



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, January 12th

**Great Vespers
5:00 pm**

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

Sunday, January 13th

**Matins
8:45 am**

**Divine Liturgy
10:00 am**

**Fellowship to follow
at
St. Olympia Chapel
123 Main Street
Potsdam, NY, 13676**

Our celebration of Epiphany:

Above Right: Fr. Peter and members of St. Olympia are joined by Fr. Christopher Brown of Trinity Episcopal Church as Fr. Peter blesses the Raquette River on January 6th.

Right: Fr. Peter blesses water in St. Olympia Chapel.

House Blessings:

Fr. Peter will be blessing homes throughout the North Country. Phone or email him to schedule his visit.



Matthew 1:1-25

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

Today's Gospel, Matthew 1:1-25, begins with "the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham," and then goes on to a long list of names of who was the father of whom. Sixteen verses are taken up with tracing a pedigree from Abraham to David, and from David to the family in which Jesus was born. And let's be honest: most of us find this list of unpronounceable names rather boring. "What's the point?" we wonder. But nothing in the Bible is useless. Every word of it is inspired, God-breathed into the minds and hearts of the human writers. So let's start our reflection on this Gospel by looking again at those sixteen verses, and see in them what we need to learn.

And the first thing we can learn from this list of names is that God always keeps His word. Way back in Genesis 12:3 God had promised, that Abraham that "in you all the families of the earth [not just the Jewish people, the physical descendants of Abraham, but all the families of the earth] shall be blessed." And in Isaiah 11:1 God had promised to raise up a Saviour from the family of David: "There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse [David's father], and a Branch shall grow out of his roots." And in tracing so carefully our Lord's physical descent through David all the way back to Abraham, these sixteen verses demonstrate that God's promise was fulfilled, that God does keep His promises--not usually on our timetable, because the time from Abraham to Jesus was some 1800 years. But when God knows the time is exactly right, He keeps His word. And let's take comfort and encouragement in that. No matter how messy things get in our lives, our heavenly Father will be true to all His promises. No matter how hard the way, God is always faithful to His promise in Hebrews 13:5, "I will never leave you, nor will I ever forsake you;" and He always keeps the word He gives us in 2 Corinthians 12:9, that "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in [your] weakness."

Let's also learn from this list of names the purpose of Christ's coming. If we check out all these names in the Old Testament, we'll discover that some of these folks were very godly; most of them were painfully ordinary; and some of them were wicked beyond belief. But each and every one of them needed the forgiveness and salvation that comes in and through Christ. We hear, for example, of men like Rehoboam, Joram, Amon, and Jeconiah, all of whom had pious fathers, but all of whom grew up to be sinful and corrupt. And if we're paying attention, we'll see the point: that grace does not run in families and God has no grandchildren. The fact that my parents or grandparents were devout Orthodox Christians doesn't mean squat when it comes to my salvation. They may have set me good examples and given me good teaching; but that does not make me a child of God. Each person in each generation needs saving; each person in each generation needs to be born again of water and the Spirit, because to each person in each generation the words of John 1:12-13 apply: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

And leads to how this list of names demonstrates the great mercy and compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ. If we're honest with ourselves, we cannot but admit how defiled and unclean our fallen human nature is; when Jeremiah 17:9 says that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked," we each know full well, "Hey, he's talking about me." But in a love too big for us ever really to understand, says Galatians 4:4-5, "when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." Some of the names we read in this catalogue remind us of shameful and sad histories; Some are the names of people never mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. But at the end of all comes the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the pre-eternal Word of God Who in love humbled Himself to "become flesh and dwell among us," in order to provide salvation for sinners. We see here that no one is beyond the reach of Christ's sympathy, compassion, forgiveness and love. And if Jesus was not ashamed to be born from a line containing even the greatly wicked, we need never fear that He will be ashamed to call us whom He has sanctified "brethren," His very own brothers and sisters in the family of God.

Now, moving on to verses 18-25, St. Matthew tells us that "the birth of Jesus Christ as follows;" and goes on to recount that after his mother, Mary, was engaged to Joseph, before they came together, she was found pregnant. Joseph didn't know this was the work of the Holy Spirit, thought Mary had cheated on him, and decided to divorce her quietly, so that she didn't end up stoned to death for adultery at the door of her father's own house. Blessedly, God sent an angel to reassure Joseph of Mary's integrity, explain to him how this had happened, and tell Joseph what the Child should be named: "And you shall call His name JESUS [Hebrew for 'the LORD saves'], for He shall save His people from their sins." Then, again emphasizing the faithfulness of God to His promises, St. Matthew points out how "all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the LORD through the prophet saying: 'Behold the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which is translated, 'God with us.'"

These verses begin by telling us two great truths. Firstly, they tell us how "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us;" how Lord Jesus Christ took our nature upon Him, and became fully one with us by becoming fully one of us: by the miracle of His birth from a pure Virgin. But why is it so important that Jesus be born of a pure virgin? Because of Who He is. In Colossians 2:9 St. Paul reminds us that "in [Jesus] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form," while the Symbol of Faith we confess that this Jesus is "Light of Light, true God of true God...of one essence with the Father." The Saviour has to be fully and truly God, because only God can save us from our sin and condemnation. Only One Who is truly and fully God can be what 1 John 2:2 calls "the perfect satisfaction [the perfect satisfaction] for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." Thinking that we can save ourselves is quite as silly as thinking I can operate on myself to give myself a heart transplant.

At the same time, the Saviour has to be fully and truly one of us, because only a true human being could become what Philippians 2:8 says Jesus became: "a man" Who "humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." It was a human being, Jesus of Nazareth, Who, by His perfect obedience to the Father's will, reverses and heals the disobedience of our first parents which brought upon sin, death, and condemnation. And, as the ancient fathers teach, since "what is not assumed [taken on] is not healed," the Saviour needs to be fully one of us, says Hebrews 4:15, "in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin," to heal every nook and cranny of our corrupted humanity. And it is by means of our Lord's conception within and birth from a pure virgin solely by the power of the Holy Spirit, that there comes into our world Him Who is both God and Man. Only by means of His birth from a pure virgin can He be "Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us" and be the One Who "saves His people from their sins."

Look: in an age of great confusion about Who Jesus really is, we need to be very clear on our Lord Jesus Christ's nature and person, because if ever we lose sight of this great foundation truth, we run only too quickly and only too easily into spiritual disaster. The name "Immanuel," "God with us," takes in the whole mystery. Jesus took on and still in His Ascension retains a nature like our own in all things except sin. But though Jesus was "with us" in human flesh and blood, He was and is at the same time very God; and that true God is, not against us, or indifferent to us, but with us even in the midst of our sins, our troubles, our worries, our fears, our sorrows.

We often find, as we read the Gospels, that our Saviour could be weary, and hungry, and thirsty, just like us; and that He could weep, and groan, and feel pain, just like us. In all this we see Him Whom 1 Timothy 2:5 calls "the Man Christ Jesus." We see the nature He took on Him, when He was born of the Virgin Mary. But we shall also find in the same Gospels that our Saviour knew people's hearts and thoughts; that He had power over demons; that He could work the mightiest of miracles with a word; that He was ministered to by angels; that He allowed good old Doubting Thomas to finally recognize Him as "my Lord and my God;" and that in John 8:58 and John 10:30 He clearly asserts His Godhead in saying, "Before Abraham was, I AM," and "I and My Father are one." In this Jesus, soon to be born according to the flesh, we see Him Whom Romans 9:25 glorifies: "Christ...Who is over all, the eternally blessed God."