It was believed that on this day birds chose their mates. Tokens of affection or admiration were sent to a person of choice, especially among the gentry. In many parts of the country, among the peasantry, one's "Valentine" was chosen for one by lots drawn the evening before, or it was the first person of the opposite sex that one met that morning!

As a church holiday, St. Valentine's day was (again) abolished by the Edwardian Reformation, restored by Mary, and out again under Elizabeth, but the secular practices associated with the holiday still continued, as they do today.

St. Matthias - February 24

After Christ's ascension, St. Matthias was chosen by lot to fill the place among the twelve apostles left vacant by Judas Iscariot. Later accounts of his activities and martyrdom by crucifixion cannot be relied on, and there seems to have been confusion between him and St. Matthew in some of these writings. A fictitious Gospel, now lost, was put out under his name. (*Penguin Dictionary of Saints*)

As an Apostle, St. Matthias' day was an official holiday during the reign of Elizabeth.

Shrovetide

Shrovetide refers to the period around Shrove Tuesday and Ash Wednesday. The opening of the Easter cycle of holidays, it is one of the "movable feasts" of the Church calendar. Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, is forty days before Easter Sunday.

This holiday is the second largest winter celebration of the English year, second only to Christmas. It marks the end of winter, as Christmas marks the beginning. The festivities begin with Shrove Sunday, the Sunday before Ash Wednesday. Before the Reformation, it was expected that everyone would go to confession, that is, to be shriven, thus "Shrovetide." The next day was Collop Monday, so-called after the practice of eating roasted collops (slices) of meat; then Shrove Tuesday, or Pancake Tuesday, followed by Ash Wednesday.

Shrovetide was the last bash before the restrictions of Lent, and the festivity was driven both by the anticipation of privation to come, and by the need to use up the foods that could not be eaten during Lent, and would not keep over the next forty days: meat, eggs and cheese. At court, there were plays, music, and masquing, although the whole pattern of Carneval that grew up in Italy and France and later in the New World never became established in England. In towns, there was bearbaiting and other games; a Protestant preacher in 1571 described it as "a time of great gluttony, surfeiting and drunkenness."

Two sports were particularly associated with Shrove Tuesday; cock-threshing and football. The first, one of the ever-popular Elizabethan torture sports, consisted of tying a cock by one leg to a stake, and taking turns trying to kill it by throwing broom-sticks or something similar at it from a specified distance. The one to kill the bird won it as a prize. The form of the game varied from place to place; in some areas, the bird was allowed to survive in order to be used for cock-fighting later in the day. This was not a sport limited to the lower classes; the late 15th-century Lord Berkeley was known as "a notable cock-thresher." Cock-threshing was suppressed during the eighteenth century.

Football, a game without any particular rules, was described by Stubbes as "a bloody and murdering practice," where anybody involved had the opportunity to take out a grudge on another player. The object of the game was to get the ball to a specific goal, such as the church of a neighboring town, or a local squire's manor, with no restrictions on the size or composition of the teams or how the objective was achieved. The sport was banned repeatedly throughout the Middle Ages and 16th century, because of the frequent injuries and deaths, but without much effect. This day was also known as an occasion for rowdiness on the part of apprentices; London regularly doubled the watch for Shrove Tuesday.

Shrovetide was not an official work holiday; on Collop Monday the feasting took place after the day's work, and Shrove Tuesday was an unofficial half-holiday.

The particularly characteristic food of Shrove Tuesday was pancakes, and in some parts of the world this is still true today. [Here](#) are some recipes for them.

Ash Wednesday and Lent

Ash Wednesday is the day after Shrove Tuesday, and marks the beginning of Lent. The day began with a church service, which before the Reformation included the blessing of the ashes by the priest, who sprinkled them with holy water and marked churchgoers' foreheads with them, saying to each "*Remember O thou man that thou art dust and to dust thou shalt return.*" Images of saints, the altar and the rood were veiled during Lent, as a spiritual privation to match the physical ones. Protector Somerset forbade the blessing of the ashes and veiling of images in 1548; the customs were re-instated in Mary's reign and again forbidden under Elizabeth.

Lent, which commemorates Christ's forty days in the wilderness, was observed by dietary restrictions on the consumption of meat, cheese and eggs, and behavioral restrictions as well; it was forbidden to marry or make love during that time. Any other holidays that happen to occur during Lent must be observed without the feasting that is associated with almost all other holidays. Henry VIII in 1538 gave permission to his subjects to eat dairy produce during Lent, because of the high price of fish, and Somerset reinforced the ban on the consumption of meat, in order to support the fishing industry. Under Mary, the dietary restrictions were back in full force, but under Elizabeth, the restrictions were limited to a ban on eating meat.

In London, a straw effigy of a character known as Jack o' Lent was put up in a public place, where boys would take out their frustration at the privations by throwing stones at it.

St. David - March 1

The name of the patron saint of Wales was Dewi, of which David is the English approximation. According to his legend he was son of a sixth-century Cardigan chieftain, Sant, and a St. Non; he founded twelve monasteries, from Croyland to Pembrokeshire; he went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and was there consecrated bishop; he was recognized as primate of Wales. His feast day is March 1. The association of leeks with St. David's day has not been satisfactorily explained. His emblem is a dove. (*Penguin Dictionary of Saints*)

This saint's day was primarily observed by Welshmen, not Englishmen, and was most particularly celebrated by Welshmen outside of Wales by the wearing of a leek in one's hat. In Wales itself, this was far rarer. After the accession of a Welsh dynasty to the English throne, it became more common to see Welshmen in England, who made a point of their Welsh heritage on this day.

Feast of the Annunciation

This date, nine months before Christmas, was celebrated as the anniversary of the Annunciation. In 1155, the English Church decided that this day should also mark the beginning of the new year, being not only the anniversary of Christ's conception, but of the creation of the world. The rest of Europe continued to change the year date on January 1. In 1752, England came back into alignment with traditional practice.

Since this holiday falls in Lent, festivity was not characteristic of its celebration. It was an official work holiday, and everyone attended church services.

From the Edward IV Prayerbook: *The Collect, Epistle & Gospel for the Day*.

The Collect: We beseeche thee, Lorde, powre thy grace into our heartes; that, as we haue knowen Christ, thy sonnes incarnation, by the message of an Angell; so by hys crosse and passion, we maye be brought into the glory of his resurreccion; Through the same Christe our Lorde.

The Epistle: Isaiah vii. God spake once agayne unto Ahaz, saying; require a token of the Lorde thy God; whether it be towarde the depth beneth, or towarde the height aboue. Then sayde Ahaz; I will require none, neyther will I tempte the Lorde. And he sayde; hearken to, ye of the house of Dauyd; is it not ynoughe for you that ye bee greuous unto menne, but ye muste greue my God also? And therefore the Lorde shall geue you a token; beholde a virgin shall conceiue, and beare a sonne, and his mother shall call hys name Emanuell. Butter and Hony shall he eate, that he maye knowe to refuse the euill, and chose the good.

The Gospel: Luke i. And in the sixth moneth the Angell Gabriell was sente from GOD unto a citie of Galile, named Nazareth, to a virgyn spoused to a manne, whose name was Joseph, of the house of Dauyd, and the virgins name was Mary. And the Angel went in unto her, and sayd, Haile ful of grace, the Lorde is with thee; Blessed arte thou among weomen. When she sawe hym, she was abashed at hys saying, and caste in her mynde, what maner of salutacyon that shoulde be. And the angel said unto her; feare not Mary; for thou hast found grace with God. Beholde, thou shalt conceiue in thy wombe, and beare a sonne, and shalt call his name Jesus; He shall be greate, and shalbe called the sonne of the highest. And the Lorde God shall geue unto hym, the seat of his father Daud, and he shall reigne over the house of Jacob for euer, and of hys kyngdome there shalbe none end. Then said Mary unto the angel; How shall this be, seeing I knowe not a man? And the Angel aunswered and sayde unto her, the holy gost shal come upon thee, and the power of the highest shal ouersadowe thee. Therefore also that holy thing which shal be borne, shall be called the sonne of God. And beholde, thy cosin Elizabeth, she hath also conceyued a sonne in her age. And this is her sixth moneth, which was called baren: for with god shal nothing be unpossible. And Mary sayde: beholde the handmayde of the lorde: be it unto me, according to thy woorde. And the Angell departed from her.

Palm Sunday - Sunday before Easter

Palm Sunday commemorates Christ's entry into Jerusalem, and is celebrated on the Sunday before Easter. Before the Reformation it was celebrated with processions, readings of the Gospel, and "palm fronds;" obviously, in northern climates real palm fronds could not be used, so any greenery that was available was employed, such as willow, box or yew. The cloth that had covered the Rood since Shrove Tuesday was drawn aside for the first time since then to show the image of Christ. Flowers and cakes were distributed to the congregation, and the "palms" were blessed by the priest. Parishioners would then make crosses out of their palms, which were kept as a protective amulet. At the end of the service, the Rood would again be veiled.

In 1547 Protector Somerset banned the blessing of palms and the use of rood cloths; they were reinstated by Mary and banned again under Elizabeth. Under Elizabeth Palm Sunday was observed mainly by attending church services, which included substantial Gospel readings. The practice of making crosses persisted and became secularized; the custom of gathering foliage to make the crosses continued until the late 19th century, but was no longer associated with church. The crosses were used to decorate the home.

Wednesday of Holy Week

Before the Reformation, on Wednesday of Holy Week, the rood cloth was removed, with a reading of the passage in the Bible referring to the rending of the veil in the Temple of Jerusalem. After dark, the first of the Tenebrae was held (the Services of Shadows). This was banned under Edward, reinstated by Mary, and banned again under Elizabeth; older courtiers would remember attending such services.

Maundy Thursday

The Thursday of Easter Week was a commemoration of the Last Supper. On this day the monarch washed the feet of poor people in imitation of Christ, who washed his disciples' feet as a gesture of humility. This custom continued through Elizabeth's reign, since it tended to reinforce the sanctity of monarchy.

The number of poor people to be involved in the ceremony was determined by the monarch's age. During the reign of Elizabeth, because the monarch was a woman, the paupers were also women; and in order to protect Her Grace from actual contact with dirt, their feet were washed beforehand, first by the yeoman of the laundry, then by the sub-almoner, then by the almoner. Queen Elizabeth then knelt in front of them on a cushion in the great hall, and washed one foot of each woman in a silver basin of scented water; she then wiped them dry and kissed the toes. Each woman was then presented by the almoner with shoes, wine, fish, bread, an apron, and two bags of money; one contained as many pennies as Her Grace's years, and the other 20 shillings.

Another ceremony of the monarchy performed on this day was the blessing of cramp rings, as a manifestation of the sacredness of kingship; this continued up to the end of Mary's reign without interruption, but was discontinued at Elizabeth's accession. Cramp rings were gold or silver rings which were believed to help against cramps, epilepsy and palsy when blessed by the monarch.

Before the Reformation, Maundy Thursday was a popular day to go to confession, and also to get haircuts. Alters were stripped of their alter cloths and cleaned, to be ready for Good Friday, and the Tenebrae were celebrated a second time.

Good Friday

Before the Reformation, Good Friday, the commemoration of the Crucifixion, was celebrated with a morning service *without Mass*; instead there was a reading of the whole of the Passion from the Gospel of St. John. After this a large crucifix was laid upon the steps of the alter, and the congregation crawled on hands and knees to kiss its feet. (This custom is still observed in some parts of the world.) Offerings are then made to the Church. "Creeping to the Cross" was banned under Edward in 1548; Henry VIII had allowed it to continue with the understanding that Christ and not the crucifix was the object of adoration, but this was too fine a distinction for Somerset, who forbade it entirely, along with blessing of palms on [Palm Sunday](#) and ashes on [Ash Wednesday](#). Creeping to the Cross was again required by Mary, but was legal for the last time on Good Friday of 1559, just before Elizabeth's new prayerbook was issued.

After the ceremony of creeping to the Cross, the crucifix was taken from the steps and placed with the Host in a miniature tomb, which was draped with a rich cloth and lighted with candles. A vigil was kept before it in memory of the soldiers who watched at Christ's tomb. This observance was banned by Cranmer in 1548; Bishop Gardiner of Winchester, a clergyman who was notable for resisting Protestantism, encouraged it on the grounds that it was not banned by royal authority. He was called up before the Privy Council and reprimanded. This ceremony was restored under Mary, and banned again under Elizabeth.

In the evening, the Tenebrae were sung for the third and last time.

In the reformed service for Good Friday, there was an increased emphasis on preaching; the Gospel of St. John describing the crucifixion was read (John xviii). The Epistle is Hebrews x.

Easter Eve

Before the Reformation, on the Saturday of Easter week, all lights in the churches were extinguished and flint was struck to re-light them. The new flames were blessed and censed, and then used to light the Paschal candle (a very large candle decorated with flowers and paint, only used at this time of year). This was followed by a procession to bless the water in the font. In 1548 Cranmer forbade Paschal candles and the consecration of fire. Mary reinstated them, and Elizabeth banned them again. The reformed service for Easter eve was relatively brief.

The Epistle is i Peter iii and the Gospel is Matthew xxvii. *(1559 Prayerbook)*

Easter

Before the Reformation, on Easter morning the sepulchre containing the crucifix and Host was opened, and they were removed to the alter. The anthem "Christ is Risen" was sung, and the church bells were rung for the first time this week. Offerings were made, confession, and communion followed. Figures of saints were unveiled. Easter was a popular day for baptisms; so much so that the authorities had to limit baptisms performed on Easter to babies who had actually been born in the previous week. This was also a popular time for new clothes, a custom that has persisted into the 20th century.

In Elizabeth's early reign, Easter was celebrated without ceremony other than sermons, but gradually the practice of decorating the church with greenery crept back into use, and communion on Easter again became customary, though not usually in parishes that had Puritan clergymen.

The association of Easter and eggs, a symbol of new life, is very ancient: it goes back at least to Roman times. Decorated eggs were given as gifts in the 13th century, and Henry VIII as a young man received a decorated egg in a silver case as a gift from the Pope. (The Easter egg hunt is a very late addition to the holiday.)

The Epistle is Coll. iii and the Gospel is John xx. *(1559 Prayerbook)*

Before the Reformation, the Easter holidays from work extended from Holy Wednesday until Hocktide, two weeks after Easter. In 1552, an Act of Parliament cut this back to only the Monday and Tuesday following Easter Sunday.

St. Alphege - April 19

Alphege (AElfheah) was born in 954. He was a monk first at Deerhurst in Gloucestershire and then at Bath, and in 984 was made bishop of Winchester, where he presided for over twenty years. He was then raised to the archbishopric of Canterbury, at a time when England was being ravaged by the Danes. Canterbury was betrayed to the marauders, and the archbishop was captured and carried away to Greenwich. A ransom was demanded for him, which he would not allow to be paid. In a drunken fury the Danes set on him, pelting him with bones, and although one of them, Thorkell the Tall, tried to save him, he was killed by a blow on the head with an axe. It cannot be said that St. Alphege died for the Christian faith; but St. Anselm vindicated his public veneration as a martyr for the Christian virtue of justice, and his feast is still observed. (Penguin Dictionary of Saints)

St. Alphege's day was not one of the official holidays in the Elizabethan calendar, but several saints who were particularly English remained popular after the Reformation, and their days were celebrated informally (i.e., this is not a work holiday). This was particularly true in parishes where the local parish church was dedicated to one of them. As this is not an official saint's day, there is no specific collect, epistle or gospel reading for the day.

St. George - April 23

It is not clear how St. George came to be adopted as the protector of England. The feast of St. George (April 23) was established officially in 1222. His cult was particularly promoted by warrior kings like Edward III and Henry V, to rival the French St. Denis and to replace the less warlike Edward the Confessor as England's patron saint. He was very popular during the 15th and 16th centuries, when his day was celebrated with "ridings" or parades featuring a model dragon and actors portraying the saint and St. Margaret. The 1538 ban on images of saints hit St. George very hard; the ridings were largely stopped, though at least one survived by leaving out the saints and just having the dragon!

In 1552 St. George was dropped from the official calendar of saints by Parliament because there was no scriptural warrant for celebrating his day. He was restored by Mary and was allowed to continue under Elizabeth's less severe ban. The Statutes of the Order of the Garter were thoroughly revised in 1548 to "de-Catholicize" them, but a great deal of the pageantry was left intact and many people thought they were still too popish. St. George was included again in the official list of holidays of 1560, but the ridings were again discouraged.

No historical particulars of the saint's life have survived, and his legend has many variations. The *_Golden Legend_*, written in the later Middle Ages and translated into English by William Caxton, gives this story:

A dragon lived in a lake near Silena, Libya. Whole armies had gone up against this fierce creature, and had gone down in painful defeat. The monster ate two sheep each day; but when mutton became scarce, lots were drawn in local villages, and maidens were substituted for sheep. Into this country came Saint George, a knight from Cappadocia. Hearing the story on a day when a princess was to be eaten, he crossed himself, rode to battle against the serpent, and killed it with a single blow with his lance. George then held forth with a magnificent sermon, and converted the locals. Given a large reward by the king, George distributed it to the poor, then rode away. George later fell a victim to Diocletian's persecution, being tortured and beheaded for his Christian faith.

A later embellishment of the story had St. George defeating the dragon without killing it. He then borrowed the princess' girdle to use as a leash, and led it tamely into the town.

When the Order of the Garter was created c.1348 by King Edward III, he placed it under the patronage of St. George, and in 1415 his day was made an important feast day in the church calendar. His flag is a white field with a red cross. He is the patron saint of England, of the Order of the Garter, and of soldiers, archers, armourers, and saddlers. He is invoked against skin diseases and syphilis.

Members of the Order of the Garter have special observances of St. George's day required of them by the Statutes of the Order. If at all possible, all members of the Order must assemble at Windsor on the eve of the feastday; the Knights put on their mantles of the Order and the Greater George (the collar of the Order) and go to the Chapel at Windsor Castle to offer thanks. They then sup at the Dean's house. On the next morning, all Knights proceed to the Chapel for service wearing their full Robes; if there is an Installation of a new member of the Order, it takes place at this time. After the service, all go to dinner, and a great feast is provided at the expense of the Sovereign and Head of the Order. On the day after St. George's Day, the mantle of the Order only is worn. The Garter itself is required to be worn at all times, and the Greater George must be worn on all official holidays, on Accession Day, at the funeral of a member of the Order, and when a member of the Order is created a peer.

If a member of the Order is not able to attend, by reason of service abroad, or illness, he must have special dispensation from the Sovereign, and he must wear the whole habit of the Order that day wherever he is. He must also hold a private feast of his own, with all due elaboration and ceremony.

St. Mark Evangelist - April 25

The author of the gospel according to Mark, the man named Mark who is referred to in the New Testament epistles as being with St. Peter and St. Paul, and the John Mark mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles are usually regarded as having been all the same person (identical too, it is sometimes said, with the young man who ran away naked when Christ was arrested in Gethsemane). If these identifications are correct we learn from the New Testament that St. Mark was the son of a woman householder in Jerusalem named Mary (Acts xii,12). He went with St. Paul and St. Barnabas (Mark's cousin) on their first missionary journey, but turned back alone at Perga. In consequence, Paul later refused to take him on the second missionary journey, and Mark went with Barnabas to continue the evangelization of Cyprus. The breach with Paul having been healed, Mark was with him in Rome, where he probably wrote his gospel. Papias, writing c.140, said that Mark was the interpreter of St. Peter. That he afterwards went to Alexandria and preached the gospel there is possible, but the tradition that he was first bishop of that church and was martyred during the reign of the emperor Trajan lacks reliable support. St. Mark's name is commonly associated with the city of Venice because in 829 what purported to be his relics were brought there from Alexandria, and enshrined in the original church of San Marco. His symbol is a winged lion. His feast day is April 25. (*Penguin Dictionary of Saints*)

He is the patron saint of glaziers, lawyers, lions, notaries, prisoners, and Venice and is invoked against impenitence and scrofulous diseases.

The Epistle is Ephesians iv:7-16 and the Gospel is John xv (*1559 Prayerbook*)

Hocktide

This was the Monday and Tuesday a fortnight after Easter. Before the Reformation, there was no work from the Wednesday before Easter to Hocktide, a period of nearly two weeks, The merrymaking began immediately after Mass on Easter Sunday; sports were now legal, and dancing, races and athletic contests were held. All restrictions were off as to diet as well.

On the two days of Hocktide itself, a game was widely played in which groups of young folk of one sex catch members of the other in the streets and require a forfeit; on Monday the men catch the women, and on Tuesday the women catch the men. (This reminds me rather strongly of the Faire custom of "fairy-rings;" I wonder if there is a connection?) This game was widely used as a fundraiser for the local parish church, and was one of the more successful methods. It was claimed that the holiday was a commemoration of the Anglo-Saxon struggle against the invading Danes, but there seems to be no foundation in history for this.

An Act of Parliament in 1549 banned Hocktide games, which by this time were also being supplanted as a fundraiser for the church by rates and pew rentals; the custom was revived under Mary and continued under Elizabeth, but gradually faded out, most likely due to Puritan hostility. Another Act of Parliament in 1552 cut the time of festivity following Easter back to only the Monday and Tuesday immediately following the feast itself.

Maytide

The first day of May has two faces: the secular holiday of Maytide and the religious holy day of the feast of [SS. Philip and James](#). Mayday is the official beginning of summer, when cattle kept in byre over the winter were driven out to pasture, and the secular celebrations were aimed toward "bringing in the summer." The young folk of the village would go into the woods and fields the night before to gather the mayflower (white hawthorne) to deck houses with; the flower was considered unlucky at other times of the year. The popular belief (held in the period as well as in modern times) that these expeditions led to a great deal of unlicensed sexual activity seems to be exaggerated; a recent statistical study has found that there was no spike in the birth rate nine months later, as would be expected. When one considers English weather in late April/early May, this is perhaps, after all, not a surprise. However, other revelry was rife. The maypole would be brought in in procession, with musicians and flowers, and erected on the village green, often right in front of the church. Picnics or communal feasts, morris dancing, the choosing of a Summer Lord or (less frequently) a Queen of the May, and football matches were popular, as were the perennial favorites of bonfires and bell-ringing.

Maying suffered a great deal from Puritan disapproval: tagged "empty frivolity with the risk of debauchery," by radical preachers, it was suppressed wherever possible. Maypoles were particularly targeted, though there is no evidence from the period that anyone thought of them as a phallic symbol, but rather one of the flourishing of vegetation. The actual dance performed around the maypole has not survived, but what evidence we have indicates that the dance involved kissing, (a sufficient reason for Puritan disapproval!) and that holding ribbons tied to the pole did not come in until the 19th century, Maypoles were first denounced during Edward's reign; they returned under Mary, and were not banned under Elizabeth, but were acted against by Protestant reformers on a local level without government support, because of their association with mixed-gender dancing, drunkenness and Sunday merry-making.

Maytide was a popular time for another custom: the church ale. This was a fund-raiser for the parish, usually held either around Whitsun or another day in May, but it could take place anytime between Easter and August. It was basically a large communal party, with music and dancing. A special ale would be brewed, and food provided, ranging from simple bread to a full-scale feast. A sample menu: baked meats, roast veal, bread, eggs, fruit, custards and pasties, honey, cream, and ale. A fool might be hired, and usually the local morris side turned out. It was very common for people from neighboring villages to join the merriment; occasionally, more than one parish would join together to put on a church ale to raise money for both. The custom of holding church ales was largely suppressed during Edward's reign, though not by government legislation; ecclesiastical visitors were forbidding them on their own recognizance. They returned vigorously under Mary: the expenses of replacing rood screens, images and other church furnishings destroyed under Edward gave many parishes a pressing need for fund-raising. Church ales began to fade out again from the 1560's, in part because of Puritan disapproval, but also because parish funding became more reliably supported by the payment of rates.

Feast of SS. Philip and James - May 1

St. Philip was from Bethsaida, and after he had been called to be an apostle he brought Nathanael to Christ. When certain Greeks wanted to see Jesus it was to Philip they applied; and it was his request at the Last Supper, 'Lord, shew us the Father,' that elicited Christ's declaration, 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father ... I am in the Father, and the Father in me.' It is possible that Philip preached the gospel in Phrygia and died, whether martyred or not, at Hierapolis, which claimed to have the grave of him and his daughters. His feast day is May 1. (*Penguin Dictionary of Saints*)

James the Less, the son of Alphaeus, is listed among Christ's twelve apostles in the gospels; he is sometimes said to be the same as James, "the Lord's brother," referred to several times in the New Testament. If this identification is right (about which there is much doubt), it was James the Less who eventually presided over the Christian community at Jerusalem and was there martyred. The contemporary Jewish historian Josephus records that the bishop James was stoned to death; a century later a converted Jew, Hegesippus, says that James was first taken to the pinnacle of the Temple and implored to dissuade the assembled people from belief in Christ. He spoke to the contrary effect, and was thereupon thrown down from the pinnacle and stoned and beaten to death as he lay there. This Epistle of St James in the New Testament is commonly attributed to James, the Lord's brother. His feast day is May 1. (*Penguin Dictionary of Saints*)

He is the patron saint of apothecaries, and pharmacists, fullers, hatters, and milliners.

This is an official holiday from work. The Epistle for the feast of SS. Philip & James is James i:1-12 and the Gospel is John xiv:1-14 (*1559 Prayerbook*).

Rogation Days

Rogation Days take place the three days before Ascension Day. On these three days, the boundaries of each parish were verified by the whole community, by means of processions. An important feature of the days' proceedings was the blessing of crops. Before the Reformation, the procession would include banners of saints and scenes from the life of Christ, and processional crosses; all members of the parish were required to attend. One widespread feature of the ritual was the presence of children; in some parishes the children were provided with wands with which to beat the boundary markers (to fix them in the memory of the youngest members of the community); in other parishes the boys themselves were beaten, the better to remember. (Thus our expression "beating the bounds.") In yet other places, the boys would be given sweets or coins at each marker. The procession would also stop to sing and pray at each of the monumental crosses that were boundary markers. In a large parish, the tour of the boundaries might take all three days, and involve a certain amount of difficulty; members of one parish had to hire a boat to proceed along the parish boundary, while in another, a volunteer swam a river representing the procession, while the rest of it went round by a bridge some distance away. Occasionally the proceedings were enlivened by encounters between two processions from neighboring parishes, not always peacefully. Refreshments were provided for people in the procession by the homes of those along the way, and the tour often ended with a communal feast, although in theory, the Rogation Days were supposed to be fast days.

No formal decree under Edward banned Rogation Day processions, but the widespread disapproval of Protestant reformers tended to cause them to fall

into disuse. The blessing of material objects such as crops was viewed as a perversion of religion, and many of the boundary crosses were taken down. The 1548 prohibition of images removed the banners from the proceedings. The custom revived under Mary, but under Elizabeth they were allowed to continue only as a confirmation of boundaries, not as a religious exercise. Fewer of the parishioners attended; universal participation was no longer required. The minister was to wear ordinary clothing, not ceremonial vestments, and no crosses, bells or banners were to be carried; psalms and prayers were read. The custom gradually fell into disuse through lack of interest; while the practical need to keep parish boundaries (and dues) clearly established was a valid reason to hold such functions, the gradual increase in availability of good maps took the place of the Rogation perambulations.

Rogation Day processions have had a revival in the centuries since Elizabeth, and are still held in many parishes.

Ascension Day

The fortieth day after Easter, Ascension Day commemorates the ascent of Christ into heaven. It is also known as Holy Thursday. Before the Reformation, on this day the Paschal candle would be lighted for the last time, and then put away, symbolizing that Jesus was no longer here in the world. Bells would be rung, and a communal feast would be held.

After the Reformation, the day was celebrated only with church services. The Epistle for the day was Acts i:1-11 and the Gospel was Mark xvi:14-20.

St. Augustine - May 26

In the year 596 Pope Gregory the Great sent a band of forty monks, lead by this Augustine, to preach the gospel to the heathen English. They arrived in Kent in 597, and were well received by the local king, Ethelbert, who himself soon became a Christian, with many of his subjects. Augustine went to Arles to be consecrated archbishop of the English, and established his see at Canterbury, where he also founded the monastery of SS. Peter and Paul (afterwards called St. Augustine's). The mission continued to prosper, and shortly before his death Augustine founded two more episcopal sees, in London for the East Saxons and at Rochester. But he was not successful in his attempt to extend his authority to the existing Christians in Wales and south-west England (Dumnonia). These Britons were suspicious and wary, Augustine was perhaps insufficiently conciliatory, and the British bishops refused to recognize him as their archbishop. From early times St. Augustine has been venerated as the evangelizer of England (as distinct from Roman Britain), though his comparatively short mission was perforce confined to a limited area. That he was a very conscientious missionary is clear from the pages of Bede, who gives what purports to be the text of Pope Gregory's answers to Augustine's requests for direction on various matters arising out of his mission. He died at Canterbury c.605. His feast day is May 26. (Penguin Dictionary of Saints)

He is one of the patron saints of England, but not one of the saints in the official Elizabethan calender. His day was popularly observed, but was not a work holiday.

Whitsun

Whitsunday is the English name for Pentecost, the church festival that commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, and the speaking in tongues. It is an official holiday, as are the Monday and Tuesday following. It takes place fifty days after Easter (the seventh Sunday after Easter).

The three days of Whitsuntide were a popular time for holding church ales or summer games; the election of a Summer Lord, morris dancing, and general merrymaking took place. The timing was particularly apt for celebration because the ploughing and sowing were over, and haymaking hadn't started yet. Many churches were decked with flowers and strewn with herbs for the occasion, and some churches had a white dove, representing the Holy Ghost, lowered from the ceiling during the service. (It is unclear whether this was an artificial dove or a real one.) Larger towns had parades, and some towns, such as Chester and Norwich, had elaborate cycles of mystery plays. These were suppressed after the Reformation, though Chester managed to preserve their plays by pruning them of Catholic content as much as possible; this gave them only a reprieve until 1575, when the Mayor was summoned before the Privy Council and asked to explain himself. The plays were stopped forthwith.

The Epistle for the day is Acts ii:1-11 and the Gospel is John xiv:15-31.

Corpus Christi

This feast occurred on the second Thursday after Pentecost. It was originally created in 1317 in order to draw greater attention to the Real Presence of Christ in the consecrated Host (communion wafers). As you may expect, this was not a premise that commended itself to Protestant reformers.

In the Middle Ages, the celebration of this holiday was largely an urban phenomenon. Many towns had Corpus Christi guilds who sponsored processions of the Host on that day. (These guilds are more like clubs than like craft guilds, which resemble modern unions more closely.) In the processions, the Host was carried in a shrine on the shoulders of local clergy, with a canopy carried above. Town councillors and craft guilds marched behind the clergy, with crosses, banners, and torches; townsfolk were dressed to represent angels or monsters. Onlookers were required to kneel and bare their heads as the procession passed by. Another feature of the holiday was the production of mystery plays. Most of these are now lost.

In 1547, an Act of Parliament empowered the government to confiscate the endowments of religious guilds such as the Corpus Christi guilds. Since these guilds funded most of the processions, this led to a sharp curtailment in their occurrence. Corpus Christi was removed from the 1549 Prayer book of Edward VI. It was reinstated under Mary and removed again under Elizabeth. Royal ministers discouraged the processions vigorously, as a threat to civil order, especially in northern England in the years following the Northern rebellion.

The Feast of the Holy Trinity

Trinity Sunday was the Sunday after Pentecost. It had no special observances other than the usual attendance at Sunday services. This Sunday is, however, one of the calendrical landmarks that people would use to date papers: for example, "Written the second Thursday after Trinity." The Epistle for the day was Revelations iv:1-11 and the Gospel was John iii:1-15 (*1559 Prayerbook*).

St. Barnabas - June 11

Barnabas, "a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith", is styled "apostle," though he was not one of the Twelve. He was a Cypriot Jew, and is remembered for his close association with the work of St. Paul, from the time that he vouched for Paul to the nervous Christians of Jerusalem until the disagreement over St. Mark. It was Barnabas who was sent to the growing Christian centre at Antioch, and he fetched Paul from Tarsus to help him; later the teachers there, prompted by the Holy Spirit, sent Barnabas and Paul on the first missionary journey, beginning with Cyprus, of which church St. Barnabas is esteemed the founder. He was still at work when St. Paul wrote his first letter to the Christians at Corinth, but probably died not long after. He is said to have been martyred at Salamis, the Cypriot port, but the New Testament says nothing of this. The ancient work called the Epistle of Barnabas was not written by him. His feast day is June 11. (*Penguin Dictionary of Saints*)

He is the patron saint of Cyprus, and is invoked as a peacemaker, and against hailstorms.

The Epistle is Acts xi:22-30 and the Gospel is John xv:12-16 (*1559 Prayerbook*).

The Feast of SS. Peter and Paul - June 29

St. Peter was a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee, married, and the brother of St. Andrew, with whom he was called to follow Christ and be a "fisher of men." Originally he was called Simon; but Jesus gave him the Aramaic title of Kepha, meaning "rock," of which the Greek equivalent becomes "Peter" in English, the name by which we know him. The title was explained when, in reply to Simon's declaration "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," the Lord said to him, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I shall build my church," and conferred on him "the keys of the kingdom of Heaven," and the power of "binding and loosing" afterwards extended to the other apostles. The New Testament gives ample evidence of Peter's unique position among the apostles, and also makes clear his earlier misunderstanding of Christ's messiahship and the warm impetuosity of his character. Within a few hours of his assuring his Master "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee," he in fact denied all knowledge of him three times to the Jewish high priest's servants. But after the resurrection Peter was the first of the apostles to whom Jesus appeared: and subsequently the risen Lord elicited a three-fold assurance of his love; whereupon Jesus reiterated Peter's responsibilities: "Feed my lambs, Feed my sheep."

This St. Peter did boldly and faithfully, as can be seen from the Acts of the Apostles. He was the leader of the Christian community. He directed that the place among the apostles left vacant by Judas Iscariot be filled; he addressed the crowd at Pentecost; he did miracles in Christ's name - his very shadow was health-giving.

The tradition, age-long, but not explicitly recorded in the New Testament, that St. Peter eventually went to Rome and was put to death there has been called in question from time to time in later ages; but the researches of modern scholars have done much to confirm the tradition. That he was martyred under Nero is undisputed; it is said that he was crucified, head downwards at his own request, but this is very uncertain. Tradition again points to a spot below where the alter of the Vatican basilica stands as his burial-place. The results of recent excavations there are impressive and of profound interest, but not wholly conclusive on this point. (*Penguin Dictionary of Saints*)

His emblem is two crossed keys. He is the patron saint of bakers, clock makers, shoemakers and cobblers, fishermen, harvesters, locksmiths, the papacy, and Rome.

St. Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, was known as Saul until his conversion to Christ. He inherited Roman citizenship from his Jewish father, who brought him up a strict Pharisee; he studied his religion under the celebrated Rabbi Gamaliel at Jerusalem, and learned the trade of a tent-maker. As a young man he was present and consenting when St. Stephen was stoned to death; afterwards he "made havoc of the church" searching out Christians and handing them over to prison and even death. Then, while on the way to Damascus to persecute there, he had a sudden vision, in which Jesus Christ rebuked him and told him he was destined to take the Christian faith to the Gentiles, i.e. to non-Jews. Paul was duly baptized, and retired for a time to Arabia; then he came back to Damascus, but after three years his Jewish enemies became so threatening that he had to make his escape by night, being lowered over the city wall in a basket.

From about the year 45 St. Paul was on his three principal missionary journeys, beginning with Cyprus and going hither and thither in Asia Minor, Syria, Macedonia, and Greece. In each town he first preached in the Jewish synagogue before addressing himself to the heathen. At the end of a dozen years he went to Jerusalem, and his presence there caused such disorder that he was taken into custody by the Roman governor. After two years he appealed for trial at the emperor's court, and was sent to Rome, being shipwrecked in Malta on the way. He remained under house-arrest in Rome for two years, and thereafter his movements are uncertain. He may have been condemned at his trial, and then executed; or he may have been acquitted, for there is some indication that he revisited Ephesus and other places, and perhaps even went to Spain. He would then have been again arrested, brought to Rome once more, and there put to death. In either case the tradition is that he was beheaded at the place now called Tre Fontane, and his body buried where the church of St. Paul Outside the Walls stands. (*Penguin Dictionary of Saints*)

His emblem is a sword and a book. He is the patron saint of evangelists, musicians, ropemakers, saddlers, tentmakers, Malta, and Rome, and is invoked against snakes, snakebites, and hailstorms.

This is one of the official saints' days, and a holiday from work, with attendance at church services. The celebrations for St. John's Eve (June 23) were repeated in many parts of the country on St. Peter's Eve: bonfires, feasting, parades and music. The Epistle for the day is Acts xii:1-11 and the Gospel is Matthew xvi:13-19 (*1559 Prayerbook*).

St. James the Greater - July 25

James was the brother of and fellow fisherman with St. John Evangelist, and is called "the Greater" to distinguish him from the other apostle James, "the Less." With Peter and John he was chosen by Christ to be a witness of his transfiguration and his agony in the garden, and with these two had a certain precedence among the twelve. He was the first of the apostles to be martyred, being put to the sword by order of King Herod Agrippa I to please the Jewish opponents of Christianity. An early story relates that his accuser suddenly repented, declared himself a Christian, and was beheaded with him.

According to Spanish tradition St. James visited Spain and preached the Gospel there. The story is first heard of only in the seventh century, and the evidence against it is so weighty that it is now quite discredited outside Spain. It was further claimed that after his martyrdom the body of St. James was brought from Jerusalem to Spain. In the later Middle Ages its shrine at Santiago de Compostela was one of the greatest centres of pilgrimage in Christendom, and it is still much resorted to; there is, however, no evidence whatever as to the identity of the relics discovered in Galicia early in the ninth century and claimed to be those of St. James. James himself is often represented in art as a pilgrim, with a cockle shell. (Penguin Dictionary of Saints)

He is the patron saint of apothecaries, furriers, knights, pilgrims, and Spain, and is invoked against arthritis and rheumatism. His day is a popular time for bonfires.

The epistle for the day is Acts xi:27-30 and Acts xii:1-3 and the Gospel is Matthew xx:20-28.

Lammas - August 1

The first of August was the beginning of Autumn, and the beginning of the harvest. In Saxon times it was called "Hlaf-mas," or "loaf-mass," referring to the first bread made from the new harvest, and this is probably the derivation of the name Lammas. The first corn cut would be made into a loaf which was blessed in church. This custom is based on the text of Deuteronomy ch.26: "... And thou shalt say, 'And now behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land, which thou, O Lord, hast given me.' And thou shalt set it before the Lord thy God, and worship the Lord thy God; and thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which the Lord thy God hath given thee ..."

Common pastures (called Lammas Lands) would be thrown open for grazing at Lammastide, after the haymaking. It was a popular day for payment of rents, and election of local officials. It was also a popular day for fairs, especially for sheep and cattle fairs. It was not an official holiday in either the Edwardian or Elizabethan calendars.

St. Lawrence - August 10

It is known that he was one of the seven deacons of Rome, and that he was martyred there four days after Pope St. Sixtus II in 258, and was buried in the cemetery on the road to Tivoli, where the church of St. Lawrence-outside-the-Walls now stands. According to tradition, when ordered by the city prefect to hand over the church's valuables, he assembled the poor and sick and presented them to the prefect; "Here," he said, "is the church's treasure." Thereupon he was put to death by being roasted on a grid. From the fourth century he was venerated as one of the most famous martyrs of the city of Rome. His emblem is a gridiron. (Penguin Dictionary of Saints)

He is the patron saint of archives, archivists and librarians, armories and armourers, brewers, confectioners, cooks, cutlers, deacons, glaziers, laundresses, poor people, students, tanners, and vintners, and is invoked against fire and lumbago. St. Lawrence was the favorite saint of Philip of Spain, who built his palace of the Escorial in the shape of a gridiron.

His day was not an official holiday, but was a popular day for fairs to be held.

St. Bartholomew - August 24

Except that he was called to be one of the twelve apostles, nothing certain is known about St. Bartholomew; but it is possible that he is the same man as Nathanael, "an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile," of whose meeting with Christ there is a remarkable account in St. John's gospel. Later writers associate St. Bartholomew with the spreading of the gospel in Lycaonia, India and, more particularly, Armenia, where he is said to have been martyred by being flayed alive; but there is no certainty about any of this. His emblem in art is a butcher's knife. His feast day is Aug. 24. (Penguin Dictionary of Saints)

He is the patron saint of beekeepers, bookbinders, butchers, leather workers, plasterers, shoemakers, cobblers, and tanners, and is invoked against twitching and nervous diseases.

The Epistle for the day is Acts v:12-16 and the Gospel is Luke xxii:24-30 (1559 Prayerbook).

St. Bartholomew's Day was the occasion for the largest fair in England, that of Smithfield outside London. This fair was held from the twelfth century until 1855. This day is also notable for being the date of the St. Bartholomew's Massacre in Paris in 1572, when hundreds of Protestants were murdered, an event which shocked Englishmen profoundly and could not fail to be remembered in later years.

The Massacre began on August 22, with an assassination attempt on Admiral Coligny, a Protestant leader for whom the French King Charles IX had a particular animosity. The city of Paris was very full of Protestants at the time because on the 18th, the Protestant Henri de Navarre (later Henri IV) and the King's sister Marguerite de Valois had been married in an effort to end the French Wars of Religion. The attempt on Coligny's life failed, though he was wounded in the arm. The evening of the following day, the 23, the general massacre of Protestants in Paris began, starting in the Louvre itself, and by the time it was mostly over on the 26th, between two and three thousand French Protestants had been murdered. A second attempt on Admiral Coligny's life was successful. When the news of the Massacre reached other French cities, similar actions broke out.

Her Grace was on Progress visiting the earl and countess of Warwick and had just travelled to Kenilworth when the news of the Massacre arrived in England about the 28th of August. The news, carried by refugees, was not detailed, but Her Grace immediately cancelled the Progress and returned to London; all entertainments at court were cancelled, and the country was put into a defense posture. Her Grace refused to receive the French Ambassador for a week and a half after the news was received, and finally did so on September 8th. I have found no contemporary evidence for the story that Her Grace and the court wore mourning on the occasion.

Her Grace's Birthday - September 7

Though not as widely celebrated as the anniversary of Elizabeth's accession to the throne, the observations of Her Grace's birthday somewhat resembled those of Accession Day (Nov.17). Bell-ringing on the seventh of September began to be customary during the '70's, and sermons were preached celebrating her as the deliverer of England from the iniquities of Papistry. Catholics could take the opportunity to covertly celebrate the feast of the Nativity of the Virgin, which fell on the following day.

Her Grace's courtiers marked the royal birthday by giving her gifts, which invariably took the form of forty silver shillings in a pouch.

St. Matthew - September 21

Matthew was a farmer of taxes for the Roman government at Capernaum, and Christ called him from his desk to be an apostle; the gospels of Mark and Luke call him Levi, and he may well have had both names. The authorship of the First Gospel is traditionally ascribed to him, but nothing else is known of his subsequent career. Eusebius says that he proclaimed Christianity to his fellow Jews. Various references state that he was eventually martyred in Ethiopia, in Persia, or elsewhere, but no reliance can be placed on any of them. In art his symbol is a man with wings. (*Penguin Dictionary of Saints*)

He is the patron saint of accountants, bankers, bookkeepers, customs officers, guards, and tax collectors.

This is an official holiday from work. The Epistle for the day is ii Corinthians iv:1-6 and the Gospel is Matthew ix:9-13 (*1559 Prayerbook*).

Michaelmas - September 29

The festival of Michael the Archangel on this date originated in the annual commemoration of the dedication, before the seventh century, of a church in his honour near Rome. From the beginning of Christian history there is evidence for the honour in which Michael was held, and he was also venerated by the Jews. The well-known passage in the Apocalypse (Rev. xii:7-9) about the "war in heaven" contributed to his being honoured in the West as the "captain of the heavenly host" and protector of Christians in general and of soldiers in particular. Veneration for Michael was intensified by the vision of him said to have been seen on Monte Gargano in southern Italy between 492 and 496. This almost certainly gave rise to the legend of Mont-Saint Michel in France; later there were vague local legends of a vision at St. Michael's Mount in England, at the Stranberg near Stuttgart, and elsewhere. All over Christendom chapels of St. Michael were built on top of hills and mountains; one on Skirrid Fawr near Abergavenny [in Wales] was resorted to even after the Reformation. There is a very old tradition that Michael was the receiver of the souls of the dead. No other individual archangel had a feast in the Western calendar until the present century. (*Penguin Dictionary of Saints*)

He is the patron saint of battle, swordplay, knights, soldiers and swordsmiths, bakers, coopers, grocers, haberdashers, hatters and milliners, artists and sailors, and is invoked against temptations and storms at sea.

This is an official holiday from work, with church services. The Epistle for the day is Revelations xii:7-12 and the Gospel is Matthew xviii:1-10 (*1559 Prayerbook*). It is also a popular day for fairs, and, as one of the Quarter Days, a time for hiring servants and paying rents. Many leases ran from Michaelmas to Michaelmas. The traditional dinner dish for this day is goose. It was believed that after Michaelmas, one should not pick blackberries, since the devil had spat on them.

Parish Dedication Festivals - First Sunday In October

Before the Reformation, each parish would hold a celebration on the saint's day of their parish church. These were often the occasion for a church ale or wake, with feasting, dancing and music, sports competitions, and, of course, drinking. However, in 1536, Henry VIII enacted legislation to curtail such wakes, and directed that all churches hold them on the first Sunday in October). The church wakes were disliked by Protestants because they were connected with the cult of saints, and because they led to Sunday merrymaking and were usually an opportunity for drunkenness. This law was almost completely ignored, except perhaps in parishes which had either a very meek pastor or a very energetically Puritan Justice of the Peace.

St. Edward the Confessor - October 13

Edward was the son of Ethelred II, king of the English, and Emma, sister of Duke Richard II of Normandy, and he lived in that country from about his tenth year till he was recalled to England in 1041. In the following year he succeeded to the throne, and in 1045 married Edith, daughter of the ambitious and powerful Earl Godwin. Edward's reign was outwardly peaceful and he was a peace-loving man; but he had to contend with Godwin's opposition and other grave difficulties, and he did so with a determination that hardly supports the common picture of him as a tame and ineffectual ruler. His anonymous contemporary biographer gives a convincing portrait of him in his old age that has obscured the evidence concerning his middle life.

The belief that Edward was a saint was supported by his general reputation for religious devotion and for generosity to the poor and infirm, by the relation of a number of miracles (he was the first sovereign reported to "touch for the King's Evil," scrofula), and, too, by the assertion that he and his wife were so ascetic as always to have lived together as brother and sister. Edward and Edith were certainly childless; but that this was due to life-long voluntary abstinence is unlikely in the circumstances of their marriage and is not supported by adequate evidence. St. Edward was buried in the church of the abbey of Westminster, a small existing monastery which he had refounded and endowed with princely magnificence; he is almost the only English saint whose bodily remains still rest in their medieval shrine, which was set up in its present position behind the high altar in 1268. He is called "the Confessor," that is, one who bears witness to Christ by his life, to distinguish him from King Edward the Martyr (c.962-978). (*Penguin Dictionary of Saints*)

He is the patron saint of kings, difficult marriages, and separated spouses. He is represented in art as an elderly king offering a coin to a beggar, who is St. John in disguise.

This is not an official holiday, but as a popular English saint his day continued to be popularly celebrated.

St. Luke the Evangelist - October 18

St. Luke was a gentile, a Greek, perhaps born in Antioch, and a medical man by profession - St. Paul speaks of him as "our beloved Luke, the physician." He was the author of the gospel that bears his name and of its continuation called The Acts of the Apostles. Certain passages in the latter, written in the first person plural, are usually held to show that the writer was with St. Paul on parts of his second and third missionary journeys and on the voyage to Italy, when the ship was wrecked off Malta. In his letters, Paul thrice refers to Luke's presence in Rome, writing to Timothy, "Luke is my only companion." A writer of perhaps as early as the late second century declares that, having served the Lord constantly and written his gospel there, Luke died, unmarried, in Greece at the age of eighty-four, "full of the Holy Spirit." He is said to have been martyred, but it is very doubtful. St Luke is the patron saint of physicians and surgeons, and also of painters of pictures. He was himself a great artist in words, and his narratives have inspired many masterpieces of art; but the existing pictures of the Blessed Virgin which he is said actually to have painted are all works of a much later date. This evangelist's symbol is a winged ox.

(Penguin Dictionary of Saints)

He is also the patron saint of bookbinders, brewers, butchers, glassworkers, lacemakers, notaries, and sculptors.

The Epistle for the day is ii Timothy iii:5-15 and the Gospel is Luke x:1-7. *(1559 Prayerbook)*.

SS. Crispin and Crispinian - October 25

The legend of Crispin and Crispinian, which is very late and quite worthless, says that they were missionaries from Rome in the third century who preached the gospel at Soissons, where they earned their living as shoemakers and were eventually martyred. The truth may well be that they were Roman martyrs whose relics were brought to Soissons and enshrined there. Crispin and Crispinian are the traditional patron saints of shoemakers and other workers in leather, and this ascription has not been wholly forgotten in England, either in the trade or more generally. A local tradition of unknown origin says that they fled from persecution in Faversham in Kent, where formerly there was an alter bearing their name in the parish church. Their emblem in art is a shoe or a last.

(Penguin Dictionary of Saints)

Because of the English military victory at Agincourt on the feast day of SS. Crispin and Crispinian, this day was widely celebrated in England even after the Reformation as an expression of patriotism. It was not an official holiday.

They are the patron saints of shoemakers, cobblers, glove makers, leather workers, saddlers, tanners, and weavers.

The Feast of SS. Simon and Jude - October 28

St. Simon, called "the Zealot," was one of Christ's twelve apostles. Nothing else is known about him for certain. According to later accounts he preached the gospel in Egypt and Persia, and was martyred in Persia, some say together with St. Jude.

(Penguin Dictionary of Saints)

He is the patron saint of curriers and sawmen due to a late addition to his history, which described him being martyred by being sawn in half longitudinally. He is sometimes represented in art holding a saw, or two fish.

St. Jude, the apostle of this name who was "not Iscariot," is also called Thaddeus or Lebbaeus. He is traditionally identified with Jude, "brother of James," the writer of the Epistle of Jude in the New Testament, but this is not altogether certain. An apocryphal document alleges that Jude the apostle preached the gospel and was martyred in Persia with his fellow apostle Simon. *(Penguin Dictionary of Saints)*

He is the patron saint of desperate situations and lost, forgotten or impossible causes. He is represented in art holding an oar or boat hook, or holding a club, the instrument of his martyrdom.

This is an official holiday from work, with church services. The Epistle for the day is Jude i:1-8 and the Gospel is John xv:17-27 *(1559 Prayerbook)*.

All Saints and All Souls - November 1 and 2

Before the Reformation, these twin holidays were observed in varying ways in different parts of the realm, with rituals that varied from place to place as to which day they were performed on. This was largely due to the fact that the eve of All Souls was the day of All Saints. During the reign of Henry VIII, the court dressed in black on All Saints' Day. Bells were rung on the eve of All Souls to comfort souls in Purgatory, after church services had offered prayers for them; the bells rang from the end of the service until midnight. Cranmer tried to abolish ringing for the dead as early as 1546, but Henry VIII refused to approve the action due to the international political situation. It was banned under Edward, revived under Mary, and banned again in 1559, but this was one of the hardest fought battles of the Reformation in England: people might be willing to embrace the tenets of Protestantism in principle, but still they feared for the souls of their dead. Ringing continued at least into the 1580's, and may have lasted longer, since the nature of the custom meant that the labor of bell-ringing was often donated by the ringers, thus leaving no payment record in the church accounts. Bonfires were lit on All Saints' day very widely in England.

The feasts of All Saints and All Souls by their nature offended Protestant reformers, who did not believe in saints as intercessors to God, nor that prayers for the dead could help souls in Purgatory. All Saints' Day was retained in the reformed calendar, but only as a celebration of saints as persons who lived very holy lives, not as intermediaries between men and God. All Souls' Day was dropped from the calendar completely.

When the custom of prayers for the dead in church was stopped, this ceremony became privatized; Catholic families would gather to pray for the souls of the dead on the eve of All Saints; often they would light a bonfire on top of a nearby hill, and pray while it burned out. Family prayers on hilltops persisted on this night until the 19th century.

On All Saints' day, it was customary to bake a spiced cake known as soul cakes, which were given to the poor and to visitors on the following day. This

developed into a form of ritualized begging called "souling," where the poor would go from house to house, often singing a variant of a song which many will still recognize:

A soul, a soul, a soul-cake,
Please, good missus, a soul-cake.
An apple, a pear, a plum, a cherry,
Any small thing to make us all merry.
One for Peter, two for Paul,
Three for him that made us all.

The Epistle for All Saints' Day is Revelations vii:2-12 and the Gospel is Matthew v:1-12.

Here are some recipes for [Soul Cakes](#).

Martinmas - November 11

St. Martin, a soldier's son, was born in what is now Hungary and brought up in Italy, at Pavia. As a young officer at Amiens he gave half his cloak to a naked beggar, in whom he was led to recognize Christ, and soon afterwards he was baptized. About 339 he asked for discharge from the army, for, he said, "I am Christ's soldier; I am not allowed to fight." Accused of cowardice, he retorted by offering to stand unarmed between the opposing lines. However, he was given his discharge, and for some time was in Italy and Dalmatia before living as a recluse on an island off the Ligurian coast. In 360 he became one of St. Hilary's clergy at Poitiers, and founded a semi-eremical religious community at Ligugé, the first monastery in Gaul. Upon being made bishop of Tours, in 370 or 371, he lived at a solitary place near by, which soon developed into another monastery, Marmoutier. His example and encouragement led to the establishment of other communities elsewhere.

St. Martin was an extremely active missionary, his preaching being reinforced by his reputation as a wonderworker; he penetrated into the remotest parts of his diocese and beyond its borders, on foot, on donkey-back, or by water. He was one of the first holy men who was not a martyr to be publicly venerated as a saint, and his influence was felt from Ireland to Africa and the East. In England many churches were dedicated in his honour, of which St. Martin's at Canterbury is the oldest and St. Martin's-in-the-Fields in London perhaps the best-known today.

(Penguin Dictionary of Saints)

St. Martin is the patron saint of beggars, geese, horse men and horses, innkeepers, quartermasters, soldiers, tailors, and vintners, and is invoked against poverty. Goose or beef is the traditional dinner on Martinmas. He is represented in art as a mounted man in the act of cutting his cloak in half to give to the beggar.

Martinmas was the traditional time of the year when farm animals that could not be fed over the winter, when pasture was scarce, to be slaughtered. It was the last opportunity before the winter to eat fresh meat, and so was a feasting time. The meat not consumed in the festivities would be salted or otherwise preserved for the lean times to come.

This is not an official holiday, but was widely observed

Accession Day - November 17

November 17 was the anniversary of Queen Elizabeth's accession to the throne, and was celebrated from about 1570 well beyond the end of her reign. It marked the return of Her Grace to London for the winter season. In many towns, processions were held, with floats and pageants, and church services of thanksgiving were conducted on "Queen's Day," as it was known. In churches all over England bells were rung, and people let off fireworks and built bonfires to celebrate her anniversary. In great households, alms would be given and special sermons would be preached in her honor. These sermons often lauded her as Hester, Deborah or Judith, and likened her to an old Testament ruler who had delivered her people from servitude to Rome. Even in foreign parts her name would be celebrated on this day: Sir Francis Drake and Sir John Hawkins, off the coast of Brazil in November of 1582, let off cannon in honor of Queen Elizabeth on the seventeenth.

Enthusiasm for the holiday increased considerably after Elizabeth's bout with smallpox, again after the Northern Rebellion, and yet again after the defeat of the Spanish Armada. Some extremists thought it was going too far, and objected to celebrating a secular person as if she were a god; but the root of this holiday was as much a celebration of the final victory against the Anti-Christ (the Pope) and of the restoration of primitive "pure" Christianity as of a particular person. George Peele's "Polyhymnia" describes it thus in 1590:

"In honour of their mistress' holiday
A gracious sport, fitting that golden time,
The day, the birth-day of our happiness,
The blooming time, the spring of England's peace."

All that aside, the glory of this holiday was the Accession Day festivities held at court. The Accession Day tilts were started by Sir Henry Lee about 1572, and by 1581 had been developed into a huge public spectacle, organized largely by Sir Henry Lee and Her Grace's Master of Horse. Her Grace would make a triumphal entry into the city of London, then proceed to her palace of Whitehall, where she and her ladies would place themselves at the windows of the tilt gallery, overlooking the tiltyard. Bleachers were set up for the crowd, who paid a shilling to get in.

Trumpeters would then announce the entrance of pairs of knights, whose attendants would line the sides of the lists, often wearing special liveries or fancy dress such as wild Irishmen, savages, etc. The knights would then enter, some on horseback, others on floats or pageant cars. In 1595, the earl of Cumberland came in astride a dragon. As each knight entered, he would stop at the foot of the staircase leading to the gallery where Her Grace sat, and a servant ascended and addressed Her Grace with verse or laudatory or humorous speeches, and offered her the knight's impresa on a painted shield. These

speeches were meant to be elaborate compliments, but also were quite often humorous. They also could convey a real message; in 1600, Cumberland appeared as the "Discontented Knight," because of his failure to get the governorship of the Isle of Wight, and his speech threatened to retire if he did not receive royal favour. Each pair of knights would then tilt. This would continue until about 5 o'clock, when the court would retire for a great feast.

The imprese used by each competitor in the tilts were allegorical devices, semi-heraldic in nature, which were intended to convey a message to the observers. They symbolized the knight's aim and intention, and were often variations on a theme of knight and lady. There was frequently a strong astrological theme. Books of imprese were published, from which people might choose elements for their entry. William Camden, one of Her Grace's heralds, wrote this definition of impresa:

"An Impress (as the Italians call it) is a device in Picture with his Motto or Word, borne by Noble and Learned Personages, to notify some particular conceit of their own, as Emblems ... do propound some general instruction to all. ... There is required in an Impress ... a correspondency of the picture, which is as the body; and the Motto, which as the soul giveth it life. That is the body must be of faire representation, and the word in some different language, witty, short, and answerable thereunto; neither too obscure, nor too plain, and most commended when it is an Hemistich, or parcel of a verse."

Expenditure on the part of the participants in the tilts could be considerable. Not only his own costume and rich armour must be provided, but also liveries for his men, a pageant car or elaborate caparison for his horse, the shield with its impresa, props, and sometimes even scenery. Some competitors hired actors or speechwriters to handle their presentations. In 1593, Sir Robert Carey spent over 400 pounds on his entry.

These festivities were often the occasion for the overt expression of rivalry among the courtiers for royal favour; in 1598, Sir Walter Raleigh, then Captain of the Royal Guard, dressed them all in orange plumed hats and favours, as a jab at the earl of Essex, whose livery colours were white and tangerine. Essex got wind of the plan, and brought all of his retainers (nearly 2000 of them) to the tourney, all dressed in orange. Her Grace was so incensed that she called off the tourney.

This holiday was observed well into the reign of King James, as a (somewhat!) subtle expression of dissatisfaction with his government. It became a nostalgic celebration of a vanished Golden Age, the days of "Good Queen Bess," and it was notable that the festivities for the Accession Day of Queen Elizabeth were usually larger and more enthusiastic than those for the accession of King James in March.

Special service books were printed for use on the seventeenth of November, from which the following is excerpted:

A form of Prayer with thanks giving, to be used every year, the 17th of November, being the day of the Queen's Majesty's entry to her reign.

O Lord God, most merciful Father, who as upon this day, placing thy servant our Sovereign and gracious Queen Elizabeth in the kingdom, didst deliver thy people of England from danger of war and oppression, both of bodies by tyranny, and of conscience by superstition, restoring peace and true religion, with liberty both of bodies and minds, and hast continued the same thy blessings, without all desert on our part, now by the space of these eighteen years: we who are in memory of these thy great benefits assembled here together, most humbly beseech thy fatherly goodness to grant us grace, that we may in word, deed, and heart, shew ourselves thankful and obedient unto thee for the same; and that our Queen through thy grace may in all honour, goodness and godliness, long and many years reign over us, and we obey and enjoy her, with the continuance of thy great blessings, which thou hast by her thy minister poured upon us: This we beseech thee to grant unto us, for thy dear Son Jesus Christ's sake, our Lord and Saviour. Amen. [1576]

St. Elizabeth - November 19

Elizabeth of Hungary was the daughter of King Andrew II of Hungary, and at the age of fourteen married the landgrave of Thuringia, Ludwig IV. The marriage had been arranged for political reasons, but it was also a love match, and the couple lived in great content with one another for six years; their home was at the Wartburg castle, near Eisenach, and they had three children. Then, in 1227, Ludwig went to join the crusaders assembling in Apulia, and died suddenly at Otranto. We are told that when the news reached Elizabeth she ran through the castle shrieking crazily. What followed is a matter of some uncertainty. It is commonly said that, in the depth of winter, with a baby at her breast, she was turned out of Wartburg castle by her brother-in-law. In any case, having provided for her children, a few months later she formally renounced the world, put on the dress of the third order of St. Francis, and devoted herself to the care of the poor and sick at Marburg in Hesse.

(Penguin Dictionary of Saints)

She is the patron saint of bakers, beggars, brides, countesses, exiles, falsely accused people, homeless people, hospitals, lacemakers, people ridiculed for their piety, and widows, and is invoked against toothache and the death of children. She is depicted in art as a crowned woman, either tending a beggar or holding a bunch of roses in her mantle.

The feast of St. Elizabeth was observed as a public holiday in England from 1588 onwards, as a celebration of the defeat of the Spanish Armada. Following only two days after the Accession Day festivities, it became somewhat of an extension of them, with more tilting at Whitehall. It was not an official church holiday.

St. Andrew - November 30

Andrew was a Galilean fisherman of Bethsaida and the first-called of the followers of Christ, to whom he brought his brother Simon, afterwards St. Peter. Andrew is mentioned several times in the gospels, but later accounts of his life are very unreliable. They associate him with Scythia and Epirus, and say he was martyred by crucifixion at Patras in Achaia. The idea that he suffered on an X-shaped cross seems to have been unknown before the late Middle Ages. The claim that he was the first bishop at Byzantium (Constantinople) is without historical foundation. St. Andrew is the patron saint of Scotland, and his emblem is a cross saltire (X). His feast day is Nov. 30.

(Penguin Dictionary of Saints)

He is the patron saint of fishmongers, fishermen, old maids, spinsters, Scotland, and singers, and is invoked against sore throats and gout. He is

represented in art holding some fish, a fishing net or a saltire (x-shaped) cross.

The Epistle for the day is Romans x:19-21 and the Gospel is Matthew iv:18-22 (1559 Prayerbook).

St. Nicholas - December 6

There was a church of St. Nicholas at Constantinople in the sixth century, and from the ninth century in the East and the eleventh in the West he has been one of the most popular saints of Christendom: a patron of countries, provinces, dioceses, and cities, titular of churches innumerable, the saint of sailors, children, merchants, pawnbrokers, and others, celebrated in pious custom and folklore, and represented countless times in paintings and carvings. Yet what can be confidently stated of his personal history is no more than that he was a bishop of Myra in Lycia (south-western Asia Minor) during the fourth century.

On the other hand, legend about him has been extensive and sometimes childish since his first "biography" appeared early in the ninth century. The most influential part of the legend is the story of three girls whom Nicholas saved from prostitution by throwing three bags of gold as dowry into their window at night. The pictorial representation of this is said to have given rise (by confusion of the round bags with children's heads) to the tale of his bringing to life three murdered children hidden in a brine-tub. He is also said miraculously to have saved from death three unjustly condemned men, as well as sailors in distress off the Lycian coast. There is no historical support for the less sensational statements that Nicholas suffered for his faith before Constantine's accession and that he was present at the first general council at Nicaea in 325.

St. Nicholas as a patron of children is the origin of "Father Christmas." Presents were - in some countries still are - given on his feast day, and "Santa Claus" is derived, via America, from the Dutch dialect form of his name, Sinte Klaas. In 1087 Italian merchants stole the reputed relics of St. Nicholas from Myra and enshrined them at Bari in Apulia, where they still are: that is why he is sometimes called Nicholas of Bari. His emblem is three balls. (*Penguin Dictionary of Saints*)

One of the customs particular to the day was the election of a Boy Bishop, a kind of Lord of Misrule, who would perform all the functions of the real bishop except serving mass. His sermons, usually written for him, were usually very comic. This custom fell out of use fairly rapidly under Protestant rule.

St. Nicholas is also the patron saint of apothecaries, bakers, boot blacks, brewers, brides and grooms, children, coopers, fishermen, judges, lawsuits lost unjustly, longshoremen, maidens, murderers, newlyweds, paupers, perfumers, pilgrims, prisoners, scholars, spinsters, students, thieves, travellers, unmarried girls, and watermen and was invoked against imprisonment and robbery,

The feast of St. Nicholas is not an official holiday.

Advent

The four weeks immediately before Christmas was known as Advent, and both before and after the Reformation it was a period of self-denial similar to Lent. Meat was forbidden, and marriages were not allowed to take place during that time.

Advent began on the fourth Sunday before Christmas (this year, Nov. 29), and continued until Christmas Eve, which was observed as a strict fast, with meat, eggs and cheese being forbidden.

The Epistles and Gospels for the four Sundays of Advent:

1st Sunday

Epistle - Romans xiii:8-14

Gospel - Matthew xxi:1-13

2nd Sunday

Epistle - Romans xv:4-13

Gospel - Luke xxi:25-33

3rd Sunday

Epistle - i Corinthians iv:1-5

Gospel - Matthew xi:2-10

4th Sunday

Epistle - Philippians iv:4-7

Gospel - John i:19-28

St. Thomas - December 21

The references to this apostle in St. John's Gospel give a sharp impression of the sort of man he was: ready to die with his Master; drawing from Jesus at the Last Supper the declaration "I am the way, the truth, and the life," sceptical about the resurrection: "Unless I see ... and touch, ... I will not believe," but when the risen Christ was made plain to him, whole-hearted in his belief: "My Lord and my God!" There is endless discussion about St. Thomas's subsequent life. In particular, did he take the gospel to India, where for many centuries the Christians of Kerala have called themselves "St. Thomas Christians?" That he did so, and was martyred there, is the theme of a long document of the third or fourth century, called the Acts of Thomas. This is one of the most readable and intrinsically interesting of early Christian apocrypha, but it is no more than a popular romance, written in the interest of false gnostic teachings (e.g., the virtual necessity of celibacy for Christians). It is not impossible that St. Thomas should have reached southern India, but the historical reality of his mission there cannot be considered proved. It was also said that he evangelized Parthia, and in the fourth century his relics were

claimed to be at Edessa in Mesopotamia.
(*Penguin Dictionary of Saints*)

He was the patron saint of architects, blind people, builders, geometricians, stone masons, and theologians, and is represented in art holding a spear or a T-square, or touching the wounds of Christ after the resurrection.

The feast of St. Thomas is an official holiday from work. The Epistle for the day is Ephesians ii:19-22 and the Gospel is John xx:24-31.

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