



Introduction

Finding ways to connect with the worldwide family of the Christian Faith has been a growing area of interest both in churches and schools. Such windows into the multi-cultural and international practice of Christianity in today's world are a vital resource to give us a true picture of what it means to be a global Christian in the 21st century. For Christians, this is of course also important evidence of the continuing truth and power of the story of Jesus to influence lives and transform societies.

In [A-cross the World](#), published by Barnabas in 2005, this connection to the big picture was through the symbol of the cross. Differing Christian traditions and various Christian faith communities around the world are united by this one key and central sign of a shared faith. This universal cross has at the same time been interpreted, designed and adapted to express a unique, local expression of that same faith. With each cross comes a particular story of how each community experiences God's love and puts it into action.

Preparation

Each of the crosses in this new series supplements the 40 crosses that can already be found in the book [A-cross the World](#). With each, there is a Bible link with wondering questions, background information about the cross, stories to share and craft ideas to make a version of the cross – providing enough material for a session with children in a church group, in the classroom or at an all-age event. There is also a picture provided for each cross that could be printed or used in a PowerPoint presentation in order to provide a talking point for groups or as a focus for collective worship.

This cross belongs to a series of new crosses and, as with the first collection, the overall aim remains the same, namely:

- to enable children and adults to see the cross through the eyes of other cultures and traditions;
- to prompt discussion and debate on why this single, historical event continues to exercise such an influence worldwide;
- to explore how Christians in a wide variety of places, different times in history and in different circumstances, have lived purposeful lives because of their faith in a Christ, who died and who is risen – symbolised by the cross.

Development

Bible Link

Finally, let the mighty strength of the Lord make you strong. Put on all the armour that God gives, so you can defend yourself against the devil's tricks. We are not fighting against humans. We are



fighting against forces and authorities and against rulers of darkness and powers in the spiritual world. So put on all the armour that God gives. Then when that evil day comes, you will be able to defend yourself. And when the battle is over, you will still be standing firm.

Be ready! Let the truth be like a belt around your waist, and let God's justice protect you like armour. Your desire to tell the good news about peace should be like shoes on your feet. Let your faith be like a shield, and you will be able to stop all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Let God's saving power be like a helmet, and for a sword use God's message that comes from the Spirit.

Ephesians 6:10-17 (CEV)

At the end of his pastoral letter to the Christians in Ephesus, Paul urges his readers to stand firm against everything that would try to stop them from believing in Jesus. Paul was writing from prison and was probably inspired by the armour that his guards in Rome wore. Some of the equipment was to be used to defend themselves against those who were persecuting the church and some was to help them take positive action and bring the story of Jesus to their friends and neighbours.

Wondering about this Bible story

- I wonder how we can 'put on all the armour that God gives'. It isn't something you can buy in the shops or find in military stores, so where does it come from?
- I wonder which parts of this armour are for protection and which should be used to spread the message of God's love.
- I wonder what image Christians could use nowadays to encourage themselves to trust in God. Are there contemporary uniforms or sets of equipment you can think of that might symbolise similar truths for believers today?

The story of this cross

Of course, this cross is most immediately recognisable as the English national flag and emblem of St George, so perhaps it could be called an English Cross? However, further investigation reveals that the origin of this cross is found in the holy lands of Israel and Palestine and it came to England at the time of the crusades. It is more accurately a Palestinian Cross, as it is with the land of Palestine that the story of St George is traditionally associated.

St George's story has become focused in the popular imagination on his dragon-slaying exploit and as such he is seen as the archetypal hero who defeats evil. But there's more to him than just this legend. Although, as with many early saints, facts are very sketchy, it seems that he was from Palestine and, as a conscript in the Roman army, decided to stand up against the persecution of Christians in the fourth century because he was so disgusted by the barbaric methods employed by the Empire. He was very impressed by the faith of those who died believing in Jesus that he became a Christian himself, even though he knew that this would mean certain death.

At a place called Lod near Tel Aviv in Israel, St George's Church is the alleged resting place for his body. In fact, St George is very highly regarded by many in this part of the world, including Muslims.



Many Greek Orthodox churches in the Middle East are dedicated to Saint George and George is one of the most popular boys' names. It seems that it was Richard the Lionheart from England who decided to adopt George as our English saint in the time of the crusades, probably because he too was impressed by the military might of this hero. Among Palestinian Christians, however, St George has other associations: as a protector of the home, as a healer and as someone who stood up against the misuse of power.

It was at Lod – which in Bible times was called Lydda – that Peter was used to perform a miracle. Because of the resurrection of Jesus, he experienced the power of God of work through him to bring peace and healing to a man who had been ill for eight years (see Acts 9:32-35). As a follower of Jesus, this is the sort of power of which St George would have approved and for which he would want to be remembered as a saint.

Crafting the cross

The following idea picks up some of the Palestinian associations with St George and links them to the red cross on a white background.

You will need rectangular pieces of red card – one for every person in the group – and a set of four small white rectangles – again a set for everyone. When these four smaller rectangles are placed on to the red card base at the corners, you can form the red cross of St George in the centre. In addition, you will need some pencils and crayons, and some Blu-Tack.

Give each person a set of four pieces of white card. The people of the Middle East remember St George in four different ways:

1. As a protector of their homes to keep evil away: Many people have an icon of St George in their houses. On the first piece of card, invite them to draw a picture of their home.
2. As a person who healed others with God's power: Many people make pilgrimages to St George's Church in Lod to pray for those who are sick, and the cathedral in Jerusalem is named after St George. On the second piece of white card, invite the children to draw a picture of the work of healing today or perhaps that of a Bible story of healing such as that described in Acts 9:32-35.
3. As a person who looked after the environment: His name in Arabic means of 'the green one' and he is remembered as someone who cared about the trees and the earth. On the third piece of card, invite the children to draw a countryside scene including all the things they like best about God's world.
4. As a person who is respected by people of many traditions and even other faiths: Christians, Jews and Muslims all respect St George. In fact, he is the patron saint of many countries, including Portugal, Lithuania and, of course, Georgia! In addition, his flag is not only used by the English but by a number of other towns and cities around the world. On the fourth piece of card, invite the children to draw people of different nations and ethnic groups, all joined together. Like his Lord, St George would have approved of being such a peacemaker.



These four aspects of St George often get overlooked if we just focus on the dragon. Of course, the dragon itself can be a symbol of all that is bad – the things that threaten what is in each of the pictures that have been drawn: danger to our homes, sickness, pollution and war.

St George was a Roman soldier and, as such, would probably have worn a red tunic, especially as a cavalry officer. Now take the red card that represents the old life of St George and, using some Blu-tack, attach the four white cards to the red base. You will now have a picture of the life of Saint George as a Christian, and at the heart of this is the cross of Jesus.

Finally, if you now turn over each of the pictures showing only the white side and reattach them to the red card, you have the cross of St George and hidden within it the values of respect for others, protection of the home, healing and care for the earth.

Here is certainly something of which St George would approve and something worth celebrating.

Here is a prayer for St George's day (23 April): the collect for St George's Day:

O God of hosts, who didst so kindle the flame of love in the heart of thy servant George that he bore witness to the risen Lord by his life and by his death: grant us the same faith and power of love that we, who rejoice in his triumphs, may come to share with him the fullness of the resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Cross reflection

*The Cross is the Abyss of Wonders,
The Centre of Desires,
The Schole of Virtues,
The House of Wisdom,
The Throne of Love,
The Theatre of Joys
And the Place of Sorrows;
It is the Root of Happiness,
And the Gate of Heaven.*

This is from the 58th in the first century of *Centuries of Meditations* by the English poet and writer Thomas Traherne (1637-74).