



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 preceded by Great Vespers every Saturday evening.**

Services are primarily in English.

Next Services

**Saturday
May 12th**

**Great Vespers at 5:00
pm**

**Sunday
May 13th**

**Sunday of the
Blind Man**

**Divine Liturgy
at 10:00 am**

at

**St. Olympia Chapel
123 Main Street**

Potsdam, NY

All welcome!

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Sunday of the Samaritan Woman (The Woman at the Well, John 4:5-42)

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

Today's Gospel, John 4:5-42, begins with Jesus on a journey. In verses 3-4 John tells us that Jesus "left Judea and departed to Galilee. But He needed to go through Samaria," not because it was the only way, but because it was the easiest and fastest way to get from Judea to Galilee. But Samaria was full of Samaritans, whom Jews held in utter contempt as mongrel half-breeds and heretics. And the Samaritans weren't exactly fond of the Jews either. So why does John say that Jesus "needed to go through Samaria?" Because Jesus had a mission to accomplish: to proclaim the Good News of God's saving love to the Samaritans too. It would start with him having a one-on-one encounter with a woman, a Samaritan woman, a much-married Samaritan woman---a triple no-no for any respectable Jewish man. But Jesus was all about tearing down whatever walls stood in the way of the Gospel.

After walking all morning, Jesus stops at noon near the town of Sychar to rest at Jacob's well, and sends the disciples into town to buy some food. And while they were gone, "a woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, 'Give Me a drink.'" That Jesus would even notice a woman, and a Samaritan woman to boot, much less speak to her, much less ask her for a favor, was in that culture absolutely scandalous. The woman herself, in shock and surprise, "said to Him, 'How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?'" But "Jesus answered and said to her, 'If you knew the gift of God and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water."

Now the woman's response makes the same mistake we sometimes make, taking His words with deadly literalism: "Sir, You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?" But Jesus isn't talking about H2O. "Jesus answered and said to her, 'Whoever who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water welling up to eternal life.'"

Now understand: this encounter is not just about a hot day in a far country a long time ago; it's about us too. You and I also thirst: we thirst for safety and security; for provision for our material needs; for friendship; for love; for our life to have meaning and purpose. But too often you and I are exactly the people God addresses in Jeremiah 2:13, "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken Me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water." We ignore, forsake or just forget about God, and seek to quench our thirsts our own way. We try to fill our lives up with what we think will bring us happiness and fulfillment, and then wonder why, in the end, these things, these belief systems, these relationships cannot bring the satisfaction we seek. The answer's obvious: these things are "broken cisterns that cannot hold water." We are made by God, designed for relationship with God; so the only thing we can drink and "never thirst," is the living water, Jesus Christ. And as we find true fulfillment in the living water, we're not going to thirst for all that other stuff to give meaning and value to our lives. The risen and living and ever-present Jesus is the real thirst-quencher; and everything else we go to in the world actually makes our thirst worse, like drinking alcohol actually dehydrates us.

Another aspect to our Lord's promise that "whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst" is how the water that kills us is the water through which eternal life comes. "Do you not know," asks the Apostle in Romans 6:3-4, "that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." In Holy Baptism we die to our fallen nature, are raised up to eternal life in Christ Jesus and once and for all adopted as God's own child. So we who have received the living water in Holy Baptism never have to come again to the baptismal well.

Further, note how the Samaritan woman needed to go to the well every day to get more water. And in the temple in Jerusalem, says Hebrews 10:1-4, the priests needed to make "these same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year," but which cannot "take away sins." In contrast, says Hebrews 7:27, Jesus "does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself." Further, says 1 John 2:2, that sacrifice is "the propitiation [the perfect satisfaction] for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." So we do not need to confess that same sin over and over again in the fear that somehow God didn't/ wouldn't forgive it the very instant of our repentance or that somehow our repentance and confession isn't "enough" to gain God's forgiveness. Sure, we do need to repent again and again, because as long as we're breathing we'll likely sin again and again. But our forgiveness is given once for all because Jesus' sacrifice was once for all. 1 John 1:9 assures us that "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." But that forgiveness is not earned by repentance; God's forgiveness is already there, waiting to be received through repentance.

The woman still doesn't understand and asks Jesus for this special water "that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw." But instead of explaining further, "Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come here.'" She "answered and said, 'I have no husband.'" But Jesus calls her on that: she's been married five times and she wasn't married to the guy she was living with now. Why did Jesus say that: to shame her? to challenge or condemn her behavior? No. It was to help her to see what she was really thirsting for: love, being valued and appreciated, feeling worthwhile. She was defeated by life, broken in spirit, devoid of hope, yet unwilling to face that hard truth. She tried to dodge facing her reality by trying to draw Jesus into an argument about the right place to worship. But Jesus steered her back onto the track leading to God: "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." She tried again to dodge her real issue by saying that when the Messiah shows up He will explain everything. But again Jesus steered her back on track: "Jesus said to her, 'Who speak to you am He; I'm the Messiah.'" Get it? God loves us too much to let us run away and hide from where we're broken; as with this woman He's going to keep steering us back to that confrontation with self which allows Him in to heal us.

Now the disciples return, surprised to see Jesus speaking with a woman in public, but afraid to ask Him about it. The woman, meanwhile, runs off to tell the townspeople about her encounter with this strange Man, asking "Could this be the Messiah?" Intrigued, the townsfolk made their way out to Jesus. Back at the well, on the heels of a discussion about spiritual water, Jesus has a conversation with the disciples about spiritual food. When they urge Jesus to have some lunch, He answers, "I have food to eat of which you do not know." They wonder if somebody else brought Him a sandwich; so Jesus spells it out: "My food is to do the will of Him Who sent Me, and to finish His work." And that is the answer to their unasked question about why He was talking with the Samaritan woman. His food, what gave His life strength and meaning, was to do the Father's will by sharing the Good News of the New Covenant and ultimately sealing the New Covenant in His own blood. That's why he went to Samaria and why He asked the woman for a literal drink: so that He could tell her about the spiritual drink and, through her witness, lead the rest of the townspeople to hearing about it...

...Which is what happened: "Many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman" and came to profess "we know that this is indeed the Messiah, the Savior of the world." And the disciples needed to see that. That was only way they'd ever get over their prejudices against the Samaritans and focus on sharing the Gospel with all. And while we may not have the same prejudices, we too need to get over our assumptions about who's "supposed" to hear the Gospel from us. Beyond these walls are thousands of thirsty souls who, whether they realize it or not, are looking for living water but are settling for the stagnant, contaminated water of sin and simply of a life devoid of God. They need clean, fresh, living water yet they don't know where to find it. But we do. And in the life of each and every one of us there's somebody to whom God wants us to say, "Kid, you're dying of thirst. Let me take you to the water that satisfies." We cannot force anyone, but we can make the offer. Will we?

Some wisdom about worship from Holy Myrrhbearers Monastery

Our liturgy proclaims to all, beginning with ourselves, that God is the center of our lives. We offer this worship "on behalf of all and for all." Our liturgy is our primary missionary endeavor: each time we gather as the Body of Christ for this liturgy the cosmos is changed; the saints and angels are summoned by our side and the atmosphere around us becomes conducive to attract those whom God desires to save, that is all people. We are also changed; insofar as we enter this liturgy with love, attention and care.

New to our library

Man of God: St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco (no author listed). This book contains a biography of a wonder-working servant of God, as well as remembrances and testimonies of healings from those who encountered him, some of his sermons, and other writings. Very readable!

Enlighteners of Ancient Kingdoms by Valerie G. Zahirsky. From the preface: "The three countries whose enlighteners are discussed--Armenia, Georgia, and Ethiopia--are all under the domination of anti-Christian powers today. At first glance this tragic situation would seem to indicate the end of their existence as Christian lands. But another look will tell us that they have all had long histories of foreign domination and persecution. Despite all that, their churches have survived and even, at some times more than others, flourished. All these churches have made wonderful contributions to Christian worship, art and theology. When we think of all the ancient kingdoms whose names are known now only the history books, it is extraordinary to think that these three nations still exist after nearly 2,000 years. It seems to have been their Christian faith, which so separated them from their neighbors, that strengthened and made them more tenacious..." The book summarizes the lives and contributions of St. Nina of Rome, the enlightener of Georgia, St. Gregory of Parthia who brought the Good News to the Armenians and St. Frumentius of Tyre who evangelized the Ethiopians. Also in this short book is the story of the forty soldiers of the Twelfth Legion martyred for their faith by the Roman emperor Licinius in 320 AD.