

Next Services

**Saturday
January 20th**

Great Vespers at 5:00 pm

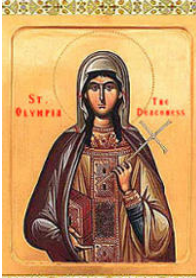
**Sunday
January 21th**

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.**

Circumcision of our Lord

(Luke 2:20-21, 40-52)

Note: the following article has been written by an anonymous contributor.

It is included here by permission

As a reminder from last week bulletin, our contributor is on the Old (Julian) Calendar.

Have you ever gone to one of those all-you-can-eat buffet places, like Buffet Royale or Golden Corral? They can be fun. But suppose you could dine at those places only if you ate an average-sized portion of each and every dish available. No matter how big our appetite and our tummy, what human could make it all the way from salad bar through all the desserts without getting way too full? Well, that's how I feel this morning. Today, January 1st on the Julian Calendar, is a double celebration: the Circumcision of our Lord and the memory of St. Basil the Great. So we have two Epistles and two Gospels, one for each feast. On top of that, the Russian calendar also calls for the reading of the Epistle and Gospel for the Sunday before Theophany. And my tiny brain can't profitably wrap itself around that much Scripture. So let's just focus on two verses, Luke 2:20-21, "And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called JESUS, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb."

Now for us North Americans, for whom circumcision is largely a decision related to hygiene and physical health, we wonder: what does it matter that a ceremony no longer found important, was performed on an eight-day-old baby, in a remote part of the world? Ah, but if we think it through, the significance is amazing. The Word-become-flesh, the Lord, the Messiah, God-with-us, Who by His Incarnation has become one of us, here allows Himself to be identified with us. These two

short verses are packed with meaning and lead to hope, because as we begin a new year, having our past cut away is incredibly liberating.

How so? Firstly, in allowing Himself to be circumcised, our Lord was clearly identifying with the People of God. Circumcision goes back to the father of the Jewish People, to Abraham. In Genesis 17:1-14, "the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. And I will make My covenant [My solemn agreement] between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly...and you shall be the father of many nations...And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.'" And the continuing sign of God's promised blessing, and the way a descendant of Abraham became a participant in the promise and covenant was clear: "Every male among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant." And what happened if parents did not have their son circumcised? "The uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant." By the sovereign will of God, circumcision was the one and only way of being marked as part of the family that God had chosen to work through in a very specific way; it was the one and only way of being in covenant relationship with God..

So? So as Jesus is circumcised, He is made part of that family; He's formally and officially united to the People of God through a covenant oath sealed by the shedding of his own blood, an oath that pictured and foreshadowed His blood being spilled much later, and in a much more dramatic way. But in that painful cut, He is officially made one of the People from whom God's Messiah and Sufferings Servant and Savior would arise. Here is that we see in Jesus the God Who is not a just God Who just stands idly by, a God Who is not the watchmaker God who simply sets things in motion and then walks away, leaving us to our own devices and with nothing but our own paltry resources. In Jesus we see the God Who comes and dwells among us, and identifies Himself with us in the very ways that His faithful people have honored His covenant: He is circumcised; forty days after His birth He will be presented in the Temple; He will later take His stand with us sinners as He is baptized; and eventually, like all of us, He will suffer death and its agony.

But did you notice in our text that He is not only circumcised as on this day, but He is always finally named. And in His naming, we see God's promise delivered. What promise? Think back to Genesis 3:15 when, after the Fall, God says to the serpent, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall crush your head, and you shall bruise His heel." That is the first instance where God promises a Saviour and Redeemer. In Isaiah 53:5-6 God clarified that when the promised Saviour came, He would be "wounded for our transgressions...bruised for our iniquities" because God will have "laid on Him the iniquity of us all." But neither in Genesis nor Isaiah nor anywhere else in the Old Testament does God give a precise timetable for our deliverance: not until Matthew 1:20-21, where the angel explains to a worried Joseph that Mary's pregnancy is by no human agency; "for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS [the LORD saves], for He will save His people from their sins." There, in His naming, God's promise is fulfilled. This Child is nothing other and nothing less than the I AM who saves us, the I AM who delivers His people. Indeed, He identifies with us, so that He can do that very thing: deliver us from the sewer of our sins; and deliver us, not necessarily from, but always certainly through the troubles we face in our economy, the challenges we face in our families and in our work places, and all the other struggles we suffer in our fallen humanity. He is the one willing to spill His own blood and have His own flesh cut through, to make things right.

And there's one more crucially important thing to see in what we celebrate today, namely, our own circumcision, where we identify with Him. Contrary to what some folks may think, the concept of circumcision has not left the Church. It's still something we all go through, male and female; and it's something that happens to us in Christ, and by which we too enter into covenant relationship with God. The terms of the covenant we know right well: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

But how do you and I enter into that covenant? What it is which establishes that kind of relationship with God? Well, listen to St. Paul in Colossians 2:9-12, where he explains: "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you are complete [have been filled] in Him, Who is the head of all rule and authority. In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead." Get it? It's no longer circumcision as in the cutting of flesh, and only for Jewish males. It's the spiritual removal of sin from our hearts, our souls, through Baptism. It's God uniting us to Christ's death, wherein "our old man is crucified with Him," that He might raise us up and unite us to the new and eternal life flowing out to us from Christ's resurrection. And this covenant relationship is open to every person, regardless of gender, race, age, or any other human category. After twenty centuries we take that for granted. But in the first century it was absolutely mind-blowing to hear, as we do in Galatians 3:27-28, that "as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In our Baptism, it is God Who acts, carefully cutting away the sin which mars and disfigures that which was made in His image. To do this, He wanted to know from the inside, as it were, that which He would operate on; so He chose to be one with us, one of us. And so here He is, at only eight days old, getting cut and bleeding; and thirty-plus years later, there He was, getting nailed to the cross. And every time you and I receive Holy Communion, His Body broken for us, His Blood of the New Covenant shed for us, we are renewing our acceptance of this covenant relationship with God and re-pledging our commitment to honoring it.

As we look at this new year, then, let's shift our focus away from the events and disappointments and hurts of last year, all of which are only temporary anyway; and shift our focus away from our hopes and dreams for this new year, which are also only for the short duration of this life; to a realization of, reflection on, and re-commitment to the fact, to the meaning, and to the joy of our eternal baptismal covenant with the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit, to Whom be all honor, glory, worship and power, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.



FEBRUARY 16-18TH ANNUAL ALTAR SERVERS RETREAT

"Serve the Lord with gladness!"
Please join us at our Annual Retreat which is intended for altar servers of all ages who currently serve, and for those with an interest in serving in the altar. The event is fully sponsored by the OCA Diocese of New York & New Jersey. Register today!



QUESTIONS?
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Join us for fun and fellowship!

Learn how to faithfully serve The Lord in the altar!

Spend time with Archbishop Michael!

Basketball and Indoor Swimming!

Register online by February 2, 2016!
<http://www.nynjoca.org/retreat>

To register, go to <https://nynjoca.org/>
(the addresses in our newsletter are not links)

Sayings of the Desert Fathers
will return at the end of this month.