

The Nativity Season

Introduction

All great things in life must be prepared for—we human beings can't just casually “walk up to” significant events without readying ourselves for them. And certainly the Great Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord calls for joyful yet serious preparation.

That is why this unit of study is entitled *The Nativity Season*. The feast does not stand alone. In preparation for the Feast of the Nativity, the Church offers us a season, a time, to prepare—the Nativity Fast, or Nativity Lent, known to many in the West as Advent. One of the lessons in this five-lesson unit deals with this period of preparation.

God began preparing His people long ago, of course. A second lesson in the unit tells students about the ancestors and genealogy of Jesus Christ. The all-important Biblical connection is made in this lesson, showing students how the Old Testament prepared people over millennia for the coming of the promised Savior. The Theotokos is presented as the one who brought this long process to its intended fruition.

The Nativity season also brings us celebrations of several inspiring saints. First among these is Saint Nicholas, and a third lesson in this unit gives students an understanding of his real place in the Church. They come to see him as a self-denying defender of the faith and protector of the poor, rather than merely a cozy and uncritical dispenser of presents.

Another lesson takes students into the lives of more “winter saints”—among them Saint Romanus the Melodist, Saint Barbara and Saint Herman. And of course there is a lesson on the various aspects of the Feast itself.

Like all the units now being produced by the DCE, this one is written on five levels, thus offering material for parishioners of all ages. So, for example, in one lesson the younger children talk together on a simple level about giving and receiving gifts. The same lesson, written on another level, invites older students to look at *The Gift of the Magi*, O. Henry's great story about self-sacrifice and love. The format of all these lessons is the same as that in the units already available.

Two overall objectives for this unit are:

1. Students will be able to **describe** some of the elements of the Nativity season, including hymns, saints, fasting, and Old Testament preparation.
2. Students will be able to **define** the Feast of the Nativity as God's long-awaited gift to us of a Savior.

Some Notes:

Gathering for Prayer: We suggest having a gathering place for the class to pray together. You might have a candle, flowers or a plant, and the appropriate icon for the lesson. Icons are provided in the Resource Section of each lesson. You can reproduce these and put them on backing and then display them on a small stand (like a

plate stand.) Of course you can use your own icons, or print out the ones in the *Feasts and Saints* section of the OCA website.

Teachers of younger students may also want to establish a place to gather for stories. A specified area, perhaps sitting on a rug or gathering in a circle of chairs, will serve the purpose well.

Preparing Ahead of Time: Lessons include themes, objectives, attached resources, step-by-step procedure, and a list of materials needed. In some lessons, the *Materials* section will give you special notes for lesson preparation. These enable you, as you prepare by reading through the lesson and getting materials ready, to be aware of any particular things you'll need to do. It is assumed that you will always have Bibles (we recommend the Revised Standard Version) plus pens/pencils and paper ready for use in class.

Timing Your Lessons: Because our church schools vary widely in the time they have for teaching, we have not timed the procedural steps of these lessons specifically. You are free to adapt, shorten or expand the material, or to spread it over more than one session.

Extra Resources: Many lessons include extra information, icons, links to resources, or other items. Use these for your own edification, or to enhance your class presentations. They are there for you to use in whatever way you choose.

***For unto us a child is born; unto us a Son is given. Authority rests on His shoulders, and He is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace
(Isaiah 9: 6.)***

Prepare the Way of the Lord (Ages

7-9)

Overview

It's Hard To Wait - Students will consider the stories of the coming of God's Son to us on earth, as He is born of Mary "as a little child." They will consider the concept of "waiting" and preparing for something important. The birth of Christ, the "light of wisdom," is the most important event ever to have taken place.

Objectives

By the end of this Lesson, learners should be able to:

- Give examples of things you had to wait to have happen (or to receive)
- Describe how you felt and whether or not the waiting was difficult
- Compare waiting for special events in your life to the Church waiting for the birth of Jesus during the Nativity Fast
- Describe the importance of the preparation for the birth (nativity) of Jesus Christ
- Identify people and things in the icon of the Nativity of Our Lord

Materials

- Bowl of treats (have enough for each child to choose one from among several. If you choose to have edible treats, be aware of children's dietary restrictions, allergies etc. You may choose instead to have non-edible treats such as Christmas trinkets or small puzzles)
 - Copies of the [blank](#) November and December page from My Advent Calendar (a Resource for this lesson) for each child
 - Recording of the Troparion for the Nativity of Christ, and a player to play it in class.
 - Four pieces of card stock or heavy paper. On one card, in large enough letters for the students to read in class, write the first 2 lines of the Nativity Troparion (beginning with *Thy--or Your* if that is the word used in your parish--and *Has.*) On the second card, write the next 2 lines, beginning *For* and *Were*. On the third card write the next 2 lines beginning *The* and *And*. On the fourth card write the entire last line: O Lord, glory to Thee (or You).
 - Chart with all the words of the Nativity Troparion, large enough for students to read in class. Again, use "thee" or "you" according to the way it is sung in your parish.
 - Tape
 - Icon of the Nativity of Christ
 - Pre-made Advent Calendars (in the Resources for this lesson)
 - Christmas Stickers
-
- For the "Waiting Game" (see #2 of Procedure for this lesson) have

- a timer or stopwatch
- an inflated beach ball, or a plastic or sponge wiffle ball, or something light like a roll of paper towels (put a few rubber bands around the roll so it stays together) that students can safely throw to one another.
- for each group of 4 to 6 students--a Bible, a pencil, and a copy of the sheet "Bible People Who Waited." Create the sheet by putting the title at the top, and then the following, leaving room for students to write in answers:

1. Read about me in Genesis 8: 6-12. What did I wait for? What is my name?

2. Read about me in Psalm 37: 1-9. What did I wait for? What is my name?

3. Read about me in Luke 2: 25-32. What did I wait for? What is my name?

4. Read about me in Acts 18: 24-26. What did I wait for? What is my name?

(Correct answers are in #2 of the Procedure for this lesson)

- for the first part of the game, a basket or container with small folded sheets of paper. On each paper write one of these phrases:

Something you wait for all year

A time you waited in line (*make 4 copies*)

A place where you have waited more than once

A time when you have to wait your turn (*make 4 copies*)

A time during this past week when you waited (*make 4 copies*)

Something you waited for when you were very young

A place where a machine tells you to wait

Something that was really worth waiting for (*make 4 copies*)

(Note: The "place where a machine tells you to wait" might be a hard one for students to think of. You could suggest answers such as a walk/wait or walk/don't walk sign, or a toll booth.)

Resources

Required Resources

[Icon of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of the Nativity of the Theotokos \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of The Presentation \(Meeting\) of Our Lord \(Image\)](#)

Optional Resources

[Entrance of the Theotokos in the Temple \(Icon\) \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of Christ and the Children \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of Christ the Pantocrator \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of the Conception of the Theotokos \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of The Crucifixion of the Lord \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of The Deisis \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of The Dormition \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of The Entry Into Jerusalem \(Image\)](#)

[Saint Barbara the Greatmartyr \(Image\)](#)

[Tikhvin Icon of the Mother of God \(Image\)](#)

Procedure

1 Opening Prayer

(Have students stand.) In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

{Have the icon of the Nativity displayed where students can see it. Also have the chart with all the words of the Nativity Troparion where students can clearly see it.) Play the recording of the Nativity Troparion through a few times. Then, next to the chart, put up the card with the first two lines, and practice just these two lines with the students a few times.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

2 Waiting and Preparing: Discussion and Game

Ask students:

- When have you had to wait for something important to happen?
- What makes waiting difficult, or not so difficult?

Let students give their own answers to these questions; to help the discussion you might tell about some experiences of waiting in your own life.

For the "Waiting Game," have students stand in two lines, about three feet apart.

- Have container of folded papers and ball/object ready. Tell students the papers describe situations in which we wait for something.
- Tell students that each person will choose a paper, read it aloud, and think of an answer as quickly as possible.
- That person will then throw the ball to someone on the other team, who will repeat the process: choose a paper, read it aloud, think of an answer and throw the ball to someone on the other team, all as quickly as possible.
- Tell students that some of the papers say the same thing, because there are many possible answers that could be given.

Be sure each student gets at least one turn

This part of the game was just for fun. To choose a winning team, give each team--either 2 teams, or 4 if your class is large--a Bible, pencil, and a "Bible People Who Waited" sheet. Tell the students:

- The winning team will be the one that works together to find the information in the Bible and gives clear, complete answers on the sheet in the shortest time.
- You will time their work; limit is 5 minutes.
- They will start when you begin timing and say "Go."

You may choose not to have a winner, but rather just use this as a timed exercise. Correct answers for the sheet are as follows. (Students' answers may differ in wording but should give the same general idea.)

#1. Genesis 8: 6-12. *I waited for the dove to return with an olive branch, showing that the waters of the Flood had subsided. My name is Noah.*

#2. Psalm 37: 1-9. *I waited for the Lord (to do His will in His own time--students should be able to tell you that this is what the psalm writer was waiting for, even if they did not include it in their written answer). My name is David.*

#3: Luke 2: 25-32. *I waited to see the Lord's Christ (the promised Savior--students should know that this is what "the Lord's Christ" means, even if they did not include it in their written answer.) My name is Simeon.*

#4: Acts 18:24-26. *I waited with my husband Aquila till after Apollos had preached in the synagogue. Then Aquila and I took him aside and taught him the way of God "more accurately" (in other words, we corrected some of what he had said.) My name is Priscilla.*

3 Discussion: The Nativity Troparion

Talk about the words of the Nativity Troparion, referring to the words on the chart.

Ask students to define "nativity." To reinforce the fact that "nativity" means birth, ask each student to state the date of his or her day of nativity. The "Nativity Feast" is the Church's celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ on earth.

Ask students what other name we often give this feast. The answer, of course, is "Christmas."

Referring to the words of the Troparion, ask students to find three ways that Jesus is described as light. (The phrases "light of wisdom", "sun of righteousness" and "orient from on high" all describe Him in this way.) The "Orient" is the guiding light that rises in the East.

Ask students to what other name is often used for "Magi." The magi or wise men were astronomers who paid attention to the stars in the night sky, looking to them to find out what might happen in the world. They were brought by a special star to the cave where the baby Jesus, the holy Son of God, was born. So the Troparion tells us that the magi who "worshipped the stars" were taught by the star they followed to adore the "Sun of Righteousness," who gives true wisdom that no star in the sky can give.

Read together the story "The Star and the Wise Men", in the *Stories* section of the Resources for this unit. It's the 4th story on the 5th page of the *Stories* section. Ask, "*Why was Herod so worried about the birth of Jesus Christ?*" (He didn't want another king. He could not understand that Jesus Christ was not looking for political power.)

Ask, "*What did Herod 'wait and wait' for?*" (He hoped the wise men would tell him where to find and kill Jesus Christ. Such evil waiting was not rewarded by God.)

Ask, "*What did Joseph and Mary have to wait for?*" (They had to wait to return from Egypt to their home until Herod had died and could no longer threaten Jesus Christ.)

4 Nativity Icon

Have the Nativity icon displayed where all students can see it well.

Put out the bowl of treats, and tell students that you're going to have a brief experience of waiting. Everyone can choose a treat at the end of class, waiting till then to do so.

Put the words "Advent" and "Nativity Fast" on the chalkboard. During Advent or the Nativity Fast, we are waiting for something--the birth of God's Son, Jesus Christ..

Look together at the icon of the Nativity. Help the children identify the various figures in the Nativity icon: Mary, Joseph, the animals, the shepherds, the magi, and especially the anticipated baby Jesus.

We wait through the weeks of the Nativity Fast, until Christmas Day when we celebrate the birthday of Christ. Not until the day of Christmas will we hear the priest exclaim, "Christ is Born!" And we will answer, "Glorify Him!"

But what does it mean to "glorify" Him? When we answer, "Glorify Him," we thank God, like all those in the icon. We are joyful because Jesus Christ, the Son of God the Father, has been born so that He could be here in with us to help and save us.

Write the greeting and response on the chalkboard. Practice them with the class.

5 Advent Calendar

Give students their copies of the blank November and December pages from the *Resource* for this lesson, entitled *My Advent Calendar*. Have them put their names on both sheets.

Say, "*We said that Advent is a time of waiting for the Nativity Feast. How do calendars help us wait and prepare?*" (They mark the days, and we can put marks on them to remind us of how we need to prepare for things that are going to happen.)

Ask students what days are marked on calendars at home--birthdays, appointments, etc.

Have students choose stickers and mark November 15, the beginning of Advent or the Nativity Fast, and Christmas, the Feast of the Nativity, on December 25. The days in between are the period of the Fast, or Advent.

Ask students about some ways we can prepare for the coming of Jesus Christ, such as prayer, fasting, and serving others by helping them, praying for them, and being kind to them.

Collect the calendar pages to use in an upcoming lesson.

Give students each pencil and paper, and ask them to write one way they will try to serve others during the time of Advent, as Jesus Christ served all of us when He came to be with us and save us.

6 Optional Activity

Students could create a paper chain, which they add to each week, of things they plan to do during Advent to help and serve others. They could also add links of a different color of things they have done during this time.

7 Wrap Up

As students are preparing for the Closing Prayer, ask:

- *How can the Advent calendar help you wait for the Birth of Christ?* (Marking off the days can help us see them getting to be fewer.)
- *Sometimes, does waiting for something make it even better when it comes?* (Students may have varying opinions.)

Next:

- Review the meaning of the word "nativity" and the terms that apply to Jesus Christ in the Nativity Troparion.
- Enjoy the treats together. Praise the students for waiting.

8 Closing Prayer

(Have students stand.) In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Repeat the procedure for the Opening Prayer.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

Showing God's Love *(Ages 7-9)*

Overview

St. Nicholas of Myra in Lycia - The life of St. Nicholas gives an outstanding example of helping others without seeking thanks or praise. We also can associate acts of charity with the real St. Nicholas and help students not to confuse him with the more familiar Santa Claus.

Objectives

By the end of this Lesson, learners should be able to:

- Compare and contrast the acts of getting/giving.
- Retell some generous acts of St. Nicholas
- List ways we can imitate St. Nicholas and his acts of charity
- Give a simple definition of the word "saint"

Materials

- Icon of the Nativity of Christ (use all throughout this unit)
- Card stock in various colors for students to make thank you cards
- Crayons, markers, pens, stickers to decorate thank you cards
- Map showing the country of Turkey (can be a book page--just to point out Turkey on a map while telling the story of St. Nicholas' life)

Resources

Required Resources

- [Biography - Santa Claus \(2005\) \(Image\)](#)
- [Icon of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ \(Image\)](#)
- [Saint Nicholas of Myra\(HTML\)](#)
- [St. Nicholas - Nearly Everybody's Saint!\(HTML\)](#)
- [St. Nicholas Banners \(HTML\)](#)
- [Story of St. Nicholas\(HTML\)](#)
- [Troparion of St. Nicholas\(HTML\)](#)

Optional Resources

- [Discovering the Truth About Santa Claus\(Link\)](#)
- [St. Nicholas Archbishop of Myra in Lycia Icon \(Image\)](#)
- [St. Nicholas Archbishop of Myra in Lycia Icon \(Image\)](#)
- [St. Nicholas the Wonder-Worker](#)

[St. Nicholas Archbishop of Myra in Lycia\(HTML\)](#)

[St. Nicholas Troparian & Kontakion \(Book\)](#)

[The Real Santa Claus: Legends of Saint Nicholas \(Image\)](#)

[Wonderworker \(Image\)](#)

Procedure

1 Opening Prayer

Have the Nativity icon displayed where students can see it, for this and all Opening Prayers and Closing Prayers in the unit.

(Have students stand.) In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Follow the same procedure as in the previous lesson, but put up the card with the second set of lines (starting with "For" and "Were") and practice those. Then put up the card with the first two lines, and practice all four lines.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

2 Giving and Receiving

Ask, *"Have you ever received a gift without knowing who it was from?"* Have students answer, and then ask, *"Have you ever given a gift secretly, so that the person didn't know it was from you?"* Talk about this, then ask, *"Why would someone give a gift secretly?"* Let students answer. (Possible answers: *Not wanting to embarrass the recipient, feeling generous and not looking for thanks, etc.*)

Read together Matthew 6: 2-4. Ask, *"What is Jesus Christ saying here about the things we have talked about?"* (Let students answer. Bring out the point that He is saying not to look for praise, or to do things with receiving praise in mind. Rather, do them because you love God and other people. Try to help students understand that when Jesus speaks about God rewarding us, He means that God responds to our love with His love, just as people respond to others' love with their own love. Jesus' words do not mean that God measures our love and then gives some tangible reward for it.)

3 The Life of St. Nicholas: Story and Icon

Have the icon displayed where students can easily see it. Say, "*This is the icon of a saint. What is a saint?*" (Let students answer. Bring out the point that a saint is a man or woman who loves God and tries hard to live the way He wants us all to live. If your church is named for a saint, mention that saint's name.)

Ask students, "*What do you think are some things a saint might do?*" (Let students answer. Mention, if they don't, such things as praying, being loving to others, not trying to pile up money or possessions for themselves.)

Tell the students you are going to read about a saint who was famous for giving gifts secretly, and ask them to give the saint's name if they can. Read them the following story of the life of St. Nicholas. You may want to gather them together to sit on a rug, in a circle of chairs, or in some other special way, for this story and others.

Saint Nicholas was born hundreds of years ago in a small town near the sea. It's now in the country of Turkey. (*Show Turkey on map.*) His parents raised him to love God and to care about other people. Nicholas had a great sadness--his parents both died while he was young. But he always remembered what they had taught him, and he helped other people whenever he could.

So it isn't a surprise to learn that one day, Nicholas did something that people still remember today, hundreds of years later. A very poor man in the town had three daughters who all wanted to get married. But their father had no money to give them the things they needed to get married, or even enough to buy a few nice clothes.

Nicholas's parents had left him a good amount of money, but he wasn't interested in keeping it for himself. On a dark summer night, he took a bag of gold and threw it in the poor man's window. Hearing the noise, the man woke up and ran to the window, but couldn't see Nicholas outside.

The next night, Nicholas did the same thing, again making sure that nobody saw him. But on a third night, the man was waiting by the window and saw the generous man who had saved his daughters from poverty. He thanked Nicholas with tears of joy running down his face, but Nicholas just nodded his head, smiled, and told the man to give thanks to God. Then he quickly left.

People in the town and the surrounding area came to love Nicholas. It seemed he was always helping someone, smiling at a child, or giving poorer neighbors what they needed. When it came time to elect a new bishop, Nicholas was everyone's choice.

But the Emperor Diocletian hated Christians, and soon Nicholas was arrested, chained, and thrown into prison. When the next Emperor, Constantine, took the throne, Nicholas and thousands of other Christians were finally set free. They had been tortured and starved, but they still kept their faith. Nicholas would face many troubles and would suffer during his life, but he never stopped helping others.

There is a story of sailors who were caught in a raging storm at sea. They had heard of St. Nicholas, and they had heard that he saved people and even did miracles. They called on him to save them, and as they did so he came to them in a vision, took the helm himself, and guided the boat safely into port. When the sailors reached town they went to church and thanked God, just as Nicholas would have wanted them to. After this happened, sailors would wish each other a safe journey by saying, "May St. Nicholas hold the tiller!" (*Ask students what the tiller is, and if necessary tell them it is a bar or handle on a boat that turns the rudder, the hinged piece that steers the boat.*)

Another time, there was a famine--a terrible shortage of food--in Nicholas' home town of Myra. Some ships loaded with wheat came into the harbor, on their way to the great city of Constantinople. Bishop Nicholas asked the men on the ships to leave some wheat for his starving people. They refused, because they were worried that they would get in trouble if they arrived at Constantinople with less than full loads. But the bishop promised them that they would have no problem.

The men trusted this bishop so famous for his goodness and mercy. They left two years' worth of wheat. And sure enough, when they reached the port at Constantinople, their ships were full.

St. Nicholas did many miracles. But we remember him especially for his kindness. We may never do miracles, but we can help and be kind to others. Maybe, like St. Nicholas, we can sometimes do good things secretly. Only God will know, and He will rejoice that we have learned from the great saint and bishop, Nicholas.

4 Story Review

Review the story with a "True/False" game.

Have students stand, making sure they have room around them to move and make gestures. Tell them, *"For this review game, I am going to say something about St. Nicholas. I will ask you to do one thing if what I have said is true. I will ask you to do something else if what I have said is false. So listen carefully!" (Be ready to repeat each statement, and give students a few seconds to think about it. Give correct answers each time.)*

1. Say, **"The country of Greece is where Saint Nicholas was born. If that's true, march in place. If that's false, raise both hands high in the air."** (False--he was born in Turkey.)
2. Say, **"Saint Nicholas's parents were poor farmers. If that's true, bend over and touch the floor with your fingers. If that's false, put your hands behind your head."** (False--they were wealthy city people.)
3. Say, **"Saint Nicholas was a bishop. If that's true, put your hands above your head and clap. If that's false, march in place."** (True.)

4. Say, "**Saint Nicholas's parents died when he was young.** If that's true, turn around in a circle. If that's false, bend over and touch the floor with your fingers." (True.)

5. Say, "**Saint Nicholas was put in prison and tortured for being a Christian.** If that's true, wiggle all ten fingers. If that's false, raise both hands high in the air." (True.)

6. Say, "**Some other prisoners and Saint Nicholas secretly escaped from prison one very dark night.** If that's true, put your hands behind your head. If that's false, bend over and touch the floor with your fingers." (False. Saint Nicholas was released from prison only when a new emperor came to the throne.)

7. Say, "**Sailors wished each other a safe journey by saying, 'May Saint Nicholas keep your boat from sinking.'** If that's true, march in place. If that's false, wiggle all ten fingers." (False. They said, "May Saint Nicholas hold the tiller" because of a time when he came in a vision to sailors in a storm, and guided their boat safely to harbor.)

8. Say, "**Saint Nicholas, when he was a bishop, once saved his people from starving by getting loaded ships to leave grain with him.** If that's true, turn around in a circle. If that's false, put your hands high above your head." (True. Ask students to tell you the part of the story that is a miracle--the ships were still fully loaded when they reached their final port, even though they had left a good deal of grain for Nicholas' people.)

5 Thank You Cards

Ask each student to think of someone--a family member, a friend, or someone in the church community--to whom they would like to offer thanks for something. Have each student choose a piece of card paper or stock, fold it, write a message to the person, sign the card, and decorate it with markers, stickers, and any other materials you have brought.

Have the students think of ways they might be able to deliver the cards in secret, as Saint Nicholas delivered his bags of gold for the three girls and their father. (It may not be possible for some or all of them to do this in secret, and that is all right.)

Ask students to think, during the coming weeks, of helpful things they might do for others for which they may not be thanked. Remind them that God is always made joyful when we are kind and helpful.

6 Optional Activity: Shoes Filled with Treats

Some cultures leave shoes out so that St. Nicholas can fill them with treats. This could be done outside the classroom door during class for a wonderful surprise. Or you might consider holding a festival for the church school close to the saint's feast day on December 6. The students could

leave shoes out at the beginning of the festival. During the festival, the children could make banners of St. Nicholas to be used for the Festal Liturgy in a procession of church school students before the Little Entrance. (See the Resources for this lesson for very simple directions on banner making, or look on line for ideas.)

7 Wrap Up

As students are cleaning up and preparing for closing prayer, put this line from the Troparion for St. Nicholas on the chalkboard:

Your poverty enriched you.

Ask, *"What do you think this line means? How could poverty--which means having or owning very little--make a person rich?"* (Let students answer. Help them see that by giving his time, energy and money to others, working for them, even saving them from starvation and death, St. Nicholas received blessings from God. Those are the real riches.)

Say, *"Saint Nicholas was a bishop. We have a bishop, too. Who is our bishop?"* (Let children answer; provide the name of your Diocesan bishop if they cannot, and show his picture.)

8 Closing Prayer

Follow the same procedure as in the Opening Prayer. putting up the card with the second set of lines (starting with "For" and "Were") and practicing those. Then put up the card with the first two lines, and practice all four lines.

(Have students stand.)

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.

The Winter Saints (Ages 7-9)

Overview

Saints Are Special People Who Are Friends of God. - Knowing about these winter saints helps students to know and prepare for Christ's birth.

Objectives

By the end of this Lesson, learners should be able to:

- Tell basic facts about the lives of Saints Romanus, Barbara and Herman
- Define in very basic terms the word "Kontakion"
- Identify Saint Romanus as the composer of the Kontakion on the Nativity of Christ

Materials

- Resource Download: *Kontakion, Nativity of Christ*. In the *Resources* for this lesson is an MP3 file of the Kontakion which you can download and burn to a CD for use in class
- Resource handout: *St. Herman Handouts* for each student
- Icons of St. Romanus
- Icon of the Nativity of Christ
- Icon of St. Barbara
- Blue or gray crayons (any shades) for each student to have one
- Picture of the Cathedral of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul/Constantinople (this is easily obtained in a book or on line)
- A rolled-up paper, on which you have drawn lines and some musical notes, to represent the musical scroll used by Saint Romanus

Resources

Required Resources

[Kontakion on the Nativity of Christ \(PDF\)](#)

[St Herman Handouts \(PDF\)](#)

[Kontakion, Nativity of Christ \(MP3\)](#)

[St Herman Resources\(Link\)](#)

[Icon of St. Romanus \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of St. Romanus the Melodist \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of St. Romanus \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of St. Romanus\(HTML\)](#)

[Icon of St. Romanus the Melodist \(Image\)](#)

Optional Resources

[St. Romanus the Melodist\(Link\)](#)

[Saint Barbara the Greatmartyr \(Image\)](#)

[The Holy Greatmartyr Barbara](#)

Procedure

1 Opening Prayer

Have the Nativity icon displayed where students can see it.

(Have students stand.) In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Follow the same procedure as in the previous lessons, but put up the card with the third set of lines (starting with "The" and "And") and practice those. Then put up the cards with the first two and second two lines, and practice all six lines.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

2 Things We Want to Do

Ask students to name some things they would like to be able to do well, or be good at--perhaps music, drawing or writing, sports or other skills and arts. Put their answers on the chalkboard in a numbered list.

Go through the list and let students suggest ways in which a person could become good at each thing. Add their answers to the items on the chalkboard. They will probably mention such things as consistent practice, having the right equipment and finding good teachers.

Ask, *"Can we ask God and His saints to help us become good at something we really want to do?"*
(Let students answer. Bring out the point that God has given us the talents and abilities we have. If we are willing to work hard, practice, and listen to teachers, God and the saints will be with us in our efforts.)

Say, "Let's learn about someone who had something he really wanted to do. He prayed for a saint's help, and also worked hard and practiced. His name is Saint Romanus."

3 The Life of Saint Romanus

Gather students in a circle, perhaps sitting on the carpet. Display an icon of Saint Romanus while you tell the following story.

Saint Romanus was born in Syria in the fifth century. He moved to Constantinople, where he helped the priests and bishop in the great church of Hagia Sophia. (Show the photo of Hagia Sophia.) This was the central church of the city, and many people came to worship and pray there, so Romanus was always busy. But he spent his nights praying alone, sometimes in a field or in a smaller church outside the city.

One Christmas Eve, the night before the feast of the Nativity of Jesus Christ, Romanus was asked to read some of the prayers during the service. The great church was crowded with people. There were government officials, priests and monks and nuns, and families. Everyone was listening to the beautiful prayers and hymns.

But Romanus was not a good reader. He did not say the words clearly, and nobody could understand what he was saying. Another reader had to take his place. Some people laughed at him, and everyone in that crowded church could hear them laughing.

Romanus was embarrassed, and ashamed of his failure. He wanted so much to be able to read in church, and to let people hear the beauty of God's words. But maybe he would never be able to. Feeling completely miserable, he prayed before the icon of Mary, the Mother of God, pouring out his sorrow.

The next day, the Mother of God spoke to him in a gentle voice as he prayed. She gave him a scroll (show the scroll and say that a scroll can have writing or music on it) and told him to eat it. That may seem strange to us, but it was her gift to the young man. It probably tasted like thin bread. Once he ate the scroll, a wonderful thing happened. Romanus was able to sing and to write church songs or hymns.

That evening in church, Romanus was able to sing in a beautiful voice. What did he sing? The very first hymn he wrote, the Nativity hymn that we heard and talked about today.

Romanus became a deacon in the church, and a teacher of singing and songs. Of course, he had to work very hard to do this. The gift from the Mother of God was not magic--it was her way of encouraging Romanus. But he had to practice and work to get better at singing and writing church songs.

But by the time he was older, he had written so many beautiful hymns and lived such a good life that the Church made him a saint. Romanus was able to do what he loved most, thanks to the

loving kindness of the Mother of God.

When Saint Romanus died, in about the year 556, he had written a thousand hymns. We have eighty of them and we sing them in our churches today. (end)

Ask: *"What did you think was the most important thing Romanus did?"* (Students' answers may vary. Point out that one important thing Romanus did was to pray for help to the Mother of God. He did not give up, or allow his embarrassing experience in church to make him stop trying to become a singer and writer of church songs.)

The Resource section has several icons of Saint Romanus. Look together at some of these. Ask students to note details that vary in the icons: the deacon's stole or orarion, the censer that a deacon (or priest) uses to cense the church during the Divine Liturgy, the musical scroll.

4 Story Review

Display the icon of the Nativity, and play the recording (see *Resources* for this lesson) of the Kontakion for the Nativity of Christ, or Christmas Kontakion, a few times for the class. Tell students that this is the best-known church song of Saint Romanus. Say, *"The words tell us that when Jesus Christ was born on in a cave, lying next to His Mother, the shepherds and magi or wise men came to worship Him. This newborn baby was also the Son of God. He came to be with us and to give us life with Him forever."*

As a brief story review, have students stand. (Have the musical scroll near at hand.) Say, *"Let's review the story of Saint Romanus. I will ask some questions. Rather than answer in words, you can act out something, or sing 'la la la' if singing answers the question."*

- Say, *"The first time Saint Romanus tried to sing and read in the great church of Hagia Sophia, how do you think it sounded to the people there?"* (Let students have fun singing off key, putting their hands over their ears, talking so fast their words can't be understood, or whatever response they choose.)
- Ask, *"How did Saint Romanus feel then?"* (Sad face.)
- Ask, *"What did Saint Romanus do next?"* (Act out praying, perhaps with hands folded, or looking up, or both.)
- Ask, *"What did the Mother of God tell him to do?"* (Act out eating a scroll.)
- Say, *"The next day Saint Romanus sang in church again. How do you think it sounded this time?"* (Nice-sounding singing.)
- Say (with the musical scroll clearly in children's view), *"Point to something that tells us what Saint Romanus did after that."* (Scroll--he wrote church songs or hymns.) Say, *"Yes, he wrote many beautiful church songs or hymns that we still sing today. The most famous one is his Kontakion for the Nativity of Jesus Christ."*
- Say, *"Saint Romanus was a deacon. We have deacons in many of our churches too. What is something a deacon does in church?"* (Act out swinging a censer, or reading from the Bible.) If need be, remind students of the censer seen in the icon of Saint Romanus

and tell them that deacons also read from the Bible and help the priest during the service in other ways. If you have a deacon serving regularly in your parish, ask students his name or tell them his name.)

Put the words **Nativity**, **Hymn**, and **Kontakion** on the chalkboard. Have students define them as well as they can. Supply definitions as needed:

- **Nativity**: birth. (Ask, "Do each of you have a day of nativity?" Let students answer--they should remember from the first lesson that their day of nativity is their birthday.)
- **Hymn**: a more formal word for a church song. It is a prayer we sing.
- **Kontakion**: a special kind of hymn, like a poem with music.

Note: Just for your own interest, not to use in class, you may want to consult the *Resource* handout *The Life of St. Romanus* for more details. Also in the *Resource* section is the lengthy *Kontakion on the Nativity of Christ*. Though the children are too young to study this, you may be interested in looking it as an example of St. Romanus' writing. Note its many Biblical references and the way they are tied to our experience as Christians.

5 Saint Barbara

Say, "Let's find out about one of the saints who has her feast day during this period of the Nativity Fast. What's another name for the Nativity Fast?" (Let students answer: **Advent**. Supply the word if they have forgotten. Put "Nativity Fast" and "Advent" on the chalkboard.)

Gather the students, and read the story of Saint Barbara. Have the black and white icon of Saint Barbara (in the *Resource* section of this lesson) displayed as you read.

In the early fourth century, a rich and well-respected man lived with his daughter Barbara in the country of Syria. He was proud of his beautiful daughter--so proud that he began to worry about letting anything or anyone in the world come too close to her. So he built a tower for her to live in.

Barbara's pagan teachers were allowed to visit her. Pagans worship many gods, and Barbara's father wanted his daughter to learn to be a pagan as he was. But nobody else except servants could enter the tower, which was very luxurious and beautiful, but still a prison.

A tall tower does at least offer a view of the country around it. Barbara saw wooded hills, a swiftly flowing river, and meadows covered with flowers. At night the sky was full of stars and twinkling lights. All of this was incredibly harmonious and beautiful, and Barbara began to ask herself how it could have come into being. She wondered who made all these wonderful things.

Before long she became sure that the statues worshipped by her father and his friends could not have made anything. They themselves were made by people's own hands! She decided to spend the rest of her life trying to discover who made the world, instead of getting married and living as a rich man's wife.

Her father had other ideas. He wanted her to get married, and there were certainly plenty of young men ready to become her husband. He insisted so strongly that she must marry that Barbara warned him, "I love you very much, but if you keep pushing me on this you may create a separation between us that we won't be able to heal."

Barbara's father decided that Barbara had been alone too much. He allowed her to go into the city. There she met Christians who could answer her questions about the Maker of all things. They taught her about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. A priest who was visiting the city told her that Jesus Christ is the Savior. The priest baptized Barbara.

About this same time, Barbara's father ordered another building, with a pool, to be built on his property. He told the builders to put in two windows. Then he looked over the construction plans, and went out of town on business. While he was gone, Barbara told the builders to put in a third window. This was a way of honoring the Holy Trinity--Father, Son and Spirit--and a way of showing how the Three-Person God gives light to the whole world.

Her father, when he came back from his trip, was angry that his instructions had not been followed. Then his daughter told him the reason--she had found the true faith of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. She did not believe in his statues and would not worship them.

This made him so angry that he grabbed a sword and began beating her with it. She escaped and ran into the street, but her father found her. Unable to believe that his own daughter would disobey him, he turned her over to the governor of the city. When the pagan governor and his helpers could not make her deny her faith in Christ, they took her into the public square and tortured her.

A Christian woman named Juliana saw what was happening to Barbara. She called out, "Stop that! She has done nothing wrong!" The governor's helpers grabbed Juliana, and tortured her along with Barbara. The two died together. People standing around could see that they were praying and thanking God. Their faces showed that they were not afraid. They were ready to go and be with God. --end--

6 Saint Herman

Give each student a set of the *Resource* entitled St. Herman handouts, and a gray or blue crayon. On the map showing Saint Herman's travels from Russia to Alaska, have students color the Arctic Ocean and the Bering Sea.

When they have finished coloring, ask, "*What would the temperature be like on a ship coming over the northern waters you have colored in?*" (Let students answer. Of course it would be very cold, and quite rough with the northern winds.)

Say, "*Let's read the story of Saint Herman, who made that trip so that he could tell the native people of Alaska about Jesus Christ.*" Read the story together, and look together at the

iconographic picture of Saint Herman. Your group may also want to sing the folk hymn about the saint.

7 Advent Calendar

Give students their December pages for the Advent calendar, and have them each choose two stickers. They can mark the feast of Saint Barbara (the 4th) and the feast of Saint Herman (the 13th.)

Collect the calendar pages to use in the fifth and final class session of the unit.

8 Wrap Up: The Nativity Greeting and "Friends of God"

Practice the Nativity greeting and response:

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

Review the meaning of "Glorify" from the first lesson.

If you wish, you may send home copies of the black and white icon of Saint Barbara (in the *Resource* section) with students, to color at home.

Ask students, "*Why do you think some people refer to saints as 'friends of God'?*" (Let them give their ideas. Bring out the point that by trying to live as God wants us to, not lying or being fake, saints are friends to God because He never lies and is always the same. The saints also want to be close to Him, so they pray. A friend is someone we want to be close to. Students may come up with many more ideas.)

9 Closing Prayer

(Have students stand.)

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

The Ancestors of Christ (Ages 7-9)

Overview

We Are All God's Family - We are members of God's family. Like Jesus, we have ancestors.

Objectives

By the end of this Lesson, learners should be able to:

- Recognize that grandparents and earlier relatives are our ancestors: those family members who came before us
- Identify some ancestors of Jesus Christ
- State that we all are members of God's family, whom He loves

Materials

- Icon of Joachim and Anna
- Icon of the Nativity of Christ
- Inflated beach ball or other object for "Four Saints" review (see the *Materials* list in the first lesson of the unit for suggestions of items to use)
- Copies, for each student, of the stories "Isaac and His Sons Jacob and Esau" and "A Happy Reunion." To find these, go to the home page of the Department of Christian Education, and find *Teacher Resources*. In the "Stories" section, the first story on page 1 is "A Happy Reunion." The 6th story on page 3 is "Isaac and His Sons Jacob and Esau."
- Chart with the words of Saint Romanus' Kontakion on the Nativity, to display so students can see the words
- Recording of the Kontakion to play, and player (as for Lesson 3)

For the "Flowers for My Family" activity:

- Basket-type coffee filters (have plenty; two per flower and enough for students to make flowers for the members of their families)
- Watercolor paints in various colors (have a good supply of red, since students may want to make red flowers for the Christmas season)
- Brushes to paint
- Green chenille stems, one per flower (these are available in craft stores--similar to pipe cleaners but longer--usually 12 inches)
- Cups for water to rinse brushes in
- Ribbon to tie bouquets of finished flowers together
- Scissors--strong enough to cut stems, and enough pairs for students to share

Resources

Optional Resources

[Icon of Joachim & Anna \(Image\)](#)

[The Icon of the Nativity \(Image\)](#)

Procedure

1 Opening Prayer

Have the Nativity icon displayed where students can see it.

(Have students stand.) In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Follow the same procedure as in the previous lessons, but put up the card with the last line of the hymn ("O Lord, glory to Thee") and practice it a few times. Then put up all the cards and practice the whole hymn. Say or sing it together.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

2 Review: Four Saints

Say, *"Over the past few weeks we have talked about four saints. Can you tell me their names?"*

(Let students answer, then supply any names they can't come up with. Put the four names on the chalkboard: Saint Nicholas, Saint Barbara, Saint Romanus, Saint Herman.)

Have students stand in two lines, about three feet apart. Tell them that you are going to read sentences that tell something about each of the four saints. The person who has the ball should name the saint.

Throw the ball to a student, and read the first sentence. The student with the ball answers and throws the ball to someone on the opposite side. (If the student answers incorrectly, make a note of it but have the student throw the ball anyway.)

Read through all the sentences one by one, having the students throw the ball back and forth between the two lines. Then go back and repeat any that were answered incorrectly. If students seem very unsure of some answers, review more details. (For example, ask: *"Why did Barbara's father kill her?"* Because she would not worship his gods that were only statues.)

Sentences with correct answers:

1. A tower was my home (Barbara)
2. The Mother of God helped me become a singer (Romanus)
3. I helped a father who needed money for his daughters (Nicholas)
4. You hear my songs in church (Romanus)
5. I made the long journey from Russia to Alaska (Herman)
6. I was a bishop (Nicholas)
7. The Mother of God cured me of a disease (Herman)
8. I asked for three windows instead of two, to show God's light (Barbara)
9. I was the first American saint in the Orthodox Church (Herman)
10. My own father had me killed (Barbara)
11. I was a deacon (Romanus)
12. Sailors on ships prayed that I would guide them (Nicholas)

3 This is Your Family

On the chalkboard, write the following words as shown:

ANCESTORS

Grandmother and Grandfather

Grandmother and Grandfather

Mother and Father

(leave space here to write in "Jesus Christ" later)

YOU

Connect all the words except the word ANCESTORS with dotted lines and colored or white chalk.

Say, *"We all have parents and grandparents. Then there are the people who were the grandparents of our parents. We call these our ancestors."* Under the word "YOU" on the

chalkboard, write all the students' names. (Leave room under the words "Mother and Father" to write in the name of Jesus Christ later.)

Say, *"You and I, all people have ancestors."* Circle the word "ancestors." Ask students to name a few of their ancestors--grandparents and perhaps great-grandparents. They might also tell of a way they are like an ancestor--perhaps a physical resemblance, or a character trait. You could share some of your own ancestry too, if you wish to.

4 Jesus' Family and Ancestors

Ask, *"Did Jesus Christ have a family?"* (Students should know that Mary is Jesus' mother. Though He is God's Son, Joseph took care of Him during His growing up like a father.) Put Jesus' name under "Mother and Father" on the chalkboard.

Ask, *"Who were Jesus' grandparents?"* (Let students supply the names Joachim and Anna, or tell them if they don't know.) Put the names on the chalkboard near "Grandmother and Grandfather." These are Mary's parents. Look together at the icon of Joachim and Anna.

Ask, *"When do we hear the names of Jesus' grandparents, Joachim and Anna, in church?"* (Let them answer, or tell them, that these two are remembered as part of the dismissal prayers at the end of the Divine Liturgy.)

Ask, *"Did Jesus have human ancestors?"* (Let students answer. They may know that we find two records of Jesus' ancestors in Matthew 1: 1-16 and Luke 3: 23-38.) Look together at Matthew 1: 1-2. Ask, *"Who are the first ancestors mentioned?"* (David, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.)

Now look together at Luke 3: 23-38. Have students skim through the names and find Abraham, Isaac and Jacob here. (They are in verse 34.) Ask, *"How is the listing different here from the way it is in Matthew's Gospel?"* (It goes "backwards" from Jacob to Isaac to Abraham, rather than "forward" From Abraham to Isaac to Jacob.)

Ask students to find David's name in Luke's list. (It is in verse 31.)

Say, *"All these names tell us that Jesus really did come to be with us, and to share our life. He had ancestors and a family, just as we do."*

5 Going Deeper: Jacob and His Brother

Give each student a copy of the story "Isaac and His Sons Jacob and Esau" (see *Materials* for this lesson.) You may choose to read the story yourself to the class, or to have students who like to read take turns reading.

When you finish the story ask the class, *"Do you think Jacob is a wonderful person?"* (Let students give opinions. Of course Jacob is far from perfect--students may say they don't even like him very much. Point out that God has a plan for everyone, including people like Jacob, who need to change a lot.)

Say, *"Let's find out how this story of the two brothers turns out."* Hand out copies of "A Happy Reunion" and read it together.

Ask, *"How does Esau's forgiveness help Jacob?"* (Let students give opinions. Sometimes when we are forgiven rather than condemned by the person we have sinned against, it helps us to become better people. We want to be more like the person who forgave us.)

6 Flowers for My Family

Say to the class, *"Having a family is important--Jesus shows us that, because He had a family and loved His family. For some of us, our families are our parents and brothers and sisters. Others have people who love and care for them--they are not parents, but they are still our family."*

Tell the class you are going to pass out materials so each student can make a flower for each member of his or her family. (Be aware of those children who may not be cared for by parents--these children can make flowers for those who care for them, or who are close to them.)

Cover the work surface, and pass out coffee filters (2 per flower), scissors, paint, brushes, and cups of water for rinsing brushes. Have the green chenille stems ready at hand.

Directions:

- 1. Flatten coffee filters.
- 2. Have children choose colors (one or more--they may wish to use red shades for the Christmas season) and paint one side of the filters, varying the shades by thinning some paint with water, and leaving some paint unthinned.
- 3. Cut 2 inches off each stem, and set aside both pieces of each.
- 4. Blow-dry the painted filters so they are thoroughly dry.
- 5. Fringe the ends of the filters by cutting into them with scissors, leaving the center intact.
- 6. For each flower, put two painted filters together so the painted sides are on the outside and the unpainted ones are on the inside.
- 7. Insert the larger piece of chenille into the center of the joined filters, about 1 1/2 inches. Hold onto the small end of the stem, and turn the flower upside down so the long end is sticking up.
- 8. Grasp the center of the filters and gather it around the small end of the chenille stem.
- 9. Twist the smaller piece of chenille around the gathered filter to secure the flower in place.

- 10. Turn the flower back over and fluff the petals as needed. You may also want to bend the short end of the chenille into a ball in the center of the flower.
- 11. Tie the flower stems together with ribbon to make a bouquet.
- 12. Tag or mark each bouquet with the student's name.

7 Wrap Up

As students are cleaning up and preparing for the Closing Prayer:

- Review the meaning of the word "ancestors."
- Practice the Nativity greeting and response, and encourage students to share it during the feast: **Christ is Born! Glorify Him!**
- Give students their bouquets to take home.

8 Closing Prayer

(Have students stand.)

Display the chart with the words of the Christmas Kontakion and play the recording so students can hear it and see the words at the same time.

Ask, *"What words in this hymn tell us that we are part of God's family, that He loves us as His own family members?"* (Let students answer. Bring out the words "for our sake"--everything Jesus did was for our salvation. Everything was done so we could have eternal life with Him. That is how much God loves all of us--we belong to His family.)

Close by saying or singing the words of the Kontakion together.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today the virgin gives birth to the transcendent One,
 And the earth offers a cave to the unapproachable One.
 Angels give glory with the shepherds, and the magi journey with a star,
 As for our sake He is born as a new child, He who from eternity is God.

God Is With Us *(Ages 7-9)*

Overview

The Birth of Jesus Christ - God became man and dwelt among us - the incarnation of God in Christ Jesus.

Objectives

By the end of this Lesson, learners should be able to:

- Identify the main characters present at the birth of Jesus
- Review important words from the lessons of the unit
- Recite the Nativity greeting and response: **Christ is born! Glorify Him!**
- Describe in simple terms the events of the Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos in the Temple

Materials

- Small icon of the Nativity of Christ for each student – laminated as a gift
- Copies of the *Resource* sheet "What shall we offer Thee, O Christ" for each student
- 6 pieces of card stock, about 4" by 8", for each group of 3-4 students
- Markers, thick and thin, and crayons for students to share
- Christmas stickers plus others (stars, dots, moons, shapes, etc.) Have enough for students to mark 2 days on their Advent calendars and also some to take home

Resources

Required Resources

[The Nativity of Christ \(PDF\)](#)

[Icon of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ \(Image\)](#)

[What shall we offer You, O Christ\(HTML\)](#)

Optional Resources

[Graphic Organizer of a T-Chart \(PDF\)](#)

[Saint Barbara the Greatmartyr \(Image\)](#)

[Prepare O Bethlehem \(Image\)](#)

Procedure

1 Opening Prayer

Display the icon of the Nativity, as well as the word chart. Say or sing the whole Troparion together.

(Have students stand.) In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

2 The Icon and the Troparion

Have the class look together at the Nativity icon. Go over these points and questions:

Why is Jesus shown twice? (He is shown next to His Mother, and also is shown being bathed, which reminds us that He came as a real baby needing to be cared for.)

Where is Joseph, and who is with him? (He is on the left lower part of the icon. With him is a figure representing the devil, trying to convince him to believe that this newborn Baby is not really the Son of God.)

Where are the shepherds, wise men, and angels? (Have students point these out.)

Read together Isaiah 1: 3, a vision that the prophet Isaiah had. Ask, "*Where do you think these words are reflected in the icon?*" (The animals, the ox and ass or donkey, are shown next to Jesus' crib, the manger. They know Him to be the Master.)

Next, have students look at the words of the Troparion on the chart, and review the three places where Jesus Christ is compared to light.

Light of wisdom: Jesus is not a physical light, but the One who enlightens us with wisdom and truth.

Sun of Righteousness: Jesus is like the "Sun" giving light. He is also the "Son" of Righteousness--of God the Father. The wise men, who thought wisdom and knowledge could come from the stars, now know that He is the One to be worshipped because He is wisdom and truth.

Orient from on high: The light that rises in the East.

Say, "*Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, the Mother of God, was born just the way we are. She had a mother and a father, just as we do. Mary's parents were quite old when she was born--they had to wait a long time to have a baby. (Pause for a moment.) We said the names of Mary's parents*

when we were talking about the ancestors of Jesus Christ. What were their names?" (Students may not remember the names. Put "Joachim" and "Anna" on the chalkboard, and look together at the icon of Joachim and Anna.)

Say, "Let's hear a story about Mary's growing up, and the special thing she did when she was still a little girl. We remember this special thing she did on a day in December--it is one of the winter feast days of the Church." Read the story that follows.

3 A Winter Feast Day

The Entrance of the Theotokos in the Temple

You remember that Joachim and Anna waited a long time to have a baby. They prayed for many years that God would grant them the gift of a child. When Mary was born, they were quite old. How glad they were that God had finally answered their prayers!

Joachim and Anna knew that Mary was meant to serve God in a special way. How did they know this? An angel visited them and told them that God had planned long ago what this little girl would do when she grew up.

Anna and Joachim knew that Mary would have to be carefully prepared for such special service to God. So they promised Him that they would bring Mary to the Temple to live. There, every day, she could be with holy people who loved her. They would show her how to serve God, and how to pray. She would be prepared to be the Theotokos, the Mother of God. And later she would give birth to Jesus Christ our Lord.

Her parents thought and thought about the best way to take Mary to the Temple. Joachim wanted to take her when she was two years old, but Anna felt that they should wait a bit longer so she would not miss them so much. So when Mary was three, her parents walked with her to the Temple. Many relatives and friends came along, too. They carried lighted candles and sang as they walked along, so that Mary would not feel afraid or worried.

Even though she was so very young, Mary walked up the Temple steps by herself. At the top the priest Zechariah met her, wearing his colorful robes. She walked to him, and she wasn't afraid. She didn't cry for her parents to take her home.

Then something happened that surprised everyone. One part of the Temple is called the "Holy of Holies." People were very respectful of this place. In fact, nobody ever entered it except the High Priest, and he only did it once a year. So Zechariah shocked everybody by taking Mary, this little girl, right into the Holy of Holies!

People whispered to each other. They said, "How can she be going into that special place? What is a little girl doing there?" But Zechariah understood that Mary had an important part in God's

plan. He knew that God wanted her to be prepared in the Temple. He knew that one day she would give birth to Jesus Christ.

Mary stayed in the Temple for twelve years. The holy people there taught her how to pray and how to live a life that would please God. Then, as she grew into a young woman, she was engaged to Joseph. Later, Joseph would take care of her and of the divine Son, Jesus Christ.

After you finish the story, give students their November pages from "My Advent Calendar" and let them choose two Christmas stickers. They can mark the feast day, November 21st. Put the name of the feast day on the chalkboard: "The Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple." (Ask students what "Theotokos" means, and if they are not sure, tell them it means "the one who gave birth to God.")

Then say, "*When we talked about the ancestors of Jesus Christ, we read the words of two New Testament books telling who His ancestors were. One book was written by Saint Luke. Who wrote the other book?* (Let students supply the name, or tell them, and write "Saint Matthew" on the chalkboard. Read together Matthew 1:16. Then let students mark November 16, feast day of Saint Matthew the Apostle, on their calendars with a sticker.)

4 Word Review

Put the word **incarnation** on the chalkboard. Ask students to define it. Say, "*This is the word we use to describe what happened when Christ was born. God became Man.*"

Break the word down for them:

IN, when used before other words, means into or becoming

CARN means flesh

ATION means something that takes place.

So INCARNATION means that God comes into flesh, or becomes Man. He is at the same time always God. This is not easy to understand, but it is basic to our faith.

Review these other words, asking students to supply the definition of providing it if they cannot

Advent: another name for the Nativity Fast, the period of preparation for the Feast of the Nativity or Birth of Jesus Christ.

Prophet: a person who speaks for God, or tells God's people what He wants them to do.

Ancestors: Our family members who came before us; grandparents, great-grandparents, etc.

5 Our Gifts

Have the Nativity icon displayed.

Give each student a copy of the *Resource* "What Shall We Offer You, O Christ." Go through the "givers" and "gifts." Most are easy to point out in the icon. The "wilderness" which offers the "manger" refers to the fact that Jesus Christ was born in a relatively unprotected and "wild" place, rather than a warm, clean and familiar home.

Ask, "*What does it mean to say that we offer Christ His Virgin Mother?*" (Let students answer. Mary is one of us, a human being born just as we are. Therefore she is offered by the whole human race--she says "yes" to God's plan for all of us.)

Divide the class into groups of 3 or 4. Give each group 6 pieces of card stock, markers, crayons, and stickers. Have them write one of the "gift" words on each of their pieces. They can also add a simple illustration of the gift, if possible. ("Wonder" and perhaps "cave" might be difficult to illustrate, but encourage them to use their imaginations and do so if they wish to!) Depending on how long your class session is, put a reasonable time limit on the time they have to draw.

Collect the "What Shall We Offer You" papers, so that students will be working from memory rather than looking at their papers. Then read the "givers" one by one, and tell the groups to have one member stand and hold up the matching card for each one.

Finally, ask: "*What do we, all the people in the world, offer?*" (Let students supply the answer, a Virgin Mother.)

Write the word "pre-eternal" on the chalkboard. Students will probably not be able to define it. You can tell them that it means that Jesus Christ, who came as a baby, was also the Divine Son of God. Obviously this is not something these children (or any adult) can fully understand, but it is good to let them hear this basic truth of our faith at an early age.

6 Wrap Up

Practice the Nativity greeting and response: Christ is Born! Glorify Him! Encourage students to use it during the season.

Give students their Advent Calendar pages and a few stickers to take home. Encourage them to add events, notes, or markings for special days as the Feast of the Nativity approaches.

Give them the "What Shall We Offer You, O Christ" pages to take home. Remind them that it speaks about the gifts the world offers to God. We, too, should offer Him gifts. (Ask students to name some possible gifts. Suggest such things as prayer, kindness to others, and sharing the good news of His Birth with everyone we can.)

Give students their laminated icons to take home.

7 Closing Prayer

Display the icon of the Nativity, as well as the word chart. Say or sing the whole Troparion together.

(Have students stand.) In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

Prepare the Way of the Lord (Waiting and Getting Ready) *(Ages 4-6)*

Overview

We Wait and Get Ready - Children will become familiar with the word "Nativity" as the birthday of Jesus Christ. They will relate this to their own birthday/day of nativity, and to the common name "Christmas," when the Son of God is born of Mary as a little child. They will consider the concepts of waiting and getting ready for good or important things.

Objectives

By the end of this Lesson, learners should be able to:

- Give examples of things you had to wait to have happen (or receive)
- Describe ways in which you prepare for things that are going to happen
- Compare waiting for special events in your life to the Church waiting for the birth of Jesus during the Nativity Fast
- Identify some people and things in the icon of the Nativity of Our Lord

Materials

- Recording of the Nativity Troparion (and player) to be played during class. There are many recordings of the Nativity Troparion by various choirs. If you do not have one, you might record a good singer (perhaps yourself) singing the hymn, and use that. Otherwise, sing "live" to the class!
- Words of the Nativity Troparion (the Opening Prayer) in large letters on a chart to hang in the classroom throughout this unit
- Scripture story of the Nativity (from the *Resources* section of this unit)
- Bowl of treats, either edible items suitable for all the children, or inedible items such as Christmas trinkets. Have enough so that each child can choose from several
- Icon of the Nativity of Christ
- Christmas stickers (enough so that each child can choose one from several)
- From "My Advent Calendar" (a resource for this lesson) a copy for each child of the page with blank blocks with "November" in the upper left block, and a copy of the page with blank blocks marked "December" for each child.

NOTES: The other pages of the "My Advent Calendar" resource, which list saints and feasts, as well as the pages with feasts and saints' names in the blocks are for you, the teacher, to expand your own knowledge of the Advent/Nativity fast season. You may wish to tell the children about some of the saints and feasts if you have extra time. Find information about saints and feasts on the OCA website and in several books of lives of saints.)

We suggest that you establish part of your classroom as the prayer area, with a candle, perhaps flowers or a plant and a pretty cloth on the table or desk, and the icon of the Nativity of Jesus Christ. This will be the area in which you pray during each session.

Resources

Required Resources

[My Advent Calendar](#)

[Icon of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of The Presentation \(Meeting\) of Our Lord \(Image\)](#)

Optional Resources

[Entrance of the Theotokos in the Temple \(Icon\) \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of Christ and the Children \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of Christ the Pantocrator \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of the Conception of the Theotokos \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of The Deisis \(Image\)](#)

[Saint Barbara the Greatmartyr \(Image\)](#)

[Tikhvin Icon of the Mother of God \(Image\)](#)

Procedure

1 Opening Prayer

Display the icon of the Nativity where children can see it, for this and all Opening and Closing Prayers. Also have the word chart where they can see it.

(Have children stand.) In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Say together: *O Lord, glory to Thee* (or "You" if that is used in your parish and if your recording of the Nativity Troparion uses it) Play the Troparion for the children, and point to the words on the chart as it is sung.

*Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!*

Play the Troparion again, and have the children sing just the last line, "O Lord, glory to Thee." Practice the line, and sing it again with the recording. (Some words of the Troparion are beyond

young children's understanding, so it seems best not to try to teach the whole hymn at once, but rather to familiarize them with hearing it, singing the line that is easiest to understand, and teaching a few lines at a time. Even then, familiarity with what they hear in church is the goal, rather than full comprehension.)

You may want to use the word "troparion" once or twice so the children hear the word, but rather than try to teach that word, refer to the hymn as a "church song.") I

2 Discussion

Talk about the word "nativity" in the Troparion. Tell the children that "nativity" means birth. Ask each child to tell you when his/ her birthday is. As each one tells you, say, "*June 5th* (or whatever the date is) *is the day of your nativity.*" (If some younger children don't know their birthday dates, just say "your birthday is the day of your nativity.")

Say: "*The church song we listened to and sang with tells us about the nativity, the birth, of Jesus Christ. He is God's own Son, but He came to be born and to live with us. So we celebrate His Nativity every year in church. We celebrate His birthday. Do you know another name for the Nativity of Jesus Christ?*" (Supply the word "Christmas" if the children do not know.)

3 Scripture Story and Nativity Icon

Have the Nativity icon displayed so the children can all see it easily. Read the story of the Nativity of Jesus Christ to the children. It is in the Resources section of this unit, under *Stories*. It is the 3rd story on the 4th page, and is entitled "Jesus, our Savior is born."

Have a Bible open as you read, so the children will know this is a Bible story even though you are not reading directly from the Bible. As you read, have children take turns pointing out in the icon: Mary and Joseph, the stable/cave, the shepherds, the animals at the manger, the angels. (Children may ask about the baby being washed in the icon--this shows us that Jesus was a real baby who was bathed and cared for. The old man at the bottom of the icon is the devil, trying to tell Joseph that this baby is not really God's own Son.)

Read again from the story the words that the angels sing: "Glory to God in the highest." Ask: "*Where did we already hear that word 'glory' today?*" (You sang it together; let children answer or give the answer if they cannot.) Say, "*We sing to God just as the angels do. We give God glory. That means we thank Him for making such a beautiful world, and for loving us so much.*" Have the children stand and sing the last line of the Troparion/church song again. While they are still standing, tell them that there were three more people who came together to see Jesus Christ when He was born. Have them look together at the icon and find the three wise men. When they have found the three, ask them how they traveled. Did they walk, or ride animals?

Seat children again, and read the following story, "The Star and the Wise Men," written by Mrs. Sophie Koulomzin. Before you begin, ask the children what "wise" means. (*Smart, knows a lot, can figure things out, etc.*)

When Jesus Christ was born there lived in a country far away three very wise men. These wise men spent much of their time studying the stars in the night sky.

One night the three wise men saw a star clearer and brighter than all the other stars. They knew it meant something special. They knew from the old holy books that a great King and Savior was to be born. The wise men wanted to go and worship this special Child. (*Ask the children what "savior" means and help them define it as the one Person who gives us life with God that will never end. That Person is Jesus Christ.*)

It was a long way from the wise men's home country to where the Savior was born. Their animals were heavily loaded with all the things they needed for such a long trip. (*Ask the children to name some of the things the three might have needed.*) They also carried presents for the Child. Every night as it grew dark a beautiful bright star in the sky showed them which way to go. They followed the star for many days. It led them to a small house in Bethlehem, where the Child was. Then it stopped.

The wise men were happy. This was the end of their long journey. This was the Child God wanted them to find. They found Mary with the baby in her arms. The wise men fell on their knees and worshipped the Baby. Then they brought out the precious things they had carried with them, and offered their presents to the Child. (End)

4 Waiting and Getting Ready

Ask students to think of some things we have to wait for. (Examples: waiting in line, waiting for our turn during a game, waiting for our favorite part of a story someone is reading to us, waiting for someone to come home, etc.--let children give their own answers.) Say: "*Sometimes we need to prepare for things we are waiting for. I'll name some things we wait for, and you show me how we can prepare.*"

Have children stand, with plenty of space between them, and have them act out silently how they would get ready in the following ways. Tell them they don't all have to do the exact same thing:

- cleaning the house before company comes
- putting on our good clothes before going to church
- mowing the lawn and pulling weeds before leaving on a family trip
- making the bed before having breakfast

Say: "In church we have some days of waiting for the birthday, the nativity, of Jesus Christ. We call these days Advent. Write the word on the chalkboard. (*You can add that we also call these days the Nativity Fast, but the children don't need to memorize these terms.*) We get ready for His

birthday by doing things we know He wants us to do. We try to be kind to others, we help our parents and do as they ask, we pray and go to church." Let children name ways they can get ready for the Nativity of Jesus Christ.

5 Discussion: Calendars

Talk with children about calendars: how they help us to keep track of important days/dates to remember: birthdays, doctor appointments, plans for traveling or having visitors, etc.

Ask whether someone at home writes or marks important things on a calendar. Then give each child a copy of the page with empty blocks, marked "My Advent Calendar" and with November in the upper left block. Say: "*This calendar page shows the days of Advent during which we wait and prepare for Christmas, the Nativity of Jesus Christ.*" Have children put their names (or do it yourself) at the bottom left of their pages. Give each child a Christmas sticker and let them mark November 15, the first day of Advent/Nativity Fast. Have each choose a second sticker and mark the Feast of the Nativity on December 25.) Collect the pages to use again.

Special Note: If your parish is on the Old Calendar, you can easily make your own calendar on two sheets with 31 blocks each for December and January.

6 Wrap Up

Put the bowl of treats on the table for all to see. Tell children that everyone will each get one, but that you are going to practice waiting just a few minutes, till you have finished. (If some children become really impatient, put the treats out of sight and assure them that you will bring them out in just a little while.)

Review the meaning of the words "Nativity" and "Advent" with the children. Ask them to think again about things they suggested as ways to prepare for the Nativity or birthday of Jesus Christ, and encourage them to do these things at home during the week.

Praise the children for waiting for the treats, and join them in each choosing one. Then enjoy them together.

7 Closing Prayer

(Have the children stand.) In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Practice making the sign of the cross with the children. Then play the Nativity Troparion, and have them sing the last line.

Showing God's Love (Ages 4-6)

Overview

St. Nicholas of Myra in Lycia - The life of St. Nicholas illustrates how we can help others, thereby showing God's love for all. We also can associate acts of charity with the real St. Nicholas and help students not to confuse him with the more familiar "Santa Claus." Santa (whom many young children believe in) is not mentioned in the lesson. But if children get a solid idea about Saint Nicholas, they will in later years be more able to replace "Santa" with a real person who did good throughout his life, and is a true example.

Objectives

By the end of this Lesson, learners should be able to:

- Tell a story about an event in St. Nicholas' life, showing how he helped others
- Identify St. Nicholas as a bishop, and state that your church also has a bishop
- Give a simple definition of a "saint" as someone who lives as God wants us to

Materials

- Icon of the Nativity of Christ
- Recording of the Nativity Tropar and player
- Icon of St. Nicholas
- Notes to parents of each child, telling them that the children are bringing home copies of Advent calendar pages with some suggestions for good deeds to do at home to get ready for the Nativity of Jesus Christ (Christmas.) Ask parents to stress being helpful, praying, and coming to church during this season.
- Christmas stickers
- Copies for each child (from last week) of 2 "My Advent Calendar" pages, November and December
- Picture of your Diocesan bishop to show the children (OCA bishops' pictures are on the OCA website)
- Paper and crayons for each child

Resources

Required Resources

[Biography - Santa Claus \(2005\) \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ \(Image\)](#)

[Nativity Fast Charity Box\(HTML\)](#)

[Saint Nicholas of Myra\(HTML\)](#)

[St. Nicholas - Nearly Everybody's Saint!\(HTML\)](#)

[St. Nicholas Banners \(HTML\)](#)

[Story of St. Nicholas\(HTML\)](#)

Optional Resources

[Saint Nicholas Wikipedia](#)

[Discovering the Truth About Santa Claus\(Link\)](#)

[St. Nicholas Archbishop of Myra in Lycia Icon \(Image\)](#)

[St. Nicholas the Wonder-Worker](#)

[St. Nicholas Archbishop of Myra in Lycia\(HTML\)](#)

[St. Nicholas Shoes\(HTML\)](#)

[St. Nicholas Troparian & Kontakion \(Book\)](#)

[The Real Santa Claus: Legends of Saint Nicholas \(Image\)](#)

[Wonderworker \(Image\)](#)

Procedure

1 Opening Prayer

(Have children stand.) In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

As in the previous lesson, play or sing the Troparion for the children and refer to the words on the wall chart. Have them sing the last line together.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

2 Review Activity and Icon

Have the icon of the Nativity displayed so all the children can see it. Ask them to recall the meaning of the word "nativity." Remind them that we celebrate the Nativity or birth of Jesus Christ at Christmas, and that each of them also has a day of nativity--their birthday.

Write the word "Advent" on the chalkboard and ask them to recall its meaning--it's the time during which we wait and prepare for Christmas. Ask whether they remember another name for this time: Nativity Fast. Write the phrase on the board. Show them the calendar pages from last week. This is the way we keep track of many things, including these special days of waiting and getting ready.

Have children find in the icon: Joseph and Mary, the baby Jesus Christ, the shepherds, the wise men, the angels, the animals. Then, as a review of the Nativity story, have them stand and listen as you read the following. Ask them to make motions or to move in ways that "match" what you are reading. Suggestions are in parentheses, but try to let the children come up with their own ideas.

The three wise men traveled long and very far; from other lands they came, following a special star (*motion of riding a horse, as shown in the icon; point up to a star*)

The shepherds were in the field caring for their sheep; though it was cold and dark that night, the shepherds didn't sleep (*looking all around to see the sheep and make sure nothing threatens them; huddling against cold*)

Mary and Joseph were together in the cave; watching over God's own Son, Jesus the newborn Babe (*gazing down as if at the baby in the manger*)

Even the animals worshipped the Child they saw; peeking in the manger where He lay on His bed of straw (*bending over and lowering heads; using hands as animal's ears on head; "peeking" in silent amazement*)

They all heard the angels singing a holy song; the Savior is born because God's love is deep and strong (*cupping ears to hear angels singing*)

3 Story of St. Nicholas and Icon

Have the icon of Saint Nicholas displayed so all the children can see it. Say to the children, *"During the days of Advent we remember in church many saints. Saints are people who love God and try to live good lives because they love Him. I will tell you about one saint--Saint Nicholas."* Write "Saint Nicholas" on the chalkboard, draw children's attention to his icon, and then tell the story:

Saint Nicholas was born in a place far from here, but he did some of the same things you do. He played with friends, enjoyed games, and went on picnics with his parents. He also loved to pray and read the Bible. Nicholas loved God. He spent a lot of time in church.

Nicholas showed his love for God by being kind to others. As he grew up, he was able to do lots of good things for people. Once there was a man who was so poor he didn't have money to feed his three daughters. This man wanted his daughters to get married, but he had no money to help them buy the things they would need. Nicholas heard about the man's troubles, and one dark summer night he threw three bags of gold into the man's open window--one bag for each daughter. At first the man didn't hear anything, but as the third bag was thrown in, he heard the sound of it hitting the ground. He went to the window, saw Nicholas, and thanked him. Nicholas said to the man, "Give thanks to God always." He did kind things only because he loved God, not because he wanted everybody to tell him how great he was. He didn't even want to be thanked.

The man and his daughters were so happy--now they would have enough of everything!

Another time Nicholas was on a boat and a great storm came up--the huge waves were crashing against the side of the boat. Everyone on the boat thought they would all be killed. But Nicholas prayed, and the storm died down.

Nicholas became a leader in the church. He became a bishop. (Put this word on the chalkboard.) A bishop is a man who is in charge of many churches. Even though he had to work very hard as a bishop, he never stopped doing kind things for other people. (End)

4 Story Review and Calendar

Ask, "*What is a saint?*" (Help children remember that a saint is a person who tries hard to live the way that God wants us to live.)

Say, "*We heard the story about Saint Nicholas. What is one special thing he did?*" (Let children recall something from the story.)

Have the children stand, with plenty of room between them. Have them act out these things:

- Saint Nicholas tossing heavy bags of gold into the window of the poor man with three daughters
- The poor man with three daughters telling the girls how Saint Nicholas helped them
- A sailor standing on the ship caught in a storm, when the waves were crashing against the side and making the ship rock from side to side
- A sailor standing on the ship after Saint Nicholas prayed and everything was calm

Give each child his or her "My Advent Calendar" page for December, and have each one choose a sticker. Have them mark December 6, the day when we remember Saint Nicholas in church.

5 Drawing: Being Like Saint Nicholas

Give each child paper and crayons. Have them draw a picture of something they will do at home to help someone, or make someone happy, as Saint Nicholas did. Remind them to ask God for help in doing good things.

6 Extra Activity: St. Nicholas Shoes

If time permits, follow the procedure outlined in the Resource Activity *St. Nicholas Shoes* attached to this lesson. That Resource suggests a festival to be held on a Saturday. An early weekday evening is another possibility.

7 Wrap Up

- Ask children: "*Was Saint Nicholas a bishop?*" (Yes. Remind them that a bishop takes care of a group of churches.)
- Say, "*Our church has a bishop too.*" Show them the picture of your bishop, and help them pronounce his name.
- Give children their 2 "My Advent Calendar" pages and the notes to their parents to take home, or plan to send them

8 Closing Prayer

(Have children stand.) In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Play the Troparion, singing the last line, as you did for the Opening Prayer above. Then have student begin learning the hymn, by writing the two first lines on the chalkboard:

Thy (or Your) Nativity, O Christ our God,

Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.

Practice singing these two lines together a few times. Don't worry if the children, especially the younger ones, don't have the words exactly right.

As a formal ending to the session, say "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" together, making the sign of the cross.

The Winter Saints (Ages 4-6)

Overview

Saints Are Special People Who Are Friends of God - Saint Romanus and other saints who are remembered during the fall and winter help us get ready for the feast of the Nativity, because they give an example of love for Jesus Christ. Saint Romanus, in particular, wrote hymns praising Christ and His Birth.

Objectives

By the end of this Lesson, learners should be able to:

- State that saints, by living as God wants us to, become "friends of God."
- Tell a few facts about Saint Romanus, the sweet singer.
- Tell a few facts about Saint Barbara the Greatmarty

Materials

- Resource Download: *Kontakion, Nativity of Christ*
- **NOTE:** You may wish to consult the Resource handout *The Life of St. Romanus* for more details about him. Attached to this lesson is an MP3 file of the Nativity Kontakion which you can download and burn to a CD for use in class. Also in the *Resource* section is the lengthy *Kontakion on the Nativity of Christ*. The children are much too young to study this, but for your own edification and interest you may wish to look through it, and note its many Biblical references, as an example of other hymns written by St. Romanus.
- Icon of St. Romanus (either showing him holding a church and a scroll, or a church and a censer)
- Icon of the Nativity of Christ
- Poster paper and markers
- Four pieces of paper or card stock. In large letters that the children can see in class, write the first two lines of the Nativity Troparion on the first piece. Write the second pair of lines (beginning with *For* and *Were*) on the second piece, and the third pair of lines (beginning with *The* and *And*) on the third piece. On the fourth piece, write the line the children have been practicing: *O Lord, glory to Thee (or You)*. Have these ready at hand to use in the next weeks.
- Tape
- Long, rolled-up piece of paper, on which you have written some musical notes, to show children what a scroll looks like as you tell them the story of Saint Romanus
- Photo of the Cathedral of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople to show children as you tell the story
- Black and white icon-style picture of Saint Barbara (from the *Optional Resources* section for this lesson)-one for each child
- Crayons for children to share

NOTE: Saint Catherine, Saint Ambrose of Milan, and Saints Cosmas and Damian are a few of the other "winter saints" whose feast days are in fall and winter. You may wish, if time permits, to tell the children a little about one or more of them. Find information (which you can simplify and shorten) on the OCA website, as well as icons of

the saints. An icon and information about Saint Barbara, whose feast day is December 4th, and Saint Herman, whose feast day is on December 13, are included as resources for this lesson.

Resources

Required Resources

- [Kontakion on the Nativity of Christ \(PDF\)](#)
- [St Herman Handouts \(PDF\)](#)
- [Kontakion, Nativity of Christ \(MP3\)](#)
- [St Herman Resources\(Link\)](#)
- [Icon of St. Romanus \(Image\)](#)
- [Icon of St. Romanus the Melodist \(Image\)](#)
- [Icon of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ \(Image\)](#)
- [Christmas Kontakian\(HTML\)](#)
- [Icon of St. Romanus \(Image\)](#)
- [Icon of St. Romanus\(HTML\)](#)
- [Icon of St. Romanus the Melodist \(Image\)](#)
- [The Life of St. Romanus\(HTML\)](#)

Optional Resources

- [Troparion: Nativity of the Theotokos \(Sheet Music\) \(PDF\)](#)
- [St. Romanus the Melodist\(Link\)](#)
- [Saint Barbara the Greatmartyr \(Image\)](#)
- [The Holy Greatmartyr Barbara](#)

Procedure

1 Opening Prayer

(Have children stand.) In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Play the recording of the Troparion, or sing it, as you have done in the previous two lessons, having the children sing the last line. Say: *"This church song or hymn is telling us that when Jesus was born, people saw the truth about God--He loves us enough to send us His own Son to be with us. Jesus gives light to the world, more than all the brightest stars."*

In place of the chart with all the words of the Troparion, tape the piece of paper with the first two lines of the Troparion where children can see it, and practice singing these two lines (as you began doing last week). Review the meaning of the word "nativity" and let them define (or define for them) the word "wisdom" as meaning "knowing what is true."

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

2 Discussion Starter

Ask, "*What is something you like to do?*" Let children answer, and then say, "*Sometimes we have to work hard to learn how to do something we want to do. Sometimes we won't be very good at it at first. So we have to keep doing it till we get better at it.*" Let children give examples, and give one or two from your own life.

Say, "*I would like to tell you about a saint who had to work hard to learn something he really wanted to do.*" You might want to bring the children into a circle for the story.

3 The Story of Saint Romanus

The story:

Saint Romanus was born many years ago. He lived in a big city, and he helped the priests and bishop in the great church there. (Show the photo of Hagia Sophia, and tell the children you can still visit this church today.) Many people came to worship at the great church, and he was busy all day. But he spent his nights praying alone, sometimes in a field or in a smaller church outside the city.

One Christmas Eve, the night before the feast of the Nativity of Jesus Christ, Romanus was asked to read some of the prayers during the service. The great church was crowded, and everyone was listening. But Romanus was not a good reader. He did not say the words clearly, and nobody could understand what he was saying. Another reader had to take his place. A few people even laughed at him.

Romanus was very unhappy. He wanted so much to be able to read in church. But maybe he would never be able to. He prayed before the icon of Mary, the Mother of God, and told her how sad he was.

The next day, the Mother of God spoke to him in a gentle voice as he prayed. She gave him a scroll (show children the scroll and say that a scroll can have writing or music on it) and told him to eat it. That may seem strange to us, but it was her gift to the young man. It probably tasted like thin

bread. Once he ate the scroll, a wonderful thing happened. Romanus was able to sing and to write church songs or hymns.

That evening in church, Romanus was able to sing in a beautiful voice. What did he sing? The very first hymn he wrote, the Nativity hymn that starts, "Today the Virgin gives birth ..." (Ask the children: Who was the Virgin Mary's child, the one she gave birth to? Make sure they know that the Virgin and the Mother of God are the same person: Mary, and that she gave birth to Jesus Christ.)

Romanus became a deacon in the church, and a teacher of singing and songs. He wrote so many beautiful hymns and lived such a good life that the Church made him a saint. Romanus was able to do what he loved most, thanks to the loving kindness of the Mother of God.

Today, in our churches, we still sing many of the hymns that Saint Romanus wrote. They are called "Kontakia."

4 Story Review and Icon

Have the children stand, and say, *"Let's try to remember some things from this story without you children saying any words. I'll tell you something, and you show me what you remember."*

- Say, *"The first time Saint Romanus tried to sing and read in the great church, how do you think it sounded to the people there?"* (Let children have fun singing off key, or talking so fast their words can't be understood.)
- Ask, *"How did Saint Romanus feel?"* (Sad face.)
- Say, *"Saint Romanus prayed to the Mother of God. What did she tell him to do?"* (Act out eating a scroll.)
- Say, *"The next day Saint Romanus sang in church again. How do you think it sounded this time?"* (Nice-sounding singing.)
- Say (with the musical scroll clearly in children's view), *"Point to something that tells us what Saint Romanus did after that."* (Scroll--he wrote church songs or hymns.) Say, *"Yes, he wrote many beautiful church songs or hymns that we still sing today."*

Look together at the icon of Saint Romanus. Ask the children why he is holding a church. (*This tells us that he did something good for the people in the Orthodox Church--he gave us beautiful music to sing.*) Next, ask the children what else he is holding. Why is he holding this? (*Some icons show a censer because he was a deacon; others show a musical scroll for the church songs he wrote.*)

5 Music and Icon

Have the Nativity icon displayed so all the children can see it. Play Saint Romanus' Kontakion for the Nativity of Christ. Say, *"Saint Romanus gave us a way to sing what the icon lets us see."* Say the lines of the Kontakion (with some of the words beyond children's comprehension changed) and have them point out the corresponding items in the icon:

- Say, *"Today the Virgin gives birth to the One who is above all things"* (Icon: Virgin lying in cave with the Baby)
- Say, *"And the earth offers a cave to the One who is like no other"* (Icon: the cave)
- Say, *"Angels with shepherds give glory"* (Icon: angels and shepherds)
- Say, *"The Magi journey with a star"* (Icon: wise men; tell children that "magi" is another name for the wise men)
- Say, *"Since for our sake the eternal God was born as a little child."* (Icon: the Baby Jesus)

You may have a version of the hymn with slightly different words, but you can still do this exercise of corresponding the icon with the words.

6 Color the Image of Saint Barbara

Give each child crayons and a copy of the black and white image of Saint Barbara. Say, *"Here is a picture of another saint. What can you tell me about this saint?"*

Let children answer. Of course the most obvious thing is that she is a woman. Children might also notice that she is not dressed the way we dress, so maybe she lived a long time ago.

Tell the children that you will find out more about her. First, they can color her picture. Tell them her name: she is Saint Barbara.

7 About Saint Barbara

Gather the children and tell the story:

Long ago, a rich lived with his daughter Barbara in the country of Syria. He was proud of his beautiful daughter--so proud that he began to worry about letting anything or anyone in the world come too close to her. So he built a tower for her to live in.

Barbara's teachers were the only people allowed to visit her. They did not believe in our Lord Jesus Christ. Instead, they believed in many gods. So did Barbara's father. He wanted her to learn to worship the gods as he did.

From a tall tower you can see the country around it. Barbara saw wooded hills, a swiftly flowing river, and meadows covered with flowers. At night the sky was full of stars and twinkling lights. All of this was wonderful, and beautiful. Barbara began to wonder who could have made such

beautiful things. She knew that the gods her father believed in were just statues--they could never have made these things!

Barbara's father decided that she was alone too much. He let her leave the tower and go into the city. There she met Christians who could answer her questions about the Maker of all things. They taught her about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. A priest who was visiting the city told her that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who loves us and who made the world for us with His Father.

The priest baptized Barbara.

About this same time, Barbara's father ordered another building, with a pool, to be built on his property. He told the builders to put in two windows. Then he looked over the construction plans, and went out of town on business. While he was gone, Barbara told the builders to put in a third window. This was a way of showing how the real God--the Father, Son and Holy Spirit--give light to the whole world.

When Barbara's father came back from his trip, he was angry that the builders had put in an extra window. Then his daughter told him the reason--she had found the true faith. She did not believe in his gods and statues.

This made him so angry that he grabbed a sword and began beating her with it. She escaped and ran into the street, but her father found her. He could not believe that his dear daughter would not do what he told her to. He turned her over to the governor of the city. When the governor and his helpers could not make her deny her faith in Jesus Christ, they took her into the public square and beat her even more.

A Christian woman named Juliana saw what was happening to Barbara. She called out, "Stop that! She has done nothing wrong!" The governor's helpers grabbed Juliana, and beat her along with Barbara. The two women died together. People who were standing around could see that they were both praying and thanking God. Their faces showed that they were not afraid. They were ready to go and be with God. --end--

8 Wrap Up

Say, *"Remember that we said a saint is a person who tries hard to live the way God wants us to live. Sometimes we say saints were 'friends of God'. How would a person become a friend of God?"* (Let children answer. Try to bring forth that we become friends of God by praying and by doing the things He wants us to do.)

Say, *"When we want to be friends of God, we can't give up on the good things we're trying to do. We need to keep trying. Did Saint Romanus keep trying instead of giving up?"* (Yes. Saint Romanus didn't say, "I will never sing again" when he had a bad time trying to sing in church. He prayed and asked the Mother of God to help him.)

9 Closing Prayer

(Have children stand.) In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Follow the same procedure as for the Opening Prayer above.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

The Ancestors of Christ *(Ages 4-6)*

Overview

God's Family - We are all members of God's family.

Objectives

By the end of this Lesson, learners should be able to:

- Recognize that their grandparents and earlier relatives are their "ancestors"
- Develop an understanding of ourselves as members of God's Family
- Identify the ancestors of Jesus (his earthly parents and grandparents)

Materials

- Icon of Joachim and Anna
- Icon of the Nativity of Christ
- Round card stock or poster board piece about 3" in diameter with a hole punched in the top (one for each child)
- Yarn to make the round piece into a medallion (one for each child)
- Hole punch
- Crayons, markers and small stickers (stars, dots, etc.) to decorate the medallions
- Colored chalk if you wish to use it for the second step of the Procedure, entitled "Discussion Starter"
- Icon of the Old Testament figure David the King

Resources

Optional Resources

[Icon of Joachim & Anna](#) (Image)

[Icon of King David](#) (Image)

[St. Ruth Icon](#) (Image)

[The Icon of the Nativity](#) (Image)

Procedure

1 Opening Prayer

(Have students stand.) In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Tape the paper with the second pair of lines of the Nativity Troparion where children can see it. Have children practice singing these two lines a few times, then tape above it the paper with the first two lines, and practice all four. The children can again sing "O Lord, glory to Thee (or You)" as the last line.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

2 Discussion Starter: Ancestors

On the chalkboard, write the following words as shown:

ANCESTORS

Grandmother and Grandfather

Grandmother and Grandfather

Mother and Father

(leave space here to write in "Jesus Christ" later)

YOU

Connect all the words except the word ANCESTORS with dotted lines and colored or white chalk.

Say, *"We all have parents and grandparents. Then there are the people who were the grandparents of our parents. We call these our ancestors."* Under the word "YOU" on the chalkboard, write all the children's names. (Leave room under the words "Mother and Father" to write in the name of Jesus Christ later.)

Say, *"You all have ancestors."* Circle the word "ancestors." Have the children say it a few times. Ask the children to name a few of their ancestors--grandparents and perhaps great-grandparents. (Some children may not be able to name anyone, so this need not be a big part of the lesson. The names given will just be examples of "ancestors.")

3 Jesus' Ancestors and Icons

Ask, *"Did Jesus have ancestors?"* (Let children answer. Yes. The Bible tells us who they were.) Write Jesus' name right below the words "Mother and Father" on the chalkboard. Say, *"Jesus had ancestors, just as we do."*

Look at the Nativity icon together and let children identify Mary and Joseph. Say, *"Even though Jesus was God's own Son, Joseph took care of Him like a father, and also took care of Mary. Mary is Jesus's mother."*

Next, show children the icon of Joachim and Anna. Say, *"These were Jesus' grandparents. They were Mary's parents."*

Say, "The people who were our ancestors are part of our family." And we all belong to God's family because He loves us all."

4 Medallions

Give each child one of the card stock rounds. Have them write (or help them write) their names on one side, and decorate the round with markers and stickers. On the other side, have them write (or help them write) "I belong to God's family" and decorate that side.

Punch a hole at the top of each round and help the children string and tie yarn to make "necklace" they can wear home.

5 Story Reading

Gather the children for a story. Have the icons of Ruth and David displayed, and point to them as you tell the stories.

Say, *"The Bible tells us about many people who were Jesus' ancestors. Let's hear a little about two of them. The first is a young woman named Ruth. She was married to a man from the city of Bethlehem. Her husband died. When that happened, her husband's mother, who was named Naomi, said, "Ruth, go back to the place where you grew up and find happiness there." But Ruth said, "I want to be with you, Naomi. Your people will my people. Your God will be my God." So Ruth went with Naomi and took care of her. Something wonderful happened, too--Ruth found a man to marry, and he, Ruth, and Naomi made a happy family."*

Say, *"Another ancestor of Jesus was a young man named David. He could write songs and play the harp. He also wrote some poems in the Bible that we say often in church. They are called the Psalms. David grew up to be a great king of the people of Israel. He still wrote songs and poems, but he also was a brave soldier. God gave him many victories over enemies. David built a palace in the city of Jerusalem, and made it a beautiful city."*

Say, *"Ruth and David are just two of the people the Bible tells us were ancestors of Jesus Christ."*

6 Wrap Up

Review the meaning of the word "ancestor" as being the members of our family who lived before us.

7 Closing Prayer

(Have children stand.) In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Say the first four lines of the Nativity Troparion together several times. End the session with the last line, "O Lord, glory to Thee (or You)" and make sure the children take their medallions home.

God is with us! *(Ages 4-6)*

Overview

The Birth of Jesus Christ - God became man and dwelt among us.

Objectives

By the end of this Lesson, learners should be able to:

- Tell the story of the Birth of Jesus Christ, using the icon of the feast
- Identify the main characters present at the birth of Jesus
- Learn the Nativity greeting and response, ***Christ is born! Glorify Him!***

Materials

- Small icons of the Nativity of Christ for each child, laminated, as a gift for each child
- Strips of felt with the images of the angels, etc. on them for the matching game to the verse “What shall we offer...”
- Poster of the verse “What shall we offer...”

Resources

Required Resources

[Discovering Biblical Meanings in Liturgical Verses \(PDF\)](#)

[Jesus, our Savior is born \(PDF\)](#)

[The Nativity of Christ \(PDF\)](#)

[Icon of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ \(Image\)](#)

[What shall we offer You, O Christ\(HTML\)](#)

Optional Resources

[Graphic Organizer of a T-Chart \(PDF\)](#)

[The Parish Prepares for Christmas\(HTML\)](#)

[Prepare O Bethlehem \(Image\)](#)

Procedure

1 Opening Prayer

(Have children stand.) In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Tape up the card with the third pair of lines Nativity Troparion, and sing through them with the children several times. (Have children also sing the last line.) Don't be concerned about pronunciation; the idea is just to familiarize them with the hymn. You may want to repeat the brief explanation of the hymn that was suggested in a previous lesson: *"Remember that this church song or hymn is telling us that when Jesus was born, people saw the truth about God--He loves us enough to send us His own Son to be with us. Jesus gives light to the world, more than all the brightest stars."*

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

2 Review of the Nativity Story and Icon

Have the Nativity icon displayed so all the children can see it. Have them stand, with space between them, and review the Nativity story with an activity from a previous lesson. They will do appropriate motions as you read the following lines:

The three wise men traveled long and very far; from other lands they came, following a special star
(motion of riding a horse, as shown in the icon; point up to a star)

The shepherds were in the field caring for their sheep; though it was cold and dark that night, the shepherds didn't sleep
(looking all around to see the sheep and make sure nothing threatens them; huddling against cold)

Mary and Joseph were together in the cave; watching over God's own Son, Jesus the newborn Babe
(gazing down as if at the baby in the manger)

Even the animals worshipped the Child they saw; peeking in the manger where He lay on His bed of straw
(bending over and lowering heads, using hands as animal's ears on head; "peeking" in silent amazement)

They all heard the angels singing a holy song; the Savior is born because God's love is deep and strong
(cupping ears to hear angels singing)

Have them find the various figures in the icon: Mary and Joseph, the sheperds, wise men, angels. Remind them that Joseph is being tempted by the devil not to worship God or His Son Jesus. Ask, *"Where do we see the baby Jesus in the icon a second time, not just in the manger?"* (Let them find the baby being bathed, which tells us that He was a real baby who needed to have baths as we all do.)

3 Word Review

Review the meaning of these words with the children:

Nativity: birth

Saint: a person who tries hard to live the way God wants us to live. Sometimes we call saints "friends of God." Ask the children, "What are some ways we can become friends of God?" (Let them give answers such as praying, going to church, helping at home, being kind to people, caring for animals, etc.)

Advent: the time when we get ready for the Nativity of Jesus Christ, or Christmas.

4 Making a card

Let children choose a piece of card stock. Help them fold their pieces evenly to make a card, and to write **Christ is Born!** on the inside.

Children can decorate their cards with the materials you have provided.

Help them sign their names on the cards, and ask them to tell you the person to whom they plan to give the card. You might want to make a note of each recipient so that you can be sure the cards are received.

5 Icon Review

Have the icons of Saint Nicholas and Saint Romanus displayed so the children can see them.

Ask the children, *"Who was the saint who secretly gave gifts and helped people?"* (Remind them of the story of Nicholas and the poor man with three daughters.) Say "Let's remember how Saint Nicholas threw the bags of money into the poor man's window." Let the children "sling" three bags of gold--give them plenty of room! Look together at the icon.

Ask, *"Who was the saint who ate a scroll?"* (Remind them of the story of Saint Romanus being unable to sing and asking the Mother of God for help, eating the scroll at her direction, and then being able to sing and to write church songs.) (Let children act out eating a scroll.) Look together

at the icon, and note the items Saint Romanus is holding--a deacon's censer or a scroll, and a church to reflect his helping the Orthodox Church by writing beautiful music to sing.

6 Activity

Practice the Nativity greeting with the children:

Have half the children say "Christ is born!" and the other half respond "Glorify Him!" Then reverse it and have the responding half say "Christ is Born!" and the others respond. Go through this several times.

Ask children what it means to "glorify" Jesus Christ or to say "Glory to You." (It means that we worship Him as God, and thank Him for making the world, for making us, and for being with us in our lives.)

7 Wrap Up

Tape the card with the first lines of the Nativity Troparion where children can see it, and practice it. One by one, add the other three cards and practice the whole hymn together.

8 Closing Prayer

Use the Nativity Troparion as your Closing Prayer. Give the children their small icons to take home. End with "Christ is Born!" "Glorify Him!"

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen:

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

Great Expectations (Ages 18+)

Overview

Expectations Must Sometimes be Modified

Objectives

By the end of this Lesson, learners should be able to:

- State that anticipated events don't always meet our expectations
- Acknowledge that sometimes we must modify our expectations
- Compare the Winter Pascha to Great Lent
- Identify the expectations expressed in the liturgical verses of preparation for the Nativity of Christ

Materials

- Icon of the Nativity of Christ
- Copies of the short Story, "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry (in the *Resources* section of this lesson) for each participant
- Two nicely gift-wrapped boxes, one small and one large (e.g. a jewelry box and a shoe box or larger box) The larger box should be heavy--perhaps put in a rock surrounded by paper or packing material so it won't roll around. The smaller box should contain only a small paper icon of the Nativity of Christ.
- 5 x 8 index cards for each participant
- Markers, colored pencils, Christmas stickers and other stickers (dots, stars, moons, small shapes etc. to decorate the cards
- Copies of *The Winter Pascha* by Fr. Thomas Hopko (in the *Resources* section of this lesson) for each participant
- Copies of *He is Coming, He is Approaching* (in the *Resources* section of this lesson) for each participant
- Chart with the words of the Nativity Troparion (they are the Opening Prayer for this lesson) taped up where students can see it during class. Use "Thee" and "Thou" or "You" and "Your" according to the way the words are sung in your parish.
- Chart with the words of the Closing Prayer to tape up as you say it together. These words are part of the Kontakion on the Nativity of Christ, which you will be looking at more closely in Lesson 3.

Resources

Required Resources

[Gift of the Magi \(PDF\)](#)

[The Winter Pascha \(PDF\)](#)

[Icon of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ \(Image\)](#)

[He is approaching, He is coming,\(HTML\)](#)

Optional Resources

[Teaching Devices: General Reading Strategies\(HTML\)](#)

Procedure

1 Closing Prayer

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today the virgin gives birth to the transcendent one,
And the earth offers a cave to the unapproachable one.
Angels give glory with the shepherds,
And the magi journey with the star,
As for our sake He is born as a new child, He who from eternity is God.

2 Opening Prayer

Display the icon of the Nativity of Jesus Christ. Display the chart with the words of the Nativity Troparion where participants can easily see it.

(Have participants stand.)

Sing or say the words of the Troparion together.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

Talk together about the words of the Troparion. Note that Christ is compared to "light" in three places. Let students find these. They are: the "light of wisdom," the "Sun of Righteousness" and the "Orient," which means the light or star that rises in the East.

Of course this light isn't just physical. It is the light of real wisdom (not that supposedly given by the stars in the night sky, or a horoscope) and of truth.

3 Discussion: Expectations

- Show the two gift-wrapped boxes. Ask the class what they might expect to be inside each box. List their guesses on the chalkboard.
- Ask, “Based on your expectations, which box would you choose?”

Note: To reinforce the message of the short story that will follow as part of this session, have students lift each box. The weight of the rock in the larger box may lead them to believe it will contain something of some value. On the other hand, there is the old saying, “Good things come in small packages.” Let students make their choices based on their own ideas.

4 Discussion Questions

Divide the class into groups of 3 or 4, and put these discussion points on the chalkboard for the groups to talk about:

Describe a time in your life when that you had high expectations

How were these expectations met? Were you satisfied, or disappointed?

How did your feelings of satisfaction or disappointment affect your future actions?

(Tell participants that they can choose any event, either recent or in the past, to talk about. The effect on future actions might have been that they were encouraged to have high expectations again after being satisfied. But if they were disappointed, they might have lowered their expectations so as not to experience disappointment again. In either case, it would be interesting to talk about how our experiences affect what we expect in the future.)

5 Short Story

Read “The Gift of the Magi” by O. Henry together. You might want to try some of the reading strategies attached to this lesson.

Discuss:

What were Jim and Della's expectations?

Were their expectations reasonable?

How did they deal with their unfulfilled expectations?

What do you think they will do next? What do you think they should they do next?

6 As Christmas Approaches

After reading "The Gift of the Magi", talk about your own expectations by using the following questions:

- What are some of the things you anticipate as Christmas draws near?
- Do you think your expectations are realistic?
- How do you deal with the reality that your expectations are not always fulfilled?
- What elements in our society might make our expectations for Christmas unrealistic? *(This would be a good time to discuss the constant "hype" and commercialism that can lead us to have unrealistic expectations of the Christmas season and holiday. We are pushed to think everything should be fun and exciting. We are also pushed to overdo with gifts, entertaining, and decorating.)*
- What can we do to make our expectations more realistic? *(Encourage discussion of the fact that the Church calls us to prepare for the Nativity in a quiet, thoughtful way by giving us a Lenten period. The event we prepare for is monumental, but it comes quietly with the birth of a child who is not mighty in the world's view. Though it is counter-cultural, we can slow down and use this gift of time to think about the meaning of Christ's incarnation.)*

7 The Winter Pascha

Distribute copies of the *The Winter Pascha* and read it together. Then, discuss the following to continue the discussion above:

- How did Mary, Joseph and the Magi prepare for the birth of Christ? *(Let participants come up with their own answers, based on what they know about each person. Suggest that Mary and Joseph did not have much opportunity to prepare because of the journey they had to make.)*
- What opportunities does the Church give us to receive the gift of Christ's Nativity? *(Special prayers, hymns, and services which call us to prepare with joy to receive Christ, and also to make special efforts to serve others. Let participants come up with their own answers in addition to these suggestions.)*
- How does the Winter Pascha prepare us in the same way as Great Lent? How is it different? *(As noted, the two Lenten seasons both call us to prepare in quiet, meditative ways. The only real difference is in the events each season prepares us for--otherwise, they are very similar.)*

8 He is Approaching. He is Coming.

Distribute copies of the Resource entitled *He is approaching, He is coming.*

Ask participants, *"What words in this hymn give a sense of anticipation, or perhaps urgency?"* (Let participants answer. The words approaching, coming, expectation, prepare, and hasten give this sense.)

Ask, *"Is there a difference between this kind of anticipation and urgency that is different from the anticipation and urgency that pervades our society during the Christmas season?"* (Let participants give their ideas. Bring forth in the discussion that the urgency here has nothing to do with making sure all the presents get wrapped--the "Christmas rush." The anticipation here has nothing to do with what presents we hope to get from others. Rather, the anticipation is of our salvation. The urgency is because the time to meet Christ and follow Him is now.)

Give each participant a card. Have them each choose a verse from the various readings and hymns you have looked at today. This might be a verse that will help them keep the Nativity fast in a peaceful way, or simply a verse they like.

Participants can write their chosen verse on the card, and then decorate it with the materials you have provided.

Have participants take their cards home.

9 Wrap-Up

Open the two gift boxes and discuss the contents. Did they meet participants' expectations? (Perhaps the larger box might be thought to contain a more valuable gift. But the small box contains a depiction, in the icon, of the truly valuable gift--God becoming man for our sake.)

Before saying the Closing Prayer together, go over the meaning of two of the words:

"transcendent" means greater than any other.

"unapproachable" does not mean that we cannot come to God in prayer and worship, but that He is beyond anything or anyone else--no other being or thing can even begin to match Him in glory and beauty.

Showing God's Love (Ages 18+)

Overview

St. Nicholas of Myra in Lycia - The life of St. Nicholas illustrates how we can help others while not seeking praise and thanks. This is the way God calls all of us to live.

Objectives

By the end of this Lesson, learners should be able to:

- Identify St. Nicholas as a bishop, and as the patron saint of many groups
- State some facts about Saint Nicholas' life that differentiate him from the popular figure of Santa Claus
- Relate the saint's life experiences to our own today

Materials

- Icon of the Nativity of Christ
- Icon of St. Nicholas
- Copies of the Resource for this lesson entitled "St. Nicholas--Nearly Everybody's Saint!" for each participant
- Notebooks and pencils for each participant (for journaling)
- Collected ideas for a class service project from the "Resource Handbook." Find this on the OCA website under *Work of the Church*. The Handbook offers a wide variety of possible ministries and projects. Tell your priest and parish council that you will be undertaking a service project, and bring to class the information about those you feel the participants might want to try. Class members could also look at the Handbook and bring to class information about projects they find interesting
- For # 3 in the Procedure, entitled *Digging Deeper: Saint Nicholas*, you may wish to put the questions on a chart before your class session, since they are rather lengthy and would take a lot of time to write on the chalkboard
- Copies of the following "The Story of Saint Nicholas" for each student

The Story of Saint Nicholas

Saint Nicholas was born in the fourth century in a small town near the sea. It's now in the country of Turkey. His parents raised him to love God and to care about other people. Nicholas had a great sadness early in life--his parents both died while he was young. But he always remembered what they had taught him, and he helped other people whenever he could.

So it isn't a surprise to learn that one day, Nicholas did something that people still remember today, hundreds of years later. A very poor man in the town had three daughters who all wanted to get married. But their father had

no money to give them the things they needed to get married, or even enough to buy them a few nice clothes. He certainly could not provide a dowry--the customary gift from the bride's family to the groom's family--and without it his girls would have a hard time finding worthy husbands.

The father, who loved his daughters, became so desperate that he was tempted to do a terrible thing: to sell his daughters into prostitution so that they would at least have enough to eat and a roof over their heads.

Nicholas' parents had left him a good amount of money, but he wasn't interested in keeping it for himself. He knew of the man's problem, and knew he could help. On a dark summer night, he took a bag of gold and threw it in the poor man's window. Hearing the noise, the man woke up and ran to the window, but couldn't see Nicholas outside.

The next night, Nicholas did the same thing, again making sure that nobody saw him. But on a third night, the man was waiting by the window and saw the generous man who had saved his daughters from poverty. He thanked Nicholas with tears of joy running down his face, but Nicholas just nodded his head, smiled, and told the man to give thanks to God. Then he quickly left.

People in the town and the surrounding area came to love Nicholas. It seemed he was always helping someone, smiling at a child, or giving poorer neighbors what they needed. And he could always be counted on to be in church on Saturday evening, Sunday, and any other day there was a service. So when it came time to elect a new bishop, Nicholas was the person everyone thought of. In fact, God Himself had chosen Nicholas, telling a bishop to wait in church to see who would arrive earliest for the morning service. The devout Nicholas, as usual, was the first, and so the bishop knew he was God's choice.

Nicholas himself had not wanted to be a bishop. After a visit to the holy places--Jerusalem, Golgotha and Mount Sion--he planned to go to the desert to live as an ascetic. But a voice, which he recognized as divine, told him to go home.

Back in his home of Lycia, he entered a monastery, wanting nothing more than a quiet life of prayer. But again a voice said, "This is not the vineyard in which you shall bear fruit for me. Go back to the world and glorify My Name there." So Nicholas was consecrated a bishop.

The Emperor Diocletian hated Christians, especially well-loved and influential ones. Soon Bishop Nicholas was arrested, chained, and thrown into prison. It was not until the next Emperor, Constantine, took the throne, that Nicholas and thousands of other Christians were finally set free. They had been tortured and starved, but they had kept their faith.

Nicholas had to face new problems after he was set free. He was one of the bishops who attended the Council of Nicaea, where clergy from all over the world gathered to ask the Holy Spirit to guide them in choosing the right words to express the Church's teachings. One person present at this Council was a man named Arius. He was clever, and able to speak well to a crowd of people.

But Arius had some dangerous and false ideas. He was trying to convince everyone that Jesus Christ is not the divine Son of God, but just a man created by God like every man in the world. He talked and talked, with his smooth words and clever phrases.

Finally Nicholas couldn't stand any more lies from Arius. He stood up, went over to Arius, and slapped him in the face!

Of course Nicholas knew this wasn't the right thing to do, and the other bishops at the Council were shocked that a bishop would do such a thing. They even took away his rank as a bishop. But the Mother of God appeared to them all in a vision, and told them to give him back his rank. They did so.

Nicholas never stopped helping others. There is a story of sailors who were caught in a raging storm at sea. They had heard of St. Nicholas, and they had been told that he saved people and even did miracles. They called on him to save them, and as they did so he came to them in a vision, took the helm himself, and guided the boat safely into port. When the sailors reached town they went to church and thanked God, just as Nicholas would have wanted them to. After this happened, sailors wished each other a safe journey by saying, "May St. Nicholas hold the tiller!" (*Ask participants what the tiller is, and if necessary tell them it is a bar or handle on a boat that turns the rudder, the hinged piece that steers the boat.*)

Another time, there was a famine--a terrible shortage of food--in Nicholas' home town of Myra. Some ships loaded with wheat came into the harbor, on their way to the great city of Constantinople. Bishop Nicholas asked the crews on the ships to leave some wheat for his starving people. They refused, worried that they would get in trouble if they arrived at Constantinople with less than full loads. But the bishop assured them that they would have no problem.

They trusted this bishop so famous for his goodness and mercy, and left two years' worth of wheat. And sure enough, when they reached the port at Constantinople, their ships were full.

Sometimes St. Nicholas, as bishop and guardian of his people, had to deal with government officials. He once heard about a governor who had condemned three men to death for terrible crimes. But the men were actually innocent--the governor had accepted a bribe, and was willing to execute them in exchange for a big sum of money. Nicholas went to the place where the men were to be put to death and ordered the executioner to stop. By a miracle, he did so and the men went free.

Then Nicholas went to the office of the governor and confronted him with the dishonest thing he had done, almost taking three lives for money. He convinced the man to repent, and prayed with him for God's forgiveness.

As it happened, three military men under the direct command of the Emperor Constantine were present at this event. Little did they know that in a few weeks they themselves would be falsely accused of serious crimes against the Emperor. They were sentenced to death, and it occurred to them to pray to Saint Nicholas. Soon after, the saint appeared to the Emperor in a vision and told him to overturn the unjust sentence. The three innocent officers were saved.

St. Nicholas did many miracles. But we remember him especially for his kindness. We may never do miracles, but we can help and be kind to others. Maybe, like St. Nicholas, we can sometimes do good things secretly. Only God will know, and He will rejoice that we have learned from the great saint and bishop, Nicholas. END

Note: The *Resources* section of this lesson contains several biographical and hagiographical materials about Saint Nicholas. You may want to add some details from these materials as you tell the story, or simply read them for your own edification.

Resources

Required Resources

- [Biography - Santa Claus \(2005\) \(Image\)](#)
- [Icon of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ \(Image\)](#)
- [Saint Nicholas of Myra\(HTML\)](#)
- [St. Nicholas - Nearly Everybody's Saint!\(HTML\)](#)
- [St. Nicholas Banners \(HTML\)](#)
- [Story of St. Nicholas\(HTML\)](#)

Optional Resources

- [Discovering the Truth About Santa Claus\(Link\)](#)
- [St. Nicholas Archbishop of Myra in Lycia Icon \(Image\)](#)
- [St. Nicholas Archbishop of Myra in Lycia Icon \(Image\)](#)
- [St. Nicholas the Wonder-Worker](#)
- [St. Nicholas Archbishop of Myra in Lycia\(HTML\)](#)
- [St. Nicholas Troparian & Kontakion \(Book\)](#)
- [The Real Santa Claus: Legends of Saint Nicholas \(Image\)](#)
- [Wonderworker \(Image\)](#)

Procedure

1 Opening Prayer

Display the icon of the Nativity of Christ. You can also display the word chart if you feel participants would still like to have it to see the words.

(Have participants stand.)

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

2 St. Nicholas

Ask students, *"What saint would you say most people know especially well as being kind and generous?"* (Most will probably answer Saint Nicholas, or you can suggest his name.)

Say, *"Even though the character of Santa Claus is based on Saint Nicholas, there's very little similarity between Santa and the real saint. Let's find out more about the saint."* Distribute copies of "The Story of Saint Nicholas" and read through it together. You can have one student read, or have several taking turns. Display the icon of Saint Nicholas as the story is read.

3 Digging Deeper: Saint Nicholas

Discuss the following questions, either all together or by having four groups each discuss one, and then sharing their thoughts with the whole class:

1. Nicholas lost his parents early in life. How can we help those who have hard losses to become compassionate, as he did, rather than bitter, as some who suffer such losses do?
2. Nicholas dealt with things we also see: financial desperation, corrupt officials, having your life plans interrupted (becoming a bishop rather than a monk). Can his example help us deal with disappointment and disillusionment in our own lives?
3. Nicholas hit the blaspheming Arius. Does his action surprise you? What should a person do who feels that kind of anger for the same kind of reason?
4. The Troparion for Saint Nicholas includes these words: "Your poverty enriched you." How would you interpret these words?

4 A Service Project

With the materials you have collected from the Resource Handbook, have the class decide on a service project they can undertake. Write down your plans, the things each class members will do, and the results you hope to achieve. Check in with the priest and parish council.

5 Journaling

Give each participant a notebook and pen. Ask them to write (or draw, or express in their own way) their reflections on whatever aspect of Saint Nicholas' life they find most significant. In addition, ask them to write about something they will do secretly to help another person--in the spirit of Saint Nicholas.

When people have finished, collect the notebooks and pens, assuring participants that you will not open the notebooks, and that they are only being collected so that everyone will have them again for the next class session.

If participants prefer to take their notebooks home, they certainly may do so, but ask them to be sure to bring them to the next session.

6 Wrap Up

Give each participant a copy of the Resource entitled "St. Nicholas--Nearly Everybody's Saint" to take home and look over. It is fascinating to see how many people, all over the world, have taken this wonderful saint as their patron.

7 Closing Prayer

Display the icon of the Nativity of Christ. and have participants stand.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

The Winter Saints (Ages 18+)

Overview

Saints Are Special People Who Are Friends of God - Knowing about these winter saints helps students to fully know and prepare for Christ's birth.

Objectives

By the end of this Lesson, learners should be able to:

- Describe the life and work of St. Romanus the Melodist
- Sing or say and reflect upon the Christmas Kontakion, and identify it as the composition of St. Romanus
- Identify some elements of a Kontakion
- Give basic details of the lives of Saint Barbara and Saint Herman, whose feast days fall during the Nativity Fast/Advent

Materials

- Resource Download: *Kontakion on the Nativity of Christ* (One of the *Resources* for this lesson is an MP3 file of the Kontakion which you can download and burn to a CD for use in class) and a CD player
- Copies of the text of the Kontakion (in *Resources* for this lesson) for each participant
- Copies of the *Resource* entitled *St. Herman Handouts* for each participant
- Icons of St. Romanus
- Icon of the Nativity of Christ
- Copies for each participant of the following two stories: 1) life of Saint Romanus 2) life of Saint Barbara

Saint Romanus the Sweet Singer or Melodist

Saint Romanus was born many years ago. He lived in a big city, and he helped the priests and bishop in the great church there. (Show the photo of Hagia Sophia, and tell students you can still visit it, though unfortunately it is no longer a church.) Many people came to worship at the great church, and he was busy all day. But he spent his nights praying alone, sometimes in a field or in a smaller church outside the city.

One Christmas Eve, the night before the feast of the Nativity of Jesus Christ, Romanus was asked to read some of the prayers during the service. The great church was crowded, and everyone was listening. But Romanus was not a good reader. He did not say the words clearly, and nobody could understand what he was saying. Every word he fumbled over echoed in the high, open space of the church. Several people laughed at him. Finally, another reader had to take his place.

Romanus was very unhappy. He wanted so much to be able to read in church, and to do it properly. But maybe he would never be able to. He knelt with his head in his hands and prayed before the icon of Mary, the Mother of God, and told her how sad and humiliated he was.

The next day, the Mother of God spoke to him in a gentle voice as he prayed. She gave him a scroll (show students the scroll and say that a scroll can have either writing or music on it) and told him to eat it. That may seem strange to us, but it was her gift to the young man. It probably tasted like thin bread. Once he ate the scroll, a wonderful thing happened. Romanus was able not just to read prayers and Scripture properly--he could sing. He felt inspired to hymns, putting the words he loved to music.

That evening in church, Romanus was able to sing in a beautiful voice. What did he sing? The very first hymn he wrote, the Nativity hymn that starts, "Today the Virgin gives birth ..."

Romanus became a deacon in the church, and a teacher of singing and songs. Of course, this didn't happen quickly. He had to practice, and spend many hours to get better at singing and writing church hymns. The Mother of God had given him a gift, but it was not magic. He still needed to work hard to get good at what he wanted to do.

By the time Romanus was older, he had written so many beautiful hymns and lived such a good life that the Church made him a saint. Romanus was able to do what he loved most, thanks to the loving kindness of the Mother of God.

*Today, in our churches, we still sing many of the hymns that Saint Romanus wrote. They are called "Kontakia."
END*

In the *Resources* section for this unit are several icons of Saint Romanus. Look at them together, and ask students to find details that show he was a deacon (censer, stole) and one that shows he composed music (scroll.)

Saint Barbara the Greatmartyr

In the early fourth century, a rich and well-respected widower named Dioscorus lived with his daughter Barbara in the Syrian city of Heliopolis. He was proud of his beautiful daughter--so proud that he began to worry about letting anything or anyone in the world come too close to her. He built a tower for her to live in.

Her pagan teachers were allowed to visit Barbara, for Dioscorus was devoted to the worship of the gods and wanted his daughter to learn to be the same. But nobody else except servants could enter the tower, which was very luxurious and beautiful, but still a prison.

A tall tower does at least offer a view of the country around it. Barbara saw wooded hills, a swiftly flowing river, and meadows covered with flowers. At night the sky was full of stars and twinkling lights. All of this was incredibly

harmonious and beautiful, and Barbara began to ask herself how it could have come into being.

Before long she became convinced that the idols her father and friends worshipped could not have created anything. They themselves were created by people's own hands! She decided to spend the rest of her life trying to discover who created the world, rather than getting married and living as a rich man's wife and the mother of his children.

Her father had other ideas. He wanted her to marry, and there were certainly plenty of young men ready to become her husband. He insisted so strongly that she must marry that Barbara warned him, "I love you very much, but if you keep pushing me on this you may create a separation between us that we won't be able to heal."

Dioscorus decided that Barbara had been too isolated, and allowed her to go into the city. The result was the worst thing that he could ever have imagined. Barbara met Christians who could answer her questions about the Creator, and who taught her about the Holy Trinity. A priest who was visiting the city enlightened her heart and mind by telling her about Jesus Christ the Savior, and granted her request to be baptized.

About this same time, Dioscorus ordered a bathhouse to be built on his property. He instructed the builders to put in two windows, approved the construction plans, and went out of town on business. While he was gone, Barbara told the builders to put in a third window. This was a way of honoring the Holy Trinity and a way of showing how the Three-Person God enlightens the world.

Dioscorus, back from his trip, was angry that his instructions had not been followed. Then his daughter told him the reason--she had found the true faith of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. She did not believe in his idols and would not worship them.

This enraged him so much that he grabbed a sword and began beating her with it. She escaped and ran into the street, but her father found her. Unable to believe that his own daughter would defy him, he turned her over to the governor of the city. When the pagan governor and his helpers could not make her deny her faith in Christ, they took her into the public square and tortured her.

A Christian woman named Juliana saw what was happening to Barbara. She called out, "Stop that! She has done nothing wrong!" The governor's helpers grabbed Juliana, and tortured her along with Barbara. The two died together, praying and praising Christ.

Nine hundred years later, the relics of Saint Barbara were transferred to the city of Kiev by another Barbara, the daughter of the Byzantine Emperor. The relics rest there now, in the Cathedral of Saint Vladimir. END

Resources

Required Resources

[Kontakion on the Nativity of Christ \(PDF\)](#)

[St Herman Handouts \(PDF\)](#)

[Kontakion, Nativity of Christ \(MP3\)](#)

[St Herman Resources\(Link\)](#)

[Icon of St. Romanus \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of St. Romanus the Melodist \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of St. Romanus \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of St. Romanus\(HTML\)](#)

[Icon of St. Romanus the Melodist \(Image\)](#)

[The Life of St. Romanus\(HTML\)](#)

Optional Resources

[St. Romanus the Melodist\(Link\)](#)

[Saint Barbara the Greatmartyr \(Image\)](#)

[The Holy Greatmartyr Barbara](#)

Procedure

1 Opening Prayer

Display the icon of the Nativity.

(Have participants stand.)

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

2 Activity

Play the recording of the *Kontakion on the Nativity of Christ* written by Saint Romanus. This was the Closing Prayer for Lesson 1. Have the word chart displayed. After listening to the recording, sing the *Kontakion* together a few times.

Then distribute copies of the text of the *Kontakion*, a pdf in the *Resources* for this lesson. Have participants find these parts of the *Kontakion*:

- the prelude
- the stanzas or *ikoi* (strophes)
- the refrain
- Have them find the number of stanzas in the hymn.

Answers:

- the prelude begins "Today the Virgin.."
- the first stanza begins "Bethlehem has opened..."
- the refrain of each stanza is "a little child, God before the ages"
- there are 24 stanzas.

Read stanzas 3, 4 and 5 together. Ask, "*How do 3 and 4 reflect very human feelings about the miracle of Jesus Christ's birth?*" In Stanza 3, Mary the Mother of God or Theotokos is speaking to her Son. She points out that she is obediently doing what God asked of her, but she is expressing surprise--and almost annoyance--at the way He has chosen to do it. The words "your servant" are Mary's words about herself.

In Stanza 4, the magi are basically saying to Mary, "Who are you that you should have been chosen to bear this Child?") Like Scripture, the hymns of the Church are not afraid to show the whole range of our human emotions and attitudes.

Read together Stanza 5, and then Numbers 24: 17. Here is an early prophecy of the Savior. Stanza 5 is a beautiful description of the Star, Jesus Christ, who is greater and brighter than all stars, and who allows us to put aside all augury (relying on omens and fortune telling) because His love makes those things unnecessary and meaningless.

Read the 22nd stanza together. It begins "When the blameless Virgin saw..." Ask participants to name the "trinity of gifts" that Mary asks her Son to accept. (These are the well-known gifts of the Magi--gold, frankincense and myrrh. They are named in the 21st stanza.) Ask: "*What three things does the Virgin ask her Son for?*" (Temperate seasons, growth of the crops and fruit, and the well-being of all people on earth. The Theotokos is also a "mother" to us, always concerned for the welfare of all of us human beings.)

If necessary, review the meaning of "transcendent" (greater than all others or supreme) and "unapproachable" (not inaccessible but so great as to be unmatchable by anything or anyone).

3 The Life of Saint Romanus

Say, "*Let's find out more about the life of Saint Romanus, the composer of this Kontakion.*"

Distribute copies of the story about Saint Romanus' life. Have a participant read the story, or have several people take turns reading.

In the *Resources* section for this unit are several icons of Saint Romanus. Look at them together, and ask participants to find details that show he was a deacon (censer, stole) and one that shows he composed music (scroll.)

After you have read the story, ask: *"How might Romanus have reacted differently after his humiliating experience on Christmas Eve?"* (Let participants answer. Of course, he might have given up, or become angry. Instead he humbly asked help of the Mother of God.)

4 The Lives of Saint Barbara & Saint Herman

Give each participant a copy of the story of Saint Barbara's life. Have one person read it aloud, or have people take turns reading. Display the icon of Saint Barbara as the story is read.

When you have finished the story, distribute copies of the St. Herman Handouts to each participant. Divide the class into groups of three or four. Have each group read the story of Saint Herman's life, with the iconographic drawing in view. Have them look at the map of his travels, to get an idea of the cold and hardship his journey from Russia to Alaska entailed.

Ask each group to choose two things they think are most significant about Saint Herman. Let the groups share their choices with the rest of the class.

5 Journaling and Wrap Up

Suggest to participants to write in their journals about one of these:

- Choose Saint Romanus, Saint Barbara, or Saint Herman. If you could ask your saint one question, what would it be? **OR**
- Saint Barbara honored God through a building. Saint Romanus honored God through the art of music. Saint Herman honored God by living a life of poverty and prayer. Which comes closest to the way you honor God, or hope to honor God?

Continue with your plans or work for the service project you have undertaken. Update participants on anything they need to know.

6 Closing Prayer

(Have students stand.) Play the Kontakion again. Sing or say it together.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today the virgin gives birth to the transcendent one,

And the earth offers a cave to the unapproachable one.

Angels give glory with the shepherds,

The magi journey with the star,

As for our sake He is born as a new child, He who from eternity is God

Members of God's Family (Ages 18+)

Overview

The Genealogy of Jesus - By learning of the genealogy of Jesus, we learn that we are all God's family. We can learn much about the coming of Christ and the incarnation in the Old Testament, especially in the prophecy of Isaiah.

Objectives

By the end of this Lesson, learners should be able to:

- Note some of the ancestors of Jesus Christ
- Recognize that the ancestors form a continuous line from the forefathers and foremothers of the Old Testament to the birth of Jesus, the promised Messiah
- Explain the meaning of Jesus Christ's Incarnation

Materials

- A copy for each participant of the Resource handout: *Messages of the Promised Messiah*
- Icons of "Mother of God of the Akathist" and "Holy Righteous Joseph the Betrothed" (*Resources* for this lesson) to display during class
- One copy of the "Jesse Tree Illuminated Manuscript" and "Jesse Tree Window" (*Resources* for this lesson) to look at together during class. You may also want to find and show the class icons that depict the Jesse Tree.
- Icon of the Nativity
- Items for Journaling
- For "The Ancestors of Christ" (Procedure step #4), copies for each participant of "Christ's Ancestor's" below:

CHRIST'S ANCESTORS (after each ancestor's name, write in the Bible passage and description that fits. You will need to look up at least some of the Bible passages--maybe not all)

1. NOAH
2. JACOB
3. JOSEPH
4. RUTH
5. DAVID

6. ISAIAH

7. ELIZABETH

Bible Passages:

- Genesis 45: 4-8 II
- Samuel 5: 1-5
- Ruth 2: 1-9
- Isaiah 11: 1
- Luke 1: 39-45
- Genesis 8: 20-22
- Genesis 28: 10-15

Descriptions:

- King and ancestor of Christ
- Forgave persecutors, as Christ would
- God's first promise
- First to call Mary "Mother of My Lord"
- Foreigner became faithful believer
- God's renewed promise
- Prophecy

END

Resources

Required Resources

[Messages of the Promised Messiah \(PDF\)](#)

[Tree of Jesse Symbols\(HTML\)](#)

Optional Resources

[Holy Righteous Joseph the Betrothed \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of the Mother of God of the Akathist \(Image\)](#)

[Jesse Tree Illuminated Manuscript \(Image\)](#)

[Jesse Tree Window \(Image\)](#)

[Christ in the Old Testament \(Image\)](#)

Procedure

1 Opening Prayer

Display the icon of the Nativity.

(Have participants stand.)

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

2 The Incarnation

Put the word INCARNATION on the chalkboard. Ask participants how you would break this word down into parts, and put those on the chalkboard:

- IN--coming into or entering
- CARN--flesh
- ATION--a process, something taking place

Ask participants, *"Based on this breakdown, how could we define the word for someone who was not familiar with it?"* (Let participants answer. Basically, it means "becoming flesh." Speaking specifically about Our Lord, we say that the Incarnation of Jesus Christ is God becoming Man.)

Read to the class this simple modern story about why the Incarnation took place:

Once upon a time, there was a farmer who was having a run of bad luck. Her health was deteriorating, there were crop failures that year, and she had problems with her children. Her faith in God was wearing thin. It was hard to believe that God could understand and care about the struggles of ordinary human beings. Then, to add to her troubles, a bad storm began to brew. As she hurried out to get the animals into the barn, she noticed a flock of birds overhead, frantically searching for shelter.

As she watched them fly confusedly in one direction and then another, getting blown around by the strong wind, she felt sorry for them. She tried to think of a way to shoo them through the open barn door to safety. But the noise of the panicky animals and her own shouting only seemed to frighten the birds more.

She thought to herself, "Poor little things! If only I could become one of them! Then they would trust me, and I could lead them to safety!"

Suddenly she stopped in her tracks. She whispered to herself, "Now I understand why He did it that way."

After reading the story, discuss these questions:

Does this story give a good explanation of the Incarnation? (Let participants give their opinions.)

Does the story give the whole explanation? (Let participants give their opinions. Bring into the discussion that there is more to the Incarnation than the story expresses. While the story shows that Jesus Christ became Man in order to save us from something, we are also saved for something.)

To make that point, put these words of Saint Athanasius on the chalkboard:

GOD BECAME MAN SO THAT MAN MIGHT BECOME GOD.

Ask participants to say what these words mean to them. Bring into the discussion that the words don't mean that we will ever be God. They mean that we are intended to live with God forever, to share the blessings of His Kingdom.

Through the Incarnation we see, in the Person of Jesus Christ, how to live in a way that prepares us for the Kingdom, as well as saving us from death. This is an essential part of our understanding of the Incarnation.

3 The Ancestors of Christ

Display the icons of Mary ("Mother of God of the Akathist") and Joseph ("Holy Righteous Joseph the Betrothed") as you go through this section of the lesson.

Put the words ANCESTORS and GENEALOGY on the chalkboard.

Ask participants to define them both. Most participants will know that "ancestors" refers to the generations of our families that came before us. "Genealogy" is the record of our ancestors.

Say, "*Jesus had human ancestors. His birth was anticipated through many generations.*" Then glance together at the genealogies in Matthew 1: 1-17 and Luke 3: 23-38. Let participants pick out familiar names.

Divide the class into pairs, and give each a copy of *Christ's Ancestors*, from the *Materials* section of the lesson. Let them complete the exercise.

Answers:

- 1. Noah/ Genesis 8: 20-22/ God's first promise
- 2. Jacob/ Genesis 28: 10-15/ God's renewed promise
- 3. Joseph/ Genesis 45: 4-8/ Forgave persecutors, as Christ would
- 4. Ruth/ Ruth 2: 1-9/ Foreigner became faithful follower
- 5. David/ II Samuel 4: 1-5/ King and ancestor of Christ
- 6. Isaiah/ Isaiah 11:1/ Prophecy
- 7. Elizabeth/ Luke 1: 39-45/ First to call Mary "Mother of My Lord"

Go over the answers together. Note the following with the class:

Isaiah (#6), writes of the "root of Jesse." This phrase is part of some of our prayers, because Isaiah made the prophecy in a bad time for Israel, and it has been taken as a prophecy of Christ. Even though Israel's disobedience had made her a mere stump of the healthy tree that God had planted, a shoot would grow--the Savior, Christ.

Joseph (#3), is sometimes compared to Jesus Christ. Ask participants why this might be so. (Joseph is seen as one who suffered unjustly and still could see God's plan in what happened.)

Ruth (#4) reminds us that God's plan is for everyone. (Ask participants how she is a reminder of this. (Ruth was from Moab, not just a foreign country but an enemy of Israel.)

Say, "*This small sampling of the ancestors shows us how God's plan proceeded through the centuries and generations. There are many more who could be included. The line of Jesus' ancestors is sometimes depicted in a "Jesse Tree" icon or illumination.*" Look together at the examples you have copied from the *Resources* section of this lesson. Also note, on the icon of Mary the Theotokos, the figures around her--these also are the people who came before and awaited the Savior.

You might arrange to have participants visit the classrooms of the Ages 10-12 and 13-17 students to see and hear them tell about the Jesse Trees they created.

4 Messages of the Promised Messiah

Distribute the Resource handout *Messages of the Promised Messiah* to participants. This goes more deeply into the verse from Isaiah.

Have class members read Isaiah 11: 1-10, and then fill in the sheet with four attributes of the coming Savior (most of the answers will come from verses 1 – 5).

Then have them list four “wonders” that will take place when the Savior fully reigns (answers will come from verses 6 – 8).

Ask: *“Which attributes of the Savior do you think are the most important? Which of the ‘wonders’ would you most like to see?”*

Next, have participants fill in the blanks in the second part of the sheet. Not all versions of the Bible will be worded exactly as on the sheet, but they are close enough that the answers will be similar. Answers don't have to match the sheet exactly.

5 Journaling and Wrap Up

Suggest that participants write in their journals about what aspect/s of the new world as described in Isaiah 11: 1-10 they find most appealing.

Continue with planning or work on the class's chosen service project. You might keep a record of things that need to be done, and who is to do them. Then as they are completed you can mark them off.

Be sure to keep your pastor and parish council informed about your work. You might plan to make a presentation to the parish, and think of ways they can become involved,. perhaps by giving of their time, money, or any resources they have that could be of help.

6 Closing Prayer

(Have participants stand.)

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today the virgin gives birth to the transcendent one,
And the earth offers a cave to the unapproachable one.
Angels, with shepherds, glorify Him.
The wise men journey with the star,
Since for our sake the eternal God was born as a little child!

God is with us! *(Ages 18+)*

Overview

The Birth of Jesus Christ - God became man and dwelt among us: the Incarnation.

Objectives

By the end of this Lesson, learners should be able to:

- Compare and contrast the Nativity accounts and genealogies of Gospel writers Matthew and Luke
- Review facts about Saints Barbara, Herman, Nicholas and Romanus
- Consider ways which the terms New Child, Man and Pre-Eternal God can form an explanation of what the Incarnation of Jesus Christ means

Materials

- Icon of the Nativity
- Items for Journaling
- Copies for each student of the following *Resources*:
 - --- *What shall we offer You, O Christ?*
 - --- *Nativity of Christ Biblical Accounts*
 - --- *The Nativity of Christ by Professor Veselin Kesich*

For the "Review: Four Saints" activity, have the following for each group of 3-4 participants:

- Adhesive tape that won't damage the wall
- Four pieces of butcher paper (about 2 feet by 3 feet), each with one of these headings: Saint Barbara, Saint Nicholas, Saint Herman, Saint Romanus
- A set of "clues", which you can create by making enough copies of the following phrases for each group, then cutting them into strips or small pieces (NOTE: The sets of 5 clues apply to the saints in this order: Barbara, Nicholas, Herman, Romanus)
- An envelope to put the set of clues in

Clues:

A FURIOUS FATHER

A NUMBER OF SERVANTS

A THIRD WINDOW

A PUBLIC MARTYRDOM

A TOWER AS HOME

A SHIP IN TROUBLE

A FINANCIALLY STRAPPED FATHER

A RELUCTANCE TO BE BISHOP

A BRIBED OFFICIAL

A SLAPPED SPEAKER

A FOREST DWELLING

A JOURNEY FROM RUSSIA

A BOARD AS BLANKET

A HAND-FED BEAR

A LIMITED WARDROBE

A CHRISTMAS HYMN

A HUMILIATING CHRISTMAS EVE

A SWALLOWED SCROLL

A CROWDED CATHEDRAL

A DEACON AND TEACHER

Resources

Required Resources

[The Nativity of Christ \(PDF\)](#)

[Icon of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ \(Image\)](#)

[Nativity of Christ Biblical Accounts\(HTML\)](#)

[What shall we offer You, O Christ\(HTML\)](#)

Optional Resources

[Graphic Organizer of a T-Chart \(PDF\)](#)

[Prepare O Bethlehem \(Image\)](#)

Procedure

1 Opening Prayer

Display the icon of the Nativity.

(Have participants stand.) In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

2 Review: Four Saints

As a review of facts about Saints Barbara, Herman, Nicholas and Romanus:

- Divide the class into 3 or 4 teams.
- Have them take just a minute or two to choose team names. Give each team tape, a marker, and a small blank piece of paper.
- Have each team write their team name on the paper and choose an area of the room's walls or chalkboard.
- Have them put up their name paper with tape, and below that the the 4 chart papers you have prepared for them, with the names of the four saints.
- Give each team an envelope containing a set of strips of papers with "clues" pertaining to the saints.

Tell them that the winning team will be the first one that correctly tapes all the clues that pertain to each saint on that saint's chart.

Correct answers are given in the *Materials* section of this lesson. Go over the answers when everyone finishes.

3 Jesus in the Gospels: His Birth and Family

Give each participant a copy of the Resource for this lesson entitled *Nativity of Christ Biblical Accounts*. Everyone should have a Bible, or two people can share one. Discuss the following questions and points, letting participants answer and adding the information given as needed.

Look together at the genealogy of Jesus Christ in Matthew 1: 1-17, not reading all the names but glancing over them and finding some familiar ones such as Ruth, Jesse, David and Solomon.

Ask, "*Why does Matthew begin his genealogy with David and Abraham?*" (Matthew is addressing his Gospel especially to fellow Jews. He wants to make the point that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies and promises that they know well. The promises to Abraham and David are among the most important.)

Now look together at the first two verses of Matthew 2 on the *Nativity* sheet. Ask, "*Do you see a way in which these verses reinforce the point that Jesus fulfills the Old Testament?*" (The verses immediately contrast Herod, the king imposed on the Jews by the Roman government, with Jesus Christ, the true king given by God and prophesied in the Old Testament.)

Ask, "*How is Herod depicted in these verses?*" (He and his successors--see verses 16-18 and 22--are characterized as brutal, and no friends of believers in Jesus Christ. Matthew is emphasizing to the Jews that they owe their deepest allegiance to only One: the newborn Savior.)

Ask, "*How else does Matthew establish the universal kingship of Jesus Christ in the very first verse?*" (The wise men from the East are exotic and educated--they represent the "greater" world far from obscure Bethlehem. Yet they too know about and want to see this King.)

Glance together at Luke's genealogy in 3: 23-38. Don't try to read through all the names, but do read together verse 38. Ask, "*How does this verse show us that Jesus Christ's salvation is for all people?*" (It calls Jesus the "son of Adam." Every person--not just those of one nation or people--is descended from Adam. So Jesus Christ is the Savior for all people. Luke is a Gentile and wants to stress this to fellow Gentiles.)

Ask, "*How often is Herod mentioned in Luke's account?*" (He is not mentioned at all. Luke is not emphasizing the contrast of Christ as true King to Herod as mere worldly king.)

Now have the class look through Luke's account of the Nativity on the sheet. Ask, "*Who are the first people Luke mentions as knowing about Jesus as the Savior? How is this different from Matthew's account? What part of the account is the same?*" (The shepherds--verses 8-16--are first. Shepherds, unlike wise men, were neither exotic or educated. They were considered very low class. By making them the ones the angels visit, Luke again emphasizes that Jesus' salvation is

for everyone. What is the same in this account is that they, like the wise men, set out to see the Child.)

Finally, reread Matthew 1: 3-6. This time ask, "*Do you think it was usual in Matthew's time to include women in a genealogy?*" (From the way you have asked the question, participants will realize that the answer is no. Tell them they are right--the inclusion of Tamar, Ruth, Rahab and "her who had been the wife of Uriah", meaning Bathsheba, is another way we are being shown that God's plan of salvation is for everyone. Genealogies of the time would usually only include men. And, as you noted in the previous lesson, Ruth came from the alien country of Moab.)

Ask, "*Is there anything else that Tamar, Ruth, Rahab and Bathsheba have in common besides being women?*" (They were Gentiles, not members of the people of Israel. In addition, Rahab was a prostitute, and Bathsheba committed adultery with David. So Matthew, like Luke, is including people of all backgrounds in his genealogy. This emphasizes the universality and compassion of Christ's salvation.)

Ask participants: "*What does this emphasis on universality say about our work in the Church?*" (There may be various answers and opinions given, but certainly these verses tell us that we, in our churches, must be open to all people who seek Christ.)

4 Serving Others: Your Service Project

Continue with the work on your class service project.

If you have chosen something that will be ongoing when this five-week unit of study is finished, plan the means by which you will continue, and make specific assignments to class members. Set up a system for keeping in touch and making sure things get done as they need to.

If you have not done so, work with your pastor and parish council to plan a presentation to the whole parish. This should not only be informative, but if possible give parishioners a way to take part in and contribute to the project.

You might consider making posters, preparing a brief informative piece for the parish bulletin, or simply planning to talk with as many parishioners as possible about what you are doing, to get their suggestions and to ask for whatever help they can give.

5 Jesus Christ: New Child, Man, Pre-Eternal God

Distribute copies of the Resource handout entitled *What shall we offer You, O Christ* to each participant.

Read through it together, and notice the two terms it applies to Jesus Christ: "Man" and "Pre-Eternal God." Then ask, "*What is the term that appears in the refrain of the Kontakion on the*

Nativity by *Saint Romanus?*" (It is "new child.")

Discuss together: What does it mean to each of us that we have a Pre-Eternal God who became not just Man, but a New(born) Child?

Let participants give their ideas, and express their feelings. Perhaps you might discuss ways in which to approach discussions of faith with other groups (Jews, Muslims, Buddhists) who do not share our belief that the Pre-Eternal God became Man and New Child for us.

6 Wrap Up and Journaling

Suggest to participants to write in their journals about the gift they will give to God during this Nativity season. As they read over the gifts in *What shall we offer You, O Christ*, they can consider their own offering.

Give participants their journals to take home. Encourage them to keep writing during the Nativity season, and beyond.

Remind participants of the Nativity greeting and response: **Christ is Born! Glorify Him!** Encourage them to offer the greeting to others, and to promote its use in the parish.

Give each participant a copy of the Resource handout entitled *The Nativity of Christ* by Professor Veselin Kesich. Encourage them to do this Bible study with family or a group of friends. It is a good way of reinforcing the study you have done together over these weeks, and gives those who do it a way of going deeper into the study of the Gospels in general.

7 Closing Prayer

(Have students stand.)

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today the virgin gives birth to the transcendent one,
And the earth offers a cave to the unapproachable one.
Angels give glory with the shepherds,
The magi journey with the star,
As for our sake He is born as a new child, He who from eternity is God.

Great Expectations *(Ages 13-17)*

Overview

Our Expectations - Students will consider the stories of the coming of God's Son to us on earth, as He is born of Mary "as a little, or in some translations a 'new' child." They will discuss the concepts of expectation and preparation--especially preparing to "meet the Lord."

Objectives

By the end of this Lesson, learners should be able to:

- Acknowledge that sometimes we must modify our expectations
- Compare and contrast the Winter Pascha to Great Lent
- Identify ways the services and hymns of the Nativity Fast help us to prepare for the Feast of the Nativity in a spiritually healthy way

Materials

- Resource handout: *The Gift of the Magi* (one per student)
- Resource handout: *The Winter Pascha* (one per student)
- Resource handout: *He is Approaching, He is Coming* (one per student)
- 5 x 8 Index Cards (one per student--if you choose to do the optional activity)
- 2 Gift-Wrapped boxes, 1 small and 1 large, *i.e. a jewelry box and a shoe box*. In the larger box have something heavy but not valuable (perhaps a rock with paper or packing material surrounding it so it won't move); in the small box a small icon of the Nativity of Christ
- Markers and colored pencils
- Christmas stickers
- Glitter, glue, or any small decorative materials to put on the index cards if you choose to do the optional activity
- Chart with the words of the Nativity Troparion, which is the Opening Prayer. (Note: On the OCA website in the *Liturgical Music* section you can find words and music for the Troparion.) *For the chart and the prayer, use either Thee/Thou or You/Your according to the custom in your parish.* You may want to designate a certain area in the room, with icon and candle, as the place in which your class prays together.
- Poster board for each group of 3-4 students to make posters
- From magazines and/or on line, copies of various secular ads for Christmas. Choose those that show a commercialized view of the holiday. Have copies for each group of students.

Resources

Required Resources

[Gift of the Magi \(PDF\)](#)

[The Winter Pascha \(PDF\)](#)

[Icon of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ \(Image\)](#)

[He is approaching, He is coming,\(HTML\)](#)

Optional Resources

[Teaching Devices: General Reading Strategies\(HTML\)](#)

Procedure

1 Opening Prayer

(Have the icon of the Nativity of Christ displayed where students can see it. Have the chart with the words of the Nativity Troparion put up so students can review the words if they need to.)

(Have students stand.) In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Sing or say the Troparion together.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

Ask students to identify three places in the Troparion where Jesus Christ is compared to light. Talk a little about each one, asking students about their meaning and supplying information as needed:

Light of wisdom: Jesus is not a physical light, but the One who enlightens us with wisdom and truth.

Sun of Righteousness: Again, Jesus is like the "Sun: giving light. He is also the "Son" of Righteousness--of God the Father. The wise men, who thought wisdom and knowledge could come from the stars, now know that He is the One to be worshipped because He is wisdom and truth.

Orient from on high: The light that rises in the East.

2 Discussion Starter

Show the class the two gift wrapped boxes you have prepared. Then:

- Ask the class what they might expect to be inside each box. List their ideas on a chalkboard or chart. .
- Ask: *“Based on your expectations, which box would you choose as a gift?”* Then those who wish to can tell you their expectations. Some might say that the large box, being rather heavy, is more likely to contain something good. Tell the class you will open the boxes at the end of the lesson.

Invite any students who would like to to write on the board a situation or event about which they had high expectations (perhaps a holiday, a birthday, a visit to or from someone, a trip, a class with a certain teacher, a book or movie, etc.)

3 Discussion Questions

Ask students to look at the words they have put on the chalkboard. Divide the class into groups of 3 or 4, give each group paper and pencil, and have them each choose a person to record some general ideas from their discussion (not every word.) Ask them to do the following:

Have a few volunteers who wrote on the board describe the event or situation their words on the board refer to.

Ask: Were their expectations satisfied, or were they disappointed?

Ask: What happens to us when our expectations are met? What happens when our expectations are disappointed? How does satisfaction or disappointment affect our future behavior? (Does disappointment make us lower our expectations? Does satisfaction make us have higher expectations--that things will always get better and better?)

4 Short Story

Distribute copies of the short story, “The Gift of the Magi” by O. Henry. Read it together. (Students can stay in their groups.)

Talk about these questions together:

What were Jim and Della's expectations?

Were their expectations realistic?

Do you think they dealt well with their disappointed expectations?

What do you think they will do next?

What do you think they should do next?

Let students give their own answers. There may be an interesting variety of opinions, which could make for an interesting discussion with no right or wrong answers.

5 Activity: Christmas Expectations

After reading "The Gift of the Magi" discuss the following:

- What are some of the things you expect as Christmas draws near?
- Do you think your expectations are realistic?
- Are there things in our society that encourage unrealistic expectations? (Bring into the discussion such points as the efforts of advertisers to make us spend a lot, and to feel cheap if we don't; the sense in the media that Christmas is mostly about parties and fun; the absence of any time for quiet reflection.)

Give each group several copies of the Christmas ads you have found. Have each group make a poster and create a title. The title can express the group's own feelings about Christmas, or about the way our society views it.

Plan to hang the posters in the classroom, or in a place where parishioners can see them.

6 The Winter Pascha

Distribute and read together the Resource handout *The Winter Pascha*.

Compare the verses that are listed side by side. Ask, "*How are the Christmas verses similar to the Pascha (Easter) verses?*" Bring into the discussion the point that the Christmas verses tell us of Jesus' divinity and at the same time His humility. For example, the verse, "God who in the beginning fashioned the heavens lies in a manger."

The Paschal verses lead Him from humility to actual suffering and death. He is "pierced with a sword" and "nailed to a cross." So Christmas is the beginning of His plan to come to us, teach us, suffer, and be crucified. The plan ends in victory when He rises from the dead and promises us eternal life, too.

So our real Christmas expectation can be eternal life--the greatest of all possible gifts--because of the plan that begins with the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

7 He is Approaching. He is Coming.

Distribute the Resource handout *He is Approaching, He is Coming*.

Read the verse together, and ask what students think it means to call Jesus Christ "the expectation of the nations." Bring into the discussion the point that a Savior had been promised for many ages, in many cultures. Yet the true Savior, Jesus Christ, was different from what many people expected.

Read the Bible passages and discuss the mistaken expectations some people had of Jesus Christ as Savior:

- **Herod** (Matthew 2: 7-16) Herod expected that the Savior would seek political power and would be a threat to Herod's own power.
- **The disciples** (Acts 1:6) The disciples expected that Jesus would free Israel from Roman authority.
- **Peter** (John 13: 5-8) Peter did not expect the Savior to do a very humble task like washing the feet of His own disciples.
- **The disciples** (John 4: 27) The disciples did not expect Jesus to ignore the rules about a rabbi (a Jewish teacher) talking to a woman alone in public.

Remind students that we as Christians have a special expectation of Christmas: it is the beginning of God's plan to be with us, teach us, die and rise again to give us eternal life through the Resurrection.

8 Optional Activity

Have each student choose a verse from *He is approaching, He is Coming* and write it on a card. They can decorate it with stickers and glitter if they choose to, and take it home to keep close at hand. The card can serve as a reminder of what we anticipate and expect during the Nativity Fast, also called Advent--the time of waiting and preparation for Christmas, the Feast of the Nativity of Jesus Christ.

9 Wrap-Up

As students are cleaning up and preparing for the Closing Prayer, open the two gift boxes and discuss the contents. Ask students whether the contents surprised them. The small box, containing the icon, is another reminder of the greatest gift Christmas can bring us--the birth of Christ, leading to His Resurrection and our promise of eternal life with Him.

10 Reflection

Ask students to think about how the period of preparation, the Nativity Fast or Advent, can help us to have good and realistic expectations of Christmas. Bring into the discussion that the Fast gives us:

Words of prayer, such as the ones we have talked about today, that can be the basis of our own prayer.

Church services which remind us of the real gift--eternal life.

Time--some weeks in which we are asked to slow down and really think about God and His gifts, as well as our families and loved ones. The Nativity season shouldn't be lost in a rush of buying and partying.

The fast itself. Fasting helps us become open to God's presence because our bodies (and souls) are not "weighed down" with rich food. Fasting also helps us really enjoy the feast when it comes. To emphasize this point, share a story about Archbishop Dmitri of blessed memory. He was a hierarch of the Orthodox Church in America:

At a parish coffee hour, a child asked Abp. Dmitri whether he preferred plain donuts or the ones with frosting and sprinkles. He answered that he preferred the donuts with frosting and sprinkles. He said, "Because we Orthodox fast, and give up fancy foods for certain periods of time, we should really feast when we feast. The fancy donuts--the ones with frosting and sprinkles--are good for feasting!"

11 Closing Prayer

(Have students stand.) In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Sing or say the Troparion together.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

You may wish to review words again, as follows:

Ask students to identify three places in the Troparion where Jesus Christ is compared to light. Talk a little about each one, asking students about their meaning and supplying information as needed:

Light of wisdom: Jesus is not a physical light, but the One who enlightens us with wisdom and truth.

Sun of Righteousness: Again, Jesus is like the "Sun: giving light. He is also the "Son" of Righteousness--of God the Father. The wise men, who thought wisdom and knowledge could come from the stars, now know that He is the One to be worshipped because He is wisdom and truth.

Orient from on high: The light that rises in the East.

Showing God's Love *(Ages 13-17)*

Overview

St. Nicholas of Myra in Lycia - The life of St. Nicholas illustrates how we can help others, thereby showing God's love for all. We also can associate the acts of charity with the real St. Nicholas, rather than the fictionalized character of Santa Claus so familiar in our world. Understanding the true nature of St. Nicholas in Myra and Lycia helps us to prepare for to meet the Lord.

Objectives

By the end of this Lesson, learners should be able to:

- Retell the life and works of St. Nicholas
- Distinguish the differences and/or similarities between St. Nicholas and popular ideas about Santa Claus
- Recommend several ways in which you and other members of your parish can serve the needs of others, following the example of St. Nicholas
- Select and commit yourselves, as a class, to a service project in the parish. This might be cleaning the grounds or an area of the building; keeping in touch with shut-ins or older parishioners; planning events for the young children. Make plans with the parish priest and parish council, and get permission from your students' parents for whatever you decide.

Materials

- Resource handout: *Troparian and Kontakion of St. Nicholas*
- Icon of the Nativity of Christ
- Icon of St. Nicholas of Myra in Lycia
- Map (easily found in a book, or on line) showing the country of Turkey
- Copies of the following "Story of Saint Nicholas" for each student:

The Story of Saint Nicholas

Saint Nicholas was born hundreds of years ago in a small town near the sea. It's now in the country of Turkey. (*Show Turkey on map.*) His parents raised him to love God and to care about other people. Nicholas had a great sadness early in life--his parents both died while he was young. But he always remembered what they had taught him, and he helped other people whenever he could.

So it isn't a surprise to learn that one day, Nicholas did something that people still remember today, hundreds of years later. A very poor man in the town had three daughters who all wanted to get married. But their father had no money to give them the things they needed to get married, or even enough to buy a few nice clothes.

Nicholas's parents had left him a good amount of money, but he wasn't interested in keeping it for himself. On a dark summer night, he took a bag of gold and threw it in the poor man's window. Hearing the noise, the man woke up and ran to the window, but couldn't see Nicholas outside.

The next night, Nicholas did the same thing, again making sure that nobody saw him. But on a third night, the man was waiting by the window and saw the generous man who had saved his daughters from poverty. He thanked Nicholas with tears of joy running down his face, but Nicholas just nodded his head, smiled, and told the man to give thanks to God. Then he quickly left.

People in the town and the surrounding area came to love Nicholas. It seemed he was always helping someone, smiling at a child, or giving poorer neighbors what they needed. And he could always be counted on to be in church on Saturday evening, Sunday, and any other day there was a service. So when it came time to elect a new bishop, Nicholas was everyone's choice.

But the Emperor Diocletian hated Christians, and soon Nicholas was arrested, chained, and thrown into prison. When the next Emperor, Constantine, took the throne, Nicholas and thousands of other Christians were finally set free. They had been tortured and starved, but they still kept their faith.

Nicholas had to face new problems after he was set free. He was one of the bishops who attended the Council of Nicaea, where clergy from all over the world gathered to ask the Holy Spirit to guide them in choosing the right words to express the Church's teachings. One person present at this Council was a man named Arius. He was clever, and able to speak well to a crowd of people.

But Arius had some dangerous and false ideas. He was trying to convince everyone that Jesus Christ is not the divine Son of God, but just a man created by God like every man in the world. He talked and talked, with his smooth words and clever phrases.

Finally Nicholas couldn't stand any more lies from Arius. He stood up, went over to Arius, and slapped him in the face!

Of course Nicholas knew this wasn't the right thing to do, and the other bishops at the Council were shocked that a bishop would do such a thing. They even took away his rank as a bishop. But the Mother of God appeared to them all in a vision, and told them to give him back his rank. They did so.

Nicholas never stopped helping others. There is a story of sailors who were caught in a raging storm at sea. They had heard of St. Nicholas, and they had been told that he saved people and even did miracles. They called on him to save them, and as they did so he came to them in a vision, took the helm himself, and guided the boat safely into port. When the sailors reached town they went to church and thanked God, just as Nicholas would have wanted them to. After this happened, sailors wished each other a safe journey by saying, "May St. Nicholas hold the tiller!" (*Ask students what the tiller is, and if necessary tell them it is a bar or handle on a boat that turns the rudder, the hinged piece that steers the boat.*)

Another time, there was a famine--a terrible shortage of food--in Nicholas' home town of Myra. Some ships loaded with wheat came into the harbor, on their way to the great city of Constantinople. Bishop Nicholas asked the crews on the ships to leave some wheat for his starving people. They refused, worried that they would get in

trouble if they arrived at Constantinople with less than full loads. But the bishop assured them that they would have no problem.

They trusted this bishop so famous for his goodness and mercy, and left two years' worth of wheat. And sure enough, when they reached the port at Constantinople, their ships were full.

Sometimes St. Nicholas, as bishop and guardian of his people, had to deal with government officials. He once heard about a governor who had condemned three men to death for terrible crimes. But the men were actually innocent--the governor had accepted a bribe, and was willing to execute them in exchange for a big sum of money. Nicholas went to the place where the men were to be put to death and ordered the executioner to stop. By a miracle, he did so and the men went free.

Then Nicholas went to the office of the governor and confronted him with the dishonest thing he had done, almost taking three lives for money. He convinced the man to repent, and prayed with him for God's forgiveness.

St. Nicholas did many miracles. But we remember him especially for his kindness. We may never do miracles, but we can help and be kind to others. Maybe, like St. Nicholas, we can sometimes do good things secretly. Only God will know, and He will rejoice that we have learned from the great saint and bishop, Nicholas. END

Note: The *Resources* section of this lesson contains several biographical and hagiographical materials about Saint Nicholas. You may want to add some details from these materials as you tell the story, or simply read them for your own edification.

Resources

Required Resources

- [Biography - Santa Claus \(2005\) \(Image\)](#)
- [Icon of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ \(Image\)](#)
- [St. Nicholas - Nearly Everybody's Saint!\(HTML\)](#)
- [Story of St. Nicholas\(HTML\)](#)

Optional Resources

- [Saint Nicholas Wikipedia](#)
- [Discovering the Truth About Santa Claus\(Link\)](#)
- [St. Nicholas Archbishop of Myra in Lycia Icon \(Image\)](#)
- [St. Nicholas the Wonder-Worker](#)
- [St. Nicholas Archbishop of Myra in Lycia\(HTML\)](#)
- [Teaching Devices: General Reading Strategies\(HTML\)](#)
- [St. Nicholas Troparian & Kontakion \(Book\)](#)

[The Real Santa Claus: Legends of Saint Nicholas \(Image\)](#)

[Wonderworker \(Image\)](#)

Procedure

1 Opening Prayer

Have the icon of the Nativity displayed, as well as the chart with the words of the Nativity Troparion.

(Have students stand.) In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Sing or say together:

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

You may wish to review some of the words, as you did last week.

2 Discussion Starter

Begin by asking the following:

- What are all the things you can think of that you know about Santa Claus? (List students' comments on the chalkboard or butcher paper)
- Where do you think most people get their information about Santa Claus if they are not regular churchgoers?
- Do you think the information most people have about him is complete, or accurate? Why or why not?

Bring into the discussion that there is very little similarity between Santa Claus and the real St. Nicholas. Point out, for example, that "Mrs. Santa Claus" has now become a popular fictional figure, even though the real St. Nicholas was a celibate and a bishop. But any child who ever believed in Santa Claus will not be disappointed to find out that the real saint on whom the legend is based--St. Nicholas--was kind, courageous, and much loved.

3 The Story of St. Nicholas

Distribute copies of "The Story of Saint Nicholas." Tell the story, or have students (those who like to read out loud) take turns reading. (Note: As an optional activity outside of class, you may want to get and show the A & E Biography Film or Biography Channel Film "Santa Claus" about the life of St. Nicholas and the development of the character of Santa Claus. Many public libraries have this item. Its cover is shown in the *Resources* list for this lesson.)

Introduce the story by saying, *"Let's find out more about the real Saint Nicholas."*

4 Story Review

Review the story with a "True/False" game.

Have students stand, making sure they have room around them to move and make gestures. Tell them, *"For this review game, I am going to say something about St. Nicholas. I will ask you to do one thing if what I have said is true. I will ask you to do something else if what I have said is false. So listen carefully!" (Be ready to repeat each statement, and give students a few seconds to think about it. Give correct answers each time.)*

1. Say, *"The country of Greece is where Saint Nicholas was born. If that's true, march in place. If that's false, raise both hands high in the air."* (False--he was born in Turkey.)

2. Say, *"Saint Nicholas's parents were poor farmers. If that's true, bend over and touch the floor with your fingers. If that's false, put your hands behind your head."* (False--they were wealthy city people.)

3. Say, *"Saint Nicholas was a bishop. If that's true, put your hands above your head and clap. If that's false, march in place."* (True.)

4. Say, *"Saint Nicholas's parents died when he was young. If that's true, turn around in a circle. If that's false, bend over and touch the floor with your fingers."* (True.)

5. Say, *"Saint Nicholas was put in prison and tortured for being a Christian. If that's true, wiggle all ten fingers. If that's false, raise both hands high in the air."* (True.)

6. Say, *"Some other prisoners and Saint Nicholas secretly escaped from prison one very dark night. If that's true, put your hands behind your head. If that's false, bend over and touch the floor with your fingers."* (False. Saint Nicholas was released from prison only when a new emperor came to the throne.)

7. Say, *"Sailors wished each other a safe journey by saying, 'May Saint Nicholas steer your boat.' If that's true, march in place. If that's false, wiggle all ten fingers."* (False. They said, "May Saint Nicholas hold the tiller" because of a time when he came in a vision to sailors having trouble in a storm, and guided their boat safely to harbor.)

8. Say, "*Saint Nicholas, when he was a bishop, once saved his people from starving by getting loaded ships to leave grain with him. If that's true, turn around in a circle. If that's false, put your hands high above your head.*" (True. Ask students to tell you the part of the story that is a miracle--the ships were still fully loaded when they reached their final port, even though they had left a good deal of grain for Nicholas' people.)

9. Say, "*At the Council of Nicaea, a man named Arius slapped Saint Nicholas because of the things he was saying. If that's true, bend over and touch the floor with your fingers. If that's false, put your hands on your knees.*" (False. Nicholas, unable to listen to any more lies about the Son of God from the mouth of Arius, slapped him.)

10. Say, "*One time, Saint Nicholas couldn't convince a government official that the official was wrong to take bribes and let innocent men die. If that's true, shake your arms. If that's false, turn around in a circle.*" (False. He did convince the official, and got him to repent and ask God's forgiveness.

5 Digging Deeper: Saint Nicholas

Hand out copies of the Troparion and Kontakion for St. Nicholas. Talk together about the phrases "your humility exalted you" and "your poverty enriched you." Ask students what they think these phrases mean.

Ask, "*How could these phrases apply to our lives?*" Ask whether these words apply to the way our society and culture encourage us to live. (Let students give their ideas. Bring forth the fact that we are encouraged to seek money, fame, enjoyment and self-satisfaction. Saint Nicholas sought none of these things--yet his life was more full and satisfying than the lives of many people.)

6 Scripture and Discussion Questions

- Why do you think St. Nicholas gave gifts anonymously?
- Is it hard to be anonymous in doing good things? Would you be willing to do things that would help others, and that were costly to you in time, effort, and money, and never have anyone know that it was you who did those things? What are some reasons to be anonymous, and are there any reasons NOT to be anonymous?

Let students give their own answers.

Read together Matthew 6: 2-4. Ask, "*What is Jesus Christ saying here about the things we have talked about?*" (He is saying not to look for praise, or to do things with receiving praise in mind. Rather, do them because you love God and other people. Try to help students understand that when Jesus speaks about God rewarding us, He means that God responds to our love with His

love, just as people respond to others' love with their own love. Jesus' words do not mean that God measures our love and then gives some tangible reward for it.)

Give each student pencil and paper to write down something they will do anonymously for another person during the coming weeks. They can keep this confidential, not sharing it with you or anyone else in the class.

7 Service Project

Ask students to think of ways they might be of service to the parish. Some possibilities are listed in the Objectives for this lesson.

Put students' suggestions on the chalkboard, and list things you will need to do. Those would include making your plans with the pastor and the parish council, as well as parents. All these people need to be in agreement with your plans.

You may also need materials or tools, a schedule, and any other arrangements necessary for the project you choose.

8 Wrap-Up

Remind students to think about their private pledge to do an anonymous service, and about their corporate project.

9 Closing Prayer

(Have students stand.) In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Sing or say together:

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

The Winter Saints *(Ages 13-17)*

Overview

Saints Are Special People Who Are Friends of God - Knowing about these winter saints helps students to know Christ, and prepare for His birth.

Objectives

By the end of this Lesson, learners should be able to:

- Describe the life and work of St. Romanus the Melodist
- Identify some parts of St. Romanus' Kontakion on the Nativity of Christ
- Tell the basic story of the life of Saint Barbara the Greatmartyr
- Tell the basic story of the life of Saint Herman of Alaska

Materials

- Resource: *Kontakion on the Nativity of Christ (text)*
- Resource download: *MP3 file of the Kontakion which you can download and burn to a CD for use in class, with CD player*
- Resource: *St. Herman Handouts*
- Icons of St. Romanus
- Icon of the Nativity of Christ

- For the "Fill in the Facts" Game (see Procedure #4) create two posters. On the first, put the title *Saint Barbara* and write the following sentences in large letters, with the blank spaces as shown. The blank spaces should be large enough for students to tape in cards or pieces of paper with the correct words. Do the same for second poster, entitled *Saint Herman*. Instructions for the cards are below.

On the first poster:

- a. I was the _____ of a rich and well-known man.
- b. I grew up living in a _____ my father built.
- c. I had three _____ made to honor the Holy Trinity.
- d. I knew that man-made _____ could not have created the beauty of nature.
- e. My own father had me _____.

f. I was a _____ for the faith.

On the second poster:

a. I was a _____ in Russia.

b. I did most of my work for God in _____.

c. I lived on an _____.

d. My only blanket was a _____.

e. Even the wild forest _____ trusted me as a friend.

f. Unlike many male saints, I was never _____.

On cards or pieces of paper that will fit into the blanks (students will tape them onto the posters), write the following words. Use 2 different colors of paper, or of markers, for the 2 groups of 6 words:

For the first poster: daughter, tower, idols, windows, killed, martyr

For the second poster: monk, Alaska, island, board, animals, ordained

Have tape for students to use.

If you have a large class, you may want to make more copies of the posters and word cards. The teams playing the game should be 3-4 students each.

- Copies for each student of the following story of the life of Saint Barbara:

Greatmartyr Barbara

In the early fourth century, a rich and well-respected widower named Dioscorus lived with his daughter Barbara in the Syrian city of Heliopolis. He was proud of his beautiful daughter--so proud that he began to worry about letting anything or anyone in the world come too close to her. He built a tower for her to live in.

Her pagan teachers were allowed to visit Barbara, for Dioscorus was devoted to the worship of the gods and wanted his daughter to learn to be the same. But nobody else except servants could enter the tower, which was very luxurious and beautiful, but still a prison.

A tall tower does at least offer a view of the country around it. Barbara saw wooded hills, a swiftly flowing river, and meadows covered with flowers. At night the sky was full of stars and twinkling lights. All of this was incredibly harmonious and beautiful, and Barbara began to ask herself how it could have come into being.

Before long she became convinced that the idols her father and friends worshipped could not have created anything. They themselves were created by people's own hands! She decided to spend the rest of her life trying to discover who created the world, rather than getting married and living as a rich man's wife and the mother of his children.

Her father had other ideas. He wanted her to marry, and there were certainly plenty of young men ready to become her husband. He insisted so strongly that she must marry that Barbara warned him, "I love you very much, but if you keep pushing me on this you may create a separation between us that we won't be able to heal."

Dioscorus decided that Barbara had been too isolated, and allowed her to go into the city. The result was the worst thing that he could ever have imagined. Barbara met Christians who could answer her questions about the Creator, and who taught her about the Holy Trinity. A priest who was visiting the city enlightened her heart and mind by telling her about Jesus Christ the Savior, and granted her request to be baptized.

About this same time, Dioscorus ordered a bathhouse to be built on his property. He instructed the builders to put in two windows, approved the construction plans, and went out of town on business. While he was gone, Barbara told the builders to put in a third window. This was a way of honoring the Holy Trinity and a way of showing how the Three-Person God enlightens the world.

Dioscorus, back from his trip, was angry that his instructions had not been followed. Then his daughter told him the reason--she had found the true faith of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. She did not believe in his idols and would not worship them.

This enraged him so much that he grabbed a sword and began beating her with it. She escaped and ran into the street, but her father found her. Unable to believe that his own daughter would defy him, he turned her over to the governor of the city. When the pagan governor and his helpers could not make her deny her faith in Christ, they took her into the public square and tortured her.

A Christian woman named Juliana saw what was happening to Barbara. She called out, "Stop that! She has done nothing wrong!" The governor's helpers grabbed Juliana, and tortured her along with Barbara. The two died together, praying and praising Christ.

Nine hundred years later, the relics of Saint Barbara were transferred to the city of Kiev by another Barbara, the daughter of the Byzantine Emperor. The relics rest there now, in the Cathedral of Saint Vladimir. END

Resources

Required Resources

[Kontakion on the Nativity of Christ \(PDF\)](#)

[St Herman Handouts \(PDF\)](#)

[Kontakion, Nativity of Christ \(MP3\)](#)

[St Herman Resources\(Link\)](#)

[Icon of St. Romanus \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of St. Romanus the Melodist \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of St. Romanus \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of St. Romanus\(HTML\)](#)

[Icon of St. Romanus the Melodist \(Image\)](#)

Optional Resources

[St. Romanus the Melodist\(Link\)](#)

[Saint Barbara the Greatmartyr \(Image\)](#)

[The Holy Greatmartyr Barbara](#)

Procedure

1 Opening Prayer

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

2 The Kontakion on the Nativity of Christ

Play the prelude to the *Kontakion on the Nativity of Christ*. Then, distribute copies of the text of the *Kontakion*. Have students find these parts of the *Kontakion*:

- prelude
- stanzas or *oikoi* (strophes)
- refrain.
- Have them check to see how many stanzas are in this kontakion.

Answers:

- The prelude begins "Today the Virgin..." T
- The first stanza begins "Bethlehem has opened..."
- The refrain of each stanza is "a little child, God before the ages"

- There are 24 stanzas

Read together the 22nd stanza. Ask, "What is the 'trinity of gifts' that the Mother of God asks her Son to accept?" (The gold, frankincense and myrrh brought to the baby Jesus are mentioned in the 21st stanza.)

Ask, "What three gifts does the Mother ask her Son for?" (Temperate seasons, growth of fruits and crops, the well-being of all people. Note that all three gifts are for the benefit of every human being. The Mother of God is our loving, concerned mother as well.)

Look again at the Prelude. Ask students what they think the last words mean: "to us there has been born a little Child, God before the ages." ((Let students give their ideas. Bring forth the point that the words are telling us that we have received the greatest possible gift. God loves us enough to come and be one of us, to be born a little Child. But He is the eternal God, and His coming means we can have eternal life.)

3 The Life of Saint Romanus

(Display the icon of Saint Romanos as you tell the story.)

Saint Romanus was born many years ago. He lived in a big city, and he helped the priests and bishop in the great church there. (Show the photo of Hagia Sophia, and tell students you can still visit it, though unfortunately it is no longer a church.) Many people came to worship at the great church, and he was busy all day. But he spent his nights praying alone, sometimes in a field or in a smaller church outside the city.

One Christmas Eve, the night before the feast of the Nativity of Jesus Christ, Romanus was asked to read some of the prayers during the service. The great church was crowded, and everyone was listening. But Romanus was not a good reader. He did not say the words clearly, and nobody could understand what he was saying. Every word he fumbled over echoed in the high, open space of the church. Several people laughed at him. Finally, another reader had to take his place.

Romanus was very unhappy. He wanted so much to be able to read in church, and to do it properly. But maybe he would never be able to. He knelt with his head in his hands and prayed before the icon of Mary, the Mother of God, and told her how sad and humiliated he was.

The next day, the Mother of God spoke to him in a gentle voice as he prayed. She gave him a scroll (show students the scroll and say that a scroll can have writing or music on it) and told him to eat it. That may seem strange to us, but it was her gift to the young man. It probably tasted like thin bread. Once he ate the scroll, a wonderful thing happened. Romanus was able not just to read prayers and Scripture properly--he could sing. He felt inspired to hymns, putting the words he loved to music.

That evening in church, Romanus was able to sing in a beautiful voice. What did he sing? The very first hymn he wrote, the Nativity hymn that starts, "Today the Virgin gives birth ..." (Make sure students know, as they probably do, that the Virgin and the Mother of God are the same person, Mary, and that she gave birth to Jesus Christ.)

Romanus became a deacon in the church, and a teacher of singing and songs. Of course, this didn't happen quickly. He had to practice, and spend many hours to get better at singing and writing church hymns. The Mother of God had given him a gift, but it was not magic. He still needed to work hard to get good at what he wanted to do.

By the time Romanus was older, he had written so many beautiful hymns and lived such a good life that the Church made him a saint. Romanus was able to do what he loved most, thanks to the loving kindness of the Mother of God.

Today, in our churches, we still sing many of the hymns that Saint Romanus wrote. They are called "Kontakia." (end)

In the *Resources* section for this unit are several icons of Saint Romanus. Look at them together, and ask students to find details that show he was a deacon (censer, stole) and one that shows he composed music (scroll.)

4 Saint Barbara and Saint Herman: Fill in the Facts

Say, "Let's see how quickly we can put together some facts about two saints who are remembered during the Nativity Fast, as we prepare for the Feast of the Birth of Jesus Christ."

- Mount the two posters, with the names of the two saints, on a wall.
- Divide the class into two teams, and assign each one a chart to fill in.
- Give each team their set of 6 word cards, and tape.
- The winning team will be the one that is first to put their cards in proper order on their chart. (The order given in the *Materials* section is correct.)

Review the answers and make sure they are in the right order on the posters. Say, "*You have done a good job of telling us about Saint Barbara and Saint Herman. Let's find out more about them.*"

5 The Life of Saint Barbara

Display the icon of Saint Barbara, and give each student a copy of the story of Saint Barbara's life. Read the story to the group, or have a student read or have students take turns reading.

6 The Life of Saint Herman

Divide the class into groups of 3 or 4, and give each group a set of the Saint Herman handouts (life story, icon-style picture, and map of his travels.) Have them read the story together (taking turns, or choosing one person to read), and ask them to look at the map and picture. Ask each group to write down three things they find most significant in his story.

When everyone has finished, each group can share their choices of significant things with the rest of the class.

7 Looking Deeper: Saint Herman

Note the long journey traced on the map of Saint Herman's travels.

Ask, "*What would conditions have been like in Saint Herman's day for a journey like that?*" (Conditions were difficult, and travel was slow. So the lengthy trip was a huge physical effort. In addition, he left all that was familiar in Russia to go to a vast, unknown land.)

Saint Herman did all of this to bring the Gospel to people whose culture was completely different from his own. Encourage students to think about the enormity of this saint's effort and sacrifice.

8 The Poetry of a Kontakion

Give students an opportunity to look more closely at the poetry of Saint Romanus' *Kontakion*.

Look together at Oikos 13, and ask students to find six references to light and fire. *Answers:*

- Shining One
- lamps
- spark
- Persian fire
- all-devouring fire
- fire which brings dew

Next, ask students to think about how these words and phrases describe light in different ways.

Suggested answers:

Mary is the "Shining One" who obeys God and is honored as the mother of His Son.

The wise men or magi are "lamps" because they have been enlightened by learning that Jesus Christ, not the gods of their Eastern empires, is the true God.

The newborn Jesus Christ is a "spark"--a small light which can still enlighten the world.

"Persian fire" refers to the fireworshipping people of Persia. (The Chaldeans, Persians and Babylonians are all related peoples.)

"all-devouring fire" describes false worship, the worship of fire, which can only destroy the worshipper.

"fire which brings dew" describes the worship of the true God. He is like light and fire, but His fire does not destroy. It is like dew, like a blessing, for the one who loves and worships Him. Look together at the reference, Daniel 3:46-50.

This kind of poetry, in which the same thing is described in different ways, is common in the worship texts of the Church. Ask students to listen for examples in the hymns and prayers they hear during the Divine Liturgy and other services.

9 Wrap Up

As students are preparing for the Closing Prayer, review the meaning of the word *Kontakion*.

Remind students that after his humiliating failure to read and sing in church on Christmas Eve, Saint Romanus did not give up.

Encourage them to ask for God's help when they are trying to do something difficult.

10 Closing Prayer

(Have students stand.)

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today the virgin gives birth to the transcendent one,
And the earth offers a cave to the unapproachable one.
Angels give glory with the shepherds,
The magi journey with the star,
As for our sake He is born as a new child, He who from eternity is God

Note: You may want to check that students understand the meaning of both "transcendent" and "unapproachable" here. "Transcendent" means that Jesus Christ is divine and glorious, beyond any thing or being on earth.

"Unapproachable" means unmatchable or unequalled. We can always approach God in prayer, with proper respect and awe. He is not "unapproachable" for us in the sense of not allowing us to be in communion with Him.

Members of God's Family *(Ages 13-*

17)

Overview

God's Family - By learning about the genealogy of Jesus, we are reminded that He truly became man and shared our life so as to show us the path to salvation.

Objectives

By the end of this Lesson, learners should be able to:

- Identify some of the human ancestors of Jesus Christ
- State that God's plan for salvation began in the Old Testament and was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, as shown by the Jesse Tree
- Relate Jesus' human ancestry to our own ancestry

Materials

Icon of the Nativity

Bibles, enough for every or every other student to use

Butcher paper

Thin and thick markers in various colors, small stickers, scissors, tape for students to share

Card stock for students to have 5" by 5" pieces to make ornaments (enough for at least 16 pieces, plus extras)

Copies of the list of readings below

SIXTEEN READINGS FOR THE JESSE TREE

1. Adam and Eve lived in harmony with God in the Garden He gave them. Even when they disobeyed Him, so that it was no longer possible for them to stay in the Garden, He did not abandon them.
2. When human beings continued to sin, God sent a great flood to cleanse the earth. But the rainbow was the sign to righteous Noah that God would not destroy the earth again.

3. Through Isaac, the son of Abraham, God rewarded Abraham's trust. Having told Abraham that he would be the father of many nations, God also told him that his line would continue through Isaac (Genesis 21: 12). So God provided a ram for sacrifice.
4. Jacob, Isaac's son, also received a promise from God. He saw a ladder reaching to heaven and heard God say, "I am with you and will keep you wherever you go."
5. Joseph was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers because he was a braggart, and very much his father Jacob's favorite. But he rose to prominence in Egypt, and greatly helped the people. His brothers later met him and asked his forgiveness. Like Jesus Christ, Joseph gave his forgiveness to those who had mistreated him.
6. Moses was given strength to lead God's people, the Israelites, out of Egyptian bondage. God gave Moses the Ten Commandments as a law for the people to live by.
7. War, conquest, and corruption were all part of the life of the Israelites over many years. There were leaders among them, though, such as Deborah. She judged, or governed, Israel while sitting "under the plam tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill counry of Ephraim; and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment" (Judges 4:
8. God's blessings were not only for the people of Israel. The Old Testament tells us about Ruth, a woman of Moab, who was faithful and loving, and who adopted the true God of her mother-in-law, Naomi. Ruth married a good man named Boaz. They were the parents of Jesse.
9. God gave His people He also gave them great leaders like David, the grandson of Ruth and Boaz, and son of Jesse. David was a soldier, poet, musician and king.
10. But the people continued to sin, and forgot God. They worshipped the idols of those who lived in the lands around them. God let them make their free choice, but sent prophets like Elijah to warn that it would lead to disaster, and to call the people back to holiness.
11. As Jeremiah and other prophets warned, the conquering armies of Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple. They took the Hebrews far from their homes, into exile and slavery.
12. Now God's people, the Israelites, were like the mere stump of a tree that God had once carefully and lovingly planted. But the prophet Isaiah wrote: "A shoot will spring forth from the stump of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots" (Isaiah 11:1). Jesse, and then King David, would be the ancestors of this "shoot" and "branch"--God's promised Savior.
13. God did not abandon the promises He had made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He brought the people back to their land, and forgave them, offering them another chance to be truly His people. Nehemiah led them in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, and they did not fall into the worship of false gods again.
14. The people never fulfilled their dream of restoring the great kingdom they had once had. Harshly ruled by the Greeks and then the Romans, they became discouraged in the struggle to live up to their calling as God's people.

But after many years, God would send a final prophet, John the Baptizer, who would come to "prepare the way of the Lord."

15. Mary went to the house of her cousin Elizabeth, who would soon give birth to her baby, John the Baptizer. Mary shared with Elizabeth the wonderful news: the angel had told her that she, too, would give birth. Her child would be Jesus, the Son of God. Elizabeth rejoiced with Mary, and called her "the mother of my Lord."

16. Jesus Christ was born. He was the Savior God had promised. God's plan was fulfilled. This is the plan that He has always had for all of us who live on earth. We are all members of His family, and His loving will is for us to live with Him forever in His Kingdom.

END

Resources

Required Resources

[Icon of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ \(Image\)](#)

Optional Resources

[Jesse Tree Ornaments \(PDF\)](#)

[Jesse Tree Window \(Image\)](#)

[The Icon of the Nativity \(Image\)](#)

[Christ in the Old Testament \(Image\)](#)

Procedure

1 Opening Prayer

Display the Nativity icon and, if necessary, the word chart.

(Have students stand)

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,

And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

2 Ancestors

Ask, *"Do you or another family member have an interest in genealogy--the record of your generations of ancestors?"* (Let students answer.)

Ask, *"What do you know that's especially interesting about one of your ancestors--perhaps a distant one, or a closer one like a grandparent?"* (Let students share interesting things about their family members.)

Ask, *"Where do we find a record of the human ancestors of Jesus Christ?"* (Let students answer, or supply the answer: there are two genealogies in the Gospels, in Matthew 1: 1-17 and in Luke 3: 23-38.)

3 Jesus Christ's Human Ancestors

Have students read through Matthew's genealogy and find familiar names. Students will recognize Ruth, David and Solomon, and possibly others.

Ask, *"Why does Matthew begin his genealogy with David and Abraham?"* (Matthew is addressing his Gospel especially to fellow Jews. He wants to make the point that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies and promises that they know well.)

Glance together at Luke's genealogy in 3: 23-38. Don't try to read through all the names, but do read together verse 38. Ask, *"How does this verse show us that Jesus Christ's salvation is for all people?"* (It calls Jesus the "son of Adam." Every person--not just those of one nation or people--is descended from Adam. So Jesus Christ is the Savior for all people. Luke is a Gentile and wants to stress this to fellow Gentiles.)

Finally, reread Matthew 1: 3-6. This time ask, *"Do you think it was usual in Matthew's time to include women in a genealogy?"* (From the way you have asked the question, students will realize that the answer is no. Tell them they are right--the inclusion of Tamar, Ruth, Rahab and "her who had been the wife of Uriah", meaning Bathsheba, is another way we are being shown that God's plan of salvation is for everyone. Genealogies of the time would usually only include men.)

Ask, *"Is there anything else that Tamar, Ruth, Rahab and Bathsheba have in common besides being women?"* (Let students answer, or supply the information that they were Gentiles, not members of the people of Israel. This again shows us that Jesus' salvation is for everyone.)

4 The Jesse Tree

Ask students, "*What is the Jesse Tree?*" Let them explain, or explain to them, that it is a traditional way of showing how God's promise of salvation came down through the people of the Old Testament and was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Read together Isaiah 11:1. This is the basis of the Jesse Tree. Ask students, "*What do you think the stump and the shoot refer to?*" Let them explain, or explain to them, that this prophecy of Isaiah came at a bad time for Israel. The people had strayed far from God and had been conquered by foreign enemies. They were like a mere "stump" of what had once been a tree lovingly planted by God.

But in this bad time, Isaiah prophecies that there will be a "shoot" and "branch" that will grow from this "stump of Jesse."

. The Church sees this as a prophecy of the coming of Jesus Christ the Savior. Jesse, the father of King David, will be one of His ancestors.

5 Creating a Jesse Tree

Have students begin by drawing, outlining, or coloring a large Christmas tree shape on the butcher paper. (The tree should be large enough to have 16 "ornaments" of the size described in the *Materials* list fit on it, or around it. It need not be formal-looking. The shape can be as simple as a large triangle with a block for a stem, or it can be more elaborate if students wish.) Mount the tree shape on a wall.

- Explain that you are going to make sixteen "ornaments" with symbols of some of these people to attach to the hang on the poster board tree, which will be your Jesse Tree.
- Give each student card stock, and have Bibles, scissors, stickers and markers ready for everyone to share. Then assign the 16 symbols to students. Have them write down their assigned symbol, plus the name and Bible reference. (You might also copy the list below, for reference.)
- Divide the assignment of the 16 ornaments according to the size of your class. Each student can make 2, or several if your class is small.
- Have students make the ornaments by drawing the symbol on the card stock, which they can either cut into a shape they choose, or leave as is. They can decorate their ornaments with markers and stickers. Assure students that their drawing work can be very simple. In the *Resources* for this lesson there are patterns for some of the symbols, and others are available on line.
- Be sure students look up and read the Bible reference to the person whose symbol they are drawing.
- When everyone has finished making ornaments, have the class stand. Give each person a copy of the 16 Readings, and have each person read the piece that goes with his or her ornament, and then attach the ornament to the tree with a small loop of tape.

Symbols and Names. (If more than one symbol is suggested, students can choose.)

1. Adam and Eve. Symbol: Apple or tree with apples. Genesis 3: 20-24
2. Noah. Symbol: Rainbow, dove, or ark. Genesis 8:20-22
3. Isaac. Symbol: Ram. Genesis 22: 1-14.
4. Jacob. Symbol: Ladder. Genesis 28: 10-15.
5. Joseph. Symbol: Multicolored coat. Genesis 45: 4-8.
6. Moses. Symbol: Tablets with writing (Ten Commandments) Exodus 20: 1-17
7. Deborah. Symbol: Palm Tree. Judges 4: 4-5.
8. Ruth. Symbol: Bundle of straw. Ruth 2: 1-9.
9. David. Symbol: Harp or shepherd's crook. II Samuel 5: 1-5
10. Elijah. Symbol: Altar of stones. I Kings 18: 30-32
11. Jeremiah. Symbol: Tears. Jeremiah 9: 7-11
12. Isaiah. Branch with leafy shoot. Isaiah 11: 1
13. Nehemiah. Symbol: Wall. Nehemiah 2: 17-18
14. John the Baptizer. Symbol: Scroll with words *Behold, the Lamb of God*. John 1: 29.
15. Elizabeth. Symbol: House or dove. Luke 1: 39-45.
16. Jesus Christ our Lord. Symbol: Manger or crown. John 1: 1-18.

6 Review: Saints Romanus, Barbara and Herman

Divide the class into two teams, and have the teams stand about 3 feet apart. Tell them you are going to read statements about the three saints Romanus, Barbara and Herman. Tell them you'll start by throwing the beach ball to someone and reading a statement. The person holding the beach ball will say whether the statement is true or false.

Give a point for a correct answer, or no point for an incorrect answer. (Keep score as you go.)

The person with the ball then throws to someone on the other team, and you read the next statement. Try to see that everyone gets at least one turn, and make sure that the two teams get

the same number of turns. (If your class is very large, you could do half the statements with part of the class in teams, and then do the second half with the rest of the class in teams.)

Statements and Answers:

1. Saint Barbara was the daughter of a Christian priest (*False, a pagan*)
2. Saint Herman was Russian by birth (*True*)
3. Saint Romanus was embarrassed by his inability to paint icons well (*False; by his inability to sing and read well in church*)
4. Saint Herman did miracles (*True*)
5. Saint Barbara discovered the true God by reading books her mother gave her (*False; she discovered God when she met and talked with Christians. Her father was probably widowed*)
6. Saint Romanus served in the great church at Constantinople (*True*)
7. Saint Herman was ordained to the priesthood at the age of 60 (*False; he was never ordained*)
8. Saint Barbara asked her father not to pressure her about getting married (*True*)
9. Saint Herman made his own pillow and blanket from the down of a goose he fed each day (*False; he had no bed, pillow or blanket--only boards to sleep on*)
10. Saint Romanus was a deacon but did not become a priest (*True*)
11. Saint Barbara had builders tear down a wall to let light in as a way of honoring the Holy Trinity (*False; she had them build a third window on a wall to let light in and honor the Holy Trinity*)
12. Saint Herman often had wild animals nearby because they trusted him (*True*)
13. Saint Romanus is best known for his Kontakion on the Transfiguration of Christ (*False; he is best known for his Kontakion on the Nativity of Christ*)
14. Saint Romanus asked the Mother of God to help him (*True*)
15. Saint Barbara was a martyr for the faith (*True*)
16. Saint Herman worked to bring the faith to the native people of Arizona (*False; Alaska*)

Go over the answers together.

7 Wrap Up

Ask, "Why do you think the Church emphasizes the fact that Jesus' Christ had human ancestors?" (Let students answer. Bring out these points: The long generations of Jesus' ancestors show us that God has had the plan of our salvation being worked out for a very long time. Also, these ancestors show that the Incarnation is real--God truly did become Man for us.)

8 Closing Prayer

(Have students stand)

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

God is with us! *(Ages 13-17)*

Overview

The Birth of Jesus Christ - God became man and dwelt among us - the incarnation of God in Christ Jesus.

Objectives

By the end of this Lesson, learners should be able to:

- Explain the meaning of the word "incarnation"
- Examine the significance of gold, frankincense and myrrh in the Bible
- Review the symbols and names on the Jesse Tree

Materials

Note cards with envelopes for each student (note cards should be the kind that fold over)

Thin and thick markers in various colors

Christmas stickers as well as other stickers (stars, moons, dots and other shapes, etc.)

Resources

Required Resources

[The Nativity of Christ \(PDF\)](#)

[Icon of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ \(Image\)](#)

[Nativity of Christ Biblical Accounts\(HTML\)](#)

[What shall we offer You, O Christ\(HTML\)](#)

Optional Resources

[Graphic Organizer of a T-Chart \(PDF\)](#)

[Prepare O Bethlehem \(Image\)](#)

Procedure

1 Opening Prayer

Display the icon of the Nativity.

(Have students stand.) In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

After saying or singing the Troparion together, review words as you did in previous lessons, if you feel it is necessary or would be helpful to students.

2 Review: The Jesse Tree

Have at hand the names and Biblical references of the figures whose symbols are on the Jesse Tree.

Taking the symbols one by one, ask students to identify the person associated with each, and what the symbol means.

Ask students to think about the variety of people who are Jesus Christ's human ancestors. Give a few examples of people who might surprise us:

- Jacob was a trickster who deceived his own father to get the blessing that rightly belonged to his brother Esau.
- Ruth was a foreigner, and came from one of Israel's real enemies: the Moabites.
- Joseph was such an annoying braggart that some of his brothers, jealous of him as the favorite of their father, were ready to kill him.

Encourage students to consider that God never abandoned or gave up on these people. We are the "modern" members of Jesus Christ's family, and He will never abandon or give up on us, either.

3 The Wise Men's Gifts

Say to the class, "*We know the three gifts that the wise men, or magi, brought to the newly born Jesus.*" (Let students name gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Then read together Matthew 2: 11. Note

with students that gold is a sign of royalty and Christ is the King; frankincense shows us that Christ is the High Priest because incense is related to worship; myrrh was used to anoint the dead and Christ gives His life for us.)

Continue, *"These things are referred to in the Bible at other times, too. Let's look at some of these references."*

Divide the class into three teams, giving each team a Bible, paper and pencil or pen.

- Exodus 30: 34-38
- Isaiah 59: 20-60:6
- Psalm 141 (140): 2
- John 19: 38-40
- Exodus 30: 7-8

Next, write these questions on the chalkboard:

1. *When is Aaron to offer incense?*
2. *Where do we read that myrrh is used for the dead?*
3. *What should people not do with incense offered to God?*
4. *Where do we read of incense and personal prayer together?*
5. *Where do we read of nations coming with gifts to Zion?*

Have each team work together to find the answers to these questions from the Bible passages on the board, and write their answers. See which team can finish first, with the best or most complete answers.

Discuss the following correct answers:

1. Aaron is to offer incense in the morning and the evening. (Exodus 30: 7-8.)
2. We read this in the passage from John (19: 38-40.) When the wise men brought myrrh as one of their gifts, it told the world that part of God's plan was that Jesus would die and be buried with myrrh. Read together Mark 14: 3-9 to see Jesus' own words about this.
3. In Exodus 30: 34-38 we read that they should not make perfume for themselves. What we offer to God should be a real offering, not something from which we take a benefit for ourselves. Anything offered to God should be treated as holy. We should not casually use it for our own adornment.

4. Psalm 141 (140): 2 speaks of incense and prayer together. The Bible frequently associates incense with prayer, so we do the same in our churches today by burning incense at times of prayer.

5. Isaiah describes the nations bringing gifts to Zion, the new Jerusalem. The "new Jerusalem" for Christians is the Church, with Jesus Christ as its head.

4 Digging Deeper: Isaiah

Look again at Isaiah 59:20-60:6. Ask, *"These verses are seen by the Church as a prophecy of the time when Jesus Christ will come to save the world." Do the words remind you of anything we talked about when we discussed the Old Testament people whose symbols are on the Jesse Tree?"* Here are some points for discussion:

These verses mention several places. The people in those places are different from each other-- they are of various tribes and countries. Yet they will all will welcome in the New Jerusalem.

The ancestors of Jesus Christ were different from each other, too. Some were more virtuous than others. Some were from tribes and countries that weren't friendly to Israel. Yet God included them in the human family tree of His Son. In a similar way, all the various lands and people mentioned in Isaiah will be welcome, and will become one, in God's Church, the New Jerusalem, which Jesus Christ established by His coming.

Ask students, *"Since we are part of God's Church established by Jesus Christ, what responsibility do we have?"* (We are called to welcome others, including those not like ourselves, as God has welcomed people who are different from each other, in His Son's family tree and in the Church that His Son established.)

5 Digging Deeper: The Psalm

Look again at Psalm 141 (140) verses 1-4. Ask, *"Does this psalm tell us that when we offer incense and our prayer to the Lord, we have done all we need to?"*

Let students answer. Points to discuss: The speaker, King David, prays that God will help him do more than just offer incense. Ask, *"What does the speaker want to avoid doing?"* (He wants to avoid doing wicked things, or being in the company of those who do. In asking God to "set a guard" over his mouth, he also is asking God to help him avoid saying bad things, gossiping, etc. Try to get students to give these answers, or answers similar to these.)

Ask, "Why do you think these verses were chosen to be sung during our Presanctified Liturgy, the Liturgy that is done during Great Lent?" Let students answer. Bring out these points: During Great Lent we are making a special effort to avoid doing the things that are not good for us, not good for our relationship with God. So these verses are especially appropriate--they describe things we will try *not* to do.

Give each student a note card and envelope. Remind them that in an earlier lesson they each made a private pledge to do a service to someone else. Ask them, this time, to write about something they will try *not* to do--something they will try to avoid doing-- during this Nativity Lent.

After they have written their plan in their closed note, have them share the materials you have brought to decorate an envelope. They should make it bright and attractive enough to call their attention to it, and to remind them of what is inside. Nobody else needs to see what they have written, but they will have the note to look at.

6 The Incarnation

As students are preparing for the Closing Prayer, put the word **incarnation** on the chalkboard. Ask students to define it. Say, "This is the word we use to describe what happened when Christ was born. God became Man."

Break the word down together by asking students what each syllable means:

IN, when used before other words, means into or becoming

CARN means flesh

ATION means something that takes place.

So INCARNATION means that God comes into flesh, or becomes Man. He is at the same time always God. This is not easy to understand, but it is basic to our faith. The Feast of the Nativity celebrates the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

7 Wrap Up

Practice the Christmas/Nativity greeting and response:

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

Encourage students to use and exchange the greeting during the season of the Nativity.

8 Closing Prayer

(Have students stand.)

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today the virgin gives birth to the transcendent one,

And the earth offers a cave to the unapproachable one.

Angels give glory with the shepherds,

The magi journey with the star,

As for our sake He is born as a new child, He who from eternity is God.

Prepare the Way of the Lord (Ages

10-12)

Overview

It's Hard To Wait - Students will review the stories of the coming of God's Son to us on earth, as He is born of Mary "as a little, or in some translations a 'new' child." They will consider the concepts of waiting and preparing, as these relate to "meeting the Lord." The birth of Christ is set within the context of human family and God's family.

Objectives

By the end of this Lesson, learners should be able to:

- Define Advent/Nativity Fast as a time of waiting and preparation for the Feast of the Nativity of Jesus Christ
- Compare some elements of Great Lent to the Nativity Fast
- Identify figures in the icon of the Nativity of Jesus Christ

Materials

- Icon of the Nativity of Christ
- Chart with the words of the Nativity Troparion in large letters
- Christmas stickers
- Resource handout: *The Winter Pascha*
- Copies of the blank "November" and "December" pages of the Resource *My Advent Calendar* for each students (Note: The extra pages in this resource are for your own interest and further study of the Nativity season. If your parish is on the Old Calendar, make your own blank pages of December and January to use.)
- For the "Waiting Game" (see #4 of Procedure for this lesson) have
- a timer or stopwatch
- an inflated beach ball, or a plastic or sponge wiffle ball, or something light like a roll of paper towels (with a few rubber bands around the roll so it stays together) that students can safely throw to one another.
- for each group of 4 to 6 students--a Bible, a pencil, and a copy of the sheet "Bible People Who Waited." Create the sheet by putting the title at the top, and then the following, leaving room for students to write in answers:

1. Read about me in Genesis 8: 6-12. What did I wait for? What is my name?

2. Read about me in Psalm 37: 1-9. What did I wait for? What is my name?

3. Read about me in Luke 2: 25-32. What did I wait for? What is my name?

4. Read about me in Acts 18: 24-26. What did I wait for? What is my name?

5. Read about me in John 3: 1-6. What did I wait for? What is my name?

6. Read about these people in Acts 28: 1-6. What did they wait for? What is their name? (Who are they?)

(Correct answers are in #4 of the Procedure for this lesson)

- for the first part of the game, a basket or container with small folded sheets of paper. On each paper write one of these phrases:

Something you wait for all year

A time you waited in line (*make 4 copies*)

A place where you have waited more than once

A time when you have to wait your turn (*make 4 copies*)

A time during this past week when you waited (*make 4 copies*)

Something you waited for when you were very young

A place where a machine tells you to wait

Something that was really worth waiting for (*make 4 copies*)

(Note: The "place where a machine tells you to wait" might be a hard one for students to think of. You could suggest answers such as a walk/wait or walk/don't walk sign, or a toll booth.)

Resources

Required Resources

[My Advent Calendar](#)

[The Winter Pascha \(PDF\)](#)

[Icon of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of the Nativity of the Theotokos \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of The Presentation \(Meeting\) of Our Lord \(Image\)](#)

Optional Resources

[Entrance of the Theotokos in the Temple \(Icon\) \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of Christ and the Children \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of Christ the Pantocrator \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of the Conception of the Theotokos \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of The Crucifixion of the Lord \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of The Deisis \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of The Dormition \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of The Entry Into Jerusalem \(Image\)](#)

[Tikhvin Icon of the Mother of God \(Image\)](#)

Procedure

1 Opening Prayer

Have the icon of the Nativity of Jesus Christ displayed where students can easily see it.

Have the chart with the words of the Troparion mounted where they can see it. (You can have these displayed for all five sessions.)

(Have students stand.) In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Play the Troparion for the students a few times. Then sing or say it together.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

Ask students to identify three places in the Troparion where Jesus Christ is compared to light. Talk a little about each one, asking students about their meaning and supplying information as needed:

Light of wisdom: Jesus is not a physical light, but the One who enlightens us with wisdom and truth.

Sun of Righteousness: Jesus is like the "Sun" giving light. He is also the "Son" of Righteousness--of God the Father. The wise men, who thought wisdom and knowledge could come from the stars, now know that He is the One to be worshipped because He is wisdom and truth.

Orient from on high: The light that rises in the East.

2 A Time of of Waiting

Write the word "nativity" on the chalkboard and ask, "*What is another word that means the same thing?*" Let students come up with the word "birth" (or supply it yourself if they cannot) and put it on the chalkboard.

Say, "*We celebrate the Nativity, or Birth, of Our Lord Jesus Christ on a big holiday. What is the name most people use for that holiday?*" (Put "Christmas" on the chalkboard.)

Ask a student, "*When is your own day of nativity?*" Let this student, or another if the first is unable to, make the connection of his/her birthday to "day of nativity." Say, "*So Our Lord shares this with us. He has a birthday, a day of nativity, a day of being born. But His Nativity is not like any other. He came to be with us as a newborn baby, to grow up and to teach us and to save us. At the same time He was always the divine Son of God.*"

Read together John 1: 14 to see how the Bible expresses this. Ask, "*Who is 'the Word' in this verse?*" and make sure students know that "the Word" is Jesus Christ. Explain that He "became flesh"--which means He became a real human being, a real Man--but He never stopped being God at the same time.

Say, "*Because the Nativity of Jesus Christ is so important, the Church gives us a time to prepare for it. What is that time called?*" (Let students come up with the word "Advent" or supply it yourself, and write it on the chalkboard. Also write "Nativity Fast" on the chalkboard. Ask, "*Why could we call the time of Advent by this other name, the Nativity Fast?*" (Let students explain, or explain yourself, that before great feast days, days of celebration in the Church, there is a time of fasting and preparation.)

Give each student a few Christmas stickers, and copy each of the blank November and December pages from the Resource *My Advent Calendar*. Have them put their names on both. Have them mark with stickers the beginning of Advent/Nativity Fast on November 15, and also the Feast of the Nativity of Jesus Christ on December 25th.

Ask, "*What are some of the ways the Church gives us to use these days of waiting to prepare for the Feast of the Nativity of Jesus Christ?*" (Suggested answers: Prayer, church services with special hymns, a chance to eat simple foods so that we don't spend a lot of time thinking about meals and can think about the gift of Our God coming to be with us.)

Ask, "*What are some other ways we can prepare?*" (Suggest that a good way to prepare is to follow the example of the One who is going to be born--by trying to love everyone, helping others, giving to people who are really in need, and so on. Look together at the suggestions on the *My Advent Calendar* pages for ways to use this time well.)

Ask, "*Do you think these ways of preparing are different from the ways many people prepare for Christmas?*" (Yes. Suggested reasons: The Church's ways call us to slow down and think about God rather than hurry around buying gifts, going to parties and spending a lot of money.)

Ask, *"Can we still enjoy the feast if we follow the Church's ways?"* (Let students give their opinions. Suggest that we can enjoy the feast more if we are not exhausted and already saturated with "celebrating" when it comes. We can have good times with family and friends during the Nativity Fast, but if we also take time to pray, thank God, and give to others, the feast will have special joy for us. We can have a wonderful feast!)

3 Nativity Icon

Have students identify the various figures in the Nativity icon: Mary, Joseph, the animals peeking into the manger, the shepherds, the magi or wise men, and especially the anticipated baby Jesus.

Ask: *"Who is the old man, on the lower part of the icon, talking with Joseph?"* (He is the devil, trying to convince Joseph not to believe that this baby is the divine Son of God, born by the power of the Holy Spirit.)

Ask, *"Where does Jesus appear twice in the icon?"* (He lies next to His Mother, and is also shown being bathed. This detail reminds us that He truly became human and truly lived human life-- including being a baby getting a bath. Later, when He is an adult, He will also allow Himself to be baptized in water by John the Baptizer.)

4 Waiting and Preparing

Ask students:

- When have you had to wait for something important to happen?
- What makes waiting difficult, or not so difficult?

Let students give their own answers to these questions; to help the discussion you might tell about some experiences of waiting in your own life.

For the "Waiting Game," have students stand in two lines, about three feet apart.

- Have container of folded papers and ball/object ready. Tell students the papers describe situations in which we wait for something.
- Tell students that each person will choose a paper, read it aloud, and think of an answer as quickly as possible.
- That person will then throw the ball to someone on the other team, who will repeat the process: choose a paper, read it aloud, think of an answer and throw the ball to someone on the other team, all as quickly as possible.
- Tell students that some of the papers say the same thing, because there are many possible answers that could be given.

Be sure each student gets at least one turn

This part of the game was just for fun. To choose a winning team, give each team--either 2 teams, or 4 if your class is large--a Bible, pencil, and a "Bible People Who Waited" sheet. Tell the students:

- The winning team will be the one that works together to find the information in the Bible and gives clear, complete answers on the sheet in the shortest time.
- You will time their work; limit is 5 minutes.
- They will start when you begin timing and say "Go."

You may choose not to have a winner, but rather just use this as a timed exercise. Correct answers for the sheet are as follows. (Students' answers may differ in wording but should give the same general idea.)

#1. Genesis 8: 6-12. *I waited for the dove to return with an olive branch, showing that the waters of the Flood had subsided. My name is Noah.*

#2. Psalm 37: 1-9. *I waited for the Lord (to do His will in His own time--students should be able to tell you that this is what the psalm writer was waiting for, even if they did not include it in their written answer). My name is David.*

#3: Luke 2: 25-32. *I waited to see the Lord's Christ (the promised Savior--students should know that this is what "the Lord's Christ" means, even if they did not include it in their written answer.) My name is Simeon.*

#4: Acts 18:24-26. *I waited with my husband Aquila till after Apollos had preached in the synagogue. Then Aquila and I took him aside and taught him the way of God "more accurately" (in other words, we corrected some of what he had said.) My name is Priscilla.*

#5: John 3: 1-6. *I waited till night to visit Christ and ask Him about His teachings. My name is Nicodemus.*

#6: Acts 28: 1-6. *We waited to see whether Paul would be killed by the bite of a viper, or snake. When he survived the bite, we thought he must be a god. We are the natives of Malta. (Paul assured us he was only a man.)*

5 The Winter Pascha

Give each student a copy of the *The Winter Pascha*, from the Resources for this lesson. Have them read the first paragraph, and name three things that are the same in the Nativity season and the Pascha season. (They can name any of the things noted in those paragraphs.)

Write these lines from the second paragraph on the chalkboard:

He was born in order to die. He was baptized in order to be raised.

Ask, "*What do these lines tell us about the way God prepares?*" (Let students give their ideas. Emphasize that Jesus Christ saved us by being born--becoming a real Man. Then He was baptized, crucified, and raised from the dead. All these things had to happen in order for Him to save us and give us everlasting life. So all the events of Jesus Christ's life on earth were God's preparation to save us.)

6 Closing Prayer

(Have students stand.)

If you wish to, play the Troparion as you did for the Opening Prayer. Then sing or say it together.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

Showing God's Love (Ages 10-12)

Overview

St. Nicholas of Myra in Lycia - The life of St. Nicholas illustrates how we can help others thereby showing God's love for all. He is so widely loved, across cultures and countries and time, that every church school student should know about him. He is a great example of the kinds of things we should do as we prepare for the Feast of the Nativity of Jesus Christ.

Objectives

By the end of this Lesson, learners should be able to:

- Define "patron saint" and identify St. Nicholas as the patron saint of many groups of people
- Consider ways of following Saint Nicholas' example
- Examine the meaning of some words in Saint Nicholas' Troparion
- Plan a way of secretly helping someone, in emulation of Saint Nicholas

Materials

- Resources: *St. Nicholas Banners (instructions)*
- Resources Handout: *St. Nicholas Troparion and Kontakion*
- Resources handout: *My Advent Calendar*
- Icon of the Nativity of Christ
- Icon of St. Nicholas

Materials for groups of 3 or 4 to create banners or posters as follows:

- icon of Saint Nicholas,
- fabric (for banners) or poster board
- paper for students to draw and write on
- ruler
- scissors
- glue
- stapler
- markers in various colors
- decorative stickers or other decorative items
- for banners, dowel to attach it to (with glue) and string to put at the ends to staple or glue to the ends to hang it.
- a photograph of your Diocesan bishop

Resources

Required Resources

[My Advent Calendar](#)

[Biography - Santa Claus \(2005\) \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ \(Image\)](#)

[Saint Nicholas of Myra\(HTML\)](#)

[St. Nicholas - Nearly Everybody's Saint!\(HTML\)](#)

[St. Nicholas Banners \(HTML\)](#)

[Story of St. Nicholas\(HTML\)](#)

Optional Resources

[Discovering the Truth About Santa Claus\(Link\)](#)

[St. Nicholas Archbishop of Myra in Lycia Icon \(Image\)](#)

[St. Nicholas the Wonder-Worker](#)

[St. Nicholas Archbishop of Myra in Lycia\(HTML\)](#)

[St. Nicholas Troparian & Kontakion \(Book\)](#)

[The Real Santa Claus: Legends of Saint Nicholas \(Image\)](#)

[Wonderworker \(Image\)](#)

Procedure

1 Opening Prayer

(Have students stand.) Say or sing the Troparion together, with the icon and the word chart displayed. You may want to review some words, as you did in the previous lesson.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

2 A Famous Patron Saint

Ask: "*What is a patron saint?*" (Let students answer. Bring out the fact that a patron saint is one who prays in heaven for and watches over a group of people. The people might be those in a certain country, or people who do a certain type of work, or people who are in a certain situation.)

Write the following groups of people on the chalkboard. They are taken from the Resource for this lesson entitled *St. Nicholas--Nearly Everybody's Saint*. (If you wish, you may choose other groups from the long list in that Resource.) Don't reveal Saint Nicholas's name as you write the list.

- Orphans
- Shoemakers
- Pirates
- Prisoners
- Newlyweds
- Schoolchildren
- The poor
- Dockworkers and sailors
- Robbers and thieves
- Russia and Holland

Ask, *"There is one person who is the patron saint of all these groups. Do you know who it is?"* (Let them answer; if they don't know, tell them that it is Saint Nicholas.) If students are surprised that pirates and robbers/thieves have patron saints, remind them that God loves everyone and hopes those who do bad things will change their ways--perhaps through the influence and prayer of their patron saint!

Say, *"Let's find out more about the life of Saint Nicholas. Maybe we can discover why he is the patron saint of some of these groups."*

3 The Story of Saint Nicholas

As you read the following story to the class, have the icon of Saint Nicholas displayed where students can easily see it. You may want to gather the students together sitting on a rug, or in a certain part of the room, for this story and others.

Saint Nicholas was born hundreds of years ago in a small town near the sea. It's now in the country of Turkey. (*Show Turkey on map.*) His parents raised him to love God and to care about other people. Nicholas had a great sadness--his parents both died while he was young. But he always remembered what they had taught him, and he helped other people whenever he could.

So it isn't a surprise to learn that one day, Nicholas did something that people still remember today, hundreds of years later. A very poor man in the town had three daughters who all wanted to get married. But their father had no money to give them the things they needed to get married, or even enough to buy a few nice clothes.

Nicholas's parents had left him a good amount of money, but he wasn't interested in keeping it for himself. On a dark summer night, he took a bag of gold and threw it in the poor man's window. Hearing the noise, the man woke up and ran to the window, but couldn't see Nicholas outside.

The next night, Nicholas did the same thing, again making sure that nobody saw him. But on a third night, the man was waiting by the window and saw the generous man who had saved his daughters from poverty. He thanked Nicholas with tears of joy running down his face, but Nicholas just nodded his head, smiled, and told the man to give thanks to God. Then he quickly left.

People in the town and the surrounding area came to love Nicholas. It seemed he was always helping someone, smiling at a child, or giving poorer neighbors what they needed. When it came time to elect a new bishop, Nicholas was everyone's choice.

But the Emperor Diocletian hated Christians, and soon Nicholas was arrested, chained, and thrown into prison. When the next Emperor, Constantine, took the throne, Nicholas and thousands of other Christians were finally set free. They had been tortured and starved, but they still kept their faith. Nicholas would face many troubles and would suffer during his life, but he never stopped helping others.

There is a story of sailors who were caught in a raging storm at sea. They had heard of St. Nicholas, and they had heard that he saved people and even did miracles. They called on him to save them, and as they did so he came to them in a vision, took the helm himself, and guided the boat safely into port. When the sailors reached town they went to church and thanked God, just as Nicholas would have wanted them to. After this happened, sailors wished each other a safe journey by saying, "May St. Nicholas hold the tiller!" (*Ask students what the tiller is, and if necessary tell them it is a bar or handle on a boat that turns the rudder, the hinged piece that steers the boat.*)

Another time, there was a famine--a terrible shortage of food--in Nicholas' home town of Myra. Some ships loaded with wheat came into the harbor, on their way to the great city of Constantinople. Bishop Nicholas asked the crews on the ships to leave some wheat for his starving people. They refused, worried that they would get in trouble if they arrived at Constantinople with less than full loads. But the bishop assured them that they would have no problem.

They trusted this bishop so famous for his goodness and mercy, and left two years' worth of wheat. And sure enough, when they reached the port at Constantinople, their ships were full.

St. Nicholas did many miracles. But we remember him especially for his kindness. We may never do miracles, but we can help and be kind to others. Maybe, like St. Nicholas, we can sometimes do good things secretly. Only God will know, and He will rejoice that we have learned from the great saint and bishop, Nicholas.

Look again at the list of groups on the chalkboard. Ask, "*Do you see from the story why Saint Nicholas is the patron saint of some of these groups?*" Students should be able to see why Saint Nicholas is the patron saint of prisoners, the poor, dockworkers and sailors. Let them name any groups they feel are represented in the story.

4 Story Review

Review the story with a "True/False" game.

Have students stand, making sure they have room around them to move and make gestures. Tell them, *"For this review game, I am going to say something about St. Nicholas. I will ask you to do one thing if what I have said is true. I will ask you to do something else if what I have said is false. So listen carefully!" (Be ready to repeat each statement, and give students a few seconds to think about it. Give correct answers each time.)*

1. Say, **"The country of Greece is where Saint Nicholas was born. If that's true, march in place. If that's false, raise both hands high in the air."** (False--he was born in Turkey.)

2. Say, **"Saint Nicholas's parents were poor farmers. If that's true, bend over and touch the floor with your fingers. If that's false, put your hands behind your head."** (False--they were wealthy city people.)

3. Say, **"Saint Nicholas was a bishop. If that's true, put your hands above your head and clap. If that's false, march in place."** (True.)

4. Say, **"Saint Nicholas's parents died when he was young. If that's true, turn around in a circle. If that's false, bend over and touch the floor with your fingers."** (True.)

5. Say, **"Saint Nicholas was put in prison and tortured for being a Christian. If that's true, wiggle all ten fingers. If that's false, raise both hands high in the air."** (True.)

6. Say, **"Some other prisoners and Saint Nicholas secretly escaped from prison one very dark night. If that's true, put your hands behind your head. If that's false, bend over and touch the floor with your fingers."** (False. Saint Nicholas was released from prison only when a new emperor came to the throne.)

7. Say, **"Sailors wished each other a safe journey by saying, 'May Saint Nicholas fill your boat's sails with wind.' If that's true, march in place. If that's false, wiggle all ten fingers."** (False. They said, "May Saint Nicholas hold the tiller" because of a time when he came in a vision to sailors having trouble in a storm, and guided their boat safely to harbor.)

8. Say, **"Saint Nicholas, when he was a bishop, once saved his people from starving by getting loaded ships to leave grain with him. If that's true, turn around in a circle. If that's false, put your hands high above your head."** (True. Ask students to tell you the part of the story that is a miracle--the ships were still fully loaded when they reached their final port, even though they had left a good deal of grain for Nicholas' people.)

9. Say, **"At the Council of Nicaea, a man named Arius slapped Saint Nicholas because of the things he was saying. If that's true, bend over and touch the floor with your fingers. If that's false,**

put your hands on your knees." (False. Nicholas, unable to listen to any more lies about the Son of God from the mouth of Arius, slapped him.)

10. Say, "***One time, Saint Nicholas couldn't convince a government official that the official was wrong to take bribes and let innocent men die. If that's true, shake your arms. If that's false, turn around in a circle.***" (False. He did convince the official, and got him to repent and ask God's forgiveness.)

5 Troparion & Kontakion

Give each student a copy of the Resource handout *St. Nicholas Troparion and Kontakion*. (Make sure students know that these two words are both types of hymns.)

Look together at these words from the Kontakion: "...you fulfilled the Gospel of Christ by giving up your soul for your people, and saving the innocent from death."

Ask: "*How does a priest give up his soul for his people?*" (Let students answer. Suggest that a priest puts his people first, as Christ did. This is a way of putting your own soul in God's care, not relying on the world to take care of you. Few people can do this. A priest also helps those most in need, such as those who are innocent and have been wrongly condemned to death.)

6 Banners

Using the Resource Activity *St. Nicholas Banners* attached to this lesson, let groups of 3 or 4 students choose to create a banner or poster depicting some event(s) from the life and work of St. Nicholas. Make sure they put a title on their creation.

When the projects are finished, ask one person from each group to tell why the event they chose was significant for them.

Display the students' work in the room or in an area where parishioners can see it.

7 Activity: Advent Calendar

Give students their copies of the December page from the Resource *My Advent Calendar*, plus a choice of stickers. Have them mark Saint Nicholas' feast day on December 6th.

If students have any important personal days during December, such as family birthdays, they can mark those with stickers too. They can do the same with the November page.

Collect the calendar pages to use at the next lesson.

8 Optional Activity

Give each student pencil and paper, and ask them to think of something they can do that will be of help or comfort to another person. This might include taking on a task at home, doing or making something for an elderly family member, etc. They should keep their intention secret from everyone, so as to follow Saint Nicholas' example of not looking for praise.

Of course it may not be possible to keep what they do entirely secret, but they can at least begin that way.

Have students write down what they have chosen to do.

9 Wrap Up

Remind students that Saint Nicholas was a bishop. Show the picture of your Diocesan bishop and make sure students know his name.

Practice receiving a blessing from the bishop--open hands, with the right hand resting in the left, then kissing the bishop's hand as he blesses us and rests his hand in ours.

10 Closing Prayer

(Have students stand.)

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

The Winter Saints *(Ages 10-12)*

Overview

Saints Are Special People Who Are Friends of God - Knowing about some of the winter saints helps students to understand that love for Christ led some to sacrifice their lives, and others to focus their whole lives on Him.

Objectives

By the end of this Lesson, learners should be able to:

- Define Saint Romanus as the composer of the Kontakion on the Nativity of Christ
- Reflect on the words of the Kontakion
- Identify Saint Barbara and Saint Herman as two saints commemorated in the winter
- Recall some elements of the lives of Saints Romanus, Barbara, and Herman
- Note the dates on which these three saints are commemorated in the Orthodox Church's calendar

Materials

- CD of the Kontakion on the Nativity of Christ, and a CD player (*attached to this lesson is an MP3 file of the Nativity Kontakion which you can download and burn to a CD for use in class*)
 - Chart with the words of the Nativity Kontakion, mounted on the wall for students to look at as you say or sing it for the Closing Prayer
 - Thick markers for students to share
 - For each group of 3 to 4 students: a copy of the Resource entitled "Saint Herman Handouts (PDF). These include the saint's life story, a black and white iconographic picture, and a map of his travels)
 - Icons of Saint Romanus
 - Picture of the Cathedral of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul/Constantinople. This is easily available in books or on line
 - A rolled-up piece of paper, on which you have drawn lines with some musical notes on them. This can be very simple; it is just a way of giving students an idea of what a scroll of music would look like
 - Icon of the Nativity of Christ
 - Icon of Saint Barbara
 - Resource *My Advent Calendar* December pages (with students' names)
 - Christmas stickers
 - Materials for friendship bracelets. Instruction and needed materials are given in the Resource section for this lesson
-
- For the "Fill in the Facts" Game (see Procedure #6) create two posters. On the first, put the title *Saint Barbara* and write the following sentences in large letters, with the blank spaces as shown. The blank

spaces should be large enough for students to tape in cards or pieces of paper with the correct words.
Do the same for second poster, entitled *Saint Herman*. Instructions for the cards are below.

On the first poster:

- a.. I was the _____ of a rich and well-known man.
- b.. I grew up living in a _____ my father built.
- c.. I had three _____ made to honor the Holy Trinity.
- d.. I knew that man-made _____ could not have created the beauty of nature.
- e.. My own father had me _____.

On the second poster:

- a. I was a _____ in Russia.
- b. I did most of my work for God in _____.
- c. I lived on an _____.
- d. My only blanket was a _____.
- e. Even the wild forest _____ trusted me as a friend.

On cards or pieces of paper that will fit into the blanks (students will tape them onto the posters), write the following words. Use 2 different colors of paper, or of markers, for the 2 groups of 5 words:

For the first poster: daughter, tower, idols, windows, killed

For the second poster: monk, Alaska, island, board, animals

Have tape for students to use.

If you have a large class, you may want to make more copies of the posters and word cards. The teams playing the game should be 3-4 students each.

Resources

Required Resources

[Christian Friendship Bracelets \(PDF\)](#)
[Kontakion on the Nativity of Christ \(PDF\)](#)
[St Herman Handouts \(PDF\)](#)
[Kontakion, Nativity of Christ \(MP3\)](#)
[St Herman Resources\(Link\)](#)
[Icon of St. Romanus \(Image\)](#)
[Icon of St. Romanus the Melodist \(Image\)](#)
[Icon of St. Romanus \(Image\)](#)
[Icon of St. Romanus\(HTML\)](#)
[Icon of St. Romanus the Melodist \(Image\)](#)
[The Life of St. Romanus\(HTML\)](#)

Optional Resources

[St. Herman - General Resources](#)
[St. Romanos: Primary Level Resource](#)
[St. Romanus the Melodist\(Link\)](#)
[Saint Barbara the Greatmartyr \(Image\)](#)
[The Holy Greatmartyr Barbara](#)

Procedure

1 Opening Prayer

(Have students stand.) Have the icon of the Nativity displayed, and have the word chart where students can easily see it.)

Say or sing the Troparion together.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,

And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

2 Discussion Starter

Give each student a copy of the Kontakion on the Nativity of Christ, and play the recording of the Prelude. Ask students to listen for what is being expressed in the Prelude, and write their ideas on the chalkboard. (Points to get across: The Kontakion tells us that the whole universe is offering gifts to the newborn Christ. The Virgin Mary gives birth to Him, the earth gives a cave, the angels and shepherds give glory, and the magi give their precious gifts. The last line, the refrain "a little Child, God before the ages" tells us that this human baby is also the Son of God.)

Have the class find these parts of the *Kontakion*: the stanzas or *ikoi* (strophes), the opening words of the first stanza, and the refrain. Also have them check to see how many stanzas there are. (Answers: the stanzas are the groups of verses; the first stanza begins "Bethlehem has opened..."; the refrain of each stanza is "a little child, God before the ages"; there are 24 stanzas.)

Look together at the first line of the 2nd stanza: "The mother's Father has willingly become her Son." Then read John 1: 1-3 and 14-15. Ask, "How do these words in the *Kontakion* reflect what the Gospel of John says?" (The *Kontakion* is saying that Jesus Christ, along with His Father, made everything. So He is the "Father" or Creator of Mary. But now He is becoming her Son by being born of her. The Gospel also says that the Word, Jesus Christ, created everything with His Father, and then "became flesh and dwelt among us.")

Read the 22nd stanza together. It begins "When the blameless Virgin saw..." Ask: "What 'trinity of gifts' does the Mother of God ask her Son to accept?" (The three gifts of the Magi--gold, frankincense, and myrrh--are named in the 21st stanza. Students can look back and find them there if necessary.)

Ask: "What three things does she ask her Son for?" (Seasons that are temperate and pleasant; growth of the crops and fruits of the earth; the well-being of all the people on earth. As you talk about the Mother of God's requests, emphasize to students that she is always praying for us and caring about our well-being.)

Ask, "What do the words 'him whom no one can approach' mean?" Help students understand that these words do not mean that Jesus Christ is distant from us. They mean that His glory is beyond measure--beyond the ability of anyone or anything to approach. Yet this One who is "above all being" is willing to have the Virgin give birth to Him so that He can be with us, overcome death for us, and save us.

3 We Practice and Prepare

Ask, *"What is something you would like to be really good at doing?"* (Let anyone answer who wishes to, and put brief answers on the chalkboard.)

Ask, *"What would a person have to do to become good at these things we have named?"* (Point to each answer on the chalkboard, and let students give ideas, such as practicing a lot, observing those who are good at doing the thing, taking lessons, etc.)

Ask, *"Can we pray and ask God's help to make us good at something?"* (Help students understand that God will help us if we are willing to work at the things we have mentioned.)

Say, *"When you work to become good at something, remember that God is the One who gives us our abilities and gifts, and He will help us to develop and use them."*

4 Introducing the Story

Say, *"Let's read about someone who had to work hard to do the thing he really wanted to do. He is the man who wrote the Kontakion, the hymn we have been talking about. He is Saint Romanus. As you hear the story, find what you think is the most important thing Saint Romanus did."*

5 Story: The Life of St. Romanus

Have an icon of Saint Romanus displayed.

Saint Romanus was born in Syria in the fifth century. He moved to Constantinople, where he helped the priests and bishop in the great church of Hagia Sophia. (Show the photo of Hagia Sophia.) This was the central church of the city, and many people came to worship and pray there, so Romanus was always busy. But he spent his nights praying alone, sometimes in a field or in a smaller church outside the city.

One Christmas Eve, the night before the feast of the Nativity of Jesus Christ, Romanus was asked to read some of the prayers during the service. The great church was crowded with people. There were government officials, priests and monks and nuns, and families. Everyone was listening to the beautiful prayers and hymns.

But Romanus was not a good reader. He did not say the words clearly, and nobody could understand what he was saying. Another reader had to take his place. Some people laughed at him, and everyone in that crowded church could hear them laughing.

Romanus was embarrassed, and ashamed of his failure. He wanted so much to be able to read in church, and to let people hear the beauty of God's words. But maybe he would never be able to. Feeling completely miserable, he prayed before the icon of Mary, the Mother of God, pouring out his sorrow.

The next day, the Mother of God spoke to him in a gentle voice as he prayed. She gave him a scroll (show the scroll and say that a scroll can have writing or music on it) and told him to eat it. That may seem strange to us, but it was her gift to the young man. It probably tasted like thin bread. Once he ate the scroll, a wonderful thing happened. Romanus was able to sing and to write church songs or hymns.

That evening in church, Romanus was able to sing in a beautiful voice. What did he sing? The very first hymn he wrote, the Nativity hymn that we heard and talked about today.

Romanus became a deacon in the church, and a teacher of singing and songs. Of course, he had to work very hard to do this. The gift from the Mother of God was not magic--it was her way of encouraging Romanus. But he had to practice and work to get better at singing and writing church songs.

But by the time he was older, he had written so many beautiful hymns and lived such a good life that the Church made him a saint. Romanus was able to do what he loved most, thanks to the loving kindness of the Mother of God.

When Saint Romanus died, in about the year 556, he had written a thousand hymns. We have eighty of them and we sing them in our churches today.

Ask: "What did you think was the most important thing Romanus did?" (Students' answers may vary. Point out that one important thing Romanus did was to pray for help to the Mother of God. He did not give up, or allow his embarrassing experience in church to make him stop trying to become a singer and writer of songs.)

The Resource section has several icons of Saint Romanus Look together at some of these. Ask students to note details which vary in the icons: the deacon's stole or orarion, the musical scroll, the church Romanus is holding as a symbol of his service to the great Church.

6 Saint Barbara and Saint Herman: Fill in the Facts

Say, "Let's see how well we can put together some facts about two saints who are remembered during the Nativity Fast, as we prepare for the Feast of the Birth of Jesus Christ."

- Mount the two posters, with the names of the two saints, on a wall.
- Divide the class into two teams, and assign each one a chart to fill in.
- Give each team their set of word cards, and tape.
- The winning team will be the one that is first to put their cards in proper order on their chart. (The order given in the *Materials* section is correct.)

Review the answers and make sure they are in the right order on the posters. Say, "You have done a good job of telling us about Saint Barbara and Saint Herman. Let's find out more about them."

7 Stories: Saint Barbara and Saint Herman

Gather the students for a story. The following is a slightly altered version of the text on Saint Barbara in the *Feasts and Saints* section of the OCA website. Let students take turns reading, or tell the story yourself.

Greatmartyr Barbara

In the early fourth century, a rich and well-respected man named Dioscorus lived with his daughter Barbara in the Syrian city of Heliopolis. He was proud of his beautiful daughter--so proud that he began to worry about letting anything or anyone in the world come too close to her. Perhaps it was because his wife had died that he felt he had to take such very good care of Barbara. He built a tower for her to live in.

Barbara's pagan teachers were allowed to visit her, for Dioscorus was devoted to the worship of the gods and wanted his daughter to learn to be the same. But nobody else except servants could enter the tower, which was very luxurious and beautiful, but still a prison.

A tall tower does at least offer a view of the country around it. Barbara saw wooded hills, a swiftly flowing river, and meadows covered with flowers. At night the sky was full of stars and twinkling lights. All of this was incredibly harmonious and beautiful, and Barbara began to ask herself how it could have come into being.

Before long she became convinced that the idols her father and friends worshipped could not have created anything. They themselves were created by people's own hands! She decided to spend the rest of her life trying to discover who created the world, rather than getting married and living as a rich man's wife and the mother of his children.

Her father had other ideas. He wanted her to marry, and there were certainly plenty of young men ready to become her husband. He insisted so strongly that she must marry that Barbara warned him, "I love you very much, but if you keep pushing me on this you may create a separation between us that we won't be able to heal."

Dioscorus decided that Barbara had been too isolated, and allowed her to go into the city. There she met Christians who could answer her questions about the Creator, and who taught her about the Holy Trinity. A priest who was visiting the city told her about Jesus Christ the Savior, and granted her request to be baptized.

About this same time, Dioscorus ordered a bathhouse to be built on his property. He instructed the builders to put in two windows, approved the construction plans, and went out of town on business. While he was gone, Barbara told the builders to put in a third window. This was a way of honoring the Holy Trinity and a way of showing how the Three-Person God enlightens the world.

Dioscorus, back from his trip, was angry that his instructions had not been followed. Then his daughter told him the reason--she had found the true faith of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. She did not believe in his idols and would not worship them.

This enraged him so much that he grabbed a sword and began beating her with it. She escaped and ran into the street, but her father found her. Unable to believe that his own daughter would defy him, he turned her over to the governor of the city. When the pagan governor and his helpers could not make her deny her faith in Christ, they took her into the public square and tortured her.

A Christian woman named Juliana saw what was happening to Barbara. She called out, "Stop that! She has done nothing wrong!" The governor's helpers grabbed Juliana, and tortured her along with Barbara. The two died together, praying and praising Christ.

Nine hundred years later, the relics of Saint Barbara were transferred to the city of Kiev by another Barbara, the daughter of the Byzantine Emperor. The relics rest there now, in the Cathedral of Saint Vladimir.

After you have read the story about Saint Barbara, divide the class into groups of 3 or 4. Give each group a copy of the "Saint Herman Handouts" and have them read the life story of Saint Herman, and then trace his travels on the map.

Ask, "*What do you think conditions would have been like during Saint Herman's journey from Russia to Alaska?*" (Let students answer. Bring forth these points: the conditions would have been far from luxurious on the very long journey. Also, Saint Herman was leaving his familiar home country for a vast, unknown land whose people whose had a culture that was completely different from his own. All this was a real effort to preach the Gospel, made for love of Jesus Christ.)

8 Reviewing Stories of Three Saints

Note: If you feel that you will not have time to do this review activity today, save it for the next session. Have students do the first part today--making their three papers--and tell them you will use these next time to review the stories of the three saints.

Give each student three pieces of paper, and have them write a large letter B on one, R on the second, and H on the third. Students can do this with thick markers, which they will share.

Have students stand. Read the following review statements one by one. Students should hold up the B paper for statements about Saint Barbara, R for statements about Saint Romanus, and H for statements about Saint Herman. (Answers follow the statements--the correct letter is given.)

1. A tower was my home. **(B)**

2. The Mother of God helped me become a singer **(R)**
3. I saw my father go crazy with anger **(B)**
4. I was laughed at in a big crowd, but I didn't give up **(R)**
5. I made the long voyage from Russia to Alaska **(H)**
6. The Mother of God cured me of a disease **(H)**
7. I was a deacon **(R)**
8. I was publicly tortured **(B)**
9. I grew my own vegetables and shared them with people and animals **(H)**
10. You will hear my songs in church **(R)**
11. An island was my home **(H)**
12. My relics are now in Kiev, Ukraine **(B)**

Go over the answers together.

9 Marking the Advent/Nativity Fast Calendar

Give each student his or her copy of the December page of *My Advent Calendar*, and a choice of Christmas stickers. They can mark the feast days of Saint Barbara on December 4th and of St. Herman on December 13th. (Saint Romanus' feast day does not fall in the Advent period.)

Collect the calendar pages to use again in the final session.

10 Friendship Bracelets

Have students make these bracelets, as described in the *Resource* section.

11 Closing Prayer

(Have student stand.)

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Sing or say the words of the Prelude from the Nativity Kontakion together.

Today the virgin gives birth to the transcendent one,
And the earth offers a cave to the unapproachable one.
Angels give glory with the shepherds,
The magi journey with the star,
As for our sake He is born as a new child, He who from eternity is God

Members of God's Family *(Ages 10-*

12)

Overview

God's Family - We can learn much about the coming of Christ and the incarnation in the Old Testament, especially in the prophecy of Isaiah.

Objectives

By the end of this Lesson, learners should be able to:

- Recognize that the ancestors form a continuous line from the forefathers of the Old Testament to the birth of Jesus, the promised Messiah.
- Discuss some Old Testament prophecies and images of the coming of Christ and the Incarnation.

Materials

- Copies for each students of the Resource handout: *Messages of the Promised Messiah*
- Icons and artistic representations of the ancestors of Jesus (Resources)
- Example of a family tree (a picture in a book or on line, perhaps of a famous person--anything that shows students what a family tree looks like)
- Chart with the words of the Nativity Kontakion, mounted on the wall for students to look at as you say or sing it for the Closing Prayer

For the Jesse Tree activity (# 4 in the Procedure for this lesson):

- Card stock--have enough 5" by 5" pieces to make 12 ornaments for the tree. If you have more than 12 students, several students can make the same ornament. Have extra pieces in case some students need more than one try!
- Scissors, hole punch
- Pieces of string to hang ornaments
- Thin and thick markers or crayons in various colors
- Christmas stickers, star stickers
- Large, clean branch with strong twigs or limbs that ornaments can hang on
- Pot of sand, gravel or soil in which branch will stand firmly (or some other means of making branch stand)
- 12 copies of the following readings, for students to read from:

TWELVE READINGS FOR THE JESSE TREE

1. God gave Adam and Eve a beautiful Garden to live in and cultivate. When they disobeyed God and had to leave the Garden, He did not abandon them.
2. When human beings continued to sin, God sent a great flood to cleanse the earth. But the rainbow was the sign to righteous Noah that God would not destroy the earth again.
3. God promised the elderly Abraham that he would be the father of many nations, as many as the stars in the heavens. God's promises were also given to Abraham's son Isaac and to Isaac's son Jacob.
4. Moses was given strength to lead God's people, the Israelites, out of Egyptian bondage. God gave Moses the Ten Commandments as a law for the people to live by.
5. Years of wandering followed. The Israelites finally settled in the land God gave them, but there was war, foreign domination and corruption. Still, God never gave up on His people. He later sent them great leaders like David--a soldier, poet, musician and king.
6. But the people continued to disrespect God, and worshipped the idols of those who lived in the lands around them. God let them make their free choice, but sent prophets like Elijah to warn that it would lead to disaster, and to call the people back to holiness.
7. As Jeremiah and other prophets warned, the conquering armies of Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple. They took the Hebrews far from their homes, into exile and slavery.
8. Now God's people, the Israelites, were like the mere stump of a tree that God had once carefully and lovingly planted. But the prophet Isaiah wrote: "A shoot will spring forth from the stump of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots" (Isaiah 11:1). Jesse was the father of King David.
9. God did not forget the promises He had made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He brought the people back to their land, and forgave them, offering them another chance to be truly His people. Nehemiah led them in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, and they did not fall into the worship of false gods again.
10. The people never fulfilled their dream of restoring the great kingdom they had once had. Harshly ruled by the Greeks and then the Romans, they became discouraged in the struggle to live up to their calling as God's people. But after many years, God would send a final prophet, John the Baptizer, who would come to "prepare the way of the Lord."
11. Mary went to the house of her cousin Elizabeth, who would soon give birth to her baby, John the Baptizer. Mary shared with Elizabeth the wonderful news: the angel had told her that she, too, would give birth. Her child would be Jesus, the Son of God. Elizabeth rejoiced with Mary, and called her "the mother of my Lord."
12. Jesus Christ was born. He was the Savior God had promised. God's plan was fulfilled. This is the plan that He has always had for all of us who live on earth. We are all members of His family, and His loving will is for us to live with Him forever in His Kingdom.

---end---

Note: This activity calls for students to draw symbols of several Biblical figures. If you prefer, you can, for many of these figures, find and use small icons.

You might consider having students rehearse this activity a few times. They could then present it to the parish.

Many Old Testament figures can be used for the Jesse Tree--we have chosen certain ones for this lesson. You can find several lists of possible figures on line, and you may want to have students look up some of these with their symbols, read about them in the Bible, and talk about how they fit into the long line of Jesus' ancestors.

Resources

Required Resources

[Messages of the Promised Messiah \(PDF\)](#)

Optional Resources

[Jesse Tree Ornaments \(PDF\)](#)

[Holy Righteous Joseph the Betrothed \(Image\)](#)

[Icon of the Mother of God of the Akathist \(Image\)](#)

[Jesse Tree Illuminated Manuscript \(Image\)](#)

[Jesse Tree Window \(Image\)](#)

[Christ in the Old Testament \(Image\)](#)

Procedure

1 Opening Prayer

Display the icon of the Nativity, and the word chart.

(Have students stand.) Sing or say the Troparion together:

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.

For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

2 Discussion Starter

If you decided to save the *Reviewing Stories of Three Saints* activity from last week, do it with students now, and then go over the correct answers.

Begin this week's procedure by putting this passage on the chalkboard:

The eternal purpose that God has carried out in Jesus Christ our Lord (Ephesians 3:11)

Ask, "*What do you think this passage means? How could you put it in different words?*" (This may not be easy for students. Let them give their ideas. Bring forth the point that God has had a plan for us forever, long before Jesus Christ was born on earth. The plan was carried out, or fulfilled, when Jesus Christ came.)

Ask, "*What part of the Bible tells us about some of the long, long years before Jesus Christ was born?*" (Have one or more students open the Bible and pick out the very thick part that tells about the centuries before Jesus Christ was born. Make sure students can name this as the Old Testament.) Put the words **Old Testament** on the chalkboard.

Say, "*One of the writers in the Old Testament who tells us the most about God's plan is the prophet Isaiah. Let's look at some of the things he said.*" Put the words **Prophet Isaiah** on the chalkboard.

Give each student a Bible, copy of the *Resource Messages of the Promised Messiah* and a pen or pencil. Divide the class into groups of three or four and let them work together to fill in the blanks.

3 The Words of Isaiah

Ask students, "*What is a prophet?*" (Write the word on the chalkboard. Let them give their ideas, and if necessary define *prophet* as a person whom God has chosen to tell people what God wants them to do. Sometimes a prophet warns; other times a prophet reminds people of God's promises. Write "prophecy" on the chalkboard and tell students that this word means the message from God that a prophet gives.

Emphaze that prophets are not fortune tellers, though they do sometimes tell what God plans for His people in the future. Say that Isaiah, whose words you will be looking at, is one of the most important prophets.

Go over the first part of the *Messages of the Promised Messiah* sheet with students. There are several possible "attributes" of the coming Savior in verses 1-5, so students' choices may vary. Discuss their reasons for choosing the particular attributes they did.

Ask students what they think verse 3b means: "*He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear.*" (Let students give their ideas. Emphasize that Isaiah is saying the Savior will have deep insight, and real understanding of people, not being impressed by outward appearances.)

Go over the four "wonders" students have chosen. These will come from verses 6-9, and again students may make different choices. Give students a chance to answer these questions: "*Which of the wonders would you most like to see? Which do you think is most important?*"

The four passages from Isaiah should be easy to fill in, even if the wording in the Bible you use are slightly different from those on the page. This is a good way for students to see that slightly different wording can still have the same meaning.

When students have finished, review a few points:

Isaiah 7:14 *What is the sign that God Himself gives us?* (A young unmarried woman bears a son who is to be named Emmanuel, which means "God with us.")

Isaiah 41:8-10 *What is the final promise God makes in this passage?* (He promises that He will uphold you--meaning all of us--with His victorious right hand. The word "victorious" here means that nothing and nobody can defeat Him. This is a promise for all of us to count on through our whole lives.)

4 The Jesse Tree

Ask students, "*What is a family tree?*" Let them tell you, or supply the information, that it is a record of generations in a family--the ancestors, grandparents, parents, etc. Show them the example you have brought.

Say, "*The Jesse Tree is a way of remembering the human ancestors of Jesus Christ--the people who make His family tree. They are the people in the Old Testament, coming down through the generations to Jesus Himself. We remember them during this period of Advent, as we prepare for His Nativity.*"

Read Isaiah 11:1 together. Tell students that this verse is the basis of the "Jesse Tree." Ask them what they understand about it. Bring out these points: Isaiah's words gave the people assurance that even the bad times they were going through would end. A "shoot" would grow from the "stump" of the tree of Jesse. This was a rather mysterious reference to a Person who would come and fulfill God's promises to His people.

Jesse, Jesse's son David, and other Old Testament people would be the ancestors of the Person referred to as a shoot or branch. This Person would be the Savior--Jesus Christ.

- Explain that you are going to make twelve ornaments with symbols of some of these people to hang on the branch, which will be your Jesse Tree. Have students stand the branch in the sand, or however you are going to have it stand.
- Give each student card stock, and have Bibles, scissors, stickers and markers ready for everyone to share. (If you have fewer than 12 students, each can make more than one ornament.) Ask them to write down the name, symbol and Bible reference you are assigning. (Be ready to help with this. You may want to copy the list below for reference.)
- Have students make the ornaments by drawing the symbol on one side and the name on the other. They can cut their card stock into a shape they choose, or leave it as is. They can decorate their ornaments with markers and stickers. Assure students that their drawing work can be very simple. You may want to use the symbol patterns included in the *Resource* section for this lesson. You can also find patterns on line.
- Make sure they leave a spot at the top for the hole and string to hang the ornament.
- Have them look up and read the Bible reference to the person whose symbol they are drawing.

Symbols and Names. (If more than one symbol is suggested, students can choose.)

1. Adam and Eve. Symbol: Apple or tree with apples. Genesis 3: 20-24
2. Noah. Symbol: Rainbow, dove, or ark. Genesis 8:20-22
3. Abraham. Symbol: Sky with stars. Genesis 15: 5-6
4. Moses. Symbol: Tablets with writing (Ten Commandments) Exodus 20: 1-17
5. David. Symbol: Harp or shepherd's crook. II Samuel 5: 1-5
6. Elijah. Symbol: Altar of stones. I Kings 18: 30-32
7. Jeremiah. Symbol: Tears. Jeremiah 9: 7-11
8. Branch with leafy shoot. Isaiah 11: 1
9. Nehemiah. Symbol: Wall. Nehemiah 2: 17-18
10. John the Baptizer. Symbol: Scroll with words *Behold, the Lamb of God*. John 1: 29.
11. Elizabeth. Symbol: House or dove. Luke 1: 39-45.

12. Jesus Christ our Lord. Symbol: Manger or crown. John 1: 1-18.

When students have completed their ornaments, have them stand, and give each one a copy of the twelve readings. They can read in turn, and hang their ornaments on the tree as they read. (If you are too short of time to do this today, you can begin next week's session with this as a review.)

5 Jesus' Ancestors in the Bible and in Art

Together, look through Matthew 1: 1-17. Ask, "*What is a genealogy?*" (A record of ancestors and generations.)

Have students find a few names that are familiar to them. They will probably know Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Ruth, Jesse, David and Solomon in the first part. Joseph and Mary are at the end, closest to Jesus.

Ask, "*What event that we mentioned in the Jesse Tree activity is part of this genealogy?*" (The deportation to Babylon.)

Look together at the icons and artistic representations in the Resources for this lesson. Then look together at the Nativity icon, and have students find the Jesse tree. (It is at the bottom center of the icon.)

6 Wrap Up

Practice together the greeting and response for the Nativity of Christ:

Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

Ask, "*What does 'glorify Him' mean?*" (Let students give their ideas. Bring out the point that we praise and thank Christ for what He has willingly done for us. We acknowledge that He is the only One who could do this, because He is God.)

7 Closing Prayer

Have students stand. Have the word chart mounted where students can see it.)

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Sing or say the words of the Prelude from the Nativity Kontakion together.

Today the virgin gives birth to the transcendent one,
And the earth offers a cave to the unapproachable one.
Angels give glory with the shepherds,
The magi journey with the star,
As for our sake He is born as a new child, He who from eternity is God

God is with us *(Ages 10-12)*

Overview

The Birth of Jesus Christ - God became man and lived among us - that is the incarnation of God in Christ Jesus.

Objectives

By the end of this Lesson, learners should be able to:

- Define the word "incarnation" by breaking it down into parts so as to understand and then combine the meaning of each part
- Note some aspects of two Biblical accounts (Matthew and Luke) of the Nativity of Christ
- Identify figures from the Old Testament and New Testament who are ancestors of Jesus Christ
- Consider their personal efforts of prayer, service, and help to others as gifts that they can offer to the incarnate Lord during the season of His Nativity that we celebrate

Materials

- Icon of the Nativity
- Word chart for the Nativity Troparion, mounted so students can see it easily
- Poster materials: For each group of 3 or 4, have a piece of poster board (any size you choose), markers/crayons in various colors, stickers, glue, and any small decorative items you like
- Christmas stickers
- Copies for each student of the Resource handout *What Shall We Offer You, O Christ*

Resources

Required Resources

- [My Advent Calendar](#)
- [The Nativity of Christ \(PDF\)](#)
- [Icon of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ \(Image\)](#)
- [Nativity of Christ Biblical Accounts\(HTML\)](#)
- [What shall we offer You, O Christ\(HTML\)](#)

Optional Resources

- [Graphic Organizer of a T-Chart \(PDF\)](#)
- [Prepare O Bethlehem \(Image\)](#)

Procedure

1 Closing Prayer

(Have students stand.) Give each student a copy of *What Shall We Offer You, O Christ*. Read it together as your Closing Prayer.

Ask students to take their copy home and think, over the days of the Nativity Season, about what they will offer Jesus Christ as their gifts.

Prayer, witnessing to Jesus Christ as Lord, service and help to others, donations of time or energy or money could be their gifts.

Encourage students to consider the saints you have talked about in this unit of study as examples.

Remind students again to offer the Nativity greeting and response to others.

2 Opening Prayer

(Have students stand.) Have the icon of the Nativity and the word chart displayed so students can easily see them.

Sing or say the Nativity Troparion together.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thy nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shown to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!

3 Review: The Jesse Tree

If you have saved the Jesse Tree reading activity for this week, you can do it now. Otherwise, review the Jesse Tree material by giving each student a copy of the twelve readings. Have them

take turns reading a numbered item, and finding the corresponding ornament on the Jesse Tree you made at the last session.

Ask them to explain the meaning of the symbol on their ornament. (You may want to review the Bible passages to reinforce the meanings of the symbols.)

4 Review: The Nativity Icon and Troparion

Look at the icon together, and let students consult the word chart as needed. Review a few points from an earlier lesson:

- *What three phrases in the Troparion tell us Jesus Christ enlightens the world with truth?* (Light of Wisdom, Sun of Righteousness, Orient from on high)
- *What does "Orient from on high" mean?* (It refers to the place in the East where the light rises and comes from)
- *Where is Christ in the icon?* (Lying, wrapped in white, near His mother. He is also shown being bathed--He was a real baby, cared for by others and needing to be bathed)
- *Who are the two male figures near the bottom of the icon?* (One is Joseph, and the other is the devil, trying to convince Joseph that this baby is not really God's divine Son. The devil is depicted in various ways in Nativity icons--usually as a very unappealing figure.)
- Have students find the Jesse Tree in the icon. There are often several trees or plants in the Nativity icon, with the Jesse Tree prominent among them, but not always easy to distinguish. The important thing for students to know is that the Jesse Tree, representing Isaiah's prophecy, is in the icon.

5 Poster

Put the following words on the chalkboard, in the order shown. Tell students the words are from the Nativity Troparion. Make sure everyone has pencil and paper, and as a fun challenge see who can quickly put the words in the correct order. (Students can consult the word chart.)

adore who those star by taught a worshipped Thee stars to were the

(Correct order: those who worshipped the stars were taught by a star to adore Thee)

Divide the class into groups of 3 or 4, and give each group poster materials. Have them use the words and the icon to create their poster, using their creativity to depict something that the words tell us.

The groups may come up with different ideas of what to put on their posters. They can design and decorate their posters as they wish to.

Plan to display the posters where parishioners can see them.

6 The Bible Record

Say, *"The New Testament gives us two descriptions of the birth of Jesus Christ. Let's look at a few facts about each one."*

Read together Matthew 1: 22-23, and then Isaiah 7:14. Ask, *"Why did Matthew make reference to Isaiah's prophecy?"* (Let students give their ideas. Bring forth the point that Matthew, a Jew, was especially addressing his Gospel to his fellow Jews. He wanted them to see that everything Jesus Christ did fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies that the Jews knew well.)

To reinforce the point, read Matthew 2: 14 and then Micah 5:2.

Read together Luke 2: 8-17. Say, *"Shepherds were very low in the social order. Their job was dirty, poorly paid and not at all glamorous. Why do you think Saint Luke features shepherds as witnesses to Christ's birth?"* (Again, let students give their ideas. Bring forth the fact that the inclusion of the shepherds reminds us that the salvation of God is for all people. He makes no distinctions.)

Glance together Luke's genealogy in 3: 23-38. Don't try to read through all the names, but do read together verse 38. Ask, *"How does this verse show us that Jesus Christ's salvation is for all people?"* (It calls Jesus the "son of Adam." Every person--not just those of one nation or people--is descended from Adam.)

Finally, read Matthew 1: 3-6. You have looked at these verses before, but this time ask, *"Do you think it was usual in Matthew's time to include women in a genealogy?"* (From the way you have asked the question, students will probably guess that the answer is no. Tell them they are right--the inclusion of women (Tamar, Ruth, Rahab and "her who had been the wife of Uriah", meaning Bathsheba) is another way we are being shown that God's plan of salvation is for everyone. Genealogies in the time of Matthew would usually include only men.)

The *Resources* for this lesson include the full accounts from Matthew and Luke, if you wish to use them in class.

7 Add Them Up!

As a review of the unit, write the following names and numbers on the chalkboard:

- Romanus 6
- Barbara 8
- Herod 2
- Nicholas 5

- Elizabeth 1
- Jesse 3
- Abraham 4
- Isaiah 6
- Moses 3
- Herman 7
- Noah 2
- David 4

Have the groups that worked on posters continue together, and have each group quickly choose a team name. (If they dawdle, assign names.) Tell students you will read descriptions of people that end, "Who am I?" They should write down the the name and number of the correct person, for example "Moses 3."

Read the following four descriptions. (Correct answers are provided, but don't read them.)

- a. God said I would be the father of many nations. Who am I? (*Abraham 4*)
- b. My son was named David. Who am I? (*Jesse 3*)
- c. I feared the newborn Jesus as a rival king. Who am I? (*Herod 2*)
- d. I loved the Holy Trinity, but my father didn't. Who am I? (*Barbara 8*)

--Stop here, and have a representative from each team come up to the chalkboard, write the team's name, and below that write the total of their team's 4 answers.. When all the numbers are written, you can announce with a dramatic flourish, "The correct total is...17 !"

Continue with the next set of four:

- e. My son was John the Baptizer. Who am I? (*Elizabeth 1*)
- f. God gave me the Ten Commandments for His people. Who am I? (*Moses 3*)
- g. I was a secret giver and a bishop. Who am I? (*Nicholas 5*)
- h. I taught the Alaskan people about Jesus Christ. Who am I? (*Herman 7*)

--Call up a representative of each team again, and have them write their totals. Announce the correct total: 16.

Go on to the final four:

- i. God showed me a rainbow as a sign. Who am I? (*Noah 2*)

j. I prophesied about the Savior. Who am I? (*Isaiah 6*)

k. I composed many Orthodox church songs. Who am I? (*Romanus 6*)

l. I was a poet, a soldier, and a king. Who am I? (*David 4*)

--Have the representatives write their numbers and announce the total: 18

Go over the answers together. If some teams did especially well, acknowledge their work, or if all did equally well, commend everyone.

8 Nativity Season Greeting and Calendar

Practice the Nativity greeting and response:

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

Encourage students to share the greeting and response with their families, parishioners, and others during the Nativity season.

Give students their December pages from the *My Advent Calendar* resource, and have them choose a sticker. They can mark the 16th for Saint Matthew the Evangelist (Gospel writer.)

Students can take their calendar pages home. Encourage them to note important events, or things they are doing to prepare for the Feast of the Nativity, on their pages.

9 Wrap Up

As students are preparing for the Closing Prayer, put the word **incarnation** on the chalkboard. Ask students to define it. Say, "*This is the word we use to describe what happened when Christ was born. God became Man.*"

Break the word down for them:

IN, when used before other words, means into or becoming

CARN means flesh

ATION means something that takes place.

So INCARNATION means that God comes into flesh, or becomes Man. He is at the same time always God. This is not easy to understand, but it is basic to our faith.

