



Abbey Gate College
EASTER SERVICE
Chester Cathedral
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George Herbert was a priest, teacher, musician, and poet in the 17th century. Through a 21st century lens, his life may seem to have been on the shorter side; he died before reaching his 40th birthday. However, his active contribution to society has certainly lasted, and he is remembered by statues, stain glass windows, and the continued appreciation and evaluation of his works, 400 years later.

One particular poem of interest for us today is 'Easter Wings'. The poem itself is actually written in the shape of a pair of wings; if viewed on its side, as it was in fact printed, with just 2 stanzas, the left page stanza symmetrical against the right page one, and line length creating the shape of large wings. This is the poem:

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,
Though foolishly he lost the same,
Decaying more and more,
Till he became
Most poore:
With thee
Oh let me rise
As larks, harmoniously,
And sing this day thy victories:
Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

My tender age in sorrow did beginne:
And still with sicknesses and shame
Thou didst so punish sinne,
That I became
Most thinne.
With thee
Let me combine
And feel this day thy victorie:
For, if I imp my wing on thine
Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

If we briefly reflect on the poet's message, we see that the first half of each stanza is actually quite bleak. Herbert describes humanity's Biblical fall, where everything was positive in the beginning, and yet through greed, envy, selfishness, vanity – sins we recognise from our religious studies and wider reading – humanity became disconnected from Goodness. Herbert uses the language of sickness and death, and takes the poem's reader to a thin and precipitous edge.

But then the poet turns each stanza around, pulling the reader back from the chilling darkness. Herbert fills the respective second halves with images of music, joy, growth, strength, victory, and ultimately flight. For Herbert, a profoundly spiritual man, he cannot do all of this by himself, and he asks for and accepts the additional help and guidance of God, in order to choose a better way of life for himself.

Which he did, in reality, serving his parishioners selflessly until he died.

It is a poem of re-birth. A new beginning. A fresh start. It's a poem of hope. It's a poem about how humankind needs to re-connect with Goodness: with Love, Kindness, Forgiveness, Compassion, Humility. And then we can thrive, or like the poet, metaphorically fly. On Easter wings.

The Easter story is a binary one. First, we have the darkness and despair of injustice, suffering, and death. Then we have the light, the joy, and the hope of new life. But only if we make the right choices. It can be easy for you, as our pupils, to sit where you are, hear the fine music, listen to all the words, and think that all of this has got nothing at all to do with you. But it has.

The Easter story may not have the same marvel for you as a cinematic duel between Iron Man and Thanos, but fundamentally the hope is the same. We aim for a world of peace, and a world of goodness. We all make the world we live in. The same way that Herbert shaped his poem into the outline of angel wings, the choices you make every single day will shape the world you live in.

If you want to see kindness, then be kind. If you want to experience friendship, then be friendly. If you want to feel valued for who you are, then show others how much you value them. If you want to experience happiness, then make others happy. If you want to feel loved, then give love.

The Easter story is a positive one. Have hope. Make good choices. And our shared world will turn away from the edge of darkness, and there will be growth, light, and life. It is in all of our hands.