

The Nativity of Jesus Christ

Objective: The students will be able to identify three ways our Church proclaims our belief that God is with us at the celebration of the birth of Jesus: 1) through the icon of the Nativity of Jesus Christ, 2) through our songs, and 3) through our greeting, "Christ is born! Glorify Him!"

For the Catechist

In the Feast of the Nativity of Jesus Christ, our attention focuses on what God has done: God became man. In Jesus the union of God and humanity is fully accomplished. Through Jesus' birth, the Church is both human and divine, visible and invisible. Jesus' birth announces God is with us.

In Lesson 10 the children learned they have to prepare to celebrate the Nativity. They have been preparing since November 15, the beginning of the Nativity Fast or Philip's Fast. Through fasting, praying, and almsgiving, they have grown closer to God so that they are ready for the birth of His Son, Jesus Christ. You might want to review parts of Lesson 10 before you begin this lesson. Help the children realize their preparation leads them to a more joyous celebration as they share their happiness that God is with us.

Most of us celebrate the Nativity of Jesus Christ on December 25 according to the Gregorian Calendar, but some people celebrate the Nativity on January 7 according to the Julian Calendar. The Julian Calendar was adopted in Rome in 45 BC and was followed until Pope Gregory XIII replaced it with the Gregorian Calendar, which is the one followed for civil purposes. Some Eastern Churches continue to follow the Julian Calendar, which means fixed dates occur thirteen days after the date on the Gregorian Calendar. That is the reason the Nativity is celebrated on January 7. Some Eastern Churches use a mixed calendar. That means fixed feasts are computed on the Gregorian Calendar and Pascha is dated according to the Julian Calendar.

Lesson Plan Overview

Opening: The Creed

Introduction: A present for the class

Need: Icon of the Nativity wrapped in a box

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

Activity Tracks:

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

- *Basic:* The Nativity of Jesus

- *Group:* Sing Along

- *Craft:* Nativity Banner

Closing: The Creed

Icon Packets:

Come Bless the Lord:
Nativity of Christ

Teaching Pics:

Nativity of Christ (F3)

Background Reading

(Direct quotations from the sources noted)

Icon The icon of the Nativity is one of the most complex. Several events are pictured, as well as scenes that have theological meaning rather than historical relevance.

"The black mouth of the cave, then symbolically, is precisely this fallen world in which the 'Sun of Righteousness' has dawned, this wilderness which the 'Light of Wisdom' has illumined. The Virgin Mother is shown half-sitting, supported by a hammock-type bed used by the early Jews in their travels. Striking is the absence of the usual sufferings of childbirth which is iconographically seen to be an indication of the virgin-birth of Christ. As in the Gospel, all mankind is called to this event. The Wise Men represent the learned and astute, and the shepherds represent the humble of this world. A multitude of Angels give glory to God and announce this good news to mankind. In the icon, several episodes are grouped together and shone simultaneously. In the bottom left corner, Joseph sits in painful thought, while the Devil, under the guise of an old and bent shepherd, suggest new doubts and suspicions to him. In the opposite corner, two women are seen bathing the new-born Infant, to show the real humanity of Jesus" (CBL).

The Date of the Nativity

"While many in the early Church sought to determine the date of our Lord's birth or His baptism in the Jordan, our observances of these feasts are connected more with annual calendar events than with historical dates. Their dates fall around the winter solstice, when the days begin to lengthen. All the pagan religions kept a feast around this time as a rebirth of hope in the return of the sun and warmth.

Christians could not take part in the pagan festivities of false worship. Instead, they celebrated the beginning of the life of the true Son of God, the Light of Life. Thus the feast of Theophany was most likely introduced in Alexandria, Egypt to counteract a gnostic feast on the same day. Gnosticism (an early heresy) denied the humanity of Jesus and taught that the Son of God only entered Jesus at His baptism. Instead, Orthodox Christians celebrated the glorification of the Lord at His baptism as a manifestation of the Trinity.

"While the Eastern Churches emphasized the manifestation of the Lord at the Jordan, The Western Church was to develop the feast of Christ's birth by the Virgin Mary. The Feast of Christmas originated in Rome. Since the pagan feast celebrated the lengthening of the day as a 're-birth' of the sun, the Christians chose to commemorate the beginning of Christ's life on that occasion. They celebrated the coming of the true light into the world and the birth of the Son of God. The feast existed as early as the third century.

"In time most Eastern Churches would add the feast of Christmas on December 25, but retained the feast of Theophany as the celebration of the Lord's baptism in expression of the profound theology connected with it. The West was later to accept the feast of Theophany but changed it to commemorate the 'manifestation' (*epiphany*) of Jesus to the Gentile nations through the Persian wise men" (LLII 43-44).

Jesus Christ: The Union of God and Man

"As Christians we believe that the fullness of the revelation of God is in our Lord Jesus Christ, whom we confess as 'begotten of the Father before all ages, light of light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one essence with the Father, through whom all things were made.' Thus Jesus Himself is the only adequate image of God. Whoever has seen Him has seen the Father (cf Jn 14:9), for 'He is the image of the invisible God' (Col 1: 15)" (LLI 15-16).

The Lesson Plan

Opening

For our opening prayer, we'll use the greeting for the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord. We say "Christ is born!" and reply "Glorify Him!" [Use the traditional greeting for your jurisdiction.] When do we say this greeting? (In church) We should also say this greeting in our homes. This week when you walk into your house, say "Christ is born!" to your parents. We are happy Jesus is with us. This morning we will also pray the Creed. We have been learning this prayer during the Nativity Fast. One part of this prayer tells the Nativity story. Let's begin.

Introduction

Did anyone notice what I have on my desk? [Have a wrapped present there. Inside the colorful paper have an icon of the Nativity.] Are presents part of this season? Who gets them? Who gives them? (We give them to each other; Santa Claus brings them; Saint Nicholas brings them.) Some of us have been very busy getting all of our presents ready. But remember, we learned in lesson 10 that we have to get ourselves ready for the Nativity of Jesus. What three things did we have to do to get ready? (Pray, fast, and give alms) We had to prepare for the Nativity of Jesus Christ. We can say we give a special gift to Jesus. We give ourselves and our prayers and everything good we have done. We offer Jesus everything we are. Now we are going to open the present we have here. [Have the children help.] What is this? (The icon of the Nativity) This icon is very special. It shows us many important events that happened with the birth of Jesus. Let's put it in a special place. [Put the Nativity icon in your icon corner.] We should have this icon in a special place in our house; if we have an icon corner, that is the best place in our home for this icon.

We just opened our beautiful present, and it is on display. Do you have any of your presents on display at home? [If there is time, share some stories.]

Why do we show our presents? (To show what we got) Our most important present is the gift of Jesus Christ. One way we can show our gift of Jesus is by being happy and kind.

Let's turn to our books to learn other ways we can tell everyone we are happy with our gift of Jesus.

The Nativity of Jesus



"Christ is born! Glorify Him!"

During the next few weeks we should say to each other every time we meet, "Christ is born! Glorify Him!" We start saying this greeting during the Divine Liturgy on the Feast of the Nativity. We believe God is with us, and we want to announce this to everyone. That is the reason we should say "Christ is born! Glorify Him!" to everyone we see as we leave church. We should continue to say this greeting to all our relatives and friends as we celebrate this season of the Nativity of Jesus Christ.

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).

as we celebrate this season of the Nativity of Jesus Christ.

What greeting should we say to each other to let everyone know we are celebrating the birth of Jesus? (*Christ is born! Glorify Him!*) What does glorify mean? (*To give honor and to worship*) We need to remind people to glorify Jesus because through Jesus Christ God is with us.

... the story we hear in the Gospel.

[Have the children look at the icon in their book and ask them to find the scenes described.]

Another Bible passage describes the scene with the kings.

That passage is not in our books so I will read it to you:

"When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage.' . . . After their audience with the king they set out. And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was. They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gold, frankincense, and myrrh " (Matthew 2:1-11).

Our Church gives us a beautiful icon for the Feast of the Nativity. This icon shows us the story we hear in the Gospel.



In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town. And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were struck with great fear. The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying:

"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

(Luke 2:1-14)

Our Church gives us songs, icons, and greetings to tell the world: "Christ is born! Glorify Him!"

What are we to tell everyone? (Jesus Christ is born! Glorify Him!) Even Jesus' name means "God saves His people." Right from His birth Jesus wanted everyone to know He would save us. What are some signs to tell the people Jesus was sent from God? (The star, the angels told the shepherds) That is why everyone is so happy. God sent His son to live with us and save us. We need to celebrate God is with us. Should we celebrate before the Nativity? (No) We need to wait until the day of the Nativity to start our celebrations. What are some ways you can show everyone you are celebrating the birth of Jesus? (Have the Nativity icon on display in our houses, sing our songs at family and church get-togethers, and greet each other with "Christ is born! Glorify Him!")

We also sing beautiful songs during this season. Some of us learn Christmas carols in school and at home. These songs tell the story of Jesus' birth. One of these songs is "Silent Night."

In church we sing many other beautiful songs that announce God is with us. One of them is called "God is with us!" Another one is "Heaven and Earth." The words for "Heaven and Earth" tell the story we just heard from the Gospel.

The Feast of the Nativity of Jesus celebrates God is with us.

Our Church gives us songs, icons, and greetings to tell the world: "Christ is born! Glorify Him!"

Words to Remember:
Nativity of Jesus: Birth of Jesus Christ. We start the celebration on December 25.
Savior, Messiah and Lord: We call Jesus by these titles because He saved us from our sins.

106

Activity Tracks

Basic: The Nativity of Jesus Christ
 [This worksheet is in the student text.]

We read the story of the birth of Jesus. We have been hearing that story every year in our classes because it is so very important. Why is it important? (Because God sent His son; God is with us) Today we are going to search for words that tell us the story. Use the words from the word box. You might have to look on an angle for some of them. Also, there is one word that is not in the box. See if you can find it. [The word gold is in the scramble but not in the box.] Did anyone find the extra word? Does anyone know the names of the other gifts the Wise Men brought? (Frankincense and myrrh) [If there is time, have the students tell the story of the Nativity by using the words they found.]

The Nativity of Jesus

Circle the words that help you tell the story of Jesus' birth. Use the word box at the bottom of the page to help you.

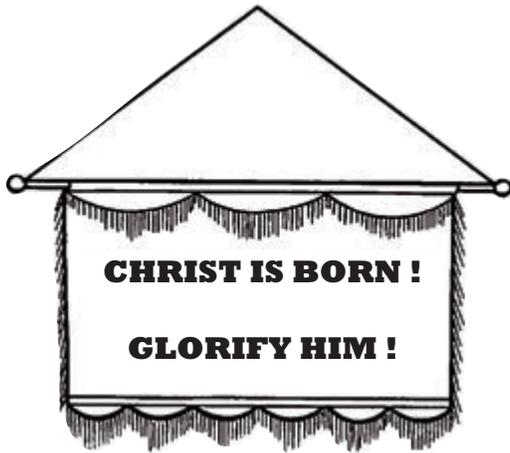
Word Box

Nativity	kings	shepherds	angels
Jesus	heaven	Bethlehem	God
manger	Mary	Joseph	baby

Group: Sing Along

Materials: Song sheets of Christmas hymns and carols for your jurisdiction

When people are happy, they sing. Christmas time is the perfect time for singing because everyone should be happy. Why? (Jesus Christ was born.) Do any of you get together with family or friends and sing Christmas carols. Today we are going to do that. [Sing a few carols that the children know.]



Craft: Nativity Banner

Materials: "Nativity Banner" worksheet (duplicated on heavier paper or glued onto construction paper), markers, and red yarn (14 inches per student), hole punch

[Have sample ready to show children.] *Do you give presents to your family members? Today we are going to make an ornament that you can give your family to announce Christ is born! Let's color the worksheet and cut out the banner. We'll punch one hole at the top of each side and put the yarn through. Tie a knot at the end of each side of the yarn so it holds. This banner could be placed on your Christmas tree or it can be placed on a door knob.*

Closing:

For our closing prayer, we'll use the greeting for the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord or Christmas. We say "Christ is born!" and reply "Glorify Him!" We will also pray the Creed.

