

What helps us "see" the Church in our church building?

Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the students should be able to

- identify the dome and the cross as features of the exterior of Byzantine church buildings.
- define the following words: narthex, nave, Holy Place, icon screen, Platytera, and Pantocrator.
- explain how the interior sections of the church building help us grow closer to God and reflect our role as God's people.

For the Catechist

The Church has seen itself as the "communion of Saints," the community of God's holy people of all times and places. We are united in Christ with all those in other Christian assemblies throughout the world and with those who have gone before us into eternal life. Our unity comes from the fact that we are all one in the same Christ. Our church buildings help us realize this relationship. The traditional structure of the Byzantine Church building attempts to show the worshipers exactly where they stand in relation to God, to Christ and to the saints. This lesson teaches the children that our Byzantine Church buildings are the visualization of God's people as the Church.

In particular, the icon screen reveals the Church's understanding and appreciation of God's plan for us and of the dynamics of the Divine Liturgy. Man does not have automatic access to God. Rather, God has made Himself accessible to us through the coming of Christ. The icon screen depicts the events of His coming. It joins the Holy Place, the realm of the Holy Spirit, with the nave, the realm of man. That means the icon screen, rather than being a wall of separation, is actually a visualization of our way to the throne of God. Our way is through Jesus Christ, whose coming is depicted by the icons on the icon screen.

Materials Needed

Opening and Closing Prayers: Prayer page

Review: Paper, pens, or pencils

Introduction: "Where Are We?" worksheet

The Message: Note cards, pencils or pens

Application: Pens or pencils, completed note cards from the lesson

Icons and Pictures

Icon Screen, Christ Pantocrator, the Icon of the Sign (*Icon Packet 1*)

For Next Week's Lesson

1. Develop the pictures taken at the beginning of class. (If possible, arrange to start class in the nave of the church.)
2. Invite your deacon or cantor to the class for the interview.

Connections

1. Opening Prayer (2 minutes)

Materials: Prayer Page

Invite the class to stand by the icon and remain silent for a few seconds before making the sign of the cross.

- Pray "Come, let us sing ..." (Third Antiphon)

2. Review (*The Church*) (5 minutes)

[If students have pictures for the Action page from Lesson 6, let them share them first.]

Then, write on the board: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). Have the students identify some places the Apostles went. (Refer to "Let us remember that..." from the last lesson.) Ask: *Where are some places we can go to ask people to become members of the Church?* (The mall, school, sports events)

Alternate: Have the students work together in groups. Give each student a note card with the name of an Apostle. On a map have them find where the Apostles preached. Let each group present their findings.

3. Introduction (5 minutes)

Materials: Worksheet with pictures of a desk, a dining room table, and an exercise machine.

Show the pictures and ask of what is this picture?

Ask: *How do you know? What specific things show what it is?*

Look at the picture on the first page in this lesson.

Ask: *What do you see in the picture in your book that shows we are looking at a church?*

Connect the idea that parts of a building or place help us recognize the location to the fact that parts of our church building remind us that we are the Church.

Notes for the lesson:

(Use this space to write helpful hints to use each year)

Supplementary Activity:

[If arrangements were made to enter the church, go to the church now.]

Materials: An Instamatic camera or any other camera from which you could get the pictures developed by next week.

Ask the children to sit in the last pew. Tell them to find a part of the church they would want to photograph. Give them the camera and have them take the picture. [The pictures could be of individual icons or of an entire section of the church.] Before returning to the classroom, have the students venerate the icon on the icon table.

The Message

4. Our Church Building (2 minutes)

- a) Read the first paragraph aloud.
- b) Divide the class into two groups. Have one group read the next two paragraphs about the domes and the other group reads the fourth and fifth paragraphs about the cross. Have one person from each group match with a person from the other group. Tell them to teach the other what they learned.
- c) Ask: *Did you ever invite anyone to visit our church? Pretend you are walking to the church, how would you explain the outside of our church to your visitor?*

Supplementary Activity:

(Activity 1 on the back of the unit page)
Write the question for this lesson on the board or on a poster board: *What helps us "see" the Church in our church building?*
Write the following answers when you read them in the text.

1. In the narthex we come together and prepare.
2. In the nave we join with each other and the saints on the icons—we become one.
3. In the Holy Place we see the throne of Jesus on the Holy Table through the Gospel Book, the cross, and the Eucharist.
4. The icon screen shows us that through Jesus Christ we become one with God.
5. The Pantocrator shows us that Christ will come again.
6. In the Platytera, the Theotokos shows us how to say "Yes" to God.

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The Church Building Helps Us "See" the Church

What helps us "see" the Church in our church building?



Our Church Building
The way our church is built and everything inside of our church building show in a symbolic way the relationship between God and the Church, His people. Wherever we look in our Byzantine church building, we are reminded of the relationship we have with God.

Usually we first see one or more domes shining brightly on our Byzantine churches. Some domes look like a bowl upside down. They remind us of the "bowl" of the sky and represent the universe created by God. Some domes are called "onion domes" because they look like—onions!

Some churches have one dome to represent Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church. Some

have three domes to stand for the Holy Trinity. Others have five domes pointing to Christ and the four Evangelists.

On top of every dome is a cross. On some crosses there are two bars the same size. They are called "Greek crosses." Some crosses have three bars. The top bar bears the sign "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews," announcing that Christ is the King of Glory. On some crosses the third bar is slanted.

Different reasons are given for the slanted third bar. One is that the slant up on the right symbolizes the repentant thief who asked for Jesus' forgiveness and the slant down on the left symbolizes the thief who was angry with Jesus for not helping him.

Walter G. Pope, Grade 5 Unit 2: The Church 35

Background Reading:

(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).

5. Narthex (3 minutes)

a) Have the students read the paragraphs about the narthex silently.

b) Give each one a note card. Tell them to write the word *narthex* on one side and the definition on the other. Tell them to list the facts that they learned about the narthex.

6. Nave (3 minutes)

a) Have the students read the next paragraphs about the nave silently.

b) Give each one a note card. Tell them to write the word *nave* on one side and the definition on the other. Tell them to list the facts that they learned about the nave.

c) Ask: *What do the words nave and navy have in common?* (They are both about ships.) *This part of the church building is called a nave because we are on a journey to the Kingdom of God.*

Background Reading:

(The Nave and the Narthex)

"Today, although the structure has changed somewhat from the time of Constantine, the essential elements of the Byzantine church structure have remained the same. The nave is still the center of the church; it represents creation as it was originally intended to be, that is, in communion with God. Therefore, it is the place of the faithful, those who have shared in salvation through Baptism, and who are still seeking that salvation. The narthex, or vestibule, remains outside the church proper. It represents the world which has not yet found its salvation. For instance, this is why today the celebration of Baptism begins in the narthex, outside the area of the faithful, with the rite of the Catechumenate. The candidate has not yet been baptized, he is not yet a part of the community of faithful. Therefore, until the time for Baptism itself, this candidate's place is not with the faithful" (*LW* 43-44).

Narthex
The inside of the church building helps us experience our relationship to God. The different sections help us realize that we are one with God and each other.

When we first enter the church, we are in the narthex or vestibule. This section allows us to prepare to enter the center section of the church, the nave. In some churches we can prepare by venerating the icons that are in the narthex. Also, we can buy candles to light before the icons. In some churches, icons of Old Testament scenes are placed in the narthex to remind us that the Old Testament was a preparation for the New Testament.



Nave
From the narthex, we enter the nave, the place where we worship God. The people in the nave are surrounded by icons of the Saints. These icons on the walls, on columns, and on icon tables show us that we are one Church with all believers throughout all ages.

Some churches have special shrines where people light candles to pray for the dead. We never forget our loved ones who have died; they are still part of Christ's Church.

When we enter the nave, we make the sign of the cross and bow to honor the presence of God. Another way we can honor God's presence is by making the sign of the cross and kissing the icons that are on the icon tables in the front and throughout the nave. Once we enter the nave of the church, we are quiet and prayerful—we are honoring God and showing our respect for the other people in church.

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7. The Holy Place

(3 minutes)

a) Have the students read the paragraphs about the Holy Place silently.

b) Give each one a note card. Tell them to write the word Holy Place on one side and the definition on the other. Tell them to list the facts that they learned about the Holy Place.

8. The Platytera (Orante)

(3 minutes)

a) Have the students read the paragraphs about the Platytera (Orante) silently.

b) Give each one a note card. Tell them to write the word *platytera (orante)* on one side and the definition on the other.

c) Ask: *Do we have this icon in our church? Let's place our arms the way we see the Theotokos' arms and hands. We are now praying in a classical position with our upraised arms. In this way we are praying to God and telling Him that we accept everything that He asks of us and we offer ourselves to God.*

[This icon is in icon packet 1, *Come Bless the Lord.*]

Holy Place
At the front of the church is the Holy Place where we see the Holy Table. On the Holy Table are enthroned the signs of Christ's presence to us: the Eucharist, the Gospel Book and the cross. The Holy Eucharist is the sacramental presence of Christ, and the Gospel Book is His scriptural presence. The Cross is a sign that Jesus Christ's death and resurrection gained eternal life for us.

Divine Life comes to us from God's heavenly throne through Jesus Christ. Through Jesus we, too, go to the Father and share His glory. In our Byzantine churches, the Holy Table is covered with rich fabrics to represent the Lord "robed with majesty" (Psalm 93).

The church may have *ripidia*, fans with icons of angels, placed behind the altar to show that the One it represents is the Lord of the Cherubim. Similar to images used since the time of Moses (Exodus 25), they remind us that the Holy Table is truly the throne of God.

Platytera (Orante)
This icon of the Theotokos (Mother of God) is usually placed above the Holy Place, overlooking the Holy Table and the people in church. By having the icon there, we are shown that the Theotokos is the one through whom the Son of God came to us. She also serves as a model for our prayerful relationship with Jesus. The Theotokos is praying with upraised arms, the way the early Christians held their hands as they

prayed. In this icon she is called *Platytera*, a word meaning "more spacious than the heavens" because she had in her womb the Son of God, whom even the heavens cannot contain. These words are part of a hymn to the Theotokos. Another name for this icon is the "Orante" (a word meaning "prayer") because the Mother of God is shown with her hands raised in prayer.



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Background Reading:

(The Holy Place)

"The sanctuary and the nave have been given different meanings. The altar area represents the throne of God, become truly present as 'our Father in heaven' who has 'lowered the heavens' to dwell among us in His only Son. The nave, place of the worshipping community, signifies the pilgrim Church on its journey toward the kingdom of God. The goal of this pilgrim Church is to achieve unity with God beginning in this life and culminating in the future world. ('Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.')" (LLII 14).

9. The Icon Screen

(3 minutes)

a) Have the students read the paragraphs about the icon screen silently.

b) Give each one a note card. Tell them to write the word *icon screen* on one side and the definition on the other. Tell them to list the facts that they learned about the icon screen.

10. The Pantocrator

(3 minutes)

a) Have the students read the paragraphs about the *Pantocrator* silently.

b) Give each one a note card. Tell them to write the word *Pantocrator* on one side and the definition on the other.

c) Ask: *Where is the Pantocrator in our church?*
[This icon is in icon packet 1, *Come Bless the Lord.*]

11. Our Church

(2 minutes)

Have the students read together the final paragraph on this page. Reread the paragraph again slowly, and ask the students to picture how our church building helps us think about being God's people.

Background Reading:

(Icon Screen)

"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 Icon Screen

The icon screen or iconostasis joins the nave and the Holy Place; it is the gateway to the Holy Place. The divine plan for our salvation is represented on the icon screen. By looking at the main icons, we see that Christ is our way to the Father and that the Theotokos gives Christ to us. We are reminded that it is the coming of Christ that brought God and us together.

On the icon screen are icons of Christ and scenes from His life. We also see icons of the people connected with Him: His Mother, the Apostles, the prophets who awaited His coming, and the saints who lived in Him. When we look at all the icons, we are reminded that through Christ with the help of the Holy Spirit we go to the Father and

the Father's love comes to us. The icon screen shows the unity of God and man, and it invites us to come into God's presence.

Pantocrator

Overlooking the whole Church, usually in the dome, is a large icon of Christ called the Pantocrator or All-Powerful One, which is surrounded by angels and saints. When we look at this icon, we see that Christ is the Head of our Church, the One who is with us at our worship and through whom we live. This icon shows us that Jesus will come again in glory at the end of time, and we will be with Him forever in the life of the world to come.



Our Church is God's people, and our Byzantine church building helps us remember that this is true. We are people of every place and age (nave), who stand in worship before God (in the Holy Place), and unite ourselves to Him through Christ (icon screen), whose coming in glory we are awaiting (Pantocrator).

Application

12. Today's Witnesses to Christ

(10 minutes)

Because each church is unique, use your own judgment as to who should be interviewed as a representative of the Church family. You might want to consider more than one parishioner. Then you would need a larger room to be able to organize into groups without interfering with each other.

The catechist should contact the person in advance and give him or her the list of questions that will be asked. Also, inform them of the time they should be there. [A 10-minute interview session at the end of class would work well with the lesson plan, but you need to adjust the time accordingly.]

All the students should be prepared to take notes on the day of the interview, but have one student (a different one each time) ask the questions. Arrange to have everyone ask a question by the end of this unit. At the end of the interview, suggest that one person thanks the guest and leads everyone in the singing of "God grant you many years" Also, use one of the following ways to thank your guest:

1. Have one student write a thank-you note and everyone signs it.
2. Buy a thank-you note and have the students sign it.

If the interview is at the beginning of class, have the students complete the "What do you think?" section immediately.

If the interview is at the end, ask the students to complete this section at home. Encourage them to share their answers with their parents.

Optional Activity 1

Ask the children to interview their fathers and mothers and complete a page with their answers.

Optional Activity 2

Take a picture of the person and place it onto the copy of the question and answer sheet (found at the end of this lesson). Have the students share the way they wrote their answers and decide on the best ones to use. Have someone with good printing skills print the answers. Place this page into a three-ring binder or a folder with clasps.

Ask the students for suggestions for the title for the booklet. At the end of the year, add this booklet to your library in the room—or even the church library.

Today's Witnesses to Christ

Our Parishioners
All the members of our Church family can be seen as witnesses to Christ because they have chosen to follow Jesus Christ. They arrange their schedules and make choices that help them follow God's way in everything they do. Today we are going to learn more about one (or more) of our parishioners.

Write his or her name on the first line and ask the questions on this page.

When and where were you baptized?

When did you become a member of this church?

Do you have any stories that you would like to share with us as to why you are a member of our church?

What are some of the church activities with which you are involved?

(Use this space to write any other questions you want to ask or to take notes.)

Do you have any advice for us to follow?

What do you think?
(Answer these questions after the interview.)

1. What was a surprising fact that you learned about this church member?

2. List 2 ways that you can use what was said to help you learn how to become involved in our church activities.

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13. Action Plan

(6 minutes)

Use this page to focus the students' attention on the details of their own church. If possible, have the students spend about five minutes at the end of class writing some of the details. (Let them use their note cards to check their lists to think about what is in their church.)

Remind them to notice the ways our church helps us grow closer to God.

14. Summary

(8 minutes)

Use the note cards that were made for each section of the chapter reading. Have the students work together in pairs. The first time they ask each other for the definition, and the second time they state how that part of the church helps them "see" the Church.

Supplementary Activity

Have the students work in groups as they complete a poster for each section of the church building. Include the name for the section and a list of the ways we "see" the Church in that section. Arrange for the students to visit the church so that they can write specific details about your church.

12. Closing Prayer

(2 Minutes)

Hymn from the Divine Liturgy:

“Come let us worship. ...”

For Next Week's Lesson:

1. **Develop the pictures taken at the beginning of class.** (If possible, arrange to start class in the nave of the church.)
2. **Invite your deacon or cantor to the class for the interview.** (Instructions on back of the unit page)

Action Plan

Our Church Building

Use this page for the next two weeks. Choose one section of the church that you will focus on each week and write everything that you see in that section. For example, if you choose the narthex, go to church early and write the names of the icons that you see there. In fact, try to sketch what you see. Be prepared to share your findings as part of lesson 9.

Holy Place

(The details on this page will vary with each church. Make a list of the details from each section of your church.)

Nave

Narthex

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Where Are We?

Hold up these pictures and ask the students if they know where they were taken. After they offer suggestions such as an office or someone's living room, ask them to identify the details that helped them guess. [Catechists: You could bring in any pictures from magazines that help the students realize that we recognize things by certain details.]



Third Antiphon

(from the Divine Liturgy)

Come, let us sing joyfully to the Lord; let us shout with joy to God our Savior.

People: O Son of God, who are risen from the dead, save us who sing to You: Alleluia!

The Melkite Greek Catholic Church

Come Let Us Worship

Come, let us worship and bow down before Christ. O Son of God, who are risen from the dead, save us who sing to You. Alleluia.

The Melkite Greek Catholic Church

Third Antiphon

(from the Divine Liturgy)

Come, let us sing joyfully to the Lord; let us shout with joy to God our Savior.

People: O Son of God, Thou who didst arise from the dead, save us who sing to Thee: Alleluia!

The Romanian Greek Catholic Diocese
of Canton

Come Let Us Worship

Come, let us worship and bow down before Christ. O Son of God, Thou who didst arise from the dead, save us who sing to Thee. Alleluia.

The Romanian Greek Catholic Diocese
of Canton

Third Antiphon

(from the Divine Liturgy)

Come, let us sing joyfully to the Lord; let us acclaim God our Savior.

People: O Son of God, risen from the dead, save us who sing to You: Alleluia.

The Ruthenian Byzantine Catholic
Metropolitan Province

Come Let Us Worship

Come, let us worship and bow down before Christ.
O Son of God, risen from the dead, save us who sing to You. Alleluia

The Ruthenian Byzantine Catholic
Metropolitan Province

Third Antiphon

(from the Divine Liturgy)

Come, let us rejoice in the Lord; let us shout with joy to God our Savior.

People: O Son of God, risen from the dead, save us who sing to You: Alleluia!

The Ukrainian Catholic Diocese of
Saint Josaphat

Come Let Us Worship

Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ.
O Son of God, risen from the dead, save us who sing to You. Alleluia

The Ukrainian Catholic Diocese of
Saint Josaphat

Third Antiphon

(from the Divine Liturgy)

Come, let us sing joyfully to the Lord; let us acclaim God our Savior.

People: Son of God, risen from the dead, save us who sing to You: Alleluia!

The Ukrainian Catholic Synod

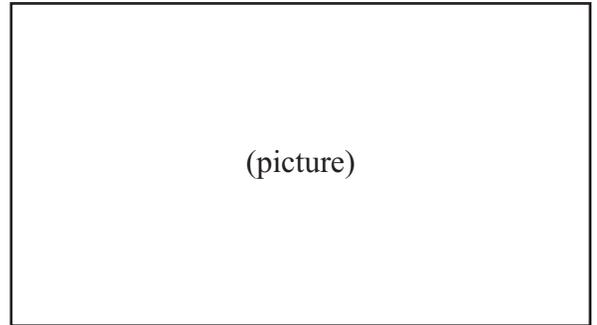
Come Let Us Worship

Come, let us worship and bow down before Christ.

O Son of God, risen from the dead, save us who sing to You. Alleluia.

The Ukrainian Catholic Synod

Name:



1. When and where were you baptized?

2. When did you become a member of this church?

3. Do you have any stories you would like to share with us as to why you are a member of our church?

4. What are some of the church activities with which you are involved?

5. Do you have any advice for us to follow?