

Unit One

Creation

1. Why Life?

People have been questioning the purpose of life throughout the ages. When the Jewish people asked these questions, they finally realized that God is the very Source of life. In His outpouring of love, God—the truly Existing One—shares His life with all creation and that is the reason for our existence.

2. Life Is from God

The Biblical stories of creation teach that all creation is of God, made out of nothing by His Word alone. The creation story does not attempt to tell "exactly how it happened" but gives an understanding of why the universe exists. The Genesis story teaches that God accomplished Creation in power and wisdom, and His Creation is good.

3. Made in the Divine Image

Both Genesis stories of creation stress that human beings are the highpoint of the universe. Genesis 1 emphasizes that we are created in God's image and likeness.

4. Change: Creation Is Not Finished

God is not finished creating. Creation will not be finished until everything is brought into perfection in Christ. Until then we are called to be stewards or caretakers for all of God's creation.

5. We Are Called to Fulfill God's Plan

We are called to grow and mature in our spiritual life. We can grow in holiness through our cooperation with the Holy Spirit. This ongoing process of our growing in the image and likeness of God will lead us to our glory in eternal life.

1 - Why Life?

Objectives

By the end of this lesson students will be able to ...

- recognize that God is the Creator of all things.
- state that the purpose of all things is to share God's existence.
- understand that God has a plan for His creation and He will fulfill His plan.
- state that Christians have an optimistic worldview that reflects their trust in God's plan.

For the Catechist

The adolescent is beginning to form his or her own attitude toward life which is known as a "worldview." The Christian worldview says that it is good to be because everything that exists shares somehow in God's own existence. Creation reflects the wisdom of God because He knew what He was doing when He created all things. Therefore, our existence is a wonderful thing because we reflect God's own wisdom and existence. This is the message of Lesson 1—God created us and life is good! Lesson 1 calls the students to accept this optimistic worldview based on God's teaching.

Although the early adolescent is beginning to form an individual philosophy of life, he or she probably cannot express it. Adolescents are already putting together a set of values by which they judge the world around them, their own worth, and even God. This lesson aims to help them formulate their own outlook in words and compare it with the outlook of Scripture. The goal of this year is to help them realize that life is good because it is of God. The title of this Book 7, *We Become God-Like*, announces that even something better is to come for God's creation!

Even though the students know each other from the earlier grades, take some time to help them become reacquainted. Consider having them introduce themselves by sharing a time they experienced a calm and peaceful activity and environment. Also, ask them what they expect to learn this year in class. Possibly consider having a shoe box (decorated however you want) for any questions they might have. At the end of the month, answer these questions in the beginning of class. [In advance, look at the questions and research the answers, if necessary.] The purpose of this activity is to encourage students to want to learn more about their Church and the teachings of the Church as applied to today's complicated world.

Materials Needed

Opening Prayer: Prayer Page ("O Heavenly King") for your jurisdiction and icon of Christ the Teacher (*Come Bless the Lord* icon packet #4).

Introduction: Worksheet, pens, pencils

Guided Reading: student text, drawing paper, markers

Ancient Wisdom for Today: pencils or pens

Vespers: Folders (one for each student), 27 plain white sheets of paper attached to the center of the folder, icons from old bulletin covers, religious stickers, markers, pens and pencils

Activity A: "Journal," pens or pencils, journal folders

Closing Prayer: Prayer Page ("Christ our God") for your jurisdiction

1. Opening Prayer

- Gather in front of the icon corner that includes the icon of Christ the Teacher (Come Bless the Lord icon packet #4). Light the candle and hand out copies of the Prayer Page.
- Pray for the wisdom to grow in the knowledge of God as the school year begins. Take a few moments to allow the students to voice their own intentions, either verbally or silently.
- Chant or recite "O Heavenly King."

2. Introduction

- Give students a few minutes to greet each other. Ask them to introduce themselves by their name and school and by something they did this summer that was peaceful and calm.
- Distribute copies of Introduction Worksheet and tell them this activity will help them think more about "Who You Are."
- Have the students write or draw an appropriate response to the corresponding questions at the bottom of the page. The exercise is designed to help the student identify and express his or her values and goals in life.
- Acknowledge that the depictions may vary based on our influences and that as we grow in the spiritual life, the words or images may change.
- Collect the worksheets and keep them in a folder. At the end of the school year repeat the exercise and compare the worksheets with the students to determine how their outlook has changed over the course of the year.

3. Guided Reading, Page 2

- 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.
- Assign one or more students to read page 1 aloud.
- Assign each student one paragraph to study and summarize. After a few moments of reflection, ask each student to share his or her summary.

Guided Reading, Page 2 "God's Answer"

- Assign one or more students to read this section aloud.
- Allow the students to share how they feel knowing that God "fashioned all things that they might have being" (Wisdom 1:14)—that God wanted them to have life.

Background Reading (The Mystery of God)

"From the beauty and order of nature, thinkers have argued about the existence of a creating principle. But faith requires a leap beyond this to knowledge of a loving and holy Creator. In truth, this can be done only by the favor and power of this Supreme Being. As material creatures, our direct experience of God is limited. As the Gospel says, 'No one has ever seen God.. '(John 1:18). God, however, has revealed Himself in many and varied ways. The Old Testament, as well as other religious traditions, describe many experiences of God. God speaks to the hearts of those who have faith and calls them to knowledge of Himself and of His loving plan for humanity. The testimony of various religions agrees on several attributes of God, our name for the Supreme Being. He is holy, meaning that He is completely other than us. He is infinite&nd transcendent. He is also good and loving to such a degree that we often call what is good 'god-like'" (*LLI* 9).

Guided Reading. Page 2 “Your Answer”

- Assign one or more students to read this section aloud.
- Before moving on, take a walk outside—if possible. Ask the students to look at the trees and grass and sky as God's gift of creation to them.

[If you are willing to use your camera, ask each student to take one picture of God's creation. Download and print these pictures for the next class and make a collage. Ask the students to state then-reason for taking their picture. Some students might choose to take a picture of each other—God's creation!]

Guided Reading page 2, "Our Worldview"

- Ask for a volunteer to read this section aloud.
- Depending on the class size, divide into small groups.
- Hand out two pages of drawing paper and markers to each group. Ask the groups to illustrate on one sheet the various worldly influences on their lives (advertising, athletes, celebrities, etc.) and share their list with the class.
- Have the groups illustrate on the second sheet the spiritual influences on their lives.
- Discuss which influences draw them away from God and which draw them closer to God and why.
- Encourage students to share ways people their age can show God's love.

4. Ancient Wisdom for Today

- Ask one student to read the information about Church Fathers.
- Ask the students for qualities they think the Church Fathers had—write the list on the board. [Suggestions: wisdom, good speakers, smart, prayerful]
- Read the reading from the Church Father aloud or as a group.
- Have the students answer the questions; then discuss their answers.
[Suggestions: God created man to have life; "Have life" means to breath, eat, and enjoy God's creation; Athenagoras believes everyone has worth because God created all people.]

5. Icon Study

- Inform the students that each week during the course of the year a different icon will be presented for prayer and reflection. In this first session we will look at an icon of Christ because the Son of God becoming man is what makes icons possible.

Background Reading (Becoming)

"Could not God make people perfect at the beginning?" someone may ask. Take the example of a very small child. The mother can give her baby grown-up food, but the baby is still unable to take adult nourishment. Similarly, God could have given humanity perfection right at the beginning, but humanity could not have received it because it was only a child. For that reason when our Lord, who sums up all things in Himself, came on earth in these last days, He came not in the full glory which He could have done but in a form which we could see. Certainly He could have come in His imperishable glory, but we should not have been able to bear the greatness of His majesty. Therefore, like giving milk to infants, the perfect Bread of the Father revealed Himself to us on earth in human form, so that we should be nourished by His Word like babes at the breast and so, by degrees, become strong enough to digest the whole Word of God" (St Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4, 62).

- Read "Icons Reveal our Vision of God" on page 5 of the student text. Emphasize the following points:
 - Iconography is a spiritual art form whose goal is to carry us beyond the material from which it is made that we may be placed in the presence of God.
 - Icons are not merely religious decorations; they are invitations to experience the presence of God in prayer. Emphasize the prayerful attitude and reverence with which we venerate icons (bowing, kissing, lighting candles).
- Examine the icon in the book and any other icon of Christ available in church. Point out the different inscriptions (ICXC - abbreviation for Jesus Christ; O WN—the Existing One, both in Greek and the inscriptions on the Gospel Book).
- Direct the students to research "Byzantine icons of Christ" on the internet and print out other types of icons of Christ. Have these brought to class next session to display.
- Ask students to share their answers to the questions at the bottom of this page.

6. Vespers

- Introduce the service of Vespers as the evening prayer of the Church, marking the end of one day and the beginning of the next. In some parishes it is served the evening before a Great Feast; in others it is served on Saturday evening to prepare for Sunday. Most parishes have Vespers during the Great Fast and Holy Week.
- Ask the students if they have ever attended Vespers and what they remember about it.
- **Before you begin to read the information about Vespers (page 6) in the student book,** announce the following:

Every week we will learn about Vespers and pray the prayers, hymns or readings in Vespers. By the end of this year, we will have a Vesper booklet that we will use for our end-of-the-year Vesper service. Turn to the last page of today's lesson to learn more about Vespers. This page with information about Vespers will not be part of your Vesper booklet.

- Distribute folders that have at least 27 blank white pages attached in the center of the folder. Each week the words from Vesper prayers will be taped or glued to a page in this booklet. By the end of this year, each student will have a Vespers prayer book. [In advance, the catechist can prepare the folders or the students can work with the catechists to add the pages to their folders.]

Background Reading (Two Ways of Living)

"The Church's evening service, *Vespers*, also celebrates a natural time of day, the setting of the sun. As darkness approaches, the Christian proclaims that Jesus is the true light of the world, the 'joyful light of the holy glory of the heavenly and immortal Father.' Psalm 140, coupled to the offering of incense and lighting of lamps (candles), typifies this service inasmuch as vespers is the evening sacrifice of praise. The second verse of the psalm sums up this theme: 'let my prayer come like incense before you, the lifting up of my hands, like the evening sacrifice.'

"...Especially solemn vesper services are held on Forgiveness Sunday, the eve of the first day of the Great Fast, when we are invited to begin the fast in the spirit of mutual love and reconciliation. Vespers on Great Friday is highlighted by the taking down of Christ's body, from the cross and the procession with the holy shroud. . . ." (*LLII* 25-26).

- Ask the students to write their own name on the front cover. Suggest that they decorate their booklet with icons cut from weekly church bulletins or with religious stickers or with their own religious drawings. [**Note:** If possible, catechists can have icon drawings and stickers and glue or tape available. Keep the folders in the classroom.]
- Tell the students to tape or glue the prayer page from this session as the first page in their Vespers folder. Encourage the students to learn by next week the prayer if they don't already know it.

7. Activity A: My Personal Journal

- Distribute worksheet along with pens or pencils and a folder to each student. Have the students write their names on their folder.
- Explain the concept of a journal. Tell the students that they **will not be asked to share their answers**—the journal is to help each person reflect on their own convictions and feelings. Encourage them to think of these worksheets as their chance to record their thoughts now as they grow in their knowledge about God.
- Have the students complete the worksheet in silence (or you can play religious music if available) and place it in their folder. Plan accordingly, but they should need no more than 5 minutes to complete the journal entry.
- Keep the folders in a secure place so that no one else is reading them.
- Try to complete the personal journal page each week to add to the folder that you will return to the students at the end of the school year.

8. Summary

Ask the students what the main idea of today's lesson. Refer back to the objectives that you might have listed on the board or read at the beginning of class. Ask the students if they have any further comments or questions about what you discussed today.

9. Closing Prayer

Gather the students at the icon corner. Distribute the prayer sheet (pages 18-19) for your jurisdiction and pray the verses on it.

**Opening and Closing Prayers
The Melkite Greek Catholic Church**

O heavenly King, Consoler, Spirit of truth, present in all places and filling all things, the Treasury of blessings and the Giver of life: come and dwell in us, cleanse us of all stain, and save our souls, O Good One.

Christ our God, the Existing One, is blessed at all times: now and always and forever and ever. Amen.

**Opening and Closing Prayers
The Romanian Greek Catholic Eparchy of Canton**

O heavenly King, Consoler, Spirit of truth, present in all places and filling all things, the Treasury of blessings and the Giver of life: come and dwell in us, cleanse us of all stain, and save our souls, O Good One.

Christ our God, the Existing One, is blessed at all times: now and always and forever and ever. Amen.

**Opening and Closing Prayers
The Ruthenian Byzantine Catholic Metropolitan Province**

Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth, everywhere present and filling all things. Treasury of Blessings and Giver of Life, come and dwell within us, cleanse us of all stain, and save our souls, O gracious One.

Blessed is Christ our God, the One-Who-Is, always, now and ever and forever. Amen.

**Opening and Closing Prayers
The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Eparchy of St Josaphat**

Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth! You are present everywhere and fill all things. Treasury of Blessings and Giver of Life, come and dwell within us. Cleanse us of every stain, and save our souls, O gracious Lord.

Blessed be Christ our God, always, now and forever and ever. Amen.

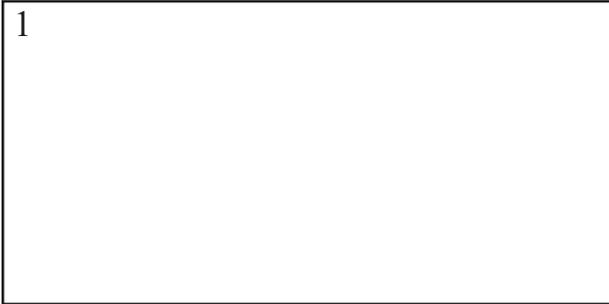
**Opening and Closing Prayers
The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Synod**

Heavenly King, Advocate, Spirit of Truth, who are everywhere present and fill all things. Treasury of Blessings, Bestower of Life, come and dwell within us; cleanse us of all that defiles us, and, O Good One, save our souls.

Blessed be Christ our God, always, now and forever and ever. Amen.

About Me

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In the boxes above draw a picture, design, symbol, or word that best expresses the following:

1. Who were the persons who most influenced your life before you started school?
2. Who are the persons who most influence your life today?
3. What has been your greatest personal achievement so far in your life?
4. What is the most important material possession that you have?
5. What do you see yourself doing ten years from now?
6. If you were to be honored today, what three things would you like people to say about you?

MY PERSONAL JOURNAL

Our lives are made up of many of experiences and relationships. In order to grow to our full human potential, we must be aware of these many experiences and reflect on them. To reflect means to think quietly and calmly about our experiences: the persons and the events that have touched us and continue to touch us. Knowing what they mean for us helps us to understand who we are, how we have come to be the people we are, and what we hope to be tomorrow.

Of all the ideas that were presented in class today, I would really like to remember...

One new insight about life that I learned today was ...

This new insight about life might change my attitude about life in the following ways:
