



The Story of Saint Christopher

Once there was a very tall, strong man called Reprobus. He decided that he wanted to serve the most powerful king in the whole world, so he set off on a journey to find him.

He came to a city where the people said their king was the greatest king in all the world, so Reprobus began to serve him. His job was to help people to cross a dangerous river. It was very deep and very wide and many people had been swept away when they tried to cross it.

One night Reprobus was sleeping in his hut on the bank of the river when he was woken by the sound of a child crying. Then the crying stopped and Reprobus thought it must have been the wind he had heard. The next night he heard the same sound again, but Reprobus told himself it must have been an animal calling. On the third night he heard the sound of crying once again and this time Reprobus got out of bed and went down to the riverside.

By the light of his lantern he could see a small boy crying on the river bank. "Why are you crying?" asked Reprobus. "And why are you here all alone at night?"

"I need to cross this river but I am very frightened," sobbed the boy. "The water is dark and deep. It flows so fast that I might get swept away!"

"Don't be afraid, I will help you to cross the river," said Reprobus. "Climb up onto my shoulder and you will be quite safe."

The boy climbed up onto Reprobus' broad shoulder and held on tightly. Using his big wooden staff to steady himself, Reprobus set off across the river. He had made this journey many, many times before but, this time, he found it really hard. He was only half way across when the water began to rise, first to his knees and then to the top of his legs. At the same time the current grew stronger and stronger.

Reprobus struggled on and on, leaning on his staff and wondering why the child on his shoulder seemed to be getting heavier and heavier. Reprobus was at the end of his strength when, at last, he reached the far bank and lifted the boy down onto dry land.

"You were so heavy, I was worried that we wouldn't make it across the river. I felt like I was carrying the whole world on my shoulder," he said.

The boy replied "Don't you know me Reprobus? You were not only carrying the world, but also its Creator's son, Jesus. From now on you shall be called Christopher, the Christ-bearer. As a sign that you serve me, push your staff into the ground and tomorrow it will be covered with leaves and fruit."

Christopher did as he was told and Jesus went on his way.

The following morning he went down to the river again and found a new tree where no tree had been growing before. As he walked up to it he saw it was covered with leaves and fruit, just as Jesus had promised.

Note to Teachers & Parents:

This is a simplified version of a legend which itself exists in many versions!

Reprobus' early searches for a powerful king and his meeting with the devil have been condensed and edited, as you may not feel happy about introducing the concept of the devil to young children.

Reprobus' desire to serve, his work at the river crossing, his struggle to carry the Christ child and the planting of the staff are the main elements of the story and the ones which children engage with easily. They could perhaps be explored further at school through drama, art and music.

The ideal setting for children to hear this story is in front of Norton Priory's huge late fourteenth-century statue of St Christopher, housed in its very own gallery. This can be contrasted with a visit to the twelfth-century Undercroft to see the portrayal of the Saint in a modern stained glass window.