



# Prophet Elias News

**News in the time of self – isolation for the Orthodox Church of  
the Holy Prophet Elias in Devon  
31st January 2021**

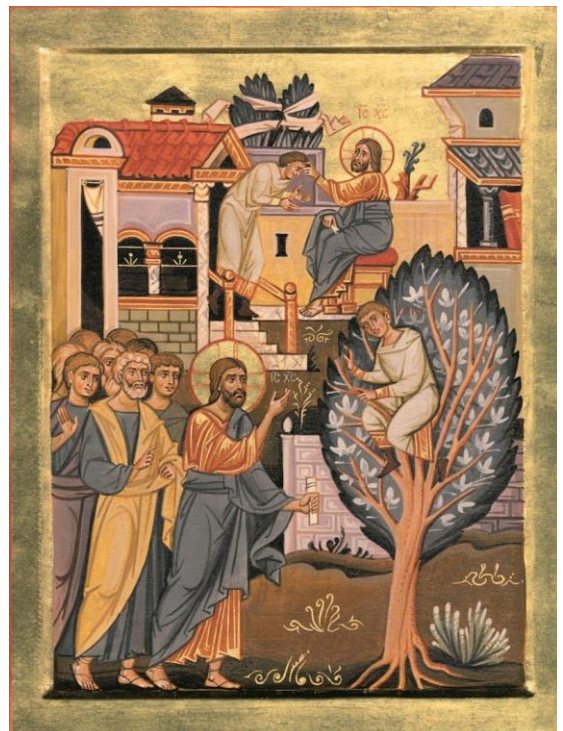


## The Sunday of Zacchaeus

Long before the actual beginning of Lent, the Church announces its approach and invites us to enter into the period of pre-lenten preparation. It is a characteristic feature of the Orthodox liturgical tradition that every major feast or season is announced and “prepared” in advance. Why? Because of the deep psychological insight by the Church into human nature. Knowing our lack of concentration and the frightening “worldliness” of our life, the Church knows our inability to change rapidly, to go abruptly from one spiritual or mental state to another. Thus, long before the actual effort of Lent is to begin, the Church calls our attention to its seriousness and invites us to meditate on its significance. Before we can *practice* Lent we are given its *meaning*. This preparation includes five consecutive Sundays preceding Lent, each one of them – through its particular Gospel lesson – dedicated to some fundamental aspect of repentance.

The very first announcement of Lent is made the Sunday on which the Gospel lesson about Zacchaeus (Luke 19: 1-10) is read. It is the story of a man who was too short to see Jesus but who *desired* so much to see Him that he climbed up a tree. Jesus responded to his desire and went to his house. Thus the theme of this first announcement is *desire*. Man follows his desire. One can even say that man *is* desire, and this fundamental psychological truth about human nature is acknowledged by the Gospel: “Where your treasure is,” says Christ, “there shall your heart be.” A strong desire overcomes the natural limitations of man; when he passionately desires something he does things of which “normally” he is incapable. Being “short,” he overcomes and transcends himself. The only question, therefore, is whether we desire the right things, whether the power of desire in us is aimed at the right goal, or whether – in the words of the existentialist atheist, Jean Paul Sartre – man is a “useless passion.”

Zacchaeus desired the “right thing”; he wanted to see and approach Christ. He is the first symbol of repentance, for repentance begins as the rediscovery of the deep nature of all desire: the desire for God and His righteousness, for the true life. Zacchaeus is “short” – petty, sinful and limited – yet his desire overcomes all this. It “forces” Christ’s attention; it brings Christ to his home. Such, then, is the first announcement, the first invitation: ours is to *desire* that which is deepest and truest in ourselves, to acknowledge the thirst and hunger for the Absolute which is in us whether we know it or not, and which, when we deviate from it and turn our desires away, makes us indeed a “useless passion”. And if we desire deeply enough, strongly enough, Christ will respond.



## Archbishop Dmitri of Dallas: Sermon on the Meeting of the Lord

On February 2nd the Church celebrates the great feast of The Meeting of our Lord in the Temple. This particular feast is part of the great celebration that began forty days prior, with the Nativity of Christ. Eight days later (January 1) we remembered the Circumcision of Christ and then His Baptism (January 6). The commemoration of these events in our Lord's earthly life basically forms one feast, the feast of the Incarnation of God the Word. God literally entered the world, into time and history. He was physically present in the midst of His people, His creatures whom He loves. Our Lord took on human nature in order to reconcile unto Himself, man who had strayed far from the Source of his life. In taking on the "form of a servant" God, at the same time, in the Person of Christ, fulfilled every requirement of the Law that He Himself had given to His people through Moses. He demonstrated, thereby, that everything that had happened in Israel's history could not be described merely as a succession of unrelated events. Rather this was a history with a definite goal: the salvation of mankind. He identified Himself as the Director of that history and fulfilled its expectation.

When the righteous Simeon took the child into His arms and declared that this indeed was Salvation Incarnate, the "Light to lighten the gentiles, and the glory of Israel," a new era began; the era of God's presence among His children. To this day, all of the Church's celebrations, no matter what the event commemorated may be, whether in the life of Christ, of the Theotokos, or of the saints, all are celebrations of Christ and the establishment on earth of the Kingdom of His presence. He initiated this Kingdom and promised its ultimate realization.

Although all of our celebrations are intimately rooted in the knowledge that we have been called for complete communion with Christ and to live in anticipation of His Kingdom to which we already belong, we still live in a world that has for the most part rejected what Christ gave it, that is, authentic life "in abundance," life with real purpose and meaning. We Christians, in spite of having accepted what God's intervention in human affairs gave us, slip repeatedly and fall into the great temptation to convert the things of this world into gods. We are constantly attracted by ways of seeking happiness and fulfilment that exclude God. This, of course, always proves to be vain and futile. So our lives vacillate, back and forth, between the assurance of salvation and indifference, between moments of real joy because we know that God is with us, and moments of boredom because we cannot give ourselves totally over to Him.

Every Christian celebration reaches its climax in the Divine Liturgy for the feast. In this sacred work, when God's people assemble in His name, we actually become participants in the Heavenly Kingdom to come. We are as literally present with Christ in His future Kingdom as the Apostles were with Him at the Last Supper. So the Kingdom is initiated among us and we enjoy it before our time, by anticipation. This is what every Eucharist is; this is what our feasts and celebrations are all about, and that is why the Eucharist is the very centre of all of them.

I will emphasize again, however, that although what we have said is true, we continually orient our lives towards everyday pursuits, often living as though we had never experienced this divine reality. That is why repentance and penitential seasons are in order. That is why in approximately one month we will enter the Great Fast during which time we are exhorted to repent of our sins.

What is important for us Christians is that we have really "seen the True Light, received the Heavenly Spirit, found the true faith" in this experience of the Kingdom of God. The question we must all ask ourselves sincerely, however, is "what are we like when we return into this world after this Heavenly experience?"

Sermon by Archbishop Dmitri (Royster) of Dallas of Blessed Memory (1923 – 2011)

First published in *The Dawn* - Publication of the Diocese of the South, Orthodox Church in America January 1999

### **The Opportunity to Be Still**

The world is busy grumbling and whining at being stuck indoors, etc., but surely the Christian should be glad to have the opportunity, during Lockdowns, to be still, & to study.

No.15 from '*The Wisdom of the Desert Fathers*' by Sister Benedicta Ward (ISBN 0 7283 0109 1):

A brother came to see a very experienced old man & said to him: 'I am in trouble' & the old man said to him: 'Sit in your [cell] & God will give you peace.'

Christa Antonina

### This Week We Celebrate

On Sunday January 31<sup>st</sup>: **Sunday of Zacchaeus**

Epistle: 1 Timothy 4: 9-15 Gospel: Luke 19: 1-10

On Monday February 1<sup>st</sup>: **Martyr Tryphon** of Campsada in Syria (250)

We wish **Father Trayan** a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**

**Saint Bridget (Bride)** Abbess of Kildare (525)

We wish Poppy O a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**

On Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup>: **THE MEETING OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE**

Epistle: Hebrews 7: 7-17 Gospel: Luke 2: 22-40

On Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup>: **Righteous Simeon** the God-Receiver and **Prophetess Anna**

We wish **Anya K** and **Felicia F** a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**

Our apologies to **Christa Antonina** that we failed to flag up that 17<sup>th</sup> January (Saint Anthony the Great) was her nameday. (See page 4)

We wish her, albeit belatedly, a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**

### Come and Behold Christ

O Virgin Mother of God, Thou Hope of all Christians,  
protect, watch over and guard all those who put their  
hope in thee.

Simeon the Elder takes in his arms the Maker of the Law  
and Master of all.

Come and behold Christ the Master of all, whom Simeon  
carries in the temple today.

‘It is not the old man who holds Me, but I uphold him:  
for he begs Me to let him depart.’

‘Thou dost look down upon the earth and make it  
tremble: how then can I, aged and weary, hold Thee in  
mine arms?’

Simeon had lived for many years when he beheld Christ  
and cried aloud to Him: ‘Now do I seek my release.’

O daughter of Phanuel, come and stand with us, and give  
thanks to Christ our Saviour, the Son of God.

Him whom the Ministers at the Liturgy on high entreat  
with trembling, here below Simeon now takes in his  
arms.

O Thou by nature One but in persons Three, watch over  
Thy servants who put their faith in Thee.

O Virgin Mother of God, Thou Hope of all Christians,  
protect, watch over and guard all those who put their  
hope in thee.

*Verses from the 9th Ode for the Feast of the Meeting of the Lord*

### From Nunc Dimittis by Joseph Brodsky

*Brodsky's beautiful poem on the Meeting of the Lord is  
eighteen stanzas long – here is room only for the closing  
stanzas, as Simeon leaves the Temple after the Meeting:*

He went forth to die. It was not the loud din  
of streets that he faced when he flung the door wide,  
but rather the deaf-and-dumb fields of death's kingdom.  
He strode through a space that was no longer solid.

The rustle of time ebbed away in his ears.  
And Simeon's soul held the form of the Child—  
its feathery crown now enveloped in glory—  
aloft, like a torch, pressing back the black shadows,

to light up the path that leads into death's realm,  
where never before until this present hour  
had any man managed to lighten his pathway.  
The old man's torch glowed and the pathway grew wider.

*Trans. George L. Kline  
in New European Poets: Joseph Brodsky, Penguin Books 1973.*

You can find the full text at:  
[https://andrewhammel.blog/2006/12/25/nunc\\_dimittis1](https://andrewhammel.blog/2006/12/25/nunc_dimittis1)

or in Russian (Сретенье) at  
<http://www.world-art.ru/lyric/lyric.php?id=7668>

A few weeks ago Suzy Klein played as her morning Slow Moment on Radio 3 a gorgeous (to my ear) setting of the Nunc Dimittis by Icelandic composer Sigurður Sævarsson. You can find it on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOLBHPqyvAc>

There is also of course the lovely setting from Rachmaninov's Vespers, of which this <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=rachmaninov+vespers+nunc+dimittis&docid=60805022448117492> is only one of many versions.

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## Prayer Over Candles for Use at Home

The Feast of the Meeting of the Lord, often also called Candlemas, is a Feast of Light. The prediction of the righteous elder Simeon, that Christ has come as 'a light to enlighten the gentiles' anticipates Christ's own declaration that: 'I am the light of the world: he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.' (John 8: 12). In our parish we have for many years taken candles to church on this Feast to be blessed after the Liturgy, for use at home. Sadly, we can't do this in the present circumstances, but as with our houses, we can make sure our candles have been prayed over. All we need is to set out in front of our icon corner a basket or tray to hold the candles and a small bowl of blessed water. Father Patrick has approved the following outline:

*To begin:*

Through the prayers of our holy fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us.

O Heavenly King.... Holy God.... x3 Glory....Both now.... O all holy Trinity....  
Lord have mercy x3 Glory....Both now.... Our Father....

*Then sing or read the Troparion of the Feast:*

Hail Mother of God, Virgin full of grace: for from thee has shone forth the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, giving light to those in darkness. Be glad also, thou righteous Elder, for thou hast received in thine arms the deliverer of our souls, who bestows upon us resurrection.

*Then this prayer, during which we sprinkle the candles with blessed water:*

O Lord Jesus Christ, true Light, enlightening every man who cometh into the world: Pour forth Thy blessing upon these candles, and sanctify them with the light of Thy grace, and be Thou pleased, O merciful One, that, as these candles, set alight with visible light, drive away the gloom of night, so may it be with our hearts, which burn with invisible light. Illumined with the radiance of the Holy Spirit, may they escape the blindness of all sins, that with a purified spiritual eye, we may see those things which are well-pleasing for Thee and conducive to our salvation; that when we have overcome the dark tribulations of this world, we may be counted worthy to attain unto never-ending light. For Thou art our Saviour, and we send up glory unto Thee, and Thy Father Who is without beginning, and Thine all-holy, good, and life-creating Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages.

*Then the kontakion:*

Thou who hast sanctified by Thy birth a virgin womb and fittingly blessed the hands of Simeon, Thou art come, O Christ our God, and on this day hast saved us. Give peace to Thy community and strengthen the Orthodox people whom Thou hast loved, O Thou who alone lovest mankind.

*At the end:* 'Through the prayers of our holy fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us.'

## The Letters of Saint Antony

We celebrated my Saint, Antony the Great, recently. Oh, what a man, and I'm sure many of you are familiar with Athanasius' writings on Saint Antony, so pertinent, for they were friends, albeit in age apart.

May I just add, perhaps especially to all Antonys, Antonias, Antoninas, that I do hope you will already have Derwas J. Chitty's '*The Letters of Saint Antony the Great*', too, (Foreword by Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia) or obtain it: ISBN 0 7283 0052 Fairacres Publications. Athanasius' *Apothegmata*, Evagrius, Cassian, etc., give us pictures of Antony, but here are 7 letters from the hand of Saint Antony himself! As Bp. Kallistos remarks, 'We are listening here to the authentic voice of desert spirituality.'

Chitty's booklet cost me £1.00 in '96 & its 28 pages can accompany you wherever life takes you, even in a Rucksack or back pocket!

Christa Antonina



### Some on-line recommendations:

A series of on-line lectures is currently in progress entitled 'Miracles in Greco-Roman literature' on <https://www.iocs.cam.ac.uk/new-seminar-series-in-2021-miracles-in-graeco-roman-literature/>

Whereas the title might suggest something of interest only to a select sub-group of classical scholars, these lectures actually open up a fascinating window onto the connections, parallels and divergences between the early Church and the culture in which it developed.

You can listen to the first lecture on <https://youtu.be/0y1KP-dqgcQ>  
- further recordings will be available to participants on request.

These seminars take place at 5.00 p.m. on Thursdays until 4 February, and are free and open to all. But if you wish to be sent the relevant texts in advance of each session, please e-mail [info@iocs.cam.ac.uk](mailto:info@iocs.cam.ac.uk)

The Monastery of St John the Baptist, Tolleshunt Knights now have on-line talks 5.30- 7.00 p.m. on Sundays, given alternately by Fr Zacharias and the abbot, Archimandrite Peter. The talks are profound, inspiring, and a world away from church politics, and are followed by an extensive and very valuable question-and-answer session.

The talks attract an audience of up to 1,000 from many parts of the world; and in these days of isolation and closed churches, simply to be part of such a large group of Orthodox Christians - even a virtual one - can raise the spirits. Flicking through the pages of participants is likely to turn up many familiar names! One needs to get on the mailing list via the link: <https://rebrand.ly/1opx0>

They will then send a notice each week, with a link to click in order to get that week's Zoom code. Not as complicated as it sounds, and well worth it.

Elizabeth Theokritoff

And Philip found this link to the Orthodox Arts Journal, full of fascinating articles on iconography:

<https://orthodoxartsjournal.org/author/jonathan-pageau/>

### A Prayer of Saint Gregory of Nazianzus

O You, the One-Beyond all things,

how could we call You by any other name?

What song can be sung for You? No word can express You.

What spirit can perceive You? No intelligence can comprehend You.

You alone are inexpressible; all that is said has come from You.

You alone are unknowable; all that is thought has come from You.

All creatures proclaim You, those who speak and those who are dumb.

Every one desires You, everyone sighs and aspires after You.

All that exists prays to You,

and every being that can contemplate Your universe raises to You a silent hymn.

Have pity on us, You, the One-Beyond all things;

how could we call You by any other name?

Found by Irina