‘Down at the Riverside’ we shall pray for Colchester...

On Sunday 8 January we go down to the River Colne below St Helen’s Chapel to bless the waters as usual. It is the Sunday after Theophany, and that is what we have done for some years.

The walk to the water is the ancient custom of the whole Orthodox Church, inspired by the lovely feast of Theophany (6 January). We recall the Baptism of Christ in the River Jordan, when the Lord at the very beginning of his ministry entered the waters to identify himself in every way with our sinfulness, though himself without sin.

Water has a manifold meaning for us as Christians and as human beings, spiritually and naturally. As in nature, it clearly symbolises life itself, for without water there can be no life. Astronomers look for water on the surface of other bodies in the sky, to see if there is the possibility of life ever having been on them. We can live a while without food, but a much shorter time without water.

But it also symbolises death, for if we fall into it we can drown: the very gift that reminds us of life, reminds us also of death.

These basic human references to water are the reason they also mean so much in the Christian Faith.

Water rich in meaning in the life of the spirit

We use water in Holy Baptism, in sprinkling our homes and buildings and things and people with sanctified water.

This reminds us of the occasions that water is vitally important in the whole Old Testament story - the waters of chaos in the creation of the world; the waters of the Nile through which the Hebrews had to pass to enter the promised land of Canaan; the waters of the Jordan through which the Hebrews had to pass to enter the promised land of freedom.

It reminds us too, in the New Testament, of the waters of the Jordan which we contemplate now at the time of Theophany - the water into which Christ descended, the water which was the death-depriving mixture of sin and death for the human race, the product of the fall, but the water also which now gives life, spiritual life, eternal life, since Christ has entered it and cleansed it, the divine life given to all who will enter into it.

So it is entirely natural to go to the water-side and bless it once a year. Yet it is also entirely super-natural to bless it.

We call upon Christ again to enter, to renew his entrance, into our sinful, our death-filled, existence, to renew it, to make it pure again and life-filled. Not just with its own inherent natural life but also with his divine life.

Thus the blessing of the water at Theophany symbolises, realises, makes real, that bringing together, of the natural and the supernatural, of the human and the divine, which is a characteristic of our Holy Faith. Heaven and earth are united, God and Man are reconciled, Heaven is not dragged down to earth, but earth is drawn up into the life of heaven.

And of course the blessing of the river will also mean the blessing of the natural and supernatural life of this town of Colchester, and of this country and world.

This world so needs our prayers – including Syria, a land which means so much in the life of the Church, and Egypt, which also means a great deal in the life of the Church. Pray this Theophany for these countries and for their peace.

And God bless us all. 

Father Alexander
April to Wednesday 2 May? The full cost will be
dates you might like to note in your diary are:

be generous response. There is of course a
box in the porch to gather them: it brought a

mas I asked in church for items which people
return, displayed in the porch.

BEACON HOUSE
in East Hill cares for the
homeless. Their work reminds me of the words of
Christ, The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his
head. We should care for the homeless. Beacon
House provide washing facilities, clothing, food,
etc. I recently sent a gift of £100 from the
Parish, and they sent a nice letter of thanks in
return, displayed in the porch. Before Christ-
mas I asked in church for items which people
could wrap up as Christmas gifts, and we had a
box in the porch to gather them: it brought a
generous response. There is of course a
 continuing need for suitable items, including
socks, coats, scarves, gloves, etc.

HOLY PASCHA this year falls on 15 April,
one week later than western Easter. Other related
dates you might like to note in your diary are:

- Sunday of the Publican & Pharisee 5 February
- First day of Lent 27 February.

DEANERY CONFERENCE: Those who attended
the Conference in 2011 much enjoyed it—finding
it enlightening and inspiring, I think. Why don’t
you join us for the 2012 Conference - again at
Swanwick in Derbyshire, and over Monday 30
April to Wednesday 2 May? The full cost will be
£130 per adult (children reduced), but I shall ask
the Church Council to contribute to the costs of
those who go from here, to make it considerably
cheaper for those attending. The title will be
Discipleship Today, and the Archbishop
has promised to attend. Details from me.

DEANERY CLERGY MEETING: The Clergy of
the Deanery will be meeting in London, at St
George’s Cathedral, on Saturday 14 January.
There will be no Vespers in St Helen’s that day.

CHRISTMAS BAGS: This year as in most years
the Rotonians have provided some bags of good-
ies and asked me to distribute half-a-dozen, and I
have been pleased to pass them round. They
fund them from the Rotary Christmas street
collections, and I find that many recipients
appreciate the kindness.

A Word from the Fathers

See, Fire and Spirit in the wound that bore you;
See, Fire and Spirit in the river where you were baptised:
Fire and Spirit in our baptism:
In the Bread and the Cup, Fire and Holy Spirit.
In your Bread is hidden a Spirit not to be eaten,
In your Wine dwells a Fire not to be drunk.
Spirit in your Bread, Fire in your Wine,
A wonder set apart, yet received by our lips.
How wonderful your footsteps, walking on the waters!
You subdued the great sea beneath your feet.
Yet to a little stream you subjected your head,
Bending down to be baptised in it.
The stream was like John who performed the baptism in it,
In their smallness each an image of the other.
To the stream so little, to the servant so weak,
The Lord of them both subjected himself.

Christian Unity Week Service
at the Baptist Church, Eld Lane
Sunday 22 January at 6.30 pm
We are all invited

Churches Together in Central Colchester

Orthodoxy in Basildon: developments
Our next Holy Liturgy in south Essex will be at
St Basil’s RC Church on 7 January at 11.00 am.
It will be the last at St Basil’s, at least for the
moment.
We are most grateful to Father DOMINIC and his
people for their hospitality for over a year, mainly at
St Basil’s but a few times at Holy Trinity.
At very short notice, it was not possible to hold
the December Liturgy at St Basil’s, and we hastily
moved to a newly-arranged chapel in the garden of
GEORGE and NEKTARIOS HARRISON at 18 St
Agnes Road, just outside the Basildon boundary
into Great Burnstead, Billericay, off Noak Hill Road.

We dedicated the chapel to the
Holy Virgin-Martyr Agnes of Rome
(feast: 21 Jan). It is indeed tucked
away in a delightful spot, and (as you
can see in the photographs) it makes
a lovely place to worship.

But the Basildon group under
PAUL BRIGHTON-CROSS continue
to look for somewhere more suitable
as a permanent place of worship.
The group also plan to worship
more frequently than just once the
monthly Liturgy we have there at the
moment. Contact Paul for full details.

The People Column

GHISSÉ SARKO: For several years,
while studying for a PhD at our University,
Ghissé was a regular member of our
congregation. Now she lives again in her
home town of Latakia on Syria’s Medi-
terranean coast, the town His Eminence our
Archbishop come from (I remember him
engaged to RICHARD ANTONIOS
recently awarded her PhD by Birkbeck
University of Portsmouth for over a year now, was
sent our congratulations.

Latakia. We are now delighted to hear from
Helen’s about ‘home’!

MIHAELA COCEA, St Neophytos the Anchorite, of Cyprus
Our next Holy Liturgy in south Essex will be at
St Basil’s RC Church on 7 January at 11.00 am.
It will be the last at St Basil’s, at least for the
moment.
We are most grateful to Father DOMINIC and his
people for their hospitality for over a year, mainly at
St Basil’s but a few times at Holy Trinity.
At very short notice, it was not possible to hold
the December Liturgy at St Basil’s, and we hastily
moved to a newly-arranged chapel in the garden of
GEORGE and NEKTARIOS HARRISON at 18 St
Agnes Road, just outside the Basildon boundary
into Great Burnstead, Billericay, off Noak Hill Road.

We dedicated the chapel to the
Holy Virgin-Martyr Agnes of Rome
(feast: 21 Jan). It is indeed tucked
away in a delightful spot, and (as you
can see in the photographs) it makes
a lovely place to worship.

But the Basildon group under
PAUL BRIGHTON-CROSS continue
to look for somewhere more suitable
as a permanent place of worship.
The group also plan to worship
more frequently than just one monthly Liturgy we have there at the
moment. Contact Paul for full details.

The People Column

GHISSÉ SARKO: For several years,
while studying for a PhD at our University,
Ghissé was a regular member of our
congregation. Now she lives again in her
home town of Latakia on Syria’s Medi-
terranean coast, the town His Eminence our
Archbishop come from (I remember him
engaged to RICHARD ANTONIOS
recently awarded her PhD by Birkbeck
University of Portsmouth for over a year now, was
sent our congratulations.

Latakia. We are now delighted to hear from
Helen’s about ‘home’!

MIHAELA COCEA, St Neophytos the Anchorite, of Cyprus
Our next Holy Liturgy in south Essex will be at
St Basil’s RC Church on 7 January at 11.00 am.
It will be the last at St Basil’s, at least for the
moment.
We are most grateful to Father DOMINIC and his
people for their hospitality for over a year, mainly at
St Basil’s but a few times at Holy Trinity.
At very short notice, it was not possible to hold
the December Liturgy at St Basil’s, and we hastily
moved to a newly-arranged chapel in the garden of
GEORGE and NEKTARIOS HARRISON at 18 St
Agnes Road, just outside the Basildon boundary
into Great Burnstead, Billericay, off Noak Hill Road.

We dedicated the chapel to the
Holy Virgin-Martyr Agnes of Rome
(feast: 21 Jan). It is indeed tucked
away in a delightful spot, and (as you
can see in the photographs) it makes
a lovely place to worship.

But the Basildon group under
PAUL BRIGHTON-CROSS continue
to look for somewhere more suitable
as a permanent place of worship.
The group also plan to worship
more frequently than just one monthly Liturgy we have there at the
moment. Contact Paul for full details.

The People Column

GHISSÉ SARKO: For several years,
while studying for a PhD at our University,
Ghissé was a regular member of our
congregation. Now she lives again in her
home town of Latakia on Syria’s Medi-
terranean coast, the town His Eminence our
Archbishop come from (I remember him
engaged to RICHARD ANTONIOS
recently awarded her PhD by Birkbeck
University of Portsmouth for over a year now, was
sent our congratulations.

Latakia. We are now delighted to hear from
Helen’s about ‘home’!

MIHAELA COCEA, St Neophytos the Anchorite, of Cyprus
Our next Holy Liturgy in south Essex will be at
St Basil’s RC Church on 7 January at 11.00 am.
It will be the last at St Basil’s, at least for the
moment.
We are most grateful to Father DOMINIC and his
people for their hospitality for over a year, mainly at
St Basil’s but a few times at Holy Trinity.
At very short notice, it was not possible to hold
the December Liturgy at St Basil’s, and we hastily
moved to a newly-arranged chapel in the garden of
GEORGE and NEKTARIOS HARRISON at 18 St
Agnes Road, just outside the Basildon boundary
into Great Burnstead, Billericay, off Noak Hill Road.

We dedicated the chapel to the
Holy Virgin-Martyr Agnes of Rome
(feast: 21 Jan). It is indeed tucked
away in a delightful spot, and (as you
can see in the photographs) it makes
a lovely place to worship.

But the Basildon group under
PAUL BRIGHTON-CROSS continue
to look for somewhere more suitable
as a permanent place of worship.
The group also plan to worship
more frequently than just one monthly Liturgy we have there at the
moment. Contact Paul for full details.