

We Meet the Lord Jesus in Icons

Objective: The students will be able to define icons as the holy images of Saints or events that recall God's presence.

For the Catechist

Learning about icons can be a lifetime commitment. Each line and color adds to our encounter with God. Through icons we experience the peace that one day can be ours if we follow Jesus. Through icons we remember God's promise to be with us always. That is the reason we should have icon corners in our homes. We need to pray in front of our icons and remember that we are in God's presence every minute of every day.

Children in Grade 3 have been looking at and learning about icons since they started coming to church. In the "Observances" unit of each grade level in this series, they have read and learned about many icons. In this lesson they are going to learn that the icons and the icon screen are an important part of our church buildings. Our icons help us remember we are part of an ancient Church family in communion with the Holy Spirit. Our icons help us recall the people who have been called by God to form the Church, the Body of Christ.

Icons. Icons are unlike any other form of art. They are purposely not natural looking. The figure or scene is presented in a "transfigured" state, as existing in eternity. Icons are an aid to meditation and prayer and have been termed "windows" through which we may glimpse the stillness and peace of heaven. They are valued as teaching tools in the same vein as the Gospel. Just as the evangelists, iconographers pray and fast before they visually write the inspired Word of God. They pray for direction from the Holy Spirit to help them write their visual expression of the Word

Lesson Plan Overview

Opening: "O Heavenly King"

Introduction: Discussion of icons
Need: picture from home, icons

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:* The Icon Screen
- *Group:* "Our Church" Review
- *Craft:* Icon Album
Alternate: Build Your Own... Kits

Closing: "O Heavenly King"

Icon Packets:

Come Bless the Lord: The Icon Screen, Saint Nicholas, Saint Stephen, Saint Michael the Archangel

Teaching Pics:

Great Censing (DL11)

Background Reading

(Direct quotations from the sources noted)

Iconography

"Iconography, therefore, is more than simply an invitation to remember a person or event. It is in addition an attempt to make present the meaning of what is depicted, so that we can share in the reality of what God is doing for us. Such a participation is only possible in the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus the discipline of the Church requires prayer for the inspiration of the Spirit by the Iconographer and those who will pray through the icons. Iconography is an expression of Tradition in shape, color, and form, or as one theologian put it, Icons are theology in color" (*SLW* 13).

Icons

"The walls of Byzantine church buildings are usually covered with icons, proclaiming a 'theology in color.' They follow certain traditional forms in portraying the scenes or persons depicted in order to reveal the teaching of the Church. They visually attract the beholder by expressing levels of meaning too complex for words. Icons derive from the mystery of the incarnation, in that Christ is 'the icon of the invisible God' (Col, 1:15). In the incarnation God has become visible in human form, making it possible to depict Him in Christ.... The icons of the saints are painted according to the same principles as the icon of Christ to show deification by the Spirit into the image of God. The saints' eyes, the mirrors of the soul, are open wide to represent wisdom and spiritual insight. Their posture and clothing are harmoniously arranged to represent integrity and wholeness of being. Icons de-emphasize physical features (physiognomy) in order to lead us to a perception of spiritual reality and beauty" (*LLII* 13).

Veneration of Icons

"We pray whenever possible standing before an icon which is considered in our Tradition a 'window to heaven.' We bow before them and kiss them as part of our prayer in order to honor the holy ones depicted on them. God became man in a depictable way; His Spirit visibly enlivens the saints. This is why we can paint and venerate icons as part of our prayer life. In doing so we proclaim that God has truly assumed everything human, except sin, and transfigured all creation by His light."

"Perhaps the most common method for venerating icons is as follows: 1) Make a metany. 2) Kiss the principal figure(s) on the icon. Usually we kiss the hand, the foot or the hem of the garment of Christ or the saint represented. When venerating icons depicting several figures, such as the Theotokos carrying the child Jesus, many people kiss each principal figure on the icon. 3) Make another metany. 4) If candles are available, light one, place it in the proper receptacle and offer your prayer" (*DC* 44).

The Icon Screen

"The icon screen is the most distinctive feature of the Byzantine church structure. Its practical function is to set apart the altar area from the main body of the church (the nave). This architectural purpose of the icon screen was drawn from the style of other public structures in the Roman and Byzantine Empire. The usual division between the area for the public and that for the official function was a low fence, often enhanced by columns with an architrave (a lintel running along the tops of the columns). Icons were given a more prominent place on the screen after the ninth century controversy with the iconoclasts (icon breakers) had highlighted the connection with the incarnation" (*LLII* 13-14).

"The theological function of the icon screen is to be the 'gate of paradise,' proclaiming that, through Christ, 'the reflection of the Father's glory, the exact representation of the Father's being' (Heb 1:3), we have access to the Father and to the Kingdom of God. The icons of the Mother of God, the apostles, the gospel scenes on the screen are placed there because of their connection with the mystery of the incarnation. Likewise the Church, represented by the icons of the parish patrons, is there as the continuation of the incarnation, affording us spiritual and bodily unity with God" (*LLII* 14).

The Presence of God in the Icon

"We call the sacred painting of our Church icons because they manifest the otherwise hidden presence of God and are sacraments which put the soul in direct contact with this presence. The icon is a witness which in some way extends the presence of the saints, of the Holy Scriptures, and makes them present realities. The theology of icons, which received its formal pronouncement at the Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicea (787 A.D.), is based on the doctrines of the Incarnation of the Redemption.

"'Christ,' says St. Paul, 'is the icon of the invisible God' (Col. 1:15). Christ is the Icon of the Father because he manifests the Father to mankind. 'He who sees me, sees the Father,' Jesus said to Thomas. The underlying idea of icon, as indeed of the Logos, the Word of God, is the manifestation of the hidden. The icon not only manifest the hidden, it shares in the reality of what it represents. 'Icon does not demand equality with the archetype,' wrote St. John of Damascus, 'but in fact we know that Christ, the Icon of the Father, is identical with the Father in every particular, differing from him only by the fact of being begotten' (FG 151).

The Icon: A Presentation of the Beauty of God's Love

"Thus an icon of Christ or of a Saint tells us next to nothing about his 'real' physical appearance. It does not give any detail of the person's social or historical background. A Saint announces the end of time when everything is perfected in the risen Christ in the parousia. An icon, therefore, radiates the influence of man beyond human history. It bears history in itself, but it proclaims it in a different manner. We contemplate the mystery that the icon portrays as in silence and awe because the powerlessness of human words compels us to veneration by silence and meditation.

"The icon is not only an aesthetic entity, it is also a little compendium of the faith and worship life of the Church. It is, in miniature, the life of the Church as lived in Christ. A saving truth is not communicated by word alone but by awakening the vital forces of life, and by the presentation of beauty. It is because God loved us that he turned a visible face toward us, a human face. He turned to us the face of absolute beauty, a face filled with the fullness of God and the fullness of being. It is the love of this beauty, and the beauty of this love which the icon bears and reveals" (FG 154).

The Lesson Plan

Opening

Let's pray the prayer we have been learning. What are the first three words? ("O Heavenly King")
Let's pray. [Use their prayer books.]

Introduction

Last week I asked you to bring in a picture of your family. Does everyone have one? [Have some available from a church event for those who forgot.] *Let's hear about these pictures. Who are the people in it? Where was it taken?* [After all pictures are discussed, place them on the desk.] *What do you do with special pictures at home? (They are in frames.) I have some pictures from my house.* [Show pictures of family members—parents, children, nieces, nephews.] *I keep these pictures in a frame so that I can look at them throughout the day. The pictures help me recall the family member and the event in the picture. Does anyone have a special picture that you look at in your house?* [Allow them to discuss.]

Is this a picture? [Display an icon of a saint and let the students respond.] *Let's see what is different between this icon and the pictures you brought in. Does the saint look like a person we would see outside? (Not really) An icon is an image of a real person, but the iconographer, the person who wrote this icon, made this person look a little different. Does our camera do that to us? Do we look different on our pictures? (No, we should not look different.) Our pictures show us the way we are.*

The icon is different because it shows us more than a person's appearance. The icons show us the love of God. This love of God is shown in the people and the events. The icons help us remember how we have to live to be with God forever. Does anyone have an icon at home? [Allow time for discussion.]

Do you look at this icon every day? What else should we do when we see an icon? (We should cross ourselves, bow, and kiss the icon.) That is our way to honor the love of God shown through the icon and to remember God is with us.

Let's turn to our books to read more about icons.

9

We Meet the Lord Jesus in Icons



The holy pictures in our church have a special name. We call them icons. Icons are holy images of Saints or events that recall God's presence. The holy image shows the heavenly life of the people in the icon. We have icons of Jesus, His Mother Mary, the Saints, and feast days.

Icons are called "windows to heaven." Through icons we see the stillness and peace of heaven. We want to feel that peace. We are shown that we can if we look to Jesus and follow Him. We are shown that if we look to Jesus and follow Him, we can feel the peace of heaven. Now they are living with Him forever.

36 God With Us Grade 3

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 icon screen in our church look like the one in the picture? What is the same? What is different?

Let's read our lesson.

Now they are living with Him forever.

Is an icon a picture? (No) What is an icon? (Holy images of Saints or events that recall God's presence.) Name some icons. (Jesus, His Mother Mary, Saints, feast days)

We say iconographers write icons.

What is an iconographer? (A prayerful person who writes icons) How do iconographers prepare? (They pray and fast.) What does the icon screen do? (Stands between the nave and the Holy Place)

The altar servers enter the Holy Place through those doors.

How many doors are on the icon screen? (Three) What are they? (The Holy (Royal) Doors and the deacon doors) Who enters the Royal Doors? (Bishops, priests, and deacons)

... join us in prayer.

Who joins us in our prayers in church? (All the Saints on the icons) What are they praying for? (For us to be followers of Christ)

Icons are written by prayerful people called iconographers. Iconographers pray and fast before they write an icon. They read and listen to God's word. Then they write the icon that shows God's word through pictures. They are not painting pictures. That is why we do not say they paint icons. We say iconographers write icons.



We have many icons of the Mother of God, the Theotokos. We also have many icons of Saints. These icons are on the walls of our churches. They are also on the icon screen. The icon screen stands between the nave of the church and the Holy Place.

The icon screen has three doors or entrances to the Holy Place. The set of doors in the center is called the Holy (Royal) Doors. We see icons of the Gospel writers and/or an icon of the Annunciation on these doors. Only bishops, priests, and deacons are allowed through the Holy (Royal) Doors. The two side doors on the icon screen are called the deacon doors. The altar servers enter the Holy Place through those doors.

The icons on the icon screen are arranged in rows. Some churches have one row. Some churches have as many as six rows. Each time we worship God in church, we are joined by all the Saints on the icons. The Saints on the icons join us in prayer.

We have icons of many saints. We light candles and put them in front of icons. That is one way we honor the light of Christ that shines through the saints on the icons.

37

We venerate icons in our church and in our homes.

What does venerate mean? (To honor and respect) When we venerate an icon, we call to mind God's presence in the person or the event shown on the icon. How do we show our respect? (We cross ourselves, bow, and kiss the icon.)

Each time we bow and kiss the icon we are honoring God's presence.

Where are some places we see icons in church? (On the walls, on the icon screen, on the icon table) Where is the icon screen? (Standing between the nave and the Holy Place)

Do we see many icons with Jesus? (Yes) What are some of the icons with Jesus? (Resurrection, Nativity) Jesus is calling us to follow Him. We meet the Lord Jesus in icons, and He is showing us the way to God. Of what do the icons remind us? (God is with us.)



We venerate icons in our church and in our homes. One way to honor the image of Jesus Christ, His Mother Mary, the Saints, and the feast days is by lighting candles in front of the icon. Another way to show our respect is by crossing ourselves, bowing, and kissing the icon. Each time we bow and kiss the icon we are honoring God's presence.

Icons are holy images of Saints or events that recall God's presence.

Words to Remember:
Icons: Icons are the holy images of Saints or events that recall God's presence.
Iconographers: Prayerful people who write icons.
Icon Screen: The icon screen stands between the nave of the church and the Holy Place.
Holy (Royal) Doors: The set of doors in the center of the icon screen.
Deacon Doors: The two side doors on the icon screen.

39

Activity Tracks

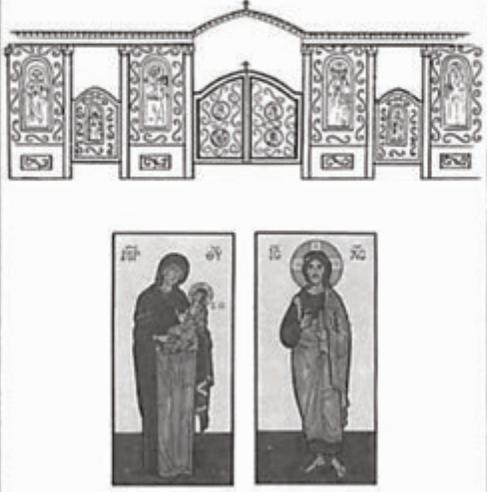
Basic: Icon Screen

[This worksheet is in the student text.]

What is the name of the screen that separates the Holy Place from the nave? (The icon screen) Today we are going to complete the icon screen on this page. We are going to match the icon with the correct place for it on the icon screen. [If there is time, let the children color the icons.]

The Icon Screen

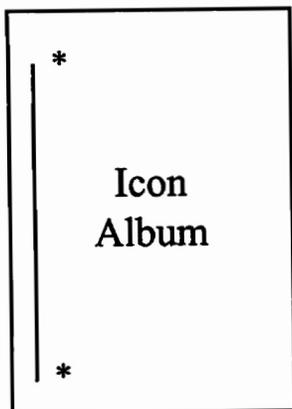
Match the icons from the bottom of the page to the place where you will find them on the icon screen. Under the other icons, write the names of the saints who are shown on your church's icon screen. Now color the icon screen the way it is in your church.



Group: "Our Church" Review

Materials: Review worksheet (paste the questions on 3 x 5 notecards and use throughout the year), ball, waste basket or bucket

[Use the review worksheet for the questions. Include any other question. Also, decide where the students should stand to throw the ball so it is fair for everyone.] *We have learned about Jesus calling us and about how we meet Jesus in our church. Today we are going to review the details by answering questions I have on these cards. When you get an answer correct, you get to throw the ball into the basket. You get two points for every basket. If you are wrong, the other team gets to answer the question and tries for the basket. Let's divide in teams.*



Craft: Icon Album

Materials: Pictures and explanation of icons from bulletin covers or use the icons from the "Icon" worksheet, white construction paper, hole punch, scissors, and yarn

[Have sample ready to show children.] *Today we are going to make an album of icons. Are icons pictures? (No) They are images, so we won't call it a photo album. We will include two icons. Below the icon on the worksheet are a few sentences telling details about the icon. Cut out and paste the icon on a half sheet of construction paper. Write the name of the icon underneath it. Add one sentence to tell something about the icon. [If time, have them make a cover sheet. Punch holes and fasten with yarn.]*

Alternate: Build Your Own... kit

Materials: Kits, scissors, contact cement, tape.

Complete any work on the *Build Your Own...* kits used in the two previous lessons. Use the models to review the division of the church building and the items on the holy table.

Closing: Let's pray, "O Heavenly King. [Use their prayer books.]

Name three signs of God's presence found on the Holy Table? (The Gospel Book, the hand cross, and the Tabernacle)

What are icons?
(The holy images of Saints or events that recall God's presence)

What are the three parts of the church building?
(The narthex, the nave, and the Holy Place)

What is the Church?
(The people of God who follow Jesus as their Lord.)

What is the Greatest Commandment? (Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and your neighbor as yourself.)

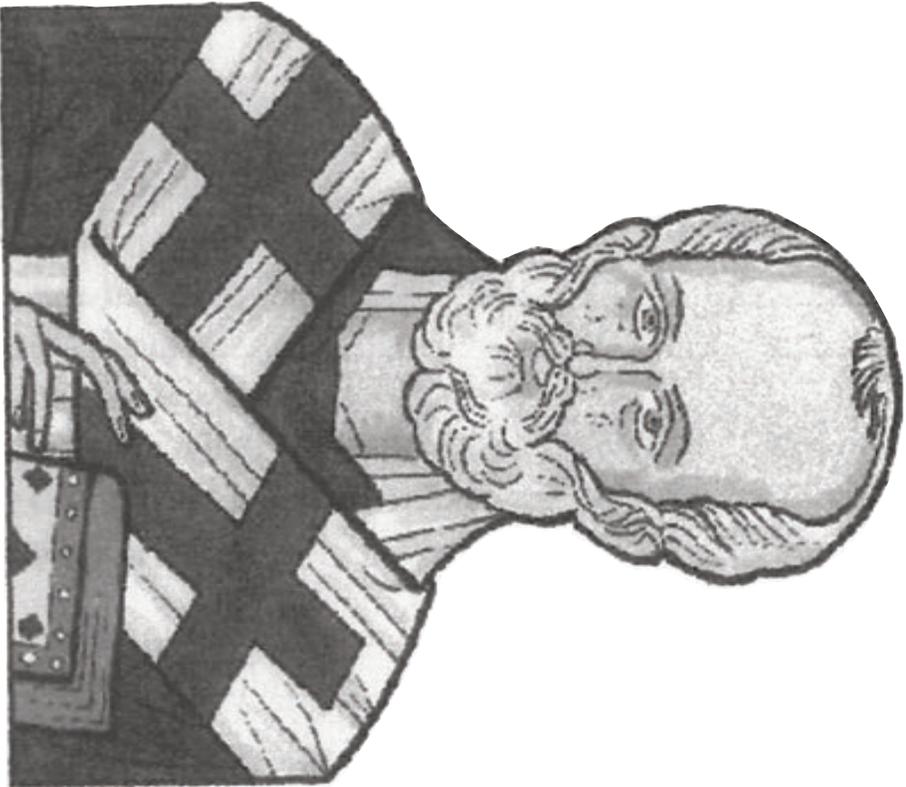
Why is Jesus called our Savior?
(Jesus saved us and gave us eternal life.)

Why does Jesus want everyone to be saved?
(Jesus wants everyone to be with God.)

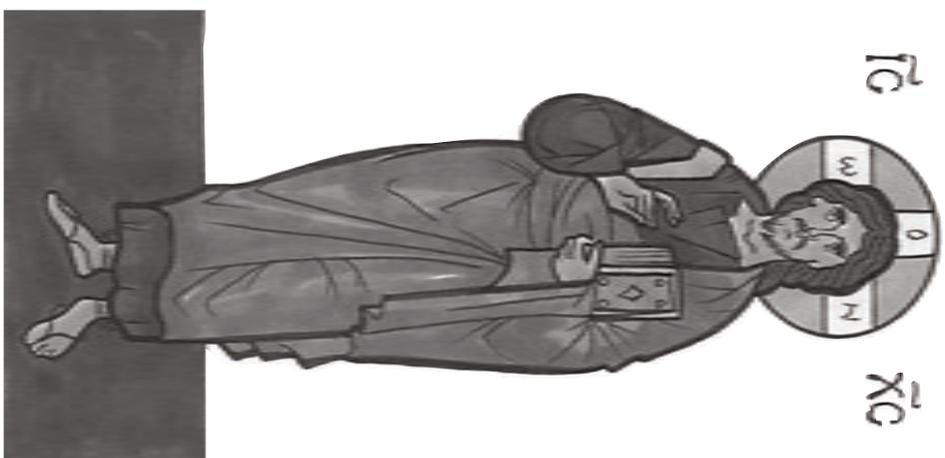
What is a Christian?
(A follower of Jesus Christ who believes in Him and has been baptized)

What is the Church?
(The Church is the people of God who follow Jesus as their Lord.)

Whom do our Church leaders follow?
(They follow Jesus, the perfect example of a leader.)



Saint Nicholas was Archbishop of Myra in Lycia in the fourth century. He is called the Wonder-worker. He is shown with his right hand raised in blessing and his left hand holds the Gospel Book. As bishop he blesses his people in the name of Christ and brings the Word of Truth to them.



This is an icon of Christ the Teacher. This icon is placed to the right of the Holy Doors on the icon screen. Jesus' right hand is raised in blessing, and his left hand is holding the Gospel Book. Jesus teaches us and shows us the way to God.

Unit 2

We Meet the Lord in Church

Review

1. What are the three parts of the church building?
(Lesson 7: The three parts of the church building are the narthex, the nave, and the Holy Place.)
2. Name three signs of God's presence found on the Holy Table.
(Lesson 8: Three signs of God's presence are the Gospel Book, the hand cross, and the Tabernacle.)
3. What are icons?
(Lesson 9: Icons are the holy images of Saints or events that recall God's presence.)
4. What is the Church?
(Lesson 5: The Church is the people of God who follow Jesus as their Lord.)