

Next Services

**Saturday
December 30th**

Great Vespers at 5:00 pm

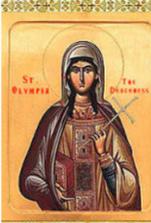
**Sunday
December 31st**

Divine Liturgy at 10:00 am

both at

**St. Olympia Chapel
123 Main Street
Potsdam, NY**

All welcome!



ST OLYMPIA ORTHODOX CHURCH
POTSDAM, NEW YORK 13676

ORTHODOX CHURCH OF AMERICA
DIOCESE OF NY AND NJ



**Welcome to St. Olympia Orthodox Church,
a young and, God willing, growing community of worshippers.**

Join us for prayer and fellowship.

**Divine Liturgies are held every Sunday and are primarily in English.
Fr. Luke Majoros is our presbyter.**

The Christmas Gospel (Matthew 2:1-12)

Note: the following article has been written by an anonymous contributor.
It is included here by permission.

I have to admit it: as much as I appreciate and value our Orthodox liturgical texts for this feast of our Lord's Nativity according to the flesh, what I love is Christmas carols. English, Ukrainian, German, Greek, Italian and French carols: I love them all. But one in particular comes to mind this Christmas Day: "O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant. O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem! Come and behold Him, born the King of angels." And then we're bidden, "O come let us adore Him." And what's striking here is the emphasis on the word "come."

"Come" to Whom? In John 14:9-11 Jesus tells His disciples "He who has seen Me has seen the Father...I am in the Father, and the Father in Me... The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father Who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me." As amazing as it sounds, Jesus is God together with the Father; and as God together with the Father, He knows exactly what the Father thinks and wills and does; and He tells and shows those things to you and to me. It's when we're in relationship with Jesus that we know the Father.

But we can come and adore Him today only because He first came to us and called us to Himself. As much as we may think otherwise, we cannot by our own reason or strength come to Jesus Christ and/or believe in Him, put our trust in Him. People do not have the ability simply to "decide" to "get close to God." A person who has never heard the Gospel or knows nothing of Jesus Christ and the work He did to effect our salvation cannot and does not just wake up one morning and out of the blue declare, "Today I'm going to enter into a relationship with Jesus Christ." On our own, we cannot and do not come to God because, as the Apostle says Romans 8:7, "The carnal mind [the mind separated from God by sin] is enmity against [hostile to] God. For it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be [It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so]."

Instead, God must draw us to Himself. It is He, the Father, Who must bring us to Jesus. It is He Who must show us the Saviour's words and persuade our hearts to accept them in faith. It's by God's power and God's power alone that we are brought to Jesus, just as Christ Himself says in John 6:44, "No one can come to Me unless the Father Who sent Me draws him." It's by God's power and God's power alone that we have come to believe the things the Holy Scriptures have revealed. It's by God's power and God's power alone that we as Christians can cling by faith to the Saviour.

The actions of King Herod in today's Gospel, Matthew 2:1-12, reveal the thought process of our fallen human nature when it comes to Christ. Herod pretended to the wise men that he wanted to worship Jesus, but in his heart of hearts he had no intention of kneeling before this or any other Child. He was concerned with one thing and one thing only: keeping his own power as ruler in Judea. He didn't want Jesus in his life at all and had no intention of moving even one step toward the manger himself. He sent the wise men to find Jesus and then "bring back word to [him]," but not so he could come and worship. We humans in our fallen human nature cannot make that step toward Jesus by ourselves. We must be drawn to Him by God Himself.

Now in contrast to Herod, look at the wise men. They came to Jerusalem and went on further to Bethlehem rejoicing "with exceeding great joy" and tremendous excitement. Why? God the Father Himself had been bringing them to Jesus. Think about it: first, there was a star in the sky, a star the likes of which in all their years of studying the heavens they'd never seen before. Then somehow it was made known to the Magi that the star meant the Messiah had finally been born. Then they traveled for months from Persia through deserts crawling with snakes and scorpions, along roads infested with murderous robbers, to Jerusalem and then Bethlehem. Why? "For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." Clearly, it was the Father Who was drawing their hearts and their feet ever closer to His Son. Only God was able to bring these men from the east all the way to the house "where the young Child was." Only God was able to inspire their hearts to make such a journey. They would not have even begun to saddle their camels without divine intervention.

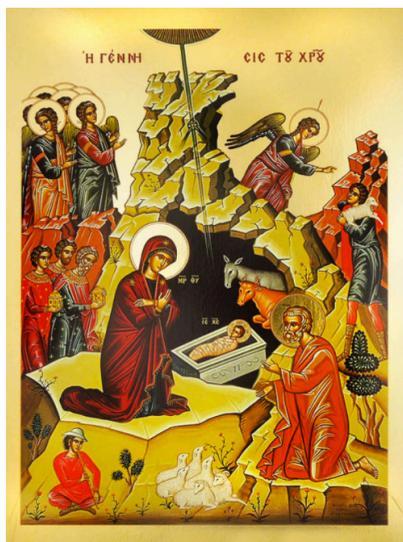
And while it may be a blow to our ego, the fact that only the Father can bring a person to faith in and relationship with Jesus Christ is fantastically good news! It's good that my faith, and its power and effectiveness, don't depend on me! After all, if my eternal life hinged on how well I approached Christ, I'd never be good enough; and I can never get it all exactly and totally 100% right. Look: imagine if God told you, "Say the Lord's Prayer just once in your lifetime, but with perfect devotion of heart and mind, without any distraction entering your head whatsoever; and you'll be saved." Could you do it? I know I couldn't. Part of my mind would be wondering if my devotion of heart and mind were truly perfect; and that itself is a distraction. So, even my best effort wouldn't be that perfect devotion. But if indeed it's the Father Who draws me to Jesus, then the forgiveness of my sins, my restoration to right relationship with God, and my receiving eternal life ultimately depend, not on me or anything of mine, but completely on God's mighty power. And the good news is also, says 1 Timothy 2:4, that because God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth," the Father is always at work seeking to draw every heart to Christ.

And although there are any number of ways God could've chosen to put faith into our hearts---a bolt of lightning or an earthquake or a simple snap of the fingers---instead He chose the Word: His living and incarnate Word, Jesus Christ; His written Word, the Scriptures; and both of those Words shared

from one person to another by human voice. As ever, we turn to Hebrews 1:2, the Good News that "in these last days [God] has spoken to us by His Son." He not only brings God's message; He is God's message. And faith in that Message, says Romans 10:17, "comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." That is how the Father draws us to His Son. Think now: how were the "shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night" moved to hurry to Bethlehem in the middle of the night? It was, says Luke 2:11, through the word spoken by the angels: "There is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." It was the word spoken to them which drew them to find "Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger." Consider also the wise men. The star they saw in the east got their attention, but ultimately it wasn't the star which drew them to the Lord Jesus. It was the word perhaps spoken in copies of the Hebrew Scriptures they had studied, or perhaps spoken in their minds and hearts directly by the Holy Spirit; but either way, it was the meaning and significance of the star being spoken to them which brought them.

And it's no different for us. What is it which, despite all the commercialism, and all the stress, and all the emotional turmoil, keeps people coming back year after year, century after century, to make this day a day unlike any other, so invested with hope? It's not the eggnog, fruitcake, and cookies; it's not the dinner, the presents and the pretty tree; and it's probably not the visiting in-laws! No; it's the word, the story: "And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered...I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, Who is Christ the Lord." It's the story spoken, and its meaning explained and experienced---the forgiveness of sins, the new birth, the glorious truth of Heaven opened---that keeps drawing human hearts to the Baby at Bethlehem.

In and through our Baptism the Father has called us and drawn us to Himself through His Son. But still, on this Christmas Day and every day we should make our prayer, "O God, draw me closer to You by Your mighty Word" so that, like the wise men who "fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh," all the chains still binding mind and heart can be broken; so that Christmas Day and every day we're liberated to do what our heart has always wanted to do, longed to do, ached to do: come and adore Him, and really love Him with all our mind and all our heart and all our soul, and all our strength.



Sayings of the Desert Fathers

It was said of Abba Mark the Egyptian that he lived for thirty years without going out of his cell. The priest used to take holy communion to him. But the devil, seeing the remarkable endurance of this man, decided to tempt him, by making him blame the priest. He brought it about that a demoniac went to the old man, under the pretext of asking for prayers. Before anything was said, the possessed man cried out to the old man, "Your priest smells of sin, do not let him come near you any more." But Mark, filled with the spirit of God, said to him, "My son, everyone rids himself of impurity, but you bring it. It is written, 'Judge not for that you be not judged. (Matt. 7:1) However, even if he is a sinner, the Lord will save him, for it is written, 'Pray for one another that you may be healed.'" (James 5:16) When he had said this and when he had prayed, he drove the devil out of the man and sent him away healed. When the priest came, according to his custom, the old man received him with joy. Seeing the absence of malice in the old man, the good God showed him a marvel. When the priest prepared himself to stand before the holy table, this is what the old man related, "I saw the angel of the Lord descend from heaven and place his hand on the priest's head and he became like a pillar of fire. I was filled with wonder at this sight, and I heard a voice saying to me, 'Man, why are you astonished at this? In truth, if an earthly king does not allow his nobles to stand in his presence in soiled garments, but only arrayed in glory, how much more will the divine power purify the servants of the holy mysteries who stand before the heavenly glory?'" And the noble athlete of Christ, Mark the Egyptian, became great and was judged worthy of this grace because he had not judged the priest.



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