

St George, Proclaims of the Risen Life of Christ  
St George's Day, 2025, Transferred to 28 April, Monday after the Octave Day  
PSALMS 3,11, JOSHUA 1.1-9, EPEHESIANS 6.10-20

***Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.***

We are celebrating St George's the day after the one eternal day of the octave of Easter. The glory of Easter so fills up our days that other festivals normally celebrated on the dates which fall in the eight days after Easter flow over into this week. They are lesser lights, but still bright with the light of Christ.

This almost-coming together of the Feast of St George with the Octave day of Easter, the one Eternal Day of the Resurrection, invites us to consider the way in which St George Proclaims and manifests the Risen life of Christ. What Christ accomplishes for us must then be worked out in us. St George's shows us this and at least three ways. The resurrection proclaims Christ's victory over sin and death. We are incorporated into Christ's victory by baptism, by the life of faith, by the sacraments which communicate Christ, and by the offering of ourselves, our souls and our bodies to Christ and in Christ. (The sacraments are conduits of the life of Christ which incorporate us into Christ, which knit us into the Church the vine of Christ.) What He accomplishes for us must be worked out in us. We seek to walk in the Risen life in Christ by putting to death the sins which our Lord has defeated for us in his perfect offering of himself to the Father, the perfect offering of his whole earthly-human life, and his offering of himself on the cross.

First, St George's pictures the battle against sin and death which we are called to fight. Secondly, St George shows us the role of the Christian in adorning and loving the bride of the Risen Christ, the Church. Thirdly, St George's show us what it means to witness to the power of the Resurrection. To see how St George proclaims the Risen Life we will have the help of an 18<sup>th</sup> c Russian icon now in the Pitti Palace in Florence.<sup>1</sup>

References to St George's and his veneration may appear as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the century of his martyrdom. One account of his life suggests that he was born after the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c into a Christian family (c265), in what is modern Turkey. At the young age of 17, he may have enlisted as a cavalry soldier in the Roman army.

This account suggests that by c304 George had risen to a senior rank in the Roman army and was serving in Lydda, a town about half way between modern Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. It was in the early 300s that the emperor Diocletian began his savage persecution of Christians, and when George refused to compromise or renounce his Christian faith, he was tortured and eventually beheaded in April 304. That is a bare outline of his story.

Some speculate that the legend of St George and the dragon may have an historical source in a village terrorized by a crocodile or some other 'dragon-like' beast. Most suggest that the story of St George and the dragon draws on older mythology, or simply presents a Christian or theological account of the battle against sin and our Lord's conquest of Satan. The earliest existing account of the story of St George and the dragon comes from a Georgian text in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

We see most of the usual elements of the St of George and the dragon in the Russian icon in the middle of your service booklets. Each day the inhabitants of the city offer a child chosen by lot to the dragon. Eventually, the King's daughter is chosen. However, St George intervenes to slay the dragon, in this case, unusually, on a brown horse rather than a white one. In the icon, the king and queen look on. An Angel presents George with a Martyr's crown. The image of Christ the Rule over all who blesses his servant and orders all things for good looks on.

---

<sup>1</sup> 'St George Slays the Dragon', Central Russia, 1725–50 c., in the Pitti Palace, Florence (Museum of Russian Icons), Tempera on wood, Size 32,3x25,5 cm



The dragon is a biblical symbol of the devil and the the spiritual powers and principalities which St Paul describes. The great monster Leviathan appears in the book of Job, the psalms, and Isaiah. In Revelation Chapter 12, St Michael the archangel fights again ‘the great dragon . that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world’.

Christ defeats the ancient serpent on the cross. In the power of the Resurrection, we are called into battle with him, to share his conquest over sin, and to be partakers of his victory:

‘Mortify, put to death, therefore what belongs to the earth: fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry’ (Col. 3)

Or in the words Joshua to the people of Israel: ‘Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law’ (Josh 1). And thanks be to God, we began our worship today like this – we confessed our sins, and we asked the grace of the Holy Spirit to fight against sin, the world, and the devil, to fight with St George, more bravely, more truthfully.

Pharoah’s bitter yoke, another description of the dragon, has been loosed, we have been brought ‘Through the Red Sea waters’ into the kingdom defined by the presence of the Risen Christ, a heavenly kingdom. With the people of Israel, we are invited to possess the land, the kingdom. In Christ, we know that our enemies are not flesh and blood, but spiritual powers and principalities.

‘Would to God’, says Origen ‘that Jesus Christ my Lord, the Son of God, would grant me His grace, and enable me to tread under my own feet the spirit of Lust, and to trample on the neck of Anger and

Revenge, and to tread on the head of the malignant fiend of Covetousness and Vain-glory, and to bruise with my feet the spirit of Pride; and when I have done this, to ascribe all the glory of the work not to myself, no, but to His Cross ... If we thus wage war against our Canaanites, and drive out the Powers of spiritual wickedness in high places from among ourselves, we may hope to inherit our heavenly Canaan through Jesus Christ our Lord.<sup>2</sup>

St George's pictures the Risen life Christ in us, and the spiritual battle against sin in all its forms. The icon helps us to see that this a battle worth fighting, age our battle of love for bride of Christ and for love at its best. It is a battle that demands courage and faithfulness. Thanks be to God which gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Secondly, St George shows us what it means to love the Church, to adorn and protect the Church. The King's daughter in the icon is usually seen as a symbol of the Church, the bride of Christ. She is the 'king's daughter' of Psalm 45, 'all glorious within'. What makes the bride all glorious within are the gifts and graces of the Risen Christ, his wisdom, goodness, and holiness. The word of God, on which Joshua/Jesus calls us to mediate day and night is the bright Sun of wisdom and virtue which makes the king's daughter all glorious within, and which furnishes our souls with some of that same glory. Christ espouses to himself the Church, and He makes his bride radiant and holy (Eph 5). The life of Christ in St George, and the life of the Risen Christ in each of us, are the gifts and graces of Christ's risen life: courage, obedience, faithfulness. These are his gifts, his life in us, but his life in us also adorns and beautifies the Church.

By fighting against the dragon, St George also protects the king's daughter, the bride of Christ. Whenever we fight with St George against the dragon in our lives, we protect Christ's bride also. It is a strange mystery that the Saviour who holds all things in existence is protected by his mother and St Joseph mother from Herod, or it is a great mystery that we have any role in guarding and protecting the life of Christ in us. And yet Christ our Lord gives himself into our hands to handle and to adore.

We may think also of Nehemiah, and those who returned with him to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. The builders who worked with Nehemiah to restore the walls of Jerusalem worked with swords girded to their side: 'each with one hand laboured on the work and with the other held his weapon' (Neh 4.17-18). If we give ourselves as labourers in the vineyard of the Lord, if we have the courage to oppose what threatens Christ's life in us and in the world, if we in our different ministries and vocations we labour on behalf of Christ's Church, whose walls are Salvation and whose gates praise, the work will be opposed. St George shows us both what to expect, and what it looks like to love and adore the bride of Christ, the Church

With St George we will carry 'the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: 'praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication [with] all saints'. (Eph. 6) St George show us the Risen life of Christ by proclaiming what it means to adorn and protect 'the king's daughter', Christ's Church.

Finally, St George proclaims what it means to witness to the power of the resurrection. In the icon we see the mother and father of the King on the walls of the city. In some icons or frescos of St George, we see the dwellers of the city watching. The people lining the walls of the city picture those who are without faith who are looking on at the struggle between the life of the Risen Christ and spiritual powers and principalities. What do they see? What is the Character of that witness? Our witness?

The world is often anxious and afraid. The world especially finds it hard to make sense of suffering. The Christian finds an answer not in a technique, but in a person in whom we are incorporated. In the words of the *Anima Christi*:

Soul of Christ, sanctify me.  
Body of Christ, save me.

---

<sup>2</sup> Origen On Joshua, Homily 8, and 12.

Blood of Christ, inebriate me.  
Water from the side of Christ, wash me.  
Passion of Christ, strengthen me.  
O Good Jesus, hear me.  
Within your wounds hide me.

This is condensed theology, speaking to us in images what could be elaborated in argument. Even in suffering, we are with Christ in his Passion and in his Resurrection. The Risen Christ is with us, going in and out among us, looking through the lattice, seen out of the corner of our eye, in all the little whiles of the Christian life.<sup>3</sup> Joshua prophesies this for us: 'Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest'.

St George is not fighting alone. Christ the ruler over-all is with him to bless him and strengthen him. The Risen Christ is with us also, wherever we go. He shows us his hands and his side and speaks Peace to us. In trials of age we can hear something of courage we see in St George in words Cosmo Gordon Lang – 'Let us have the courage to be thankful for the times [these times] in which God has called us to serve him'.<sup>4</sup> Let us give thanks that this struggles our ours, St George shows us how to witness to the life of the Risen Christ.

Here in the University, the spiritual powers may seek to convince us that what we call faith is a personal psychological thing which belongs in some inner space, a kind of personal choice like a gym membership. The struggle with dragon and spiritual powers may be hidden, often invisible. Or we may be urged to keep faith apart from public life or our studies. The people from the walls look on – do St George's companions have integrity? In the academy, St George invites us to proclaim that all our sciences, all our forms of knowledge, have their origin and goal in the one source of truth, the word and wisdom of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Our faith enlightens and inspires our academic work, and enables us to see how all things hold together in Christ. With St George, we look up to Christ ruler over all.

One of the curious features of this icon are the bones and bits of the bodies of the dragons old

---

<sup>3</sup> Song of Solomon 2.9 'My beloved is like a roe or a young hart: behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice', and John 16.16 'A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father.'

<sup>4</sup> Cosmo Gordon Lang, *The Opportunity of the Church of England: Lectures delivered in the Divinity School of the University of Cambridge in 1904*, (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1905), pp. 4-5:

'Let us at the very outset have the courage to be thankful for the times in which it has pleased God to ask for our ministry. It is useless to sigh for other times; the days in which there were no special trials and difficulties, what we call 'the good old times,' never were.' There is a maxim of the great Bishop Lightfoot, of Durham, which it is always worthwhile to lay to heart – 'The study of history is the best cordial for drooping spirits. Think of the apostolic days, of the anxieties and disappointments which pressed heavily upon the ardent spirit of St. Paul, of the catastrophes which were witnessed by St. John; think of the days of the great persecutions, when the Church seemed almost overwhelmed by disasters; think of the days of St. Athanasius, when not the world only, but the Church itself, seemed to be lost to the faith; think of the Middle Ages with their depressing spectacle of the ruin of great hopes and the corruption of noble institutions; think of the time of the Reformation with its bewildering problems and wearisome controversies; think of England in the eighteenth century, and the blight of indifference and worldliness which seemed to have settled down upon the Church; think of the hard hearts and deaf ears which resisted the first movement of the Evangelical revival; think of the ignorance, obstinacy, and obloquy which met the efforts of the Church in the last century to regain its true spiritual heritage; think of the disquiet and even panic with which the boasts of science in the pride of its first great conquests, and the early challenges of Biblical criticism, were received forty or fifty years ago. Think of all this, and it may help us to accept with willing and ready obedience God's choice of the times in which we are to serve Him with our lives.'

victims In the symbolic universe of the icons, these bones also evoke the pit of hell from which the Risen Lord raises us Adam and Eve. Maybe they are meant to evoke those depths for us also. The Risen Christ has first descended to the depths, not just of hell, but to the depths of our souls. He has broken the chains, and healed the broken bones. Perhaps St George is so courageous because he has first invited the Risen Christ into those depths to heal and to restore.

St George proclaims for us what it means to see and to live the Risen life of Christ. He invites us to join him in the battle against the dragon within and the dragon without, spiritual powers and principalities. He invites us to love and to cherish the king's daughter, the bride of Christ all glorious within. Finally, St G invites us to proclaim the power of the Risen life, to be strong and of good courage even in the face of battles which face us.

Thanks be to God ,which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.