

# Christmas Nativity Services Notice



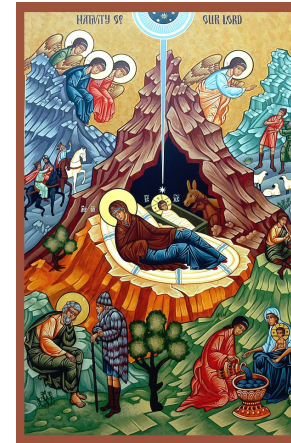
Christmas Eve falls on a Sunday this year. The usual Sunday services (including Saturday Vespers) will be as set for any other weekend. However, although Christmas Eve is usually part of the Advent Fast, this will be relaxed to a non fast day for the purposes of lunch after Liturgy. For some this will be the only opportunity to receive Holy Communion over Christmas if they are travelling the next day. For those who can attend church on Christmas Day, the Liturgy will be at the slightly earlier time of 10 am.

## Puzzle Solution (see page 14)



# The Apostle

The Monthly Magazine of St Aidan's Orthodox Church, Henderson Street, Levenshulme, Manchester M19 2JX **Issue 6: December 2023**



## Celebrating the Incarnation

Ask anyone on the street if they know the Christian significance of Christmas and (hopefully) they will say “the birth of Jesus” but the “birth of Jesus” may have no more significance for them, (if it has any meaning at all), other than the birth of any other religious figure.

If, however, you were to ask if they knew that, for Christians, this Feast of the Nativity celebrates God being born in the flesh (“a little child before the ages”) and that He has taken upon Him our humanity from the Virgin to save us from sin, suffering, evil and death; you would probably be met with either a blank face or utter astonishment. Of course, we do indeed celebrate Christmas as the “birth of Jesus” but we cannot stop at this simple fact. It is by this means, (the Incarnation), that God Himself, Emmanuel, has come among us, to save us.

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*Fr Gregory*

## What's on at St Aidan's ...

Every Saturday at 3pm  
(EXCEPT 23rd December):

**E-Quip Course in Orthodox Faith and Life starts.** All are welcome to these talks with a Q&A and a discussion session afterwards over tea and biscuits.

For our **Christmas Services**, please see page 12

**Pray for our Catechumens:** Andie, (recovering from an accident) Beth, Billy, Kermane, Nathaniel, Michael and Kitan. (Kitan is to be baptised in Cyprus where his girlfriend lives).



## Our Orthodox Christian Education Provision at St Aidan's ... All for you!

1. Two well stocked libraries (upstairs) and a "mini Library" by the main doors for a quick browse.
2. A bookstall with current titles, icons, charcoal, incense, cards and much more besides.
3. A Sunday School after the Sunday Divine Liturgy for all ages (3 to 18).
4. The E-Quip Course in Orthodox Faith and Life, Saturdays at 3pm.
5. A weekly Bible Study by Zoom, Tuesdays, 7.30pm to 8.30pm.
6. Homilies and sermons that we strive in the Holy Spirit to be inspirational, thoughtful, biblical and patristic. We welcome feedback!
7. Personally designed Catechumenate Courses, tailor made to each person and staffed by a team of lay catechists working with the clergy.
8. An informative website incorporating a blog regularly updated with great content for you, your family and friends.

## Book Review

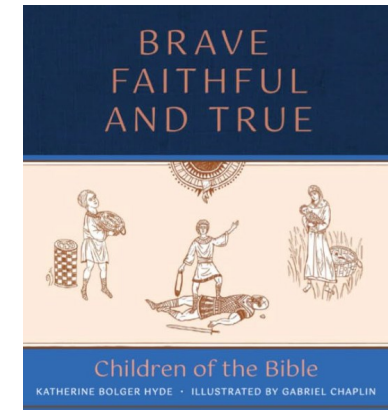
**Brave, Faithful and True:**

**Children of the Bible**

**by Katherine Bolger Hyde**

**Ancient Faith Publishing 2023**

**(in stock in our bookstall now)**



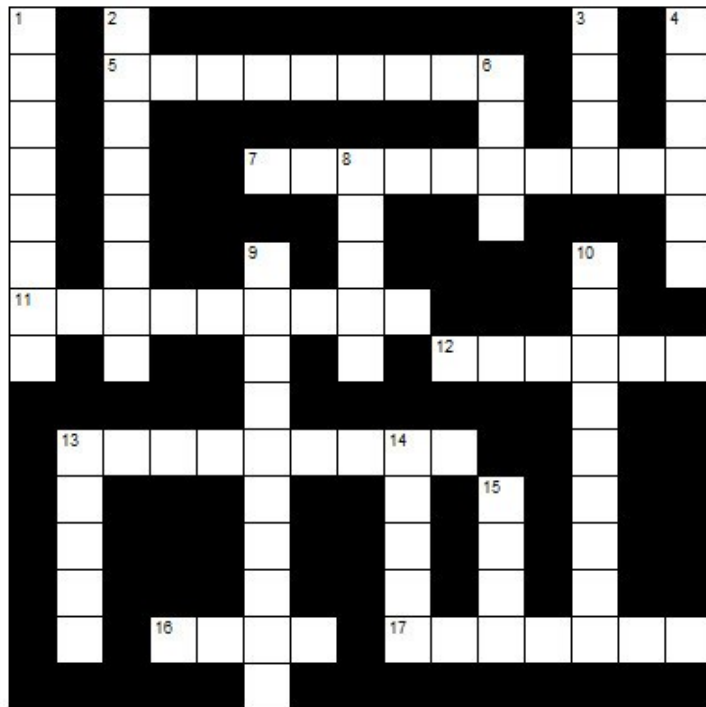
This well produced book of 130 pages contains six short stories from the Old Testament and six short stories from the New Testament about children and how they built a close relationship with God, with the help of their parents. However, adults will need to read each story first in order to be able to answer children's later probing questions.

It would be best to start with the stories from the New Testament. Several stories from the Old Testament lead to difficult questions about how Isaac experiences the possibility of his father Abraham sacrificing him, and in the NT how Holy Mary leaves her parents to live in the Temple precincts at a very young age.

This is not a "feel good" book of bedtime stories that suggests faith in God is easily built and sustained. Rather, it is a challenge to both adults and older children to learn to trust God in the midst of difficult challenges. The stories are linked to the Orthodox Liturgy. Care will need to be taken about which stories to share with children at an appropriate age.

**Father Emmanuel**

## Puzzle Corner (Difficult!)



Across

- 5 Blameless they died  
 7 Alexandrian defender  
 11 Mary contra Nestorius  
 12 Russian calendar  
 13 How small it is wherein to be born!  
 16 Gospel with no origin  
 17 Partaking the divine nature

Down

- 1 Orthodox Christmas  
 2 Persons on the icon but not in the book  
 3 Wise apparently  
 4 Ancient number crunching  
 6 Astronomical guidance  
 8 Psychotic despot  
 9 Horological dovetailing  
 10 Speak to the Governor  
 13 His Liturgy on the Eve  
 14 Exodus in reverse  
 15 Speleological context in prophecy

**Solution? - Page 16**

## An American Pilgrimage

by Edward Bennigsen



I have just returned from a month in the United States. I was over there to attend a conference, to see family, to be a tourist, but also to make pilgrimage.

I began with the conference, which was a kind of pilgrimage in itself. This was themed around the Lord of Spirits podcast, which focuses on the unseen world as understood in the Orthodox Tradition. I met many lovely like-minded people, some of whom I stopped in to see later in my trip. Antiochian Village, where the conference was hosted, is home to the grave of St Raphael of Brooklyn. We had a supplication to him during the event at his grave. Three years ago, this would have felt totally foreign, if not downright blasphemous. The podcast was instrumental in helping me grasp the teaching of the communion of the saints, so it was wonderful to be able to take part in this service with other attendees. During one of the talks, one of the priests who hosts the podcast asked for a show of hands: those who had been introduced to Orthodoxy through the podcast and had since converted. I and about a third of the room raised their hands!

In that respect, the USA seems to very similar to the UK. Almost every parish I went to was full of new converts like myself. I swapped stories of God's grace with many people, and the hope for the future we have found in his Church. There is a real zeal, and sense of opportunity. That new zeal can have its own challenges, but all the clergy I met were carefully seeking to channel it in their parishes into positive change. I was refreshed to see so many different traditions, with different styles of Liturgy and church programmes, all seeking to serve God. *<contd> ...*

Orthodoxy in the US is also quite different to the UK. For one, they have a much bigger monastic presence. But as one monk I spoke to pointed out, most of them were founded only in the last 40 years, and most of them by one man (Elder Ephraim)! We can be encouraged here to think how much could change in our lifetimes. We should also take the monk's caution that a 40-year-old monastery in Orthodox terms is still a baby monastery, and that there is a lot of growing and maturing to do. That's another difference between our two nations. The British Isles has a rich millennium of Orthodox heritage, followed by hundreds of years of silence. North America is much newer to Orthodoxy, but in the modern era has had more time to establish a presence. I was blessed to be able to venerate a number of relics of American saints, which is surely the truest sign of a nation's Christian witness.

The most precious moment of my trip was at a small parish in northern Pennsylvania. In many respects, this is a very normal, local respects. But, in her grace, the Theotokos has blessed the parish with a wonder-working icon. The Kardiotissa icon has been streaming myrrh for the last ten years. It's almost a secret: there is very little publicity, and photography is forbidden inside the church. I turned up on a Wednesday evening for the Moleben (Paraklesis), not really knowing what to expect. I was late, and not in a good mood. Upon walking in I immediately smelled the sweet aroma of myrrh. Almost a hundred people were singing and praying. Visibly sick people lined the front row, standing near a normal-looking icon screen.

I was taken aback. Was this what the miraculous looks like? Why would God do something so strange like making an image weep perfume? My modern, materialist mind tried to sort it all out, to reject it, to work out the illusion. I was confronted with my unbelief. As the hymns swelled, the priest-guardian left the altar and picked up the icon. He took it over to a young girl, clearly suffering from cancer. He lifted the Mother of God above her, and myrrh dripped down from the icon onto her forehead. She wasn't instantly healed and I didn't hear angelic choruses, but I knew that I had just

Sun of Justice far outshining  
Stars that led the kingly wise,  
Today is born for our salvation  
Him Unseen before our eyes.

Infants run then to adore Him  
Shepherds come to be His sheep,  
Priests to labour in His Vineyard  
Wine and Bread His presence keep.

Fishers catch the world before Him  
Sinful, lost and maimed repent,  
That they may embrace together  
This Child whom the Father sent.

Therefore let us sing together  
Sharing in this choral dance,  
"Christ is born!" the incarnation  
So we may to heaven advance.

This our song our hope our story  
This our life, so glory be  
To the Father, Son and Spirit  
Undivided Trinity.



## Nativity: "The Mystery" by Fr Jonathan Hemmings

Parish Priest: Holy Cross Morecambe and Lancaster

Luke 2:11: "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour,  
who is Christ the Lord."

Based on the Nativity sermon of St. John Chrysostom



Look a new and wondrous mystery

Christ is born in Bethlehem,

Angels singing blend their voices

With the hosts of Cherubim.

Join in praise then all you living

Here on earth with those above,

He "Who is" comes down from heaven

Manifests the Father's love.

witnessed a miracle. And I continued to witness it, to live in it, as the priest went down the pews and poured out the myrrh onto the people.

If you asked me a few years ago if I thought I'd be Orthodox, I would have been confused by the question. Why would I join a church that was so old and weird and complicated? Being Orthodox in Britain today certainly isn't simple. The services are long and your feet will be tested. Fasting is difficult and countercultural. We have the joy of our heritage, and the grief that it was taken away from us. And yet I'm here because I know it's real. I see God working. I know His saints are alive and well, interceding for us.

So why would the Lord make an icon miraculous? Why would He use difficult circumstances to grow the Church? Why would He become food for us in the Eucharist? I think, simply, because He loves us.

All Saints of America, intercede for us!



*Icon of the Saints of America*

## From Edward's Photo Album ...



St Tikhon's Monastery, Pennsylvania  
(the oldest in the US),



St Gregory Palamas Monastery, Ohio



Shrine of St John of Shanghai &  
San Francisco in Detroit



Supplication at the grave of St  
Raphael of Brooklyn

your likes, dislikes and online behaviour. This has one primary objective: to keep you on the page or site, for data collection of course and profit.

Recently I noticed, that although I mainly posted interesting articles and comments on Facebook, I was spending too much time doing this; returning to read comments and scrolling down for that next titbit of information or that next funny graphic. I was getting just too much dopamine reward inside my head for doing this. It had to stop; so I cut out this soft but hardening addictive behaviour. I unceremoniously dumped Facebook! - complete with my over 3,000 "friends". However, I also deleted all the other church related parish Facebook pages I had set up as well — except the YouTube channels where comments and discussion are disabled. I had other reasons for doing this, leading to my final point.

Facebook is increasingly "old hat" - a platform for the middle aged and seniors, but not for the young. Apparently many young people now call it "Boomerbook" - after the Baby Boomer post war generation (me included), Mark Zuckerberg of course knows that he is losing young people in their droves from Facebook ; which is why, very cannily, he has rebranded the company "Meta" and switched his focus to VR simulation and other, doubtless, AI orientated projects.

All the statistics show that the young are now to be found on Snapchat and TikTok, not Facebook. However, the same fate that has befallen Facebook will, I predict, apply soon enough to all the other social media platforms. I do not want to get stuck in the ephemera of such media anymore; especially since these media have more or less ceased to be a message medium for the preaching of the gospel. Instead they have turned into mere mirrors and echo chambers, shallow ponds in which to paddle, not the waters of the deep into which we are to cast our nets.

I started by saying that this is very much and only my view. If social media brings you true happiness, carry on with my blessing; but if it doesn't, ask yourself a question: "should I be here?"

*Fr Gregory*



## Social Media: Personal Use and Church Use

*This is very much a personal statement from Fr Gregory. Bear that in mind when you read please. I am not counselling anyone to do or not do anything - except to stay safe!*



Social media has many positive aspects and it can be a great way to share ideas and to keep in touch with people. I would want to encourage those of you who use it to good effect to continue to do so. OK, now the precautionary message! Social media also has its darker side. No matter

how tech savvy and alert you may consider yourself to be, there are very sophisticated fake messages out there right now that are proving increasingly successful in manipulating you into offering up your data to people with ill intent. Do visit this page to be better informed on how to keep yourself and your family safe:

<https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/guidance/social-media-how-to-use-it-safely>

I consider myself to be alert to these issues but I was the victim of a hack recently into my Facebook account. I could have simply scrubbed clean and carried on; but I decided not to do so. I deleted my Facebook account. My reasons for so doing include another aspect of social media, even more troubling.

Quite aside from the narcissism of taking endless photos of yourself, your friends and your last meal, also perhaps sharing videos of cute dogs doing tricks and getting grumpy at the political views of others; there is a more sinister side to social media: click bait and scroll junkies. Social media platforms design the information and graphics displayed in accordance with

## My Experience of E-Quip by David Green



At first glance, the mountain of material contained in E-Quip can seem daunting. The scope of topics, theology, history, teaching, insight, and practical advice can appear to be overwhelming and simply too much to tackle.

However, as with all “mountains”, they can be climbed quite simply – one step at a time. With this mindset, E-Quip becomes an extremely practical and, perhaps, even an essential part of our Orthodox life. Knowledge and understanding are vital parts of our deepening Orthodox life. If we bring commitment and effort, will we climb higher.



The range of topics covered are wider and more demanding than we might meet in the Sunday homily – important as these are. The origins of our Christian faith are explored – where our understanding of God springs from, the way this understanding was clarified, the implications it compels us to face, all leading, by the grace of God, to a deeper, richer, more loving, more Christ-like, life.

Our shared Orthodox life in the early 21st Century did not appear from a vacuum. E-Quip is an excellent way to explore and understand the roots of every aspect of Orthodoxy – the wellsprings of our Faith, how the Liturgy came to be as we experience it, the rise and development of monasticism, the writings of the Fathers, why the Councils were battlegrounds and not dull administrative meetings, essential doctrine, and how we integrate all of this rich heritage into our lives here and now. <contd> ...

Speaking personally, I've benefited from E-Quip as a resource for catechesis, and through the lectures Fr Gregory has started. Its strength as a resource lies in its flexibility – you can look at specific subjects and/or sit back and absorb all of this teaching as the lectures unfold. The format is challenging in its depth but remains accessible to all. The opportunity to listen to the lectures and be able to review the topics online enables all to gain a firm grip on even the most “difficult” subjects.

All those who have contributed to E-Quip deserve our thanks and, I have no doubt, the thanks of future generations of Orthodox believers across the globe.

## The Chapel on the Sea

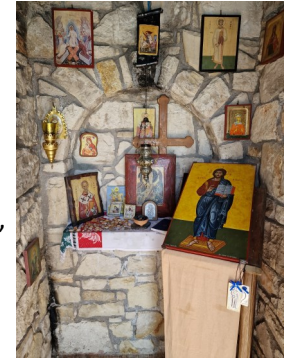
By Elizabeth Anne Valentina (Anna-Irene) Stenström

A sunset in late May painted all;  
 the young wheat,  
 the tide and the beach,  
 A sea of golden angels did meet,  
 To bless the day and give thanks,  
 with golden light,  
 We all were covered,  
 And lifted up our hearts,  
 And skipped along the shore,



And gathered there,  
 The tide recedes in prayer,  
 To offer up our brokenness,  
 Our bodies, souls, and voices,  
 Taking drink from the source,  
 Emboldened,  
 To spill outwardly in love again,

To join,  
 The chapel on the sea,  
 Whose stones face patiently East,  
 Whose stones stood for centuries,  
 Whose stones bore witness,  
 to the rise and crest and breaking of this Great Faith,  
 The martyrs of this land,  
 With open doors,  
 Who bear us now within its walls.



## The Prelude and Second Stanza of the Kontakia of St Romanos the Melodist on the Nativity of Christ

Today the Virgin gives birth to him who is above all being,  
 and the earth offers a cave to him whom no one can approach.  
 Angels with shepherds give glory,  
 and magi journey with a star,  
 for to us there has been born ...

*... a little Child, God before the ages.*

The mother's Father has willingly sent forth her Son,  
 the infants' Saviour is laid as an infant in a manger.  
 As she who bore him contemplates him, she says,  
 "Tell me, my Child, how were you sown, or how were you planted in me?  
 I see you, my flesh and blood, and I am amazed,  
 because I give suck and yet I am not married.  
 And though I see you in swaddling clothes,  
 I know that the flower of my virginity is sealed,  
 for you preserved it when, in your good pleasure, you were born ...

*... a little Child, God before the ages.*