

## **SAINT RUMWOLD, INFANT OF BUCKINGHAM**

The holy infant Rumwold was the grandson of the famous pagan King Penda of Mercia, who killed the first two Christian kings of Northumbria, Saints Edwin and Oswald. His mother, however, was Christian, perhaps one of the converts of St. Cedd, bishop of the East Saxons, who was given permission to preach in Mercia. Now she was given in marriage to a pagan king of Northumbria. But during the marriage feast she sighed deeply and prayed God that she would not be joined to a pagan, but that her husband would be converted to the Truth Faith. And in the marriage chamber she told her husband that she would not sleep with him until he renounced his idols and was baptized. By the Providence of God, he accepted her words, and was baptized, after which they were joined according to the Christian rite of marriage. So it came to pass that she conceived a son.

As the time for giving birth drew near, King Penda invited his daughter and her husband to visit him. On the way, at what is now King's Sutton in Northamptonshire, the pangs of childbirth came upon her, and when the soldiers had set up a tent in a field, she gave birth to a son. But then an extraordinary miracle took place, which has parallels in the lives of some Eastern saints, such as the Martyrs Cyricus and his mother Julitta, and St. Sergius of Radonezh. The infant immediately cried out in a loud voice: "I am a Christian" three times. At this two priests named Widerin and Edwold said: "Thanks be to God". And then the infant said: "I worship, confess and adore the God Who is three and one, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." At this the priests and bystanders marvelled and began to chant: "We praise Thee, O God." Then the child asked that he be made a catechumen (one preparing for baptism) by the priest Widerin, and be held for the signing of the Faith by the priest Edwold, and be given the name Rumwold. After the signing, the parents said to each other: "Let us send to the neighbouring kings and princes,

that they receive our dearest son from the sacred font of Baptism." When St. Rumwold heard this, he summoned his parents and said to them: "It is not fitting that I, a servant of God, should be received from the regeneration of Holy Baptism in the hands of the proud and rich of this world, but the example of God should be imitated, Who was humbled for our sake to the taking on of human flesh, and was conceived by the Holy Spirit from the life-giving womb of the Virgin, and did not wish to be baptized in the flowing waters of the Jordan by the might of this fleeting age, but by the forerunner of His Nativity, who lived in the desert clothed in camel's hair, whose food was wild honey and locusts, and was made poor among me, though he was worthy to be venerated as the prophet, forerunner and baptist. For he was announced by an angel, was born of a priestly father, and deservedly baptized the Holy of Holies and King of all the ages and eternal Priest, Who give to all who believe in Him the Baptism of salvation to the remission of all sins, since in Him there was no stain of sin. I ask, therefore, that I be baptized

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by the priest Widerin and received by Edwold; for it is in their hands that I desire to be made a Christian through the virtue and mystery of God." When he had said this, Rumwold pointed out a hollow stone which lay not far away in a certain hut in a low-lying valley, and ordered the servants who were standing by to bring it with all haste. But they were unable to move the stone from the earth by any means. When they told this to the king, he ordered them to fetch a wooden vessel in which to baptize the recruit of Christ. But when Rumwold saw them going and bringing back a wooden vessel full of water, he said to the priests Widerin and Edwold: "You go alone in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and of the Holy Trinity, and without doubting take up the stone, and trusting in the supreme Creator of all bring it here." Immediately they went, easily lifted the stone (which was very heavy) from

the earth, and place it in front of Rumwold. And when he had been baptized, he ordered the Divine Liturgy to be celebrated, so that he might be given the Body and Blood of Christ.

After the Liturgy, the holy infant gave a sermon which amazed all those present. Then he said: "Behold, I go the way of all flesh; for it is not right that I should live in this mortal body after the hour of my birth. But after my departure I wish to remain in the place where I was born the space of one year. After that I should be taken to Brackley for two years. And after three years I propose that my bones should rest in the place which will at some time be called Buckingham for all time." The names of these places were not known at that time, but afterwards came to be known.

And so on the third day St. Rumwold gave up his spirit to God, on the third of November. And, as he had commanded, he was buried in that same place. Then after the death of the priest Edwold, he was translated to Brackley by the priest Widerin. And after three years he was translated to Buckingham, where many miracles were wrought for those who sought his prayers. The blind were given their sight, the lame walked, and many diseases were cured. St. Rumwold was commemorated on many Anglo-Saxon calendars, including that of Canterbury which was compiled by St. Dunstan. But his cult died out after the Norman Conquest of 1066, being preserved only in some church dedications. In Camden's time he was still invoked by the fishermen of Folkestone as their patron. The saint's popularity, according to Farmer's *Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, "was unexpectedly persistent".

St. Rumwold is commemorated on November 2 or 3.

*Holy Infant Rumwold, pray to God for us!*

(Sources: *Nova Legenda Anglie*, II, 345-50; David Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1978, p. 350)