

## ST. GEORGE'S SWORD

It is likely that Saint George was born to a Greek Christian noble family in Lydda in Palestine, during the late third century between about 275 AD and 285 AD. His father, Gerontios, was a Greek from Cappadocia, an officer in the Roman army; and his mother, Polychronia, was a Greek native of Lydda. They were both Christians from noble families, so their child was raised with Christian beliefs. They called him Georgios (Greek), meaning "worker of the land". At the age of fourteen, George lost his father; just a few years later, his mother died.

Subsequently, George decided to go to Nicomedia, the eastern capital city of the Roman Empire, and present himself to Emperor Diocletian to apply for a career as a soldier. Diocletian welcomed him with open arms, as he had known his father, Gerontius — one of his finest soldiers. By his late 20s, George was promoted to the rank of Tribune and stationed as an imperial guard of the Emperor at Nicomedia.

On 24 February AD 303, Diocletian (influenced by Galerius) issued an edict that every Christian soldier in the army should be arrested and every other soldier should offer a sacrifice to the Roman gods. George objected, and with the courage of his faith approached the Emperor and ruler. Diocletian was upset, not wanting to lose his best tribune and the son of his best official. But George loudly renounced the Emperor's edict, and in front of his fellow soldiers and tribunes he claimed himself to be a Christian and declared his worship of Jesus Christ.

Diocletian attempted to convert George, even offering gifts of land, money and slaves if he made a sacrifice to the Roman gods; he made many offers, but George never accepted. Recognizing the futility of his efforts and insisting on upholding his edict, Diocletian was left with no choice but to have George executed for his refusal.

Before the execution, George gave his wealth to the poor and prepared himself. After various torture sessions, including laceration on a wheel of swords in which he was resuscitated three times, George was executed by decapitation before Nicomedia's city wall, on 23 April 303. A witness of George's willing suffering for his faith was able to convince Empress Alexandra and Athanasius, a pagan priest, to become Christians as well. They joined George in martyrdom. His body was returned to Lydda for burial, where Christians soon came to honor him as a martyr.

Undoubtedly, being an elite imperial guard, George was skilled in the use of a sword, but his renunciation of Emperor Diocletian's edict and declaration of his faith in Jesus Christ shows that he relied foremost on the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

*"And take unto you the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit (which is the word of God)."*

**Ephesians 6:17** Douay-Rheims 1899