

Unit 5 "Observances" Lesson 24

The Nativity of Our Lord

Objective: With the help of the teacher and the Nativity icon, the students will be able to retell the story of the Nativity.

For the Catechist

The lesson presents the Nativity icon as a teaching tool for the story of the birth of Jesus Christ. The children have heard parts of the story in lessons 9 and 10. This lesson combines what they have learned. The Christian greeting appropriate for the Feast of the Nativity, "Christ is born," and the response, "Glorify Him," will be taught and the children will be encouraged to use it at home. Be certain to use this greeting in your class during the Christmas season.

Icon. The icon of the Nativity is one of the most complex. Several events as well as scenes that have theological meaning rather than historical relevance are pictured.

"The black mouth of the cave, then symbolically, is precisely this fallen world in which the 'Sun of Righteousness' has dawned, this wilderness which the 'Light of Wisdom' has illumined. The Virgin Mother is shown half-sitting, supported by a hammock-type bed used by the early Jews in their travels. Striking is the absence of the usual sufferings of childbirth which is iconographically seen to be an indication of the virgin-birth of Christ. As in the Gospel, all mankind is called to this event. The Wise Men represent the learned and astute, and the shepherds represent the humble of this world. A multitude of Angels give glory to God and announce this good news to mankind. In the icon, several episodes are grouped together and shone simultaneously. In the bottom left corner, Joseph sits in painful thought, while the Devil, under the guise of an old and bent shepherd, suggest new doubts and suspicions to him. In the opposite corner, two women are seen bathing the new-born Infant, to show the real humanity of Jesus" (CBL 39-40).

Lesson Plan Overview

Opening: Nativity Greeting

Introduction: Discussion of Nativity story using the Nativity icon **Need:** Nativity icon

Read Text Aloud: Hold text up for students to see as you read each page aloud. After each page, use the questions in the shaded box at the bottom of that page to discuss the lesson with the students.

Activity Tracks:

Choose a basic, group, or craft activity to reinforce the lesson (detailed on the pages that follow).

- **Basic:** Jesus Is Born
- **Group:** Nativity Icon Review Game
- **Craft:** Star Ornament

Closing: Nativity Greeting

Come Bless the Lord Icon:

Packet I: Nativity of Our Lord
Packet II:

Background Reading

(Direct quotations from the sources noted)

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).

The Date of the Nativity

"While many in the early Church sought to determine the date of our Lord's birth or His baptism in the Jordan, our observances of these feasts are connected more with annual calendar events than with historical dates. Their dates fall around the winter solstice, when the days begin to lengthen. All the pagan religions kept a feast around this time as a rebirth of hope in the return of the sun and warmth. Christians could not take part in the pagan festivities of false worship. Instead, they celebrated the beginning of the life of the true Son of God, the Light of Life. Thus the feast of Theophany was most likely introduced in Alexandria, Egypt to counteract a gnostic feast on the same day. Gnosticism (an early heresy) denied the humanity of Jesus and taught that the Son of God only entered Jesus at His baptism." Instead, Orthodox Christians celebrated the glorification of the Lord at His baptism as a manifestation of the Trinity" (LLII 43).

The Lesson Plan

Opening

[Gather the students before the icon of the Nativity at the icon corner.] *This is a special season in our Church year—the Feast of the Nativity or Birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. We use a special greeting during special seasons. Our greeting for the Nativity is “Christ is born!” The reply is “Glorify Him!” Let’s repeat both together. . . . Now I’ll say the greeting and you say the response.*

Introduction

Did you know that pictures can talk? How? [Allow responses.] Pictures can tell us a story. Have you ever figured out a story by looking only at the pictures? In our church, we have many pictures that tell stories. Do you know what I am talking about? Icons. The icon I will show you right now tells a story that we have been learning about. When we are done with this lesson, I hope you will be able to tell the story using this icon. It is the icon of the Nativity of Our Lord. Who remembers what Nativity means? (Birth)

[Point out story characters on icon when names appear in bold print.] *Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem and looked for a place to stay. There was no room at the inn where travelers stayed, so they had to go to a cave where the innkeeper kept his animals. It was there that **Mary** gave birth. **Mary** gave birth to **Jesus** and laid Him in a manger. **Joseph** was nearby.*

*There were **shepherds** in the fields keeping watch over their flocks of sheep. An **angel** of the Lord appeared to them and said, “I come to proclaim good news to you—tidings of great joy. This day a savior has been born to you, the Messiah and Lord. You will find Him in a manger wrapped in swaddling clothes.”*

*A beautiful and bright **star** appeared above the place where Jesus lay and more **angels** were seen. They were singing, “Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth and good will among men.” When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said, “Let us go to Bethlehem and find Him.” They found **Mary** and **Joseph** with the baby lying in the manger.*

*A little while later **wise men** came to see the newborn baby Jesus. They had seen His **star** rising. They came over to **Mary** and the baby and presented three gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh. **Mary** thought about all that had happened. [Paraphrased from Luke 2 and Matthew 2.] Do you think you can retell the story? Let’s read our lesson and see if that helps.*

Reading of Text

Hold text so that children can see the page as you read it to them. Read

slowly and draw their attention to the illustrations. After reading each page, use the questions below (given also on the bottom of the student text) to review what you have read.

Page 1

- *Why did Mary give birth to Jesus in a cave? (There was no room in the inn.)*
- *Where did Mary place Jesus? (In a manger)*
- *Where was Joseph? (Nearby)*

Page 2

- *Who appeared to the shepherds? (An angel)*
- *What did the angel say? (I proclaim good news; a savior has been born to you.)*
- *What did the shepherds say? (Let us go to find Him.)*
- *What was special about the sky that night? (A big and beautiful star appeared.)*
- *Who saw the star and followed it? (Three wise men)*

Page 3

- [Help the students retell the Nativity story by pointing to various parts of the icon.]

Activity Tracks

Basic: Jesus Is Born

Read the title to the children and also the story. They may color the illustration. Questions to reinforce the reading are as follows:

- *Where was Jesus born? (In a cave) What color do you think the cave should be? (black or dark)*
- *Who cared for Jesus? (Mary and Joseph)*
- *The animals had a special job. What did they do? (They stayed close to Jesus to keep Him warm.)*
- *You may color the icon.*

Group: Nativity Icon Review Game

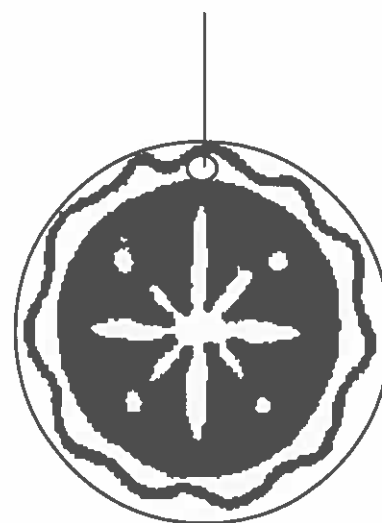
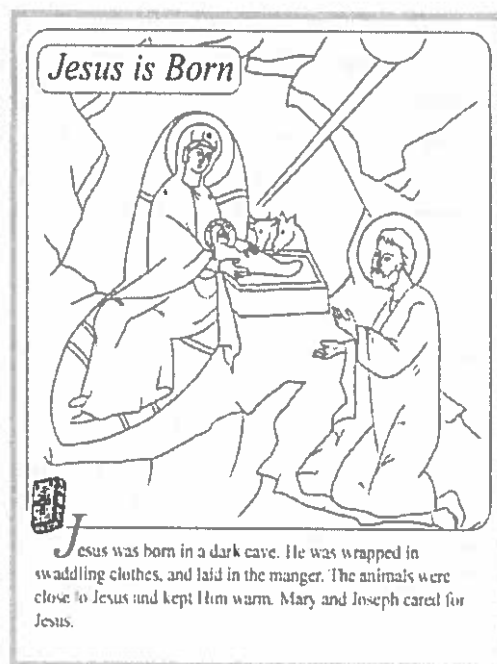
Materials: Nativity icon either from page 3 of lesson or from *Come Bless the Lord* packet, ball

[Have children sit in a half-circle on the floor. Sit facing them.] *We learned about the Nativity icon today. It tells the story of the Nativity. Let's see if you can remember what we learned. We'll play a game to help us remember. I have the Nativity icon here and a ball. I'll ask you a question about the icon. If you think you know the answer, raise your hand; and I'll roll the ball to you. When you have the ball, answer the question. If you answer correctly, hold onto the ball and you can roll it to someone who raises his or her hand after the next question. If you don't know the answer, the ball comes back to the one who had it to give someone else a chance. [You may have to demonstrate. Point to various people on the icon and ask who they are. You may wish to ask other questions related to the story, too. For example, point to the wise men and ask, "Where did the wise men come from?" (The East).]*

Craft: Star Ornament

Materials: Ornament worksheet copied onto heavier paper, markers, glitter, hole punch, yarn, glue, scissors

Today we studied the Nativity icon. One thing we see on the icon is the star that led the wise men and shepherds to Jesus. What do we call the star? (The star of Bethlehem) For our project today, we'll make an ornament for your Christmas tree. [Hold up sample.]



The ornament will be the star of Bethlehem. On the back it says our Christmas greeting, "Christ is born! Glorify Him!" First I'll pass out the ornament for you to color, trace over the greeting, and cut. Then we'll glue the front to the back and punch a hole through. Finally, we'll place the yarn so it can hang on your tree. [As the children work and you help them, ask each what the Christmas greeting is.]

Closing

[Gather the students before the icon of the Nativity at the icon corner.] We began our lesson with the greeting of the special season we're in. Who remembers the greeting? (Christ is born!—Glorify Him!) Who remembers which special season we're in? (The season of the Nativity or Birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.) For our closing, let's see if you can say "Christ is born!" and I'll say "Glorify Him!" Are you ready to say the greeting? "Christ is born!"—"Glorify Him!"



Christ is
Born!
Glorify
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