

## 25 — Theophany: Creation Renewed

### *Objectives*

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

- recognize the importance of water in creation.
- respect the power of water to create and to destroy.
- state that the Feast of Theophany celebrates the recognition of the divinity of Christ and the sanctification of the material world.

### *For the Catechist*

This lesson begins by discussing the importance of water since the beginning of Creation, and water continues to be important for our survival. Yet, water also causes destruction. Recognizing the power of water helps the students realize the importance of the water of baptism. The baptismal waters destroy the old Creation tainted with the sin of Adam and Eve and re-create us as we begin our new life in Christ.

This lesson also focuses on the sanctification and renewal of all Creation that Christ brings to the world as he steps in the Jordan River. Because Christ has immersed himself into the waters of the world, the physical world has become holy. We are reminded of our role as stewards of creation as described in the stories of Creation in Genesis. In earlier books in this God With Us series, the emphasis for the lessons on the Feast of Theophany has been on the revelation of the Trinity at the Baptism of Christ. This lesson recognizes that emphasis and also asks the students recognize that all Creation is good because it is from God. Now we need to live our lives protecting our earth and its people from the destruction caused by the evil in the world.

We read and hear about returning to a "green" world. Our Church has always called us to take care of our environment because God created it. Encourage the students to think of ways they can help our earth through recycling and making choices that save our natural resources.

### *Materials Needed*

*Opening Prayer:* Vesper folder

*Review:* Easel or wall pad with the objectives listed

*Introduction:* Paper cups, blessed water or "New Life in the Trinity" DVD and playback

*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

*Activity C:* Colored markers or colored pencils, worksheet

*Closing Prayer:* Vespers folders

## 1. Opening Prayer

- Gather in the icon corner and distribute the Vespers folders.
- Pray the hymns from the Feast of the Nativity.

## 2. Review

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

## 3. Introduction

- Bring in a container of blessed water and fill a small cup for each student.
- Pray the "The Lord's Prayer."
- Have the students drink the water.
- Ask them to share how they think the drinking of the blessed water could "deliver [them] from evil."
- Remind them that at their Baptism the blessed water did deliver them from evil and brought them to a new life in Christ.

### Alternative:

Arrange to watch excerpts from the DVD "New Life in the Trinity." Review the video in advance, and show the excerpts of the baby being placed in the baptismal font.

## 4. Guided Reading, Page 127, "Creation"

Read the paragraphs aloud and ask all the students to join in reading the scriptural passages.

### Guided Reading, Page 128, "The Fall"

Read the paragraphs aloud and ask all the students to join in reading the scriptural passages.

### Guided Reading, Page 128, "The Mystery of Baptism"

Read the paragraphs aloud and ask all the students to join in reading the scriptural passages.

### Guided Reading, Page 128, "The Feast of Theophany"

- This section can be divided into paragraphs for separate groups to read. Then the group teaches the information to the other students.
- This section could be read aloud by volunteers from the group.

## 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: *All of Creation is connected; I can take care of the environment and other people to remind me that we are connected; I need to recycle and use less energy and water.*]

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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).

## 6. Icon Study

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

## 7. Vespers

- Distribute the Vespers folder.
- Give each student one copy of the prayer from Vespers (see page 186).
- 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.

## 9. Activity B: Recycle Project

[Ask one of the parents to help with this activity.] Consider starting a project in your church community where you can help the environment. One idea is to ask parishioners to bring in their empty cans to be recycled. Place a large trash can to collect the cans weekly. Ask the parent to locate a recycle plant in your area and take the cans to this place. Most places pay a set amount for the weight of the cans. Ask the students to choose a charity to receive the money. At the end of the year, ask a representative from the charity if you and the students can deliver the check to them.

## 10. Activity C: Theophany Icon

This can be a group or individual activity—even a homework activity. Choose a different colored pencil for each passage. Circle or color the image that shows the words from the passage.

## 11. Summary

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

## 12. Closing Prayer

- Gather in the icon corner.
- Pray the Vespers prayer for the Feast of the Theophany.

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## Background Reading (Sanctification of Nature)

"This manifestation of the Trinity is commemorated in the Church as one of its greatest feasts, the Theophany (January 6). By this Theophany Jesus was revealed as the Messiah, the 'anointed one' of God. His true Son, one with the Father and equal to Him in divinity. Since the Lord Jesus was without sin, His baptism was a voluntary acceptance of the consequences of sin, so that He might raise us up from sin and make us sharers in the divine life. On this day water is solemnly consecrated to proclaim that, as Christ's Incarnation enables human nature to be deified, His presence in the material creation renders matter a vehicle of holiness.

"By means of liturgical celebrations such as these, the Church constantly proclaims that the events of the Lord's life are not merely happenings of the past. They represent a part of His plan of salvation which is still at work for us today and will be fulfilled in the future. The hymns for the feast shout out, 'Today, Christ is baptized; He emerges from the water and uplifts the world with Him.. Today all creation is enlightened. Today all nature rejoices....Today the nature of water is sanctified.'" (LLI 47).

## *Vespers*

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

When the Forerunner saw the One who is our enlightenment, the One who has brought light to all, coming to be baptized, his heart rejoiced and his hand trembled. He pointed Him out to the people and said: This is the Savior of Israel who delivered us from corruption. O Christ our God, O Sinless One, glory to You!

O our Savior, the armies of angels trembled when they saw You baptized by your servant, and the Holy Spirit bearing witness and descending, and when they heard the voice of the Father speaking from heaven: This One upon whom the Forerunner lays his hands is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. O Christ our God, glory to You!

When the Jordan River received You, O Fountainhead, the Comforter descended in the form of a dove. Now behold the marvel: the One who bowed the heavens bows his head to the Forerunner, and the one made of clay cries out to his Maker: Why do You command me to perform what is beyond my power? It is I who need to be baptized by You. O Christ our God, O Sinless One, glory to You!

O God and Lord, when you resolved to save those who had strayed from You, You condescended to take the form of a servant, for it was fitting that You assumed our human nature for us. And when You were baptized in the flesh, O our Redeemer, it made us worthy of your forgiveness. Therefore, we cry out to you: O Christ our God, our Benefactor, glory to You!

You have bowed your head before the Forerunner, and You have crushed the heads of the demons. You have descended into the water and given light to all things that they may glorify You, O Savior, the Enlightenment of our souls.

## *My Personal Journal*

Describe a scene close to your home or somewhere you have been that reflects the beauty of God's creation and the way someone or some group is taking care of it. [Suggestions: Your parent's or grandparent's flower or vegetable garden; a park; a playground.]

Describe a place near your home or somewhere you have visited that shows no one is taking care of this place because of all the litter and pollution in the area. What can you or someone else do to help take care of this place? [Suggestion: Plan a clean-up day, call the township to tell them, write a letter to the city.]

## THE THEOPHANY ICON



*Icons often depict in paint what the Scriptures and our liturgical prayers depict in words. Find the elements in the following texts that are also found in the icon of the Theophany:*

At Your baptism in the Jordan, O Lord, the worship of the Trinity was revealed; for the Father's voice bore witness to You by calling You His beloved Son. And the Spirit in the form of a dove confirmed the truth of these words. O Christ God, who have appeared to us and enlightened the world, glory to You! (Troparion of the Theophany)

Make ready, O River Jordan, for behold, Christ our God draws near to be baptized by John that in your waters He may crush with His divinity the heads of the serpents. Rejoice, O wilderness of Jordan! Dance with gladness, O mountains! For eternal Life has come to call back Adam. O John the Forerunner, the voice crying in the wilderness, cry out: "Make ready the way of the Lord; clear Him a straight path." (from Matins of the Fore-feast)

John said, "Even now the axe lies at the root of the trees. Therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire" (Mt3:10)

Why was it, sea, that you fled? Jordan, that you turned back? You mountains, that you skipped like rams? You hills, like lambs of the flock? (Ps 113/114: 5-6)

### Instructions

[Choose a different colored pencil for each passage. Circle or color the image in the icon that illustrates the words from the scriptural passage.]