

# The Orthodox Parish of St Martin and St Helen

Charity number: 1192469

Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of the British Isles & Ireland  
HE Metropolitan Silouan Oner



The icon of the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is a rich feast of theology and spiritual edification. Icons show how reality exists through symbols, they depict spiritual and theological realities rather than being merely representational church 'art', and for Orthodox Christians they are essential to a full life of worship and prayer. In the 2nd Century Christian writings known as *The Protoevangelium of James*, from which we derive much of our Holy Tradition, we can discover the origin of many of the symbolic elements present in this icon. We see the infant Christ lying in a manger. His Mother, Mary, the Theotokos beside Him, an ox and an ass behind Him. Christ's birth in a cave is not mentioned in The Holy Gospels, but is an ancient tradition, from the first and second centuries. He is dressed in burial clothes to foreshadow His death. His location in a cave also foreshadows the grave in which He would be buried

and where He would resurrect. When Adam and Even were first created, they were 'clothed' in the glory of God. That was their natural state. After falling into sin, they became conscious of their nakedness and were ashamed. They put on animal skins (representing death), and went into exile outside of the Garden. In a similar way Christ descends from glory to become one of us, in a way exiling Himself from heaven. He clothed Himself in mortal flesh, as we read: '*God made Christ who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Christ*' (2 Cor. 5:21). Mary looks at Joseph, her husband, and prays for him. Joseph walks outside the cave with an old man - the devil - who tempts him and troubles his thoughts: "whose child is this?" God often does this, bringing Grace into our lives and then withdrawing a little, letting us struggle, to grow spiritually and learn perseverance. The blue shape at the top, known as a mandorla, shows the Glory of God shining downwards and indicating Christ, His Anointed One. The women washing the infant Christ are midwives, indicating Jesus' full humanity, shown here to defeat the heretical view that He only *appeared* to be human. Finally the cave indicates our heart; the centre of our very personhood. Our Christian life is a journey into our hearts, and wholeness, for it is there we find the Kingdom of God (Luke 17:21). We are in many ways, like Joseph in the icon, outside our hearts (beside ourselves) and therefore afflicted by terrible anxiety and self-consciousness. Let us repent and pray, asking also for the helpful prayers of the Theotokos and the saints, that God will lead us back within our hearts and rejoicing, find Him born in us, bringing light and love and faith into our darkness and despair. A happy and blessed Feast! Merry Christmas! —Fr Mark + Khouria Paula

## News

### Roof repairs

An application has now been submitted for Listed Buildings Consent so that the roof of St Martin's Church can be repaired and made sound for the future. It has been a lengthy process compiling the relevant documents to support the application, which include a bat survey, boundary drawings and quotes from builders amongst others. Seeking the funds for the work to take place has also been a priority. Please pray that, if it pleases God, our work will be successful and that the City Council and others will make their decisions speedily.

### Parish Communications

The recently introduced parish WhatsApp chat has proved very helpful in getting information out to our community. We are thinking of other ways we can communicate with everyone, and over the next couple of months we will be letting you know about some ideas we have to help bring us closer together as a community and to publicise various initiatives and projects. Watch this space!

### Bread and Wine

The parish is in constant need of prosphora (bread) and wine for the Holy Liturgy. Please consider making an offering of a bottle or two of wine (Mavrodaphne of Patras or St John's Commandaria are preferred but if unsure please ask Subdeacon George or Father Mark). Perhaps some of you can learn to bake the prosphora breads; Subdeacon George can give instruction and advice. It is a great and holy service to the Church to do this. We average around 100 people on a Sunday now and we need at least two large loaves per liturgy! These precious elements do not simply magically appear. Somebody actually has to sacrifice their time and energy to make it happen!

### Regular Service Times

Saturdays: Great Vespers 4:30pm

Sundays: Matins & Holy Liturgy from 9:30am

### Additional Services

Thursday 4 December: Great Martyr Barbara, Hours & Holy Liturgy. **St Helen's Chapel from 8:15am.**

Friday 12 December: St Spyridon the Wonderworker, Bishop of Tremithus, Hours & Holy Liturgy. **St Helen's Chapel from 8:15am.**

Monday 15 December: Hieromartyr Eleutherius, Bishop of Illyria and his mother Martyr Anthea, Hours & Holy Liturgy. **St Helen's Chapel from 8:15am.**

Wednesday 24 December: Eve of the Nativity of Christ. Royal Hours **9am, St Martin's Church.** Vespers Liturgy of St Basil the Great **4:30pm, St Martin's Church.**

Thursday 25 December: The Nativity According to the Flesh of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Hours and Holy Liturgy, followed by carols. **St Martin's Church from 9:15am.**

## News (cont'd)

### The Project Committee and Church Council

The Church Council meets on the 7th of December after the liturgy. Anyone who wishes to stay and observe the proceedings is very welcome to do so, although the business and decisions are made and conducted by elected members only. The project committee meets again on the 14th December, again after the liturgy to discuss issues relating to the buildings and refurbishments.

### Kursk Root Icon Pilgrimage

On the evening of Wednesday 12 November we were blessed to make a parish pilgrimage to venerate the Kursk Root Icon of the Mother of God and to celebrate with our Orthodox brothers and sisters of the ROCOR parish in St Mary's Church, Bury St Edmunds. Over thirty of our people attended and with Sayedna's blessing, Father Mark concelebrated the vigil service with Archpriest Vladimir Dyachenko. It was a moving and blessed service and a wonderful chance to worship with our Orthodox neighbours. Special thanks go to Subdeacon Christopher Dive of the ROCOR parish, who helped make us so welcome. Most Holy Theotokos save us!

### 30 years anniversary

We have now realised the full-video (around 55 minutes long) of our second and final interview with Fr Alexander Haig. As previously mentioned, in these interviews Fr Alexander discusses our parish in Colchester and how it has evolved over the past 30 years. All videos can be found on our parish webpage: <https://stmartinscolchester.org.uk/videos>