Prophet Elias Quarterly

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

October-November-December 2026



END OF AN ERA IN NORTH DEVON

It is with a heavy heart that we report the imminent closure of the House Church of **The Righteous Elder Simeon and the Prophetess Anna in Combe Martin.** Situated in a purpose-built extension to the home of Fr John and Dawn Marks in Shute Lane, its closure has been necessitated by the need for their daughter Naomi and her family to be on hand to help Dawn support Fr John in his declining health. Within the next few months, they will be moving there from their present home in Barnstaple; meanwhile, the final Liturgy will be celebrated on **Saturday 3 October**.

Fr John Marks, his wife Dawn and their daughter Naomi who had been attending the church in Willand were received by Fr Barnabas in 1971. The church in Combe Martin began its life in 1972 in a curtained off portion of a room in the Marks' house big enough for about five regular attendees. The dedication of the chapel took place in February 1972. Fr Nicholas Behr would travel from Bristol to celebrate Saturday Liturgies in Combe Martin both in the chapel and in Combe Martin parish church.



Deacon Peter and Father John
Easter 1982

Following Fr John's ordination to the priesthood by Metropolitan Anthony in Willand in 1974, an extension was built onto the Marks' house and one of the new rooms became a dedicated church, with a vigil and liturgy celebrated most weekends for many years by Fr John with Deacon Peter (ordained Deacon in 1973 and Priest in 2020). Parishioners travelled from near and far and were provided with refreshments after the liturgy in the main portion of the house.

In 1986, Fr John, assisted by Fr Nicanor (ordained Deacon in 1968 and Priest in 1993) and Deacon Peter, was given charge of the Exeter congregation in addition to his house church in Combe Martin.

Services were reduced to every other weekend in Combe Martin. In more recent years, as the number of people attending in Exeter increased, the parish's principal focus was on providing services for the Exeter area. At the same time, owing to Fr John's declining health and the loss of several members of the North Devon congregation, the Liturgy has been celebrated only occasionally in Combe Martin.

The needs of Orthodox Christians in and around North Devon will however not be forgotten, although as yet no concrete plans have been made to cater for them, and the contents of the church will be carefully stored for future use elsewhere.

We wish to convey our love and gratitude to Fr John and Dawn who opened up their home and welcomed so many parishioners, friends and visitors over the last five decades.



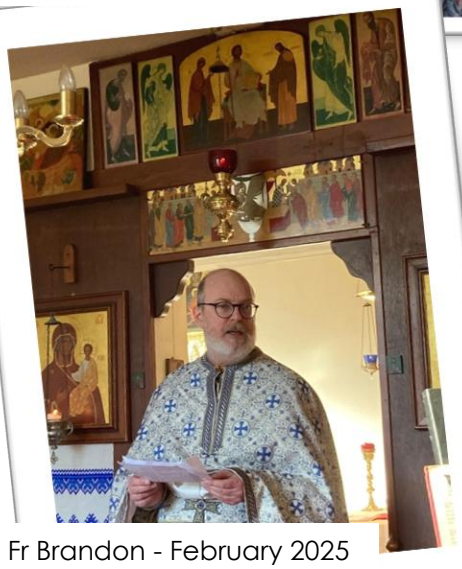
Fr Peter - one week after his ordination to the priesthood February 2020



EASTERN VISITOR. Metropolitan Anthony Bloom, Russian Orthodox Church, conducted an Orthodox L in Combe Martin Parish Church on Saturday. He was g by the rector, the Rev. F. A. Lovell.



Fr Trayan – January 2026



Fr Brandon - February 2025

Chapel has its first wedding

THE private chapel of the Orthodox Church of St. Simon and St. Anna at Combe Martin has had its first wedding.

The bridegroom was Mr. Vasily Frank, a journalist from Munich. He married Miss Suzanne Kilner, a graduate in Russian language and literature of London University.

Mr. Frank is the son of Mrs. Tatiana Frank, of Coningham Road, London, and Miss Kilner is the elder daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John Kilner, of Strouden Avenue, Bournemouth.

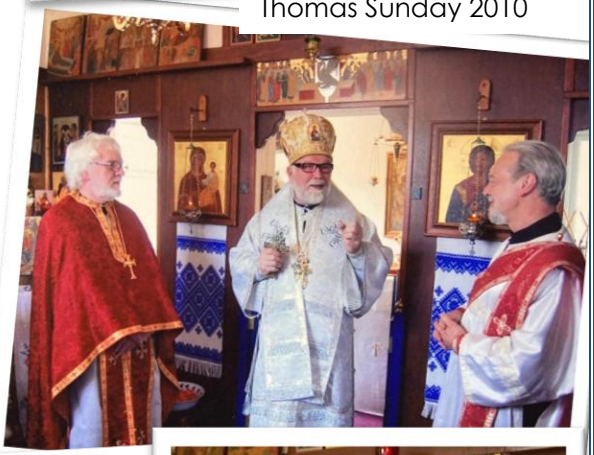
The Orthodox priest, Father [illegible]



—Photo by Sharp's Studios, Combe Martin.



Archbishop Gabriel Thomas Sunday 2010





Easter 1982 – Fr John and Deacon Nicanor



Metropolitan Kallistos – November 1982



Deacon Philip February 2025

In an email to PAC members Naomi wrote of her "*huge sadness" at this turn of events -- "all my grandparents and many loved ones have rested in the church, with many weddings and baptisms – so many memories.*"

Parish Life

BAPTISM OF BEAU GABRIEL

We would like to welcome **Beau Gabriel** into the Church. He was baptised on Saturday 13th September 2026, before the Vespers of the Exaltation of the Cross.



He has taken as his patron saint,

St Gabriel of Georgia.

A 20th-century Orthodox Monk, venerated for his dedicated monastic life and piety with many miracles attributed to him. Tortured by the Soviets, on his release took up his cross and became a Fool for Christ, reposing in 1995. His feast Day is celebrated on 2nd November.

Douglas Alexander stood as his sponsor.





We wish him MANY YEARS

Your prayers are asked for Melanie Cowpland, a regular worshipper at St Anne's a few years ago until her move to Plymouth, who is to enter the community at Tolleshunt Knights in Essex.

The Orthodox Camp in Dartmoor - by Fr Trayan

Or How God Gathered a Few Orthodox Christians, a Crate of Icons, and More

There are places where one goes to rest.

There are places where one goes to pray.

And then there are places where one goes for a **spiritual retreat** and comes home smelling of wood smoke, slightly sleep-deprived, with mud on one's shoes, and with serious unresolved questions about which Orthodox brother is capable of snoring loudly enough to be heard through two layers of tent fabric and across twenty metres of meadow.



Our place was Dartmoor. More precisely, it was a deep, beautifully cut valley somewhere in the hills of south-west England, with a little brook running along the bottom.

It was very sparsely populated, with narrow roads on which driving faster than about twenty miles an hour would have been an act of optimism. Whenever a car came towards you, both drivers had to start looking for one of those mysterious wider patches of road where, by the grace of God, two vehicles might actually pass one another.

The organisers gave a rather grand title: **DARTMOOR HOLY BROOK RETREAT**. The name sounded impressive. It sounded like the sort of place where a person might expect to encounter God. Nobody had mentioned the wind. Or the rain.

The retreat had been organised by Iwan the Belgian, our singer, and Douglas from the Exeter parish. The idea was simple and, in its own way, rather beautiful: Orthodox Christians from the two parishes would spend two nights and nearly three days together in prayer, fellowship, food and the great English spiritual discipline of trying to stay dry.

It was the August Bank Holiday weekend. After Sunday Liturgy, everyone set off separately by car. From Torquay it was roughly twenty-four miles — about fifty minutes by road, assuming the road was willing to co-operate. There were no motorways. There was Dartmoor. And there were the roads.

The English Summer

By the time I arrived, some people were already there. Iwan and I sat down and drew up a rough timetable for the next couple of days. I say rough because this was an Orthodox retreat. We generally managed to follow the timetable, allowing for the usual Orthodox delay. Which, of course, is not really lateness. It is simply liturgical time.

As for the weather, I would rather not discuss it. I am not English.

We had enjoyed about two and a half months of glorious dry weather and sunshine, and naturally decided that this would be the ideal moment to go camping. So, naturally, we chose the most unstable weather imaginable.

Storms came and went in shifts.

As I drove towards Dartmoor, the windscreen wipers were working overtime.

I looked at the rain and thought:

Yes, of course. I am definitely not going to sleep in a tent in this. Absolutely. I had already decided that I would sleep in the car. Then, naturally, the rain stopped.

The Accommodation

Matthew had promised me a tent. The others had already begun setting themselves up. One couple had a van converted for sleeping. Another lady had brought what could only be described as a van chapel. Behind the front seats was a metal partition covered with icons, arranged almost like a little Orthodox chapel. At the very back she had made herself a bed. It was rather impressive.



The rest of us had tents.

Matthew immediately suggested that we open mine — a new tent he had recently bought. We opened it. Then we read the instructions. Because, after all, we are English. There is a certain dignity in refusing to assemble anything until one has first read the instructions. Eventually we worked out what went where and managed to put the tent up. It was a one-man tent.

Just as we finished, Iwan looked around and announced: "*I don't want anyone near me who snores.*"

It was an innocent remark; at the time. We moved my tent about twenty metres further down the field. I was also given an inflatable mattress. Proper priestly luxury.

In the middle of the meadow stood a large, fairly tall marquee. Underneath it was a long dining table with chairs.

At the side was a rough wooden shelter with no doors, but it had a sink, electricity and gas hobs.

Outside, nineteen-year-old William, the Hungarian, was keeping the campfire alive, chopping wood and generally doing the sort of things young men are useful for at camping trips.

Chloe and Mia moved between the cooking pot and the tent, helping with the meatless soup and offering Matthew and me advice on how the tent ought to be assembled. Whether all the advice was consistent? Of course. I had a proper tent.

A Chapel in the Meadow



Then Douglas arrived. He brought an entire crate of icons, crosses, candles, a vigil lamp. And of course, plenty of bottles of milk — he works in a dairy farm, and chilli. And he began turning the marquee into an Orthodox place of prayer or a chapel.

For an altar table, we adapted a large plastic drainage drum. It was not exactly Byzantine. But Orthodox ingenuity is a wonderful thing. If you have enough icons, candles and faith, almost anything can begin to look ecclesiastical.

The wind, however, was unimpressed. Keeping candles alight became an engineering discipline. One lit. The wind blew. It went out. We lit it again. The wind blew again. At some point you begin to understand why perseverance is considered a Christian virtue.

Around 6:30 we began Vespers for the **Feast of the Placing of the Precious Cincture of the Most Holy Theotokos**. The whole thing took place beneath the marquee, with the wind blowing around us and the candles fighting for their lives. I asked Michaela to help as reader and singer. But then Serena surprised me. She had remembered the melodies and parts sung by the church choir better than anyone. A few months earlier, when I had asked her to sing, she had modestly replied that she could not sing.



Clearly, one must be careful with the Orthodox definition of "I can't sing."
Sometimes it means: "I cannot sing loudly enough to be heard from the other side of the parish." But in Serena's case, she could. And she could sing very well. I realised that I had probably been overlooking a gift simply because the person who possessed it was too modest to display it.

Our Lord says: "**Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."** (Matt. 5:16)

And that evening, there really was light. The candles were flickering. The wind was trying to extinguish them. And somehow, despite everything, the Vespers was beautiful. A little church beneath a tent. Icons surrounded by Dartmoor hills. Prayers carried into the evening air.

———

After Vespers we put the food on the table. There was the meatless soup. But there were also chicken drumsticks. Because spiritual retreat or not, nobody had said that we were required to go to bed hungry. Did I write 'bed'? Ha ha. By the time we finished eating, it was dark. William revived the campfire and we gathered around it. The rain had stopped. The wind had not. We sat on the benches, talking and laughing. For a few hours, the ordinary world seemed very far away.

"Where Two or Three Are Gathered"

At around ten o'clock we went into the wooden shelter, where there was some light, and began reading the evening prayer rule. We took turns. Everyone read a prayer. Mia and William are not baptised, yet they told us that this was an extraordinary spiritual experience for them. And there was something deeply joyful about that. It is one thing to say your evening prayers alone. It is another thing to say them with a group of people. Twelve people, perhaps, all turning their hearts towards God together. Christ Himself gives us this promise: "*For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.*" (Matt. 18:20) That night we were certainly more than two or three. But the point was not the number. The point was that He was there.



After the prayers, we went back to the fire for a little while. We smoked ourselves gently over the flames. At the time I did not realise that the smell of the campfire would become one of the souvenirs of the retreat.

One by one, we eventually headed towards our tents and vans.

The Night of the Full Moon

I normally sleep like a rabbit. Very lightly. I am accustomed to complete silence. Dartmoor had other plans. First there was the rain. A light drizzle tapping against the tent. Then the wind. Sometimes it rose suddenly, making the tent swell. Then it fell away. Somewhere on the hills, the trees were constantly whistling.

At one point I began wondering whether I was hearing the wind or the brook. I had deliberately pitched my tent further away from the water, but apparently sound had not received the memo.

Oddly enough, I was neither wet nor cold. It was actually quite comfortable. I simply could not sleep. I felt as though I had drunk several energy drinks. So I lay there listening. One sound. Then another. Rain. Wind. Trees. The brook. The occasional movement from somewhere in the camp.

I found myself trying to identify every sound. Eventually, I must have fallen asleep. I woke up.

Ah. It must be nearly morning. I checked the time.

1:40 a.m. That was a disappointment.

My first call of nature got me out of the tent. And then I saw the moon. It was enormous. A full moon, very bright, like a lamp post with strong light above. The whole meadow was lit up so brightly that it looked almost as though dawn were about to break. Only the trees near the brook cast shadows, together with the marquee. Everything else was visible.

I was just about to get back into my tent when I noticed someone walking from the direction of the toilet. No torch. He entered the shadow of the marquee. A little later, the figure began walking in my direction. I decided not to say anything, lest I wake RR, whose tent was only five to ten metres away. I thought it was Iwan because the figure entered in his bright orange tent. I went back into mine. And once again, I could not sleep.

Then I heard it. Snoring. *No*. I listened again. Surely not. It was impossible to hear someone from that distance through two tent walls. Then:

Hrrrrrrrrrrrr.

Yes. Definitely snoring. I remembered Iwan's earlier announcement: "*I don't want anyone near me who snores.*"

His orange tent was quite away of me, so it must had been RR. He had started a chainsaw in his sleep? I started to worry about Iwan.



Eventually I fell asleep again. Then I woke up because of the light. Right. It must be after six now. My second call of nature was not negotiable. I got out of the tent. The same scene. The full moon had moved further west. I looked at my watch.

3:50 a.m.

Oh dear. Back into the tent. Another struggle to fall asleep. Another round of timber being sawn somewhere in the darkness. But at least it was no longer raining. There was only a light breeze, which briefly muffled the sound of the snoring.

Morning

I got up at about 6:50. The girls were already awake. As I passed RR's tent, I took out my phone. Some things need to be documented. This was one of them. The snoring was magnificent.

Someone struck the makeshift wooden clapper, rather like those used in monasteries, and gradually everyone began getting up. We gathered in the shelter and started discussing the night's sleep. On my personal Sleep Scale, I rated my night:

3 out of 10.

Nobody seemed to know how the ground had absorbed so much rain without turning the entire field into a swamp. Yet, remarkably, nobody's tent had leaked.

RR eventually admitted that quite a few people had already told him about his snoring. So the mystery was solved.

Mostly.

Iwan insisted that there was no way he could have been awake at 1:40 because he had been deeply asleep. Unless, he suggested, he had been sleepwalking.

And so another Dartmoor mystery entered the annals of Orthodox camp history:

Was I imagining things, or had Iwan been sleepwalking beneath the full moon?

We may never know.

Morning Prayer Under the Sun



Around 7:30–8:00 we moved the plastic drum altar outside the marquee. The sun had come out. Under its rays, we gathered again and said the morning prayers. Once more, we took turns, so that everyone read at least one prayer. There was something very simple and beautiful about it. No grand building. No elaborate arrangements. Just people standing together in the morning light, praying.

Breakfast was almost a collective operation. I positioned myself near the fire in the important role of **someone who gives advice**. It is a highly respected camping position. It requires almost no physical effort. The sausages, however, still had to be cooked. Only when I got home did I realise that I had been completely impregnated with the smell of smoke. Apparently one can wash one's clothes. But campfire smoke has its own theology.

The Valley of the Theotokos

After breakfast we celebrated the Matins for the Feast of the Placing of the Precious Cincture of the Mother of God. At the end, Matthew read about the meaning of the feast. I suggested that, if we organised another camp there, we should call the meadow:

"**The Cincture of the Theotokos**."

Michaela suggested something more poetic:

"**The Valley of the Theotokos**."

I agreed. And somehow the name fitted. A piece of Dartmoor which had previously been nothing more than a field had acquired a memory. And a name.

Back to Reality

I had to return to Torquay because I was due at work in the pizza shop. There is one thing I have never quite understood about the local mentality. Saturday. Sunday. Monday. Three days without going to work. Three days at home. And instead of cooking something delicious… They order **junk food**.

I have been delivering food for thirteen years and I still cannot understand this particular mystery of British civilisation. How can someone have three days off and still arrive at the conclusion that the best possible use of those three days is to order a pizza?

Anyway.

We were only four drivers. And we were absolutely hammered. By the time I was finally released at about 9:30 p.m., I felt as though I could fall asleep at the wheel.

Meanwhile, back in the Valley of the Mother of God, the others already had a plan for the day. We had prepared it the previous day.



At one point they went up to the top of one of the hills ('tor' in local dialect). I received a video. Fr Brandon from Exeter was also on the tor. They were being battered by the wind. They were carrying icons. Later I learned that they had read the Akathist to Our Most Holy Lady the Theotokos. So while I was driving around delivering junk food, they were standing on a tor with icons and praying.

Different kinds of nourishment.

Before I left, I had promised them: "I'll be back in the morning." I had said that we would celebrate the Matins for the beginning of the Church New Year.

After finishing work, I was exhausted. But a promise is a promise. And some promises are made not only to people.

1 September

At 5:40 in the morning, my friend the prostate woke me up. This particular friend has never been especially diplomatic. I lay there for a moment thinking:

Should I stay in bed?

Should I get up?

Can I really get up?

Would it be wiser to sleep for another hour?

Eventually, the second option won. I got dressed, got into the car and headed back to the Valley of the Theotokos.

At 7:00 a.m. I was there.

On the narrow road, during the final 2.3 miles, I met Nadia, Lyubo and their children. Lyubo was rushing off to work. Life was already returning to normal, according to the secular understanding of normality.

On the meadow, only the heroes remained. Iwan. Douglas. William.

And Matthew from Plymouth with his two children. Unfortunately for Matthew, his three-year-old daughter had been sick until about two in the morning. He was getting them ready to leave, so he could not stay.

And so there were four of us. Four people. One meadow. One new Church year.

A New Beginning



The four of us celebrated the Matins for the beginning of the Church New Year and commemorated the saints of the day. At the end, we read their lives. And somehow, as we stood there, the whole retreat seemed to come together.

The tents. The rain. The wind. The full moon. The snoring. The campfire. The plastic drum. The icons. The children. The people who were not yet baptised but had joined us in prayer. Those who had climbed the hills carrying icons. Those who had gone home to work.

All those seemingly ordinary moments had somehow become one thing. A memory. A blessing. A small piece of Church life lived outside the church building.

The men began packing everything away. The tables. The equipment. The icons. The candles. Gradually the meadow returned to what it had been before. Just the marquee in the middle of the meadow. Just Dartmoor. Just a little brook running through a valley. But it was no longer the same place to us. Because places where people have prayed become part of the people who prayed there.

What We Took Home

When we began the retreat, I do not think any of us knew exactly what it would become. There was no luxury. There was no perfect weather. There was no guarantee that we would sleep. But there were people. There was prayer. There were icons. There was food. There was fire. There was wind. There was laughter. There was tiredness.



And there was God.

Christ did not say: "*Where there is a magnificent church, excellent weather and perfect organisation, I will be there.*"

He said: "*For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.*"

And we were sometimes thirteen. Sometimes four. Sometimes two people sitting around a fire. But we were not alone.

Perhaps that was the real retreat. Not the tents. Not the walks. It was the attempt to remember what it means to be together. To pray together. To eat together. To carry icons up a hill. To protect a candle from the wind. To help someone put up a tent. To discover another person's hidden gift. To give room to someone who is still searching. To keep a promise when you are exhausted. And sometimes simply to sit around a fire and talk.

There are things that cannot be learnt from books. They have to be lived.

We are often waiting for better conditions before we do something good. A bigger church. A better choir. More people. More time. Better weather. More money. More equipment.

And sometimes God simply says: **"Give Me what you have."**

And a meadow becomes a place of prayer. A plastic drainage drum becomes an altar table. A marquee becomes a church beneath the sky. A group of people becomes a community. A weekend becomes a memory. And a memory becomes thanksgiving.

As the Psalmist says: "*Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; They will still be praising You.*" (Ps. 83:5)

And perhaps one day, when we drive down those narrow Dartmoor roads again, we will see the same valley. The same stream. The same hills. The same trees. But for us it will no longer be merely another field somewhere in Dartmoor. It will be the **Valley of the Theotokos**. The place where, for a few days, we left behind the noise of ordinary life, no phone signal so that we could hear the silence a little more clearly. And in that silence — prayer. And in that prayer — God.

If it is according to God's will, and if the Most Holy Theotokos helps us, there will be other camps.

Perhaps it will rain again. Perhaps the wind will return. Perhaps we will once again have to read the instructions before putting up a tent. Perhaps someone will snore. Perhaps someone will walk through the meadow at 1:40 in the morning under a full moon. But there will be prayer. There will be icons. There will be people.

And there will be that unseen Presence for whose sake it is all worth setting out.

Amen.





Help for Fr Daniel in Uganda

Each year, around the time of our AGM, we send two separate contributions to Saint Cyprian's Parish – one of £750 from our parish funds to Saint Cyprian's Parish Council, and one made up of parishioners' personal contributions which goes direct to Fr Daniel. This is because under Charity Law our Parish, as a charity, can only send money from its own funds to another charitable body, and not to an individual, while personal contributions may be used as we see fit.

The money we send to the Parish Council is used for church building and maintenance and for parish expenses, but does not include support for Fr Daniel himself – this is met from our personal contributions. And increasingly, Fr Daniel needs our support. He receives only a pittance from the Uganda Archdiocese,* and he has recently taken on responsibility for a neighbouring parish at Vvumba (Saint Catherine's). This means not only that he has extra expenses, but he also has less time available to work on his land to provide his family with food.

For whatever reason, the money from the collection box in Saint Anne's is so far well down on previous years, so I am appealing now for your help – either via the collection box, or using the QR code here.

With heartfelt thanks on Fr Daniel's behalf.

Martin Olsson

** The inability of the Patriarchate of Alexandria to provide realistic salaries for its priests is one of the reasons so many of the younger priests in Uganda (and elsewhere in Africa) have succumbed to the temptation to transfer their allegiance to the Moscow Patriarchate, who have the resources to pay them $200/month. This places yet more strain on the older priests, those who like Fr Daniel were ordained by Archbishop Christopher (Reuben) Spartas, the founder of East African Orthodoxy, and are determined to remain faithful to his vision.*



We also take payment by mobile phone! The QR codes are all easy to find in the church on the candle desk and collection basket.



A PILGRIMAGE WITH A DIFFERENCE

A few of us, four in all, decided to make a pilgrimage to Chittlehampton on the Feast Day of St Urith, to venerate this once very popular Devon saint.

It was 8 July, the Feast Day of St Urith. We had arranged for Chittlehampton Church to be open at 7.00 pm. Doug and I set off at 5.30, first to Exeter to pick up anyone wanting to go, two turned up, Francis, and James from St Pancras. We drove back home, dropping off the second redundant car (or so we thought), and set out.



We found the church in the main square of Chittlehampton, with one of the largest towers in Devon, built with gifts of those making pilgrimages over the years to venerate St Urith.



Inside the church, on the north side of the altar, is a tomb for St Urith and there we held prayers. Believed to be one of the few early English saints whose relics were not destroyed by the Reformation.

Afterwards, we walked to the holy well to take of the waters. However, North Devon Water Board had other ideas about making this an easy feat, having in the 1950's destroyed the structure over the well on grounds of safety and covered the area with concrete and a manhole cover. This was later replaced in 2013 by the Parish Council with a glass dome, which can be lifted to view and gain access to the water.

Of course, after taking the waters, this called for a meal at the local pub opposite, eventually leaving to return home around 9.30 pm. All was going well until 9.45 pm, when we started to hear strange noises going around corners. Dismissing it at first, the noise gradually increased until it couldn't be ignored any longer and we pulled over into a lay-by. Getting out of the car we beheld the back wheel, tilted at a dangerous angle. Realising we could go no further, our fun began. First calling the RAC, of course, no human voice was to be had, just forms to fill in on the phone to get assistance. An hour later they got back to us with another form to fill out before they would pass our request onto a person with an estimated time of recovery around 4.30 am. We decided to give up on this and try my breakdown cover, a much better idea, and we actually spoke to an actual person!! They even offered to pick us up by taxi in order to spare us the wait for a pick-up truck. Good idea, or so you would think and so we thought. However, this was a bad call because they couldn't get a taxi and the breakdown truck turned up first. Not a problem you would think, only the breakdown truck had been informed that they were only picking up a car, because their non-existent taxi would pick us up. So, with two seats in the breakdown trucks cab, two were left on the road, in the dark, in the middle of the misty night, with a blanket each and prayer. Doug and I returned home and he became the taxi to pick up the stranded and drive to Exeter. Where in the empty city streets an urban fox carrying a dead seagull, a badger, and a hedgehog crossing the road (requiring a hard stop, and verbal assistance) was witnessed. A pilgrimage not to be forgotten, our patience tested and peace retained, especially by those left behind! … We shall return next year.



St Urith lived in the 6th century. She was born in East Stowford, near Barnstaple. She was baptised into Christianity and consecrated to God in holy virginity by St Kea and left her home to found a hermitage at Chittlehampton, where she also constructed a church, living in solitary prayer and ascetic disciplines. Blamed for a severe drought, she was killed at the behest of her pagan stepmother by some female haymakers with a scythe. Where her head fell, a spring of purest water gushed forth and scarlet pimpernels bloomed. She was buried in the church she founded. So great was her reputation for miracles, especially for eye diseases, that the offerings provided to the vicar were three times his usual income.

Elizabeth Axon.

Monastic tradition and Orthodox theology today:

Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies, Cambridge, 3-5 December 2026

3-4 December will be full days of talks and discussion, with a full day visit to the Monastery of St John the Baptist, Tolleshunt Knights, Essex, on Saturday 5 December.

This is not an academic conference. It is intended for anyone who wants to explore Orthodox faith and tradition in greater depth, as well as people taking the IOCS Certificate in Orthodox Christian Studies.

This year's Winter School will uncover the roots of theology in holy people's experience of God through the ages. It will look at profound and sometimes unexpected ways in which the monastic tradition and theologians formed by it lead us to rediscover 'theology as a liturgy of the Church' (Archimandrite Vasileios of Iviron), expressed alike in Christian teaching and in all facets of life.

It will explore how monastic experience informs, perhaps transforms, our understanding of Scripture and of the human being; how it underpins pastoral service to 'the world'; and its powerful witness to contemporary spiritual seekers hungry for the sacred.

Speakers to include:

- Archbishop Angaelos, Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London;
- iconographer Aidan Hart;
- Archimandrite Antonios Kakalis, Senior Lecturer in Architecture, Newcastle University;
- Kyriacos Markides, author of *Mountain of Silence;*
- Hieromonk Nikolai (Sakharov) of the Monastery of St John the Baptist, Essex, great-nephew of St Sophrony;
- Mother Sarah of the Parish of St John of Kronstadt, Bath

For further details, see https://www.iocs.cam.ac.uk/save-the-dates-iocs-winter-school-2026-monastic-tradition-and-orthodox-theology-today-3-5-dec-2026/

To receive more information as it becomes available, you can sign up at https://www.iocs.cam.ac.uk for the 'What's On' fortnightly newsletter.

Elizabeth Theokritoff

Our 'Purist' Dreams

The March edition of La Lettre du Vicariat, the newsletter of the French equivalent of our Deanery, drew attention to a recently published volume of ***Fr Alexander Schmemann's*** *correspondence (in French) with Irene Rovere – 'a young woman on a spiritual quest' (Une Lumiere Sur Ma Route, YMCA-Press, 2026). In this extract from a letter of 1952, Fr Alexander is responding to Irene's complaint that churches were empty in the weeks following Easter, showing that most of the people who filled them during Holy Week and Pascha were simply looking for an emotional 'hit'.*

On the Day of Judgment we will be very surprised to see what a multitude of simple, joyful, normal people, who have lived imperceptibly in the Church, will enter into Life before the professional Christians, those who have always judged, but have never loved. Be careful: Christianity can easily satisfy a certain turn of mind, a certain taste for pathos, a certain romanticism of the heart, and it is very easy to mistake this enthusiasm for true faith. But the only true faith expresses itself in life, and its only true expression is love. It is in love that His disciples can be recognised, and it is in them that He will triumph. I sometimes imagine a culmination of our "purist" dreams: a pure church, a pure liturgy, true icons, an orgy of purism, where everything would finally be full of meaning, classical, simple, true. Everyone takes communion, etc. And now we make a terrible discovery: all this has been done for the love of "purism", for a perfectionist mindset, and everything has been empty of love. With what shame shall we return to our poor churches which we see as being deformed by so many superstitions, paganism, bad taste, by being "human, all too human." We will learn on that day that we have been the worst of sectarians, for "purism" will have been more important to us than those for whom Christ died.

Trans. MO

Additional note: 'The purpose of God in creation was, and is, to fashion a fellowship of free spirits knit together by a love in all its members which answers to the manifested love of God – or, as St Paul expresses it, to "sum up all things in Christ"' (Eph. 1.23) (William Temple, Readings in St John's Gospel p 319).

If you would like to contribute something to the next newsletter, please either send it to **Hugh Allen** by email to hughallen188@gmail.com or give it to him in person.

The Newsletter is published **quarterly**.

Contributions for the next edition (January-February-March 2027) must reach Hugh by **30th November 2026**.

SAVE THE DATE! Deanery Conference-Festival, 28-31 May 2027

Next year's Conference-Festival, the annual gathering of all parishes in our Deanery, will be held at Highgate House, Creaton, Northants. Especially for those new to the parish or indeed to the Orthodox Church, this is a rare opportunity to encounter the wider Church as a body, uniting us across space and time. Meeting many other members of the Deanery is a chance to enter more deeply into the Church's tradition the old-fashioned way, through getting to know people who have been shaped by it. And in many cases, by some of the great spiritual figures of twentieth century Orthodoxy, whose vision has shaped English-speaking Orthodoxy in this country.

Theme and speakers for 2027 are still under discussion (conference participants are invited to join an on-line group to help plan the following year's event). Recent themes have included 'Orthodox Christianity in Everyday Life'; 'Our encounter with God in Orthodox Life and Worship'; 'Living and bearing witness in Britain today'; 'Saints and Teachers of our day, and their message for us'; 'How to be the Church'; 'One in Jesus Christ: faithfulness in a world of conflicting identities'; 'Preaching the Gospel to all creation: vocation & witness at a time of ecological crisis'; 'My peace I give unto you'...
See further https://jp-deanery-thyateira.web.app/the-conference

Our annual gathering continues the Diocesan Conference instituted by Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh in 1975. And that in turn has roots in a conversation among Orthodox attending a conference of the Fellowship of St Alban and St Sergius – Bishop Kallistos, Fr Peter and Fr Patrick Hodson among them – who started to ask themselves why it was only at ecumenical meetings that Orthodox from different parishes ever got to meet each other. But conferences of this sort have a longer history in the Russian emigration of the twentieth century, responding to the needs of a community suddenly removed from an environment where their faith was embedded in the culture. Such gatherings speak of a desire among Orthodox Christians in all walks of life to take responsibility for exploring and understanding their own church tradition, and equip themselves to give an account of their faith.

This is the first time the Deanery Conference will be held at this fine 17th century manor house (https://www.cct.org.uk/highgate-house/highgate-house-conference-centre; https://www.cct.org.uk/about-us/latest-news/post/330-the-history-of-highgate-house). Beyond the handsome surroundings, it brings the advantage that we shall be the only group in residence, giving more flexibility in numbers and restoring something of the sense of a family gathering that has been hard to maintain at larger venues.

Just 3 miles down the road from Highgate House is a large and impressive Saxon church (https://www.friendsofbrixworthchurch.org.uk/the-church/). It is dedicated to All Saints, but at one time, it seems, was an important shrine of that most illustrious of Devonian saints, St Boniface. It is hoped that a pilgrimage to this church will feature in the programme, either during the weekend or as we leave.

If you have never been to the Conference before – why not try it next year?

Elizabeth Theokritoff

ORTHODOX PARISH OF THE HOLY PROPHET ELIAS DEVON

SERVICES IN OCTOBER 2026

Thursday	1	*The Protection of our Most Holy Lady, the Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary*	NO SERVICE
Saturday	3	**Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom in Combe Martin**	10.30 am
Sunday	**4**	Typika	11.00 am
Saturday	10	Vespers	6.00 pm
Sunday	**11**	Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom	10.30 am
Saturday	17	Vespers	6.00 pm
Sunday	**18**	Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom	10.30 am
Saturday	24	Vespers	6.00 pm
Sunday	**25**	Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom	10.30 am
Saturday	31	Vespers	6.00 pm

SERVICES IN NOVEMBER 2026

Sunday	**1**	Typika	11.00 am
Saturday	7	Vespers	6.00 pm
Sunday	**8**	Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom	10.30 am
Saturday	14	Vespers	6.00 pm
Sunday	**15**	Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom	10.30 am
Saturday	21	**PRESENTATION OF THE MOTHER OF GOD INTO THE TEMPLE**	
		Vespers	6.00 pm
Sunday	**22**	Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom	10.30 am
Saturday	28	Vespers	6.00 pm
Sunday	**29**	Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom	10.30 am
		Followed by Bring & Share Meal and Parish AGM	

NB: *All services are in St Anne's Chapel, Exeter, unless otherwise indicated*

SERVICES IN DECEMBER 2026

Saturday	5	Vespers	6.00 pm
Sunday	**6**	Typika	11.00 am
Wednesday	9	*Conception of the Most Holy Mother of God by the Righteous Anna*	NO SERVICE
Saturday	12	Vespers	6.00 pm
Sunday	**13**	Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom	10.30 am
Saturday	19	Vespers	6.00 pm
Sunday	**20**	Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom	10.30 am
Thursday	24	*Eve of the Nativity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* Vespers	6.00 pm
Friday	25	**NATIVITY OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST** Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom	10.30 am
Saturday	26	*Synaxis of the Most Holy Mother of God*	NO SERVICE
Sunday	**27**		NO SERVICE

NB: *All services are in St Anne's Chapel, Exeter, unless otherwise indicated*

Please note the start time for the Typika is 11am rather than 10.30am

Sunday morning services are followed by light refreshments in St James' Church Hall or by a Bring & Share Meal

October

We celebrate…

2 October Hieromartyr Cyprian and Virgin Martyr Justina of Nicomedia (c250)
We wish Father Daniel and all in the Parish of Saint Cyprian in Uganda a Happy Feast and Many Years!

3 October Hieromartyr Dionysios the Areopagite, Bishop of Athens (96)
We wish Dionisius A a Happy Feast and Many Years!

6 October Holy Apostle Thomas (1stC)
We wish Thomas S a Happy Feast and Many Years!

18 October Holy Apostle and Evangelist Luke (1stC)
We wish Luke K a Happy Feast and Many Years!
We remember Luke D. May his Memory be Eternal!

19 October Translation of the relics of Saint John of Rila (Rilski) Patron Saint of Bulgaria (1238)
We wish Father Trayan and all our Bulgarian friends a Happy Feast and Many Years!

23 October Holy Apostle James the Lord's Brother (1stC)
We wish James T a Happy Feast and Many Years!

26 October Glorious Great Martyr Dimitrios of Thessaloniki (c306)
We wish Father Gregory Palamas, Presbytera Elizabeth and all members of the Parish of Saint Dimitrios and Saint Nikitas in Plymouth a Happy Feast and Many Years!

29 October Martyr Anastasia of Rome (3rdC)
We wish Anastasia T a Happy Feast and Many Years!

November

We celebrate…

1 November Righteous Deborah the Prophetess and Judge
We wish Debra B a Happy Feast and Many Years!

2 November Saint Gabriel of Georgia, Confessor and Fool for Christ (1995)
We Wish Beau Gabriel and McKenzie Gabriel a Happy Feast and Many Years!

8 November Synaxis of the Archangels Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Salathiel, Jegudiel, Barachiel and Jeremiel
We wish Michail C and Mike L a Happy Feast and Many Years!

10 November Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian (1924)
We wish Charlie Arsenios a Happy Feast and Many Years!

11 November Saint Martin the Merciful, Bishop of Tours (397)
We wish Martin M and Martin O a Happy Feast and Many Years!

13 November Saint John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople (407)
We wish William O a Happy Feast and Many Years!

14 November Holy Apostle Philip (1stC)
Saint Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessaloniki (1359)
We wish Deacon Philip a Happy Feast and Many Years!
We wish Father Gregory Palamas a Happy Feast and Many Years!

16 November Holy Apostle and Evangelist Matthew (1stC)
We wish Hugh A a Happy Feast and Many Years!

22 November Martyrs Cecilia, Valerian, Tiburtius and Maximus, at Rome (c230)
We wish Celia O a Happy Feast and Many Years!

24 November Great Martyr Catherine of Alexandria (c310) (Russian use – Greek use 25th)
We wish Catherine L a Happy Feast and Many Years!

30 November Holy Apostle Andrew the First-Called (1stC)
We wish Andreas A a Happy Feast and Many Years!

December

We celebrate…

04 December Great Martyr Barbara and Martyr Juliana (c306)
We wish Varvara K a Happy Feast and Many Years!

09 December Prophetess Hannah the mother of the Prophet Samuel
We wish Anna C a Happy Feast and Many Years!

13 December Sunday of the Holy Forefathers
We wish Mother Sarah, Naomi S and Sally L a Happy Feast and Many Years!

17 December Prophet Daniel and the Three Holy Children (c600BC)
We wish Fr Daniel Kaddu in Uganda, Daniel L and Daniel W a Happy Feast and Many Years!

20 December We celebrate All the Righteous who pleased God, from Adam down to Joseph the Betrothed of the Mother of God.
We wish Adam R a Happy Feast and Many Years!

25 December The Adoration of the Magi, Melchior, Caspar and Balthazar
Commemoration of the Shepherds in Bethlehem who went to see the Lord.
We wish Christos P and Father Ian and all members of the Parish of the Nativity of Christ in Lewes a Happy Feast and Many Years!

28 December Apostle Nicanor the Deacon (1stC)
We remember Archpriest Nicanor. May his Memory be Eternal!

We try to include name days for all parishioners, so if it is not listed and you would like it added, please email the parish secretary on hpeliasdevon@gmail.com

For more detailed information on lives of the Saints, you can go to the Orthodox Church of America website: https://www.oca.org/saints/lives

Prophet Elias Quarterly is the newsletter of the Parish of the Holy Prophet Elias, Devon, Deanery of Great Britain, Archdiocese of Thyateira (Ecumenical Patriarchate).
Archbishop: His Eminence Archbishop Nikitas (Lioulias)

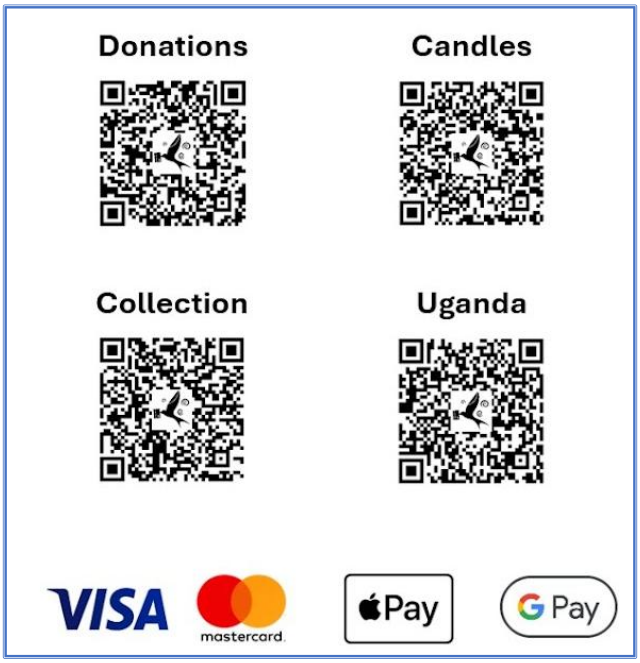
Rector: Fr Patrick Hodson – hodson44@btinternet.com
Retired Archpriest: Fr John Marks
Serving Priest: Fr Brandon Gallaher - fr.brandon.gallaher@gmail.com Tel: 07873 983 433
Deacon: Fr Philip Scorer - philip.scorer@gmail.com Tel: 07812 170 139
Parish Secretary: Edward Skidelsky - hpeliasdevon@gmail.com
Parish Warden: Kyriaki Hadjiafxendi - contact Deacon Philip (see details above)
Safeguarding Officers:
Elizabeth Axon - axonelizabeth@hotmail.com Tel: 07391 877 811
Francis Rothery - francisrothery@yahoo.co.uk

For services in the Torquay parish visit:
https://www.facebook.com/standrewtorquay?locale=en_GB
Or contact Fr Trayan Goranov either at otrayan@gmail.com or telephone 07800 644 599

For services in Plymouth visit:
https://plymchurch.com/

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.

This newsletter and all past newsletters can be downloaded here:
Parish Newsletter – Orthodox Parish of the Holy Prophet Elias in Devon



Remember that we also take payment by mobile phone! The QR codes are all easy to find in the church on the candle desk and collection basket.