

St Michael and the Dragon

A story to introduce The Michael Festival

When people lived on the earth in the middle world between heaven and the dark depths, all was peaceful and well. The dragon nestled in the fiery centre of the mountain, rested and made its plans. On a pitch-dark night it went forth. By the light of its own fiery breath it found crops and animals and the little villages that tended them...and laid waste to them! By morning nothing was left on the trail it had made across the land. Scorched fields of stubble, the bleaching bones of animals, and the crushed and smouldering remains of houses and churches were all that remained. Nothing could flourish or even grow, where the dragon had scraped and scratched with its terrible claws and where its fiery breath had burned and scorched.

Every month on the darkest night the dragon would appear on its destructive journey, until around the mountain was a barren plain. Where beautiful forests had stood now not even one tree rose above the scorched land. Many villages had been destroyed and all the people trembled at the thought of what would happen when the dragon came to their land. Fear stalked freely and the people were very afraid. In desperation the villagers held a large meeting. People came from all around. "What can we do? No one can fight the dragon and win. Who can help us! Something must be done! This dragon must be stopped!"

The people decided to go to the king for he was very wise and good. Surely he would know how to defeat the dragon.

The king was indeed wise and also very humble and he saw that no mortal could defeat the dragon without help from on high. Now, faced with this terrible situation he turned from his other pressing duties and called upon St Michael to lend his aid.

That night there was a mighty meteor storm, and the sky blazed with streaks of fiery light from the meteor's tails.

"St Michael has sent his aid," said the King quietly.

The next morning the village people were amazed to see, lying on the ground, in the fields and on the road, hundreds of lumps of meteoric iron.

"Gather them up," cried the people as they scooped up the lumps and collected them in sacks and baskets.

Nearby to the village was a mine where much iron, tin, gold and copper had been dug out in the past. It was also the home of the gnomes.

When the villagers had collected all the iron, they carried the heavy sacks up the mountain trail to the entrance of the mine. There they placed the sacks carefully inside the entrance tunnel, and called out respectfully, "Good Gnomes, we thank you from our hearts." Then they quietly withdrew, knowing that the gnomes were shy creatures who preferred not to be seen by humans.

The next day, when the men came back to the mine, there in the tunnel entrance was a pile of the most beautifully made swords. Sharp as the sharpest blades, gleaming in the sunshine. One for everyone in the village. They felt the swords and took one each, placing them carefully into their scabbards in readiness for battle, before bowing graciously towards the mineshaft and returning to the village again.

Upon their return the people of the village gathered together in the town green, and began a song of thanks that carried on the late afternoon air all the way to the mine, high in the mountains. There it reached the ears of the gnomes, who were well pleased with their workmanship, and rejoiced at the wonderful reception their work had received. One stepped forward and called down the mountain side, "Help from on high men sought, magic the swords they wrought,"

But before more thank yous could be shared there came the dreadful sounds of the dragon. Its footsteps and fearsome roar could be plainly heard, from many miles away, and it appeared to be getting closer and heading directly towards the little village. Before long the villagers could see clouds of smoke, drifting in dark angry clouds, above the distant fields; the last of the autumn crops, laid waste to by the dragon...

Trembling, they gathered together on the village green, wearing what armour they could find, and carrying their swords still inside their scabbards.

The old people and children were hidden from harm but able to see the village green easily.

Time seemed to stand still as the dragon made its destructive way straight towards the village green. They stood back in the shadows of the trees as the monster roamed the village looking for people or animals to devour, and destroying whole houses with one blast of its fiery breath. Finally it stalked its hideous way right onto the village green and stopped exactly in the middle.

The men drew their swords, and with one glance heavenward, in thanks to St Michael, they rushed as one powerful unit and fell upon the monster.

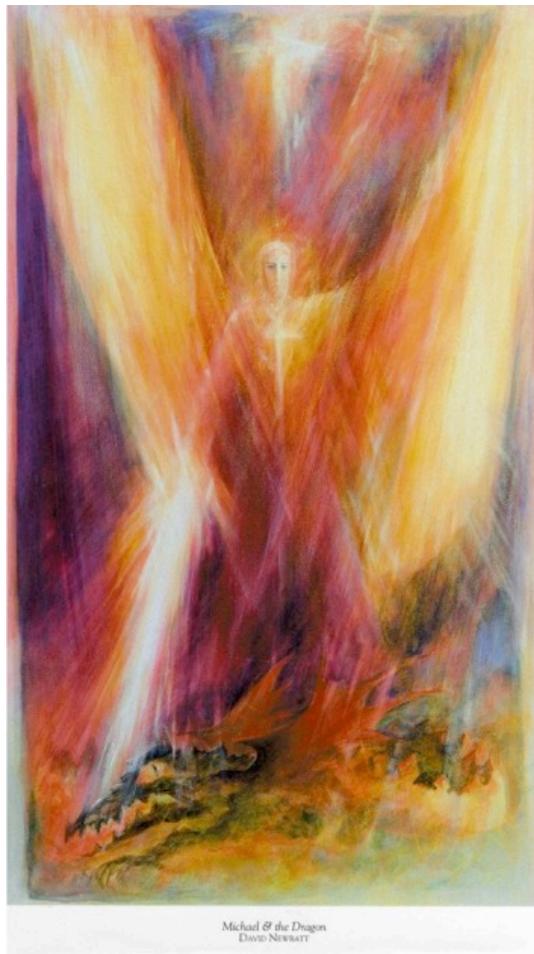
The shiny, polished scales of the dragon, which had turned and broken many a mortal sword, could not withstand a blow from a sword forged from heavenly iron. Down on its knees the dragon fell, bleeding from many wounds. The men watched in amazement as a bright light descended from the sky and came to stand before the dragon. The dragon screamed and tried to turn away from the blinding light. With a sudden flash the light grew even stronger and the monster fell silent, slain by St Michael.

A great, spontaneous cheer rang from the people. They came from their hiding places to stand around the enormous body, cautious in case it should suddenly come to life again. Smiles began to spread across faces as they realized that the monster could trouble them no more. People began to talk and soon a noisy chatter and laughter filled the green. Music broke out.

"So for joy let's dance and sing, faster, faster around the ring, this way that way leap and spring," they called, and soon the whole village was dancing joyfully around the still body of the dragon.

Tired and happy, the villagers left the green and went back to their homes. In later weeks the body of the dragon was used to make a town flour mill. The polished scales became tiles for the roof; the strong bones became the axles that drove the great mill stones and the rows of sharp teeth were placed into the gears as the teeth that drove the wheels. Even the skin was used to make strong and resilient sails to catch the wind and drive the stones. And so the dragon was redeemed, for all the wickedness it had brought into the world it was now harnessed as a helpful force. And every time the mill successfully ground another corn and wheat harvest into flour the people would give their thanks to St Michael, and hold a great festival in his honour.

And what became of the heavenly-iron swords? Well, whenever darkness and strife fell upon a town or city, one of the village people would take one of the swords to the King or Mayor of the town and the trouble seemed to clear up very quickly. Who knows maybe there are still some swords around, even today...



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