

The Apostle

The Monthly Magazine of St Aidan's Orthodox Church,
Henderson Street, Levenshulme, Manchester M19 2JX

What not Where!



As May ends, we celebrate the Ascension of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ, and then, as June begins, the age of Pentecost, the birth of the Church and Her Mission. The Ascension of

Christ often does not receive the attention it deserves. Maybe some are embarrassed by what the Ascension might mean when we say that Christ has gone "up" into the heavens! We now know what the Earth looks like from space, and there certainly is no air up there! However, after the Resurrection, Jesus still eats (Luke 24:36-43; John 21:9-15). He still has a body, albeit a Resurrection body. We cannot assume, therefore, that the

Risen and Ascended Lord is now in no need of bodily sustenance or indeed air for breathing or that searching for Him among the stars has anything other than a figurative meaning. So where does this place



the risen and ascended Lord? ‘In heaven’ is the usual answer, of course, and that is true, but where is heaven? Is heaven ‘up’? Maybe heaven is within. Maybe heaven is beyond in another dimension. Perhaps all of these are true. The plausibility of any answer to “where” depends partly on cosmology (our best understanding of the universe) and beyond that the metauniverse, which lies utterly remote from all testable theories of creation in the realm of faith.

Hebrew science, as recorded in Genesis 1, proposes a three-decker universe. In this scheme, waters exist above the firmament (the sky), which is a shell embedding the sun, the moon, and the stars. Genesis uses the cosmology of

its time, but the message of the bible is not about a particular cosmology, a particular “where”. If we were to attempt to answer the question (from the basis of modern cosmology): “where did Christ ascend?” no reasonable satisfying answer could be given. The diagrams on the next two pages show how unnecessary the “where” question is; even misleading. We cannot easily resolve “where” questions, nor do these necessarily impart any spiritual meaning or value. “What” questions, however, are far more interesting. What was the Ascension for Christ, and what is the Ascension for us? To explore these two questions, after examining the pictures that follow, please read on!

BIBLICAL COSMOLOGY



HEAVEN OF HEAVENS
The dwelling place of God
(2 Chronicles 6:18; Psalm 11:4)

WATERS ABOVE
(Genesis 1:7)

FIRMAMENT
OR VAULT OF HEAVEN
(Genesis 1:6-8)

SUN
(Genesis 1:16)

STARS
(Genesis 1:16)

MOON
(Genesis 1:16)

EARTH / LAND
The inhabited world
(Genesis 1:10)

SEA
(Genesis 1:10)

THE DEEP
OR WATERS BELOW
(Genesis 1:2)

SHEOL / UNDERWORLD
The realm of the dead
(Psalm 16:10; Proverbs 9:18)

FOUNDATIONS / PILLARS OF THE EARTH
They uphold and stabilize the earth
(1 Samuel 2:8; Job 9:6; Psalm 75:3)

THE DEEP
OR WATERS BELOW
(Genesis 1:2)

HORIZON
WHERE THE
WATERS ABOVE
MEET THE EARTH
(Job 26:10)

HORIZON
WHERE THE
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(Job 26:10)

EARTH IN THE SOLAR SYSTEM

Earth —
3rd planet from the Sun.



Sun



Mercury



Venus



Earth



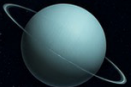
Mars



Jupiter



Saturn



Uranus



Neptune

THE SOLAR SYSTEM IN THE MILKY WAY GALAXY

Galactic Center

Solar System
Located in the
Orion Arm / Orion Spur



Earth is a planet
in the Solar System.



The Solar System is
part of the Milky Way.



The Milky Way is one of
billions of galaxies in
the universe.

What then was the Ascension for Christ? Simply put, it was His glorification. Jesus had spoken much about this in His aptly named 'High-Priestly Prayer' in John 17 (1-5; 24). Whatever this glory is, (and we will come to this in a moment), it is not something that Jesus did not have and then gained. In John 17:5, it is abundantly clear that Jesus had this glory before the creation of the world. No, the glorification of Christ is to be found in the death, Resurrection, and Ascension of our Lord. Glorification is for our benefit, not for His. This was also true in His Baptism and in His Transfiguration. As God He never lacked anything. Without Him, however, we lack everything (John 15:5).

This is why our glorification in its entirety only finds meaning in the death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ. The pattern of life this presents is that which we are emboldened by divine grace to follow as His cross-bearing disciples. If we accept to be glorified in this way, then we shall also participate in the Ascension of Christ. This is what we Orthodox commonly call theosis, deification. The first to tread this path and enter the fulness of the Divine Glory, upon her Ascension, was the Theotokos and ever-Virgin Mary. Before the ecclesiastical year ends

on 1st of September, and on the 15th of August, we celebrate her Dormition (her "falling asleep") and her Assumption into Heaven.



Throughout the year, we have followed Christ with His Mother always at our side. She shows us that the Ascension of Christ is not some sort of isolated event particular to Christ alone, but rather that which we are called to enjoy by our baptismal participation in Him, and then an ongoing life of dedication to the way of love of which He is the supreme manifestation in human form. Christ is ascended and glorified, and so shall we ascend in Him and be glorified if we repent daily. What the Ascension is remains far more important than where the Ascension may be found.

- Fr Gregory

The Doors, The Doors!

A testimony from our Church community...



A blanket of darkness had descended upon me in November last year (2025) and seemingly, at the end of everything, I reached out and turned towards the unknown ...

I had known about Orthodoxy previously, for quite a few years actually. A lifetime of soul searching and a love of books finally led me here ...

It was a broken heart that pushed me from general interest to action.

I have spent my entire life searching for something. I never, as it turned out, knew what that something was? Until now ...

I am of the firm belief that I have been slowly maneuvered into a position in life where the signs couldn't have been any clearer to me ... God was knocking at the door.

To have St Aidans literally on my doorstep is truly a blessing, and of

profound significance in my life. (I am continually aware of the distance covered by some of you in order to attend here. This makes the gift of living so close feel that much more precious.

A privilege indeed).

With an aching heart I reached out to Father Gregory one Friday evening (7th November 2025 to be exact!) and within 30mins he responded in the most perfect way ... With warmth and kindness.

It took a huge amount of courage to walk through the doors of St Aidans for the first time, but walk through them I did. The very next Sunday.

The reward began immediately.

I have found nothing but joy here!

For someone with no religious background and a history of social awkwardness/ anxiety, walking into a church for the first time is pretty intimidating I'd have to say! I almost immediately felt safe here however, ... welcomed and encouraged, albeit gently.

It has fast become a place of refuge, and my attendance (limited to Sunday mostly due to work commitments) is without doubt the

highlight of my week.

As many of you are already aware, I now man the doors most Sundays and I am delighted to fulfill that role. As a humble Catechumen the learning curve is steep, but one that I am enjoying climbing. Slowly but surely ... I see my role at the door as part of that climb.

Due to the path of my life thus far and the experiences that led me here, I am at a point where I realised that to be of practical use is worth so much and I am truly blessed to have been given the responsibility in this task. I can't stress enough the significance of this!

I have a (very) long way to go on my journey, but I have now found the right direction. In this church, its guidance and its people.

I am no great writer, so this is short and sweet I'm afraid.

May the Lord have mercy on me, and may he bless you all.

- Paul

75\$ Bike Ride - Part 1

Prologue



The story starts 10 August- my friend Ian emailed and asked would I like to share driving to Cyprus for the wedding of one of the girls in the church choir. I had already told her I couldn't go but the chance was too good to pass. So 11-8-14 I told the agency I was working for I was going on holiday next day "no problem they said there is nothing for a week. When are you

back?" I told them don't hold your breath .and booked a ticket on Ian's flight to Munich with Singapore Airways (a bit more posh than Whizz air or even Aeroflot). Incredibly cheap Ian said something about feeder connection to their main European hub. We arrive in Munich 12-8-14 and collected Ian's campervan and more importantly Ian's state of the art hand built touring bike (think megabucks and then add some). We set off for Passau and the Donau radweg or eurovelo 6 or Atlantic/Back

sea cycle path. If you are not into bike rides, think canal tow path but motorway standard, big big river and lots of bikes some families out for the day and more than a few enthusiasts loaded down with gear for all or part of 4400kms.

The basic idea was Ian rode, while I drove to find a camping spot and then next day I rode, you get the picture.

Ian and I have a lot in common both married twice, divorced twice, both second wives Russian, both of us lived and worked in Russia, both of us converted to Greek Orthodoxy, but our closest bond is that we never agree on anything EVER, particularly politics. Even if after ferocious debate we do arrive at a mutual opinion, we reach it from diametrically opposite starting points. Ian is always advising me to spend a serious amount of money and buy a quality bike.

After many adventures in 7 countries including a let off for speeding in Serbia, punctures in both tyres (bike) in Bulgaria and a ½ day in Istanbul while his bike was serviced and punctures repaired (nearest approved specialist for this quality of bike) and a rust streaked HGV ferry from Turkey we arrived safely in good time for the wedding on 30/8/14. Much to Ian's relief, until then a vociferous opponent of H&S regulations, we had slept on deck in sleeping bags as much to assure Ian of a certain escape from a sinking ship, as to avoid the heat in the cramped passenger saloon. (See Ian's blog for details). I resisted the temptation to remark

on Titanic's newness and British approval of sea worthiness

We picked up Ian's spare bike as soon as we got to Nicosia and spend a few days riding around the national park that was the venue for the wedding: once around Troodos Mountain and once over the mountain or more accurately rode down and pushed bikes back up a forest drive visiting ancient frescoed local churches. See UNESCO world heritage list for details.

After the wedding (See Ian's 2nd blog for details) Ian had a lot of things to organise. There were no cheap flights back to UK, so I booked a ticket to Belgrade for 4/9/14. Ian agreed to take the camper to Pafos (Paphos of package tour fame) while I rode down the mountain, spend the night there and then return to Nicosia to sort out things giving me 3 days to cycle to Larnaca, sleeping on the beach (in Ian's tent) where we would meet up.

To be continued...

- Paul

A day in St Vladimir's

Chiang Mai, Thailand



Myself and Bonnie recently returned from spending 3 months in Thailand. One of the most memorable days we had is the day we attended the liturgy at St Vladimir's in Chiang Mai.

With all of it's beauty, and everything I could write about the temple, the beautiful and fun priest (Fr Paul), Thailand, etc. I want to focus in on one thing that really made an impression on me: The Church as a family.

After the liturgy, we went invited to the basement of the temple where

there was a little home, where I think Fr Paul lived with his family. His two daughters were already down there with their mother.

We ate together, and Fr Paul and his wife really made an effort to try to get to know us, asking us everything about where we were from, what we were doing there, our Church back at home etc.

All of this was beautiful and we felt such at home immediately. It brings tears to my eyes when I think about it. After we ate, Fr Paul (in not so good English, so I thought

there might have been a misunderstanding) asked us if we wanted to go canoeing. He showed us an address on the map for a shop that rents canoes, and told us to meet him there in a couple of hours.

We arrived and others who attended the liturgy were there. We all rented our own canoes: Fr Paul with his wife and two young children, the younger lads in a 3 man canoe, Sergei and his sister together, and me and Bonnie, and canoed in the river. It was so much fun. Not at all formal, just playing around and having fun canoeing in a beautiful river in Thailand

(maybe a little dirty, with a lot of river water splashing all over us, but that was a concern for another day). We felt like we had been welcomed into a family, it was so much fun.

We then spotted Fr Paul and his family going onto land, so we all joined him, and there was a restaurant right there on the side of the canal. We all went in, Fr Paul helped us order food (Thai restaurant without any English on the menus etc). We all prayed together, and we ate.

Upon returning to our boats, we played with leaves, and used them to make really loud whistling sounds, which his children (And us!) found really fun.

We then said goodbye to Fr Paul and his family, and everyone else, and went home to get changed out of our (slightly wet) clothes.

All of this was just so much fun. And it felt so right. We had come together in Christ, and as a family, and just had fun. There was no fear, it felt like hanging out with friends. I knew Fr Paul for a very short amount of time, but I love him, and he felt like a friend.

All of this is to lead up to the main takeaway: The Church as a family. Hanging out, spending time, laughing and having fun together all felt so right. It felt like exactly what we should be doing. Family's aren't perfect – people have their quirks, own lives and personalities, and on the surface might not be people who you generally would spend time with. But they are your family: you love them, you have fun together, you spend time together – you talk together, and you eat together, and you help each other.

Since this experience I have



realised the importance of us getting together and spending time as a family. We might not be very similar on the surface, but we are a family, and we should make efforts to function as one. These efforts don't need to be perfect, and with St Aidan's being such a big parish it might be a bit more difficult to connect in the way we did with Fr Paul (being a very small congregation, no more than 10 people attending), but it is still possible.

This is to implore us to all get together, spend time with one another, and make efforts for us to function as a family. Our salvation is in Christ, and our salvation is found within our Parish: not alone, and not only when we see one another in the temple during liturgy. We can come together in Christ outside of the temple too, and doing this in Chiang Mai felt so right: It was

beautiful, and all of this brings tears to my eyes. So I'd like to ask: If there's a hobby you like to do, maybe plan to invite some people from the congregation. If you want to go watch a movie, maybe pop a message in the WhatsApp group, and see if people would like to join you. Maybe you want to go for a meal, and you can ask some people from the congregation if they want to join you.

On Metropolitan Siluan's visit sometime last year, he implored us to "Make the Church more beautiful"

If you've read all of this, I hope it has made some kind of impression on you.

With love and in Christ,

- Joseph Cunnelly.

The Jesus Prayer...

Here is a wonderful post concerning the Jesus Prayer



- When I visited St John Baptist Monastery back in the 1980's, it was said for two hours, both morning and evening, with almost no other prayers. (yes, it was quite hard work!)
More recently it is incorporated into morning and evening Hours.

'...a Catholic priest, visiting the monastery, saw how we prayed the Jesus Prayer, and he said to Fr. Sophrony [of Essex], 'I cannot understand why you have to repeat the same prayer for so long.' Fr. Sophrony answered, 'We repeat it because we are slow to understand

it, and once we have understood it, we do not want to abandon it.'" The Enlargement of the Heart (p. 138)

'slow to understand...' I, George, can forget that I'm a sinner between one sip of coffee and the next. And without that acknowledgement the Holy Spirit finds it so hard to come to us. It will repay you a thousand fold if you persevere...

Love to all

- George

Spread The Word...



Over my years as a Christian, and even before I came home to Orthodoxy, I have always spread the Word. As many may already know, I have engaged in countless debates and discussions with those, both inside and outside of the faith. Throughout this time, I have come to notice a reoccurring pattern in the questions that are asked of me, though often worded differently, their intent remains much the same; “Why does God allow evil to happen?” or more specifically sometimes “what do Christian’s think about homosexuality?”. The same questions, I have come to assume, are either asked from a place of two motivations. The first being

curiosity, yet not enough to search the scriptures themselves, whilst prying into the faith with a truly open mind and heart, inquiring as the Spirit gently nudges them. These people are mostly agnostic, however even atheists and those of other faiths ask much the same style of question with similar curiosity.

Now to these people, I have a great amount of time, for we are not called to keep Gods promise too ourselves as though it was a secret, rather, spread unto all people who have ears to hear.

However, in spreading the Gospel so indiscriminately, you will also be sure to meet people with bad intentions, hence the second type of people that I’ve come across. There are those who have decided they know enough about the Christ to put themselves at enmity with Him. Those who know just enough that they may twist the scriptures and spread deceptions about Christ and His bride. Like a lion hunting

its prey, they look to pounce on the lesser versed Christian, that they may ensnare them in hedonistic moral subjections and spiritually suicidal ideologies, tied together as bow of death. Whilst the lesser versed brother or sister may feel slight humiliation and frustration, for their words have failed them, they are not a concern of mine, for they are in the Spirit and the Spirit in them, thus they are immune to tricky words and persuasive arguments of blasphemy. My concern has always been those not of the Spirit who spectate. For should one's first witness of the Gospel become so undermined, God forbid such spectators may assume the Gospel alike; unable to answer for itself. I say this not to discourage one from spreading the Word, but merely to make aware of the snares and traps that lay in wait for you. Yet, the truth needs not to remember what has been said, for it is true, simply only that it has been said. Such is the case a thing cannot be deemed true due to the articulation of its claim, rather the fruit in which it bares. That is to say, that you need not reach for intricate doctrine or a tenuous Church

history to state your own claim, that the tomb was empty, and He is risen. This claim alone is enough to fold stars and dry up oceans according to your will, that His will be done.

Alas, should you wish to teach the truth, you must first understand it. It is with this understanding and a degree of responsibility, that I have decided to recall the many divisive objections I've become accustomed to in my defending of the Gospel. I have compiled them into one book, and offered what I know to be true and can explain, that is the Gospel and fallacy that dare stand against It. By this means, I may not become exalted in things too marvellous for me, such as the sound doctrine of the Church. More so, inspired by our wonderful Saint Aidan's pastoral teaching, that one who is unfamiliar and perhaps even resistant to the name Christ, is perhaps better to first be fed the milk of the faith, before the solid food. That is to say, I will answer such moral quagmires using only universal Christian truths, found in the scriptures; not by any means that I claim the Church any less evident in the scriptures.

I have reflected and found as such, that as much as I wish it were not so, I am apart of the world, yet longing to be in Spirit. Thus, I must believe that our God has placed me in the world, that I may be of some use to His kingdom here. With this as my witness, my book will make efforts in addressing contemporary issues of our place and time, such as gay marriage, abortion and racialism and all the way through to the concept of a moral compass. I shall guide the reader using pragmatism and easy to digest concepts, in which I shall address the very nature of a sin, beyond its condemnation. Ultimately, I wish that the reader remains no longer ignorant in such matters, rather, that they become equipped to make an informed choice of what they believe to be good.

Finally, do bear in mind, this book is meant for those outside of the faith, or perhaps long unfamiliar to God. In accordance then with my target audience, I have defined key terms for readers, using universal Christian understandings, rather than doctrinal definitions held

by the Church, yet all the same, using only definitions accepted by the Church. So if you should feel I've understated a term, such as the most Holy Trinity, in which I analogously describe distinction, but refrain from matters concerning the "Filioque", do not think me ignorant or the appeasing sort, rather a man who is trying patience, and by way discernment.

I should conclude then that this book is not for Orthodoxy, but because of Orthodoxy: For there is no use trying to force-feed a man who believes himself full, rather he must first be made hungry by the sweet scent of food. Only then will I offer him some, and should he accept, let him be offered the best food; food that shall see those who eat it never need to eat again. Amen.

When printed and published, I'll place a couple of copies in the Church library, feel free to share your thoughts, both good and bad.

- Callum Paisios.

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GREEK

For Beginners

Learn Practical Greek
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Course details



Start date: Saturday 20th June

Session time: 2 hours, 10:30 - 12:30



Class location: Stockport Meeting House,
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SK1 3DW



Parking: Free parking on site



Course duration: 8 weeks



Classes: In person, face to face

Course Price: £160



What's included



All course materials



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A Recipe for Summer...

Lemon and thyme pork schnitzel with potato salad

This is an amazing recipe, it's quick, very tasty and great this time of year as spring turns to summer. The potato salad in the recipe is delicious with the schnitzels, however, if you want something warmer just serve with boiled new potatoes coated in butter and a pinch of salt, no faff involved!

I have made this a few times recently and I don't think it's necessary to trim the fat on the pork loins (more flavour!) but you can if you want. I also would suggest shallow frying the schnitzels in lard instead of sunflower oil but the decision is yours. Pork goes well with so many flavours but this particular dish goes great with a side helping of mild mustard, fried onions and lots of lemon!

https://www.bbc.co.uk/food/recipes/lemon_and_thyme_pork_15402

In Christ,

- Cecilia



A Pilgrimage To Georgia...

Myself (Kevin) and Nathanael recently went on a pilgrimage to Georgia. It was an incredible experience to be able to explore the country and experience their rich Orthodox Christian faith and culture. The pilgrimage was organised by the Antiochian cathedral in London who arranges yearly pilgrimages with a limited number of spaces, we were

accompanied by Fr Dmitry from the cathedral. We stayed in Tbilisi and travelled out via coach with a Georgian guide to a different location each day to various holy sites as well as experiencing Georgian music, dance, food and wine tasting. I'd like to talk about some of the highlights of the trip as well as tales we have learnt of Georgians great and holy saints.



Scetiskhoveli Cathedral and Saint Nino

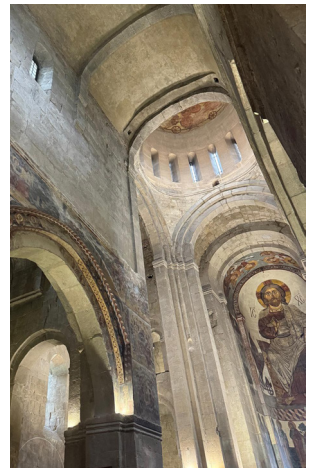
Scetiskhoveli Cathedral is an incredible 11th century cathedral in Mtshka. It is a beautiful display of the Georgians unique architecture. While we were there a monk taught us about the origins of the

Cathedral and its connection to the life of Georgia's most important and loved saint, St Nino. Through her miraculous healings and miracles, the saint converted many, including in time, the king and

queen making Georgia one of the first Christian nations after Armenia in approximately 327 – 337. ad. St Nino instructed King Mirian III to build the first Christian church on the grounds that Scetiskhoveli Cathedral now stands. It is on this ground also that the robe of Christ is said to have been buried, obtained by a Georgian Jew named Elias who had brought the cloak from the Roman soldier who drew lots for it.

The name of the cathedral translates to “Life-giving Pillar” in reference to the tale of this holy place. Within the cathedral there is a stone pillar which is referred to as the life giving pillar, this is the spot where the robe of Christ is buried and can be venerated. Here also rests Sidonia, Elias’ sister who

upon greeting Elias on his return to Georgia embraced the robe and passed away with it still in her grasp. She was buried holding the robe. From her grave grew a Cedar tree which St Nino instructed be cut down to build the church. From this tree 7 pillars were made, 6 of which were put into their rightful places however the 7th miraculously hovered in the air. It remained in place, St Nino spent the night in prayer and eventually it came back down to earth, it is said the pillar leaked holy oil which cured many people with serious illness, hence the name “life giving pillar”. We were also told that months prior to our arrival an apparition of Christ’s faces had appeared and remained for some time in front of a candle at the base of the pillar - it was reported by many.



Samtavro Monastery resting place of St Gabriel

Also located in Mtskheta is the Samtavro monastery where St Gabriel spent his last days as a spiritual father to the sisters there. His relics are buried under a shrine dedicated to him within the monastery. I am sure that many are already familiar with the life of St Gabriel, so I will not discuss too much about him. I would highly recommend, as recommended to me by Nathanael the Trisagion films Youtube video titled - 'cloaked in faith and Humility, The Life of St.

Gabriel, the Fool for Christ' for those who would like to hear more about this marvellous saint's story. It was an amazing experience being at this monastery and venerating the saint's relics to say the least. It was made even more so by the fact that we entered during a service so were able to experience the beautiful Georgian chanting by the sisters there. The monastery was built in the 4th century original and reconstructed in the 11th century.



St David Gareji desert and monasteries

We travelled to the St David Gareji desert to visit a church and a monastery. This is a remote part of Georgia known for its striking landscapes and monastery complexes established by the saint and his companions the 13 Assyrian Fathers. These Syrian ascetics, 12 disciples led by St John of Zedazeni, who had been instructed by the Virgin Mary to travel to Georgia and “strengthen the Christian soul of the people”. They brought with them their ascetic discipline and monastic tradition. St David and another of the disciples Lukiane travelled to what would become known as the Gareji wilderness. Here they lived an ascetic life and experienced the

grace of God in times of struggle, when upon running out of water a herd of deer visited them whose milk they drank, the deer returned to them every day except for on fasting days. The word spread of the wonders they performed and their ascetic discipline, soon the area became a refuge for Christians that desired the ascetic life. Many of the churches in this area tell the story of St David through ancient stone carvings on the exterior walls. We visited one very beautiful church here before travelling to St David’s monastery where the monks live in cells carved from the very stone from the cliffs of the desert. It was a very beautiful and peaceful place for the final day of our trip.



Conclusion

Georgia is an amazing place and I would highly recommend visiting there. There is much more I have not included, I have not mentioned much of Tbilisi but it is a beautiful city with many ancient churches and cathedrals. The Seoni cathedral there was my favourite and in there

they have the cross of St Nino and fragment of the skull of the apostle Thomas. I hope you have enjoyed this, thanks for reading and may the holy St Nino, St Gabriel, St David and all the Georgian saints intercede for us all. :)

- Kevin

