

100// OF ST. CHRISTOPHER

Christopher was of the lineage of the Canaanites, and he was of a right great stature, and had a terrible and fearful cheer and countenance, and he was twelve cubits of length.

HIS SEARCH FOR THE GREATEST PRINCE THAT WAS IN THE WORLD

The Right Great King

And as it is read in some histories that, when he served and dwelled with the king of Canaan, it came in his mind that he would seek the greatest prince that was in the world, and him would he serve and obey. And so far he went that he came to a right great king, of whom the renomee generally was that he was the greatest of the world. And when the king saw him, he received him into his service, and made him to dwell in his court.

Christopher tofore his baptism was named Reprobis, but afterwards he was named Christopher, which is as much to say as bearing Christ, of that that he bare Christ in four manners. He bare him on his shoulders by conveying and leading, in his body by making it lean, in mind by devotion, and in his mouth by confession and predication.

Upon a time a minstrel sang tofore him a song in which he named oft the devil, and the king, which was a Christian man, when he heard him name the devil, made anon the sign of the cross in his visage. And when Christopher saw that, he had great marvel what sign it was, and wherefore the king made it, and he demanded of him. And because the king would not say, he said: If thou tell me not, I shall no longer dwell with thee.

And then the king told to him, saying: Alway when I hear the devil named, I fear that he should have power over me, and I garnish me with this sign that he grieve not ne annoy me.

Then Christopher said to him: Doubtest thou the devil that he hurt thee not? Then is the devil more mighty and greater than thou art. I am then deceived of my hope and purpose, for I had supposed I had found the most mighty and the most greatest Lord of the world, but I commend thee to God, for I will go seek him for to be my Lord, and I his servant.

The Knight Cruel and Horrible

And then [Christopher] departed from this king, and hasted him for to seek the devil. And as he went by a great desert, he saw a great company of knights, of which a knight cruel and horrible came to him and demanded whither he went, and Christopher answered to him and said: I go seek the devil for to be my master. And he said: I am he that thou seekest. And then Christopher was glad, and bound him to be his servant perpetual, and took him for his master and Lord.

And as they went together by a common way, they found there a cross, erect and standing. And anon as the devil saw the cross he was afeard and fled, and left the right way, and brought Christopher about by a sharp desert. And after, when they were past the cross, he brought him to the highway that they had left. And when Christopher saw that, he marvelled, and demanded whereof he doubted, and had left the high and fair way, and had gone so far about by so aspre [daunting] a desert. And the devil would not tell him in no wise.

Then Christopher said to him: If thou wilt not tell me, I shall anon depart from thee, and shall serve thee no more.

Wherefor the devil was constrained to tell him, and said: There was a man called Christ which was hanged on the cross, and when I see his sign I am sore afraid, and flee from it wheresoever I see it.

To whom Christopher said: Then he is greater, and more mightier than thou, when thou art afraid of his sign, and I see well that I have laboured in vain, when I have not founden the greatest Lord of the world. And I will serve thee no longer, go thy way then, for I will go seek Christ.

The Hermit

And when he had long sought and demanded where he should find Christ, at last he came into a great desert, to an hermit that dwelt there, and this hermit preached to him of Jesu Christ and informed him in the faith diligently, and said to him: This king whom thou desirest to serve, requireth the service that thou must oft fast.

And Christopher said to him: Require of me some other thing, and I shall do it, for that which thou requirest I may not do.

And the hermit said: Thou must then wake and make many prayers.

And Christopher said to him: I wot not what it is; I may do no such thing.

And then the hermit said to him: Knowest thou such a river, in which many be perished and lost?

To whom Christopher said: I know it well.

Then said the hermit, Because thou art noble and high of stature and strong in thy members, thou shalt be resident by that river, and thou shalt bear over all them that shall pass there, which shall be a thing right convenable to our Lord Jesu Christ whom thou desirest to serve, and I hope he shall show himself to thee.

Then said Christopher: Certes, this service may I well do, and I promise to him for to do it.

The Christ Child

Then went Christopher to this river, and made there his habitacle for him, and bare a great pole in his hand instead of a staff, by which he sustained him in the water, and bare over all manner of people without ceasing. And there he abode, thus doing, many days. And in a time, as he slept in his lodge, he heard the voice of a child which called him and said: Christopher, come out and bear me over.

Then he awoke and went out, but he found no man. And when he was again in his house, he heard the same voice and he ran out and found nobody. The third time he was called and came thither, and found a child beside the rivage of the river, which prayed him goodly to bear him over the water.

And then Christopher lift up the child on his shoulders, and took his staff, and entered into the river for to pass. And the water of the river arose and swelled more and more: and the child was heavy as lead, and alway as he went farther the water increased and grew more, and the child more and more waxed heavy, insomuch that Christopher had great anguish and was afeard to be drowned.

And when he was escaped with great pain, and passed the water, and set the child aground, he said to the child: Child, thou hast put me in great peril; thou weighest almost as I had all the world upon me, I might bear no greater burden.

And the child answered: Christopher, marvel thee nothing, for thou hast not only borne all the world upon thee, but thou hast borne him that created and made all the world, upon thy shoulders. I am Jesu Christ the king, to whom thou servest in this work. And because that thou know that I say to be the truth, set thy staff in the earth by thy house, and thou shalt see to-morn that it shall bear flowers and fruit, and anon he vanished from his eyes.

And then Christopher set his staff in the earth, and when he arose on the morn, he found his staff like a palmier bearing flowers, leaves and dates.

HE CONVERTS EIGHT THOUSAND IN LYCIA

And then Christopher went into the city of Lycia, and understood not their language. Then he prayed our Lord that he might understand them, and so he did. And as he was in this prayer, the judges supposed that he had been a fool, and left him there. And then when Christopher understood the language, he covered his visage and went to the place where they martyred Christian men, and comforted them in our Lord.

And then the judges smote him in the face, and Christopher said to them: If I were not Christian I should avenge mine injury.

And then Christopher pitched his rod in the earth, and prayed to our Lord that for to convert the people it might bear flowers and fruit, and anon it did so. And then he converted eight thousand men.

ST. CHRISTOPHER BEFORE THE KING OF LYCIA

And then the king sent two knights for to fetch him to the king, and they found him praying, and durst not tell to him so. And anon after, the king sent as many more, and they anon set them down for to pray with him. And when Christopher arose, he said to them: What seek ye?

And when they saw him in the visage they said to him: The king hath sent us, that we should lead thee bound unto him.

And Christopher said to them: If I would, ye should not lead me to him, bound ne unbound.

And they said to him: If thou wilt go thy way, go quit, where thou wilt. And we shall say to the king that we have not found thee.

It shall not be so, said he, but I shall go with you.

And then he converted them in the fath, and commanded them that they should bind his hands behind his back, and lead him so bound to the king. And when the king saw him he was afeard and fell down off the seat, and his servants lifted him up and releved him again. And then the king inquired his name and his country; and Christopher said to him: Tofore or I was baptized I was named Reprobus, and after, I am Christopher; tofore baptism, a Canaanite, now, a Christian man.

To whom the king said: Thou hast a foolish name, that is to wit of Christ crucified, which could not help himself, ne may not profit to thee. How therefore, thou cursed Canaanite, why wilt thou not do sacrifice to our gods?

To whom Christopher said: Thou art rightfully called Dagnus, for thou art the death of the world, and fellow of the devil, and thy gods be made with the hands of men.

And the king said to him: Thou wert nourished among wild beasts, and therefore thou mayst not say but wild language, and words unknown to men. And if thou wilt now do sacrifice to the gods I shall give to thee great gifts and great honours, and if not, I shall destroy thee and consume thee by great pains and torments.

But, for all this, he would in no wise do sacrifice, wherefore he was sent in to prison, and the king did do behead the other knights that he had sent for him, whom he had converted.

THE CONVERTS NICÆA AND AQUILINA PULL DOWN THE LYCIAN IDOLS

And after this he sent in to the prison to St. Christopher two fair women, of whom that one was named Nicæa and that other Aquilina, and promised to them many great gifts if they could draw Christopher to sin with them.

And when Christopher saw that, he set him down in prayer, and when he was constrained by them that embraced him to move, he arose and said: What seek ye? For what cause be ye come hither?

And they, which were afraid of his cheer and clearness of his visage, said: Holy saint of God, have pity of us so that we may believe in that God that thou preachest.

And when the king heard that, he commanded that they should be let out and brought tofore him. To whom he said: Ye be deceived, but I swear to you by my gods that, if ye do no sacrifice to my gods, ye shall anon perish by evil death.

And they said to him: If thou wilt that we shall do sacrifice, command that the places may be made clean, and that all the people may assemble at the temple.

And when this was done they entered in to the temple, and took their girdles, and put them about the necks of their gods, and drew them to the earth, and brake them all in pieces, and said to them that were there: Go and call physicians and leeches for to heal your gods.

And then, by the commandment of the king, Aquilina was hanged, and a right great and heavy stone was hanged at her feet, so that her members were much despitously broken. And when she was dead, and passed to our Lord, her sister Nicæa was cast into a great fire, but she issued out without harm all whole, and then he made to smite off her head, and so suffered death.

ST. CHRISTOPHER IS TORTURED

The Stool of Iron

After this Christopher was brought tofore the king, and the king commanded that he should be beaten with rods of iron, and that there should be set upon his head a cross of iron red hot and burning, and then after, he did do make a siege or a stool of iron, and made Christopher to be bounden thereon, and after, to set fire under it, and cast therein pitch. But the siege or settle melted like wax, and Christopher issued out without any harm or hurt.

The Forty Archers

And when the king saw that, he commanded that he should be bound to a strong stake, and that he should be through-shotten with arrows with forty knights archers. But none of the knights might attain him, for the arrows hung in the air about, nigh him, without touching. Then the king weened that he had been throughshotten with the arrows of the knights, and addressed him for to go to him. And one of the arrows returned suddenly from the air and smote him in the eye, and blinded him. To whom Christopher said: Tyrant, I shall die to-morn, make a little clay, with my blood tempered, and anoint therewith thine eye, and thou shalt receive health.

The Beheading

Then by the commandment of the king he was led for to be beheaded, and then, there made he his orison, and his head was smitten off, and so suffered martyrdom. And the king then took a little of his blood and laid it on his eye, and said: In the name of God and of St. Christopher! and was anon healed. Then the king believed in God, and gave commandment that if any person blamed God or St. Christopher, he should anon be slain with the sword.

WHAT SAINT AMBROSE WROTE OF ST. CHRISTOPHER

Ambrose saith in his preface thus, of this holy martyr: Lord, thou hast given to Christopher so great plenty of virtues, and such grace of doctrine, that he called from the error of paynims forty-eight thousand men, to the honour of Christian faith, by his shining miracles. And Nicæa and Aquilina, which long had been common at the bordel, under the stench of lechery, he called and made them serve in the habit of chastity, and enseigned them to a like crown of martyrdom. And with this, he being strained and bounden in a seat of iron, and great fire put under, doubted nothing the heat. And all a whole day during, stood bounden to a stake, yet might not be through-pierced with arrows of all the knights. And with that, one of the arrows smote out the eye of the tyrant, to whom the blood of the holy martyr re-established his sight, and enlumined him in taking away the blindness of his body, and gat of the Christian mind and pardon, and he also gat of thee by prayer power to put away sickness and sores from them that remember his passion and figure. Then let us pray to St. Christopher that he pray for us, etc.

The [iconography of St. Christopher](#) is available at the [Christian iconography website](#).

For other saints, see the [index to this Golden Legend website](#).

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