



# Prophet Elias News

**News in the time of self – isolation for the Orthodox Church  
of the Holy Prophet Elias in Devon  
3<sup>rd</sup> January 2021**



## AT THE GATE OF THE YEAR

Year after year I have spoken of the New Year that was coming, in terms of a plain covered with snow, unspoiled, pure, and called our attention to the fact that we must tread responsibly on this expanse of whiteness still unspoiled, because according to the way in which we tread it, there will be a road cutting across the plain following the will of God, or wandering steps that will only soil the whiteness of the snow. But a thing that we cannot, must not forget, this year perhaps more than on many previous occasions, is that, surrounding, covering this whiteness and this unknown as with a dome, there is darkness, a darkness with few or many stars, but a darkness, dense, opaque, dangerous and frightening.

How shall we meet it? It would be naive, and it would be very unchristian, to ask God to shield us against it, to make of the Church a haven of peace while around us there is no peace. There is strife, there is tension, there is discouragement, there are fears, there is violence, there is murder. We cannot ask for peace for ourselves if this peace does not extend beyond the Church, does not come as rays of light to dispel the darkness. One Western spiritual writer has said that the Christian is one to whom God has committed responsibility for all other men, and this responsibility we must be prepared to discharge.

In a few moments we will entreat, for both the unknown and the darkness, the greatest blessing which is pronounced in our liturgical services, 'Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost' - blessed in the kingship of God. These words are spoken rarely: at the beginning of services, at the outset of the Liturgy, as a blessing upon the New Year, and at moments when eternity and time unite, when with the eyes of faith we can see eternity intertwined with time, and conquering. The Christian is one who must be able to see history as God sees it, as a mystery of salvation but also as a tragedy of human fallenness and sin. And with regard to both we must take our stand. Christ says, 'When you will hear of wars and rumours of wars, be ye not troubled.' Lift up your heads, there is no space in the life of the Christian for cowardice, faintheartedness and fear, which are all born of concern for self, even if it extends to those whom we love. God is the Lord of history, but we must be co-workers with God, and we are sent by Him into this world of His, in order to make the discordant city of men into the harmony which will be called the city of God.

And we must remember the words of the Apostle who says, whoever will wish to work for the Lord will be led into trial; and the words of another Apostle who tells us not to be afraid of trial by fire. In the present world we must be prepared, ready for trials and ready to stand, perhaps with fear in our heart for lack of faith, but unshaken in the service of God and the service of men.

And when we look back at the past year the words of the litany hit us and accuse us. We ask God to forgive us all that we have done or left undone in the past year. We claim to be Orthodox: to be Orthodox does not mean only to confess the Gospel in its integrity and proclaim it in its purity, but it consists, even more than this, in living according to the Gospel; and we know that Christ comes to no compromise with anything but the greatness of man and the message of love and worship. We can indeed repent because who, looking at us, would say as people said about the early Christians, 'See how they love one another!' Who would say, looking at us, that we are in possession of an understanding of life, of a love which makes us beyond compare, which causes everyone to wonder: Where does it come from? Who gave it to them? How can they stand the test of trial? And if we want this year to be worthy of God, of our Christian calling, of the holy name of Orthodoxy, we must singly and as a body become to all, to each person who may need us, a vision of what man can be and what a community of people can be under God.

Let us pray for forgiveness, we who are so far below our calling, let us pray for fortitude, for courage, for determination to discount ourselves, to take up our cross, to follow in the footsteps of Christ whithersoever He will call us.

## Fr Alexander Schmemmann on the Water of Baptism

Baptism proper begins with the blessing of the water. To understand, however, the meaning of water here, one must stop thinking of it as an isolated ‘matter’ of the sacrament. Or rather, one must realize that water is the ‘matter’ of sacrament, because it stands for the whole of matter, which the biblical ‘mythological’ world view—which incidentally is more meaningful and philosophically consistent than the one offered by some ‘demythologizers’—water is the natural symbol of life, for there is no life without water, but it is also the symbol of destruction and death, and finally, it is the symbol of purification, for there is no cleanliness without it. In the Book of Genesis creation of life is a victory of the Spirit of God over the waters—the chaos of nonexistence. In a way, then, creation is a transformation of water into life.

What is important for us, however, is that the baptismal water represents the matter of the cosmos, the world as life of man. And its blessing at the beginning of the baptismal rite acquires thus a truly cosmic and redemptive significance. God created the world and blessed it and gave it to man as his food and life, as the means of communion with Him. The blessing of water signifies the return or redemption of matter in this initial and essential meaning. By accepting the baptism of John, Christ sanctified the water—made it the water of purification and reconciliation with God. It was then, as Christ was coming out of the water, that the Epiphany—the new and redemptive manifestation of God—took place, and the Spirit of God, who at the beginning of creation ‘moved upon the face of the waters,’ made water—that is, the world—again into what He made it at the beginning.

To bless, as we already know, is to give thanks. In and through thanksgiving, man acknowledges the true nature of things he receives from God, and thus makes them to be what they are. We bless and sanctify things when we offer them to God in a eucharistic movement of our whole being. And as we stand before the water—before the cosmos, the matter given to us by God—it is an all-embracing eucharistic movement which gives the baptismal liturgy its true beginning.

Schmemmann, Alexander: *For the Life of the World*. St. Vladimir’s Press, 1963. Pg. 72-73



Today the One who does not bow bows down to his own servant, that he may free us from servitude. Today we have purchased the Kingdom of heaven, for the Kingdom of the Lord will have no end. Today earth and sea share the joy of the world, and the world has been filled with gladness.

## From the Prayer at the Great Blessing of the Waters

Today the grace of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove dwelt upon the waters.  
Today the Sun that never sets has dawned and the world is made radiant with the light of the Lord.  
Today the Moon with its radiant beams sheds light on the world.  
Today the stars formed of light make the inhabited world lovely with the brightness of their splendour.  
Today the clouds rain down from heaven the shower of justice for mankind.  
Today the Uncreated by his own will accepts the laying on of hands by his own creature.  
Today the Prophet and Forerunner draws near, but stands by with fear seeing God's condescension towards us.  
Today the streams of Jordan are changed into healing by the presence of the Lord.  
Today all creation is watered by mystical streams.  
Today the failings of mankind are being washed away by the waters of Jordan.  
Today Paradise is opened for mortals and the Sun of justice shines down on us.  
Today the bitter water as once for Moses' people is changed to sweetness by the presence of the Lord.  
Today we have been delivered from the ancient grief and saved as the new Israel.  
Today we have been redeemed from darkness and are filled with radiance by the light of the knowledge of God.  
Today the gloomy fog of the world is cleansed by the manifestation of our God.  
Today all creation shines with light from on high.  
Today error has been destroyed and the coming of the Master makes for us a way of salvation.  
Today things on high keep festival with those below, and those below commune with those on high.  
Today the sacred and triumphant festal assembly of the Orthodox exults.  
Today the Master hastens towards baptism, that he may lead humanity to the heights.  
Today the One who does not bow bows down to his own servant, that he may free us from servitude.  
Today we have purchased the Kingdom of heaven, for the Kingdom of the Lord will have no end.  
Today earth and sea share the joy of the world, and the world has been filled with gladness.

## Christmas Liturgy at Saint Stephen's

It was not Christmas Day, and we were not in Saint Anne's, but it was nonetheless a cause of great joy that after ten months of separation so many of us were able to meet in Saint Stephen's Church on Exeter High Street to celebrate Christmas together on December 27<sup>th</sup>, which was also by happy coincidence Saint Stephen's feast day. Hugh's photo from the balcony was taken at the beginning of the Liturgy before most people had arrived (and those who were already there had taken the much sought-after places at the back), but in all we numbered over forty, including a gratifying number of families. In addition, because we were on the High Street, with the doors open for Covid security, several passers by stopped in the doorway to light a candle and to listen.



**"Blessed is the Kingdom"**

Of course it is strange to have to wear masks, and it hurts to have to keep our distance from one another, but Fr Trayan and Fr Nicanor led the service beautifully, with excellent support from Deacon Brandon and server Daniel, and the choir from the balcony sounded lovely. Our thanks are due to all of them, and also to Reverend Sheila and the PCC of Central Exeter Parishes for their generous welcome and encouragement. We look forward to our next opportunity to celebrate at Saint Stephen's, on January 10<sup>th</sup> for Theophany.

Martin Olsson

## This Week We Celebrate

On Friday 1<sup>st</sup> January: **THE CIRCUMCISION OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST**

**Saint Basil the Great**, Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia (379)

We wish **Vassilis D** a **Happy Feast and Many Years!**

On Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup>:

**Saint Seraphim** Wonderworker of Sarov (1833) (See Noticeboard)

We wish **Seraphim H A** a **Happy Feast and Many Years!**

**Saint Sylvester** of Rome (335)

We give thanks for the life and service of **Sylvester Strong**. **May his memory be eternal!**

On Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup>: **THE HOLY THEOPHANY OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST**

On Thursday 7<sup>th</sup>:

The **Synaxis of the Holy Glorious Prophet Forerunner and Baptist John**

We wish **John P** and **John T** a **Happy Feast and Many Years!**

### Baby David in Uganda – Can You Help?

Many of you will remember an appeal Fr Peter made last year to raise funds towards a life-saving operation for the baby David, to repair a serious genetic abdominal weakness. This was in response to a request from Deacon Procopios, (right), one of the young men we met when we visited Uganda in 2012. Thanks to your generosity the money was raised and the operation and complex after-care were successful.

As you can see from the photograph, David is no longer a baby. But to ensure he continues to make progress he now needs follow-up surgery to reinforce his abdominal wall. His surgeon, Dr Alexander Kiwanuka, has managed to secure funds for the operation itself, but David will need intensive aftercare, initially for some time in ICU, at an estimated cost of around £500.

If you feel you might like to contribute towards the cost of David's post-operative care, please let me know – either at [martinolsson827@btinternet.com](mailto:martinolsson827@btinternet.com) or on 01837 82796 – so that I can let Dr Kiwanuka know what help we might be able to provide.



Martin Olsson

### Noticeboard

This week's **Virtual Visit** with the Orthodox Fellowship of Saint John the Baptist will be to **Diveyevo** for **Saint Seraphim of Sarov** on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> January at 7pm. To register go to: <https://forerunner.org.uk/winter-series-2020-21/>

#### Services in January (Covid restrictions permitting)

Vespers at Saint Anne's : Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> January

Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> January: **Divine Liturgy at Saint Stephen's (Celebration of Theophany) and Blessing of Water** (Bring bottles to take water for home use)

Hugh will circulate more details nearer the time.

**THE EDITORS WOULD LIKE TO WISH EVERYONE A  
HAPPY AND BLESSED NEW YEAR.**