**Silk Roads: Exploring Christianity**

**Orthodox Christian Life in Durham**

**Video running time: 8 minutes 30 seconds**

**Transcript**

My name is Father Andrew. We don't usually use surnames in the Orthodox Church. I am what's called an Archpriest of the Russian Orthodox Church belonging to the Patriarchate in Moscow.

**Tell us about the Orthodox community in Durham**

When I came to Durham to the Department of Theology in 1996, I very quickly started to have Orthodox research students from Orthodox countries like Russia and Greece and there was no Orthodox Church here at all. And I remember the look of dismay on the face of one of the people I interviewed and he asked about the Orthodox Church and I said, well, there's a Greek C hurch in Newcastle with monthly services. And there's other places with monthly services - York and so on, but there's nothing regular, and nothing in Durham at all. And I thought we must do something about that.

So we worship at one of the other Anglican churches in Durham, but only on Saturday because we can't be fitted into the Sunday schedule.

For a long time now we've had services at weekends and on great feasts and fasts. And it's not primarily a University thing, it's really for people in the North-east of England and there are a lot of Orthodox in the North-east of England. The vast majority of them from Orthodox countries, Greece, Russia, Bulgaria, and particularly nowadays Romania.

But we deliberately set out to be a Church where English was the main language, and that - we have to have an affiliation to a Church – I was ordained in the Russian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate - but we are deliberately open to everybody.

**Tell us about the new Church project**

During the lockdown, by that time we were well on engaged with what proved to be a very, very slow process of acquiring, redecorating, repairing and refurbishing the cemetery Chapel in Durham.

I want it to be a place where the Orthodox can come, and we know it’s our place and where we have our own Church which we don't have to set up every time in a makeshift way, but you’ll go in and it will look like a Church and be decorated properly.

The walls will have icons on of one sort or another. So it will be a place that Orthodox people can come. It'll be place which is also in England – it’s not foreign as it were. And everybody who comes – English is a language they know, practically everybody. We use other languages regularly in the services but it's basically in English so that everybody feels at home.

**Is there a prayer that is particularly important to you?**

There’s a prayer we use all the time, except during the 50 days of Easter when we say Christ is risen instead. It’s a prayer to the Holy Spirit. Any service we do begins with it. And the prayer goes:

*Heavenly King, Comforter.*

*Spirit of Truth.*

*Everywhere present, filling all things.*

*Treasury of blessings, giver of life.*

*Come and abide in us*

*Cleanse us from every stain,*

*And, O Good One, save our souls.*

And I find that prayer deeply, deeply moving, and it expresses more or less everything one wants to say about the way in which, because of Christ's victory and resurrection, the Holy Spirit is present among us.

**What is the most important time in the Orthodox calendar for you?**

The Feast of the Resurrection (Easter). It is really the turning point of the Church’s year. We have spent seven weeks preparing for it during Lent. The Lenten fast is kept fairly severely by many Orthodox: no meat, no fish, no dairy food, wine and oil are allowed only at weekends.

And out of this period of preparation which turns into a period of wanting to arrive at Easter in the end.

The service itself is very beautiful, but the principle one – yes you might find different services, but it is the principle one – and the one I like most is the one that is actually celebrated on Saturday morning, which originally was intended to be Saturday evening leading into Sunday.

And there's a service which is called the Vigil Liturgy of Saint Basil. And it’s an extraordinarily moving service which moves very slowly. But at the end of it, you know, we are there – Christ is Risen.

But main service – which has become the Vigil Service - which is really matins of Easter and we celebrated this year at St. Oswald’s because they're not doing anything in the middle and midnight on Saturday.

So we all gather in the Church and by about 11.30pm - this service is called the Midnight Service.

Then after that all the lights are put out and people have candles and stand there. Then the priest comes out from the altar with a candle which is lit and he says: Come, take the light that knows no evening – the light, the permanent day of the Resurrection is shared by everybody.

And then we all go outside the Church - trying to keep the candles alight and it’s sometimes windy – and the priest then reads the Resurrection Gospel and proclaims the Resurrection. And the proclamation is:

Christ has risen

And people say: He is risen indeed.

This is the Paschal Troparionand everybody knows it in their language. I know it in about four now, but there are some people who could do much better than that, which is:

Christ is risen from the dead,
by death trampling death,
and to those in the graves granting life!

When you get to this point, it’s right at the beginning of the service, people greet one another, go round - not this year because of COVID, but normally throw their arms around people's necks and say Christ is risen! He's risen indeed!

Greek: Christos anesti (Χριστός ἀνέστη)

**Alithos Anesti**(**Aληθώς ανέστη!)**

 Russian: Khristos voskres (Христос воскрес)

 Voistinu voskres! (Воистину воскрес!)

It’s actually very exciting. And it's celebrating the fact that Christ is risen and this is the centre of our faith. Christ is risen and he's with us now and I think in Orthodoxy, there's just no question this is the feast, the feast of Feasts. We have 12 great feasts and then Easter, which is Pascha, which is the feast of feasts.

**Thank you to…**

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