



# 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.**

**Our priest is Fr. Peter Irfan, Acting Rector.  
You may reach him at 716-342-8520 (cell) or at fatherpeter777@yahoo.com.**

**Please join us for prayer and fellowship.  
Divine Liturgies are held every Sunday at 10 am.  
Great Vespers are held every Saturday evening at 5 pm.**

## Next Services

**Saturday, October 20th**

**Great Vespers  
5:00 pm**

**Fr. Peter is available to hear  
confessions before Vespers  
by appointment.**

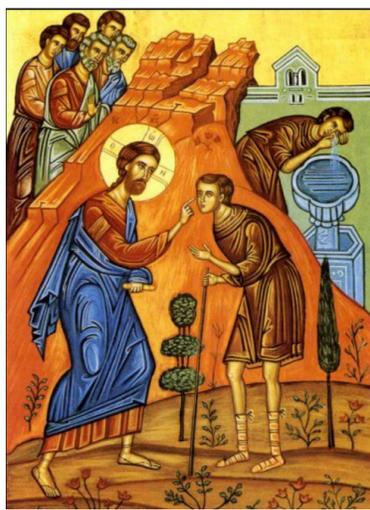
**Sunday, October 21st**

**Matins  
8:45 am**

**Divine Liturgy  
10:00 am**

**Fellowship to follow  
at**

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



## Annual Girls' Retreat

FRIDAY - SUNDAY  
**November 9-11, 2018**

Reminder: Registration for the Annual Girls' Retreat for young women in Grades 7-12 closes on Friday, October 26th. If you haven't already, please register promptly by clicking the appropriate button below, or by visiting our website.

## Finding Your True North: Where Does Christ Fit into Your Life?

**Saint Basil Academy – Garrison, NY**

Theme: Contemporary Moral Issues  
Guest Speaker: Natalie Kapeluck-Nixon

As many are aware, there is limited space available at Saint Basil Academy for our diocesan retreats. With that in mind, please register as soon as possible to ensure that you secure your spot for a wonderful weekend filled with memorable experiences! Please click on the appropriate button below to sign-up.

For more information about the weekend & schedule, please click [here](#).

If you have any specific questions regarding the retreat, please email Danielle Geeza at [nynjocayouth@gmail.com](mailto:nynjocayouth@gmail.com).

## Thoughts on John 9: 1-38

*Note: the following article was written by our anonymous contributor several years ago. It is included here by permission.*

I'm not quite sure why, but we humans tend to like scary stories. In their original versions, the fairy tales by the Brothers Grimm were grim indeed, so scary that eventually they were deemed too frightening for children and re-written into the "happily-ever-after" versions with which we're familiar. When I was a kid, some of the zombie and vampire comic books were so frightening that they were banned. But every time I visited my cousins, and despite the nightmares I knew were coming, I'd read their boot-leg copies from cover to cover. But for us, perhaps the scariest stories are those like the TV program *Person of Interest*, one of whose central characters is a government machine that spies on everybody through all the CCTV cameras dotting our streets these days, emails, cell phone records, and other electronic communications. And the story is not totally fiction, is it? On both sides of the 49th Parallel governments are spying on citizens, usually under the cloak of "national security." And it makes us---and should make us---nervous, all this nosing into our business by civil servants well into the process of becoming civil masters. Why? Because we all have secrets. They may not be criminal secrets or sinful secrets, but we all have things we want to keep hidden in ourselves: fears, regrets, guilts, mistakes, disappointments, longings: all the stuff which makes us feel, if not ashamed, then at least uneasy. And we fear what we keep in the darkness of secrecy coming to light...

...which is kind of awkward for us as Christians, because, says John 1:4-5, in this Jesus Whom we claim to follow "was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overpower it." How and where that light will shine, Jesus makes clear in Matthew 10:26; He tells us His light is so powerful that "there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known." And in John 9:1-38, Jesus says to His disciples, "I must work the works of Him who sent me, while it is day; the night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." The theme of divine Light figures prominently, and is a central focus today as we recall story of the man born blind. What, after all, could be a more powerful image of light, especially for those of us with increasingly-impaired eyesight due to age, than a man who was blind from birth, being given sight? It's just as the prophet foresaw in Isaiah 35:5; when the Messiah comes that "the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped."

Now, the ancient world had little understanding of hygiene. Due to certain practices embedded in the Law of Moses, Jews were slightly better off; but all kinds of diseases, including eye diseases and resulting blindness, were very common. And Jesus frequently healed blind persons. In Matthew 9:27-30, for example, "two blind men followed [Jesus], crying out and saying, 'Son of David, have mercy on us!'" And Jesus healed them both at the same time. In Mark 8:22-26 Jesus heals another blind man by a laying-on of hands. But in the case in today's Gospel, the man was not blind because of illness or disease; he was born blind. And did you notice? This man didn't even ask to be healed. Rather, Jesus was walking along the road; and "as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth." The disciples notice him too. As children of their culture, they assumed his blindness was punishment for some sin on his parents' part or---because they believed in the pre-existence of souls capable of sinning before being infused into a body---if the man himself had sinned in that pre-existent state.

But no, not this time. Jesus makes it very clear that "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him." And thank God He did! We need to know clearly that suffering doesn't come to us as God's punishment for sin. Usually, sickness, suffering, accidents and tragedy are simply manifestations of the fallen world in which we live; and one's affliction is, as it were, the "luck of the draw." Yes, it is true that because choices and actions have consequences, sinful choices can and often do leave us suffering the consequences. Just ask that young man who, having ignored the injunction in Ephesians 5:18 "Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation," is now suffering his first hang-over and longing for a mercifully quick death.

And sometimes, as in the case here, sickness and suffering present an opportunity for the redeeming and restoring power of God to be revealed. It's not that God was so cruel as to make the man blind and suffer, just so Jesus could come along one day and heal him. It was, rather, a practical demonstration of what St. Paul later says in Romans 8:28, that God can and does "work all things together for good to those who love God, who are called according to His purpose." You and I often get so discouraged when things go wrong, when we're faced with seemingly-insurmountable problems, when we're struggling under what feel like impossible burdens; and we start to fear in our heart of hearts that maybe the answer to God's own question in Genesis 18:14, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" may be a big fat "Yes!" Of course we know in our heads (because we've heard it often enough) that, as the risen Jesus Himself says to a suffering Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:9, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness;" we "get" that afflictions, sorrows, pains, disappointments, and losses can become opportunities for demonstration of God's grace. We know intellectually that while God may not always calm the storm, but rather calm us in the midst of the storm; and that although thunder clouds may be overhead, in our hearts the Son of God can shine; still, our hearts often remain blind to that truth. So we need reassurance; we need our spiritual eyes opened to something we can see which demonstrates the power of God over apparently impossible barriers. And giving sight to a person born blind rather fits the bill, don't you think? "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God [how God operates] should be revealed [made open and clear] in him."

However, lest we focus solely on the physical, let's remember that Jesus' healing of the blind man illuminated him in, not one, but two ways. Physically, of course, light came into his once-dark visual world. And surely that was tremendous! Imagine what it must've been like, after all those years in utter darkness, to see for the very first time the golden sunshine, the blue sky, the green grass, the faces of his parents, his own face in a reflecting surface, what his fingers and toes looked like, maybe to attach a face to the soft voice of that girl next door he'd always been sweet on. Contrast that with us, who so often take our sight for granted (at least until it's somehow threatened), and who so often stop seeing all the wonders right in front of our face every day. For example: how do you and I, as grown-ups, look at dandelions? We see them only as weeds to be exterminated, right? Ah, but I can remember back to a time when, as a child, I loved the beauty of those bright yellow flowers so much I made a bouquet of them to take to my mother. Surely this man's physical healing is a call to a deeper appreciation and a more fervent thankfulness for the gift of sight and of all the other blessings we receive day by day.

But this man was illuminated spiritually as well; he received his spiritual sight, as he came to believe in Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ. Notice in verses 35-38 that "Jesus heard that [the Jewish authorities] had cast [the man born blind] out [of the synagogue]; and when [Jesus] had found him, He said to him, 'Do you believe in the Son of God?' He answered and said, 'Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?' And Jesus said to him, 'You have both seen Him, and it is He Who is talking with you.' Then he said, 'Lord, I believe!' and he worshiped Him." Unlike the authorities, who all their lives had been able to read the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah yet didn't recognize Him when He came, the man who couldn't read because he couldn't see, who recognized God's Anointed One and came to the Christ in Whom brings healing and wholeness to us, Who restores to wholeness us who suffer so much brokenness in our persons and in our lives. It's with good reason that sometimes refer to Baptism as "Holy Illumination," that which gives to us the same spiritual sight the man born blind received.

Each Paschal season, there's a link between themes of light in the Scripture readings and the light of Christ's resurrection. Why? Simple: the Resurrection of Christ has no personal meaning if there is not an increase of light within our consciousness, such that we start to see our life and our values and our purpose with God's eyes; it has no practical value to our souls unless God's light more closely directs our lives. So especially in this Paschal season, we're faced with the challenge to open ourselves more fully to the Light of the Resurrection, so that just as Christ loosed the bonds of sin and death in His rising from the dead, we'll let the Lord loosen those parts of our lives that are still bound in darkness and fill us with His light. Ah, but will we? It's your move...and mine too.

**Save the dates...**

**Vladyka Michael will visit our parish on the weekend of Nov. 17th-18th**

**...plan ahead!**