



FROM THE FATHERS

“EACH of the faithful, through the regeneration of Baptism and renewal by the Holy Spirit, is made to conform to the image of Jesus, Who is God, according to what was said by the Apostle (Rom. 8:29) ... And to those who are baptized, the prince of the Apostles says, *You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy people* (1 Peter 2:9).”

VEN. THEODORE THE STUDITE, + 826 A.D.

“WE HAVE one Baptism, brethren, for regeneration and divine birth, one Faith, one hope, one God, Who is above all and through all and in us all. In His love He gathers us together to Himself and makes us members of one another and of Himself.”

SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS, + 1359 A.D.

“IN one God the Father and in one Lord Jesus Christ there lies the one faith of one hope and Baptism. And no alien doctrine can boast that it has a place among the truths which belong to one God and Lord and hope and Baptism and Faith.”

ST HILARY OF POITIERS, + 367 A.D.

“THOSE who, after being baptized into Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and having been taught that there is one Divine Nature in three subsistencies, are re-baptized, they, as the divine Apostle says, crucify Christ afresh. For it is impossible, he says, for those who were once enlightened, to remove themselves again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Christ afresh and put Him to open shame. But those who were not baptized into the Holy Trinity, these must be baptized again. For although the Divine Apostle says: Into Christ and into His death were we baptized (Rom. 6:3), he does not mean that the invocation of Baptism is in these words, but that the Baptism is an image of the death of Christ. For by the three immersions, Baptism signifies the three days of our Lord’s entombment. The Baptism then into Christ means that the believers are baptized into Him.”

VEN. JOHN OF DAMASCUS, + 754 A.D.

“THE GRACE of the Holy Spirit, which is given mystically to every Christian when he is baptized, acts and is manifested in proportion to our obedience to the commandments of the Lord. That is, if a Christian obeys the commandments of the Lord more, grace acts within him more; while if he obeys less, grace acts within him less. Just as a spark, when covered in the ashes of a fire becomes increasingly manifest as one removes the ashes, and the more firewood you put on the more the fire burns, so the grace that has been given to every Christian through Holy Baptism is hidden in the heart and covered up by the passions and sins, and the more a man acts in accordance with the commandments of Christ, the more he is cleansed of the passions and the more the fire of Divine grace lights in his heart, illumines and deifies him.”

VEN. NICODEMUS OF THE HOLY MOUNTAIN, + 1809 A.D.



The Voice Crying in the Wilderness

A HOMILY OF SAINT PHILARET,
METROPOLITAN OF MOSCOW, + 1867 A.D.

*The voice of one crying in the wilderness,
Prepare ye the way of the Lord, Make His paths straight.*

(Mark 1:3)

BLESSED is the wilderness in which such a longed-for voice is heard! How longed-for is that voice by which the imminent coming of the Lord was proclaimed! For if it is enjoined that the way of the Lord be prepared and His paths made straight in the wilderness, then of course the Lord is not far away from it and desires to visit it. For this reason the Lord's prophet salutes it with joy and rejoicing: *The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom like a rose* (Es. 35:1).

That which was proclaimed so much in the wilderness with trembling and reverence as its voice, was hardly spoken in the world, for amongst us it was but a rumour and a disturbance in the society of men, as a rumbling sound and distraction in the city, which is scarcely ever or anywhere better than how the desert-loving king perceived it: *I have seen iniquity and gainsaying in the city. Day and night they go round about her upon her walls; iniquity and toil and unrighteousness are in the midst of her. And usury and deceit have not departed from her* (Ps. 54:9-11). And who is there that does not desire with David *to flee afar off and dwell in the wilderness*, so that there he might *wait for God* (see Ps. 54:7-8)? Who but those very people, who are fond of finding obstacles in striving for God, is not grieved to the greatest degree

by the fact that they cannot escape from *vanity and brokenness of soul*, and that they do not have *wings like a dove* that they might *fly and be at rest?*

Oh, if only the Lord would grant us even a little time, to attentively ponder noetically on that *wilderness* which lies before His face, to accept in our hearts the *voice* which heralded His grace, and in tenderness to struggle to *prepare His ways!*

When the Gospel, in directing our eyes to the way of the Lord, proclaims the *voice in the wilderness* to us, then let none of you, Christians, desire to take it upon yourselves to adopt without discrimination in your life and pathways in society, the ways of John the Baptist in that uninhabited land of the Jordan. The prophet, hearing from afar the proclamation aforesaid of the *voice of one crying in the wilderness*, which was manifested in John, doubtless had before his eyes something greater than just the Jordan desert. *Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain, and then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed* (Es. 40:4-15), this is how Esaias depicted the transfiguration of his wilderness. But John's desert, at the manifestation of the Lord Jesus and afterwards, remained wild just as it had been before.

So what then is *this wilderness*, in which the prophet heard a voice proclaiming the coming of the Lord? In vain do we lose ourselves in various periods of time which will not return and in various places which are now beyond our reach, in order to discover it. On the contrary, it is not so much a case of its being far off but rather of its being unobservable, as it is perceived through an ascent from the sensual to the spiritual, from the human to the Divine. What is the wilderness in the common understanding of mankind, for his physical eyes? It is a place which is inhospitable and uncultivated by man, although it is full of beasts and other living creatures. Now, let us reflect on what the desert is with regard to spiritual sight, for the eye of God. When the desires and pas-

sions, which belong to the bestial nature, prevail over man, then every spiritual thought abandons him, as well as every chaste desire, every good deed, and, one might say, they lower every higher domain of his nature, - what then is his soul but a wild desert? But when the number of such animal men becomes great, then the whole body of mankind is *flesh* (Gen. 6:3), according to the word of God. Perfect and spiritual men are rarer upon the earth than the ears of corn left after a harvest that has been reaped, - and then is the whole world, in the eyes of *the Father of spirits* (Heb. 12:9), not anything but a fruitless desert? Finally when by its sons the very city of God upon earth impoverishes the Jerusalem on high, and when it is trampled down by the nations, when the chosen vineyard of the Beloved One yields thorns in place of clusters of fruit, when the Lord's people *forsake the fountain of living waters* (Jer. 2:13), when they agitate and bar the way to the pure threshing-floor of heavenly truth, but then they are debilitated with an unquenchable thirst for the bitter sources of worldly wisdom, - how then has the Church Herself not become like a thirsting wilderness?

And was it not in this unsettled, impassable desert which left much to be desired, that the Lord of glory and sublimity laid down a way for Himself? Is He not leaving the blessed habitations of the Heavens, and coming to visit the earth, which had been devastated by sin and the curse? Is He not taking leave of the sons of His own house, the pure spirits who are nourished by the light of His countenance, and is He not hastening to seek the sheep of His flock, who have strayed from Him in the mountains and thickets? Exactly so! The Lord, Who Himself *dwelleth in the flood* (Ps. 28:10), does not wish to consign to terminal desolation even one corner of His infinite domain. With one hand the only-begotten Son of God prepares *mansions* in the glorious *house* of His Father for the repose of those who are saved, and with the other forms a tabernacle in the wilderness as a saving refuge for those who are perishing. And the glory of His grace is made manifest thus: that in every slipping away, sensitivity might be upheld; every fomentation of pride is brought down; that inveteracy in one's own

unrighteousness might not be an impediment to the revelation of God's righteousness; that thorns and stones, that is malice and bitterness, might not impede the peaceful approach of Divine love - *Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed* (Es. 40:4). Exalt therefore, you who labour for an ungrateful world! Exalt over this mystical approach, as did the ancient Israelites leaving Egypt. Turn and direct the gaze of the eyes of your soul to the characteristics of the wilderness that is in us and around us, as you await your visitation and renewal, and when you hear *the voice of the Lord Who shaketh the wilderness* (Ps. 28:8), *harden not your hearts* (Ps. 94:8). Journey with the One Who is *present*, Who *traverses the wilderness* (see Ps. 67:5, 8).

And who can say that he has not sometimes heard this dread, but nonetheless kindhearted, voice? The voice of John the Baptist, which calls to repentance and proclaims the approach of the Kingdom of God, is not the only *voice crying in the wilderness*, but a voice that has been repeated frequently and is continued uninterruptedly by similar voices. Even way back, man, when he heard the *voice of the Lord God*, Who was *walking* in Paradise (see Gen. 3:8), in the first instance hid himself from His face, and in this way opened up the very first *wilderness* in Paradise itself, and then it was that the first *voice in the wilderness* was heard: *Where art thou?* (Gen. 3:9). The voice that sounded then, and has echoed innumerable times, is carried to all places and through all times, and will carry through unto eternity itself, calling to account those who are perishing in distancing themselves from the Lord. If only people would nourish their hearts, if only they would listen hard with their ears, and not close their eyes, and with all their faculties would constantly comply with the voice of grace which is the precursor of conversion and salvation! That voice is from outside, calling through visible nature; that voice is also within, proceeding from the depths of the soul; that voice is from above deriving from Divine revelation.

The voice is in nature. If it is little heard, that is not the same thing as its having ceased. Being disconcerted allays the propensity for hearing it, and its invariability is manifest in silence. An atheist would confess God, looking up to the Heavens and hearing their proclamations, had he not been born beneath them; the stoney heart would be separated from the confines of the earth, which has become cursed through the deeds of men, if only with all his being he had not been immersed within those confines rather than experiencing the voice for himself. *The heavens*, says one who had ears to hear, *declare the glory of God*, that is, *there are no tongues nor words in which their voices are not heard* (Ps. 18:1, 3), which means there is no language nor any manner of expression in which the preaching has not been told. Another, among these exultant voices of creation doxologising the sublimely wise Creator, distinguishes the painful sighs of creation *subject unto vanity*. *We know*, he says, *that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now* (Rom. 8:20, 22). These combined voices and sighings of creation - the voice from the fountain of the original good in the world and the sighing from the abyss from which evil issues forth; the voice of the order of heaven and the groanings of the earthly disorder; the voice of life and the gasp of death; the voice of the universal preservation and the groaning of the general decay - are all these not, for those who reason, types of the *voice crying in the wilderness*? And is it not the cry of the worldwide wilderness from every side which addresses man: "Who but *you* was able to introduce evil into the creation of the All-good One? Was it not *you*, who had been appointed their master, who made yourself their enslaver? Was it not you who changed the kingdom of grandeur into a disordered desert, and around the fruits of life embedded thorns and thistles? How long then will you yourself suffer and how long will you leave *all creation* to sigh and to *travail in pain* with you? How long before you turn with your whole being, that you and all the governance which is yours might approach the One responsible for every good thing and every perfection, from Whom you have

estranged yourself, but Who so manifestly still draws nigh to you in all ways, through His glory and His compassions? How long will you not *prepare the ways of the Lord, and make His paths straight?*” My God! If only one instantaneous sigh from all Thy creatures might reveal the measure of their inner pain, then what a storm and a thundering it would create! But all creation constantly sighs within our heart, unceasingly crying to our mind; but we do not hearken and still we revel in its suffering and destruction!

The voice from the depths of the soul. This one is, perhaps, even less heard than the voice from nature around us, because it requires a more delicate sensitivity and a deeper attention. Although without any doubt no one can better *know the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him* (1 Cor. 2:11), this spirit frequently becomes like a householder, who spends the greater part of his time at his house’s doorway, studying the passers-by, receiving those who call, talking and entertaining; but, as if it were an unfamiliar resting-place, his hidden store house he hardly visits at all. He does not know its treasures, and all the concerns for the building up of his house he lays upon slaves and hirelings. For the most part we live in accord with our outer feelings; we concern ourselves with passing pleasures; the wisdom of the world, the passions, the desires rule our activities. Meanwhile what proceeds from our soul, what is hidden in its secret depths, we do not know, and we do more to strive to know others than to know ourselves. We turn down every possibility of entering into ourselves, and have not even one way into ourselves. Blessed is he who has David as his example, who musters all his powers within that impenetrable country which is human nature, and which borders upon those high regions of the spiritual and Divine, and there *discloses unto the Lord his way* (see Ps. 36:5), who awaits his judgments which proceed from His Person. *I will hear what the Lord God will speak in me* (Ps. 84:8). From this height, which surpasses the understanding of reason, there enters into the heart the most lively feelings of love and faith inspired by grace. *For the Lord will speak peace to His people... and to them that turn their heart unto Him*

(Ps. 84:8). But when this *peace of God, which passeth all understanding* (Phil. 4:7) still does not visit us, then it is not yet opportune. Then, typically, as yet is it that the voice of the Lord cannot find a straight way into the soul and heart, but only the adjacent pathways of emotion and fleshliness. Have we not experienced sometimes, in a moment of interior quiet, when the tiresome, vain thoughts return from their dispersal, when the insatiate desires release their subjects, and unexpectedly we start to *take heed to ourselves* (see 1 Tim. 4:16) - have we not experienced at such a time a certain emptiness in the spirit, a certain tautness in the heart, in which there is hidden a deep and constant sighing? Watch constantly for these hidden movements within the inner houses of the soul. Let us more often have done with worldly noise; it is choking. Attentively block all the inlets to dispersion and you will recognise in your inner sighing that very thing whereby all creation sighs with you. Little by little it will resolve itself into that tortuous *groaning* (see Ps. 37:9) like that of a lion, and then softened murmuring like that of a turtle-dove, and finally you will hear the true *voice crying, in your interior wilderness*, telling you that walking in the obstinate ways of the world and the flesh only wounds and tires your soul, that to no purpose you will broaden therein the wandering paths of the one who was expelled, and that thereby it will even more be estranged from the heavenly homeland, that it is its place to seek out the ways of return to the Heavenly Father and to the saving abiding place above, - to *prepare the way of the Lord, and make His paths straight*.

The voice from revelation. Whereas the greater part of people from day to day hear with the ears things which lead to pessimism, they do not listen to the universal sighing of creation regarding the liberty of the children of God, and from hour to hour their heart becomes more gross, in that they do not comprehend the voice of that heart itself, which cries out, *Thy face, O Lord, will I seek* (Ps. 26:9). Thou dost not desire the death even of one incorrigible sinner, and inexhaustible are Thy means provided for his conversion, whom Thou Thyself dost pursue. *I am found of them*

that sought me not; I am sought of them that asked not for me (Esaias 65:1). Time and again, Thou hast opened Thine ear to Thy chosen ones, hast filled their spirits with Thy life-creating word, and hast made them to be like trumpets of Thy voice, and mouth pieces of Thine utterances for the sons of mankind and in the languages of the sons of mankind. *God, Who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, in these last days hath spoken unto us by His Son* (Heb. 1:1-2), and thereafter with renewed plentifulness He *poured out from His Spirit* upon the Apostles that they might preach, and through them even until now He continues to pour It out on all flesh (see Joel 2:23). We know that it is Thine infinite goodness and Thine ineffable wisdom alone we are bound to glorify for the gradual proliferation of Thy manifest contacts with us, and at the same time we are obliged to recognise the increase within us of a focus on, and a bitterness aroused by, the most extreme powers that war against us. The treasury of Thy triumphant revelations, gathered over the millennia, are as never before opened a little unto all in these the last days (1 John 2:18). *The word that I covenanted with you* from the ages, *and Thy Spirit*, which is clothed in the sacred writings, *remaineth among you* (Agg. 2:5). It is proclaimed in the churches, it is talked about in homes, and then, as if in service to the Word, people are called forth with gifts, somewhat lower than the apostolic ones, which Thou dost plant in the hearts of those who love Thee, as if once more with the Apostles themselves (see their writings) to go about the cities and villages, the stately homes and the hovels, and in this way in every region to fulfil what was said: *This Gospel shall be preached in all the world* (Matt. 24:14). Now, the *voice*, or more correctly, the totality of voices, in times and in places, *cries in the wilderness*. The voice not only announces but also manifests Thy coming, not arousing only dread in the wilderness, but comforting also by the grace of its visitation; not only convicting the perverse and wily, but admonishing us that we *prepare Thy way*, and *make straight Thy paths*, establishing us as the servants who *await their Lord*, and like *the virgins* who make ready to

meet the Bridegroom. This living and life-creating voice is already spread over the far-away mountains and into the deepest valleys. Thou knowest, O Lord, that there is no limit to the great, world-wide preaching, for we hear: *this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come* (Matt. 24:14). Thou alone beholdest whether in this gloomy midnight, if the time indeed has come to cry: *Behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet Him* (Mt. 25:6).

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Suspicion of Knowing the Badness of Another

ONCE a sister complained to Father Zosima about another sister, “Father, why does that sister dislike me? What did I do to her?”

“Who told you that she dislikes you?” he responded. “You are making a mistake! That thought is from the evil one. Do not accept it.”

“No, Elder, she has something against me. Her words and behaviour show it. Also my heart clearly informs me.”

“Well, then let us suppose that you are right. But go out into the forest and call out: ‘My beloved sister!’ The echo will answer you the same. Then call out again, ‘Insane! Worthless one!’ The echo will repeat the same words. Believe me, in the relation of two souls in their mutual communication, the same thing happens as with the echo. So first look into your own heart. You will discover that it is negatively prejudiced towards that sister. First of all fill your own heart with peace and love of her. Then you can be sure

that she will return the same feelings towards you.”

“What can I do, Elder? I’m unfortunate in that I do not have love in my heart for my sister.”

“You do not have love? At least act as if you have love. You learn that she needs something? Offer it to her. You disagree about something? Give way. Did she tell you off? Condemn yourself and ask her forgiveness. But on top of everything pray unceasingly for her, saying: ‘Save her, Lord, and through her holy prayers have mercy on me!’ Then for sure God will change your heart. After all this, if she is not at peace with you, you will have your conscience at rest.”

Counsel of the Elder Zosima of Siberia (1767-1833) from the Eldress Vera Verhofskey, Holy Monastery of Paraklitou, Oropos, Attiki, 1995. Text sent us by the Sisters of the Convent of the Holy Angels at Afidnai, Greece.



Teaching on the Divine Services of the Orthodox Church

BY ARCHPRIEST ALEXANDER RUDAKOV

PUBLISHED IN 1890 IN SAINT PETERSBURG

Note: In what follows we have expanded on Fr Alexander’s original text to make things clearer for contemporary readers.

§ 75. Services Appointed for the Feast of the Lord’s Baptism. This feast is called Theophany, because on this day there was a clear manifestation of the All-holy Trinity (see the troparion of the feast below), and more particularly, of the fact that the Saviour, Who comes solemnly to enter upon His saving ministry, is Divine. The feast is kept in the same way as that of the Nativity of Christ. On the eve we have the Royal Hours, the Liturgy of St Basil the Great and later the Vigil, which begins with Great Compline. However the Great Blessing of the Waters is peculiar to this feast alone. It is called the Great Blessing to distinguish it from the Lesser Blessing which is served every month in the year, and indeed on any day when the need should arise. In fact the

Great Blessing is celebrated twice on this feast. The first time is on the eve of the feast day itself, and this is served in the church. On the day of the feast the Great Blessing is celebrated under the open skies, either at a lake, spring, or river, at the sea coast, or even at a special outside font or basin. In ancient times, the water from the first blessing was used to baptise the catechumens joining the Church, thus bringing to their minds that the Baptism of the Lord is the source of their own Baptism. Even today the waters blessed on this occasion, are used to bless the homes of the faithful, and are taken by the faithful to partake of daily as a blessing first thing in the morning while they are fasting, or in times of special stress, hurt or temptation. The outside blessing derives from the custom of the Christians in the Church of Jerusalem to make a procession to the River Jordan itself on the feast of Theophany and to perform the blessing there. And this custom prevails there to this day, and as has now been shown on video coverage, the prophetic verse is fulfilled at this Baptism of the Lord, the waters turn back when they are blessed (see Ps. 113:3, 5). The journey from the church to the place where the waters are to be blessed outside the church is popularly called the Procession to Jordan.

Troparion of the Theophany:

When Thou wast baptized in the Jordan, O Lord, the worship of the Trinity was made manifest; for the voice of the Father bare witness to Thee, calling Thee His beloved Son. And the Spirit in the form of a dove confirmed the certainty of the word. O Christ our God, Who hast appeared and hast enlightened the world, glory be to Thee.

.... to be continued.

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“THE REASON why the Holy Spirit comes in the form of a dove: it is a simple, joyous creature, not bitter with gall, not biting savagely, without vicious tearing claws; it loves to dwell with mankind, it keeps to one house for assembling; when they mate they hatch their young together, when they fly anywhere they keep their formation, the resorts they live in are shared in common, by their billing too they pay tribute to concord and peace, in all things they fulfil the law of unanimity. The same is the simplicity of the Church, which we need to learn.”

HOLY HIEROMARTYR CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE, + 258 A.D.

THE COMING MONTH

THE preeminent celebration in January is, of course, the **Holy Theophany**, the festival of the Saviour's Baptism in the Jordan. It is especially remarkable for the blessing of the waters, both in church and in the open air, the Procession to Jordan, and because at this time of year, with the waters blessed the homes of the faithful are also blessed. In countries where parishes are geographically small, this is done immediately after the water is blessed, but here where our peoples are scattered over large areas, either arrangements have to be made for the priest to call after the feast or the faithful themselves bless their homes, sprinkling them with the Theophany water and chanting the troparion of the feast.

Among the saints celebrated in January we have:

The **Holy Virgin Martyr Tatiana** (12th / 25th): The name Tatiana is so popular among the Russians that one might think that the Saint was a Russian. In fact she was from Italy and lived centuries before there even was a Russia. She was born into an illustrious Roman family, and her father, secretly a Christian, raised his daughter to be devoted to God. When she came of age, Tatiana consecrated her virginity to Christ. Disdaining earthly advantages, she sought instead the imperishable wealth of Heaven. She was made a deaconess and served God in fasting and prayer, tending the sick and helping the needy. At that time, the Emperor was Alexander Severus (222-235), a minor, and the regent Ulpian, an evil enemy and persecutor of Christians, held the reins of government. The Christians were severely persecuted and Tatiana was arrested. They brought her into the temple of Apollo to force her to offer sacrifice to the idol. The saint had recourse to prayer, and suddenly there was an earthquake. The idol fell and part of the temple collapsed. The demon inhabiting the idol fled screeching from that place. Those present saw, as it were, its shadow flying through the air. In retaliation, the pagans gouged out the holy virgin's eyes,

but she bravely endured, praying for her tormentors that the Lord would open their spiritual eyes. And the Lord heard the prayer of His handmaid. The torturers saw four angels encircle the saint, and a voice was heard from the heavens addressing the holy virgin. Eight of them believed in Christ and fell on their knees before Saint Tatiana, begging her forgiveness. For confessing their new-found Faith, they were tortured and executed, receiving Martyrs' crowns. When next Tatiana was brought before the judge, she was seen to be completely healed of all her wounds. They stripped her and beat her, and slashed her body with razors, and a wondrous fragrance then filled the air. Then she was stretched out on the ground and beaten for so long that the servants striking her had to be replaced several times. The torturers became exhausted and said that an invisible power was beating them with iron rods. Indeed, the angels had warded off the blows directed against the Martyr and turned them back upon her tormentors. They then threw the saint in prison, where she prayed all night and sang praises to the Lord with the angels. Next day they took the Saint to the tribunal again and beheld with astonishment that yet again she appeared completely healthy and even more radiant and beautiful than before. They urged her to offer sacrifice to the goddess Diana. They took her to the heathen temple, but she made the sign of the Cross and of a sudden lightning struck the idol. Again she was tortured. Angels appeared to her in prison and healed her wounds as before. She was taken to the arena and a lion was loosed upon her. The beast would not harm the saint, but meekly licked her feet. Then they imprisoned her in the temple of Zeus, the chief and mightiest of their gods, only to find later his idol on the floor, shattered, and the holy martyr Tatiana joyously praising the Lord Jesus Christ. The judge then condemned the valiant sufferer to be beheaded with a sword. Her father was also executed with her, because he had raised her in the love of Christ.

The **Venerable Ephraim the Syrian** (28th January / 10th February) is perhaps best known to most Orthodox Christians of our times because of the prayer he composed which is used

repeatedly in the weekday services of Great Lent. He is indeed a teacher of repentance. He was born early in the fourth century in the ancient city of Nisibis in Mesopotamia. His family were Christian even before the Edict of Milan was promulgated (A.D. 313), establishing official toleration of our Faith, and, for this reason he recorded that his forebears had “confessed Christ before the judge; I am related to martyrs.” When still a baby, his parents had a prophetic dream: from the boy’s tongue sprang a lush vine which produced abundant clusters of grapes. The more the birds ate the fruit, the more it multiplied. Later it was revealed that these clusters were his teachings, the leaves of the vine his hymns. But in spite of his parents’ having brought him up in Christian piety, he was impetuous and even rather wild, like an unruly colt which resists the bridle. He confesses, “I would quarrel over trifles, acted foolishly, gave in to bad impulses and lustful thoughts. My youth nearly convinced me that life is ruled by chance. But God’s Providence brought my impassioned youth to the light of wisdom.” He tells the story of his conversion: “One day my parents sent me out of town and I found a pregnant cow grazing by the road. I took up stones and began pelting the cow, driving it into the woods till evening when it fell down dead. During the night wild beasts ate it. On my way back, I met the poor owner of the cow. ‘My son,’ he asked, ‘did you drive away my cow?’ I not only denied it, but heaped abuse and insult upon the poor man.” A few days later he was spending some time with some shepherds. When it grew too late to return home, he spent the night with them. That night some sheep were stolen and the boy was accused of being in league with the thieves. He was hauled before the magistrate and thrown into gaol. In a dream an angel appeared to Ephraim and asked him why he was there. The boy began at once to declare that he was innocent. “Yes,” said the angel, “you are innocent of the crime imputed to you, but have you forgotten the poor man’s cow?” When Ephraim saw the tortures to which criminals were subjected, he became terrified. He turned to God and vowed that he would become a monk if God would spare him such a cruel ordeal. The

magistrate, however, just laughed at the youth's tears and ordered that he be racked. At that moment a servant came to announce that it was time for the magistrate to take his meal. "Very well," he said, "I will examine the boy another day." And he ordered him back to the cells. Providentially, the next time the magistrate saw Ephraim, he thought he had been punished enough and dismissed him. Although he was spared the rack, Ephraim had learned his lesson and, like the Prophet David, he entreated the Lord to overlook his youthful delinquency. True to his vow, upon his release he went straightway to the hermits living in the mountains, among whom he became a disciple of the Elder James, who later became Bishop of Nisibis and is himself glorified as a saint. Ephraim began to train as an athlete of virtue, exercising himself in the study of the Holy Scriptures and in prayer and fasting. The dissolute and wayward youth was transformed into a humble and contrite monk, weeping day and night for his sins and entirely surrendered to God. Ephraim's earnest resolve pleased the Lord, Who rewarded him with the gifts of wisdom. Grace flowed from his mouth like a sweet stream, in fulfilment of his parents' dream. In spite of the gifts which God so lavishly bestowed upon him, Saint Ephraim was protected by the deepest humility. He wisely feigned madness so as to avoid being consecrated bishop and the honour that attends that ministry. Doubtless, his humility was guarded by the remembrance of the sins of his youth and by the contrition of spirit which followed upon this remembrance. He was granted the gift of tears and yet his face would shine with joy. As Saint Gregory wrote: "Where Ephraim speaks of contrition, he lifts our thought to the Divine goodness and pours out thanksgiving and praise to the Most High." On 28th January, A.D. 373, after a brief illness, the venerable one rested from his labours and was received into the heavenly habitations. The citizens of Edessa called him a "lyre of the Holy Spirit." His poetry, his homilies and his prayers still inspire the souls of the believers to this day, calling us to repentance.

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POINTS FROM CORRESPONDENCE

A reply to an email message from someone contemplating conversion to Holy Orthodoxy:

MANY THANKS for your message and the good news that you are contemplating converting to Holy Orthodoxy. You were wise, though, to wonder about the instruction you have been given. The problem is that there is now developing, as it were, two types of “Orthodoxy.”

The teaching of the Church is that outside of her there is no salvation, no sanctification, no sacramental life, and therefore no Baptism, although, of course, the mercies of our Saviour prevail there also. Throughout the centuries however, the Church has permitted those who have received a form of Baptism in the various sects to be received, by *œconomia*, by Chrismation alone, or even in extreme cases by confession. However, the form of their previous “baptism” should strictly be threefold immersion, and the reason for allowing the *œconomia* should be compelling - if someone is very ill, extremely infirm, etc. And for various personal and pastoral reasons *œconomia* may be used at the discretion of the Bishop.

This practice in no way recognises that the baptism performed outside the Church was true. Baptism is the doorway into the Church, so how could it possibly open into another house? It simply recognises that there was a form of Baptism, and that form, like an empty vessel, is given content, grace, when you are chrismated and it is perfected by the Church.

However, in recent generations it has become the custom in various national Orthodox Churches to use an *œconomic* reception as a matter of course. There has even developed - (and this development has been augmented by the participation of various national Orthodox Churches in the Ecumenical Movement) - the

“doctrine” that we accept the “baptism” of certain denominations, and therefore it does not need to be repeated, and indeed, logically, should not be repeated. Proponents of this view will claim that in the Creed, we confess “one Baptism.” But that certainly does not mean that we accept any form or type of baptism as an instance of that “one Baptism.” It means that we accept the “one Baptism” of the “One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church” (which we have just previously confessed), that is, of course, the Orthodox Church.

It appears that the priest you have spoken to is of the “modern” school of thought. I must admit that perhaps the majority of Orthodox priests in the United Kingdom whom you might approach would give you the same answer, because many are converts who have had no real grounding in Orthodox teaching, and many are in jurisdictions which have long ago espoused ecumenism, if not overtly, at least essentially.

It is a sad thing to have to say, but we are at the stage, when really you must needs choose which “type” of Orthodoxy you want to join. I have put that crudely, but there seems to be no other way. The divide between the Traditionalist Orthodox and those who now call themselves Mainstream, or are referred to as World Orthodox, is widening apace.

I hope these hasty thoughts help you a little, entrusting you to God’s guidance.



“GOD Himself said, *Unless a man be born of water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.* Anything born of flesh is certainly flesh, and anything born of spirit is certainly spirit. These words refer to the spiritual children born of God into God’s Church through holy Baptism and the Holy Spirit, if they persevere in doing good.”

ABBOT ÆLFRIC OF EYNHAM, + C. 1014 A.D.

NEWS from the Richmond Diocese of the Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece

VISIT OF BISHOP SOFRONIE

HIS GRACE, **Bishop Sofronie of Suceava** visited England mid-month. He was accompanied by **Fr Deacon Nicolae Capitanu**, and on Friday, 9th December (n.s.), celebrated the baptism of **Maria**, the infant daughter of **Ionel and Maria Strunel of Queensbury Park** at Saint Edward's Church. **Gabriella Grigoras** is Maria's godmother. After the ceremony, the family and friends came to the monastic house - the mortuary still being full of workmen - to offer light refreshments to everyone. The Bishop himself made a brief inspection of the work going on in the mortuary, but then had to leave, because he was due to serve a **Lesser Blessing of Waters** at a parishioner's home in London. On the Saturday, His Grace served an **Uction service** for the Romanian-speaking parishioners at the **Convent of the Annunciation** and heard confessions there, and on the Sunday he celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Convent. Bishop Sofronie will be with us again on the Sunday after Theophany, 22nd January, n.s.

INFANT CHURCHED

AT THE END of the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, 21st November / 4th December, the Great Feast of the Entry of the Mother of God into the Temple, **Fr Borislav Popov** read the first and eighth day prayers for the infant son of **Ciprian and Mariana Barzu of Plumstead**. The baby was named **Edward**, after our heavenly intercessor. Then, immediately the fortieth day prayers

were also read and Edward was churched. God grant in time he receive the grace of Holy Baptism.

BURIAL AT SAINT EDWARD'S CEMETERY

ON FRIDAY, 3rd / 16th December, **Catherine Lewis-Sheldon** was laid to rest in our cemetery, next to her mother, **Olga Golfand**. The funeral had been chanted by **Archpriest Maxim Nikolsky** of the **Cathedral of the Russian Orthodox Church in London at Ennismore Gardens**. May both Catherine and her mother find rest with the saints.

ANOTHER VALUED GIFT

ON THE FEAST of the **Great Martyr Barbara** (4th / 17th December), **Claudiu Ciuperpcovici** delivered a beautifully carved relic chest with shelves in which we can set all our smaller relics, a table for the *artoclasia*, and a Romanian style *antidoron* bowl. All these were hand-worked at the **Mobilier Sculptat** works in Romania, and the relic chest is beautifully carved, matching the Bishop's throne and clergy seats, given earlier. The present gifts were given by an anonymous donor from among our Romanian-speaking parishioners, and on their arrival the Romanian men working on the Mortuary broke off to help us place them in the church. On the next day, the Sunday, at the Divine Liturgy they were blessed ready for use, and in the following week **Ioan Turcu** fitted the relic chest with discreet lighting so that the relics will be clearly visible. We offer thanks to our Saviour for this gift, to the donor, and to Ioan and Claudiu and the others for helping us and showing that they *love the beauty of Thy house* (Prayer behind the Ambo at the Liturgy).

ORTHODOX AID FUND

SAINT EDWARD BROTHERHOOD'S **Orthodox Aid Fund** made donations totalling **£14,132.82 during 2016** (n.s.). These funds were donated to various church, humanitarian and environmental charities (other than the King Edward Orthodox Trust, which administers our own community). The donations were made possible by the generosity of our church people, the readers of "The Shepherd" and other friends of our Brotherhood. In 2015, the fund gave away £12,509.13, so this is an increase of just over £1,600 on that figure. This is the more remarkable in that during the year we have also been raising funds for the King Edward Orthodox Trust Co. Ltd towards the Mortuary Restoration. We owe a debt of gratitude to all who have helped us achieve this, and pray that our Saviour will grant you things heavenly for things earthly and reward you richly in this life and in the next.

MORTUARY RESTORATION PROGRESS

THE MORTUARY RESTORATION, which began on 3rd May and which we hoped would be completed by July, still continues, having hit many problems on the way, though we are beginning to see light at the end of a very long tunnel, and hope that we will soon be able to re-establish the previous order we had in our monastic and parish life. Finishing touches have to be put to the kitchen and main hall (which we have enlarged to cope with increasing numbers), work on the lavatories (which have been completely re-arranged) is well under way, a baby changing unit is to be installed, and a ramp has been provided for easier disabled access. The turret and exterior decoration are now the only major projects to be dealt with. We ask you to keep praying for the completion of the whole endeavour, and that thereafter we may also be blessed to build up our community spiritually.

VISITORS

Saturday, 17th December: **David Cooper** of the **Kingston Ramblers** brought a group to visit the church. There were about twenty people in all, and they spent about half-an-hour with us before continuing their ramble.

Friday, 23rd December: **Ivan Zharikov** brought the **Priest Eduard-Alexander** and his daughters, **Anna** and **Veronica**, to venerate the sacred relics of St Edward. Afterwards they were all given light refreshments. Fr Eduard-Alexander is a Russian priest living in Israel and serving within the Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

END OF YEAR THANKS

IN EVERY ISSUE, in the insert, we thank those who have helped and supported us with various gifts and services, but we are very aware that some of the greatest helpers are thus over-looked. We would like to thank them, and assure them that they are appreciated. First of all, our treasurer for many years, **Elizabeth Castle**, now ably helped as the work increases by **Elena Matthews; Irina Aldersley** our architect and project manager; **Messrs Cowboy and Mushroom** and the band of Romanian volunteers and workers who have been working on the mortuary; **Elena Holden** for managing the Sunday Parish Breakfast rota and chivvyng, and to all who have provided the after-Liturgy meals; **Gill Cossey** and colleagues at **Woking Association of Voluntary Service** for help and advice in obtaining grants; to **Andrew Plumridge** for similar help and for advice about the building; to the trustees of the various grant-making trusts who have supported us; **Ann Harrington** and other eminent media persons for publicizing news of the Mortuary Restoration, the **Brookwood Cemetery Society** for the same, and to all those who have contributed to our work. We would like especially to thank those who in various ways support us by giving regular donations by bankers' orders or by giving generously each week when they come to

church, rather than just a sporadic gift, thus ensuring that our work and witness can continue from week to week. This is particularly appreciated, because, of course, we receive no central funding from the Church nor any state funding; we earn our keep by our handicrafts but the maintenance of the church and property depends largely on what you, our supporters, give. And for their very special ministry, thanks to all those who have complained, grumbled and criticised - it would make us humble if we allowed it to! God bless and reward you.

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PRACTICAL TIP

IF you have a complaint about something at church, at work, at school or even in your social life, before you voice it do two things: first reflect whether it is you yourself whose perception is wrong and who is blameworthy and not someone else, and secondly consider whether you could have helped so that the mistake or shortcoming would not have happened in the first place. When you have cleared these hurdles only then voice your complaint, and when you do so, only do so to the person concerned, lest you start a trail of judging and gossip for which you will surely be accountable.

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“JOHN proclaims the Lord not yet as God or the Son of God, but only as a man mightier than himself. For his ignorant hearers were not yet capable of receiving the hidden things of so great a Mystery: that the eternal Son of God, having taken upon Himself the nature of man, had been lately born into the world of a virgin; but gradually by the acknowledgement of His glorified lowliness, they were to be introduced to the belief of His Divine Eternity. To these words, however, he subjoins, as if covertly declaring that He was the true God, *I baptize you with water, but He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit.* For who can doubt than none other than God can give the grace of the Holy Spirit.”

VEN. BEDE OF JARROW, + 735 A.D.