

Unit 7 "Our Church Year "

The lessons in this unit encompass the major observances in our Church year. In this *Instructional Manual* only the text which includes the answers to the questions is included. The icons that would complete the page can be found in the student text. The pages are provided for use at the beginning or end of a regular lesson, preferably the week before the observance. This year the feast day is explained in relationship to the troparion, which is a short verse that tells poetically something about the feast or the special intention for which the Divine Liturgy is offered. After the students read the explanation, they are asked to read scriptural passages that are read at Vespers for that feast. They are asked to make the connection to the story of Creation and/or the fall of humanity. They will need their Bible to complete this activity. Because there are several observances that occur during the summer, you may wish to spend the last class learning about them.

Nativity of the Theotokos... September 8

Exaltation of the Holy Cross... September 14

Entrance of the Theotokos... November 21

Saint Nicholas.. . December 6

The Maternity of Saint Ann ... December 9 (8)

Nativity of Our Lord.. . December 25

Holy Theophany of Christ. .. January 6

Three Holy Hierarchs... January 30

The Encounter of Our Lord... February 2

The Annunciation . . . March 25

The Raising of Lazarus ... The Saturday before the Entrance into Jerusalem

The Entrance into Jerusalem ... The Sunday before Pascha

Great and Holy Week ... The week before Pascha

Pascha...

Ascension ... Forty days after Pascha

Pentecost... Fifty days after Pascha

Birth of Saint John the Baptist.. . June 24

Saints Peter and Paul... June 29

Prophet Elias... July 20

The Transfiguration of Christ. . . August 6

The Dormition of the Theotokos . . . August 15

Beheading of Saint John the Baptist... August 29

NATIVITY OF THE THEOTOKOS

THE BIRTH OF THE MOTHER OF GOD

For a long time, Saint Joachim and Saint Ann prayed to have a child. God answered their prayers and gave them a daughter, Mary.

The troparion for the Feast of the Nativity of the Mother of God calls Mary "Mother of God" and announces that the birth of Mary heralds "joy to the universe." We call Mary the Theotokos, which means the Mother of God. The birth of the Theotokos heralds salvation because through Mary we had received Jesus Christ, who saved us from the curse of death and "gave us everlasting life." As we sing in the troparion, Jesus Christ is the "Sun of Justice."

When we sing the troparion for this feast, we praise the Theotokos; and we look to her son, Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Genesis 28:10-17 is read at Vespers today. In verse 13 and 14 what gift does God give that is similar to His gift to Adam and Eve in Genesis?

(God gives the land and blessings for many descendants. In Genesis God gives Adam and Eve all of His creation and blesses their descendants.)

EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS

THE GREAT SEARCH

In the fourth century, Saint Helen went looking for the cross on which Christ died. When she found it, the Bishop of Jerusalem, named Macarius, held it up for the people to see. In the icon Saint Helen is wearing a crown because she is the mother of the Emperor Constantine.

Through the ages the cross was known as a sign of disgrace, a way to humiliate and torture criminals. Because Jesus had to endure this humiliation, Emperor Constantine, a Christian, outlawed crucifixion in the Roman Empire. Also, during Constantine's reign, the cross became a great sign for Christians.

The cross calls to mind Christ's suffering and death that He was willing to endure to save us from eternal death. Through the cross and Christ's Resurrection, we have been granted eternal life.

The cross continues to be a great sign for all Christians. We begin our prayers with the sign of the cross, and we pray in front of the cross in our homes and churches. The sign of the cross reminds us that Jesus Christ saved us and He blesses us, His inheritance.

Proverbs 3:11-18 is read at Vespers today. How do verses 11 and 12 justify God's reaction to Adam and Eve's disobedience?

(These verses tell us that God shows His love for us through His punishment.)

ENTRANCE OF THE THEOTOKOS

HERALD THE SALVATION OF MANKIND

God knew that He wanted Mary to become the mother of His Son Jesus—He planned it! To fulfill God's plan, Mary had to be prepared to become the Mother of God. In the icon, Mary's parents, Saint Ann and Saint Joachim, are taking her to the high priest in the temple so that she could learn about God.

The troparion for the Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos tells us that the presence of Mary in the temple is "the prelude of God's generosity." The Jerusalem temple was the holiest shrine in Israel, and Mary's presence foretells Christ who will be the ultimate temple, the presence of God in the flesh. The troparion ends with praise for Mary who said "Yes" and allowed God's plan to take place.

Exodus 40:34-35 is read at Vespers on this day. How do the words "the glory of the Lord filled the Dwelling" recall the creation story?

(In Genesis we read how God created the world and covered the earth with His glory. In this passage we hear how God continues to be present in His Creation.)

ST. NICHOLAS THE BISHOP

Saint Nicholas was a bishop who lived in the fourth century. He was a very good man who helped the less fortunate and anyone who was in danger. In the icon we see the vision Saint Nicholas had before he was chosen to be a bishop. In the vision he saw Christ handing him the Book of Gospels and the Mother of God placing the special bishop's vestment, the omophorion, on his shoulders.

In the troparion for his feast day, Saint Nicholas is called "a teacher of moderation, a model of faith, and an example of virtue." These words describe the lifestyle for which Saint Nicholas is known. Throughout his life, he lived humbly and shared his wealth with those who needed help. Saint Nicholas has become one of the most well-known saints because of his kindness to all people. From this example, we learn that by following Jesus Christ's teaching, we can attain "greatness through humility and wealth through poverty."

Wisdom 4:7-15 is read at Vespers today. How does verse 12 recall what happened to Adam and Eve?

(They were deceived by the evil one to want more than they had—"the whirl of desire transforms the innocent mind."
Saint Nicholas lived satisfied with his life and shared what he had.)

THE MATERNITY OF ST. ANNA

THE THEOTOKOS, COMES INTO THE WORLD

Saint Joachim and Saint Ann prayed for a child, and their prayers were answered with the birth of their daughter Mary. In this icon we see them embracing as a sign of their love for one another. This feast day helps us remember that all things are possible for those who believe God's Word.

The troparion for the Feast of the Maternity of Saint Ann tells us that "the bonds of childlessness are loosed." even though Saint Joachim and Saint Ann are older. We hear how God had promised them "a divine virgin from whom the indescribable would be born as a man." Through these words, we are reminded that Mary's birth will lead us to the birth of Jesus Christ. As in all Marian feasts, we are asked to look to Christ.

Proverbs 9:1-11 is read at Vespers for this day. If Adam and Eve followed the advice in verse 10, would they have listened to the serpent?

(No, they would have followed God's Word. This feast celebrates the blessing Ann and Joachim received for believing God's Word.)

NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST

The troparion for the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord proclaims "the light of knowledge" that Jesus Christ's birth brought to the world. In the icon for this feast, we see the light projected from on high that Jesus brought to the world. The black mouth of the cave is symbolically the fallen world in which the "Sun of Righteousness" or "Sun of Justice" has dawned. In both the icon and the troparion, Christ is the "Sun," the light of the world.

In the Gospel of Saint Matthew, we read about the three wise men who followed the light of the star, and they found Jesus Christ. In the troparion we read that "those who worshipped the stars have learned from a star to worship you." Through these details we learn how the wise men looked for and followed the light and knowledge that Christ brought into the world. The wise men "recognize [Jesus] as the Orient from on high, "a sign that Christ came for all people.

Genesis 1:1-13 is read at Vespers. How is the birth of Jesus Christ similar to the story of creation?

(God created the world and its inhabitants in the story of creation; through Jesus Christ the world and its inhabitants are re-created.)

HOLY THEOPHANY OF CHRIST

GOD IS THREE PERSONS

Before Jesus began to teach us about God, He wanted to be baptized. He went to His cousin, John the Baptist, who baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. The heavens opened and the voice of the Father said, "This is my beloved Son." The Holy Spirit in the form of the dove appeared above Jesus. This first appearance of the Trinity—God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is recalled on the Feast of Theophany. This feast is one of the first celebrated by the early Church.

The troparion proclaims our "worship of the Trinity" that was shown to us at the Baptism of Jesus. Our Church calls this feast the Holy Theophany, which means the appearance of God as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The troparion praises "Christ God, who appeared and enlightened the world" by revealing the Trinity to us.

At Vespers Genesis 1:1-13 is read. How is this feast related to this Scripture?

(Jesus renews and blesses the waters from creation.)

THREE HOLY HIERARCHS

THREE IMPORTANT BISHOPS

On this feast day we remember three bishops or hierarchs. On the left is Saint Basil, in the middle is Saint John Chrysostom, and on the right is Saint Gregory the Theologian. Each is wearing on their shoulders the special bishop vestment called the "omophorion."

The troparion for this feast calls these bishops "teachers of the universe, equal to the Apostles." They continue to teach us today through the words they had written: Saint John Chrysostom's Divine Liturgy is the one we celebrate on most Sundays; on Sundays during the Great Fast we celebrate Saint Basil's Divine Liturgy; and Saint Gregory was given the title Theologian for his great writings that help us understand more about how Jesus was both God and man. In the troparion we ask these three bishops to pray for us.

Deuteronomy 10:14-21 is read at Vespers. How does verse 14 recall the creation story from Genesis? (Verse 14 praises God as the Creator of heaven and earth. In Genesis we hear how God created everything.)

THE MEETING OF OUR LORD

JESUS COMES INTO THE WORLD

Saint Simeon and Saint Anna were in the Temple when Jesus was brought there 40 days after His birth. When Saint Simeon held Jesus, he knew Jesus was the Savior for which the Jewish people had been waiting. He said, "Now my eyes have seen the light." He knew that Jesus was the Light of the world and the Savior of all humanity.

The troparion for this feast praises the Theotokos for giving us "the Sun of Justice, Christ our God, shining upon those who are in darkness." The troparion celebrates Simeon who held Jesus, "Who has given us Resurrection." On this feast day, we are honoring the Theotokos for giving us Jesus, Simeon for recognizing Jesus, and Jesus Christ for granting us eternal life.

On this feast we read Isaiah 6:1-12 during Vespers. How does verse 3 recall creation?

(The angels proclaim "All the earth is filled with his glory." They are praising God's creation. On this feast day we hear how Simeon recognized God's glory in His Son Jesus Christ.)

THE ANNUNCIATION

FEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION

In this icon for the Feast of the Annunciation, we see the Archangel Gabriel telling Mary that she would be the Mother of God. Mary is surprised by the angel and his message. Her hand is up as if to ask, "How can this be?" Then she says, "I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say."

The troparion for this feast announces this Gospel event as "the revelation of an eternal mystery: the Son of God becomes a virgin's Son." Mary's response to Gabriel shows us how we are to answer God's call to do as He asks. If we say "Yes" as Mary did, we too can be filled with Grace. Our Church gives us a prayer that lets us praise the Theotokos as did Gabriel who exclaimed, "Hail, O Woman Full of Grace, the Lord is with you." This prayer called the Akathist to the Mother of God honors and praises the Theotokos for allowing God to fulfill His plan.

At Vespers we read Genesis: 28:10-17. How does the stairway to heaven help us understand the story of creation?

(Through God's creation of the world and man and woman, He brought heaven to earth. This feast celebrates heaven coming to earth through the Theotokos, the birthgiver of God.)

The Raising of Lazarus

JESUS RAISED LAZARUS FROM THE DEAD

When Jesus went to see his friend Lazarus who was sick, Lazarus' sister Martha met and told Him that Lazarus was dead. Jesus asked to go to the cave where Lazarus was buried, and He told them to "take away the stone." Martha told Jesus that the stench would be horrible because Lazarus was buried for four days, but they removed the stone. When Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" the dead man came out alive.

In the troparion for this feast, we sing "You confirmed the resurrection of all before the time of Your passion." By raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus shows us how we will be called to rise from the dead on the last day. Even though this event happened before the Resurrection of Christ, the people praise Christ by calling Him "Conqueror of Death" and greeting Him with words that recognize Jesus as Saviour: "Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." When we sing the troparion, we join the people of Jerusalem in praise of our Savior.

Genesis 49:33-50:26 is read at Vespers today. How does this verse give us hope even though we are sinful people?

(Just as Joseph forgave his brothers who asked for his forgiveness, God forgives us when we ask for His forgiveness.)

THE ENTRANCE INTO JERUSALEM

JESUS HAILED AS KING

Jesus had just raised Lazarus from the dead, and now it was time for Him to go into Jerusalem. As He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, people hailed him saying, "Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" They waved palm branches to give Him glory.

The troparion for this feast calls the palm branches "symbols of victory." At that time people used palm branches to welcome great conquerors; and by raising Lazarus, Jesus Christ has shown us that He will conquer death for all of us through His resurrection. The people praise Christ by calling Him "Conqueror of Death" and greeting Him with words that recognize Jesus is our Savior:

"Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." The Hebrew word Hosanna means "(O Lord), grant salvation." When we sing the troparion, we praise our Savior just as the people of Jerusalem did.

Zeephaniah 3:14-19 is read at Vespers today. How does verse 17 give us hope even though we read of the fall of humanity in Genesis? (It promises that God will send a Savior. God's love will renew us. This feast day announces our Savior.)

GREAT AND HOLY WEEK

HOLY THURSDAY

Jesus took bread and wine and said, "This is my body. This is my blood." It was the first Holy Communion. This day remembers the Last Supper when Jesus took bread and wine and said, "This is my body. This is my blood." This feast tells us that God wants us to live united to Him.

GREAT AND HOLY FRIDAY

Jesus was crucified at Golgotha. A soldier pierced His side with a spear to make sure He was dead. Then Jesus was taken from the cross by Joseph of Arimathea. He was wrapped in a linen shroud and placed in a tomb. Great and Holy Friday recalls Jesus' crucifixion and reminds us of how much God loves us and wants us to be with Him. To open the gates of heaven to us, God sent His only Son, whose suffering and death led to our resurrection.

In the troparion for Great and Holy Friday matins, we read that Christ's "being nailed to the Cross and pierced with a lance" led to our salvation. Christ's suffering and death, His "precious Blood," saved us and granted us eternal life through His Resurrection. This troparion is recited in the Divine Liturgy at the beginning of the prothesis, the preparation of Holy Gifts.

Ezekiel 37:1-14 is read at the services on Great and Holy Friday. How does this selection recall the story of Creation?

(The bones were brought to life and the winds breathe life into the bodies.)

JESUS IS RAISED FROM THE DEAD

Pascha is the most important day of the year. It is the day when we celebrate that Jesus rose from the dead and opened the gates of heaven for us. In the icon Christ is trampling on the cross—a symbol of death. Christ won the victory over death and the cross. He is raising Adam and Eve to take them to heaven with Him.

Whenever we sing the troparion for Pascha, we are proclaiming our belief in Jesus Christ and all that He has done for us. We are announcing that Christ conquered death for all who believe in Him, and we are granted eternal life united to God. The troparion recalls that Christ granted life to those already "in the graves"—God wants all His people to be with Him. Our Church asks us to sing the Pascha troparion often throughout the Paschal season to glorify Christ and His Resurrection.

At Vespers on the evening of Pascha, we read Exodus 12:1-11. How do Moses' and Aaron's response to God's Word differ from Adam's and Eve's response?

(Moses and Aaron obeyed God, and Adam and Eve disobeyed. Christ shows us total obedience to God.)

HOLY ASCENSION OF CHRIST

JESUS RETURNS TO HEAVEN

Forty days after Pascha, Christ rose or ascended to heaven to be with His Father. He promised that we would not be alone because He would send the Holy Spirit. In the icon Mary, the Theotokos, is at the center, surrounded by the apostles. Jesus is seated on a throne as He ascends into heaven. Jesus is the ruler of all.

When we sing the troparion for the Feast of the Holy Ascension of Christ, we remember Christ's promise of the Holy Spirit. We join with the Apostles and are "delighted" with this blessing of the Holy Spirit. Just as this promise assured the Apostles that "You are the Son of God, Redeemer of the World," we too believe and sing praises to Christ, our God.

Zechariah 14:8-11 is read at Vespers today. How does verse 8 remind us of the creation story?

(We see the waters bringing forth life.)

**THE APOSTLES BECOME
FISHERS OF MEN**

When Jesus called Andrew and Peter away from their work as fishermen to follow Him, He told them, "I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). They were to serve God by calling people to repent and give their lives to Him. After Christ rose from the dead He promised His followers, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Returning to His Father's glory, the Lord sent the Holy Spirit upon them to give them the power and wisdom to be fishers of men.

In the troparion for the Feast of Pentecost we praise Christ for sending the Holy Spirit upon His followers. We remember Jesus' first words to Peter and Andrew: "through them You caught the world in Your net," knowing that the Apostles would spend the rest of their lives bringing the Gospel of Christ to many parts of the world. It was the Holy Spirit, come upon them at Pentecost, who enabled them to bear witness to Christ despite opposition and even death. All the Apostles, except Saint John, would be killed for preaching Christ. Still, Christ's promise was fulfilled; through the Apostles' preaching people all over the world have been drawn to Christ.

Joel 2:23 through 3:5 is read at Vespers today. How do verses 23-24 point to the creation story?

(The people have been given all that they need. This feast celebrates the gift of the Holy Spirit to help us become all that we have been made to become—deified.)

BIRTH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST IS BORN

Saint John the Baptist was the cousin of Jesus. Before John was born, God sent an angel to John's father, Zechariah, to tell him he would have a son. Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth were too old to have children, so Zechariah doubted God. The angel said, "You will be speechless until the day these things happen because you did not believe me." When his son was born, the people wanted to know what to name the child. Zechariah wrote "John" on a tablet as we see shown on the right side of this icon. The commemoration of Saint John's nativity is one of the oldest feasts in honor of any saint in the Church.

The troparion for the Feast of the Birth of Saint John the Baptist honors the importance of Saint John in the life of Jesus Christ. Through the preaching of Saint John, God's people were prepared for Jesus. That is the reason Saint John is called the "Prophet and Forerunner"—he announced Jesus' coming. Also, the troparion honors God's blessings at John's birth—his mother was freed from childlessness and his father was able to speak. This troparion reminds us that even though our words may not be able to give "worthy praise" to Saint John, we honor him for proclaiming to the world the "Incarnation of the Son of God."

Today the story of Samson's conception is read at Vespers (Judges 13:2-21). How is Manoah and his wife different from Adam and Eve?

(Manoah and his wife follow God's Word given to them by the angel; Adam and Eve disobey God's Word.)

SAINTS PETER AND PAUL**TWO PILLARS OF THE CHURCH**

When Jesus was still on earth, Peter told Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus blessed him and said, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven." In the icon Saint Peter is shown holding keys. After the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Saint Peter led the apostles at the beginning of the early Church.

Saint Paul traveled and baptized many people and wrote many letters to the people he baptized. These letters are the epistles that we hear in church. In the letters Saint Paul teaches the new Christians how to live like Christ and tells them to be strong in their faith. The epistles are part of the Bible, and in the icon Saint Paul is shown holding a scroll of the Scriptures.

The troparion for the feast day that honors both saints asks these Leaders of the Apostles and Teachers of the world to pray for us.

During Vespers we read 1 Peter 1:13-19. To what advice should Adam and Eve have listened to avoid the fall?

(They should have obeyed God's Word. This feast celebrates those who live their lives obedient to

“THE LORD IS MY GOD”

A long time before Jesus was born, God's people began to worship other gods. God sent prophets to bring these people back to Him. The greatest of these was Elias, who is also called Elijah, whose name means "the Lord is my God." In the icon he is shown in a hairy garment because he did not care about things of the world. Like Saint John the Baptist, Elijah only wanted to live close to God and to do God's will. God took care of Elijah by sending ravens to bring food. Also, Elijah did not die—He was carried away in a fiery chariot!

The Eastern Churches consider Elias the greatest prophet because he exemplifies two main beliefs of the Church: faithfulness to one God and justice for the weak. The troparion for this feast day praises Elias for healing the sick and purifying the lepers and asks Elias to "intercede for behalf of those who honor him." The troparion also honors Elias as a "pillar of prophets," who announced the coming of Jesus Christ.

The story of St Elias is told at Vespers. Read 1 Kings 17:1-23. What is similar in the revival of the son (v. 21) and the creation of humans?

(In the creation story God blew into the nose the breath of life to create a human; in this story Elias breathes life into the dead son.)

TRANSFIGURATION OF CHRIST

JESUS IS RADIANT WITH LIGHT

Peter, James and John did not know what they were in for when Jesus asked them to come with Him one day. When they arrived at the mountain, Jesus was surrounded by light—His face was dazzling as the sun, His clothes radiant with light. The Father's voice said, "This is my beloved Son." To Jesus' left was Moses (representing God's Law) and to His right was Prophet Elias (representing God's prophets). On the icon are Peter, John, and James located below Jesus.

The troparion for this feast emphasizes the light that Jesus brought into the world. We ask the Mother of God to pray for us so that Christ will let His "everlasting light shine also upon us sinners." We too ask to be transfigured by the "Giver of Light," Jesus Christ.

Exodus 33:11-23 is read at Vespers today. How is Moses' relationship with God similar to Adam's before the fall?

(Both relationships are pleasing to God—God looked at everything He created [Adam] and found it very good; God told Moses that he had found favor with Him)

DORMITION OF THE THEOTOKOS

THE MOTHER OF GOD IS TAKEN TO HEAVEN

After Jesus died, the Theotokos, the Mother of God, was beloved by the Apostles. When it finally came time for her life on earth to end, they surrounded her. On the icon is Jesus holding a little child that represents the soul of His Mother. Jesus has taken her to be with Him in heaven. This feast celebrates the Theotokos as the first of all the human race to participate fully in the Resurrection our Lord.

The troparion for the Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos identifies the mystery of the Mother of God. She gave life to God and we wonder in amazement as we pray, "The Lord Whom the heavens could not contain is contained in the Virgin." The troparion praises the Theotokos for her constant prayer and intercession for the deliverance of "our souls from death." She is the "Mother of Life," and she prays for us to be with God forever.

Ezekiel 44:1-4 is read at Vespers today. Were any entrances closed after the fall of Adam and Eve?

(Yes, the entrance to the tree of life was guarded by the cherubim so that Adam and Eve would not eat from it.)

BEHEADING OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST DIES

Many people obeyed John the Baptist when he told them to repent and change their lives. Others would not repent and became John's enemies. In Matthew 14:1-12 we read how John had criticized King Herod for taking his brother's wife, Herodias. John was arrested and put in prison. At Herod's birthday banquet, Herodias's daughter asked the king for the head of John the Baptist. Ashamed to say no before his guests, the king had John beheaded. The Church has remembered this event with a special feast day since the fourth century. In many places it is kept as a fast day to remind ourselves of what Herod did to please his friends.

The troparion for this feast day praises Saint John for baptizing Jesus whom he announced. For that reason Saint John is called "more worthy of honor than the prophets." By being chosen by God to proclaim the coming of Jesus, Saint John is recognized as the greatest man born of woman: "the Lord's testimony is sufficient for you." The troparion praises Saint John who "suffered for the truth" and "announced the good news."

Wisdom 4:7-5:7 is read today. How would you think Wisdom 4:20 applies to the story of the fall of humanity?

(Adam and Eve hid from God after they ate the fruit; they realized that they disobeyed God and they were ashamed.)