



Prophet Elias News

**News in the time of self-isolation for the Orthodox Church of
the Holy Prophet Elias in Devon**

23 August 2020



From the Parish Secretary:

As this week's stand-in Editor I hope you'll find something of interest in this partly personal offering. Thanks to Alice and Shusha for supplying the icons and getting the format right.

Good News from Mark

For the next four weeks the weekday Gospel readings are from the early chapters of St Mark. After the feast of the Cross on 14 September and its week of after-feasts, those for both Sundays and weekdays will move on to St Luke (details are given in the printed Calendar, or online at <https://www.oca.org/readings>).

Who was Mark? “John Mark” wasn’t one of the Twelve, but he makes several appearances in the Acts of the Apostles, and may have been the same Mark named by Peter a bit later as his companion in Rome (1 Peter 5.13). His mother’s house is mentioned in Acts 12.12 as a place where the Jerusalem Christians used to gather, and it may have been the location of the “upper room” to which the apostles returned after the Ascension (Acts 1.13), as well as where they were when they received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. This upper room is quite likely to have been the same one to which Jesus and the apostles went for the Last Supper, and the young John Mark may have been involved with preparing the room and the food and helping to serve it. One detail found in Mark’s account of that evening but in none of the others is that among those who followed Jesus to Gethsemane was a “young man ... with nothing but a linen cloth about his body” who left the linen cloth and ran away naked when the guards tried to detain him – quite possibly the author’s personal signature embedded in his text.



Mark’s association with Peter would have provided him with all he needed to know. Events rush forward with almost breathless haste, starting with John the Baptist’s announcement of the imminent arrival of “one mightier than I” and Jesus’s baptism and going on with little ado to the beginning of his active ministry. He has no time for stories about his birth or early life and very little in the way of theological elaboration; the opening phrase “Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (1.1) and Christ’s self-description “Son of Man” tell us who he is, and his first recorded words “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel” tell us why he’s here.

Mark's account appears to break off at the point where the Myrrh-bearers flee from the empty tomb, saying "nothing to anyone, for they were afraid". The rest of chapter 16 (verses 9-20) is in a quite different style, much of it a summary of material found in other Gospels and obviously added by another hand. If the original manuscript was written on a scroll it would have been quite easy for the original conclusion to have been accidentally torn off, but for the story to end in mid-air at verse 8 would be quite in character with the rest of Mark's narrative: You've seen the empty tomb and been told that Christ is risen; now go and follow him to the everyday world of Galilee where you will see him – in other words to our everyday world, where we will assuredly find him if we have eyes to see him.

This is how it was for the teenage Andrei Bloom, the future Metropolitan Anthony. Grudgingly accepting the challenge to "read the Gospel" he selected that of Mark, having established that it was by far the shortest. Before long he became aware that Someone was in the room with him while he read, and that was the beginning of a lifelong relationship with the living Christ. We could do the same. The whole of Mark's Gospel can be read with reasonable attention in less than an hour.

Our Lady of Llanthony/Capel-y-ffin



Fr Barnabas at Capel-y-ffin, with Douglas Lyne and his daughter Debbie, collateral descendants of Fr Ignatius OSB (Joseph Leycester Lyne, 1837-1908), founder of "New Llanthony Abbey":
25 August 1990

Normally this weekend I'd be joining in an ecumenical event in the Llanthony Valley near Abergavenny, as I have for very many years, but this time it's fallen victim to You Know What. A properly ecumenical event: it was at the 1990 pilgrimage to this holy place that I met up again with Fr Barnabas (see photo), having lost touch in the early 1970s after I left home and he left Willand; more recently Fr Nicanor has also taken part. It is held at this time of the year to remember the reported appearance on 30 August 1880 of the Mother of God to four boys at the very marginally Anglican monastery of Our Lady and St David, Capel-y-ffin, and to them and others over the ensuing fortnight.

I don't know whether if the Church of England had had the mechanism for doing so their experience would have been officially accepted as authentic, but one little touch suggests that the boys definitely believed they had seen "something". When the apparently supernatural Being interrupted their informal evening game of rounders one of them declared that if "it" came any nearer he would hit it with the stick they were using as a makeshift bat – the same reaction as that of a juvenile seer at La Salette in the French Alps three decades earlier.

Rereading the beginning of St Mark's Gospel I was struck by the "opening" of the heavens at Jesus's baptism, and put in mind of the Transfiguration which we were celebrating earlier this month. Both these Gospel events were a revelation of things *as they actually are*, if just out of sight – and the same is true of the many post-Biblical heavenly apparitions, icons weeping myrrh and other such phenomena. It seems that in this matter God is no respecter of ecclesiastical boundaries, for which may He be praised!

Echoes of Orthodoxy

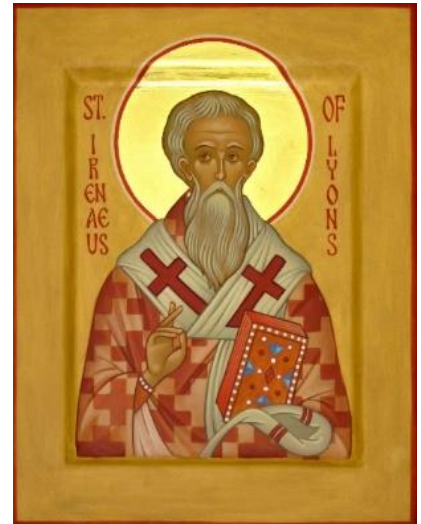
Wales is where I have spent quite a lot of my life, though sadly I've failed to learn more of the language than what is needed to get one's tongue round difficult place-names and a limited repertoire of hymns and prayers. Anglican priest and scholar A.M. (Donald) Allchin (+2010) became a great enthusiast for all things Welsh as well as all things Orthodox, and in a number of books drew attention to the real if unexpected echoes of Orthodoxy to be found in the hymns of such Welsh Calvinistic Methodist writers as William Williams Pantycelyn (+1791) and Ann Griffiths (+1805). Another, the Baptist shoemaker Titus Lewis (+1811), has given us a kind of verbal Pantocrator icon. It has quite a stirring tune (*Groes-wen* by J. Ambrose Lloyd; check on Google if interested).

*Great was Christ in heavenly glory,
Great when man he came to save;
Great his wondrous incarnation,
Death and victory o'er the grave.
King today, 'neath his sway,
Heaven and earth their homage pay.*

*Great is Jesus in his Person;
Great as God and great as man;
Great his comeliness and beauty,
Radiance of the Father's plan.
All shall see, great is he,
King through all eternity.*

Today's Saints – August 23rd

Last week we heard from the important Church father **St Irenaeus**, who was Bishop of Lyon as the second century gave way to the third (+202). The concept of “apostolic succession” comes alive when we consider that when he was growing up at Smyrna in Asia Minor he was strongly influenced by St Polycarp, who he tells us had “known John and others who had seen the Lord”. Just as Canterbury is the traditional English metropolitan see so Lyon is for France: its (Catholic) Archbishop bears the title “Primate of the Gauls”.



St Ebba the Younger was Abbess of Coldingham in Northumbria, martyred with her fellow nuns in 870 by Viking marauders: the ever-informative Wikipedia provides a macabre detail. There is an ancient church in Oxford (St Ebbe's) dedicated to her or possibly to her older namesake; I very much doubt whether its present-day adherents take much notice of either.

The industrial town of Merthyr Tydfil is named for the martyr (“*merthyr*”) **St Tydfil**, one of the 23 daughters of King Brychan of Brecon and sister of (among others) our local westcountry saints Nectan and Morwenna. She is believed to have been martyred there in the year 480; the ‘f’ in her name is pronounced as ‘v’.



The End of the Liturgical Year

Only two weeks separate the feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God and the end of the liturgical year. Many believers cannot see the cycle, during which they have followed Jesus from his birth to his glorification, come to an end without a certain sadness. When one has been close to the glory of Easter and of Pentecost, a return to the humble beginnings, the anticipation of the Nativity, may seem like a diminution. If the fullness has been reached, why come back to the starting point?

The human condition is such that we are not able to remain permanently in a maximum state. We need to learn again the first elements of what we think we know. It is only through a constantly renewed and constantly attentive contemplation of the life of our Lord, in all its aspects, in its whole succession of human vicissitudes, that we will perhaps be able to glimpse some reflections of the mystery of Christ. There are our sins, our falls. A soul that is sullied could not endure the radiance of the glory of God. It is good, it is necessary, for it to come back to periods of penitence and expiation.

The return of the liturgical cycle reminds us, too, that ‘salvation’, in the Christian sense of the word, cannot be separated from a historical and a personal context. It does not belong to a purely metaphysical order. It is not the communication of an abstract doctrine. We are saved because ‘something has happened’, because certain events have taken place. The liturgical year commemorates and renews these events mystically.

The fullness of the liturgical year does not consist of the commemorative cycle of Christ’s life being resolved or completed, for the completion of a series implies that there is a series, a succession of disjointed elements. The fullness of the liturgical year has to be thought of qualitatively and not quantitatively; it is achieved if, on any day whatever of the liturgical year, whichever it might be, we are capable of grasping – through the particular event which is commemorated – Christ as a whole, the whole of his life, the whole of his work, the whole of his word. Each feast, and even each day of the year thus becomes the fullness of the whole liturgical cycle. This cycle never repeats itself; each one of its aspects reflects the inexhaustible depth and fullness of Christ, and, as a result, becomes new for us to the extent that we understand it better. The liturgical year is a prism which receives the white light of Christ and splits it into different colours. Christ is the year.

Abridged from *The Year of Grace of the Lord* by ‘A Monk of the Eastern Church’ (Fr Lev Gillet)

Finally

We continue to pray for Fr Peter’s full recovery, and to look forward to the eventual restoration of regular services in the parish, whether at St Anne’s or (temporarily) elsewhere. Meanwhile, as well as the live-streamed Liturgies mentioned in last week’s issue, it’s good to hear that **public services have resumed** at our neighbouring churches in Plymouth and Torquay.

See <https://plymchurch.com/services/>, paying particular attention to the note about **Covid-19 Risk Provisions**. Deacon Brandon would tell you more (07837 983 433).

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God cannot be grasped by the mind. If he could be grasped, he would not be God.
Evagrius of Pontus (346-399)