

God Is with Us in Our Church

Objective: The students will be able to identify the three parts of the church building: the narthex, nave, and Holy Place.

For the Catechist

For the children in Grade 3 the word church usually means the building where they go to attend services and to be with their family and friends. They are just starting to understand that Church also means the followers of Jesus, the concept introduced in the last unit. This unit shows how the structure of the church building leads the followers of Jesus into the presence of God. The children will learn we go to church to share our common faith and to come together to worship God.

The Power of United Prayer. Jesus tells us we must join in prayer: "Again, [amen,] I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:19-20). God calls us together to pray. Our churches give us that opportunity to pray in an environment that reflects our unity with God. We need to encourage the children to attend the Divine Liturgy and other services because God wants us to come together to pray.

Church Buildings. Churches are recognized by their unique structure that says this is the house of God. This unit helps the children understand the ways our church buildings express our worship. The physical arrangement reflects God is with us, and the sacred signs call us to God. Our church buildings are our heaven on earth.

Lesson Plan Overview

Opening: "O Heavenly King"

Introduction: Tour of the church
Need: Guide pictures from the church worksheet

Read Text Aloud: Have students volunteer to read the text. Use questions in the teacher manual to discuss the lesson with the students.

Activity Tracks:

Choose a basic, group, or craft activity to reinforce the lesson (detailed on the pages that follow).

- *Basic:* This Is My Church
- *Group:* "How Do We Know?" Game
- *Craft:* "Our Church" Diorama
Alternate: Build Your Own Church Kit

Closing: "O Heavenly King"

[For next week, ask your priest if he would be willing to let the children look at the Holy Table. If possible, have him tell the children about the signs of God's presence on the Holy Table.]

Icon Packets:

Come Bless the Lord: Christ Pantocrator

Teaching Pics:

Great Censing (DL11)

Background Reading

(Direct quotations from the sources noted)

The Sacred Church Building

"The church building becomes for us a sacred space, a visible icon of the kingdom of God. Our worship becomes a sacred time wherein we come collectively into God's presence to be united with Him and each other for our sanctification. The church structure, therefore, is given a special blessing or consecration by the bishop. It is almost a kind of baptism to mark this place as a special one where the Lord acts, a portal into the Kingdom of God. The Church also celebrates rites of blessing over all the items used in liturgical worship—icons, vestments, sacred vessels, altar cloths, reliquaries, palms, candles—each of which shares in the function of the church building" (*LLII* 92).

The Structure of the Church

"St. Maximos the Confessor has emphasized that both parts of the Church structure share a common purpose (*Mystagogy* 2). Maximos affirms that the structure of the church building is an icon symbolizing the unity between God and humanity, between spirit and flesh, between the future and the past, and between symbol and reality. Thus the church structure represents the purpose of the Church itself to lead us into the presence of God, so that we can be united with Him. Through the very structure of the church building the invisible reality of the Church is presented to our bodily eyes even as we and our gifts are transformed into a heavenly reality" (*LLI* 14).

The Byzantine Church Building

"All these aspects of worship find concrete expression in the Byzantine church building. Standing before the Pantokrator, the image of the inexpressible God, we find ourselves called to bow down and acknowledge our true status before God. We are surrounded by appointments recalling both the temple of Jerusalem and its heavenly prototype (cf *Ex* 25:1-27:21), but clearly focused on the mystery of Christ at work among us. Standing shoulder to shoulder with the icons of the saints we take our place in the community of the Holy Spirit" (*LLII* 12).

The Purpose of the Church Building

"Some people feel that church buildings are unnecessary since God is present everywhere, even in the field under the stars. If silent prayer for communing with God were the sole purpose of the church building, this argument would have weight, as many other places would serve this purpose as well. Of course, we sometimes take refuge in our churches as places of quiet and peace for private prayer, but the true purpose of the church building becomes manifest only with the liturgy celebrated there. There are essential aspects of His presence and His relationship to us which can be perceived best in the church building as it comes alive through use. In the Church's liturgical worship God is truly acting in the midst of His people. The Lord is at work, creating us anew: salvation is a continuous happening, as the Fathers often proclaimed. Hence, in the divine services, we are present to the saving events of Christ's paschal mystery as well as to the entire Church across time and space, which lives through His saving acts. The timeless and universal effect of these events is accented when they are celebrated in a properly appointed church building representing the fullness of creation touched by the saving hand of God" (*LLII* 12-13).

The Lesson Plan

Opening

Let's start our prayers with the sign of the cross and pray: "O Heavenly King. . . ."

Introduction

Today we are going on a tour. Has anyone ever gone on a tour of a building? Why do people go on a tour? Today we are going on a tour of our church. I want you to look at details about our church. In fact, I have some cards here that identify some of the places we will look. [Use the cards from the Church Tour worksheet page.] I will give each of you a card. We will go into the church as a group. Then I want you to walk to that part of the building that matches your card. How should we act in church? (We must be quiet and behave in a respectful manner.) That is right. We are in God's presence; we are in God's house. We must act respectfully. Okay, let's go to church.

[In advance arrange to have the lights on in the church. Have each student venerate the icon on the icon table or stand before they walk to the location on their card. Then have the students return to the back of the church.]

Now we are going to walk around the church, and when we come to the place that your card describes, I want you to read your card. [Go to the icon stand first. Then continue until all the cards are read. Return to the classroom at the end of the tour.]

Did you ever go on tour of a church? Where? [Let the students tell about a church they might have visited.] We go to church to be with God. What are some other reasons you come to church? (To pray, to go to the Divine Liturgy and other church services) Last week we learned that Church also means the followers of Jesus Christ. This week we will learn about the church building where the followers of Jesus gather.

Does a church building look different from other buildings? What are some ways we can tell we are walking by a church? (The cross, the domes, the icons on the building) Our church buildings show us in many ways that we are in the presence of God.

Let's turn to our lesson to read about our church.

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God is With Us in Our Church



We have learned that the Church is the people of God who follow Jesus as their Lord. It is always good for people to gather together to share their common faith. That is why we go to church. Our church building is our place to come together to worship God.

Jesus wants us to know that God is with us when we come together to pray. In the Bible we read that Jesus told the disciples, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). Every time we are in church, we are in the presence of God.

28 God With Us Grade 1 Unit 2: We Meet the Lord in Church

Reading of Text

As the children read aloud, help them interact with the text using the comments or questions below which are keyed to the text phrases (in bold type).

Does the church on this page look like our church? What is the same? What is different? Why do we have church buildings? Let's turn to our lesson.

... to gather together to share their common faith.

What does faith mean? (What we believe) Christians share a common faith, a common belief. In whom does a Christian believe? (In Jesus Christ) Why do we go to church? (To come together to worship and pray to God) What does worship mean? (To honor)

Every time we are in church, we are in the presence of God.

When will Jesus be with us? (When we come together to pray) How do we know? (He told us according to the Gospel.) Why is "God Is with Us in Our Church " a good title for this lesson? (God is with us when we are in church; we are in the presence of God.)

Our churches are built in a way to show us we are in God's house. On top of the church, we see at least one dome and cross. The dome is shaped like a bowl and represents heaven. This is our way to show that our church is our heaven on earth, our house for God. The cross at the top shows everyone we believe in Jesus Christ.

The inside of our church is divided into three sections. The first section is called the narthex. This is where we prepare to meet God. In some churches the narthex is a small entrance way. In other churches it is large enough to hold candles and an icon stand.



From the narthex we walk through doors to go into the largest section of the church, the nave. In the nave the people gather to praise and worship God. We see many icons on the walls and on the icon stands in the nave. There is usually a special stand or table for the icon of the day's feast or of the church's patron. Also, there is a stand for the Gospel reading and a table for some prayer services. In some churches a special place for the cantor is found in the nave.

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... to hold candles and an icon stand.

What does the dome on the church represent? (Heaven) What is on top of the dome? (A cross) Whom does the cross say we believe in? (Jesus) What is the narthex? (The entrance way where we prepare to meet God)

... a special place for the cantor is found in the nave.

What is icon table or stand? (The small table in the front of the nave) When we come to church, we should walk up to the icon stand(s), cross ourselves, bow, and kiss the icon. We may light a candle too. These are ways we worship God in His house.

... our church is a sanctified place.

What does sanctified mean? (Holy) Who is allowed in the Holy Place? (Priest, deacon, and altar servers) Why is the eternal lamp burning? (It is a sign that our church is holy.) On what day was this light lit? (On the dedication day of the church) How long will it stay lit? (Forever)

Let's review: *What is the section of the church that you first walk into called? (The narthex) What is the middle section called? (The nave) What is the next section? (The Holy Place) In the narthex we prepare to meet God, in the nave we join together to pray to God, and in the Holy Place God is present. Should we be quiet in church? (Yes) Why? (We are in God's house; we should show our respect.)*

Beyond the nave is the Holy Place, the third section of the church. The priests, deacon, and altar servers are allowed in the Holy Place. They are there to serve the Lord in the most holy part of the church.

When we come into church, we see a light burning all the time in front of or in the Holy Place. This light was lit on the day of the dedication of our church, and it stays lit all the time. It is the Eternal Light. This light is a sign that our church is a sanctified place.



In church we come together to worship God.

Words to Remember:
Narthex: The small room where we enter the church and prepare to meet the Lord.
Nave: The largest section of the church where all the people gather to praise God.
Holy Place (Sanctuary): The holiest part of the church. At the Holy Table, the priest serves the Divine Liturgy.

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Activity Tracks

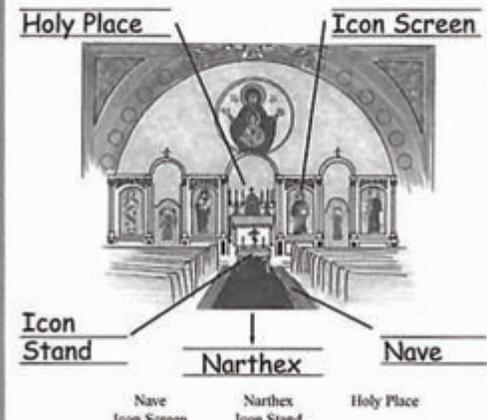
Basic: This Is My Church

[This worksheet is in the student text.]

Let's say the words at the bottom of the page. Now write the word on the line in the part of the church where it belongs. [Give a few minutes to complete this. Walk around and ask the students to say the word as they write it.] Now let's read the instructions at the bottom and follow the directions. We are going to make this a picture of our church, [Say the name of your church and have them write the name at the top. Read each sentence, and wait until the students make the stars.] Do you always sit in the same place? What is closest to you to remind you God is with you? [Allow time for discussion.]

This Is My Church

Complete the diagram of the church by adding the words listed under the drawing of the church. Then, follow the instructions at the bottom.



Icon Stand **Narthex** **Nave**

Nave Narthex Holy Place
 Icon Screen Icon Stand

Now draw stars to show the following people and the place where you usually see them during the Divine Liturgy:

1. You and your family members
2. The priest
3. The altar servers
4. The cantor

Group: "How Do We Know?" Game

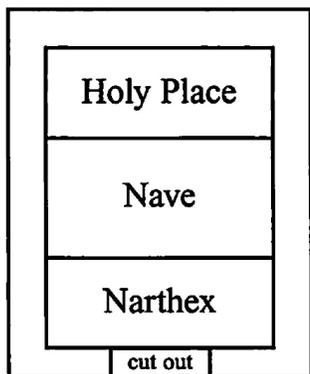
Materials: Game cube made from worksheet

We learned about the different parts of the church today. Now we are going to play a game. [In advance make the game cube from the worksheet.] When it is your turn, roll the cube. Identify something you can find in that part of the church. How does it show us God is with us? [You can turn this into a competition with teams and points.]

Craft: "Our Church" Diorama

Materials: shoe box, markers

[Have sample ready to show children.] *Today we are going to start making a model of our church. We will use a shoe box for the walls. First let's draw two lines to separate the box into three sections. Let's cut out a door on one of the smaller sides of the box—either end. This will be the door entrance to the church. Now we will know where to put the items in the church. Let's write the name of that part of the church on the bottom of the box (the floor of the church). What do we call the part of the church we walk into from the front door? (Narthex) Let's print that in the first section of the box after the door. What is the next part of the church? (Nave) Let's print that. What is the next part called? (Holy Place) Let's print that. Next week we will complete our diorama. [Remind the children who forgot their shoe boxes to bring one in next week.]*



Alternate: Build Your Own Church kit

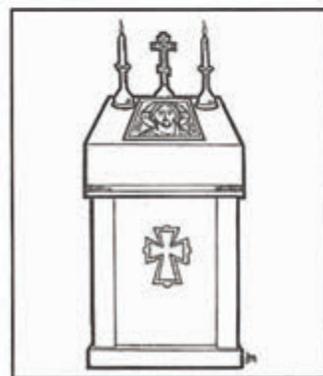
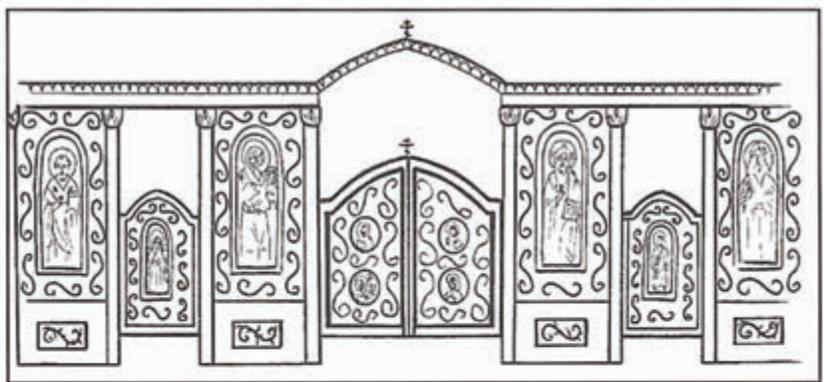
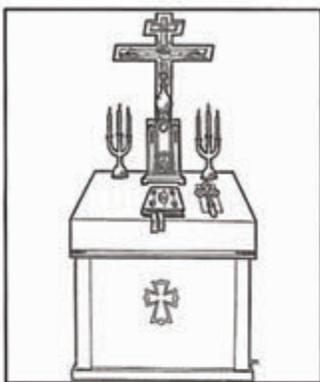
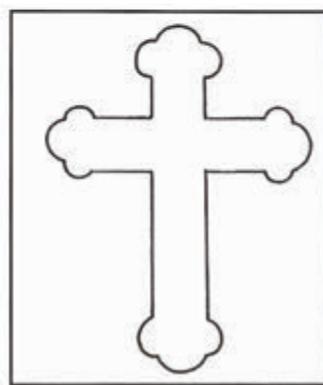
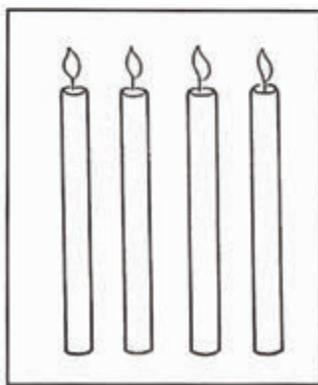
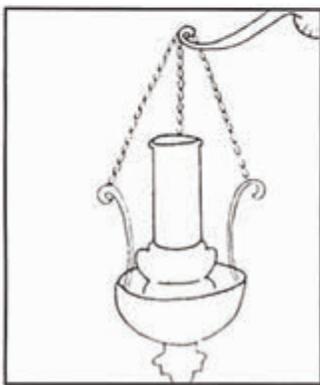
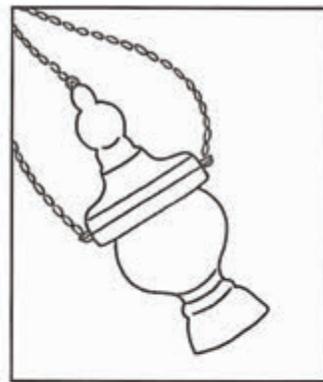
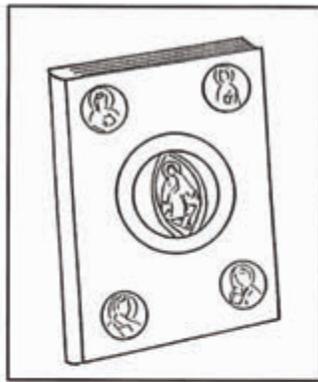
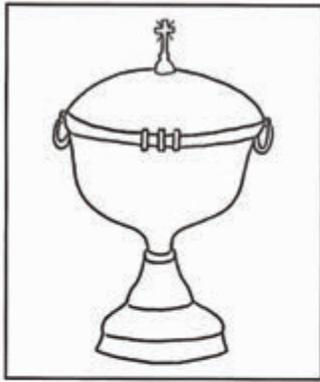
Materials: Kit, scissors, contact cement, tape.

Disassemble the book, giving each student a page to cut out. Following the instructions given in the book, help the students assemble the model, using contact cement. You may wish to reinforce the joints with a heavy, clear plastic tape. Be sure that students recognize the distinctions between the narthex, the nave and the holy place (apse). If you do not complete the project, set it aside until lesson 9.

Closing

[Use the prayer page from last week. Modify the text for your jurisdiction.] *Let's start with the sign of the cross and pray, "O Heavenly King. ..."*

[For next week, ask your priest if he would be willing to let the children look at the Holy Table. If possible, have him tell the children about the signs of God's presence on the Holy Table.]



Duplicate this page. Cut out the names and paste to the back of the pictures from the previous page.

Censer

Gospel
Book

Baptismal
Font

Hand Cross

Candles

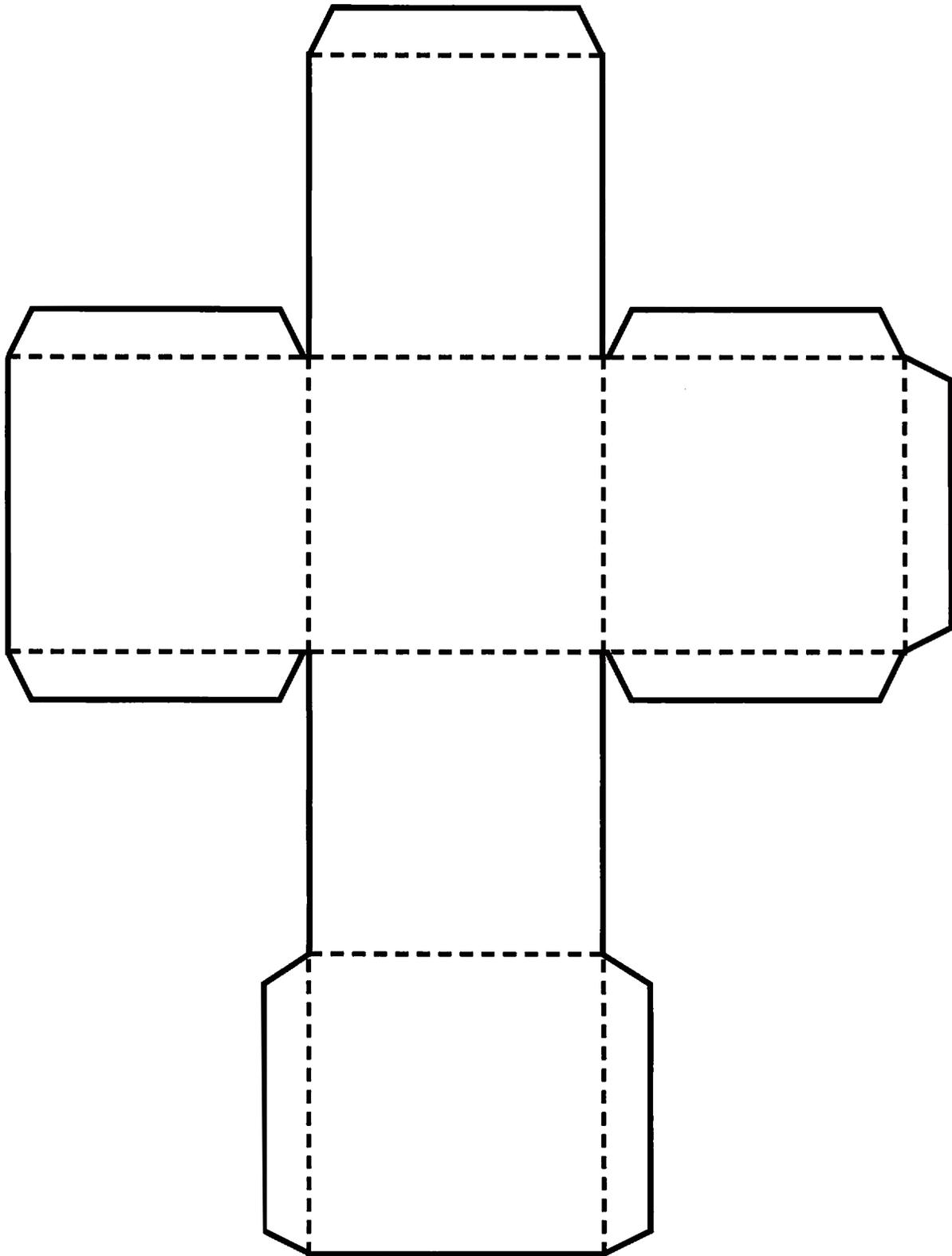
Eternal
Lamp

Icon Screen

Holy Table

Icon Table

View from the Narthex
To the Nave



Directions: Cut along the black lines. Fold along the broken lines. Insert the tabs to make a cube.
Write the following words on the different sides of the cube: Narthex, Nave, Holy Place

