



“*JOY OF ALL WHO SORROW*”

No 8 July '09

GLORY TO GOD!

THE BLESSING OF THE CHURCH

On Thursday 16 July the new church will be blessed by Archbishop Mark. The service, Divine Liturgy, will begin at 9.30am. This is a very special day. It is often unwise to claim that something is unique, but the building of an Orthodox church and the visit of an archbishop are surely rarities in the life of any village in this country. The service will be followed by an informal buffet lunch in the house. Whilst we realise that some of you will be away on holiday at this time, and for others it is a working day, we hope that as many of you as possible will attend.

SERVICES

In addition to our regular services (10.30am on Sundays and 6pm on Fridays) and the blessing of the church (see above) we will sing Vespers and Compline on Wednesday 1 July at 7pm. This is in honour of St John the Wonderworker who reposed on 2 July 1966.

The first Life of St John the Wonderworker was written by Hieromonk Seraphim of Platina just six months after the saint's repose. This text, *Vita Prima*, is being republished, with permission, as No 1 in the *Mettingham College Series*, and should be available within the next few weeks at £1.50 per copy.

On Friday 17 July, instead of the usual *Joy of All Who Sorrow* Akathist, we will read Compline and sing the Akathist to the New Martyr St Elizabeth. Note: this service will be at the slightly later time of 7pm.

PROGRESS WITH THE CHURCH

In June progress was made on the exterior of the church which is now looking very impressive. The cupolas are both in place. Carpeting has been laid in the altar and the Royal Doors, in front of the altar, were installed although the ikons for the doors have not yet been painted. On Thursday 2 July, EDF will install the new cable to upgrade the electricity supply to the house. Then the electrician will be able to connect the electricity supply to the church.

BISHOPS IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

With the forthcoming visit of Archbishop Mark, it may be useful to reflect on the role and significance of the bishop in the Orthodox Church. After Pentecost, all of the Apostles travelled extensively founding churches and ordaining numerous bishops as their successors. Thus from the earliest times, bishops were seen as essential figures in the preservation of the unity of the Church and the continuity and protection of her beliefs and practices. In the Liturgy, this vital role of the bishop as a lofty spiritual overseer and protector of the wide area of his diocese is symbolised in the small rug on which he stands throughout the Divine Liturgy and upon which is embroidered an eagle flying high above a city. Moreover, the way in which the bishop upholds Orthodox doctrine and practice is symbolised by the special candlesticks with which he blesses the faithful, one with two candles (*dikiri*), symbolising the two natures of Christ, Truly Divine and Truly Human, and the other with three candles (*trikiri*), symbolising the Holy Trinity.

Bishops are thus integral to the Apostolic continuity and identity of the Church. St Ignatius of Antioch, writing in the early 2nd Century, says 'Wherever the bishop appears, there let the people be; as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic (universal) Church'. This sense of the bishop at the heart of the Church is given vivid expression in the way in which at the beginning of the Liturgy, up to the Entrance with the Gospel Book, the bishop is in the middle of the church, at the centre of his flock, often on a raised platform, surrounded by the priests, who become types of the apostles.

The quotation from St Ignatius also underscores the mystical identity of the bishop as the one who supremely represents the person of Christ to the eucharistic community. As again St Ignatius says, 'we should regard the bishop as the Lord himself' and again, 'the bishop presides as the counterpart (type) of God'. This profound and ancient mystical dimension of the office of the bishop is seen very clearly in the Liturgy in the vestments that the bishop wears. Over the top of his vestments, he wears a scarf-like garment called an omophor. This is a wide strip of fabric that hangs around his neck, which represents the one lost sheep that Christ bore on his shoulders. The staff that he carries also reminds us of his role as archpastor for the flock of Christ, who, like the Good Shepherd, knows the needs and difficulties of all his sheep. His mitre is at once the crown of a prince of the Church of highest rank, but also a type of Christ's crown of thorns.

To the bishop belongs the great spiritual responsibility for the salvation of all of the souls in his diocese. Due to the weight of this God-given responsibility, the bishop is held strongly in the prayers of all the faithful. It is for this reason that the name of the diocesan bishop is commemorated several times in the litanies of the services and also why the laity exclaim in the Liturgy (retaining the original Greek): 'Eis Polla Eti Despota', 'Many years, Master'.

With all of his responsibilities in his extensive diocese and other official duties on behalf of the Patriarchate, we should be very grateful to Archbishop Mark for so kindly taking the time to come and bless our small country church here in Mettingham. On the 16 July, let us thus all say from the bottom of our hearts to our dear archpastor, 'Eis Polla Eti Despota'!

NEW-MARTYRS SAINTS ELIZABETH & BARBARA

In 1864, a second daughter, Elizabeth, was born to the Grand-Duke of Hesse-Darmstadt and Princess Alice, a daughter of Queen Victoria. The young princess grew up to be very beautiful, and at the age of nineteen, married a Grand-Duke of Russia, Sergei Alexandrovich. Through Elizabeth's marriage, her sister Alexandra was also to meet and marry another Russian, the future Tsar Nicholas II. On moving to Russia to live with her husband Elizabeth, who had always loved God, was soon drawn to Orthodox Christianity, intuitively perceiving the deep spirituality of the Russian Orthodox Church. Sorrowfully accepting the disapproval of her Lutheran relations, she converted in 1891.

In 1905, as civil unrest grew in Russia, Elizabeth's husband was blown to pieces in an explosion by an anarchist assassin. Amazingly, Elizabeth immediately forgave the murderer and, to the incomprehension of those around her tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to secure him a reprieve from execution. She even visited the murderer in prison. The tragedy was a turning point in Elizabeth's life. Her husband's death was a solemn reminder of the fragility of all human life, and she abandoned completely the luxurious life of a royal dignitary.

After much prayer and soul-searching, she decided to found a monastic community, the convent of Sts Martha and Mary at her estate in Moscow. The convent, which opened in 1909, was funded by the sale of all her precious jewels. It was a place of prayer and practical service, with two churches, a hospital and dispensary, lodging house, orphanage, library and soup kitchen. The sisters also worked with the poor and

sick in the slums of Moscow. Elizabeth lived a very self-denying lifestyle, eating only bread and vegetables, and always rising in the middle of the night to pray, and to check her patients, so that she never had much of a chance to rest herself.

The Russian Revolution in 1917 led to a terrible persecution of Christians. Churches and monasteries were destroyed and priests, monks and nuns tortured and killed. Against the advice she was given, Elizabeth chose to stay in Russia, and to face the inevitable fate of an abbess and member of the royal family, martyrdom. This came the following year, when she was imprisoned at Alapayevsk with other members of the aristocracy. One of the novices, Sister Barbara, who would not leave her spiritual mother, stayed with the abbess despite being warned of the consequences. Thus Barbara chose death rather than desertion.

After four months, on the very same night as the murder of the Tsar and his family, the prisoners were thrown into a shaft at a disused iron mine. None of them were killed by the fall, but were preserved by God to audibly sing hymns. Even the attempts of the soldiers to kill them with live hand grenades were unsuccessful, and the singing continued for some time, despite burning brushwood being thrown down the shaft.

When the bodies were recovered later by the White Army, Elizabeth's was found to be incorrupt, the fingers placed together in the traditional position for making the Sign of the Cross. One of the other prisoners, John, was found beside her with her monastic veil wrapped around his injured head as a bandage. By this, the former grand duchess expressed her love and care for others, even in the last moments of her earthly life.

Abbess Elizabeth's remains, along with those of Sister Barbara, are still partially incorrupt to this day, and are preserved in the church of St Mary Magdalene in Gethsemane, Jerusalem. The relics have worked, and continue to work, numerous miracles. In 1981, because of St Elizabeth's exemplary life of Christian service, sacrifice and forgiveness, her holy martyrdom and the clear evidence of her prayer and heavenly help, the Russian Orthodox Church declared Elizabeth, together with Barbara and all the other New Martyrs, to be saints.

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On Friday 26 June Archbishop Mark brought two reliquaries to Britain, These contain some of the relics of the New Martyrs Saints Elizabeth and Barbara. These relics will remain in Britain for two months for the veneration of the faithful. The plan is to take them on pilgrimage to the various parishes in Britain and Ireland. We are trying to arrange for our new church here in Mettingham to be included in the schedule, maybe at some time in August. We will keep you all informed about this, just as soon as we have definite dates. Despite the comment on the front page of this bulletin, this really will be a unique event and one not to be missed.

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Cheques for the church fund should be made payable to "*Joy of All Who Sorrow*" Church.

The account is in HSBC Bank, 3 New Market, Beccles, Suffolk NR34 9HQ

Account No 71395912 Sort Code 40-09-24