



# 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 worshipers.*

*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.\*\**

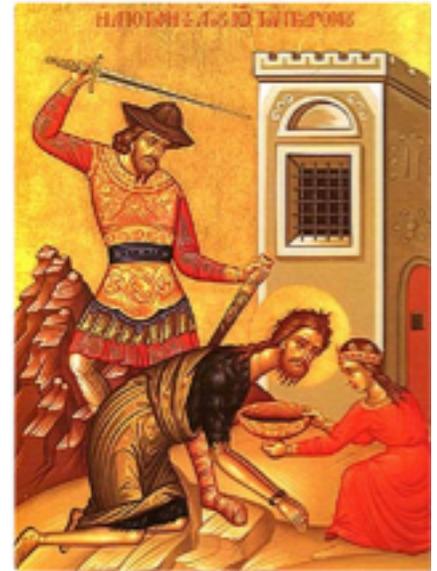
**\*\* Archbishop Michael  
has blessed us to worship  
with up to ten (10)  
households per service.  
Please contact Father  
Peter if you are planning  
to attend. \*\***

## The Beheading of the Holy Glorious Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John August 29

**Upcoming Services:  
Sunday, August 23, 30  
Divine Liturgy: 10 am**

**No coffee hour \*\*Social  
Distancing guidelines  
must be observed.**

**The above services are at  
St. Olympia Chapel  
123 Main Street  
Potsdam, NY, 13676**



*The memory of the righteous  
is celebrated with hymns of praise,  
but the Lord's testimony is sufficient  
for you, O Forerunner.  
You were shown in truth  
to be the most honorable of the prophets,  
for you were deemed worthy to baptize  
in the streams of the Jordan  
Him whom they foretold.*

*Therefore, having suffered for the truth with joy,  
you proclaimed to those in hell  
God who appeared in the flesh,  
who takes away the sin of the world,  
and grants us great mercy.*

Troparion for all Feasts of the Forerunner

*The glorious beheading of the Forerunner,  
became an act of divine dispensation,  
for he preached to those in hell the coming of the Savior.  
Let Herodias lament, for she entreated lawless murder,  
loving not the law of God, nor eternal life,  
but that which is false and temporal.*

Kontakion for the Forerunner on August 29

## The Seal of the Prophets

The importance of John the Baptizer may be gauged by the amount of paint and ink the Church spends on him. His portrait is painted and is found on every single icon-screen in all the churches, regardless of whether or not he is that church's patron saint. And many hymns have been written to celebrate his life. Much ink is required for these hymns — he has many feasts. Fifty-seven feasts each year in fact: the feasts of his conception on September 23, his birth on June 24, his beheading on August 29, the synaxis celebrating his role as the Lord's baptizer on January 7, the feasts of his relics on February 24 and May 25, and every Tuesday of the 52 weeks of the year, which celebrate him in the weekly liturgical cycle. That is a lot of feasts, requiring a lot of hymns.

This should only be expected for someone the Lord described as the greatest born of women (Matthew 11:11). Yet, as the Lord went on to say, even the least of those in the kingdom was greater than John, for John stood outside the coming kingdom, suffering death at the hands of Herod before he could enter it himself. John was, in fact, the embodiment of the Old Testament's message, and as such he stood at the end of the long line of sacred history. "All the prophets and the Law prophesied until John" (v. 13), who was the final prophet, the seal of the prophets, for after him there could be no more Old Testament prophecy. He was the prophetic hinge, connecting the Old Covenant with the New. In his ministry and message we find the entirety of the Old Testament distilled and offered to the Church. Of that message, I would mention three things.

Firstly, John tells us to repent and that repentance is the only way to avoid the coming judgment of God. That judgment will be thorough — not a little pruning of a few stray sinful branches, but the felling of the whole tree. And repentance is urgently required, that that judgment is even now impending and threatening. The axe of divine judgment is being laid at the root to the tree; the first blow of the axe is imminent, and there is no time to lose.

One might perhaps imagine that being part of a religious body would be enough to save. It is not so. Many Jews imagined that as the children of Abraham and members of the Chosen People they were immune and safe from divine wrath. That wrath was for the Gentiles, not for Jews. They were the children of Abraham, and were therefore safe. John thundered against such presumption. Being a child of Abraham was no great thing: "Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham" (Matthew 3:9). (This probably involves a play on words which vanishes in translation: from these stones [Hebrew *eben*] God is able to raise up servants/ sons [Hebrew *ebed*].) If the Jews of old were not saved by racial membership, neither are we Gentiles by ecclesiastical membership. What matters is repentance, which alone gives meaning to our inclusion in the Body of Christ. Repentance is not something we do before we can serve God; it is what serving God consists of.

Secondly, we may ask what do we repent of? What does God want from us? The Pharisees were sure that repentance consisted of scrupulous attention to the minutiae of the Law, and fastidious care in keeping the Sabbath and ritual purification. A truly devout person would wash one's hands before eating just in case they had contracted ceremonial defilement in the marketplace (see Mark 7:3f). Is that what repentance consists of? Does God primarily want us to be more religious? John taught otherwise. Repentance consisted of care for the poor and of contentment with one's lot. "He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise" (Luke 3:11). Notoriously sinful tax-collectors? Let them "collect no more than was appointed" for them, cheating no one. Soldiers? "Rob no one by violence, and be content with your wages" (v. 12-14).

Here we see the explication of the constant theme of the Old Testament prophets. All the prophets denounced social injustice and said that to know God was not to be religious, but to be kind to the poor (Jeremiah 22:16). One of them, Micah, summed it all up: "He has showed you, O man, what is good — what does Yahweh require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8). The first and great commandment to love God manifests itself in its corollary, the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself. If you love God Whom you have not seen, you will surely also love your neighbor whom you have seen (1 John 4:20).

Thirdly, John teaches us that Christ is everything. Technically Jesus became John's disciple when He was baptized by him. Yet when John had his vision of a harmless dove descending upon Jesus after He was praying on the riverside after His baptism, John knew that Jesus was the sinless Messiah, the One Who would baptize in the Holy Spirit, the One Whose way he was preparing. When John's disciples found out that Jesus branched out on His own and was baptizing and making His own disciples, they were incensed and jealous on John's behalf. John was serene, recognizing in this the hand of God. Of course all men were going to Jesus and He was winning the hearts of Israel. Should not the bridegroom win the bride? John was simply the friend of the bridegroom, the Best Man, and like the Best Man he rejoiced to see the bridegroom win his bride. "He must increase, and I must decrease" (John 4:25-30). ---

John was not just the Baptizer, he was the Forerunner, and his life had no other purpose than to reveal Christ and prepare His way. From his place on our icon-screens, John tells us that we also have no other purpose but to serve the Lord.

*By Father Lawrence Farley, edited, from the OCA website*

## International Orthodox Christian Charities



### Your Compassion Reaches More People in Need

Thanks to the generosity of donors like you, IOCC moved quickly to help survivors of the August 4 explosion in Beirut. Emergency response started with:

- Deploying nurses for home visits and wellness checks
- Offering hygiene basics like soap and toothpaste

Going door to door in Beirut's hardest-hit neighborhoods, IOCC Lebanon staff has determined the most effective ways to help as the people of Lebanon work toward recovery. As we expand our response, we're now working in these additional areas:

- Weekly hot meals for hundreds of families
- Repairs to make damaged homes safe again
- Working closely with St. George University Hospital to support the work toward resuming service.

Through IOCC, you are showing up for the people of Lebanon. Thank you.

*"In grace we grow, in service we transcend, and in love the structure is strengthened."*

—His Beatitude John X, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East, from His Pastoral Letter

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