



Prophet Elias News

News and Views for the Orthodox Church
of the Holy Prophet Elias in Devon
January 2024

For service times see Noticeboard on P2



Mural by David Bjorgen on the interior of the Saint John the Baptist Church at the Jordan River

The Lord's Baptism – The Blessing of Water **By Fr Alexander Schmemmann**

Water does not mean much to us today. It's one of life's essential comforts, accessible automatic, cheap. You turn on the tap and there it is... However, for thousands of years water was a primary religious symbol and to understand why this was so we must recover the almost completely extinguished feeling for the cosmos.

To people of the ancient world, water was no less than a symbol of life itself and of the world as life ... Water is truly a precondition for life. One can go without food for a long time, but without water a person will die very quickly, so we can say that human beings are by nature thirsty beings. Without water cleanliness is impossible, so water is also a symbol of cleansing and purity. Water as life and as purity, but also beauty, power and might, as we see it reflect and absorb, so to speak, the boundless blue sky. All of this describes the perception or experience of water that placed it at the centre of religious symbolism.

Go into a church the eve of Epiphany while the "Great Blessing of Water" is being celebrated. Listen to the words of the prayers and hymns, pay attention to the rite, and you feel that there is more here than merely ancient ritual: it has something to say to us today, just as it did a thousand years ago, about our life and our perpetual and unquenchable thirst for purification, rebirth, renewal... In this celebration water becomes what it was on the first day of Creation, when "the earth was without

form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters” (Gen 1:2). The words of the service echo this in praise and thanksgiving: “Great are You, O Lord, and marvellous are Your works, and there are no words which suffice to hymn Your wonders...” Once again, humanity stands before the mystery of existence. Once again, we experience the world joyfully and we see its beauty and harmony as God’s gift. Once again we give thanks. And in this thanksgiving, praise and joy we once again become genuine human beings.

The joy of Epiphany is in the recovery of a cosmic experience of the world, of recovering faith that everything and everyone can always be washed, purified, renewed, reborn and that regardless of how dirty and clouded with mud our life has become, no matter what swamp we might have rolled in, we always have access to a purifying stream of living water, because humanity’s thirst for heaven, goodness, perfection and beauty is not dead, nor can it ever die. Indeed, this thirst alone makes us human beings. “Great are You, our Lord, and marvellous are your works, and there are not words which suffice to hymn Your wonders...” Who said Christianity is depressing and grim, morbid and sad, and pulls human beings away from life? Look at the faces of worshippers that night and see the light and joy that shines as they listen to the psalm thundering its exultation, “The voice of the Lord is upon the waters” (Ps 29:3), as they watch the priest sprinkling volleys of blessed water throughout the church and those glittering drops flying as if throughout the whole world, making that world once again a possibility and a promise, the raw material for a mysterious miracle of transformation and transfiguration. God Himself entered this water in the form of a man; He united Himself not only with humanity, but also with all matter and made all of it a radiant, light-bearing stream flowing towards life and joy.

But none of this can be experienced or sensed without repentance, without a deep change of consciousness, without the conversion of mind and heart, without the ability to see everything in a new light. This was precisely the repentance John the Baptist preached and which made it possible to see Jesus approaching the river Jordan and lovingly accept Him as God Himself who from the beginning of time loved the human race and created the whole world for us as an image of His love, eternity and joy.

Posted at signorthodoxchurch.ca/feast-of-theophany-schmemmann-the-blessing-of-water/

Noticeboard

Saturday 6th: **HOLY THEOPHANY OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST**

Matins and Divine Liturgy followed by Blessing of the Waters Torquay 9am

Vespers 6pm

Sunday 7th: Celebration of Theophany

Divine Liturgy followed by Blessing of Waters 10.30am

Saturday 13th: Vespers 6pm

Sunday 14th: Leavetaking of Theophany Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Saturday 20th: Vespers 6pm

Sunday 21st: 33rd Sunday after Pentecost Typika 10.30am

Friday 26th: Vespers 6pm

Saturday 27th: Divine Liturgy 10.30am

Sunday 28th: No service

Friday February 2nd: **FEAST OF THE MEETING OF THE LORD IN THE TEMPLE (CANDLEMASS)**

Saturday 3rd: Vespers 6pm

Sunday 4th: Celebration of the Meeting of the Lord

Divine Liturgy and Blessing of Candles 10.30am

All services in Saint Anne’s unless stated otherwise

For services in the Romanian parish (Exeter and Newton Abbot) consult

*<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064673836911> or telephone Fr Julian on **07469 262827**.*

Similarly for the Torquay parish either visit https://www.facebook.com/standrewtorquay/?locale=en_GB or telephone

*Robert Skrivanos on **07971 316416**.*

For services in Plymouth visit plymchurch.com

Ministry of the Laity

by Fr N. Afanassieff

Part 1: The People of God

Today the doctrine of the laity occupies a central position in theology. This may represent an attempt to appreciate the role of the laity after centuries of passivity in the Catholic Church and (to a certain extent) in the Orthodox Church. The problem of the laity has now been raised, and this fact alone is of value, because it shows a change of mind within ecclesiastical thought; at the same time it may be regarded as "a sign of the times." The laity are regarded as a special state within the Church, differing almost ontologically from the "clergy," and having definite duties and (more rarely) rights and its own activities, all of which have undergone considerable changes during the course of history.

In the Early Church

It is hardly surprising that the question of the laity never arose in the Early Church. In accordance with the ecclesiological consciousness of the time, the Church (being one body) always acted as a whole; any action taken by part of its members involved the action of the whole Church, and any action undertaken by the Church was undertaken by all its members. To use contemporary terms, which were coined at an early date, action undertaken by the laity was also action undertaken by the hierarchy of the Church; and action undertaken by the latter was also action undertaken by the laity. They could not act independently, because neither of them constitutes the Church when separated from the other.

In the writings of the Apostles we only find the word "laos" = the people of God, which included all the members of the Church whatever their position. That does not mean that at the time of the apostles (and in the periods which followed) all the members of the Church formed a sort of amorphous mass in which there were no distinctions. Ever since the time of the Apostles there has been a differentiation between the members of the Church based on the diversity of the ministries accomplished by the members of the Church. In other words, the differentiation was functional, not ontological.

A Permanent Ministry

Life in the Church, to which every Christian is called, is a permanent ministry, in which the Christian serves God through the Church, and serves the Church itself. "For the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many," (Mark 10:45; cf. Matt. 20:28.) This was the new principle, hitherto unknown to human society, which was the basis of the Church's life. In the Church, life and ministry are one and the same, because in the Church the Holy Spirit, by which and in which the Church lives, forms the principle of activity. Where the Spirit is, there is life also, and hence action and ministry. The whole of St. Paul's doctrine about "the work of the ministry" is based on the words of Christ quoted above. The work of ministry is incumbent upon all the members of the Church, but they do not all minister in the same way; they render service in accordance with the gifts they have received (1. Cor. 12:4-6).

The facts given in the New Testament writings, especially in the Epistles of St. Paul, enable us to distinguish between two kinds of ministry within the Church: one accomplished by the whole people; the other accomplished by certain persons who were specially called. Owing to this, a difference developed between the members who exercised a special ministry and those who exercised the general ministry. In the course of the historical process, this fundamental division between the members of the Church has led to the formation of two groups: the laity and the ecclesiastical hierarchy. This differentiation is based on the diversity between the forms of ministry; it does not mean that some members had ministries and others had not. But during the course of history in the Western Church, and to some extent in the Eastern Church also, the laity were deprived of their ministry; the fact that there can be no inactive members in the Church was forgotten.

The ministry of the laity is the manifestation of the ministry of the whole people of God. The laity serve in the Church when the whole of God's people serves. Hence in the Church nothing is done without the people, for the Church is the people of God gathered together "in Christ." The laity, as members of God's people, take part in everything that happens in the Church, but they do so in accordance with the ministry to which God's people is called.

[To be continued in February issue.]

Abridged from Fr N Afanassieff Ministry of the Laity Posted on 18-1-2011 at [All Saints of Alaska Orthodox Church](http://www.pravmir.com/ministry-of-the-laity/)
For the full text go to <https://www.pravmir.com/ministry-of-the-laity/>

Parish of The Holy Prophet Elias in Devon, Deanery of Great Britain and Ireland, Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople. Archdiocese of Thyateira: Archbishop HE Nikitas.
Rector: Fr Patrick Hodson. Archpriests (retired) Fr John Marks, Fr Nicanor Wilkins
Serving Priest: Fr Brandon Gallaher B.Gallaher@exeter.ac.uk 07837 983433
Parish Secretary: Ed Skidelsky hpeliasdevon@gmail.com
Parish Warden: Philip Scorer philip.scorer@gmail.com 07812 170139

This Month We Celebrate

On Monday 1st: **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 Tuesday 2nd: **Saint Sylvester** of Rome (335)

Saint Seraphim Wonderworker of Sarov (1833)

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

On Wednesday 3rd: **Saint Genevieve** of Paris (5th C)

On Thursday 4th: **Saint Nikiphoros** the Leper (1964)

On Saturday 6th: **THE THEOPHANY OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST**

On Sunday 7th: Synaxis of the **Holy, Glorious Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John**

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

On Tuesday 9th: **Hieromartyr Philip**, Metropolitan of Moscow (1569)

On Wednesday 10th: **Saint Gregory of Nyssa** (395) and his wife **Saint Theosevia the Deaconess** (385)

Saint Theophan the Recluse (1894)

On Thursday 11th: **Saint Theodosios the Great** (529)

On Friday 12th: **Saint Tatiana of Rome** (c230)

On Saturday 13th: **Saint Hilary of Poitiers** (367)

Saint Just of Cornwall (6thC)

Saint Kentigern (Mungo), first bishop of Glasgow and Strathclyde (c612)

We wish **All in the Parish of Saint Bega, Saint Mungo and Saint Herbert** in Keswick
a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**

On Sunday 14th: **Saint Nina**, Equal to the Apostles and Enlightener of Georgia (c339)

Hieromartyr Platon of Tallinn (1919) and all the **New Martyrs of Estonia**

On Tuesday 16th: **Veneration of the Precious Chains of the Holy Apostle Peter**

Saint Fursey of Burgh Castle, Enlightener of East Anglia (650)

On Wednesday 17th: **Saint Anthony the Great** (356)

We wish **Eddie B** and **Tony R** a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**

We remember **Christa Antonina S.** May her Memory be Eternal.

On Thursday 18th: **Saint Athanasios the Great** (373) and **Saint Cyril** (444) Archbishops of Alexandria

On Friday 19th: **Saint Makarios the Great** of Egypt (391)

Saint Breward (Branwalader) of Cornwall and the Channel Islands (6thC)

On Sunday 21st: **Saint Maximus the Confessor** (662)

Virgin Martyr Agnes of Rome (c304)

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

On Wednesday 24th: **Saint Ksenia of St Petersburg** (1803)

We wish **Shusha S** and **Xenia C** a **Happy Feast** and **Many Years!**

On Thursday 25th: **Saint Gregory the Theologian**, Archbishop of Constantinople (389)

On Saturday 27th: Translation of the Relics of **Saint John Chrysostom** (438)

On Sunday 28th: **Saint Ephraim the Syrian** (373)

Saint Isaac of Nineveh (7th C)

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

On Monday 29th: **Saint Gildas the Wise** (Llanilltud, Wales c570) Historian of Britain

On Tuesday 30th: Synaxis of the Ecumenical Teachers and Great Hierarchs

Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom

On Wednesday 31st: Wonderworkers and Unmercenary Healers **Cyrus** and **John** (311)

*Contributions for the February issue should reach the Editors at martinolsson827@btinternet.com
or by post at **Little Linhay, Bondleigh, EX20 2AJ** by **Sunday 21st January**, please.*

*Any opinions expressed in this newsletter are entirely those of the named authors or identified sources
and should not be taken as representing the views of the parish as a whole.*

The following appeal appears on the website of [International Orthodox Christian Charities \(IOCC\)](#). Note that IOCC provides assistance without taking sides in the conflicts that generate humanitarian crises around the planet. Note also that IOCC partners with the local Orthodox Church, (the Patriarchate of Jerusalem) while providing care equally to Palestinian Muslims and Christians. The IOCC also carries out relief work in Ukraine.



UPDATE: CONFLICT IN GAZA

Responding to Urgent Needs

Since 1997, the largest, most impactful of IOCC's activities in the Holy Land have taken place in Gaza. Our long presence in Gaza has fostered deep relationships and effective humanitarian partnerships, so IOCC can deliver aid expediently when new needs arise.

Since conflict began in October 2023, IOCC has remained in close communication with partners and staff on the ground, including our Church partner in Gaza. As the situation changes and develops, IOCC teams across the Middle East are working closely with our US-based team to determine the most urgent needs and to find ways we can best assist. IOCC remains committed to ongoing service in the Holy Land and has already provided the following aid in response to the current humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza.



EMERGENCY FOOD, WATER, AND SUPPLIES

To assist displaced people, including hundreds sheltering in church buildings, IOCC has provided emergency food and water, and hygiene items. Hot daily meals for displaced people provide additional nourishment amid tremendous hardship, while plastic sheeting covers windows and helps insulate damaged buildings against the weather.



HELP FOR INFANTS AND CHILDREN

To ensure that infants and youngsters have more of the food they need even amid great chaos, IOCC has provided baby formula and potable water to families affected by this conflict. Parents and caregivers have received diapers to help keep their little ones clean and healthy.



MEDICAL SUPPORT

IOCC is working to provide medicine to displaced people with chronic conditions, helping the elderly and ill manage their health amid upheaval. Medication for asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart conditions are among the supplies delivered. The impacts of this conflict will be deeply felt and long-lasting. Long-term needs will include rebuilding and providing emotional and spiritual care. IOCC remains committed to humanitarian work in the Holy Land, to our staff there, and especially to the thousands of people already helped by IOCC's long-term work in the region. To support this work with a gift, click below:

[Holy Land: Your Help Urgently Needed](#)



The donation form will ask for an amount in dollars - £1 currently = around \$1.25. It will also ask for your State: 'None' is an option at the bottom of the drop-down list.

M O

**The grace of God comes swiftly to the soul
when endurance is no longer possible.**

Saint Dorotheus of Gaza (c505 – c565)