

# Lesson 26 - Sunday of the Ancestors of Christ

## *Objectives*

By the end of this lesson the student should be able to:

- Know that the "Winter Pascha" begins with the Christmas Fast and includes the commemoration of the spiritual ancestors of Christ as well as His blood relatives.
- Recognize that the spiritual ancestors of Christ are those who prepared the way for His coming by their lives of faith.
- Understand that Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael trusted in God, whether He would save them from the furnace or not.
- Know that Daniel's dream of the Son of Man points to Jesus, the Son of Man come into the world.

## *For the Catechist*

In our contemporary society, the preparation for Christmas consists in sometimes frenzied shopping and rounds of Christmas parties. In our Tradition, however, the time before this feast is meant to be a season of fasting and commemoration of the Old Testament figures who prepared the way for Christ. Today's lesson is built around these observances.

While the Sunday of the Ancestors commemorates all the spiritual forebears of Christ, the liturgy focuses on the acts of faith of Daniel and his three companions. Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael express a faith which is not a "commercial" exchange: "we worship You and You deliver us." It is a selfless faith: "whatever may

happen we will worship You." It remains a model for all believers seeking to mature in their life of faith. There is a further contrast in the way Christmas itself is observed. For many in our society, Christmas is a one-day event highlighted by exchange of gifts. In our Tradition the feast is observed for a week, with days devoted to the Theotokos, Joseph her spouse, David the King, and James, the brother of the Lord.

Parishes can help maintain our traditional observance of these days by holding Christmas parties during the week after December 25 instead of during the Fast. Christmas week is also a time when most schools are in recess; this provides the ideal time for a children's Christmas celebration, which may include a gift exchange or preferably a sharing of gifts with children at a local homeless shelter or similar facility.

## *Materials Needed:*

*Opening Prayer:* Icon corner, student texts

*Introduction:* Easel or wall pads, markers,

*Guided Reading:* Bibles

*Activity A:* "The Son of Man" Worksheet, pencils

*Activity B:* "Tough Choices" Worksheet, pencils.

*Activity C:* Jesse Tree Worksheet, Presentation Script

- 1. Opening Prayer** Begin with the closing prayer from the previous lesson, reminding the students of this prayer's connection with the theme of that lesson.
  
  - 2. Review** Review the main points of the previous lesson using the pages from your wall or easel pad. Lessons in this unit are not taught consecutively, so review the last lesson taught.
  
  - 3. Introduction**

Begin by asking the students when they first noticed Christmas displays in your local stores, decorations on homes, and commercials for toys and gifts on TV. Point out that some businesses begin "selling Christmas" right after Halloween or, at least, after Thanksgiving. For some businesses Christmas is first of all a time to make money.

Note that in the tradition of our Church, the time of preparation for Christmas is different. It is a time of special prayer and fasting, because we are getting ready to celebrate a most important event in Salvation History: the coming of the Savior into the world. At this time you may wish to review the current practices of your eparchy and parish for the Christmas Fast.

Discuss how some people discard their Christmas trees on December 26. For them, Christmas is over. In our Churches we celebrate for several days. You may mention some practices your students may recognize: the "Twelve Days of Christmas" (December 25-January 6) or the practice in some places of leaving Christmas trees up for forty days, until the Feast of the Encounter (February 2). Note that today we will study one aspect of our Christmas Fast: the remembrance of the Ancestors of Christ.
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***Background Reading (Nativity of Jesus and Theophany):***

"A second cycle of feasts in the Church year is called the Immovable Cycle because these observances are kept on the same date each year. Chief of these are the feasts of Christmas and the Theophany. Christmas (December 25) remembers the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Theophany (January 6) remembers the baptism of our Lord in the River Jordan by the holy prophet John. They are closely connected because they celebrate the 'appearance' of our Lord in the world. They are a development of our understanding of the identity of Jesus Christ. When He was recognized as Son of God by His resurrection (Rom 1:4), early Christians also began to appreciate this mystery of His incarnation in the Gospel events of His birth and baptism. His birth is described in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke with wise men from 'the East' recognizing Him as Messiah and King and with angels proclaiming Him as such to shepherds. At His baptism John recognized Him as the great Prophet who was to come; the Father from Heaven declared Him to be His Son; and the Spirit came upon Him revealing Him to be the Messiah" (LLII 41).

**4. Guided Reading,  
Pages 133 - 134**

Before the reading, **summarize the objectives of the lesson** on a wall pad or easel pad so that the page can be preserved and used for review next week.

Have the students read **the three paragraphs on pages 133-134** which describe how our greatest feasts are connected.

Ask:

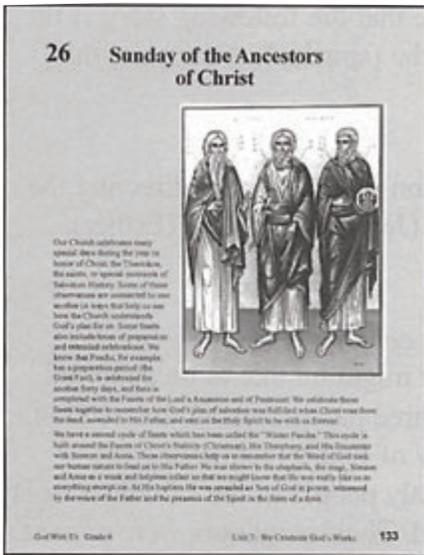
- How long is the Church's observance of the Great Fast? (*40 days*) Of Pascha? (*50 days, until Pentecost*)
- What are the elements of the "Winter Pascha"? (*the Christmas Fast, Christmas, the Theophany, and the Encounter*)
- Why do you think that only Christmas day is kept in our society? (*It is the day of gift giving.*)

Point out that during the Nativity Fast, we remember the ancestors of Christ. Have the students **read the section "The Ancestors of Christ"** on page 134. Then have the students **locate the two Sundays before Christmas** for the current year, using your Church's calendar.

Point out that these Sundays do not always have the same date, because December 25 falls on a different day of the week each year. If your parish has already obtained next year's calendar, have the students compare it with this year's to illustrate this point.

Ask:

- Which Old Testament figures we have studied this year are physical ancestors of Christ? (*Ruth, Jesse, David*)
- Which Old Testament figures we have studied this year are spiritual ancestors of Christ? (*Abraham, Moses, the Prophets*)



**Background Reading (Jesus' Descent from King David):**

"The Evangelists Matthew and Luke both provide family trees which demonstrate Jesus' descent from King David. Both likewise place his birth in Bethlehem, the birthplace of David and the object of the well-known prophecy of Micah: 'but you, Bethlehem-Ephrathah, too small to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler of Israel; whose origin is from of old, from ancient times' (Micah 5:1). Nazareth, Jesus' adopted hometown, in the region of Galilee also accommodates messianic interpretation" (OTB 109)

**Have the students read the first verses of Matthew 1.** Ask if they recall when we read this before. (*Lesson 9, Ruth*) Refer to that excerpt on page 45 of the text. Note that Matthew 1 is read every year on the Sunday before Christmas to remember the physical ancestors of Christ. Note that the following story is the focus of the previous Sunday of the (spiritual) Ancestors: the story of Daniel and His Friends.

Review the story of the deportation to Babylon by directing the students' attention to Lessons 10 (Jeremiah) and 11 (Esther).

Emphasize the following points:

- location of Babylon
- The time of the exile (*6<sup>th</sup> century BC*)
- What the students think it might be like to be deported

Have the students read the first three paragraphs in this section. Compare this story with the story of Esther, reminding the students that the Jews were the only people in the Middle East at the time who believed in one God. Their neighbors were pagans believing in many gods and goddesses. This is one reason why they were often persecuted in an age when people were expected to follow the king's religion.

Ask the students to explain why they pray:

- Do you pray because you received something (*thanksgiving*)?
- Do you pray to get something?
- What happens when you don't get what you asked for?  
Do you give up on praying?
- Do you ever praise God or just ask Him for things?

**Daniel and His Friends**  
**Pages 134-135**

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***Background Reading (The Mystery of God's Self-Emptying):***

"Both of these feasts [Christmas and Theophany] have been called other 'Paschas,' in that the same mystery is present in both: the self-emptying of the Son of God to become a man, to live among us and to accomplish our salvation. St. Paul grasped the essence of this event and wrote, 'Though he was in the form of God, he did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, he emptied himself and took the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men' (Phil 2:6-7)" (*LLII 41*).

Contrast what may be our behavior with that of Hananiah and the others. They were not asking for a car or a vacation, but for their lives. But, even if God did not save them, they were still going to be faithful to Him.

Compare to similar behavior we see in people: some are nice to those who are nice to them. Some people would only help their relatives, friends, teammates, etc.

Have the students **read Jesus' teaching on the subject in Matthew 5:43-48** and discuss how people of faith are meant to live differently from others. This is the way Daniel and his friends lived, and how we should too.

Have the students **reread Daniel 3:15-18** to be sure they understand the Jewish youths' actions. Then continue reading the remainder of the section.

Stress the miracle of Daniel 3:91-92 and emphasize that the Church sees this as pointing to how the incarnate Son of God would walk among us. Remind the students that Daniel was written many years before the birth of Christ.

Ask the students why we call Jesus the Son of God. (*He is the Son of God the Father.*) Note that He is also the Son of the Virgin Mary. Recall the Hymn of the Incarnation from the Divine Liturgy (*Only-begotten Son...*) which says that He became man "without change." Jesus is both Son of God and Son of Man.

Have the students **read the first paragraph** in this section. Ask:

- Who do you think "the Ancient One" in Daniel 7 might be? (*God*)
- Who might the son of man be? (*Jesus*)

Review the message of this section:

- Jesus is the Son of God who came to walk among us and be our Savior.
- Jesus is the Son of Man who will "come again in glory to judge the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end" (Nicene Creed).

## The Son of Man Page 136

**The Son of Man**

There is another episode in the Book of Daniel which the Church sees as pointing to Christ. Daniel had the following dream of the Kingdom of God: "At I watched, thrones were set up and the Ancient One took his throne. His clothing was snow white and the hair on his head as white as wool. His throne was flames of fire, with wheels of burning fire. A roaring stream of fire flowed out from where he sat. Thousands upon thousands were ministering to him, and myriad upon myriad attended him. The court was covered, and the books were opened. . . . As the thrones during the night continued, I saw One like a son of man coming, on the clouds of heaven. When he reached the Ancient One and was presented before him, He received

dominion, glory, and kingdom; nations and peoples of every language serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away. His kingdom shall not be destroyed" (Daniel 7:9-14).

Daniel believed that, even though the Jews were captives in Babylon, the Kingdom of God would ultimately triumph and the Son of Man would be its King.

In the Gospels Jesus often calls Himself "the Son of Man." He is the One who has come to walk among us and who will come again at the end of our age. As we prepare to celebrate Christ's coming at Christmas, we honor Daniel and his companions whose experiences pointed to Christ's coming in the flesh and His second coming in glory.



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**5. Activity A (The Son of Man)**

Have the students complete Worksheet A and share their results individually or in groups.

**6. Activity B (Tough Choices)**

Discuss with the students how brave Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael were in choosing to remain faithful to God at the risk of their lives. Remind the students that countless martyrs through the centuries made similar choices and gave their lives for Christ rather than deny Him. Stress that, while we may have to make tough choices, they are rarely as difficult.

Have the students read as a group the Scripture passages on Worksheet B and discuss the questions. Then let each write his or her own response to the questions and then share them, either with one other person or the whole group.

**7. Activity C (The Jesse Tree)**

Have the students complete the ornaments on the Jesse Tree Worksheet (Daniel and his friends).

Using the script at the end of this lesson, prepare your presentation of the Jesse Tree for parish members, other church school classes, or as an in-class activity.

**8. Time Line**

Refer to the time line poster. Have the students brainstorm the names of people mentioned in this lesson (Daniel and his friends) and indicate the period in which each lived. Write in the names and dates under each appropriate heading.

**9. Summary**

End the lesson by summarizing the lesson from the aims on page 365, from the elements in the student text on which you focused and/or from any other points raised in the lesson.

**10. Closing Prayer**

Conclude with the selections from the Song of the Three Young Men on page 137 of the students' text.

## The Son of Man

*The Lord Jesus often referred to Himself as "the son of man." Look up the following passages and tell their meaning in your own words. You may have to read a few verses that come before these passages to understand its meaning.*

**Matthew 9:6** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Matthew 17:12** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Matthew 20:28** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Matthew 24:27** \_\_\_\_\_

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*Choose the one passage which most impresses you and write the reason you chose it.*

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## Tough Choices

*Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael faced a choice we have never had to make: whether to be faithful to God or face certain death. There are choices we may face that can be made in godly or ungodly ways. Read the following Scripture passages and discuss the related questions.*

### A - Proverbs 22:24-25

- What happens when we make friends with hot-tempered people? \_\_\_\_\_

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- What other kinds of people should we not befriend? \_\_\_\_\_

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- Does this mean we should never talk to them? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

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### B - 1 Corinthians 5:9-11

- Should we choose as friends people who pretend to be Christians but don't really act like it?

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- Why should we avoid such people? \_\_\_\_\_

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### C - 3 John 5-8

- What kinds of people should you choose to be your friends? \_\_\_\_\_

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## The Jesse Tree

Add a branch marked Daniel and his friends (sixth century BC).



## The Jesse Tree

*Narrator 1:* In the beginning God created us to live in relationship with Him. We have learned through the stories of our first ancestors that they were not mature enough to receive this gift of life. Still through the ages some people have seen God's works and followed His commandments. We all the story of God's growing relationship with these people "Salvation History."

*Narrator 2:* The Jesse Tree shows us in pictures what the Bible tells us in words: the story of our salvation. The tree is named after Jesse, the father of King David, an ancestor of Christ. Each ornament shows us something to remind us of the great people of God who are our spiritual ancestors.

*Each ornament may be displayed and hung by one person while the text is read by one of the narrators. Alternatively, the same person may read and display the ornament, handing it to another person to hang.*

*Narrator 1* The Israelites traced their beginnings to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the first to believe in the one God almost four thousand years ago. **An altar** is the symbol of Abraham, who trusted God enough to offer his son Isaac in sacrifice. This is a sign that Jesus, too, would be offered to the Father.

*Narrator 2:* **A ladder** is the symbol of Jacob. In a vision Jacob saw a ladder reaching from heaven to earth. It is now Christ who joins heaven to earth, because He became one of us to unite us to the Holy Trinity.

*Narrator 1:* **Joseph** was sold into slavery because his brothers were jealous of him. But God would bring his brothers to him in Egypt and the Israelites would live there, first in prosperity, then in slavery. This period would prepare them for their greatest experience of God.

*Narrator 2* The Israelites greatest experience of God was when He delivered them from Egypt through His servant Moses about 1,450 years before Christ. The symbol of the **Burning Bush** reminds us how God appeared to Moses and called him to lead the Israelites to the Promised Land.

*Narrator 1:* The **Tablets of the Law** remind us how God gave His commandments to Moses after the Israelites left Egypt. They are a sign of the Old Covenant which God made with the Israelites.

*Narrator 2:* The **Pillar of Fire** reminds us how God led the Israelites through the desert. Now Christ is the True Light who leads us through the events of life to union with God.

*Narrator 1:* Ruth helped to continue Salvation History by remaining with her mother-in-law Naomi among the Israelites. Her grandson Jesse would be the father of David, the ancestor of Christ. Christ is **the Blossom**, rising from the root which is Jesse.

- Narrator 1:* **David** and Solomon were the greatest Kings of Israel. Their kingdom, a thousand years before Christ, point to the heavenly kingdom of Christ which is without end.
- Narrator 2:* The prophets **Isaiah** and **Jeremiah** and the rest fought idolatry and injustice in the eighth to sixth centuries before Christ. They looked forward to the coming of the Messiah who would renew God's People.
- Narrator 1:* **Daniel** and his friends remained faithful to God even though they were exiled to Babylon. They would not worship pagan idols even at the risk of their lives.
- Narrator 2:* **Esther** reminds us that, even though the Jews were allowed to return to the Holy Land after the Exile, some remained in foreign lands while keeping their faith in the one true God. God would work through them to make pagans aware of God's Covenant with Israel.
- Narrator 1:* The last of the Old Testament prophets is **John the Baptist**, who announced the coming of Christ, the long-awaited Messiah.
- Narrator 2:* **The Theotokos** is the dwelling place of the King, the gate through whom none may pass. She is the ever-Virgin who gave birth to Christ.
- Narrator 1:* The stories of all these people and many more besides are our story. Through them God prepared the world for the coming of His Son who is our Lord and Savior.
- Narrator 2:* To Him be glory, honor and worship now and ever and throughout the ages. Amen.