

## 24 — Nativity: Humanity Re-Created

### ***Objectives***

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

- state that God's plan is for His people to be with Him always.
- identify Isaiah as one of the prophets who announced that God will send a Savior.
- recognize that Jesus Christ, our Savior, was born to renew, sanctify, and re-create God's creation.
- state through Jesus Christ we are re-created in a new relationship with God—we are united to God.

### ***For the Catechist***

In the Feast of the Nativity of Jesus Christ, our attention focuses on what God has done: "*God became man so that man might become God*" according to our Church Fathers' teaching. In Jesus the union of God and humanity is fully accomplished. Through Jesus' birth, the Church is both human and divine, visible and invisible.

This lesson has similarities to Lesson 10 of Book 7. Both teach that God sent His Son to renew, sanctify, and re-create God's creation. But in this lesson the emphasis is on this new relationship that is even greater than the relationship in the Garden. In the Garden God walked with humans. In this new relationship we are united with the very person of God in Jesus Christ—we are one with God!

Our Church asks us to prepare to celebrate the Feast of the Nativity by observing the Nativity or Phillip's Fast that begins on November 15, the day after the Feast of Saint Phillip, and lasts through December 24. In the middle of the worldly excitement of "getting ready for Christmas" with our decorations and parties, we are called to pray, fast, and give alms as our way to focus on the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Help the students realize their spiritual preparation for Christmas is much more important than their daily Christmas activities that happen even before Christ is born! Our Church asks us to wait until the Feast of the Nativity of Jesus Christ (Christmas) to begin celebrating.

### ***Materials Needed***

*Opening Prayer:* Vesper folder

*Introduction:* Paper and pens or pencils and white construction paper

*Guided Reading:* student text, pens, pencils, paper

*Vespers:* Folders, prayer sheets, tape or glue, scissors

*Activity A:* "Journal," and Journal folders and pens or pencils, box of thank-you notes

*Activity B:* Unit Review

*Closing Prayer:* Vespers folders

## 1. Opening Prayer

- Gather in the icon corner and distribute the Vespers folders.
- Pray one of the Litanies.

## 2. Review

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

## 3. Introduction

- Divide the students into 2 groups.
- Ask the one group to list the ways people get ready for Christmas around their house and neighborhood. (*Decorating, parties, gifts*)
- Ask the other group to list the ways our church asks us to get ready for the Feast of the Nativity. (*Church services, a schedule for the Mystery of Reconciliation, tree of giving, other almsgiving projects, practice for singing Nativity hymns*)
- Have the groups come together to share ideas.
- Encourage discussion about which list is harder to follow and which one is more important. Challenge them to eliminate some of the "Christmas preparations" and replace them with some of the "Nativity preparations."
- Consider having a countdown of "Praying Days until Christmas" for the classroom.

## 4. Guided Reading, Page 122, "Creation"

Have volunteers read aloud, but ask all the students to read the scriptural passages aloud.

### Guided Reading, Page 123, "Prophet Isaiah"

- Encourage the students to look online for information about Isaiah to share next week.
- Read the scriptural passages aloud as a group.
- Based on Isaiah's words, list the qualities the Savior will have.

### Guided Reading, Page 123, "Re-Creation"

- Divide the students into 3 groups. Each group reads and discusses the content from one paragraph.
- Each group is responsible for teaching the information to the rest of the class.

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## Background Reading (Theosis)

"The Incarnation is the key to our understanding of the normal Christian life, our spirituality. Christ is not simply the perfect Man who shows us that it could be done, but He actually communicates this life to us. He is God who became one of us so that we could bear God within us, so that the likeness could be restored in us as well as in Himself. Christ is the first-fruits of those who were asleep, the first-born from among the dead; we are meant to be the rest of the crop. This is why St. Peter the Apostle could write that we might become 'sharers in the divine nature' (2 Peter 1:4).

"This is what the Eastern Churches call Theosis, the central concept in our spirituality: that we might become deified, divinized, by having the life of God live within us. What Christ is by nature, we are to become by adoption" (LLIII 17).

## 5. Ancient Wisdom for Today

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud the information on this page. Have the students write their answers to the questions and share them with the class.

[Suggestions: *Jesus assumed human qualities so that we can assume divine qualities; yes, seeing myself as spirit bearing, I believe I can follow Christ even when it is difficult; now I can see myself as having God's help with these choices—God is with me always.*]

## 6. Icon Study

- Have the students read the commentary on the icon of the Nativity of Jesus Christ.

## 7. Vespers

- Distribute the Vespers folder.
- Give each student one copy of the prayer from Vespers (see page 182).
- Ask the students to tape or glue this prayer onto a new page in their Vespers folder.

## 8. Activity A: My Personal Journal

Distribute Worksheet A along with pens or pencils. 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.

**Supplemental Activity:** Have each student bring in a box in which they can place small notes telling Jesus what they did each week to prepare for the Nativity. Then have them wrap these boxes and place them in the icon comer to remain there over the break for the holy days. When they return to class, have them take their own gifts home to remind themselves of their offerings to Jesus.

## 9. Activity B: Hymns for the Feast of the Nativity

- Invite your cantor into the class to teach some of the hymns or borrow the books from the church and sing the traditional hymns.
- If possible, consider having a group of students spend an afternoon singing the hymns to parishioners who are homebound. Call in advance and ask for parents to help.

## 10. Summary

Review the lesson. Ask if they are any further comments or questions about today's topics.

## 11. Closing Prayer

Gather in the icon comer and pray the Vespers prayer for the Nativity of Jesus Christ.

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## Background Reading (Deification)

"The concept of deification is central to God's plan of salvation, but it is accomplished only in conformity with His plan. The temptation of the devil in the Garden of Eden was, 'The moment you eat of the fruit [of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods' (Gn 3:5). The devil lied, since being God-like is not in humanity's powers apart from God. Through the mystery of Christ, God undid the damage of sin and restored our destiny, now revealed to be deification. By becoming a man, Christ made human nature itself share in the Godhead. We cannot become God by nature, but 'if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation' (2 Cor 5:17). Hence, 'they may both be and be called gods through the gift of grace, since God as a whole fills them entirely and does not let any part of them be empty of His presence'" (LLII 43).

## *Vespers*

### *The Nativity of Our Lord God and Savior, Jesus Christ*

Tone 2: Come, let us rejoice in the Lord; let us proclaim the present mystery by which the partition has been broken and the flaming sword withheld. Now the Cherubim shall let us all come to the Tree of Life. As for me, I am returning to the bliss of Paradise from which I have been banished by disobedience. Behold! The Image of the Father and his unchangeable eternity has taken the form of a servant. Without suffering He has come forth to us from an all-pure Virgin, and yet He has remained unchanged. He is true God and He was before, and He has taken on himself what He had not been, becoming man out of his love for all. Therefore, let us raise our voices in hymns, singing: O God, bom of the Virgin, have mercy on us.

Because the Lord Jesus was bom of the holy Virgin, all creation is enlightened. Behold! The shepherds keep watch and the Magi are adoring; the angels are singing hymns of praise and Herod is trembling; for the Savior of our souls has revealed himself in the flesh.

O Christ our God, your kingdom is eternal, and your reign is from generation to generation. You became incarnate of the Holy Spirit and became man from the ever-virgin Mary. Your coming, O Christ, has shed a great light upon us. You are the Light of Light and the radiance of the Father. You have illumined the whole creation. Therefore, everything that breathes sings a hymn of praise to You. You are the image of the Father's glory. You are the eternal God, existing before all ages, who shone forth from the Virgin. O Lord our God, have mercy on us.

O Christ, what shall we offer You for your coming on earth in our humanity for our sake? Every creature that has its being from you gives thanks to you: the angels offer hymns of praise, the heavens give a star; the Magi present their gifts and shepherds their wonder; the earth provides a cave and the desert, a manger. As for us, we offer a Virgin Mother. O God who are from all eternity, have mercy on us.

## *My Personal Journal*

Each year we think about making a gift list of what we want and what we want to give others. This year write another list—but this one describes the gifts you plan to make or do for Jesus Christ this year.

Our Church asks us to pray, fast, and give help to those less fortunate as we prepare for the Feast of the Nativity. Under each category, write a specific activity you can do during Phillip's Fast. Then each week review the list and possibly add new ideas. In the space at the bottom of the page, write your gift tag to Jesus Christ and list your offerings to celebrate the Nativity of Jesus Christ.

Pray

Fast

Give Alms

*To: Jesus*

*From:*