

# The Theotokos Prays for Us

**Objective:** The students will be able to identify the way Jesus honors His mother and the way our Church honors the Theotokos through services and feast days.

## **For the Catechist**

The Theotokos, the Mother of God, shows us all the qualities of a good mother. She believes and trusts in God totally. She says "Yes" to God when the Angel Gabriel tells her she is to be the Mother of God. She does not know how all this will be possible, but she listens to God and willingly agrees. We see her taking care of Jesus because God asked her to be His mother.

Our Church honors the Theotokos throughout the year. Prayers and songs are part of the Divine Liturgy and other liturgical services. Feast days that recognize major events in the life of the Mother of God are observed. Some churches have special services to honor the Theotokos. Encourage the children to attend the Akathist to the Mother of God (prayers offered while standing), the Paraclisis (prayers of consolation and intercession), and the Moleben to the Mother of God (Slavic for prayer service).

This lesson builds on the loving relationship Jesus and His mother have. We are to learn to love our mothers and children in the same way. This lesson asks us to love the Theotokos and Jesus the same way they loved each other. Through this love, we grow closer to God.

## **Lesson Plan Overview**

**Opening:** O Heavenly King

**Introduction:** Discussion of a mother's love  
**Need:** Icon of a Saint, Poster board

**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:* Mother of God, Pray for Us
- *Group:* Poem for Our Heavenly Mother
- *Craft:* Flowers for Mothers

**Closing:** O Heavenly King

### **Icon Packets:**

*Come Bless the Lord:*

- Icon of the Sign
- Nativity of the Mother of God
- Dormition

### **Teaching Pics:**

- Feasts of the Theotokos (F1)
- Akathist (GL4)

## **Background Reading**

*(Direct quotations from the sources noted)*

### **The Icon of the Theotokos**

"Because we believe in the true incarnation of the Son of God become man in Jesus, we give His Mother the honor we do. One of the most prominent examples of this reverence is the fact that we always place the icon of the Theotokos containing Christ in her womb high on the real wall of the church building. This image, placed between ceiling and floor, recalls that Mary bridges the gap between God and us by carrying the Son of God in her womb" (DC 11).

### **Mary's Role in Salvation**

"Byzantine theology is even clearer about Mary's role in the salvation of the human race. On the feast of the Annunciation, Gabriel is described as greeting Mary as the one 'through whom Adam is called back to Paradise, Eve is freed from bondage, and the world is filled with joy.' In her womb, God is united with human flesh 'through the good will of the Father and the operation of the Holy Spirit' (Liti Stichera). On the feast of the Dormition, the Church proclaims, 'Rejoice, O Virgin, for you alone brought heaven and earth together in giving birth to your Son' (Stichera at the Praises), and 'through her holy Dormition the world is given new life' (Liti Stichera). As the one who gave birth to God in the flesh, Mary's choices had cosmic significance; and she is the first to participate in the complete salvation wrought through the incarnation of Christ, including the assumption of her body into the presence of God. Thus she has a unique role as intercessor for all humanity. One of the most ancient prayers of the Church describes her role, 'We hasten to your patronage, O Virgin Mother of God. Despise not our prayers in our necessities, but deliver us from all danger, you who alone are pure and blessed.' Byzantine Church history contains many examples of prayer vigils to the Theotokos in times of civil danger. One such occasion gave rise to the feast of Protection of the Mother of God (October 1)" (LLI 93).

### **The Theotokos**

"Scripture honors Mary with most beautiful names: 'highly favored one' (Lk 1:28) 'blessed among women' (1:28,42), and 'mother of the Lord' (1:43). These become the basis for all the titles ascribed to the Holy Virgin. The greatest title given to Mary is that of Theotokos, Greek for 'she who bore God.' It was given to her by the Council of Ephesus (431) which defined that 'Emmanuel is truly God, and therefore the Holy Virgin is the Theotokos, inasmuch as in the flesh [in her womb] she bore the Word of God made flesh' (Canon 1). This Council very clearly rejected all opinions about the personality of Jesus that would in any way separate the divine and human natures united in Him. It refused any implication that the divinity was united to Him after His birth or that Jesus is in any way distinguished from the Word of God. Mary was not simply the mother of Jesus the man, but of Jesus the incarnate Son of God. Both natures were united in His person. Through her relationship to this one person, she is the 'Mother of God.' The Byzantine Churches ordinarily refer to Mary by this title of Theotokos, which signifies that she is truly the 'Mother of God' through her conception, bearing, and giving birth to the person Jesus, true God and true man" (LLI 93-94).

### **The Temple of God**

"The Church as Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit is exemplified by the Holy Virgin, who was the actual physical vessel containing Christ. She whom the Byzantine Churches call the 'living temple of the holy glory of Christ our God,' 'the holy temple of our holy God,' (Stichera at Vespers, Feast of the Entrance into the Temple) is the model or 'type' of the people of God, who have become His dwelling place (1 Cor 3:16-17; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16)" (LLI 91).

### **The Greatest of All Saints, Mary the Theotokos**

"The greatest of all saints is, of course, *Mary the Theotokos*, the Mother of God. In every Divine Liturgy, the unbloody sacrifice is offered first 'for our most holy, most pure, most blessed and glorious Lady, the Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary.' Her position is unique in salvation. As the one who by her own free will bore the Son of God in her womb, she is the first to be saved through the incarnation ('becoming flesh') of the Word of God. This is especially venerated in the feast of her falling asleep (*Dormition*) on August 15, which also celebrates her being taken into heaven (in Latin, *Assumptio*) as the first of all the human race to participate fully in the resurrection of our Lord. Other events of her life have a saving value for us as models of Christian life and because of her supreme role in the salvation worked through Jesus Christ" (LLII 50-51).

# The Lesson Plan

## Opening

Today we will say the prayer we said last week, "O Heavenly King." As we pray, let's think about the Saints and the way they were filled with the Holy Spirit. [Say the prayer.]

## Introduction

What is the name of this Saint? [Hold up an icon of St. Nicholas or any other Saint.] Last week we learned about the Saints. To whom did the Saints give their life? (God) Who helped them live their life with God? (The Holy Spirit) The Saints were just like you and me. They ate, drank, and lived the way we do. But they also lived their lives differently; they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Everything they did was dedicated to God.

Today we are going to learn about another Holy Person who ate, drank and slept the way we do. We are going to learn about Mary, the mother of Jesus. Before we start talking about this lesson, let's take some time to think about our mothers. In May we celebrate a special Sunday that honors our mothers. What is that day? (Mother's Day) Do you do anything special to thank your mom on that day? [Let the children share.] Let's think about some ideas you mentioned. Now let's make a special poem today. [Hold up a poster board with the letters for mother written down the left side.] I have the word MOTHER on this board. Let's add words to each of the letters. When we are done, we will have a poem that describes mothers. (Possibilities: Makes me happy; Often busy; Takes care of me; Happy and holy; Every day; Really great!) Very nice.

Do you think Jesus would have said the same things about His mother? Does anyone remember the name of the angel who asked Mary to be Jesus' mother? (Gabriel) Mary said "Yes" to the angel. She said "Yes" to God. After Jesus was born, Mary took very good care of Jesus. When Mary died, Jesus took her to be with Him in heaven. Jesus thanked His Mother for saying "Yes" and for taking care of Him.

Let's turn to our lesson.

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## The Theotokos Prays for Us

The Church gives special honor to the Holy Virgin Mary. She had a very important part to play in God's plan of salvation. She gave birth to Jesus. We call her the Theotokos, the Mother of God.



In the Gospels we read that Mary said "Yes" to the Angel Gabriel. Mary agreed to be Jesus' mother. We celebrate Mary's "Yes" on the Feast of the Annunciation. Our Church celebrates this feast day on March 25. The icon of the Annunciation is on the royal doors of the icon screen in many churches.

Mary is a perfect example of how we can love God. Just like the Theotokos, we must listen to God and live as He teaches. We must learn to say "Yes" to God.

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Unit 3: The Church in Glory

## 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).*

*Let's look at the picture on the first page of our lesson. Does anyone remember what these doors are called? (Royal doors) What is the name of the icon on these doors? (The Annunciation) Let's begin the reading.*

**We call her the Theotokos, the Mother of God.**

*What do we call Mary, the mother of Jesus (Holy Virgin, Theotokos) What does Theotokos mean? (Mother of God)*

**We must learn to say "Yes" to God.**

*What feast celebrates Mary saying "Yes" to the Angel Gabriel? (The Annunciation) What was the message from God? (She will be the mother of Jesus.) [If you have this icon on the Royal Doors in your church, tell the students to look for it the next time they are in church.]*

**Also, Jesus wants everyone to love His mother, the Theotokos, as He did.**

*In Bible stories we read how Jesus takes care of His mother and listens to her. In one story they were at a wedding. Mary asked Jesus to help the bride and groom who ran out of wine. Jesus listened and turned water into wine for the guests. When He was dying on the cross, Jesus told His apostle St. John to take care of His mother.*

**During these services we honor the Theotokos and ask her to pray for us.**

*How does our Church honor the Theotokos? (With prayers, singing, and special services)*

In the Bible we read how Jesus and His mother took care of each other. We are to look to Jesus to learn how to love and honor our mothers. Our mothers are to look to Mary to learn how to love their children. Jesus and Mary are a perfect example of how we are to take care of each other. Also, Jesus wants us to love His mother, the Theotokos, as He did.

Our Church gives us many ways to love and honor Jesus' mother. During the Divine Liturgy we remember the Theotokos in prayers and song. Our Church also has special prayer services in honor of the Mother of God. One is the Akathist to the Mother of God, another is the Paraklisis, and another is the Moleben. During these services we honor the Theotokos and ask her to pray for us.



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**Group:** Poem about the Mother of God

**Materials:** Six sheets of white construction paper, markers, hole punch, and white yarn

*Earlier today we wrote a poem about our mothers. This time let's write a poem about Jesus' mother. Let's think of some words for each letter. [Possibilities: **M**ary, **O**ur mother, **T**heotokos, **H**eavenly mother, **E**verlasting love, **R**eady to hear our prayers.]*

*Now let's write each letter of the word Mother in big and dark print on each sheet of construction paper and write the other words in smaller letters on the paper. [If possible have dark red and blue markers or crayons for the letters: These are the colors in the icons of Mary.] You may draw flowers around the rest of the paper. [Punch a hole in the center of top each paper. String white yarn through the hole to make a banner to hang the poem to the Theotokos.]*

**Craft:** Flowers for Mothers

**Materials:** "Pattern for Flowers" worksheet, construction paper, pipe cleaners, ribbon

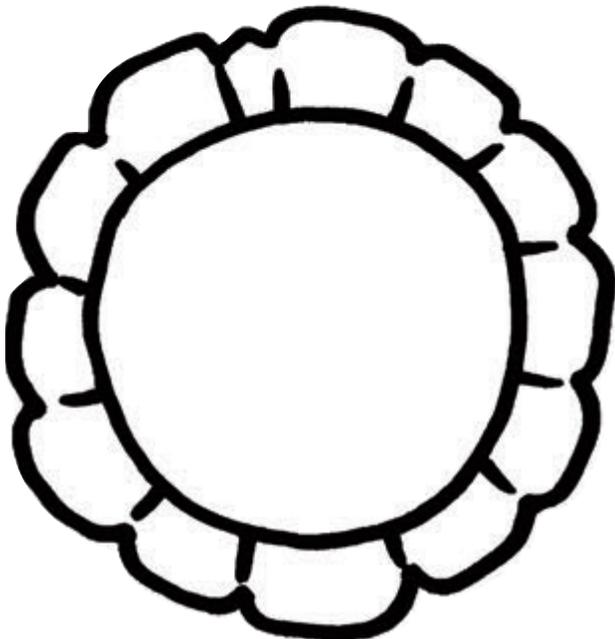
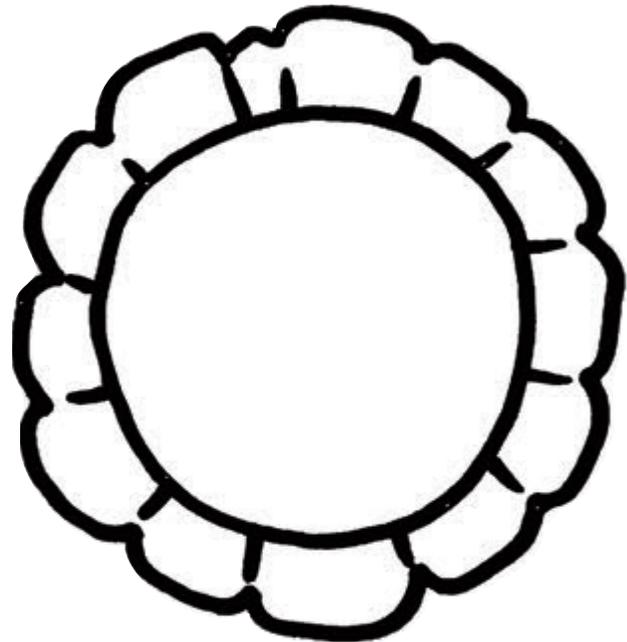
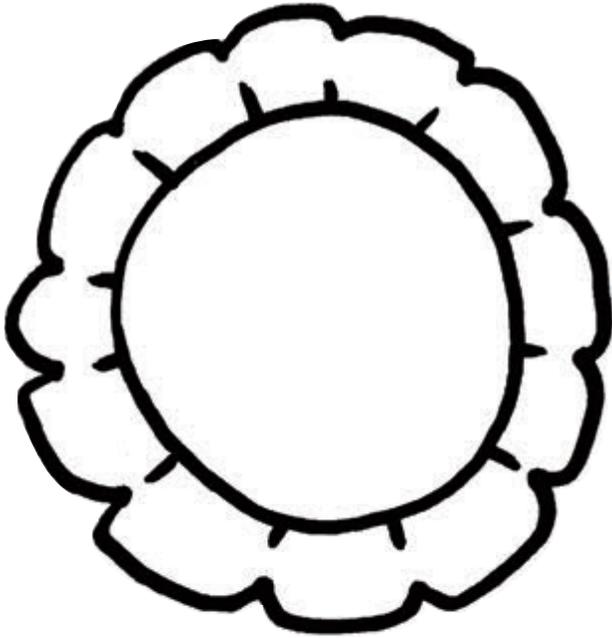
*Today we are going to make flowers for our mothers. [Follow the instructions on the flower worksheet.] Let's add some words to the petals on the flower. Let's use these petals to tell our mothers how much we love them. [Let the children take home their flower bouquets to give to their mothers for Mother's Day]*

**Closing**

*Let's pray to the Holy Spirit, "O Heavenly King."*



Write "I Love You" in the center of each flower. Color the flowers, cut them out, and paste them on construction paper. Draw stems and a ribbon or cut them from colored construction paper.



# Unit 5

## The Church in Glory

### Review

1. Who are the Saints?

(Lesson 22: Saints are those who have been filled with God's love and are with Him in glory.)

2. Who is the Theotokos?

(Lesson 23: The Theotokos is the Mother of God.)

3. What do we remember on the Feast of the Dormition?

(Lesson 23: We remember that the Mother of God was taken from earth to heaven at her falling asleep.)

4. What is a Christian?

(Lesson 5: A Christian is a follower of Jesus Christ who believes in Him and has been baptized.)

5. What is the Church?

(Lesson 5: The Church is the people of God who follow Jesus as their Lord.)