

The Golden Legend of Saint James

(Derived from the Legend Aurea (Golden Legend) written in Latin by Jacobus de Voragine)

These are the highlights of the story of the apostle James, also known as James the son of Zebedee, or James the brother of John, or Boanerges, (which means the Son of Thunder), or James the Greater, or also Santiago.

"He is the son of Zebedee not only in the flesh, but in the meaning of the name. Zebedee means giving or given, and the blessed James gave himself to Christ by his martyrdom, and was given to us by God as a spiritual patron.... He is called the son of thunder because of the sonority of his preaching which terrified the wicked, aroused the slothful, and won the admiration of all by its loudness....

James is called the Greater, as the other James is called the Less, firstly, by reason of his calling, because he was called earlier by Christ; secondly, because of his intimacy with Christ, for Our Lord seems to have held this James in closer friendship than the other, admitting him to His secrets, as when he was present at the raising of the daughter of Jairus and at the Transfiguration; thirdly, by reason of his passion because he was the first of the apostles to be put to death. Thus as he is called Greater because he received the grace of the apostolate earlier, so he is called Greater because he was earlier summoned to the glory of eternity."

After the Ascension of Jesus into Heaven and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, James began his own ministry. He first preached in Judea and Samaria, and later spread the gospel over the Roman Empire. He traveled with a fabled dog to the Iberian Peninsula, arriving there about 40 years after Christ, in the village of Saragossa, in Northeastern Spain. The name James is "Sant Iago" in Spanish. Along the way, James collected nine disciples who followed and assisted him on his journey. The people of the countryside he traveled did not react very favorably to the "Good News" that James brought them of salvation. This caused him to become very sad. One day, while praying, the Blessed Virgin appeared to James in a vision. She was atop a pillar of jasper carried by the angels and she was holding a small wooden statue of herself. She gave the pillar and statue to James requesting that a church be built on the same spot, in her honor, and the items she gave him were to be used on the altar. He built a small chapel for her, which later was replaced with the Basilica on the same spot. In the vision she also recalled him to Jerusalem. So after the chapel was completed, he left two of his converts to continue his good work. One convert, named Manuel, was a sailor who had become good friends with James, and James left his fabled dog in his care, and returned returned to Jerusalem with his other seven converts.

"Upon his return to Judea, he again began to preach the word of God. Then the Pharisees asked a magician named Hermogenes to send his disciple Philetus to confront James, and to convict him of the falsity for his doctrine before the Jews....

When the Jews saw that Hermogenes was converted, they came in anger to James, and inveighed against him for preaching Christ crucified. And the apostle proved the mission and the Passion of Christ so clearly to them, citing the sacred books, that many were converted. At this, Abiathar, who was the high priest of the year, incited the populace to riot, caused a rope to be thrown about the apostle's neck and dragged him before Herod Agrippa, who condemned him to be beheaded.... He was martyred by Herod in 44 AD.

This martyrdom took place March 25, the day of the Annunciation; but the Church has decreed that the feast of Saint James be celebrated on the twenty-fifth day of July, this being the day of the translation of his relics to Compostella.

John Beletth relates that after the apostle's death, his disciples, in fear of the Jews, placed his body in a boat at night, embarked with him, although the boat had neither rudder nor steersman, and set sail, trusting to the providence of God to determine the place of his burial. And the angels guided the boat to the shores of Galicia in Spain, where there was a queen whose name was Lupa, a name which means she-wolf, and which she well deserved by her life.

The disciples laid the body of the apostle on a great stone, which immediately softened as if it were wax, and shaped itself into a sarcophagus fitted to his body. The disciples went to Queen Lupa and said to her: "Our Lord Jesus Christ sends thee the body of His disciple, that thou mayest welcome in death him whom thou wouldst not welcome alive!" And they narrated to her the miracle whereby they had come thither without a rudder nor a steersman, and besought her to appoint a place for the burial of the saint.

Then, as John Beleth relates, she guilefully sent them to the king of Spain, a most cruel man, with the pretext of seeking his permission for the saint's burial; and the king arrested them and threw them into prison. But in the night, when he had gone to rest, an angel opened the prison doors and set them free. As soon as he learned this, the king sent soldiers in pursuit of them; but just as these soldiers were crossing a bridge, the bridge collapsed and the soldiers were drowned. At this report, the king feared for himself and his people, and repented. He sent other men to search for James's disciples, and to say to them that if they would return, he would refuse them nothing that they asked. They therefore went back, and amidst many miracles of healing, converted the whole city to the faith of Christ. Many said that the dog of Saint James, which was fabled to have been stabbed by the same spear that pierced the Savior, was in some way responsible for some of the healings, for they had been healed after touching the dog and witnessing a saintly halo around the dog's head. After Saint James' martyrdom his dog was taken care of by [Manuel the Sailor](#) and because of its history was called by many the "[dog of Christ](#)".

Then they returned to Lupa, to make known to her the king's assent. The queen was sore distraught at these tidings, and answered: "I have oxen in a mountain place. Take them and yoke them, and carry your master's body whither you will, and build him a tomb!" All this she said in wolfish cunning, for she knew that the oxen were really untamed and savage bulls, and thus she thought that they could not be yoked or harnessed, or if they were harnessed, they would run away, and destroy the car and throw the body to the ground, and kill the disciples.

But no guile avails against God. The disciples, unaware of the queen's ruse, went up into the mountain, where first they encountered a dragon which belched fire; but they held a cross before him, and he was cloven asunder. Then they made the sign of the cross over the bulls, and they became as meek as lambs, allowed themselves to be yoked, and although no man guide them, they drew the saint's body, with the stone in which it was laid, straight into the middle of the queen's palace. Seeing this, the queen was dismayed, believed in Christ, transformed her palace into a church of Saint James, and endowed it munificently. And she passed the rest of her life in doing good works."