



# 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, December 15th**

**Great Vespers  
5:00 pm**

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

**Sunday, December 16th**

**Matins  
8:45 am**

**Divine Liturgy  
10:00 am**

**Fellowship to follow  
at  
St. Olympia Chapel  
123 Main Street  
Potsdam, NY**

*We welcome James Radcliffe (shown at right with Fr. Peter) to our parish family. A native of Australia, James makes his home in Alexandria Bay and is a recent convert to Orthodoxy.*



## 28th Sunday of Pentecost - Colossians 1:12-18

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

In Romans 8:28 we find the wonderful assurance that, no matter how big the mess we happen to be in, "all things work together for good to those who love God." And in today's Epistle, Colossians 1:12-18, we're presented with one truly beautiful example of God's faithfulness to that promise. The situation of the Church at Colossae was a mess! The Colossian believers had been taught the Faith well by Epaphras, whom in verse 7 St. Paul commends as "a faithful minister of Christ." Yet it became clear to Epaphras that the enemy of our souls was sticking his oar in, because the Colossian church started having problems with false teaching. Epaphras shared these problems with Paul, who responded with this letter to the Colossians. And it is here, in this first chapter that God causes "all things to work together for good," because it's here that, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul writes the most beautiful, most exuberant, most joyful explanation possible of Who Jesus really is. Out of the pain of facing down false teaching that St. Paul articulates the great poem that celebrates with indescribable love the wonder that is Jesus.

Now the false teaching troubling the Church back then and still in our own day was, and is, the notion that all matter was evil, including the human body; and that it was not God but Satan who had created matter. Of course that's rubbish, and on two counts. Satan is a creature, not the creator; he cannot bring even a tiny speck of dust out of nothingness into being. And after presenting how God created this universe and everything in it, including human beings, Genesis 1:31 says that "Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good." Further, these false teachers went on to say, contrary to John 1:14, that Jesus, the pre-eternal Word, Who was pure and undefiled, could not possibly have "become flesh and dwelt among us;" that Jesus Christ never had a real, fully human body and, therefore, never had a real and full human nature. In their mind, a real incarnation would have put Him into intimate contact and relationship with evil matter. And the results of these false teachings were tragic, including extreme self-denial and austerity on the one hand, and unbridled sin on the other. After all, if the physical world is totally sinful, you either try to conquer and enslave it, or you sinfully enjoy it.

That false teaching is still around. Much of contemporary science fiction and popular "spirituality" say that this body of ours is just a shell which eventually we'll discard to "ascend to a higher plane of existence" in which we leave behind the physical, the material. That's not the Christian faith. 1 Thessalonians 5:23 teaches that our complete self is "spirit, soul, and body." 1 Corinthians 15 teaches plainly that physical death is not the end for our body, so that it can be tossed aside as garbage, because we share in the very real resurrection of Christ: "For as in Adam all die," he proclaims, "even so in Christ all shall be made alive." In that Last Day "the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." That's why the Symbol of Faith (the Nicene Creed) teaches us to "expect the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come." But this false spirituality is still popular, because if I'm just going to shed this body someday, what does it matter what I do with it now? Same old, same old: bad theology as an excuse for bad behavior.

But more central here is the truth of exactly Who this Jesus is. Yet notice that in presenting Christ in all His glory, St. Paul starts by talking about us, about how the Father "has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" and how the Father "has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us [carried us across] into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in Whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." We, who know only too clearly and too well our weakness, our sinfulness, our spiritual sickness, are precisely the ones the Father calls to share in all the joy of intimate life with Him; and because we in our fallenness cannot bring ourselves into right relationship with Him, He picks us up in the arms of Christ crucified and carries into His kingdom; and in the shed blood of Christ He washes away all our guilt, all our shame, all our fear, so that we don't have to hide from Him anymore, but can freely call Him "Abba, Father."

Get it? It's as we begin to grasp the greatness of our salvation that we're ready to at least try to grasp the greatness of our Savior, Who's not just some nice guy, some wise teacher, some great moralist. Rather, says verse 15 "He is the image [literally, 'eikon'] of the invisible God." Now that word "eikon" doesn't just mean a picture or likeness. In Paul's day, passports carried a section headed "eikon," meaning "distinguishing characteristics, unique characteristics." And the point is that, as the Apostle explains in Colossians 2:9, "in Him [Jesus] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form;" He's not just godlike, but really and truly and fully God come in the flesh. In later years, the holy Apostle John would put it another way in John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God;" all that God is, the Word is. And because Jesus is the "eikon" of the Father, we no longer have to wonder what God is like, because as our Lord tells us in John 14:9, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." What's God like? Look at Jesus, and you'll know. Nor do we have to wonder what God has to say to us, because Hebrews 1:1-2 assures us that "God, Who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son." Because His words are the words of God, Jesus gives us (if we'll actually accept it) the clarity and the comfort for which we long.

Does that blow your mind? It should! Who are you, and who am I, that the pre-eternal Word Who is God should get so personally and intimately involved with us, so as to become fully one of us, take on our human nature, and transform all its brokenness and fallenness from the inside by His grace? What have you or I ever said or done (or could ever say or do) to deserve such favor, such love? Nothing; that's what. But He does it anyway. What precisely does God have to say to you and to me through His Son? "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."

Further, says verse 15, Jesus is "the first born over all creation." And no, that does not mean that Jesus is a created being. In biblical language, the "firstborn" not only denotes birth order, but was also used to describe the highest-ranking, the most important; in Psalm 89:27 God promises "And I shall make Him [the Messiah] My firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth." Jesus is "the firstborn over all creation" because He is the Author and Ruler of all creation, as St. Paul explains in verse 16: "For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him." And that spikes the false teaching about creation right there. Because by the pre-eternal Word "all things were created," everything in all creation is, in its origins, good, God-designed, and a blessing from God---which means, of course, that we have every reason to celebrate and be thankful for everything in creation, instead of running around sour-pussed and afraid that if we're actually enjoying one of God's good gifts we're somehow sinning.

Further still, "He is before all things [before anything in all creation ever came into being, He already was], and in Him all things consist [hold together]; it is He Who keeps all creation in existence. Moreover, "He is the head of the body, the church, Who is from the beginning, the firstborn from the dead [the First of all who will rise from the dead], that in all things He may have the preeminence [hold first place]." That, and nothing less, is the Jesus in Whom we place our trust and Whom we are to profess and to proclaim as Saviour and as Lord.

But do you and I really believe that's Who He is? Do we really believe this assembly is His Church, not ours; that He owns it, not we; that He's the chief decision-maker, not us? And do we behave that way, as individual believers and as a congregation? Jesus is the One Who's supposed to lead His Church; our duty is to listen to our Head, so He may lead us. But do we let Him? Do we ask Him what His will is for us as individual persons and as a parish, or do we simply expect Him to bless and prosper what we have decided for ourselves? It's not the faith we profess with our lips, but the lives we live day by day, which indicate what we really believe and live by. What is your life, and mine, saying about your real faith, and mine?