



# Prophet Elias News

News for the Orthodox Church of the Holy Prophet Elias in Devon  
24<sup>th</sup> July – 7<sup>th</sup> August 2021



## A Personal Reflection on Death and Suffering by Mitch Foyle-York

Very recently, my father's cousin was diagnosed with stage-four cancer. Especially given that he is only in his 50's, this news came as a massive shock to all my family. He has been generally positive throughout the rather ghastly process of chemotherapy. A few days prior to writing this, he finished his final stage of chemotherapy, and will now undergo several scans and tests to determine if the cancer is now operable or terminal. It feels as though everyone you meet has come uncomfortably close – in one way or another – to sickness and death, particularly in COVID times.

As a Christian, I often feel hopeless when facing such situations. Immediately upon hearing the news about my cousin, the common objections sprung forth in my mind: “why would God do this!?”, “why does God let people suffer!?” I have pondered such questions for many weeks now, as I pray for the healing of my cousin. And over these weeks, I have found that God has responded to my questions with the same answer he gave the lamenting Job: ‘Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand.’ (Job 38:4). But what, exactly, does this mean?

Why such suffering, why such death, happens in the world and to all those within it is a mystery only God knows the answer to. The answer, no doubt, was laid deep within ‘the earth's foundation’. I do not know, nor does anyone, what the answer is; but revealed to us through Christ is the nature of that foundation within which the mystery was planted: *Love*. Fr. Alexander Schmemmann once said: ‘never be ashamed of believing, naïve as it may seem to people of our age; never stop believing that the battle is in this world, the struggle, is not between structures and systems... The struggle is *personal*’. This is true also of death. We carry this Christian “naivety” always – we understand, and hope, that suffering, sickness, and death have greater meaning than the worldly pain and fear they inflict upon us. But, because of the terrible nature of these things, that mystery, that meaning, is far more difficult to comprehend.

I have been thinking a lot recently about what that meaning might be. The honest answer is I do not know, and I would wager that nobody else knows either, for we are not supposed to. But what I do know is that, upon reminiscing on my cousin's life in light of his sickness and possible death, my mind is flooded with memories of him I had once forgotten: I can recall being a small child and scratching his beloved van with a screwdriver (whilst I was pretending to be Dr Who, I might add), to which he responded with not the slightest bit of scorn; I can remember him being able to lift my push-bike with just one finger; I can recall the time he installed our kitchen oven, which became a three-man job between him, my father and me. How grateful I am for the “ordinary” moments in life. But that is the thing: as Christians, we recognise that no moment in life is ordinary – it is *always personal*.

However painful sickness and death might be, I have come to learn in recent months that there are silver linings, even in tragedy: those moments of family, community, deep prayer, the realisation of how grateful I am to be merely alive, to see children receive Communion, to hear Fr. Nicanor's jokes. In other words, love always remains, even in suffering, death and grief. To be a Christian is to never be alone, no matter how lonely we might feel. Because Christ shared in our suffering, we can hope to share in His resurrection. Death, I think, is something of a mortal veil. Just as the curtain of the iconostasis is drawn back, and reveals to us the Body and Blood of Christ, death draws back the curtain of our mortal world, revealing Christ, and His Love, in all its Glory.

Mitch (Alexander) Foyle-York

*Mitch was baptised by Fr Trayan in Torquay, back in April. He has just finished his undergraduate degree in theology at the University of Exeter, and sometimes helps by serving at Saint Anne's. He will be leaving Exeter in August, but plans to visit Saint Anne's pretty regularly.*

## Amma Sarah of the Desert (July 13<sup>th</sup>)

*Most of us know something about the Desert Fathers, who took to the wilderness after Christianity became 'respectable' under Constantine, but I for one knew nothing about the Desert Mothers who did the same. Ed.*

Mother Sarah was a desert elder who is believed to have withdrawn up into the hills above the Nile, possibly near Scetis, and following the command of Christ, to have flourished in her life as a teaching hermit for 60 years. At its heart, her ministry is founded on her personal search for peace in her relationship with God. As Amma Sarah navigated her commitment to sacred celibacy in the name of Jesus Christ, she experienced herself fighting sexual temptation so fierce that she perceived it as battling with a demon. The *Sayings of the Fathers* report that: "Amma Sarah waged warfare against the demon of her temptation for thirteen years. Yet, even in the worst of it, she refused to pray for it to cease; instead, she prayed 'O God, give me strength'" (*Apophthegmata Patrum*, Sarah, 1).



One of her sayings tells how, in her valiant combat, even the Devil himself had to admit finally that she had overcome him. Yet, she answered, "It is not I who have overcome you, but my master, Christ" (*Ibid.*, 2). In describing her ascetical prayer practice, it was said that from her hermitage, you could look down the slope of the hill and see the Nile flowing by; but that for 60 years, Amma Sarah remained so focused on her prayer to Christ that she never stopped to simply enjoy watching the river go by (*Ibid.*, 3). To keep herself ever mindful of the seriousness of her ministry, she wisely taught that: "I never so much as take a step onto the ladder of spiritual progress without placing death before my eyes before going up it" (*Ibid.*, 6).

Often the other Mothers in the Desert sought out Amma Sarah, and one of them asked her, "There is so much evil in the world—I am assaulted by every injustice I witness—what shall I do?" The holy one answered: "Do not try to battle all of them. Fight against the chief one and all the others will perish. For this, my child, is your spiritual

combat: the power of stillness, fasting, tears from the heart, and a multitude of prostrations and humble offerings in your prayer" (*Ibid.*, 58).

*From V.K. McCarthy: Encouragement from the Desert Mothers in Troubling Times*

For full text see [Encouragement from the Desert Mothers in Troubling Times - Public Orthodoxy](#)

*V.K. McCarty is an Anglican theologian who lectures at General Theological Seminary and writes for the Institute for Studies in Eastern Christianity. Her book, From Their Lips: Voices of Early Christian Women, is forthcoming from Gorgias Press.*

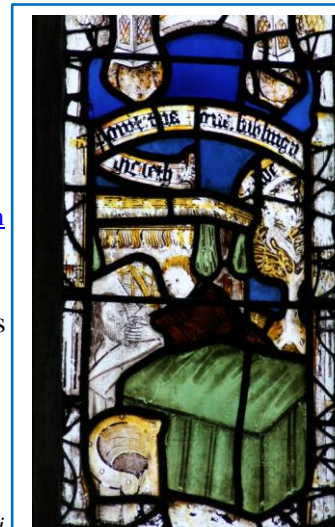
## Saint Neot (Saint Anuetis)

St. Neot lived in the ninth century. Of noble birth, it is believed by some that the saint was related to the royal family of either Wessex or East Anglia. Neot began life as a soldier but after some time he resolved to give up a military career and dedicate his life to the service of God and prayer. Thus he entered the famous monastery in Glastonbury in the Kingdom of Wessex and served there as a sacristan. After some time at Glastonbury, where he obtained a good education and was in due course ordained priest, Neot felt a calling to live a more ascetic life in solitude. So he retired to Cornwall where he spent the rest of his life as a hermit.

Bishop Asser in his *Life of Alfred the Great* tells us that during the Danish raids on England, the King visited the cell of St. Neot. The latter blessed him to fight in the decisive battle with the Danes and predicted his victory. It is also related that St. Neot, along with St. Cuthbert of Lindisfarne, appeared to King Alfred in a vision before his final victory over the pagans.

Source – Dmitry Lapa [Venerable Neot of Cornwall / OrthoChristian.Com](#)

Saint Neot's church contains several windows of wonderful intact 15<sup>th</sup>C stained glass, including one sequence telling the story of the Creation and another of Noah and the Ark. The last image in the Creation window shows Seth placing three apple pips in dead Adam's mouth and nostrils before his burial – pips which according to mediaeval legend grew to provide wood for the three crosses of Calvary. You can see many of the windows at [www.cornishstainedglass.org.uk/mgsdb/window.xhtml?churchid=254&locid=161](http://www.cornishstainedglass.org.uk/mgsdb/window.xhtml?churchid=254&locid=161)



Right: *Hic Seth ponit tria grana sub lingua Adami*

## Christian Citizenship

Christians are not distinguished from the rest of mankind in locality or in speech or customs. But while they dwell in the cities both of Greeks and barbarians, and follow the local customs in dress and food, yet the constitution of their own citizenship is marvellous, and contradicts expectation. They dwell in their countries, but only as sojourners; they bear their share as citizens, and they endure all hardships as strangers. Every foreign country is their fatherland, and every fatherland is foreign..... Their existence is on earth, their citizenship in heaven. They obey the laws and surpass them in their lives. They love all men and are persecuted by all. They are ignored and condemned, put to death and endowed with life. They are beggars, who make many rich, in want of everything and abounding in everything. They are dishonoured, and in their dishonour glorified. They are abused and vindicated. Reviled, they bless; insulted, they pay their respects. They are punished for doing good, and rejoice in this, as thereby quickened to life. They are hated and persecuted, and yet those who hate them cannot tell the reason for their hostility to them.

In a word, what the soul is to the body, this the Christians are to the world. The soul is enclosed in the body, and yet holds the body together; so Christians are in the world as in a prison, and yet they themselves hold the world together.

Anonymous second century *Epistle to Diognetus*  
Quoted in Every, Harries and Ware: *Seasons of the Spirit* SPCK 1984

## This Fortnight We Celebrate

On Sunday July 25<sup>th</sup>: **Fifth Sunday after Pentecost**

Epistle – Romans 12: 1-3      Gospel – Matthew 10:37 – 11:1

**Dormition of the Righteous Anna, Mother of the Mother of God**

We wish **Emma G-L** a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**

On Monday 26<sup>th</sup>: **Martyr Paraskevi of Rome (2<sup>nd</sup>C)**

On Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup>: **Great Martyr and Healer Panteleimon (305)**

**Holy Equal-to-the-Apostles Kliment of Ohrid (916)**

Co-founder with Saint Naum of the first university in Christian Europe.

On Saturday 31<sup>st</sup>: **St Joseph of Arimathaea**

**Saint German of Auxerre (448)** Opponent of Pelagianism in Britain

**Saint Neot, Hermit in Cornwall (c877)**

On Sunday August 1<sup>st</sup>: **Sixth Sunday after Pentecost**

Epistle – Romans 12: 6-14      Gospel: Matthew 9: 1-8

**Procession of the Honourable Wood of the Lifegiving Cross of the Lord**

**BEGINNING OF THE DORMITION FAST**

On Monday 2<sup>nd</sup>: **Saint Sidwell of Exeter (7<sup>th</sup>C)**

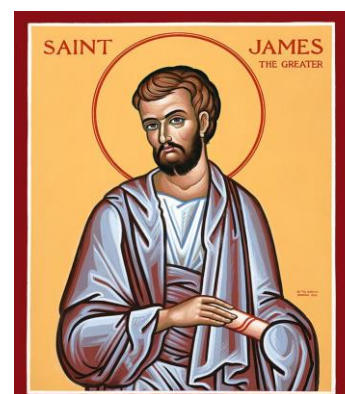
On Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup>: **Holy Myrrh-Bearer Salome**

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

## Our Thanks to Saint James' Parish

We owe Saint James' Parish a huge debt of gratitude for their unfailing hospitality during the past difficult months, in making it possible for us to use the Hall on Saturday mornings for our fortnightly Liturgies. As a small token of our thanks, the PAC have arranged to present this mounted print icon of Saint James the Greater to Father Henry and his parishioners in time for their patronal festival on 25<sup>th</sup> July – Saint James' feast day according to the Anglican calendar. (Saint James the son of Zebedee is sometimes referred to as 'the Greater' to distinguish him from Saint James the son of Alphaeus ('the Lesser') and Saint James the Lord's brother.)

*Ed.*



## Noticeboard

*Because the Editors will be away when they would normally be preparing this issue it is being put together well in advance. Consequently some notices about events in August will be circulated later through the normal parish distribution network.*

### Services:

Friday July 23<sup>rd</sup>: Vespers - Saint Anne's 6.30

**Saturday July 24<sup>th</sup>: Divine Liturgy at Saint James' Hall 10.30am**

**Celebration of our Patronal Feast of the Holy Prophet Elias**

**Parish AGM** The Parish **Annual General Meeting** will be held after the Liturgy at Saint James' Hall. Covid restrictions permitting, there will be a Bring and Share meal after the Meeting.

Sunday 25<sup>th</sup>: Matins and Divine Liturgy Saint Stephen's Church (in Romanian) 9-12  
Orthros and Divine Liturgy Plymouth 9.30 Torquay 9.30am

Sunday August 1<sup>st</sup>: Orthros and Divine Liturgy Plymouth 9.30 Torquay 9.30am

Thursday 5<sup>th</sup>: **Vespers for the Feast of the Transfiguration Saint Anne's 6.30pm**

Friday 6<sup>th</sup>: Orthros and Divine Liturgy for the Feast of the Transfiguration Plymouth **8.30am**

**Saturday 7<sup>th</sup>: Divine Liturgy to celebrate the Feast of the Transfiguration St. James' Hall 10.30am**  
with Fr Alexander Fostiropoulos

**OFSJB Summer Series of Online Talks: 'By the Prayers of our Holy Fathers and Mothers'**

**Monday 26 July - Saint Silouan and Saint Sophrony - Sister Magdalen**  
(of the Monastery of St John the Baptist)

**Monday 2 August - Saint Maria (Skobtsova) of Paris - Subdeacon Ian Randall**

**Monday 9 August - Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh - Dr Elena Sadovnikova**

**Monday 16 August - Father Alexander Men - Dr Alexei Tsvetik**

**Monday 23 August - Elder Porphyrios and Eldress Gavrilia - Dr Evi Voulgaraki-Pissina**

All talks will begin at 19.00

Register at: <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZEtdu2pqT8uGNLWPGSe3iA5Tq6WAJlpLpf>

This series follows the outline for the 2020-2021 Deanery conference talks, which was presented to the Orthodox Fellowship of St John the Baptist, to be re-cast (with modifications) as an on-line series. Not a substitute for a Deanery Conference - but at least an opportunity for people who were looking forward to hearing more about the theme we had chosen. And by the time the series starts, it should even be possible for people to gather with a few fellow parishioners to listen to the talks, and continue the discussion informally if they wish.

Elizabeth Theokritoff

## View The Exeter Book Online

A fully digitised version of *The Exeter Book*, the most precious artefact held in the Cathedral Library, will be available to view online from Monday 5 July. It has been in our care since at least the 11th century but its international importance was recognised by UNESCO in 2016, when it was added to their register of artefacts of global significance. Now, thanks to a collaborative project between Exeter Cathedral and the University of Exeter (and some impressive technology), it will be accessible to everyone.

*The Exeter Book* is a 10th-century anthology of poetry written in Old English. It is incomplete and damaged in a few places but it's the oldest book of English literature in the world and is of incalculable value.

View it online and you'll see a high definition, crystal-clear image, allowing you to spot intricate details, including parchment made from different animal skins, individual letter forms, corrections and editorial additions.

Follow us on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/exetercathedral>, or look out for information on our website <https://www.exeter-cathedral.org.uk> to find out more.

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