

Quick Summary Chart

The Christmas-Epiphany Season

FOCUS Group Levels	Preparing to Meet God	God Calls Us to Obey Him	Church & Family	True Worship of God	Shaping Our Future	Guiding News
<p>Session 1 Prepare the Way of the Lord <i>Waiting for Jesus, the Savior of the World</i></p>	<p>Christmas Lent is a time of waiting for a very special feast—the birth of God's Son Jesus. For 40 days, we wait to celebrate this big feast. Use the activity <u>"It's Hard to Wait!"</u> (in class or home)</p>	<p>Name ways we prepare for things or special events. How do we get ready for supper, church, a party or special event? How do we prepare for Christmas, the feast of Jesus birth? Make an <u>Advent Calendar</u>. cf. <u>Activities</u></p>	<p>Interview family or parish members to discover their favorite observances of Christmas. Read Bible stories about the birth of Jesus with your family. See Luke 2: 1-20. Make an <u>Advent Calendar</u>: cf. <u>Activities</u></p>	<p>The Birth of Christ: <u>"God with Us"</u> Matt. 1:18-25; 2:1-23, challenged all religions of the world, whether they focused on worship of idols, kings or political leaders. What idols today detract us from living a life in Christ?</p>	<p>How do we adjust our lifestyle to the Church's rhythm of <u>Preparing for Fasts and Feasts</u>? Plan how you or your family will prepare for the feasts of Christmas and Epiphany: what you will add, subtract or change in your life.</p>	<p>As a child, what traditions did you look forward to during the Christmas & Epiphany season? Which traditions have you kept and passed on to others. Which are the most meaningful to you today?</p>
<p>Session 2 Mary, the "Living Temple of God" <i>Mary accepts to be the Mother of Jesus</i></p>	<p>Mary the mother of Jesus was presented in the Temple when she was a 3-year old child. God chose her and prepared her to be the mother of His Son, Jesus. <u>GWU</u></p>	<p>From childhood, Mary the mother of Jesus spent her time praying to God & preparing to serve Him. Sing the verses she sang: <u>"My soul magnifies the Lord"</u>... and <u>"More honorable...."</u></p>	<p>Mary and Joseph raised Jesus in the tradition of the Hebrew people. Read Lk. 2:22-32,39-40, 41-52 to see how they followed the tradition. Why did Jesus stay to listen to the teachers.</p>	<p>Explain why Mary is called the <u>Living Temple</u> of God. How might we also become living temples of the Lord? What does this mean in practical terms in daily life? Give examples.</p>	<p>List 3-4 attitudes, practices, or values related to Advent and the feast of the Nativity that you would like to nurture in yourself or your children. Why are these important to you?</p>	<p>Read Luke 1 & Matt. 1:18-25. Discuss the lives and reactions of the parents of John and Jesus. How were they alike or different? What attitudes or behaviors can we learn from them?</p>
<p>Session 3 Prophets & Leaders of God's People <i>The Prophets Call People to Return to God</i></p>	<p>A long time before Jesus was born, the people on earth forgot God's law and disobeyed Him. Learn about the prophet John the Baptist, who baptized Jesus and told people to follow Him</p>	<p>Describe prophets as those who brought God's Word to people who had forgotten God. God sent men called prophets to remind them of the right way to live. They told people to return to God's way and to obey Him.</p>	<p>Illustrate Old Testament events: the Passover, crossing the Red Sea, the desert years (cf. Exo. 12-15; Deut. 6, 11). Moses & Aaron taught the Hebrew people to understand they were God's people & to follow His ways.</p>	<p>Find & explain the meaning of Old Testament prophecies and the events they pointed to in the New Testament. Cf. Micah 5:2-4; Isaiah 7:10-17; 9:1-7; 11:1-10; 60:1-6. Re-late these to the Christmas hymns.</p>	<p>Give examples of how Jesus challenged the relationships and customs of His time. Cf. Matt. Ch. 5-7. Discuss what Jesus' taught and how He took people beyond the limits of the Old Testament Commandments.</p>	<p>Reflect upon 1 Peter 4:1-11 and its meaning for you. Keep a journal of your thoughts, values, commitments, struggles, and faithfulness, as you try to fulfill God's will in your life today.</p>
<p>Session 4 God's People, the Saints <i>The Saints Show Us How to Live as God's People</i></p>	<p>Prepare a Christmas playlet using the verse: <u>"What Shall We Offer?"</u> Help children paint or color large pictures on pre-cut card stock that appear in the festal icon and in the verse. Cf. <u>Activities</u> for instructions.</p>	<p>Tell stories about saints who lived as God wants us to live: e.g., those who always prayed to God and helped others. Make <u>paper chains</u> for Advent that suggest things you can do for others and improve your own habits.</p>	<p>Read the story of Jesus' visit to the Temple at age 12. Tell what He did and why his earthly parents were worried about Him. Was He being "disobedient"? What did He mean by "my Father's house?" Lk. 2:39-52</p>	<p>Using stories from the series <u>"Saints for All Ages,"</u> let each student choose a story to report on the life of a saint. Tell or show in mural panels how each saint shows a different or personal way to do God's will.</p>	<p>(1 Cor. 3:10-17; 12:1-31) St. Paul describes the Church as a body and a temple. Evaluate how we measure up to his criteria. Give examples of how we, as persons, families, or parishes can grow in this way.</p>	<p>Cf. Lk. 2:22-39. Simeon and Anna had lived long lives and both had prayed to God for a sign of God's blessing upon the nation of Israel. What examples of such strong faith have you witnessed in others?</p>
<p>Session 5 Daniel and the Three Holy Youths <i>God Saves Those Who Believe in Him</i></p>	<p>God loves and protects those who believe in Him. Tell the story of the 3 Youths in the Furnace and how God protected them for they believed in Him. Make instruments for role-playing the story. cf. <u>Activities</u></p>	<p>Listen to and then role-play the story of the <u>Three Young Men in the Fiery Furnace</u>. Tell why (or how) they were saved by God. Learn to sing the <u>Refrain</u> for the verses of their song.</p>	<p>The prophet Daniel challenged King Nebuchadnezzar, refusing to worship him, for Daniel only worshipped the God of Heaven & His power. Cf. <u>The 3 Holy Youths in the Fiery Furnace</u>.</p>	<p>Kings & kingdoms of this world vs. the Kingdom of Heaven. Name the kinds of idols to which we give our attention today. How many are worthy of our time, attention, or activity?</p>	<p>Name the kinds of things or values that you would be willing to defend (even with your life) today. How are any of these related to your faith in Christ, or to His Church?</p>	<p>What difficulties have you faced in raising your children and grandchildren in the Orthodox faith? What would you have done differently or what can you still do today?</p>
<p>Session 6 The Ancestors of God <i>We Remember All the Faithful People Who Followed God's Will</i></p>	<p>Every family has special things they do on the feast of Jesus' birth. Tell how you, your parents, grand-parents and relatives prepare and celebrate the birth of Jesus. Put the icon, candles, greenery [and creche] on the table.</p>	<p>Review some of the names, events or families related to Old Testament "ancestors" of God, e.g., Abraham & his son Isaac, Jacob, Judah and his brothers, Jesse the father of David, Solomon the son of David.</p>	<p>Who are <u>our</u> "ancestors" in the faith? How are we the same or different from them? What have we learned from them? e.g., beliefs, values, steadfastness, humility, patience, etc. (Give names and examples.)</p>	<p>Name problems you face with feast days, and how you deal with them in school or at work. Does Orthodox faith and practice shape your identity? Do you accept it and witness to your faith in life, or do you try to hide it?</p>	<p>Do you converse/share your Orthodox identity with neighbors or co-workers? Do you share similar values, exchange or participate (to whatever extent possible) in each others' celebrations and respect each others' traditions?</p>	<p>Prayer and remembrance (of both the living and the departed) are the foundation of life in Christ and in the community of the Church. Keep a prayer list and spend 15 minutes several times a day remembering others in prayer.</p>
<p>Session 7 The Holy Week of Christmas <i>We Prepare for God's Coming by Helping Those in Need</i></p>	<p>Color pictures of ornaments to put on your Christmas tree, give to others or hang in a window. Put a Christmas sticker each day on a calendar to keep track of the days remaining before Christmas.</p>	<p>Prepare small gifts to give to others or visit people whose families live far away and can't travel to celebrate with them. With your parents' help, send cards, bring flowers or invite to dinner a neighbor who lives alone.</p>	<p>Illustrate verses from the Christmas services that describe events connected with the birth of Christ; or write a play about Jesus' birth using dialogue/words from the verses as your source.</p>	<p>Working in teams, plan/organize a community service project (for several weeks or visits) to bring some cheer (small gift or plant) to senior citizens in the parish, neighborhood, or hospitals during the holidays.</p>	<p>If you live in a mixed cultural neighborhood, help organize, or support a school-sponsored festival or program to share the meaning & celebration of the many different holiday traditions that are observed at this time of year. Share your Orthodox traditions.</p>	<p>Share stories with grandchildren (or children in your neighborhood) of your favorite traditions during the Christmas-Epiphany season. Make a special scrapbook or photo album with brief recollections and photos to remember your favorite times.</p>
<p>Session 8 "Christ is Born! Glorify Him!" <i>We Celebrate the Coming of God's Son</i></p>	<p>Name & practice ways you can be kind and helpful to members of your family & neighbors. Name things you can do to help at home. Learn the greeting: "Christ is born! Glorify Him!"</p>	<p>Discuss jobs and responsibilities in your family, at school, and as a member of the church. What do we learn from having to do something that helps everyone?</p>	<p>Help clean and decorate the church for the Christmas feast. Continue during the following week(s) to check and water the plants, remove dead leaves, etc.</p>	<p>Practice singing carols and organize groups to sing for shut-ins, seniors and those in nursing homes and children's hospitals. Get permissions and guidelines in advance.</p>	<p>Describe ways you are responsible for or accountable to your family (children, parents, extended family, friends), the church community (local, diocese, national).</p>	<p>Plan ways to be responsible and accountable for yourself, family, church, etc., by wisely managing your finances, insurances, health & bequests. Be faithful in spiritual life. Ask for help if you need it.</p>