

Our Father (Russia)
FONT. D. 200
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[PRAYER of St Ephraem before Script.]

That was a prayer of St Ephraem for before reading the Scriptures. I've used it today, because I missed out on using it last week. Last Monday, if you were listening, you may remember that my topic was the festival of Corpus Christi. But that date also happened to be the feast-day of St Ephraem, and he's one of the Church Fathers whose prayer I like to use from time to time in these midday programmes and elsewhere. He's perhaps topical enough just now too, for a short while ago the Syrian Orthodox patriarch and the Pope had a meeting in Rome, after which both gave a joint blessing to a general audience — the first time that's been done. And the connection? Ephraem is called 'the Syrian', and is one of the leading lights of the Syrian church and liturgy. He was a poet and theologian, born at Nisibis NE of Mosul in Mesopotamia (now better known as an important oil-field). That was about A.D. 306. He came from a Christian family and lived most of his life in Mosul. He was taught by the bishop there, one James, whom he later served as a deacon, until the town was taken and occupied by the Persians. Ephraem then migrated (in 363) to Edessa (the modern Urfa in Iraq) — it was then in Roman territory, and an important centre of theological study and writing. Ephraem founded a school there which became known as the Persian school. And there he died in 373 aged about 67. He had an enormous output of literature and theology, which earned him the name "Lyre of the Holy Spirit"

→ MP 413 p1 ff
(exc. music)