

Next Services

**Saturday
January 13th**

Great Vespers at 5:00 pm

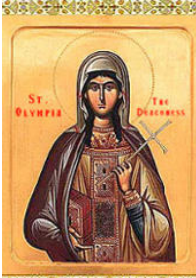
**Sunday
January 14th**

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.**

Reflections on Matthew 2:1-12

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

Have you ever thought about how the simplicity of the story of Christ's birth reveals the depth of God's love and the mystery of His actions in our life? As we celebrate anew this year the Nativity according to the flesh of our Lord and God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, once again Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and wise men, the angels and animals direct our attention to the Lord Jesus, lest we miss Him. After all, He Who is really and truly exactly what He claims to be in John 14:6, "the Way, the Truth and the Life" reveals Himself, not on a glorious throne in a magnificent palace, but in the humble circumstances of a cave in Bethlehem. Nonetheless, all of time is centered upon His coming; and all of creation surrounds Him who fashioned the creation!

And rightly so! Honestly, now: can we ever tire of hearing how the birth of Jesus Christ is a vivid expression of the depths of God's love for us? God loves us so much that He has entered into life in this world in and through His only begotten Son. The limitless God has accepted, in a way we can never fully describe, the limitations of our humanity. It wasn't enough for God to show us Himself in creation, even though, says Romans 1:20, "since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead." It wasn't enough for God to show His care simply in His providence to all people, in the way "He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust." It wasn't enough for God to guide us through the prophets and teachers of old, "at various times and in various ways [to speak] in time past to the fathers by the prophets." No. To express His boundless love for us, the Living God appeared among us as fully one of us in Christ Our Lord. Perhaps we know the text by heart: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." But do we grasp the wonder of it? By fully identifying Himself with us, the pre-eternal Word has come to teach us, to heal us and to lead us back to the Father; He has come to show us how, in terms of actual lived relationship, we can go from God's creatures to being the Father's precious children: "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," because "as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name."

Many years His baptism in the Jordan, and many years before Jesus ever spoke the Beatitudes, and many years before His glorious Resurrection, Christ revealed God's love for us through the simple events of His birth. How? The Lord of Glory demonstrated His love for us simply by entering into our life and by sharing in all that is truly human. Think of it! The Lord God Almighty, the Creator and Sustainer of all that is, He Who "is high and lifted up" above all, He to Whom the Seraphim continually cry "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory:" He it is Who chooses purely out of love for us to become one with us. And He comes, not in all the glory of divinity, but in poverty, as a helpless little Baby, so that we won't be scared. Through His birth in Bethlehem, Our Lord reveals to us the breadth and depth of God's love for us. Whether we see him as the child in Bethlehem, the teacher in Galilee, or the Risen Lord in Jerusalem; Christ is truly the greatest gift of the Father, given for us and for our salvation.

Ah, but the story of Christ's birth also speaks to us about the mysterious yet wondrous ways of God. The Triune God acts in ways that we do not always expect, yet His ways are truly wonder-filled. For centuries, the ancient Israelites had expected the Messiah. The prophets, especially Isaiah and Jeremiah, called the people to readiness and openness to God's actions, and especially to be ready for that day when "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel." Yet, when, as it says in Galatians 4:4, "the fullness of time had come" and "God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, born under the Law," the Messiah did not arrive as a conquering hero in a golden chariot with pomp and splendor. He wasn't robed in expensive clothing. He didn't appear in the capital city and assume the throne. There were no throngs of adoring followers to accompany him. When the Messiah finally arrived, He came first as a baby. He was born to a young girl who was betrothed but not yet officially married. The event occurred in the simple village of Bethlehem. He was sheltered in a place reserved for animals because the inn was full. It was in such simple circumstances that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...full of grace and truth." But with the eyes of faith we nonetheless "beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father."

And the point is that through the Christmas story, Our Lord reveals that the Father can and does act in ways we do not always expect. We cannot shape the mighty acts of God to our limited understanding. The Triune God is greater than our limited perceptions of Him. He acts in mysterious and wondrous ways to draw us to Him and to one another in love. And the wonder of it is precisely the greatness of God: that we cannot put God in a box; we cannot, either by our expectations or by the poverty of our imaginations, put limits on God's love in action.

But the story of Christ's birth also reveals to us the need for an open heart. The people involved in the story of Christ's birth were all quite different. Mary and Joseph were humble travelers seeking a place of shelter. The shepherds were simple men of the land tending their flocks. The wise men were wealthy and aristocratic foreigners wandering in a strange land. Yet they all shared a common characteristic. They opened their hearts to the actions of the Lord Who mysteriously led them to the village of Bethlehem.

Each of them was open to God acting in their lives however He saw fit. Mary and Joseph were open to changing their whole life to nurture and protect the child Jesus. The shepherds were open to hearing the words of the angel and then "go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." The wise men were open to following that star on a long and perilous journey. We remember them to this day because they opened their hearts and trusted in the Lord. Through His birth in Bethlehem, Jesus reveals that we too must open our hearts to His presence and actions. God wants us to share in His work of reconciliation. Like the participants in the first Christmas, we too are called to be persons whose hearts are open to the divine presence and actions.

And if we are truly open to the divine Presence and actions, inevitably we will center the season on Christ. The story of the birth of Christ and its true significance is often clouded by the commercialism of the season. There is a very frenzied pace to these days which can so easily depersonalize us and dampen the true joy of the season. Yet although throughout our society many fail to remember that the coming of Christ is the only true heart and centre of the Christmas celebrations, we can do otherwise. We can, first of all, stay focused on the reason for the season and remember that the season celebrates the love of God revealed in the coming of Jesus Christ. For those with true faith, the colored lights, the green trees, the wreaths, the flowers and the feasting are not ends in themselves, but tools to celebrate and return thanks to God for the joy of Christmas; the joy that we are no longer alone and afraid, because unto is born "Immanuel, which is translated 'God with us.'" Let us celebrate the joy of Christ's coming! We can also share the love of God with others. Christ has come to bear witness to the Father's love for us. We too can share this love with others, especially with the poor and less fortunate among us. We can be sensitive to those who cannot celebrate easily or at all because of loss or loneliness in their lives. There are countless ways, large and small, that we can be the ambassadors of God who share His care and love of humankind.

And most certainly by God's grace we can present to the Lord an open heart as the shepherds and wise men did. When "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us," it was God saying to each and to all of us, "Here: I give Myself, all of Me, to you in love." And that's the gift He wants in return: your open heart, my open heart, that says "Here: I give myself, all of me, to You in love." Is that the present we're giving God today?



While Orthodox on the New Calendar, such as our parish, just wrapped up the twelve days of Christmas and celebrated the Theophany of our Lord (Epiphany), shown in the icon above, the Nativity season began today for all parishes that remain on the Old Calendar, as is our anonymous contributor who adds the following:

At the risk of adding further confusion, I'd like to explain that "Orthodox Christmas" is NOT on January 7th. That day is December 25th---on the Julian calendar.

Some 500 years ago, everybody in both East and West followed the Julian calendar, the calendar inherited from the old Roman Empire. Then, with the rediscovery of the science of astronomy, astronomers calculated that the Julian calendar was 10 days behind the actual solar calendar. But these astronomers were working for the Pope of Rome, Gregory XIII. In 1582, Gregory issued a papal bull, *Inter gravissimas*, making this new calendar the official calendar of the Roman Catholic Church and the Papal States. The change in calendar was initially rejected by Protestants and by the Orthodox East. Gradually, however, the change was adopted across Europe and European overseas possessions (like North and South America). The last nation-state to make the change was the Russian Empire; the Bol'shevik "October Revolution" was actually November 7th on the new calendar!

Some of the Orthodox national Churches have also changed to the new calendar for the festal cycle but not for the paschal cycle: the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Churches of Greece, Antioch, Alexandria, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania. The Churches of Russia, Ukraine, Serbia, Japan, the Czech Lands and Slovakia, Poland, and the monasteries of the Holy Mountain remain on the old calendar for the festal as well as the paschal cycle. Our own Orthodox Church in America has some parishes still on the old calendar but most parishes are on the new calendar.

Clear as mud?

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