

How does the Theotokos respond to the message God sent her?

Objectives

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

- state that when Mary says "Yes" to the angel Gabriel, she shows us how to trust God.
- explain that Mary's example teaches us how to praise God and witness to His goodness.
- identify some ways our Church honors the Theotokos.

For the Catechist

In the New Testament, the first announcement of the Good News of Christ was the tidings brought to Mary by God's messenger, Gabriel. The Liturgy calls this event the "fountainhead of our salvation" (Troparion of the Annunciation), for with Mary's "Yes" (Luke 1:38), the Lord enters her to become man and bring to fulfillment the process of our redemption. The Church sees the Annunciation as the first announcement of that fulfillment.

Mary's reaction has two aspects: her acceptance of the news in faith (Luke 1:38) and her praise of God (Luke 1:46-55). We read in the Gospel of Luke that Mary hastened to the home of Elizabeth, then pregnant with John the Baptist, and praised God "who has done great things" for her. These words of praise are known as Mary's canticle, often called the Magnificat, that is sung at Matins every day. We are expected to follow Mary's example in our response to God working among us: we must accept in faith and praise God by sharing the Good News. Through our daily actions, we can witness to our belief that God is with us.

The Church has always shown special devotion to the Theotokos and celebrates through prayers and hymns her role in our salvation. In the Eastern Church, a popular devotion to the Theotokos is the Akathist Hymn. This hymn dates from the sixth century and is a poetic retelling of Mary's role in the Incarnation. The Akathist is sung in Byzantine Churches on the fifth Saturday in the Great Fast (or the evening before), and in some churches it is sung throughout the Great Fast.

In the *God With Us series*, this is the first book that includes an "Observance" lesson about the Annunciation and the Visitation. Help the children relate to the sincere praise and happiness that Mary experiences, and help them realize that all Christians are to feel the same way.

Materials Needed

Opening and Closing Prayers: Student books

Introduction: "Good News Stories" worksheet from the end of this lesson

The Message: The New Testament, pens, markers, Church calendar

Application: Markers or pens, tape recorder or CD player and church songs, a timer, note cards on which you have written the following: *Feast of the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Akathist and Mary's canticle (the Magnificat)*

Icons and Pictures

Come Bless the Lord: The Annunciation

Teaching Pics: Feasts of the Theotokos—F1

Connections

1. Opening Prayer (2 minutes)

Have the students gather before the icon and stand (Use "this" space to write helpful hints silently for a few seconds. Then make the sign of the cross. Pray the Akathist (bold print lines) from the student book, page 137.

2. Review (4 minutes)

Lessons in this unit are not taught consecutively; therefore, review the last lesson taught.

3. Introduction (3 minutes)

Materials: "Good News Stories" worksheet from the end of this lesson, pens and pencils

Distribute the worksheets that describe some good news stories. Have the students work in groups as they answer the questions for each story. Let them share the answers.

Connect this idea to the concept that we like to share good news. Turn to the lesson in the student book.

Notes for the lesson:

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

The Message

4. Saying “Yes”

(8 minutes)

a) Read the first paragraph. Before the Scripture is read, ask the students to remain silent for a few seconds and picture what it would be like if an angel appeared to them.

b) For the scriptural reading, ask for three volunteers—one for the narration, one for the angel, and one for Mary. Read aloud and have the students complete the passage in their book.

c) Complete the reading on this page.

Supplementary Activity:

Play a game in which the students must trust someone else. Blindfold a student and have another student lead that person around the room. Make sure no one gets hurt. Do this more than once before you discuss what it feels like to have to trust someone. Connect this activity to the way Mary had to trust God even though she had no idea what would happen next.

Supplementary Activity:

Write the question for this lesson on the board or on a poster board: *How does the Theotokos respond to the message God sent her?* Write the following answers when they are read in the text:

1. She trusts God and says "Yes."
2. She thanks God by praising Him.
3. She shares the Good News about Jesus

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The Annunciation and the Visitation

How does the Theotokos respond to the message God has sent her?

Mary Answered “Yes”
When we say “Yes” to anyone, we are saying the following:

- “I agree with you.”
- “You are right.”
- “I am willing to do what you ask.”

That is exactly what Mary meant when she said “Yes” to the angel Gabriel. In the **Gospel of Luke 1:26-38**, we can learn more about this story. On the following lines, complete Mary’s answer, “Behold, I am the handmaid

May it be done to me according to your word.

Then the angel departed from her” (verse 38).

The feast day that celebrates Mary’s “Yes” to the angel is called the Annunciation. It is celebrated on March 25.

Mary answered “Yes” because she trusted God. Every Christian is called to trust God as Mary did. When you trust someone, you do not have to know all their reasons and explanations. You believe in that person, and you believe that he or she would want only good for you.



We believe in God even though we do not understand everything that happens in life. We believe that God loves us, and we trust Him.

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Background Reading:

(Annunciation)

"Another ancient feast combining the incarnational and redemptive themes of Christmas and Pascha dates from possible the third century in the East. This is the feast of the *Annunciation of our Lord* (March 25). It commemorates the visit of the archangel Gabriel to Mary announcing, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you You shall conceive and bear a son and give him the name Jesus' (Lk 1:35-31). The mystery of the Lord's conception and His death bear a close connection. Both are manifestations of His love for us, His kenosis ('self-emptying') for our sake, by which His life and love can fill us. March 25 is important in marking the beginning of spring with new life in nature, in dating our Lord's conception in the flesh at nine months before the feast of His birth, and in being the traditional date of His crucifixion or resurrection with His 'humbling Himself even to death' (Phil 2:8) for our salvation" (LLII 44).

5. The Annunciation Icon

(4 minutes)

a) Look at the picture of the Holy Doors. Refer to the ones in your church if they have the Annunciation icon.

b) Read the paragraph. Ask: *Who do you see in the icon?* (Mary and the angel Gabriel)

6. The Akathist

(8 minutes)

a) After the reading of the explanation of the Akathist, ask the students to divide in two groups. Read the excerpt from the hymn by having one group read the words and the other the explanation.

b) Read the hymn again aloud. This time have everyone readjust the bold print.

Supplemental Activity

Enlarge the hymn and place it on poster board.

Write the descriptions from each line and place them under the line. Add pictures from magazines that show the images from the hymn.

Background Reading:

(The Akathist Hymn)

"Another popular type of devotional service in the Byzantine Churches is the *Akathist Hymn*. There are a number of akathists in the Byzantine tradition, celebrating various aspects of the mystery of salvation or devotion to particular saints or icons, but the best known is the Akathist to the Mother of God. It was composed in the year 626 as a thanksgiving for the deliverance of the Byzantine capital city of Constantinople from the attacks of the (then) barbarian Slavs and Avars. 'Akathistos' (in Greek, 'not sitting') refers to the custom of the faithful to stand throughout the entire chanting of this hymn. This akathist, a series of 24 kontakia and oikoi (stanzas) in praise of the Theotokos, is prescribed to be sung during Matins on the fifth Saturday of the Great Fast. In many churches it is also sung at Compline on most Lenten Fridays, but may be sung at any time of the year as a devotion to the Mother of God. The other akathist hymns follow the same basic structure" (LLII 53).



The Annunciation Icon
The Annunciation icon is placed on the Royal Doors of the icon screen. When we look at the icon, we recall that Mary's "Yes" opened the door for us to receive the life of Christ. That is what happens when the Holy (Royal) Doors are opened during the Divine Liturgy—we are able to receive Jesus Christ.

The Akathist
Our Church honors the Theotokos and praises her through prayers and hymns. One of the hymns, the Akathist, is from the sixth century. The Akathist hymn is a beautiful poem to the Theotokos. In many Eastern Churches it is sung during the Great Fast.

The Akathist is a collection of images about the Theotokos. Below each line of the prayer is an explanation of the images to help you think about the Theotokos. Let us begin with a few seconds of silence before we pray aloud:

Hail, O you who have become a kingly throne!
(Mary was the one on whom the infant Christ rested, on whose lap He sat.)

Hail, O Star which makes the Sun known!
(Mary reflected the light of her Son, who like the stars sheds light in the darkness.)

Hail, Heavenly Ladder, by which God came down!
(Mary was the means by which Christ came down among us.)

Hail, O Bridge, leading men to heaven!
(In Mary, God and humanity were joined.)

Hail, O Key to the Door of Paradise!
(Mary opened the door to the kingdom when she said "Yes" to God's plan for her.)

Hail, Fruitful Tree from whom believers feed!
(The fruit of Mary's womb was Jesus who grew in her.)

Hail, O Container of God's Wisdom!
(The Word of God was held in Mary's womb.)

Hail, O Treasure-chest of His Goodness!
(The One whom Mary contained was all richness.)

Hail, O Bride and Maiden Ever-pure!
(Mary's child was of the Holy Spirit, not of man.)

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7. The Visitation

(10 minutes)

a) Read the first two paragraphs.

b) For the Gospel reading, ask for two volunteers: one to read the narration and one for Elizabeth's part.

c) Read the next two paragraphs. Read Mary's Canticle (the Magnificat) aloud as a class

d) Complete the reading and have the students read the final prayer aloud together. Ask:

What are some things that you think God is asking you to do

- *at home?*
- *at school?*
- *with your family?*

Supplemental Activity

Make a prayer card for the final prayer. Use note cards or construction paper and have the students write the words. Let them make more than one prayer card to keep in their room, in school, and by the dinner table so that they remember to pray the words and to do as God asks throughout the day.

8. Let us remember that...

Materials: Church calendar, marker

a) Read the dates and the feast days. If you have a church calendar, have someone circle the dates on the calendar.

b) Divide into five groups. Each group learns more about one feast day by turning to the "Our Church Year" section. Each group tells the class more details about the feast.

Supplemental Activity

Write a note card that lists the date on one side and the feast day on the other side. Use these cards for review.

The Visitation

When something good happens to us, we like to share our news. That is exactly what Mary did. She went to her cousin Elizabeth's house to tell her about her visit from the angel Gabriel.

We can read about Mary's visit to Elizabeth in the Gospel of Luke 1:39-45. Imagine how excited they were.

Mary showed how thankful she was to God for the gift of His Son by praising Him. She believed the best way to praise God is by praying words of thanksgiving. We call her words of praise the Canticle of Mary, the Magnificat. Her prayer begins,

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my savior."

You can read the rest of the prayer in the Gospel of Luke 1:46-55.

The Theotokos shows us how we are to live as God's children. We are to trust God and say "Yes" to what He asks of us. And we are to thank God for our blessings by singing praises to Him always. One prayer we can say is

Here I am, Lord.
I am Your servant.
I want to do what
You want me to do.



Let us remember these feast days honoring the Theotokos . . .

September 8	Nativity of the Theotokos
November 21	Entrance of the Theotokos
March 25	The Annunciation
August 15	The Dormition of the Theotokos
October 1	The Protection of the Theotokos

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Background Reading

(Theotokos)

"First among the Church's devotional services are those honoring Mary, the Theotokos or one who has borne God. Christians have constantly shown great love and respect to this woman who is a model of salvation and intercession. The grace of God, which 'yearned to gather the children of Jerusalem as a mother bird gathers her young under her wings' (Mt 23:37), is especially manifest in her. We do not adore or worship her as God, but we do venerate her—show her reverence and honor—above all other saints. Our feelings of tenderness towards her are fitting for the Mother of our God. Through her unique role, she is a most powerful woman of prayer. Rooted in the love of Christ for His Mother, the Church unashamedly asks, 'Hasten, O Mother of God, to intercede for us, O you who have always protected those who honor you!' (Kontakion of the Mother of God)" (LLII 52).

9. Action Plan

(5 minutes)

Materials: Markers or pens, tape recorder and taped church songs or CD player and disks.

Play church music as the students complete the first two sections.

Tell the students to complete the last section at home.

10. Summary

(5 minutes)

Materials: Pens or pencils, a timer, and note cards on which you have written the following: *Feast of the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Akathist and Mary's canticle, the Magnificat*

Give one note card to each student. If the class is large, divide into groups and have a different note card for each student in the group. The first person writes about the term on the card for one minute. The cards are passed to another student, and that person adds to the write-up for one minute. Continue this process for three minutes. Make sure you stay with the one minute limit—that means some students will have to finish someone else's sentence. Read the words and information aloud for the class.

11. Closing Prayer

(3 minutes)

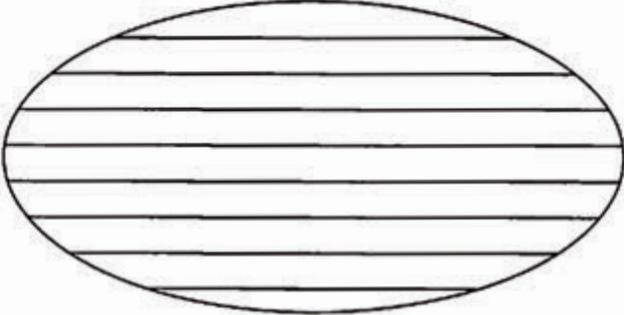
The Akathist, from the student book.

Action Plan

The Annunciation and the Visitation

I. All of us have received blessings from God, but sometimes we do not take the time to thank God for them. On the lines below write as many gifts as you can think of that you have received from God.

II. We learned that we thank God by praising Him. On the following lines, write a prayer that you will say every day for the next week to thank God for His blessings.



III. On the lines below, write the name of one family member. During the week take time to "visit" with this person by taking time to sit and talk. Ask your mom, dad, or another family member to tell you about the blessings he or she has received from God. List some of them next to the name.

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Good News Stories

Answer the following questions and think about the ways you share good news:

You just found out that you were selected to greet the bishop at your church.

Whom would you tell first? Why?

Would you be excited? Why?

Your parents were chosen as "Parents of the Year" by your local community.

How would you feel? Why?

With whom would you share your excitement?

You received the best grades ever on your report card.

Where would you go first with your report card? Why?

How would you expect everyone to react?