

**Fourth Sunday of Easter  
Sunday, 25th April 2021**



Dear Friends,

***'I am the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep.'***  
(John 10: 11)

Last Saturday afternoon, our nation came together to witness the funeral of His Royal Highness, The Duke of Edinburgh. It was touching to share the unfolding service with the Royal Family whose dignified demeanour and tender respect for Prince Philip was deeply moving. Somehow, even from her solitary pew, our beloved Monarch united us all in her grief. Many people have expressed, how, being given the privilege of experiencing the Queen and her family navigate Coronavirus restrictions just as the rest of us during such times of loss, has brought them great comfort. Prince Philip's funeral has, I feel, given us all an opportunity, not only to pray for the Duke and his family, but also to reflect on our own losses during this tumultuous year.



*Image courtesy of CNN*

The image of Her Majesty bowed in prayer and without her consort and mainstay by her side, will be one which remains in many of our hearts. Of all the Duke's many roles and achievements, the title which moved me most was listening to the Right Reverend David Conner, KCVO, Dean of Windsor, who referred to Prince Philip as 'husband.' The Duke's devoted calling in marriage to his 'Lillibet' is surely by far his greatest legacy of selfless service to his wife, their family and all citizens of the United Kingdom.

On Wednesday, the Queen quietly issued her own poignant tribute to her husband:

*I have, on the occasion of my 95<sup>th</sup> birthday today, received many messages of good wishes, which I very much appreciate.*

*While as a family we are in a period of great sadness, it has been a comfort to us all to see and to hear the tributes paid to my husband, from those within the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth and around the world.*

*My family and I would like to thank you all for the support and kindness shown to us in recent days. We have been deeply touched, and continue to be reminded that Philip had such an extraordinary impact on countless people throughout his life.*

*Elizabeth R*



*Image courtesy of The Royal Family*

In John's Gospel today, we meet Jesus who is continuing His theme of the Good Shepherd, foretelling of His own death; laying down His life for us, His sheep.

Clement of Alexandria remarks upon the Good Shepherd's desire to be close to his flock, 'as clothing to their skin.' Yet the imagery of clothing we might perceive is not what is on Jesus' mind. For He is not planning to mimic even the finest of earthly garb. Rather, Jesus' desire is to clothe us in the robes of immortality.



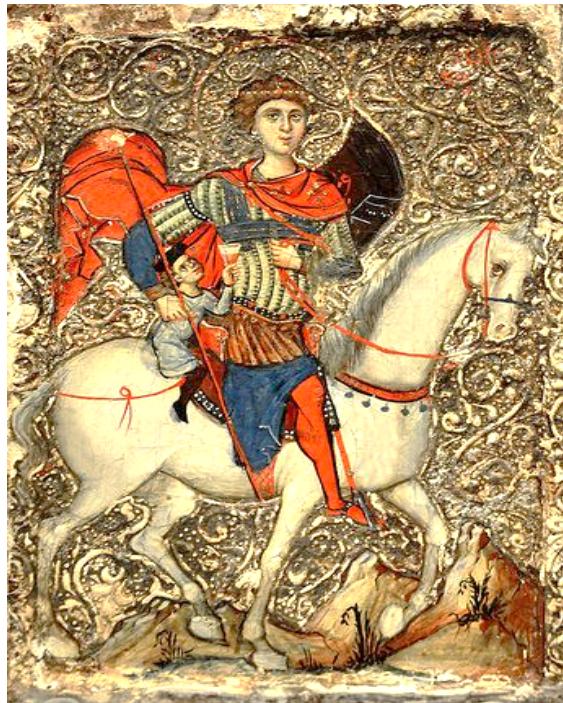
*The Good Shepherd*, by Sieger Köder

In this closeness, Clement perceives how Jesus anoints our bodies when we give our lives to Him:

'They shall call on me' Jesus says, 'and I will answer. 'Here I am, Lord, you have heard me more quickly than I ever hoped!' 'And if they pass over, they shall not fall,' says the Lord, meaning that we who are passing over into immortality shall not fall into corruption, for He will preserve us.'

Jesus, whose goodness is His own nature and not some transitory gift, promises to save us, not just in the moment but forever. He emphasises that He does so of His own will; telling us that He has not come to be served as our King, but to serve us. This section of John's Gospel describes Jesus as tired and weary, having laboured for our sakes, even promising to give His own life to set us free from our sins. The Good Shepherd will lay down His life for His sheep, changing His body and blood into a sacrament which will feed us in our faithful earthly lives, and bless us beyond death with a new life with Him forever.

Jesus is at great pains to explain to us that only a good shepherd would die for their flock. He shows us His own goodness in order to help us see that we must imitate Him. By following His example, living our own lives in service to others, Jesus is encouraging us to also follow Him in His contempt for death to which sin clings. This is an exquisitely tender passage, yet it is also radical – asking us to take a risk and believe Him when He tells us that our faith will reap an eternal reward.



Born in Cappadocia (in what is now Turkey), in the year 280 AD, Saint George, the Patron Saint of England, is one such follower of Christ who was prepared to devote his life to the Good Shepherd's sheep. Having enlisted into the Cavalry of the Roman Army at the age of 17 during the reign of the Emperor Diocletian, George quickly established a reputation amongst his peers for his virtuous behaviour and physical strength; his military bearing, valour and handsome good looks. In a time and place where Christians feared for their lives by proclaiming faith in Jesus, St George became a convert to Christianity, and as an outspoken defender of the faith, gave away all his possessions to the poor and acted selflessly to limit the excesses of Diocletian's actions against the Christians. St George was beheaded at Nicomedia near Lyddia in Palestine on the 23<sup>rd</sup> April 303 AD. Even unto death, George knew that by paying the ultimate price in defence of others, he would not lose his life. Rather, he would be blessed by the Good Shepherd he served so faithfully with life-giving pasture.

Prince Philip also lived out a life of faith in the Good Shepherd, offering himself in a lifetime of service. Neatly, he is laid to rest in the Royal vault in St George's Chapel. He is now in Paradise where he will bask in the light of Christ. I pray this is a solace to our Sovereign who has herself lived her life in that same selfless devotion to the One Shepherd's sheep.

Yours in the tender fold of Christ,

Jax

**Revd Jax Machin, Rector, The Downs Benefice**

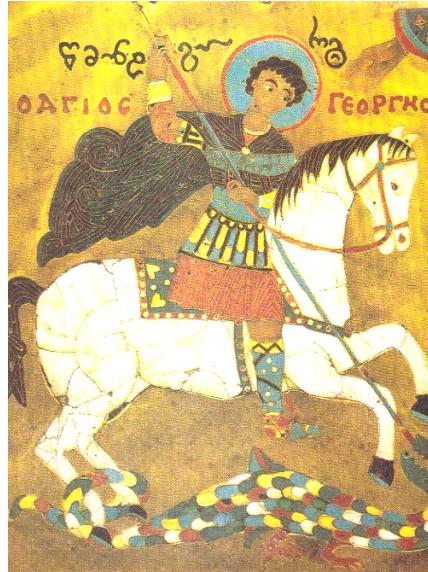
### Service Schedule

Please see the Service Schedule for the coming weeks. As you know, you need to pre-book your seats in advance. Because Caroline McAulay is taking next week off, could you please book by **ringing the Benefice Office on (01962) 880845** rather than emailing. We are monitoring the phones, so will be able to pick up your booking from your phone message.

Our website [www.downsbenefice.org](http://www.downsbenefice.org) continues to have the up-to-date service and other information and is updated daily.

Our services for May and June will be:

Date	Chilbolton	Crawley	Littleton	Sparsholt	Wherwell
18 Apr		Morning Prayer			Holy Communion
25 Apr	Morning Prayer		Holy Communion		
2 May	Holy Communion			Morning Prayer	
9 May		Holy Communion			Morning Prayer
16 May			Morning Prayer		Holy Communion
23 May	Morning Prayer		Holy Communion + APCM		
30 May				Morning Prayer	Morning Prayer
6 June	Morning Prayer	Morning Prayer			
13 June				Holy Communion	Morning Prayer
20 June	Holy Communion		Morning Prayer		
27 June		Holy Communion			



### **Collect Prayer for Saint George**

God of hosts,  
Who so kindled the flame of love in the heart of Your servant George,  
That he bore witness to the Risen Lord, by his life and by his death;  
Give 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, Your Son, our Lord,  
Who is alive and reigns with You, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
One God, now and forever. Amen.

### **Collect for The Fourth Sunday of Easter**

Almighty God, whose Son Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life: raise us, who trust in him, from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, that we may seek those things which are above, where he reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

### **John 10: 11-18 – Jesus is The Good Shepherd**

Jesus says: 'I am the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep.'

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.'