

# Introduction



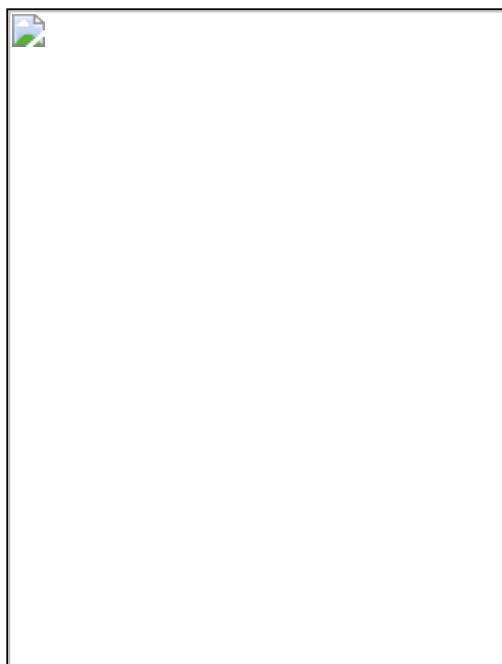
Christianity is unique in giving the world a true understanding of God as having humbled Himself, in the Person of Jesus Christ, so that He could share and redeem our life. No other faith teaches, in the same way that Christianity does, that God would "demean" Himself by becoming Man. No other faith gives humankind the joyful news that by undergoing and overcoming an excruciating death, Jesus Christ destroyed death's power over us forever.

But our loving God is so careful of our freedom that He did not come to us in a flashy and overwhelming miracle. He sought human cooperation, and that came in the person of a young woman who lived in worldly circumstances of poverty and powerlessness. The young woman faced the brutal possibility that she would be stoned to death for fornication. Her willingness to face that hard reality, to cooperate with God's will, came from her faith.

This unit is intended to help students see why the Orthodox Church honors that young woman, the Holy Virgin Mary and Theotokos. She had faith that all would be as the angel Gabriel promised her it would. So she said to him, "Let it be." With those words, she consented to God's plan for our salvation. How could we not honor her, above all other saints, when it is her co-operation that puts God's plan into action?

That brings us to one of several things we want students to know: Mary was not forced or obligated to consent to God's plan. She could have said "no." She is our model, born with free will as we all are, of one who chose to say "yes" to God, as we can also do.

We also want students to be aware of the reason for the Church's emphasis on Mary's ever-virginity. (This applies mostly to older students, who are dealing with questions of sexuality in their own lives.) The translation of the Hymn to the Theotokos ("More honorable...") most commonly used in our OCA churches states: "Without defilement you gave birth to God the Word; true Theotokos, we magnify you." Students will be learning this hymn as part of the unit, so it is important that they understand its meaning properly. The word "defilement" is not the only way to translate the original words, and should not lead students to think that normal human sexual intercourse is considered "dirty" or "defiling" by the Church. The word only points to the miracle of this birth: Jesus was born without a human father, by the power of God, while still taking flesh from His mother. This was the divine/human birth of the divine/human Son of God.



## Overall Objectives of the Unit

1. Understand the importance of the Theotokos as an intercessor in our relationship with Jesus Christ and
2. Understand the importance of the Theotokos as a model for us today.

Keeping these two objectives in mind can help us, as teachers, focus on the important fact that every worship service in the Orthodox Church contains one or more references to Mary. She also is given the title of honor, established at the Third Ecumenical Council in Ephesus (451), of "Theotokos" or Birthgiver of God.

*Fr. Alexander Schmemmann describes Mary's place in our faith in this way:*

*The veneration of the Virgin Mary is a necessary component of our faith: The image of the Virgin Mary, the Virgin Mother, stands [as] the image of infinite humility and purity, filled with beauty and strength; the image of love and the victory of love. The Virgin Mary, the All-Pure Mother demands nothing and receives everything. She pursues nothing and possesses all. In the image of the Virgin Mary, we find compassion, tender-heartedness, care, trust, humility. We call her Our Lady and the Queen of Heaven and Earth, and yet she calls herself "the hand-maid of the Lord." .. Christ said, 'Do not be anxious. Seek first the Kingdom of God' (see Mt 6:33). Beholding this woman - Virgin Mother, Intercessor - we begin to sense, to know not with our mind, but with our heart, what it means to seek the Kingdom, to find it, and to live by it.*

### **THE VIRGIN MARY: THE CELEBRATION OF FAITH**

*by Alexander Schmemmann, pages 21 - 22.*

## How the Unit is Arranged

The unit is comprised of five lessons of about 45-60 minutes each. The first four each deal with a feast of Mary, and are presented in the order in which those feasts come in the Church calendar. This order also corresponds to the chronology of Mary's life. It's suggested that the Troparion and Kontakion for each feast be used as opening and closing prayers, respectively, of the sessions in which they are covered. The fifth session deals with five icons of the Theotokos.

The lessons have each been written on five levels: ages 4-6, ages 7-9, ages 10-12, ages 13-17, and ages 18+. The ages 13-17 may be split into two groups, older and younger, for discussions. For each level in a session, there is a lesson plan. All the lesson plans contain the following parts:

- **The lesson theme**
- **The age group** for which the session is intended
- **The lesson title**
- **A series of objectives**

Objectives are things that the students should be able to do as a result of the session. Objectives should be things the teacher can measure. Objectives contain verbs such as define, name, list, explain, tell, and other measurable actions. Through questions and discussion, teachers can ascertain whether students are able to fulfill these objectives. If they are not able to do so, teachers will know that review or repetition are necessary.

- **Resources and Materials Needed.**

These are the various materials the teacher will need to teach the session and meet the objectives.

These include icons, art, photos, liturgical texts, Bible stories and passages, and craft materials that will be part of the session.

- **Procedure** This is a step-by step outline of how the session should go.

**It is truly meet to bless you, O Theotokos,  
ever blessed and most pure, and the Mother of our God.**

**More honorable than the Cherubim,  
and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim,  
without defilement you gave birth to God the Word.**

**True Theotokos, we magnify you!**

# The Nativity of the Theotokos (September 8) *(Ages 7-9)*

## Overview

**Mary's humanity and God's Love** - Mary's humanity and God's Love

## Objectives

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

- At the end of the lesson, students should be able to briefly retell the story of Joachim and Anna and their daughter's birth
- Give examples of how their own mothers care for them
- Explain their understanding of the icons of the two Nativity Feasts (that of Jesus Christ, as well as that of His Mother)

## Materials

- Icon of the Nativity of Jesus Christ, Icon of the Nativity of the Theotokos
- The *Icon Book* (relevant text )
- Texts of the Troparion and Kontakion for the Nativity of the Theotokos; text of the Hymn to the Theotokos ("Virginité is foreign to mothers...")
- Text from Fr. Alexander Schmemmann's book (available in the Lesson Resources). You, the teacher, can use this for theological insight into the meaning of Mary's birth
- The story of the Nativity (birth) of Mary
- Butcher paper and colored markers
- A picture of you, the teacher, parents or grandparents, or a relative from a previous generation or more, to share with students

# Resources

## Required Resources

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

[Kontakion: Nativity of the Theotokos \(Sheet Music\) \(PDF\)](#)

[Nativity of The Theotokos Line Drawing \(PDF\)](#)

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

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

## Optional Resources

[Troparion: Nativity of the Theotokos \(Sheet Music\) \(PDF\)](#)

[Entrance of the Theotokos\(HTML\)](#)

[Hymn to the Theotokos \(It is Truly Meet\)\(HTML\)](#)

[Nativity of Theotokos - Liturgical Texts\(HTML\)](#)

[The Story of the Nativity \(Birth\) of the Theotokos\(HTML\)](#)

[The Icon Book \(Image\)](#)

# Procedure

## 1 Opening Prayer

### **Troparion (Tone 4)**

Your Nativity, O Virgin,  
Has proclaimed joy to the whole universe!  
The Sun of righteousness, Christ our God,  
Has shone from you, O Theotokos.  
By annulling the curse, He bestowed a blessing.  
By destroying death, He has granted us eternal life.

## 2 Discuss the Prayer

After singing the Troparion, talk about the words. Point out that Jesus Christ is the "Sun" of righteousness because He is God's Son, but that He also gives light to the whole world, which makes us think of the sun.

Make sure students understand that the word "annul" means to abolish or do away with. They should understand that the "curse" refers to our disobedience toward God, which leads to unhappiness and separation from Him. God in His love did away with that by sending His Son so that we could be with Him once again.

### 3 Story of Mary's Birth

Explain that you will now read a story that tells about the prayer that you just sang.

Tell the students the story of Joachim and Anna, and the birth of their daughter, from *The Story of the Nativity of the Theotokos* in the Resource Section. Emphasize that God's plan was at work from the earliest days of Mary's life. She was the one He wanted to be the mother of Jesus Christ, but it only happened with her agreement.

### 4 Review Christ's Nativity

Briefly review the story of the Nativity of Jesus Christ (see Resources section) which should be familiar to students.

*Ask them:*

- What are some of the things that Anna did for her daughter Mary?
- What are some of the things that Mary did for her Son Jesus Christ?
- What are some things that mothers do for their children (students' mothers for them) today?

### 5 Discuss family ancestors

Talk for a few minutes about ancestors. Let students tell what they know about their grandparents, or generations farther back if they know something about them. (For example, students might talk about what their ancestors did or do for a living, where they live or have lived, or stories the students have heard from them or about them concerning their lives when younger.) Show students the picture of your own ancestors, and point out that everyone has ancestors, including the Virgin Mary. Her father Joachim and her mother Anna were descended from groups that are mentioned in the very first books of the Bible. Tell students that God's plan was at work then, too. Joseph was the man who took care of Mary and Jesus. He is a great saint of the Church, and a very noble person. But Jesus' true Father was not Joseph. His Father is God, the Father in heaven. This is a miracle and a mystery. Read through the words of the "Hymn to the Theotokos" together. This is how the Church expresses the miracle and mystery of Jesus' birth.

### 6 Closing Prayer

Use the Kontakion of the Nativity of the Theotokos [Tone Four]

By your Nativity, O most pure Virgin,  
Joachim and Anna are freed from barrenness;  
Adam and Eve, from the corruption of death.

And we, your people, freed from the guilt of sin,  
celebrate and sing to you:  
"The barren woman gives birth to the Theotokos,  
the Nourisher of our Life."

Go through the words of the Kontakion of the Feast together, and sing it. Notice that three groups of people are "freed." Joachim and Anna, the old couple who so wanted a child, were freed from sadness when they had one--Mary. Adam and Eve are freed in that they will no longer be separated from God forever because they chose to disobey Him and put themselves far from Him. We--all of us--are freed in that we can now be with God forever because Jesus Christ was born and showed us how to live so that we can be with God in the Kingdom one day.

# The Entrance of the Theotokos (November 21) *(Ages 7-9)*

## Overview

**Mary's holiness and purity**

## Objectives

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

- Retell the events of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple by placing the pictures in order
- Describe the importance of preparation for special times and events, as Mary was prepared to be the Theotokos
- Compare the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple to the Presentation of the Lord
- Enumerate some characteristics of the festal icon

## Materials

- Icons of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple and of the Presentation of the Lord, and descriptions from The Icon Book
- Story of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple
- Liturgical Texts of the Feast
- Drawing paper
- Colorful markers and/or crayons
- Scissors
- Glue
- Decorative materials such as stick-on stars or bits of vari-colored construction paper in pleasing shapes

## Resources

### Required Resources

- [Entrance of The Theotokos - Line Drawing \(PDF\)](#)
- [Icon of The Presentation \(Meeting\) of Our Lord \(Image\)](#)
- [Entrance of the Theotokos in the Temple \(Story\)\(HTML\)](#)

### Optional Resources

- [Entrance of the Theotokos in the Temple \(Icon\) \(Image\)](#)
- [Entrance of the Theotokos - Liturgical Texts\(HTML\)](#)
- [The Icon Book \(Image\)](#)



## Procedure

### 1 Opening Prayer

#### **Troparion (Tone 4)**

Today is the prelude of the good will of God,  
of the preaching of the salvation of mankind.  
The Virgin appears in the Temple of God,  
In anticipation proclaiming Christ to all.  
Let us rejoice and sing to her: Rejoice,  
O Fulfillment of the Creator's dispensation!

*After reading the Troparion, and defining words in it as necessary--noting especially that "dispensation" means God's plan--use the following prayer or one of your own choosing:*

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Father, we thank You for bringing us together today. We thank you for Mary, the Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ. We remember today that she came to the Temple to be prepared by holy people to be His Mother. Bless us as we learn and pray together. We ask in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### 2 Review the prayer

Ask the class to notice especially one word in the prayer: PREPARED. Talk about how we prepare for special events, or for things we want to do. Let students suggest ways we prepare for:

- going to a birthday party
- being asked to sing a solo in a concert at school
- a math or arithmetic test that the teacher has planned for tomorrow
- staying overnight at a friend's house
- being asked to present bread and salt to the bishop, who is going to visit your parish

When students have offered their ideas, tell them they are going to hear about a time when the Virgin Mary prepared for something very special that God had asked her to do.

### 3 The Story of the Entrance of the Theotokos in the Temple

Tell the class that you are going to read about the event described in the opening prayer.

Read the story of the Feast found in the Resources.

Discuss to review the story:

- Who went along with Joachim, Anna, and Mary to the Temple? (*Friends and relatives.*)
- What did they do as they went along? (*They carried lighted candles and sang.*)

- Why were the people surprised after Mary climbed the steps to the Temple? (*Because Zechariah took her into the Holy of Holies.*)
- What do you think Zechariah might have said to the people? (*Zechariah was a man who loved God and prayed, he understood what God wanted. He told the people that God wanted Mary to enter the holy place.*)

## 4 Activity

Give students drawing and decorative materials. Let students choose to draw one or more of the following events (but make sure that at least one student is drawing each event so that the sequence will be complete):

- Joachim and Anna pray for a child.
- Mary is born. Joachim and Anna are happy parents!
- Mary, her parents, and others walk to the Temple with songs and lighted candles.
- Mary walks alone up the Temple steps as her parents and the other people watch her.
- The priest Zechariah receives Mary at the top of the Temple steps.
- Mary and Zechariah walk together into the Temple, where holy people are waiting for them.

Have students make a large title for the series of pictures: THE ENTRANCE OF THE THEOTOKOS INTO THE TEMPLE. They can decorate this, and make a border to go around the series. Then, as a review, have students put the pictures in the proper order. They can help you arrange the way you will display the series on a wall of the room.

## 5 Icons

Look at the two icons of the *Presentation of the Lord to the Temple*, and of the *Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple*. Using the descriptions in *The Icon Book*, let students compare the two.

## 6 Closing Prayer (Sung together)

Use the Kontakion of the Feast

### **Kontakion - Tone 4**

The most pure Temple of the Savior;  
 the Precious Chamber and Virgin;  
 the sacred Treasure of the Glory of God,  
 is presented today to the House of the Lord.  
 She brings with her the grace of the spirit,  
 which the angels of God do praise.  
 Truly this woman is the Abode of heaven!

If you have time, go over the meaning of the last line of the kontakion with your students: "Truly this woman is the abode of heaven." Make sure they understand that the word "abode" means a

place where someone lives or stays. Ask them what it means to say Mary is the abode of heaven. (She carried Jesus Christ in her body as He was getting ready to be born. This is the same as what any mother does with her baby. But Jesus is God's only Son, who came from heaven. So we can say that Mary carried heaven in her body when carried Jesus Christ. She was His "abode.")

# The Annunciation (March 25)

(Ages 7-9)

## Overview

**Mary's obedience and humility** - Mary's obedience and humility

## Objectives

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

- At the end of the session students should be able to briefly retell the story of the Annunciation and the Virgin Mary's later meeting with her cousin Elizabeth
- Relate the term "Annunciation" to the concept of announcing important events
- Tell how Mary's response to the angel's announcement showed faith and humility
- Demonstrate an understanding of the icon of the feast

## Materials

- Festal icon of The Annunciation
- Festal Troparion & Kontakion
- Story of the Annunciation
- Heavy banner-sized sheets of paper for each student
- Colorful markers/crayons
- Decorative bits of paper or other things to put on banners
- Glue
- Scissors
- To display the banners, you may want to attach the top of each one to a thin dowel with tape, and tie a long string to the two ends of the dowel. The banner can be displayed by suspending the middle of the tied string from wall hooks

## Resources

### Required Resources

[Annunciation - Line Drawing \(PDF\)](#)

[Icon of the Annunciation to the Theotokos \(Image\)](#)

[Liturgical Texts: Annunciation\(HTML\)](#)

[The Story of the Annunciation \(7-9\)\(HTML\)](#)

## Procedure

# 1 Opening Prayer

## Troparion of the Annunciation

Today is the beginning of our salvation,  
The revelation of the eternal mystery!  
The Son of God becomes the Son of the Virgin,  
As Gabriel announces the coming of Grace.  
Together with him let us cry out to the Theotokos!  
Rejoice, O Full of Grace, the Lord is with you.

*The hymn says that today is the "beginning" of our salvation because it is the beginning of Jesus Christ's birth as our Savior. Nine months after this feast, which comes in March, we will celebrate the birth of Our Lord in December. Our "salvation" means our being saved from something. We are saved from the final power of death. Now, with the coming of Jesus Christ as our Savior, we have the opportunity to follow Jesus Christ into the Kingdom and to be with Him there always.*

*This announcement reveals, or lets us see, something that God has planned forever, which is what "eternal" means. That "something" is the coming of the Savior.*

*"Grace" is the gift God gives to those who love Him and want to live as He calls them to live. Grace enables people to live in God's way.*

## 2 The Story of the Annunciation

Tell students you are going to read a story from the New Testament about an announcement that was made to only one person. Yet it was the most important announcement ever for each and every person in the world.

With the class, read Luke 1:36. Ask students:

- "What other good news did the angel Gabriel give to Mary?" (*That her older cousin Elizabeth would also have a child.*)

Read Luke 1:39-45. Ask students,

- "What was the first thing Mary did after speaking with angel?" (*She went to share joy with Elizabeth.*)
- "What did Elizabeth say to her?" (*Elizabeth called her "blessed" and referred to her as "the mother of my Lord," which is what the Church still calls Mary today.*)
- "What unusual thing happened to Elizabeth?" (*Mary's wonderful news made the baby in Elizabeth's body leap for joy. The baby, though not yet born, already knew that Jesus would be the Savior! Make sure students know that Elizabeth's baby was John the Baptist.*)

### 3 Announcements

Ask students to think about announcements.

- What kinds of things do we announce? (*Important things.*)
- How do we announce them? (*Let students come up with many responses: TV and radio, e-mail, websites, billboards, newspapers, word of mouth, invitations or fliers sent through the mail, etc.*)
- What are some important announcements students have heard in their own lives? (*Such things as the impending birth of a new baby in the family, a move, a new job for a parent, a special visit from a beloved relative, a family trip or vacation, a death of someone close to the family might be occasions of announcements.*)

Allow the students to create individual announcements

### 4 Annunciation Banners

Look together again at the words of the troparion. Point out that the first words, "Today is the beginning of our salvation" are really an announcement to the whole world. The last words, "Rejoice, O Full of Grace, the Lord is with you" are an announcement to Mary (who is the one described by the words "full of grace.")

Let students choose one or the other phrase and make a banner. Have the festal icon in sight as they work. They can decorate the banners, write the words in fancy letters, and put details from the festal icon on the banners as well. Plan to display the banners under a title strip: *The Annunciation to the Theotokos.*

### 5 Icon of the Feast

Look together at the icon of the feast. Use the description in *The Icon Book* to talk about some of the details. Remind students of something you talked about in an earlier session: Mary is called the "new Eve." Just as the first Eve chose to disobey God, Mary chose to obey His will and be part of His divine plan. She had faith that God would be with her in everything that happened. She was willing to let God be "the boss" in her life. We sometimes call this kind of willingness humility. A person who has humility isn't someone who lets everyone else make fun of them or order them around. A person who has humility doesn't think of herself or himself as being no good. A person who has humility isn't fearful all the time. (Remember that Mary stood firmly and questioned the angel--she did not simply tremble in front of him and silently hear his words.) Humility means recognizing God as the loving Father and Maker of the universe, who will always lead us in good paths if we let Him. This is what Mary did. Let students talk about this for a few more minutes if they wish to. Then review: Ask students to identify Gabriel, Elizabeth, and Joseph.

### 6 Closing Prayer

### **Troparion of the Annunciation**

Today is the beginning of our salvation,  
The revelation of the eternal mystery!  
The Son of God becomes the Son of the Virgin,  
As Gabriel announces the coming of Grace.  
Together with him let us cry out to the Theotokos!  
Rejoice, O Full of Grace, the Lord is with you.

# The Dormition of the Theotokos (August 15) *(Ages 7-9)*

## Overview

**Our Salvation and Christ's perfect love** - Our Salvation and Christ's perfect love

## Objectives

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

- At the end of the session students should be able to Briefly retell the story of the Dormition, including the apostles' eagerness to be with the Theotokos as she was dying
- Tell how the Theotokos served as a mother to all the Apostles after her Son's Ascension
- Demonstrate an understanding of the icon of the feast
- State that the Theotokos can be an intercessor for us

## Materials

- Icon of the Dormition
- The Icon Book
- Liturgical texts of the Feast
- Story of the Dormition of the Theotokos based on traditional sources
- Strips of card stock for bookmarks
- Small dried or silk flower petals
- Markers
- Tweezers
- Glue
- Clear contact paper

## Resources

### Required Resources

[Dormition - Liturgical Texts\(HTML\)](#)

[The Story of the Dormition of the Theotokos, 4-6\(HTML\)](#)

### Optional Resources

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

[The Story of the Dormition of the Theotokos, 7-9\(HTML\)](#)

[The Icon Book \(Image\)](#)



## Procedure

### 1 Opening Prayer

#### Troparion (Tone 1)

In giving birth you preserved your virginity,  
In falling asleep you did not forsake the world, O Theotokos.  
You were translated to life, O Mother of Life,  
And by your prayers, you deliver our souls from death.

*Discuss unfamiliar words (preserved, forsake, translated, deliver) with the students. Note that the word "translated" here means taken to another state of being--in Mary's case, from death to life. Emphasize that the hymns for the feast help us to understand that we are celebrating that Mary is living forever with God, just as we hope to.*

### 2 Story of the Dormition of the Theotokos

THE DORMITION (OR "FALLING ASLEEP") OF THE THEOTOKOS (15 minutes) Say to the class: We have studied three other major feast days of the Theotokos. Today we are going to study her Dormition. Sometimes we hear this feast referred to as the Falling Asleep of the Theotokos, or the Assumption.

After reading the story in the Resources section, look again at the troparion. Point out to the class that two miracles about the Theotokos are compared. First, she gave birth to a child even though there was no human father--she "preserved her virginity." Second, though she "fell asleep" or died, she lives in the Kingdom of God. Both of these show us God's greatness and His love for us.

### 3 Icon of the Dormition

Show the icon of the Dormition and read together the explanation from the Icon Book. If possible, have a color icon of the Dormition. Pay specific attention to the presence of Christ, carrying the soul of the Theotokos. She is already in heaven, with God. It's very important that we understand that she is there already, and that she is able to be with God and is able to pray to God for us. Tell the class: When we celebrate the feast of the Dormition we celebrate the funeral of the Theotokos and her presence in heaven with Christ. Discuss how sad the Apostles must have been when the Theotokos died. Recall how sad anyone in the class has been when someone close to them has died. Remind the students that the Theotokos is now in heaven, having been saved, as each one of us hopes to be

### 4 Create a Bookmark

Bookmark Activity - In many Orthodox Churches it is customary to bless flowers on the feast of the Dormition.

Using the card stock, with tweezers have the students place, and then glue down, the dried or silk flowers to decorate a bookmark for their Bibles. They might want to write a few words of the Troparion or make a cross on it first. Have them try to make the petals flat and then cover the bookmark with clear contact paper to preserve it.

## 5 Kontakion for the Dormition of the Theotokos

Read together

Neither the tomb, nor death, could hold the Theotokos,  
Who is constant in prayer and our firm hope in her intercessions?  
For being the Mother of Life, she was translated to life  
By the One who dwelt in her virginal womb!

Discuss how the Kontakion tells the story of the Dormition. (Neither the tomb, nor death, could hold the Theotokos) What do we mean by "our firm hope in her intercessions"? (We can count on her.) Mother of Life? (The Theotokos is the mother of Jesus Christ, who died and rose so that we could have eternal life.) The Theotokos is still very concerned about the world and involved in our lives.

## 6 Wedding at Cana

Read together the following story of the wedding at Cana:

On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples. When the wine failed, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "O woman, what has that to do with you and me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now six stone jars were standing there, for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast." So they took it. When the steward of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now." This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him. After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples; and there they stayed for a few days. (John 2:1-12)

This story shows us that Christ and the Theotokos have a wonderful relationship. In this story she asks Him to help these people involved in the wedding. She can also ask Him to help us. She is confident that He loves her and that He loves us. When we pray to the Theotokos we can ask her help, because she is "our firm hope in her intercessions."

## 7 Closing Prayer

Use the Kontakion as a closing prayer.

# Icons of the Theotokos *(Ages 7-9)*

## Overview

**The Theotokos: compassion and protection**

## Objectives

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

- Demonstrate a recognition of various iconographic images of the Theotokos
- Compare the various iconographic representations of the Theotokos
- Describe the emotions each icon portrays
- Retell main points of the story of the Tikhvin Icon
- Recite the Hymn to the Theotokos

## Materials

- Copies of the feast day icons of the Theotokos that have been studied in previous lessons
- Copies of the Troparia from the feast days (available in Sessions 1-4)
- Copies of the following icons and troparia:
  - The Tikhvin Icon
  - The Icon of Our Lady of Vladimir:
  - Our Lady of the Sign
  - The Icon of the Protection
- *The Icon Book*
- Any available icons of the Theotokos, on cards, in books or photographs, etc
- Laminated copies of the icon of Our Lady of Vladimir or the Tikhvin Icon or any of the others (particularly the Loving Kindness icons), one for each student
- Copies of the Hymn to the Theotokos printed the same size as the icon
- Card stock or heavy construction paper, slightly larger than the icon and prayer when folded over, to be a "frame" for an icon to be mounted on the right and the prayer next to it on the left

## Resources

### Required Resources

- [Icon of The Theotokos \(PDF\)](#)
- [Icon of the Annuciation to the Theotokos \(Image\)](#)
- [Icon of the Nativity of the Theotokos \(Image\)](#)
- [Icon of the Theotokos of the Sign \(Image\)](#)

## Optional Resources

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

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

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

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

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

[Hymn to the Theotokos \(It is Truly Meet\)\(HTML\)](#)

[The Icon Book \(Image\)](#)

## Procedure

### 1 Opening Prayer

#### Hymn to the Theotokos

It is truly meet to bless you, O Theotokos  
ever blessed and most pure, and the Mother of our God.  
More honorable than the Cherubim,  
and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim,  
without defilement you gave birth to God the Word.  
True Theotokos, we magnify you!

Make certain the students understand that the Cherubim and Seraphim are ranks of angels. See the Introduction to this unit for guidance on discussing the word "defilement."

### 2 Icons of the Theotokos

Remind students that we have talked about how important the Theotokos is in our lives and in the life of the Church. We remember her frequently in our own prayers and in the services of the Church, and ask her to pray for us and to help us. In these sessions we learned about how the icons of the Theotokos teach us about important events. We are grateful to be able to have icons, because they help make present Christ and the saints. Orthodox Churches are filled with icons. There are many different types of icons of the Theotokos. The icon of the Theotokos holding the Christ child is on the iconostasis of every Orthodox Church.

Read the page from THE ICON BOOK (page 2) about the icons of the Theotokos. Discuss icons of the Theotokos with which the students might be familiar, in their homes, in the church, from other lessons.

### 3 Icon Identification

Put up copies of the 4 icons (all available on [www.oca.org](http://www.oca.org) ) Give each student a piece of paper and a pencil Have them observe all four icons Ask them to write down 3 things about each of the icons that are unique to that icon Have students share their written ideas. Identify the icons and talk a little about them.

**The Tikhvin Icon - This is a type of icon called the Hodigitria, or Pointer of the Way. In it the Theotokos is holding Christ upright. She is gesturing with her right hand, "presenting" Him, as if she were saying to us, as she did to the servants at the wedding feast at Cana, "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5.) Over some icons a riza, a decorative cover, was put to protect them, and as time went on people added precious jewels to some. In this icon you can see that Christ is blessing with his right hand and with his left he is holding a rolled up scroll.**

**The Icon of Our Lady of Vladimir This is a type of icon called Loving Kindness or Compassion. You can see how Christ and the Theotokos are touching each other more closely. It reminds us of their love for each other and their love for us. There are many miraculous icons of this type and many people have a copy of this type of icon in their own prayer corner. Our Lady of the Sign In this type of icon the Theotokos has her arms upraised in prayer. This is called the Orans position.**

Sometimes we see this icon in the domes of Orthodox Churches or behind the altar table in the sanctuary. Christ is shown inside the Theotokos, as he was before he was born. It reminds us of the prophecy of Isaiah: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14) The Icon of the Protection This type of icon recalls an event, like the festal icons we looked at during the other sessions. This one is the icon of the Protection. In the icon the Theotokos is in the Orans position of prayer, but above her you can see the angels holding a cloth. This icon commemorates the Theotokos' protection of the city of Constantinople.

Show the class any additional icons of these types or other feasts. Identify the icons of the Theotokos in Orthodox churches that the students are familiar with. Share the icons in the books or photos if any are available. Discuss if any are of these types.

## 4 Icon Card Activity

Icon Card activity (10 minutes) Using card stock, fold it in half. Have the students choose one of the copies of an icon of the Theotokos. Glue it to the right side of the card, and the copy of the Hymn to the Theotokos on the left side. This can be taken home and put on their night table or in their icon corner, to help them remember the Theotokos and ask her to pray for them. Using card stock, fold it in half. Have the students choose one of the copies of an icon of the Theotokos. Glue it to the right side of the card, and the copy of the Hymn to the Theotokos on the left side. This can be taken home and put on their night table or in their icon corner, to help them remember the Theotokos and ask her to pray for them.

## 5 Story of the Tikhvin Icon

For many years this icon was in North America for safekeeping. Read the story of the Tikhvin Icon found in the *Resource Section* together, or read it beforehand and summarize it for students.

## 6 Closing Prayer

### Hymn to the Theotokos

It is truly meet to bless you, O Theotokos  
ever blessed and most pure, and the Mother of our God.  
More honorable than the Cherubim,  
and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim,  
without defilement you gave birth to God the Word.  
True Theotokos, we magnify you!



# The Nativity of the Theotokos (September 8) *(Ages 4-6)*

## Overview

**Mary's humanity and God's love** - Mary's humanity and God's love

## Objectives

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

- Identify the feast by name and/or match it to the Icon(s) of the feast
- Identify key persons (or events) shown in the festal icon
- Tell the story of the event of the Feast, with the aid of the icon, the festal Troparion and/or Kontakion, crafts and/or activities
- Sing the Troparion of the Feast (a Psalm verse or Prokeimenon) and/or the Hymn to the Theotokos: "It is Truly Meet"

## Materials

- Festal Icon of the Nativity of the Theotokos
  - Small (4"x5") color prints of the festal icon
- Black & white line drawing of the festal icon
- Festal Troparion & Kontakion
- Available recordings of the Festal Troparion & Kontakion and any equipment needed to play them
- Story of the Nativity of the Theotokos
- A folder or large 9"x12" envelope for each child
- A children's dictionary to use in explaining difficult words from the hymns
- Crayons, colored pencils or markers
- Teacher Background Information

## Resources

### Required Resources

[Kontakion: Nativity of the Theotokos \(Sheet Music\) \(PDF\)](#)

[Nativity of The Theotokos Line Drawing \(PDF\)](#)

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

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

### Optional Resources

[Troparion: Nativity of the Theotokos \(Sheet Music\) \(PDF\)](#)

[Entrance of the Theotokos\(HTML\)](#)

[Hymn to the Theotokos \(It is Truly Meet\)\(HTML\)](#)

[Nativity of Theotokos - Liturgical Texts\(HTML\)](#)

[The Story of the Nativity \(Birth\) of the Theotokos\(HTML\)](#)

[The Icon Book \(Image\)](#)

## Procedure

### 1 Opening Prayer

#### **Troparion (Tone 4)**

Your Nativity, O Virgin,  
Has proclaimed joy to the whole universe!  
The Sun of righteousness, Christ our God,  
Has shone from you, O Theotokos.  
By annulling the curse, He bestowed a blessing.  
By destroying death, He has granted us eternal life.

*Explain words like Nativity (birth), Cherubim and Seraphim (angels of God), righteousness (goodness, doing what's right, etc.)*

### 2 Story of Mary's Birth

Explain that you will now read a story that tells about the prayer that you just sang. Tell the students the story of Joachim and Anna, and the birth of their daughter, from The Story of the Nativity (Birth) of the Theotokos in the Resource Section. Emphasize that God's plan was at work from the earliest days of Mary's life. She was the one He wanted to be the mother of Jesus Christ, but it only happened with her agreement.

### 3 Icon of the Feast

**Teachers' Note: This activity can be done each week over the period of the study, focusing on the story of the week.**

**Distribute the small icon of the feast to each student. Discuss what is in the icon. Who is pictured there; what are the people doing?**



- A. Two women reach out to help Anna sit up in her bed.
- B. One woman is holding Mary, the baby of Joachim and Anna, while other women bring water for Anna.
- C. Joachim is at the bottom of the picture, looking at his baby daughter, now resting in her small cradle while another woman watches over her.

**Distribute the full-page line drawing of the festal icon to students and allow them to color it. (This line drawing is available in the Resources Section under Handouts.)** Students should examine the small colored icon print and try to color the large outline drawing using the same colors in the appropriate places. Teachers and aides can assist the children in finding similar colors. (Aides can help them make a mark with the appropriate colors in their respective places, and then may leave students to do the coloring themselves, and move on to assist other students.) Keep the line drawings and the small color prints in their folders/envelopes for a project during the 5<sup>th</sup> session.

## 4 Hymns of the Feast

Text as well as sheet music for the hymns are found in the Resources.

## 5 Closing Prayer

**It is truly meet to bless you, O Theotokos,  
ever blessed and most pure, and the Mother of our God.  
More honorable than the Cherubim,  
and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim,  
without defilement you gave birth to God the Word.  
True Theotokos, we magnify you!**

# The Entrance of the Theotokos (November 21) *(Ages 4-6)*

## Overview

**Mary's holiness and purity**

## Objectives

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

- Identify the feast by name and/or match it to the Icon(s) of the feast
- Identify key persons (or events) shown in the festal icon
- Tell the story of the event of the Feast, with the aid of the icon, the festal Troparion and/or Kontakion, crafts and/or activities
- Sing the Troparion of the Feast (a Psalm verse or Prokeimenon) and/or the Hymn to the Theotokos: "It is Truly Meet...."

## Materials

- Festal icon of the Entrance of the Theotokos
  - Small (4"x5") color prints of the festal icon
- Black & white line drawing of the festal icon
- Festal Troparion & Kontakion
- Story of the Entrance of the Theotokos
- Available recordings of the *Festal Troparion & Kontakion* and equipment needed to play the music
- Children may be encouraged to bring in a picture of their baptism (or the first time their mother brought them into the Church (i.e. for their "churching"))
- A folder/large 9"x12" envelope for each child to keep their work
- A children's dictionary to use in explaining difficult words from the hymns
- Crayons, colored pencils or marker
- Teacher Background Information

## Resources

### Required Resources

[Entrance of The Theotokos - Line Drawing \(PDF\)](#)

[Entrance of the Theotokos in the Temple \(Story\)\(HTML\)](#)

### Optional Resources

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

[Entrance of the Theotokos - Liturgical Texts\(HTML\)](#)

[The Icon Book \(Image\)](#)

## Procedure

### 1 Opening Prayer

#### **Troparion (Tone 4)**

Today is the prelude of the good will of God,  
of the preaching of the salvation of mankind.

The Virgin appears in the Temple of God,  
In anticipation proclaiming Christ to all.

Let us rejoice and sing to her: Rejoice,  
O Fulfillment of the Creator's dispensation!

*Discuss unfamiliar words (prelude, preaching, anticipation, proclaiming, fulfillment, dispensation) with the students. Use a children's dictionary. These words are very difficult for young children. It might be best, rather than define several words, simply to emphasize that the hymns for this feast help us to understand that Mary chose to follow God even from a young age and that we in the Church celebrate this choice.*

### 2 Story Of Mary's Entrance into the Temple

**Story Focus:** As a three-year old child, Mary is brought by her parents, Joachim and Anna, to the Temple in Jerusalem, where she "is presented today to the house of the Lord." The High Priest leads her into the Holy of Holies, an unusual act, for only the High Priest himself entered there once a year.

*Find the story in the Resources Section*

### 3 Icon Activity

**Distribute the full-page line drawing of the festal icon to students and allow them to color it. (This line drawing is available in the Resources Section under Handouts.)** Students should examine the small colored icon print and try to color the large outline drawing using the same colors in the appropriate places. Teachers and aides can assist the children in finding similar colors. (Aides can help them make a mark with the appropriate colors in their respective places, and then may leave students to do the coloring themselves, and move on to assist other students.) Keep the line drawings of the festal icon and the small color prints in their folder/envelope for a project during the 5<sup>th</sup> session.

- A. Distribute the icon of the feast to each student. Discuss what is in the icon. *Who is pictured there? What are the people doing?*  
Find Joachim, Anna and Mary in the icon of the Presentation of the Mary to the Temple.
- B. Who is greeting Mary as she approaches the Sanctuary? (Zachariah, the High Priest)
- C. What kinds of things might you find in the Temple that you can see in our Church? (e.g., candles or oil lamps, incense burners, etc. (cf. Let my prayer arise ...Psalm 141:2, Exodus 30:8)
- D. What happened when your parents or godparents brought you to the Church for the first time? (named, baptized in water, anointed with oil, clothed in a white garment (garment of salvation). At this point if any children have brought in photographs of their own baptisms or churching, these could be shown.

## 4 Hymns of the Feast

The text and sheet music for the feast can be found in the Resources

## 5 Closing Prayer (Sung together)

Use the Kontakion as a closing prayer.

### **Kontakion - Tone 4**

The most pure Temple of the Savior;  
the Precious Chamber and Virgin;  
the sacred Treasure of the Glory of God,  
is presented today to the House of the Lord.  
She brings with her the grace of the spirit,  
which the angels of God do praise.  
"Truly this woman is the Abode of heaven! "

# The Annunciation (March 25)

(Ages 4-6)

## Overview

**Mary's obedience and humility** - Mary's obedience and humility

## Objectives

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

- Identify the feast by name and/or match it to the Icon(s) of the feast
- Identify key persons (or events) shown in the festal icon
- Tell the story of the event of the Feast, with the aid of the icon, the festal Troparion and/or Kontakion, crafts and/or activities
- Sing the Troparion of the Feast (a Psalm verse or Prokeimenon) and/or the Hymn to the Theotokos: "It is Truly Meet..."

## Materials

- Festal icon of The Annunciation
  - Small (4"x5") color prints of the festal icon
- Black & white line drawing of the festal icon
- Icon of the Virgin of the Sign
- Festal Troparion & Kontakion
- Available recordings of the Festal Troparion & Kontakion and any equipment needed to play them
- A folder/large 9"x12" envelope for each child to keep their work
- A children's dictionary for use in explaining difficult words in the texts of the hymns
- Crayons, colored pencils or markers
- Teacher Background Information

## Resources

### Required Resources

[An Angel Brings Good News to Mary \(Annunciation\) \(PDF\)](#)

[Annunciation - Line Drawing \(PDF\)](#)

[Icon of the Annuciation to the Theotokos \(Image\)](#)

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

[Liturgical Texts: Annunciation\(HTML\)](#)

[Mary's Song of Praise to God \(The Magnificat\)\(HTML\)](#)

[The Story of the Annunciation \(7-9\)\(HTML\)](#)

[The Story of the Annunciation \(ages 4-6\)\(HTML\)](#)

## Procedure

### 1 Opening Prayer

#### **Troparion, Tone 4**

Today is the beginning of our salvation  
the revelation of the eternal mystery.

The Son of God becomes the Son of the Virgin,  
as Gabriel announces the coming of Grace.

Together with him let us cry to the Theotokos:  
Rejoice, O Full of Grace, the Lord is with you.

*Discuss unfamiliar words (salvation, revelation, eternal, mystery, grace) with the students. Explain that we use the word "cry" in this hymn in a joyous way. Use a children's dictionary. Some of these words are very difficult for young children. It might be best to emphasize that the hymns for this feast help us to understand that Mary chose to say "yes" to God and that in the Church we celebrate that.*

### 2 Story of the Annunciation

Explain that you will now read a story that tells about the prayer that you just sung. Find the story in the Resources Section.

*Focus: An angel announces to Mary that she will give birth to a Son [Luke 1:26-38]; for which all Nations will call her "Blessed" [cf. Luke 1:39-45]. Later, Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth, who tells her that she will also give birth to a son--John the Baptist (who will go before Christ and announce His Coming to the people). Needed: Icon of the Annunciation and Icon of The Virgin of the Sign.*

### 3 Hymn of the Feast

Play a recording of the Troparion, and teach the (younger) students to sing the last words in the hymn to Mary the Mother of God, beginning with "Rejoice, O Full of Grace..." Older students can sing the entire verse (provide music)

Troparion: Tone 4

Today is the beginning of our salvation,  
The revelation of the eternal mystery!  
The Son of God becomes the Son of the Virgin

As Gabriel announces the coming of Grace.  
Together with him let us cry to the Theotokos:  
Rejoice, O Full of Grace, the Lord is with You!

## 4 Icon of the Annunciation

Distribute the icon of the Annunciation to each student. Discuss what you see in the icon.

1. Who is greeting Mary? What is his name and what does he say to her? (*The Archangel Gabriel, and he tells her that God wants her to be the mother of Jesus.*)
2. What is written on the scroll between them? (*The words from the Prophet Isaiah foretelling about Jesus' birth.*)
3. What is Mary's answer to God's messenger? (*Yes.*)
4. We see this icon in every Orthodox Church. Do you know where it is in the church? (*Sometimes it is on the top of the iconostasis with the other festal icons. It is always displayed in the center of the church for the feast day of the Annunciation.*)

Distribute the full-page line drawing of the festal icon to students and allow them to color it. Students should examine the small colored icon print and try to color the large outline drawing using the same colors in the appropriate places. Teachers and aides can assist the children in finding similar colors. (Aides can help them make a mark with the appropriate colors in their respective places, and then may leave students to do the coloring themselves, and then move on to assist other students.) Keep the line drawings of the festal icon and the small color prints in their folder/envelope for a project during the 5th session.

## 5 Closing Prayer

Recite together *The Magnificat* and give each student a copy to take home. If there is time, mount it on card stock or construction paper. Be sure to explain that these words were said by Mary herself, when she went to visit her aunt Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist.

*The Magnificat* is found in the *Resources* section.

# The Dormition of the Theotokos (August 15) *(Ages 4-6)*

## Overview

**Our Salvation and Christ's perfect love** - Mary, the Virgin Mother, is "translated to life" (i.e. eternal life, rather than death), "by the one who her dwelt in her virginal womb."

## Objectives

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

- Identify the feast by name and/or match it to the Icon(s) of the feast
- Identify key persons (or events) shown in the festal icon
- Tell the story of the event of the Feast, with the aid of the icon, the festal Troparion and/or Kontakion, crafts and/or activities
- Sing the Troparion of the Feast (a Psalm verse or Prokeimenon) and/or the Hymn to the Theotokos: "It is Truly Meet..."

## Materials

- Festal Icon of the Dormition of the Theotokos
  - Small (4"x5") color prints of the festal icon
- Black & white line drawing of the festal icon
- Festal Troparion & Kontakion
- Available recordings of the Festal Troparion & Kontakion and any equipment needed to play them
- A folder/large 9"x12" envelope for each child to keep their work
- A children's dictionary to use in explaining difficult words from the hymns
- Crayons, colored pencils or markers

## Resources

### Required Resources

[Dormition - Liturgical Texts\(HTML\)](#)

[The Story of the Dormition of the Theotokos, 4-6\(HTML\)](#)

### Optional Resources

[Dormition Line Drawing \(Image\)](#)

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



## Procedure

### 1 Opening Prayer

Troparion (Tone 1)

In giving birth you preserved your virginity,  
In falling asleep you did not forsake the world, O Theotokos.  
You were translated to life, O Mother of Life,  
And by your prayers, you deliver our souls from death.

*Discuss unfamiliar words (preserved, forsake, translated, deliver) with the students. Use a children's dictionary. These words are very difficult for young children. It might be best to emphasize that the hymns for this feast help us to understand that we are celebrating that Mary is living forever with God, just as we hope to.*

### 2 Story of the Dormition of the Theotokos

Read the story of the Dormition.

*Focus: Mary, the Virgin Mother of God, was "translated to life" (not death), "by the one who dwelt in her virginal womb." According to tradition (and this special hymn of the day), at her "falling-asleep" the Apostles gathered together "from all the ends of the earth" to honor her memory.*

### 3 Hymns of the Feast

**Troparion**

**In giving birth, you preserved your virginity!  
In falling asleep you did not forsake the world, O Theotokos! (A)  
You were translated to life, O Mother of Life, (B)  
and by your prayers you deliver our souls from death! (C)**

*Notes for the text above:*

- A. Even though Mary has left this world, she always remembers us in her prayers to God
- B. Mary was taken directly to heaven after she died
- C. By giving birth to God's Son, Jesus, She is our Mother in Christ

**Kontakion**

**Neither the tomb, nor death, could hold the Theotokos,  
who is constant in prayer, and our firm hope in her intercessions  
For being the Mother of Life, she was translated to life  
by the One who dwelt in her virginal womb!**

The Kontakion Hymn of the Feast of the Falling-Asleep of Mary the Theotokos, tells us that after Mary died she was “translated to life” (taken right away into heaven, the place of New Life), by her Son, Jesus Christ. Mary said “yes” to God when He asked her to give birth to His only-begotten Son. She kept her life pure and without sin when she carried God’s Son, as a little child in her womb. She gave human life to God’s Son, Jesus, in her own body, when He was born on earth as a little baby. As the Theotokos (Mother of God), she brought Jesus, God’s Son, into the world to give life forever to all those who believe in Him and do His Will, the Will of God the Father.

Note: With the youngest children, play the music of the hymn and then paraphrase what the words are saying: e.g. Jesus’ closet friends, the apostles had gone to different places in the world to tell the good news about Jesus, God’s Son. When Mary was going to be buried in the Garden of Gethsemane, a surprising thing happened! Even though there were no telephones in those days, or fast ways to let people know when something important happened, the disciples returned to Jerusalem to pray for Mary, who had stayed in Jerusalem while the apostles went out into the world to tell people the Good News about God’s Son Jesus.

## 4 Discuss the Icon of the Dormition

Distribute the icon of the Dormition to each student. Discuss what you see in the icon. Who is pictured there?

1. Who is standing above the Theotokos and who is He holding? (*Christ is taking Mary’s soul to heaven*)
2. Who is behind Mary? (*The apostles. St. Peter is at her head and St. Paul at her feet.*)
3. What is going on in front of Mary? (*Antonius came to cause trouble. He later became a Christian and was sad that he had been disruptive.*)
4. What happened to the Theotokos? (*After she died she went to live forever with God.*)

Distribute the full-page line drawing of the festal icon to students and allow them to color it. Students should examine the small colored icon print and try to color the large outline drawing using the same colors in the appropriate places. Teachers and aides can assist the children in finding similar colors. (Aides can help them make a mark with the appropriate colors in their respective places, and then may leave students to do the coloring themselves, and move on to assist other students.) Keep the line drawings of the festal icon and the small color prints in their folder/envelope for a project during the 5th session.

## 5 Closing Prayer

### **Kontakion (Tone 2)**

Neither the tomb, nor death, could hold the Theotokos,  
who is constant in prayer and our firm hope in her intercessions.

For being the Mother of Life, she was translated to life  
by the One who dwelt in her virginal womb.

# Icons of the Theotokos (Ages 4-6)

## Overview

### Recognizing the festal icons of the Theotokos

## Objectives

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

- Identify and arrange in chronological order the festal icons according to the events in the life of Mary, the Mother of God
- Tell what they can do at home, at school and in their life to remember Mary the Theotokos, in prayer and in their behavior towards family members and other people (friends or strangers) in their life
- Sing/recite together the Hymn to the Theotokos

## Materials

- Icons of the Feasts of the Theotokos, particularly those studied.
  - Plan a walk to the church, if the icons are visible there also, so that the students can identify them there. If they are not visible in your church, try and locate books or photographs with icons of the Theotokos
- Students' completed packets with small icons and the colored line drawings
- Crayons, markers, construction paper (4 pieces per student), single hole punch, yarn for making the icon book
- A children's dictionary to explain difficult words from the texts of the hymns

## Procedure

### 1 Opening Prayer

#### **Hymn to the Theotokos**

It is truly meet to bless you, O Theotokos,  
ever blessed and most pure, and the Mother of our God.  
More honorable than the Cherubim,  
and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim,  
without defilement you gave birth to God the Word.  
True Theotokos, we magnify you!

### 2 Discussion Starter

Discuss unfamiliar words (honorable, Cherubim & Seraphim, magnify) with the students. Use a children's dictionary. These words are very difficult for young children. It might be best to

emphasize what the hymns tell us about Mary and that they praise her.

### 3 Feasts of the Theotokos

Discuss the order of the feasts of the Theotokos. Using the small paper icons for the four feasts that we studied take slightly larger pieces of construction paper. Mount the icons on the construction paper. Write the name of the feast at the top of the page and put the date of the feast at the bottom. Discuss the order of the feasts and how we start with the Nativity of the Theotokos and end with the Falling Asleep or Dormition of the Theotokos. Single-hole punch the pages on either the top or left side in two places and tie them together using the yarn. Children can take the line drawings and the icon book home in their folder or envelope this week.

### 4 Field Trip

Take a walk to the church and find the icons of the Theotokos. If the festal icons are visible there, have the students identify them. See if they remember any of the themes from the lessons. If there are other icons of the Theotokos, point them out. If the icons are not visible, try to locate books with icons in them or photos of churches where the icons are visible. Churches named for one of the feasts may have a large icon or fresco of the festal icon. Some churches may have stained glass windows showing the scenes of the feasts.

### 5 Feastal Themes of the Theotokos

Review the themes of the four feasts that we studied.

1. **Nativity of the Theotokos** - A special gift for Joachim and Anna
2. **Entrance of the Theotokos** - A new kind of Temple
3. **Annunciation** - Mary says "yes" to God
4. **Dormition (Falling Asleep) of the Theotokos** – Life forever with God

Ask how we can be like the Theotokos in our lives. Ask the students to tell what they can do at home, at school and in their life to remember Mary the Theotokos, in prayer and in their behavior towards family members and other people (friends or strangers) in their life.

### 6 Closing Prayer

#### Hymn to the Theotokos

It is truly meet to bless you, O Theotokos,  
ever blessed and most pure, and the Mother of our God.  
More honorable than the Cherubim,  
and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim,  
without defilement you gave birth to God the Word.  
True Theotokos, we magnify you!

# The Nativity of the Theotokos (September 8) *(Ages 18+)*

## Overview

**Mary's connection to humanity and God's love** - Mary's connection to humanity and God's love

## Objectives

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

- Tell why Joachim and Anna's patience and humility are important in God's plan
- Contrast the obedience of Mary, the "new Eve", with the disobedience of the first Eve
- Describe similarities between the icon of Mary's nativity and the icon of the Lord's Nativity
- Give examples of God's abiding love, culminating in Mary's birth

## Materials

- You may wish to make copies of the instructions for the group activity so that each of the three groups will have them
- Have copies of the story of the Nativity of the Theotokos for each group
- Bibles, paper and pencils will be needed for each group
- Genesis, chapters 2 and 3.
- Liturgical Texts
- Icon of the Nativity of the Theotoko
- Icon of the Nativity of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
- Icon of the Resurrection (be sure to choose one in which Christ can be seen pulling Eve as well as Adam from the power of death)
- Icon of the Conception of the Theotokos by Anna.
- *The Icon Book* (For all but the Icon of the Conception of the Theotokos by Anna, use the descriptions in *The Icon Book* to discuss the icons with participants.)

## Resources

### Required Resources

[Kontakion: Nativity of the Theotokos \(Sheet Music\) \(PDF\)](#)

[Nativity of The Theotokos Line Drawing \(PDF\)](#)

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

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

[Examining the Nativity of the Theotokos\(HTML\)](#)

## Optional Resources

[Troparion: Nativity of the Theotokos \(Sheet Music\) \(PDF\)](#)

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

[Entrance of the Theotokos\(HTML\)](#)

[Hymn to the Theotokos \(It is Truly Meet\)\(HTML\)](#)

[Nativity of Theotokos - Liturgical Texts\(HTML\)](#)

[The Story of the Nativity \(Birth\) of the Theotokos\(HTML\)](#)

[The Story of the Nativity of the Theotokos \(18+\)\(HTML\)](#)

[The Icon Book \(Image\)](#)

## Procedure

### 1 Opening Prayer

#### Troparion (Tone 4)

Your Nativity, O Virgin,  
Has proclaimed joy to the whole universe!  
The Sun of righteousness, Christ our God,  
Has shone from you, O Theotokos.  
By annulling the curse, He bestowed a blessing.  
By destroying death, He has granted us eternal life.

### 2 Story of the Nativity of the Theotokos

Ask the group to think about ways in which our faith and patience are tested. We often have to wait for God's answer to our prayers, and live under circumstances that really test our faith.

Then, read *The Story of the Nativity of the Theotokos* (from the *Resource Section*) together. Ask participants to keep in mind the points you have mentioned as you read.

### 3 Examining the Nativity of the Theotokos through hymnography and iconography and scripture

Print out and complete the activity: *Examining the Nativity of the Theotokos through hymnography and iconography and scripture* found in the *Resource Section*

### 4 Icon of the Nativity of the Theotokos

Present the following quotation from the writings of Father Alexander Schmemmann to the group. Let them think about it as they look at the icon of the Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos. Ask them to comment on what it means to look at the icon "with our spiritual eyes":

*"Nothing about this event is mentioned anywhere in the Holy Scriptures. But why should there be? Is there anything remarkable, anything especially unique about the normal birth of*

*a child, a birth like any other? And if the Church began to commemorate the event with a special feast, it was not because the birth was somehow unique or miraculous or out of the ordinary: but because, on the contrary, the very fact that it is routine discloses something fresh and radiant about everything we call 'routine' and ordinary; it gives new depth to the "unremarkable" details of human life.*

*What do we see in the icon of the feast when we look at it with our spiritual eyes? There on the bed lies a woman, Anna according to Church tradition, who has just given birth to a daughter. Next to her is the child's father, Joachim, according to the same tradition. [In many versions of the icon] a few women stand by the bed washing the newborn baby for the first time. The most routine, unremarkable event.*

*Or is it? Could it be that the Church is telling us through the icon that every birth, every entrance of a new human being into the world and life is a miracle of miracles, a miracle that explodes all routine, for it marks the start of something unending, the start of a unique unrepeatable human life. The beginning of a new person. And with each birth, the world is itself in some sense created anew and given as a gift to the new human being to be his life, his path, his creation."*

## 5 Closing Prayer

Close with a prayer, using one or more of the hymns as part of it.



# The Entrance of the Theotokos (November 21) *(Ages 18+)*

## Overview

**Mary's holiness and purity**

## Objectives

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

- Relate the events of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple to Psalm 45, verses 10-15
- Describe four women, saints of the Church, whose service to God has been outstanding and who have things in common with the Theotokos
- Compare the icons of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple to that of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

## Materials

- Bibles - Psalm 45
- Icon of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple
- Icon of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple
- Liturgical Hymns of the Feast
- The Icon Book
- Paper
- Pencils

## Resources

### Required Resources

- [Entrance of The Theotokos - Line Drawing \(PDF\)](#)
- [Icon of The Presentation \(Meeting\) of Our Lord \(Image\)](#)
- [Entrance of the Theotokos \(Story - 18+\) \(HTML\)](#)
- [Entrance of the Theotokos - Notes\(HTML\)](#)

### Optional Resources

- [Entrance of the Theotokos in the Temple \(Icon\) \(Image\)](#)
- [Entrance of the Theotokos - Liturgical Texts\(HTML\)](#)
- [The Icon Book \(Image\)](#)

## Procedure

### 1 Opening Prayer

#### **Troparion of the Feast - Tone 4**

Today is the prelude of the good will of God,  
Of the preaching of the salvation of mankind,  
The Virgin appears in the temple of God'  
In anticipation proclaiming Christ to all,  
Let us rejoice and sing to her:  
Rejoice, O fulfillment of the Creator's dispensation!

#### **Kontakion of the Feast - Tone 4**

The most pure Temple of the Savior, the precious chamber and virgin,  
The sacred Treasure of the glory of God is presented today to the house of the Lord.  
She brings with her the grace of the Spirit which the angels of God do praise,  
Truly this woman is the abode of heaven!

### 2 Story of the Feast

Read the story of the feast (found in the *Resource Section*) together:

After reading the story, note again the words of the Troparion and the Kontakion. Mary enters the Temple of God, and later herself “becomes” the most pure Temple of the Savior by being willing to carry Him in her womb. In this way she becomes the “fulfillment of the Savior’s dispensation”—this last word referring to His plan for our salvation.

### 3 Psalm Discussion

Read Psalm 45, verses 10-15 together. Discuss: How do these words foretell the event of Mary’s entrance into the Temple? (The Church has understood Mary to be the woman referred to here. She enters God’s palace in a special way. Using a word from the Troparion, we might say that these psalm verses are a “prelude” of Mary’s entrance into the Temple.)

### 4 Icon of the Feast

Look together at the two icons: Mary’s Entrance into the Temple, and the Presentation of Christ to the Temple. Use *The Icon Book* to compare the two. The event of Mary’s entrance is a “prelude” for the Presentation of Christ to the Temple later. In that event, the Old Testament law is respected (all firstborn sons had to be presented, according to the law.) But it is also fulfilled, as Simeon proclaims when he identifies the child Jesus as the Messiah for whom he and the Jewish people have been waiting

### 5 Women Saints

Divide the participants into four groups. Assign each group one of the following saints: Nonna, Paraskeva the New, the Protomartyr Thecla, and Eupraxia. Details for this are provided in the Notes in the Resource Section.

Ask each group to consider the brief notes about the saint. The groups can also notice ways in which each woman's story has something in common with the life of the Theotokos. (Some commonalities are suggested in the Notes in the Resource Section, but groups may come up with different ones.)

After the groups have found out about their saints, reconvene the participants as a whole and let each group tell about its saint. Complete the discussion by reminding everyone that many women have been called to important service to God, and are honored by the Church for doing it well.

Though the Theotokos' role in God's plan is unique and unrepeatable, we all have a place in that same plan. The saints, and specifically many women saints, stand out as examples for us as we strive to fulfill the part of the plan that He has designated for each of us.

## 6 Closing Prayer

### **Troparion of the Feast - Tone 4**

Today is the prelude of the good will of God,  
Of the preaching of the salvation of mankind,  
The Virgin appears in the temple of God'  
In anticipation proclaiming Christ to all,  
Let us rejoice and sing to her:  
Rejoice, O fulfillment of the Creator's dispensation!

### **Kontakion of the Feast - Tone 4**

The most pure Temple of the Savior, the precious chamber and virgin,  
The sacred Treasure of the glory of God is presented today to the house of the Lord.  
She brings with her the grace of the Spirit which the angels of God do praise,  
Truly this woman is the abode of heaven!

# The Annunciation (March 25)

(Ages 18+)

## Overview

**Mary's obedience and humility** - Mary's obedience and humility

## Objectives

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

- Describe the poem of Hannah in I Samuel as a preview of Mary's Magnificat in the Gospel of Luke
- Contrast Mary's attitude toward Gabriel's announcement with that of Zachariah
- State that God's plan for human salvation depends on human: particularly Mary's co-operation
- Formulate an answer to a writer who claims that Mary has no important place in Christian teaching

## Materials

- Bibles: I Samuel 2: 1-10, Luke 1: 26-55, Luke 1: 5-20
- Icon of the Annunciation
- Liturgical Texts for the feast
- Story of the Annunciation
- Icon Book
- Paper
- Pencils

## Resources

### Required Resources

[An Angel Brings Good News to Mary \(Annunciation\) \(PDF\)](#)

[Annunciation - Line Drawing \(PDF\)](#)

[Icon of the Annunciation to the Theotokos \(Image\)](#)

[Liturgical Texts: Annunciation \(HTML\)](#)

[The Story of the Annunciation \(18+\) \(HTML\)](#)

## Procedure

### 1 Opening Prayer

**Troparion - Tone 4**

Today is the beginning of our salvation,  
The revelation of the eternal mystery!  
The Son of God becomes the Son of the Virgin,  
As Gabriel announces the coming of Grace.  
Together with him let us cry out to the Theotokos!  
Rejoice, O Full of Grace, the Lord is with you.

## 2 Story of the Annunciation

Read aloud the story of the Annunciation with the students that is found in the *Resource Section*.

## 3 Scripture Reading/Discussion

Read Luke 1: 36-45, and discuss the following questions.

1. Some Christians object to Mary being called “Mother of God” even though the early Church decided this was an appropriate title. Where in this passage do we find Scriptural basis for the title? (*Elizabeth’s words in verse 43.*)
2. What is the first thing Mary does after her encounter with Gabriel? What does it tell us about her? (*She immediately goes to tell her good news to her older cousin Elizabeth, as we read in verse 39. Obviously she is a gregarious, loving person who likes to share joy and be among people. She is hardly the spiritless, solemn person that some portray her to be.*)
3. Remind the group that in the past two sessions we have noted several ways in which the Old Testament prepared us for the New Testament. The triumphant song which Mary sings in Luke 1: 46-55 is also “foretold” in the Old Testament. Read Mary’s song, and then read together the song of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, in I Samuel 2: 1-10. Note the similarities, and point out that this is one more way that this is one more way that God prepared His people for the coming of the Savior.

## 4 Icon of the Annunciation

Look together at the icon of the Annunciation. Read the description in *The Icon Book*. Though the details in various versions of the icon may differ, one point is always the same: Mary with Gabriel was hesitant but not cynical; questioning but not disbelieving.

## 5 Scripture Reading/Hymnography

Read together Luke 1: 5-20. Then look together at the verses of the Apostikha for the Feast of the Conception of St. John the Baptist, to see how the Church has written them based on the Biblical account. (Gabriel has told the priest Zachariah that his wife Elizabeth will bear a son, John the Baptizer or Forerunner. The following verses are Zachariah’s response)

### **Apostikha for the Feast of the Conception of John the Baptist**

Tell me clearly, how will I know this? Answered the blessed elder [Zachariah]  
For as you see I am full of days and Elizabeth is barren.  
How do you utter words beyond nature?  
I am amazed and now suspect, O man, that you speak not the truth.  
Depart, for I ask the salvation of the people,  
And not to acquire a son;

Such a thing cannot be believed!

Ask the class:

1. "What kind of person does Zachariah seem to be?" (*Point out that he is certainly a person with his own agenda, not willing to accept what Gabriel tells him.*)
2. "Why does Gabriel react so negatively to Zachariah?" (*Stress the difference between his attitude and that of the Virgin Mary when Gabriel visits her. Though she is confident and strong enough to question the angel in a sensible way, she does not do so with cynicism or doubtfulness. She is a person of faith but also of humility, as described above in the story for the feast of the Annunciation. She is willing to let God be in charge, not blocking His access to her life as Zachariah does. Her attitude is an example of what Christians mean when they talk about humility.*)
3. Point out that we, too, sometimes have trouble in putting aside our own plans for our lives, and letting God be in charge. The difference between Mary and Zachariah is a good reminder of how we need to shape our own attitudes with Mary as the example.

## 6 Discussion

Divide the class into three groups. Put this statement from a contemporary writer on the chalkboard:

"Women today need the example of a capable, powerful woman who knows what life is all about. The Virgin Mary sends all the wrong messages to modern women: she's silent, and pale, and she just does what God tells her to without a word. Her example really has no place in women's lives today."

Ask each group to formulate an answer to this writer. The groups can use any information from this and the previous two sessions.

When the groups have finished, call everyone back together and let the groups report on their decisions. Close the session with prayer.

## 7 Closing Prayer

### **Kontakion of the Feast - Tone 8**

O victorious leader of triumphant hosts!

We, your servants, delivered from evil, sing our grateful thanks to you, O Theotokos!

As you possess invincible might set us free from every calamity

So that we may sing: Rejoice, O Unwedded Bride.

*Notice that the hymn tells us that Mary "possesses invincible might." This reminds us of her willingness and ability to pray for us and intercede, as she did at the wedding in Cana. It also reminds us, once again, that she is not a passive or weak person but a strong one who loves us and will pray for us.*



# The Dormition of the Theotokos (August 15) *(Ages 18+)*

## Overview

**Our Salvation and Christ's perfect love** - Our Salvation and Christ's perfect love

## Objectives

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

- Retell the story of the Dormition of the Theotokos as a joyful, not sorrowful event
- Explain why we say that the Theotokos fell asleep not into death, but into life
- Recognize the words “Assumption” and “Repose” as other, related, names for the feast
- Examine the texts of the Old Testament readings assigned to the Vigil for the feast and how they relate to the feast
- Demonstrate an understanding of the icon of the feast

## Materials

- Bible Passages: Genesis 28:10-17; Ezekiel 43:27-44:4; Proverbs 9:1-11
- Icon of the Dormition
- Story of the Dormition of the Theotokos based on traditional sources
- The Icon Book
- Liturgical Texts of the Feast

## Resources

### Required Resources

[Dormition - Liturgical Texts\(HTML\)](#)

### Optional Resources

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

[The Story of the Dormition of the Theotokos, 7-9\(HTML\)](#)

[The Icon Book \(Image\)](#)

## Procedure

### 1 Opening Prayer

**Troparion of the Dormition - Tone 1**



In giving birth you preserved your virginity!  
In falling asleep you did not forsake the world, O Theotokos!  
You were translated to life, O Mother of Life,  
and by your prayers you deliver our souls from Death!

Discuss the use of the term “falling asleep,” using the Notes for the Teacher above to help with understanding the concept.(5 minutes)

Say: We have studied three other major feast days of the Theotokos. Today we are going to study her Dormition. Sometimes we hear this feast referred to as the Falling Asleep of the Theotokos, or the Assumption.

## 2 Story: The Dormition (Falling Asleep) of the Theotokos

Read the story of the Dormition (found in the *Resource Section*) together:

After reading the story, look again at the troparion. Point out to the class that two miracles about the Theotokos are compared. First, she gave birth to a child even though there was no human father—she “preserved her virginity.” Second, though she “fell asleep” or died, she lives in the Kingdom of God. Both of these show us God’s greatness. Ask the class, “What does the troparion tell us that Mary does now, in the Kingdom?” (*She prays for us.*)

Discuss the important place Mary has in the life and tradition of the Church and how her Dormition reflects this.

## 3 Icon of the Dormition

Look at the icon of the feast together, using the description in *The Icon Book* to explain details. Ask students how the icon shows that Mary’s death is a special one. (As the book points out, Jesus is shown taking His Mother, whose soul and body are now reunited, to the heavenly Kingdom rather than leaving her to lie in the grave. No other human being has shared this special destiny of Mary. Yet we know that we, too, have been promised eternal life if we live according to God’s will as Mary did.)

In some traditions on the feast of the Dormition flowers are blessed. Sometimes the icon of the Theotokos is adorned with flowers on her feast days. It reminds us of the special place the Theotokos has in our lives. It also reminds us that we honor this special woman who tells us: “all generations will call me blessed.” (Luke 1:48)

## 4 Scripture Study

At the Vigil for the Dormition there are assigned Old Testament readings. They are: Genesis 28: 10-17; Ezekiel 43:27-44:4; Proverbs 9:1-11. These readings are about Jacob's Ladder, the Closed Gate of the Temple and Wisdom. These are all pre-figurations of the Theotokos. Read them together. These are other images from the Old Testament are used extensively in our hymnography to describe the Theotokos. Discuss how our veneration of the Theotokos is expressed in the Church, especially as we have discussed it during these sessions.

## 5 Experiencing Grief

The Dormition of the Theotokos is a major feast of the Church. As such it has a joyful rather than a sorrowful quality. Yet when we lose a loved ones we experience sorrow. People have varying degrees of experience with grief, and as adults we are sometimes expected to "handle" it. In the Church we are called to a grief of hope. This is often difficult to attain, and the world sees grief as a state of despair. St. Paul tells us:

*But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14)*

In this vein, and understanding that in American culture grieving is often ignored or unexpressed, embark on a discussion about grieving. The following questions and statements are meant as discussion starters only. Each group of students can draw on their own experiences, either personal or as a community.

How does the Church handle death?

Although the mood of our services for those who have died is somber, they are not without hope. The Church understands that we are sad that we will no longer have the physical presence of a loved one, but Christ offers us hope, hope in eternal life which will not pass away. We pray for the dead because God exists out of time and we ask that God remember our loved one eternally. We are not idly comforting ourselves in this way, but lifting up our loved one to the Father. The Church offers memorial services after death and on the anniversary of death. We do not forget, and we pray that God will not forget either.

How is grief expressed?

People often express their grief with sadness. This can be manifested by depression, an inability to cope with even simple tasks, isolation or magnified neediness. It might be useful to discuss ways to deal with others and our selves when grieving. People might share things that have helped them

or even things that have not been helpful to them when they have grieved. The offering of prayer and comfort, including both physical and emotional support are tremendous gifts to the grieving.

## 6 Closing Prayer

### **Kontakion of the Dormition - Tone 2**

Neither the tomb, nor death, could hold the Theotokos,  
Who is constant in prayer and our firm hope in her intercessions.  
For being the Mother of Life, she was translated to life  
By the One who dwelt in her virginal womb!

Note that both the troparion and kontakion emphasize Mary's ever-virginity. Use the Notes for the Teacher section above to lead a discussion on what this means. Remind students that in Orthodox teaching, a husband and wife are given the gift of sexual intercourse to enjoy, not just to procreate. Close with the kontakion of the feast as your prayer.

# Icons of the Theotokos (Ages 18+)

## Overview

### The Theotokos: Compassion and Protection

## Objectives

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

- Compare the different iconographic representations of the Theotokos
- Compare the scriptural references to hymns about the Theotokos

## Materials

- *Bibles*
- Copies of the feast day icons of the Theotokos that have been studied in previous lessons
- Copies of the Troparia from the feast days, not titled (available in Sessions 1-4)
- Copies of the following icons and troparia (not titled):
  - The Tikhvin Icon
  - The Icon of Our Lady of Vladimir:
  - Our Lady of the Sign
  - The Icon of the Protection
- *The Icon Book*

## Resources

### Required Resources

[Akathist to the Icon of the Most-Holy Theotokos \(PDF\)](#)

[Icon of The Theotokos \(PDF\)](#)

[Icon of the Annuciation to the Theotokos \(Image\)](#)

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

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

[Icons of the Theotokos - Description\(HTML\)](#)

[Icons: Teacher Notes\(HTML\)](#)

[The Story of the Tikhvin Icon of the Mother of God\(HTML\)](#)

[The Theotokos in Scripture and Hymnography\(HTML\)](#)

[Troparia for Icons of the Theotokos\(HTML\)](#)

### Optional Resources

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

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

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

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

[Icons as Teachers\(HTML\)](#)

[The Icon Book \(Image\)](#)

[The Meaning of Icons \(Image\)](#)

## Procedure

### 1 Opening Prayer

#### Hymn to the Theotokos

It is truly meet to bless you, O Theotokos,  
ever blessed and most pure, and the Mother of our God.

More honorable than the Cherubim, and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim,  
without defilement you gave birth to God the Word.

True Theotokos, we magnify you!

Make certain the students understand that the Cherubim and Seraphim are ranks of angels.

Discuss the use of hymnography about the Theotokos.

### 2 Hymnography of the Theotokos

When do we hear hymns about the Theotokos? (*At every service of the Church and in our private prayers.*) There are many references to Old Testament images. Last session we talked about the Old Testament readings and how the Theotokos is Jacob's Ladder, the Closed Gate of the Temple and the Wisdom.

Print out and complete the Activity: *The Theotokos in Scripture and Hymnography* found in the *Resource Section*.

### 3 Icons of the Theotokos

During the past four sessions we have studied four feasts of the Theotokos. We know, though, that we honor the Theotokos more often than just on these feast days. We can ask the Theotokos to pray for us and remember us to God daily.

Icons are an important part of the worship of the Orthodox Church. There was a time when people misunderstood the use of icons, and still some people today don't understand them. The Orthodox Church teaches that we do not pray to icons, but in fact pray through them and that they help us to realize that Christ and the saints are present with us always. They also help us to understand

important events in the life of Christ, the Theotokos or the saints. That's why we studied the icons of the feast days of the Theotokos. But there are many other icons of the Theotokos.

Many people have a number of icons in their home, usually in a special place, where they also pray. There are a number of styles or types of icons of the Theotokos. Many churches and individuals have several icons of the Theotokos.

Read the appropriate page (page 2) from *The Icon Book* .

Say: Here are some additional types of icons of the Theotokos. What differences do you see in the different types of icon? Have the students spend a little time looking at the icons, discussing the facial expressions and the positioning of Christ and the Theotokos. Read *The Icons of the Theotokos - Description* from the *Resource Section*.

## 4 The Tikhvin Mother of God icon - Story

For many years this icon was in North America for safekeeping. Read *The Story of the Tikhvin Mother of God Icon* found in the *Resource Section*.

Discuss the value of this icon for the Russian Orthodox people. If possible visit the [www.oca.org](http://www.oca.org) site to see the photos and description of the return of the icon. Especially note the huge crowds that greeted the icon on her return to Russia.

## 5 Closing Prayer

### Hymm to the Theotokos

It is truly meet to bless you, O Theotokos,  
ever blessed and most pure, and the Mother of our God.

More honorable than the Cherubim, and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim,  
without defilement you gave birth to God the Word.

True Theotokos, we magnify you!

# The Nativity of the Theotokos (September 8) *(Ages 13-17)*

## Overview

**Mary's connection to humanity and God's love** - Mary's connection to humanity and God's love

## Objectives

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

- Describe the significance of the Birth of the Theotokos
- Contrast the co-operation of Mary as the "New Eve" with Eve's disobedient refusal to co-operate with God in the Garden of Eden
- Enumerate similarities between the icon of Mary's Nativity and the icon of the Lord's Nativity
- Describe Mary based on the words of hymns about her

## Materials

- Bible: Genesis, Chapters 2 and 3.
- Icons of the Nativity of the Theotokos,
- Icon of the Nativity of Jesus Christ,
- Icon of the Resurrection (in which Christ is clearly shown pulling Eve as well as Adam out of the power of death)
- Descriptions of all these icons from *The Icon Book*
- Background on the *Icon of the Nativity of the Theotokos* found in the *Description Section* of the *Icon Resource*.
- Liturgical Texts of the Feast
- *Genesis 2&3 Review Activity*
- Materials needed for *Genesis 2&3 Review Activity*

## Resources

### Required Resources

[Kontakion: Nativity of the Theotokos \(Sheet Music\) \(PDF\)](#)

[Nativity of The Theotokos Line Drawing \(PDF\)](#)

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

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

[Genesis 2 & 3 Review Activity\(HTML\)](#)

### Optional Resources

[Troparion: Nativity of the Theotokos \(Sheet Music\) \(PDF\)](#)

[Entrance of the Theotokos\(HTML\)](#)

[Hymn to the Theotokos \(It is Truly Meet\)\(HTML\)](#)

[Nativity of Theotokos - Liturgical Texts\(HTML\)](#)

[The Story of the Nativity \(Birth\) of the Theotokos\(HTML\)](#)

[The Icon Book \(Image\)](#)

## Procedure

### 1 Opening Prayer

#### **Troparion (Tone 4)**

Your Nativity, O Virgin,  
Has proclaimed joy to the whole universe!  
The Sun of righteousness, Christ our God,  
Has shone from you, O Theotokos.  
By annulling the curse, He bestowed a blessing.  
By destroying death, He has granted us eternal life.

Ask the class to think of people they know about whose faith has been severely tested. Might these people have been tempted to abandon their faith, or to question God? Tell the class you are going to read about a couple whose faith was really tested over many years--Joachim and Anna, the parents of Mary, the Theotokos.

### 2 Story of the Nativity of the Theotokos

Read the story of The Nativity of the Theotokos (found in the *Resource Section*) together.

After reading the story, discuss these questions:

- Could Joachim, after being humiliated when he went to make his offering, have been tempted to be angry at God? Could both Joachim and Anna, after praying and hoping for so long to have a child, have been tempted to give up on God?
- What are some ways Joachim and Anna might have kept themselves and each other from giving up? (*Prayer, mutual loving support, consciously trying to live a good life in trust that God would not abandon them, etc.*)

### 3 Scripture

Old Testament references

Put on the chalkboard these 3 Old Testament passages:



- I Samuel 1: 9-20 (*answer: Samuel*)
- Judges 13: 1-3 and 21-24 (*answer: Samson*)
- Genesis 21: 1-3 (*answer: Isaac*)

Let students look up the passages and find the names of the children who were born to their parents late in life, and who each had something very important to do for God.

## 4 Mary: The New Eve

Mary: The "New Eve" - Tell the class that Mary the Theotokos is often called the "New Eve," and ask students their ideas about why this is so. After they have given their thoughts, bring the candle and holder to a spot where everyone can see it as you talk together. Light the candle, and tell the class that this will help in understanding what the "first Eve" and Adam did. Read Genesis 3: 1-14 together. (Note to the teacher: The next several paragraphs are intended merely to guide you in discussion with the class. But if it would help you to read portions aloud to the class, feel free to do so.) A little child is fascinated by the beauty of flame. A loving parent wants the child to enjoy the beauty. But the parent also knows that the child is not ready to get really close to the flame. This is because the child does not know that flames can also burn us. Adam and Eve were like little children. In paradise, God gave them beauty to enjoy, and they knew only that beauty. It was God's intention to teach them more about the world when they were ready ; He did not intend to withhold understanding from them forever. But they wanted to know all about the world right away, not waiting till God deemed them ready to deal with it, and to have the "knowledge of good and evil" as Genesis puts it. So, despite God's warning, Adam and Eve used the free will He had given them to disobey Him and turn from Him. Genesis uses the serpent as the teller of a great lie-the lie that claims we don't have to listen to God and obey Him because we can "handle" everything in the world, good or bad, without Him. The "first Eve" believed this. She and Adam represent all of us who disobey God and separate ourselves from Him. All human beings are tempted to believe that we can do everything on our own. Then we find, like Adam and Eve, that without Him everything falls apart. Read Genesis 3: 13-14 again together. Note that God does not curse Eve or Adam. God curses the serpent that led them to disobey and abandon Him, and lied about His warning to them. God continued to love Adam and Eve, though they had spoiled the close, loving relationship they'd once had with Him. (You see this relationship in Genesis 8:1. God is portrayed as walking in the garden with Adam and Eve, like a companion or a loving father. But now they hide from Him.) God's love would continue to the time of the birth of Mary the Theotokos. She is the one who would obey His will and do as He asked. Like the first Eve, she had a choice to say "yes" or "no" to God. Mary would make the free choice to say "yes." We honor her as the "New Eve" because her choice made it possible for Jesus Christ, the "Light of the World," to be born and to save us. (Extinguish the candle.)

## 5 Scripture Review

As a mini-review of the session so far, print out and complete *Genesis 2 & 3 Review Activity* found in the *Resource Section*.

## 6 Hymnography of the Theotokos

Look together at the Troparion, Kontakion, and Hymn texts for this session. (The Troparion is in the opening prayer section, the Kontakion is in the closing prayer section and all the hymns are in the click-on Session Resources\*.)

### **Hymn to the Theotokos:**

Virginity is foreign to mothers;  
 Childbearing is strange for virgins,  
 But in you, O Theotokos,

Both were accomplished!

For this, all the earthly nations unceasingly magnify you!

The Troparion mentions a "curse." Remind students that this curse, which is separation from God, is not placed on Adam and Eve. Rather, it is the condition of separation from God in which they and all of us live as a result of our sin and disobedience. The verses also remind us that Christ "annulled," or did away with, this curse. We no longer need to be separated from God, and death no longer has final power over us. Go over the idea of 3 groups of people who are "freed" according to the words of the Kontakion. Joachim and Anna are freed from the shame of barrenness, another word for childlessness. Adam and Eve are freed from their estrangement from God. And we are freed from the final power of death. In the Hymn for the Theotokos, we are reminded of God's great power. He can, if He wishes, make a virgin a mother, and a mother a virgin. This is not because He disdains the process of procreation or sexual intercourse between men and women. But it is a sign of His coming into the world--a miracle beyond any other, marked by the fact that it took place without a human father. Yet the birth of Mary, like the birth of Jesus Christ, was a real human birth. Make this clear to students by looking at the two Nativity icons (of Jesus Christ's birth and of Mary's) and noting the human characteristics of each. You might want to use some of the words of Father Alexander Schmemmann, provided in the Notes to the Teacher above, to discuss this with the class.

## 7 Closing Prayer

### **Kontakion of the feast**

By your Nativity, O most pure Virgin,

Joachim and Anna are freed from barrenness;

Adam and Eve, from the corruption of death.

And we, your people, freed from the guilt of sin, celebrate and sing to you:

"The barren woman gives birth to the Theotokos, the Nourisher of our Life."

Take a few minutes to tell the class that starting with the next session, a brief period for journaling will be part of each session. Tell them that you have notebooks for them.

# The Entrance of the Theotokos (November 21) *(Ages 13-17)*

## Overview

**Mary's holiness and purity**

## Objectives

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

- At the end of the session students should be able to Describe the events of Mary's entrance into the Temple
- Explain how Mary's freely given co-operation with God was an essential part of our salvation
- Retell the stories of other Biblical women who were called to important service by God
- Demonstrate the way the liturgical hymns for the feast reflect the words of Psalm 45

## Materials

- Bible: Luke 2: 22-40 and 41-50. Psalm 45: 13-17.
- Story of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple
- Icon of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple
- Icon of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple
- Descriptions of the above Feasts from *The Icon Book*
- Liturgical Hymns of the Feast
- *Holy Women of the Bible Activity*
- Teacher Background Info
- Journaling Handout
- Journals
- Pens or Pencils
- Paper
- Markers for a chart

## Resources

### Required Resources

- [Entrance of The Theotokos - Line Drawing \(PDF\)](#)
- [Icon of The Presentation \(Meeting\) of Our Lord \(Image\)](#)
- [Entrance of the Theotokos in the Temple \(Story\)\(HTML\)](#)
- [Holy Women of the Bible\(HTML\)](#)
- [Teaching Devices: Journaling\(HTML\)](#)

## Optional Resources

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

[Entrance of the Theotokos\(HTML\)](#)

[Entrance of the Theotokos - Liturgical Texts\(HTML\)](#)

## Procedure

### 1 Opening Prayer

#### **Troparion of the Entrance of the Theotokos - Tone 4**

Today is the prelude of the good will of God,  
Of the preaching of the salvation of mankind.  
The Virgin appears in the temple of God,  
In anticipation proclaiming Christ to all.  
Let us rejoice and sing to her:  
Rejoice, O fulfillment of the Creator's dispensation

*Make sure students understand these words in the hymn:*

- prelude: something that prepares us for what is to come. (If some of your students play or study music, they may be familiar with this word in the context of music)
- anticipate: look forward to
- dispensation: God's (the Creator's) gift or plan of salvation

### 2 Scripture Reading

Psalm verses

Read Psalm 45, verses 13-17, together.

Ask students to keep the words in mind as you go on to read the story of the feast.

### 3 Story of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

Read the story of *The Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple* (found in the *Resource Section*) together.

After reading the story, discuss these points:

- Mary's entrance into the Temple reminds us that later her divine Son will also be presented. Read together Luke 2: 22-40. Note that Mary and Joseph followed the law of the Old Testament and brought their Son to present Him to the Lord. Simeon and Anna the Prophetess (not the wife of Joachim) had been waiting many years to see the Savior, and when Jesus was brought to the Temple, they knew they had seen Him.

- In the next verses of Luke (41-50) we see something that goes beyond the law of the Old Testament. The young Jesus is teaching the rabbis and scholars in the Temple. Now the law of the Old Testament is fulfilled and the Savior they promised has come.
- The Old Testament also gives us a "prelude" of Mary's entrance into the Temple. Look at Psalm 45, verses 13-17. Note how these verses are reflected in the story you have just read together.

## 4 Scripture Reading/Discussion

Print out and complete the *Holy Women of the Bible* Activity found in the *Resource Section*.

## 5 Scripture Review

As a review, have students make a chart based on Psalm 45, verses 13-17. The chart should have three columns. In the first column, put words from the Psalm. In the second, describe an event from the story of the feast. In the third, where applicable, put a phrase from the troparion or the kontakion of the feast. Have students choose a title to put on the chart, and display it in the room.

Point out that Jesus Christ was also presented to the Temple, as a fulfillment of the Old Testament law. Let students look at and compare the icons of the two feasts.

## 6 Journaling - Mary as a "living temple"

Review the *Journaling Handout* found in the *Resource Section*.

### **Mary as a "living temple"**

Talk together about the title "living temple" that is often applied to the Theotokos. Ask students to tell what they think it means. (Bring into the discussion the idea that Mary carried Jesus Christ in her body as He was getting ready to be born. But also, she did the will of God. In both ways, she was ready to be God's servant. So she was always offering God worship. The temple is the place where God is always worshipped. Thus we can call Mary a "living temple" of God.)

Let students come up with their own ideas. Varied answers are completely acceptable, but they should be along the lines of the ideas offered here.

Emphasize to students that Mary's choice to become the Mother of God was made freely and without any coercion. She could have said "no" to God. But we honor her for her choice because by saying "yes" she put into motion God's plan for the salvation of all of us human beings.

Give students their journals, and ask them to take a few minutes to think about how WE can become "living temples" of God. They should write their ideas in their journals

## 7 Closing Prayer

### **Kontakion - Tone 4**

The most pure Temple of the Savior;  
the Precious Chamber and Virgin;  
the sacred Treasure of the Glory of God,  
is presented today to the House of the Lord.  
She brings with her the grace of the spirit,  
which the angels of God do praise.  
Truly this woman is the Abode of heaven!

If you have time, go over the meaning of the last line of the kontakion with your students: "Truly this woman is the abode of heaven." Make sure they understand that the word "abode" means a place where someone lives or stays. Ask them what it means to say Mary is the abode of heaven. (She carried Jesus Christ in her body as He was getting ready to be born. This is the same as what any mother does with her baby. But Jesus is God's only Son, who came from heaven. So we can say that Mary carried heaven in her body when carried Jesus Christ. She was His "abode.")

# The Annunciation (March 25)

(Ages 13-17)

## Overview

**Mary's obedience and humility** - Mary's obedience and humility

## Objectives

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

- Describe the events of the Annunciation and the Virgin Mary's meeting with her cousin Elizabeth
- Describe the poem of Hannah in I Samuel as being a "preview" of the Magnificat of Mary
- Contrast Mary's attitude toward Gabriel's announcement with that of Zachariah

## Materials

- Bible: Luke 1: 26-56, I Samuel 2: 1-10, Mark 3: 31-35, John 2: 1-11, John 19: 25-27.
- Icon of the Annunciation, and description from *The Icon Book*
- 3 large sheets of paper for charts
- 3 large sheets of paper for charts
- Rulers
- Markers/Crayons
- Tape
- Journals

## Resources

### Required Resources

[Annunciation - Line Drawing \(PDF\)](#)

[Icon of the Annunciation to the Theotokos \(Image\)](#)

[Annunciation: Teacher Notes\(HTML\)](#)

[Liturgical Texts: Annunciation\(HTML\)](#)

[The Story of the Annunciation \(10-13\)\(HTML\)](#)

## Procedure

### 1 Opening Prayer

**Troparion of the Annunciation - Tone 4**

Today is the beginning of our salvation,  
The revelation of the eternal mystery!  
The Son of God becomes the Son of the Virgin  
As Gabriel announces the coming of Grace.  
Together with him let us cry out to the Theotokos!  
Rejoice, O Full of Grace, the Lord is with you

*Discuss some points about the words of the hymn:*

- The first line reminds us that Mary has a central role in God's plan to save the world from the final power of death (this is what "salvation" means.) She consents to be the Mother of God.
- The second line reminds us that God has planned this salvation forever (that is why it is "eternal", and it is a "mystery" because it is God's plan and therefore beyond our power to know or understand fully)
- The last line gives the Virgin Mary the title "Full of Grace." Grace is God's gift to all human beings who truly want to follow His commandments and someday live with Him in the Kingdom. Grace is what enables us to follow Him through this earthly life with its temptations and difficulties

## 2 Story of the Annunciation

Tell the class that the Feast of the Annunciation is about an announcement, and make sure they understand that "annunciation" is the act of announcing. Discuss the general idea of "announcements" briefly: To announce a thing is to share it, and we only announce important things. There are many ways of announcing things (let the class come up with examples such as TV, radio, websites, e-mail, fliers, newspapers, invitations.)

Read the story of the Annunciation to the class or, better still, have students, one or more, read it aloud (*found in the Resource Section*).

With the class, read Luke 1: 36-45. Talk together about these questions and points:

- What other good news does Gabriel give Mary? (*He tells her that her elderly cousin Elizabeth, who has wanted a child, is going to have one.*)
- What does Mary do after talking with angel? (*She goes to visit Elizabeth to share her joy. This shows us something of Mary's loving and outgoing nature.*)
- What title does Elizabeth give Mary? (*She calls Mary "the mother of my Lord."*)
- What unusual thing happens when Mary tells Elizabeth her wonderful news? (*Elizabeth's own baby "leaps for joy" inside her body. That baby is John the Baptizer and Forerunner. Even in the womb he knows that Mary's baby will be the Savior.*)

## 3 Scripture Reading

With the class, read Luke 1: 46-55. Put the title "Magnificat" on the chalkboard, and tell the class that this hymn of praise to God is part of our worship services. The title comes from the first word



of the hymn in Latin.

Point out to the class that the mother of Samuel in the Old Testament sang a hymn of praise much like this one. Read I Samuel 2: 1-10 together. Divide the class into three groups. Give them paper, markers, and a ruler. Ask each group to make a chart showing three things from Hannah's hymn that are similar to the Magnificat. Let them make their charts colorful, with words written large enough to be easy to read. (Groups can divide their papers down the middle using rulers, and head one side "Hannah's Song" and the other side "Mary's Magnificat.")

When the groups have finished, they can compare their charts to see how many of the same similarities they came up with. Plan to display the charts in the room.

Point out to the class that Hannah rejoiced over the birth of her son Samuel, who would become a great leader of the Hebrew people. Samuel was a human being like all of us. But of course the greatest event ever to take place was the birth of Mary's Son, because it was a miracle and He was the divine Son of God. That's why the Church calls His birth by the special title of "the Incarnation."

Discuss the word INCARNATION with the class. The prefix "in" is familiar to all of us. "Carn" refers to flesh. Ask students to think of some words including "carn." (Carnivore, carnal, carnival and carnation are some examples. A "carnival" is a celebration of fleshly enjoyments. The flower "carnation" is so named because it is flesh-colored.) The suffix "ation" means being or becoming.

Put the word on the chalkboard in syllables: IN-CARN-ATION. To become flesh—this is what God did for us.

## 4 Hymnography

Read together Luke 1: 5-20. Then look together at the verses of the Apostikha for the Feast of the Conception of St. John the Baptist, to see how the Church has written them based on the Biblical account. (Gabriel has told the priest Zachariah that his wife Elizabeth will bear a son, John the Baptizer or Forerunner. The following verses are Zachariah's response)

### ***Apostikha for the Feast of the Conception of John the Baptist***

*Tell me clearly, how will I know this?*

*Answered the blessed elder [Zachariah]*

*For as you see I am full of days and Elizabeth is barren.*

*How do you utter words beyond nature?*

*I am amazed and now suspect, O man, that you speak not the truth.*

*Depart, for I ask the salvation of the people,*

*And not to acquire a son;*

*Such a thing cannot be believed!*

*Ask the class:*

- “What kind of person does Zachariah seem to be?” (*Point out that he is certainly a person with his own agenda, not willing to accept what Gabriel tells him. Use the points made in “Teacher Notes ” in the Resource Section to enhance the discussion.*)
- “Why does Gabriel react so negatively to Zachariah?” (*Stress the difference between his attitude and that of the Virgin Mary when Gabriel visits her. Though she is confident and strong enough to question the angel in a sensible way, she does not do so with cynicism or doubtfulness. She is a person of faith but also of humility, as described above in the story for the feast of the Annunciation. She is willing to let God be in charge, not blocking His access to her life as Zachariah does. Her attitude is an example of what Christians mean when they talk about humility.*)

## 5 Journaling

Give students their journals.

Ask them to think and write about “humility.” What does it mean to them? Could humility be the “invincible might” of the Theotokos?

## 6 Closing Prayer

### **Kontakion of the Feast - Tone 8**

O victorious leader of triumphant hosts!

We, your servants, delivered from evil, sing our grateful thanks to you, O Theotokos!

As you possess invincible might set us free from every calamity

So that we may sing: Rejoice, O Unwedded Bride.

*Notice that the hymn tells us that Mary “possesses invincible might.” This reminds us of her willingness and ability to pray for us and intercede, as she did at the wedding in Cana. It also reminds us, once again, that she is not a passive or weak person but a strong one who loves us and will pray for us.*

# The Dormition of the Theotokos (August 15) *(Ages 13-17)*

## Overview

**Our Salvation and Christ's perfect love** - Our Salvation and Christ's perfect love

## Objectives

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

- Retell the story of the Dormition of the Theotokos as a joyful, not sorrowful, event
- Explain why we say that the Theotokos fell asleep not into death but into life
- Recognize the words “Assumption” and “Repose” as other, related, names for this feast
- Demonstrate an understanding of the icon of the feast

## Materials

- Icon of the Dormition of the Theotokos, and description from *The Icon Book*
- Liturgical Hymns
- *Flowers for the Theotokos* Activity
- Journals

## Resources

### Required Resources

[Dormition - Liturgical Texts\(HTML\)](#)

[Dormition: Teacher Notes\(HTML\)](#)

[Flowers for the Theotokos\(HTML\)](#)

### Optional Resources

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

[The Story of the Dormition of the Theotokos, 7-9\(HTML\)](#)

## Procedure

### 1 Opening Prayer

**Troparion of the Dormition - Tone 1**

In giving birth you preserved your virginity!  
In falling asleep you did not forsake the world, O Theotokos!  
You were translated to life, O Mother of Life,  
and by your prayers you deliver our souls from Death!

Tell the class that today you will be talking about the Feast of the Dormition, or Falling Asleep, of the Theotokos. Tell them that they may also have heard this feast referred to as the Assumption.

Go over the meaning of the word “translated” in the troparion. Ask the class what the word means to them. (They will probably say that it means changing a word from one language to another.) Tell them that in this case it means that the Theotokos was changed from one state of being into another. After she died, she was taken from death into life in the Kingdom of God. She is there with God, and is already taking part in the wonderful life of His Kingdom that we all hope to enjoy some day. Mary did not and does not lie in the grave, like other people who have died. Rather, she is with her Son, Jesus Christ. Ask the class to keep the following questions in mind as you read the story of the Dormition of the Theotokos together: What was special about the death of the Theotokos? Why do we refer to it as “Dormition” or “Falling Asleep”?

## 2 Story of the Dormition of the Theotokos

Read the story of the Dormition (found in the *Resource Section*) together:

After reading the story, look again at the troparion. Point out to the class that two miracles about the Theotokos are compared. First, she gave birth to a child even though there was no human father—she “preserved her virginity.” Second, though she “fell asleep” or died, she lives in the Kingdom of God. Both of these show us God’s greatness. Ask the class, “What does the troparion tell us that Mary does now, in the Kingdom?” (*She prays for us.*)

## 3 Flowers for the Theotokos

Have the students complete the *Flowers for the Theotokos* activity found in the *Resource Section*.

## 4 Discussion about Grief

Have the class “brainstorm” for a few minutes about funerals they have attended. Was the tone joyful or sorrowful? Was the attention centered on God and His Kingdom, or on the grieving people? Let students give their ideas about why the Dormition of the Theotokos is seen by the Church as a joyful event. (They can use the story for ideas, if need be.)

## 5 Icon of the Dormition

Look at the icon of the feast together, using the description in *The Icon Book* to explain details. Ask students how the icon shows that Mary’s death is a special one. (As the book points out, Jesus is shown taking His Mother to the heavenly Kingdom rather than leaving her to lie in the grave. No other human being has shared this special destiny of Mary. Yet we know that we, too, have been promised eternal life if we live according to God’s will as Mary did.)

## 6 Journaling

Give students their journals. Ask them to write about why this feast, even though it centers on a death, has been described by some spiritual writers as having “no sadness, only light and joy.” Let them write their own reactions to this idea.

## 7 Closing Prayer

### **Kontakion of the Dormition - Tone 2**

Neither the tomb, nor death, could hold the Theotokos,  
Who is constant in prayer and our firm hope in her intercessions.  
For being the Mother of Life, she was translated to life  
By the One who dwelt in her virginal womb!

Note that both the troparion and kontakion emphasize Mary’s ever-virginity. Use the Teacher Notes in the Resource Section to lead a discussion on what this means. Remind students that in Orthodox teaching, a husband and wife are given the gift of sexual intercourse to enjoy, not just to procreate. Close with the kontakion of the feast as your prayer.

# Icons of the Theotokos *(Ages 13-17)*

## Overview

**The Theotokos: compassion and protection**

## Objectives

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

- Demonstrate a recognition of various iconographic images of the Theotokos
- Compare the different iconographic representations of the Theotokos
- Describe the emotions each icon portrays
- Retell main points of the story of the Tikhvin Icon
- Recite the *Hymn to the Theotokos*

## Materials

- Copies of the feast day icons of the Theotokos that have been studied in previous lessons
- Copies of the Troparia from the feast days, not titled (available in Sessions 1-4)
- Copies of the following icons and troparia (not titled):
  - The Tikhvin Icon
  - The Icon of Our Lady of Vladimir:
  - Our Lady of the Sign
  - The Icon of the Protection
- *The Icon Book*
- Any available icons of the Theotokos, on cards, in books or photographs, etc.
- Laminated copies of the icon of Our Lady of Vladimir or the Tikhvin Icon or any of the others (particularly the Loving Kindness icons), one for each student
- Copies of the Hymn to the Theotokos printed the same size as the icon
- Card stock or heavy construction paper, slightly larger than the icon and prayer when folded over, to be a "frame" for an icon mounted on the right and the prayer next to it on the left

Note: Put up the icons so that they are visible to everyone.

## Resources

### Required Resources

[Icon of The Theotokos \(PDF\)](#)

[Icon of the Annuciation to the Theotokos \(Image\)](#)

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

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

[Icons of the Theotokos - Description\(HTML\)](#)

[The Theotokos in Scripture and Hymnography\(HTML\)](#)

## Optional Resources

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

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

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

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

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

[The Icon Book \(Image\)](#)

[The Meaning of Icons \(Image\)](#)

## Procedure

### 1 Opening Prayer

It is truly meet to bless you, O Theotokos,  
ever blessed and most pure, and the Mother of our God.  
More honorable than the Cherubim,  
And more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim,  
Without defilement you gave birth to God the Word.  
True Theotokos, we magnify you!

Make certain the students understand that the Cherubim and Seraphim are ranks of angels. See the Introduction to the unit for guidance in talking about the word "defilement." In this prayer we use "magnify" to mean to glorify or praise.

### 2 The Theotokos in Scripture and Hymnography

Print out and complete the Activity: *The Theotokos in Scripture and Hymnography* found in the *Resource Section*.

### 3 Icons of the Theotokos

During the past four sessions we have studied four feasts of the Theotokos. We know though, that we honor the Theotokos more often than just on these feast days. We can ask the Theotokos to pray for us and remember us to God daily. Icons are an important part of the worship of the Orthodox Church. There was a time when people misunderstood the use of icons, and still some people today don't understand them. The Orthodox Church teaches that we do not pray to icons,

but in fact pray through them, and that they help us to realize that Christ and the saints are present with us always. They also help us to understand important events in the life of Christ, the Theotokos or the saints. That's why we studied the icons of the feast days of the Theotokos. But there are many other icons of the Theotokos. Many people have a number of icons in their home, usually in a special place, where they also pray. There are a number of styles or types of icons of the Theotokos. Many churches and individuals have several icons of the Theotokos.

Read the appropriate page (page 2) from *The Icon Book*. Here are some additional types of icons of the Theotokos. What differences do you see in the different types of icon? Have the students spend a little time looking at the icons, discussing the facial expressions and the positioning of Christ and the Theotokos.

Read *The Icons of the Theotokos - Description* from the *Resource Section*.

## 4 Journaling

Have the students take out their journals and spend a few minutes writing about who the people are in our lives who "point the way" and how we "point the way" for others.

## 5 Story of the Tikhvin Icon

For many years this icon was in North America for safekeeping. Read *The Story of the Tikhvin Mother of God Icon* found in the *Resource Section*.

Discuss the value of this icon for the Russian Orthodox people. If possible visit the [www.o.ca.org](http://www.o.ca.org) site to see the photos and description of the return of the icon. Especially note the huge crowds that greeted the icon on her return to Russia.

## 6 Closing Prayer

### **Hymn to the Theotokos**

It is truly meet to bless you, O Theotokos,  
ever blessed and most pure, and the Mother of our God.  
More honorable than the Cherubim,  
and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim,  
without defilement you gave birth to God the Word.  
True Theotokos, we magnify you!



# The Nativity of the Theotokos (September 8) *(Ages 10-12)*

## Overview

**Mary's humanity and God's Love** - Mary's humanity and God's Love

## Objectives

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

- Identify the parents of Mary and retell some traditions regarding her birth
- Contrast Mary's co-operation with God with Eve's refusal to co-operate with God
- Demonstrate an understanding of the festal icon

## Materials

- Bible: Genesis, chapters 2 and 3.
- Icon of the Nativity of the Theotokos
- Icon of the Nativity of Jesus Christ
- Icon of the Resurrection (in which Christ is clearly shown pulling Eve as well as Adam out of the power of death)
- Descriptions of the above icons from *The Icon Book*
- Background on the *Icon of the Nativity of the Theotokos* found in the *Description Section* of the *Icon Resource*.
- *Genesis 2&3 Review Activity*
- Materials needed for *Genesis 2&3 Review Activity*

## Resources

### Required Resources

- [Kontakion: Nativity of the Theotokos \(Sheet Music\) \(PDF\)](#)
- [Nativity of The Theotokos Line Drawing \(PDF\)](#)
- [Icon of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ \(Image\)](#)
- [Icon of the Nativity of the Theotokos \(Image\)](#)
- [Genesis 2 & 3 Review Activity\(HTML\)](#)

### Optional Resources

- [Troparion: Nativity of the Theotokos \(Sheet Music\) \(PDF\)](#)
- [Icon of The Resurrection of Christ \(Image\)](#)

[Entrance of the Theotokos\(HTML\)](#)

[Hymn to the Theotokos \(It is Truly Meet\)\(HTML\)](#)

[Nativity of Theotokos - Liturgical Texts\(HTML\)](#)

[The Story of the Nativity \(Birth\) of the Theotokos\(HTML\)](#)

[The Icon Book \(Image\)](#)

## Procedure

### 1 Opening Prayer

#### **Troparion (Tone 4)**

Your Nativity, O Virgin,  
Has proclaimed joy to the whole universe!  
The Sun of righteousness, Christ our God,  
Has shone from you, O Theotokos.  
By annulling the curse, He bestowed a blessing.  
By destroying death, He has granted us eternal life.

*(You will want to have the words readable for students on a chalkboard or chart.)*

### 2 Troparion Discussion

Ask students, "Have you ever had something go wrong because you didn't listen to your parents or another adult who loves you?" (Let students answer briefly.) Then, with the words of the troparion in mind, read Genesis 1: 27-30 and 3: 1-15 together.

Discuss these questions:

- Were human beings created as man and woman right from the beginning? (Yes-verse 1: 27.)
- What are some of the gifts God gave His creatures? (These are enumerated in 1: 29-30.)
- Why was the curse put on the serpent? (The serpent caused God's beloved creatures, man and woman, to sin.)
- Was anyone cursed besides the serpent? (No. Human beings, men or women, were never cursed by God. See Genesis 3: 17-19.)

Look back at the words of the troparion. How do the words reflect Scripture? (The "curse" in Genesis is overcome by Jesus Christ. When He comes to the world, He defeats death. Since the time of Adam, death had had full power over human beings. With the coming of Christ, death's power is no longer final. We can rise to a new and everlasting life with Christ. That is why the New Testament and the Church often refer to Jesus Christ as the "new Adam".)

### 3 Icon Description

Look together at the icon of the Resurrection. Christ, risen, is pulling Adam and Eve out from the power of death. Point out to students that this shows us two things: first, the sin of disobedience committed by Adam and Eve has been forgiven. Second, Jesus Christ's defeat of the power of

death is complete. Now look at the icons of Mary's nativity and Jesus Christ's nativity. Compare elements of the two. Use *The Icon Book* for helpful information. Note that both the icons depict details that show the two births are real human births (baby being washed, etc.) Say that just as Christ is called the "new Adam," Mary is called the "new Eve", and that later during the session you are going to find out why she is given that name.

## 4 Scripture Review

As a mini-review of the session so far, print out and complete *Genesis 2 & 3 Review Activity* found in the *Resource Section*.

## 5 Nativity of the Theotokos - Story Time

Read together the story of *The Nativity of the Theotokos* found in the *Resource Section*.

After reading the story, discuss these questions and points:

- Think of Joachim after being turned away when he tried to make his offering to God. How did he feel? How would any of us feel? What does it feel like not to be part of a group because other group members think you are different from them in some important way?
- Joachim and Anna had to wait a very long time to be blessed with a child. Have you ever had to wait a very long time for something you wanted very badly?
- Joachim and Anna are honored by the Church for their patience and faith. When do we hear their names? (At the end of the Divine Liturgy, when we remember the saints of the day.)
- We know that Mary freely consented to be the Mother of the Lord. She did what God asked. The "first Eve" refused to co-operate with God, and did what He had asked His creatures not to do. She and Adam listened to the serpent's false promise that they would be "like God" rather than listening to God Himself. But Mary did co-operate with God, and did as He asked. That is why we call her the "new Eve."

## 6 Troparion and Kontakion

Review the meaning of the words in the Troparion and in the Kontakion. Ask students how, according to the troparion, Christ "annulled the curse." (This is another way of saying that Christ destroyed death. Now it no longer has the final power over us that it did before.)

Talk about the three groups people "freed" according to the words of the kontakion. Joachim and Anna are freed from the shame of barrenness or childlessness. Adam and Eve are freed from the separation from God which resulted from their disobedience. And all of us are freed from the final power of death.

## 7 Closing Prayer

As a closing prayer, let students (those who wish to speak) offer thanks to God for some freedom they have. Close with the kontakion of the feast.

#### **Kontakion - Tone 4**

By your Nativity, O most pure Virgin,  
Joachim and Anna are freed from barrenness;  
Adam and Eve, from the corruption of death.  
And we, your people, freed from the guilt of sin,  
celebrate and sing to you:  
"The barren woman gives birth to the Theotokos,  
the Nourisher of our Life."

# The Entrance of the Theotokos (November 21) *(Ages 10-12)*

## Overview

**Mary's holiness and purity**

## Objectives

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

- Tell the general meaning of the Troparion of the feast
- Tell what it means when Mary is described as a living temple of God
- Retell the stories of other Biblical women who were called to important service by God
- Compare the icons of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple and the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

## Materials

- Bible: Luke 2: 22-40 and 41-50. Psalm 45: 13-17.
- Story of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple
- Icon of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple
- Icon of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple
- Descriptions of the above Feasts from *The Icon Book*
- Liturgical Hymns of the Feast
- *Holy Women of the Bible* Activity
- Paper
- Scissors
- Pens, markers, and crayons for drawing and writing
- Teacher Background Info

## Resources

### Required Resources

- [Entrance of The Theotokos - Line Drawing \(PDF\)](#)
- [Icon of The Presentation \(Meeting\) of Our Lord \(Image\)](#)
- [Entrance of the Theotokos in the Temple \(Story\)\(HTML\)](#)
- [Holy Women of the Bible\(HTML\)](#)

### Optional Resources

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

## Procedure

### 1 Opening Prayer

#### **Troparion (Tone 4)**

Today is the prelude of the good will of God,  
of the preaching of the salvation of mankind.

The Virgin appears in the Temple of God,  
In anticipation proclaiming Christ to all.

Let us rejoice and sing to her: Rejoice,  
O Fulfillment of the Creator's dispensation!

Make sure students understand these words in the hymn:

- prelude: something that prepares us for what is to come. (If some of your students play or study music, they may be familiar with this word in the context of music)
- anticipate: look forward to
- dispensation: God's (the Creator's) gift or plan of salvation

### 2 The Story of the Entrance of the Theotokos in the Temple

Tell the class that you are going to read about the event described in this hymn. Read the story of the Feast found in the *Resource Section*.

Discuss these points:

- Mary's entrance into the Temple reminds us that later her divine Son will also be presented. Read together Luke 2: 22-40. Note that Mary and Joseph followed the law of the Old Testament and brought their Son to present Him to the Lord. Simeon and Anna the Prophetess (not the wife of Joachim) had been waiting many years to see the Savior, and when Jesus was brought to the Temple, they knew they had seen Him.
- In the next verses of Luke (41-50) we see something that goes beyond the law of the Old Testament. The young Jesus is teaching the rabbis and scholars in the Temple. Now the law of the Old Testament is fulfilled and the Savior they promised has come.
- The Old Testament also gives us a "prelude" of Mary's entrance into the Temple. Look at Psalm 45, verses 13-17. Note how these verses are reflected in the story you have just read together.

### 3 Holy Women of the Bible

Print out and complete the *Holy Women of the Bible* Activity found in the *Resource Section*.

## 4 Icon Activity

Look together at the icons of the *Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple*, and of the *Presentation of the Lord in the Temple*. Use the descriptions in *The Icon Book* to compare the two.

## 5 The Theotokos as the "living temple"

Talk together about the title "living temple" that is often applied to the Theotokos. Ask students to tell what they think it means. (Bring into the discussion the idea that Mary carried Jesus Christ in her body as He was getting ready to be born. But also, she did the will of God. In both ways, she was ready to be God's servant. So she was always offering God worship. The temple is the place where God is always worshipped. Thus we can call Mary a "living temple" of God.)

Let students come up with their own ideas. Varied answers are completely acceptable, but they should be along the lines of the ideas offered here.

Next, ask students how we can become "living temples." Ask them to create something that expresses their thoughts about this. They may decide to create a poem, a drawing, a short story or essay, a cartoon or some other form of expression.

## 6 Closing Prayer (Sung together)

Use the Kontakion of the Feast

### **Kontakion - Tone 4**

The most pure Temple of the Savior;  
the Precious Chamber and Virgin;  
the sacred Treasure of the Glory of God,  
is presented today to the House of the Lord.  
She brings with her the grace of the spirit,  
which the angels of God do praise.  
Truly this woman is the Abode of heaven!

If you have time, go over the meaning of the last line of the kontakion with your students: "Truly this woman is the abode of heaven." Make sure they understand that the word "abode" means a place where someone lives or stays. Ask them what it means to say Mary is the abode of heaven. (She carried Jesus Christ in her body as He was getting ready to be born. This is the same as what any mother does with her baby. But Jesus is God's only Son, who came from heaven. So we can say that Mary carried heaven in her body when carried Jesus Christ. She was His "abode.")

# The Annunciation (March 25)

(Ages 10-12)

## Overview

**Mary's obedience and humility** - Mary's obedience and humility

## Objectives

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

- Retell, briefly, the story of the Annunciation and the Virgin Mary's later meeting with her cousin Elizabeth
- Describe Mary's response to the angel Gabriel's message as an example of faith and humility
- Demonstrate an understanding of the icon of the feast
- Describe the Incarnation of Christ as a miracle and a manifestation of God's love

## Materials

- Bible: Luke 1: 26-56, I Samuel 2: 1-10, Mark 3: 31-35, John 2: 1-11, John 19: 25-27.
- Icon of the Annunciation, and description from *The Icon Book*
- 3 large sheets of paper for charts
- Rulers for students to share
- Markers/crayons
- Tape

## Resources

### Required Resources

- [Annunciation - Line Drawing \(PDF\)](#)
- [Icon of the Annunciation to the Theotokos \(Image\)](#)
- [Liturgical Texts: Annunciation\(HTML\)](#)
- [The Story of the Annunciation \(10-13\)\(HTML\)](#)

### Optional Resources

- [The Icon Book \(Image\)](#)

## Procedure

### 1 Opening Prayer



## Troparion of the Annunciation - Tone 4

Today is the beginning of our salvation,  
The revelation of the eternal mystery!  
The Son of God becomes the Son of the Virgin  
As Gabriel announces the coming of Grace.  
Together with him let us cry out to the Theotokos!  
Rejoice, O Full of Grace, the Lord is with you.

- The first line reminds us that Mary has a central role in God's plan to save the world from the final power of death (this is what "salvation" means.) She consents to be the Mother of God.
- The second line reminds us that God has planned this salvation forever (that is why it is "eternal", and it is a "mystery" because it is God's plan and therefore beyond our power to know or understand fully)
- The last line gives the Virgin Mary the title "Full of Grace." Grace is God's gift to all human beings who truly want to follow His commandments and someday live with Him in the Kingdom. Grace is what enables us to follow Him through this earthly life with its temptations and difficulties

## 2 Story of the Annunciation

Tell the class that the Feast of the Annunciation is about an announcement, and make sure they understand that "annunciation" is the act of announcing. Discuss the general idea of "announcements" briefly: To announce a thing is to share it, and we only announce important things. There are many ways of announcing things (let the class come up with examples such as TV, radio, websites, e-mail, fliers, newspapers, invitations.)

Read the story of the Annunciation (found in the *Resource Section*) together:

With the class, read Luke 1: 36-45. Talk together about these questions and points:

1. What other good news does Gabriel give Mary? (*He says that her elderly cousin Elizabeth, who has wanted a child, is going to have one.*)
2. What does Mary do after talking with angel? (*She goes to visit Elizabeth to share her joy. This shows us something of Mary's loving and outgoing nature.*)
3. What title does Elizabeth give Mary? (*She calls Mary "the mother of my Lord."*)
4. What unusual thing happens when Mary tells Elizabeth her wonderful news? (*Elizabeth's own baby "leaps for joy" inside her body. That baby is John the Baptizer and Forerunner. Even in the womb he knows that Mary's baby will be the Savior.*)

## 3 Scripture Reading

### Group Activity

With the class, read Luke 1: 46-55. Put the title “Magnificat” on the chalkboard, and tell the class that this hymn of praise to God is part of our worship services. The title comes from the first word of the hymn in Latin. Point out to the class that the mother of Samuel in the Old Testament sang a hymn of praise much like this one. Read I Samuel 2: 1-10 together. Divide the class into three groups. Give them paper, markers, and a ruler. Ask each group to make a chart showing three things from Hannah’s hymn that are similar to the Magnificat. Let them make their charts colorful, with words written large enough to be easy to read. (Groups can divide their papers down the middle using rulers, and head one side “Hannah’s Song” and the other side “Mary’s Magnificat.”) When the groups have finished, they can compare their charts to see how many of the same similarities they came up with. Plan to display the charts in the room. Point out to the class that Hannah rejoiced over the birth of her son Samuel, who would become a great leader of the Hebrew people. Samuel was a human being like all of us. But of course the greatest event ever to take place was the birth of Mary’s Son, because it was a miracle and He was the divine Son of God. That’s why the Church calls His birth by the special title of “the Incarnation.” Discuss the word INCARNATION with the class. The prefix “in” is familiar to all of us. “Carn” refers to flesh. Ask students to think of some words including “carn.” (Carnivore, carnal, carnival and carnation are some examples. A “carnival” is a celebration of fleshly enjoyments. The flower “carnation” is so named because it is flesh-colored.) The suffix “ation” means being or becoming. Put the word on the chalkboard in syllables: IN-CARN-ATION. To become flesh—this is what God did for us. Tell the class that Mary, as the mother of Our Lord, had a very special place in His life always. Write these three phrases on the board:

- Jesus Christ praises His mother.
- Jesus Christ does as His mother asks.
- Jesus Christ sees to it that His mother will be cared for after His death.

Ask the students, still in their groups, to read (on their own) three passages: Mark 3: 31-35, John 19: 25-27, and John 2: 1-11. Then let them discuss as groups and identify which sentence (above) describes each passage. They can raise their hands to offer the answers their groups came up with. Discuss the answers, following, with the whole class together: In Mark 3: 31-35, Jesus praises His mother. He does so by expanding on the idea that His mother is merely the one who bore and raised Him. He points her out as an example of one who “does the will of God.” That is exactly what we celebrate at the Feast of the Annunciation. In John 19: 25-27 Jesus sees to it that His mother will be taken care of. Even in His agony on the cross He is concerned for her, and tells His disciple John to care for her by being her son and caring for her as his mother. In John 2: 1-11, Jesus does as His mother asks. He first tells her that His “hour has not yet come.” In other words, it isn’t time yet for Him to reveal His divine power. But He still does as she asks. This is why we can ask the Theotokos to intercede for us with Christ. We have the example of her doing so here.

## 4 Icon of the Annunciation

Look at the icon of the Feast of the Annunciation together, noting details. Use The Icon Book to enhance your discussion

## 5 Closing Prayer

Kontakion of the feast (sing together).

**O victorious leader of triumphant hosts!**

**We, your servants, delivered from evil, sing our grateful thanks to you, O Theotokos! As you possess invincible might set us free from every calamity**

**So that we may sing: Rejoice, O Unwedded Bride.**

Notice that the hymn tells us that Mary “possesses invincible might.” This reminds us of her willingness and ability to pray for us and intercede, as she did at the wedding in Cana. It also reminds us, once again, that she is not a passive or weak person but a strong one who loves us and will pray for us.



# The Dormition of the Theotokos (August 15) *(Ages 10-12)*

## Overview

**Our Salvation and Christ's perfect love** - Our Salvation and Christ's perfect love

## Objectives

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

- Retell the story of the Dormition of the Theotokos
- Explain why we say that the Theotokos fell asleep not into death but into life
- Recognize the words “Assumption” and “Repose” as other, related, names for this feast
- Demonstrate an understanding of the icon of the feast

## Materials

- Icon of the Dormition of the Theotokos, and description from *The Icon Book*
- Liturgical Hymns
- Scissors
- Various colors of construction paper
- Thin-point markers and thick-point markers in various colors
- Tape
- Stapler for students to make large paper flowers.

## Resources

### Required Resources

[Dormition - Liturgical Texts\(HTML\)](#)

### Optional Resources

[Dormition Line Drawing \(Image\)](#)

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

[The Story of the Dormition of the Theotokos, 7-9\(HTML\)](#)

## Procedure

### 1 Opening Prayer

**Troparion of the Dormition - Tone 1**

In giving birth you preserved your virginity!  
In falling asleep you did not forsake the world, O Theotokos!  
You were translated to life, O Mother of Life,  
and by your prayers you deliver our souls from Death!

Tell the class that today you will be talking about the Feast of the Dormition, or Falling Asleep, of the Theotokos. Tell them that they may also have heard this feast referred to as the Assumption. Go over the meaning of the word “translated” in the troparion. Ask the class what the word means to them. (They will probably say that it means changing a word from one language to another.) Tell them that in this case it means that the Theotokos was changed from one state of being into another. After she died, she was taken from death into life in the Kingdom of God. She is there with God, and is already taking part in the wonderful life of His Kingdom that we all hope to enjoy some day. Mary did not and does not lie in the grave, like other people who have died. Rather, she is with her Son, Jesus Christ. Ask the class to keep the following questions in mind as you read the story of the Dormition of the Theotokos together: What was special about the death of the Theotokos? Why do we refer to it as “Dormition” or “Falling Asleep”?

## 2 Story of the Dormition of the Theotokos

Read the story of the Dormition (found in the *Resource Section*) together:

After reading the story, look again at the troparion. Point out to the class that two miracles about the Theotokos are compared. First, she gave birth to a child even though there was no human father—she “preserved her virginity.” Second, though she “fell asleep” or died, she lives in the Kingdom of God. Both of these show us God’s greatness. Ask the class, “What does the troparion tell us that Mary does now, in the Kingdom?” (*She prays for us.*)

## 3 Creating Flowers

Group Activity - Divide the class into four groups. Tell them that in many Orthodox churches, flowers are blessed at the Feast of the Dormition. Ask them to make large paper “flowers” for the Theotokos to display on the wall of your classroom. Assign each group one of the four feasts you have studied over these four weeks. Have each group design a flower. With the materials you have provided, the students can make petals, each with one of these identifying words or phrases written on it:

- the name of the feast
- a line from the tropar or kontakion of the feast that tells something about it
- the date of the feast (Nativity 10/8; Entrance 11/21; Annunciation 3/25; Dormition 8/15.)
- one or more names of other people involved in the feast and/or shown in the festal icon

Let the groups design and arrange their flowers in any way they choose. They may want to have several “blank” petals interspersed with those they write on; they may choose to make a round flower or another shape; they may want to decorate their flowers, and use various colors of construction paper. Have them add a stem and leaves and then put the parts of their flowers together using tape and/or staples so that the finished products can be displayed on the classroom

wall. Use the completed flowers as a review of the feasts that have been part of this unit of study. Then, have the class members help you decide how to arrange them in a wall display.

## 4 Icon of the Dormition

Look at the icon of the feast together, using the description in The Icon Book to explain details. Ask students how the icon shows that Mary's death is a special one. (As the book points out, Jesus is shown taking her to the Kingdom, rather than leaving her to lie in the grave.) Remind students that Mary continues to pray for us. Look at the words of the kontakion of the feast together, and ask students what words tell us this. (The hymn describes the Theotokos as the one who "is constant in prayer and [is] our firm hope in her intercessions." Make sure students have understood the word "intercessions" to mean praying for another person, or asking on behalf of another person.) Remind students that flowers are often part of the Dormition Feast, and that Mary is the "Mother" to all of us as she was to the apostles. Have students take a few minutes to think of someone who is a mother even to those who are not her own children. Ask them to plan to give flowers to that person.

## 5 Closing Prayer

### **Kontakion of the Feast - Tone 2**

Neither the tomb, nor death, could hold the Theotokos,  
Who is constant in prayer and our firm hope in her intercessions.  
For being the Mother of Life, she was translated to life  
By the One who dwelt in her virginal womb!

Make sure students understand that the phrase "Mother of Life" refers to Mary as the mother of Jesus Christ.

# Icons of the Theotokos *(Ages 10-12)*

## Overview

**The Theotokos: compassion and protection**

## Objectives

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

- Compare the different iconographic representations of the Theotokos
- Compare the different icons to verses of the Akathist which portray similar emotions
- Recite the Hymn to the Theotokos

## Materials

- Copies of the feast day icons of the Theotokos that have been studied in previous lessons
- Copies of the Troparia from the feast days, not titled (available in Sessions 1-4)
- Copies of the following icons and troparia (not titled):
  - The Tikhvin Icon
  - The Icon of Our Lady of Vladimir:
  - Our Lady of the Sign
  - The Icon of the Protection
- *The Icon Book*

Note: Put up the icons so that they are visible to everyone.

## Resources

### Required Resources

- [Icon of The Theotokos \(PDF\)](#)
- [Icon of the Annuciation to the Theotokos \(Image\)](#)
- [Icon of the Nativity of the Theotokos \(Image\)](#)
- [Icon of the Theotokos of the Sign \(Image\)](#)
- [Icons of the Theotokos - Description\(HTML\)](#)
- [Troparia for Icons of the Theotokos\(HTML\)](#)

### Optional Resources

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

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

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

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

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

[The Icon Book \(Image\)](#)

[The Meaning of Icons \(Image\)](#)

## Procedure

### 1 Opening Prayer

#### Hymn to the Theotokos

**It is truly meet to bless you, O Theotokos,  
ever blessed and most pure, and the Mother of our God.  
More honorable than the Cherubim, and more glorious beyond  
compare than the Seraphim,  
without defilement you gave birth to God the Word.  
True Theotokos, we magnify you!**

Make certain the students understand that the Cherubim and Seraphim are ranks of angels. See the Introduction to the unit for guidance in talking about the word "defilement." "Magnify" means to glorify or praise.

### 2 Icons of the Theotokos

Icons of the Theotokos (20 minutes) Tell the class: During the past four sessions we have studied four feasts of the Theotokos. We know, though, that we honor the Theotokos more often than just on these feast days. We can ask the Theotokos to pray for us and remember us to God daily. We also honor her during the services of the Church, and with special hymns and Akathists, praising her and asking for her help. Icons are an important part of the worship of the Orthodox Church. There was a time when people misunderstood the use of icons, and still today some people don't understand them. Orthodox Christians teach that we do not pray to icons, but in fact pray through them, and that they help us to realize that Christ and the saints are present with us always. They also help us to understand important events in the life of Christ, the Theotokos or the saints. That's why we studied the icons of the feast days of the Theotokos. But there are many other icons of the Theotokos. Ask the class: Can anyone remember where an icon of the Theotokos is in our Church? Many people have a number of icons in their homes, usually in a special place, where they also pray. There are a number of styles or types of icons of the Theotokos. Many churches and individuals have several icons of the Theotokos.

Read together the appropriate page (page 2) from The Icon Book. Say: Here are some additional types of icons of the Theotokos. What differences do you see in the various types of icon? Have the students spend a little time looking at the icons, discussing the facial expressions and the positioning of Christ and the Theotokos.



Read *The Icons of the Theotokos - Description* from the *Resource Section*.

### 3 Hymnography and Icons

Read the 8 Troparia from the previous sessions and this one. Then:

- Discuss any words the students may have difficulty with.
- If there are only a few students, give them each several of the Troparia and ask them to match each to the icon they believe it goes with.
- If there are many students, assign numbers to the icons and letters to each Troparion. Give each student a piece of paper and have them match the numbers and letters.
- After they have completed this, go over the answers. Discuss what the Troparion tells us that helps to identify the icon.

### 4 Story: Miraculous icons

Throughout history, many miracles have occurred in association with icons of the Theotokos. Miracles of all types, especially spiritual and physical healings, have occurred. These icons have become increasingly valuable to the local communities and to the whole Orthodox Church. The Tikhvin Icon and the Icon of Our Lady of Vladimir are two such icons. For many years the Tikhvin Icon was kept in the United States, until the Communist government, which was hostile to the Orthodox Church, fell. Bishop John (Garklavs) and later his son, Fr. Sergei, were guardians of the icon. In July of 2004 it was returned to the Tikhvin Monastery in Russia.

According to tradition, the holy Icon was written by the Evangelist St Luke and sent by him to Antioch. From Antioch the Icon was sent to Jerusalem, and later, in the 5th Century, to Constantinople where a temple was built especially for the Icon in the Blachernae district. Although the Icon disappeared from Constantinople several times, the last time it left the ancient city was in 1383.

The Tikhvin wonder-working Icon of the Theotokos first appeared in the Novgorod region of Russia during the reign of Prince Dimitry Ivanovich (Donskoy). The first people to have seen the miraculous Icon were fishermen on Lake Ladoga, who witnessed an extremely bright light above them. Looking up, they saw the Icon of the Heavenly Queen airborne in the midst of bright rays of light. The Icon came to rest about 30 kilometers from the lake at Smolnova on the Oncha River. The residents built a chapel, and many were cured of ailments.

The Icon moved about from place to place, mysteriously, and in each place the people erected chapels and then temples. The Icon finally came to rest at Tikhvin, on the Tikhvin River in 1510. A wooden temple was built, dedicated to the Feast of the Holy Dormition, and many people came to venerate the Icon and became cured of their ailments. The Icon is especially revered for helping cure children's illnesses. Several times the wooden temple was leveled by fire but the holy Icon remained unharmed.

Through the efforts of Prince Basil Ivanovich (1505-1533) a stone church was built to replace the wooden temple which had burned down. During construction, a section of the arches crumbled, burying 20 workmen. Although everyone was sure the workmen had perished, after three days when the rubble was cleared all 20 were found to be alive through the intercession of the Holy Theotokos.

About 50 years later, a monastery was established at this church and a stone wall was constructed to enclose the temple and the monastic compound. The Tikhvin Monastery was saved from destruction by the intercessions of the Most Holy Theotokos in 1613 when the Swedish forces invaded the country and besieged the cloister.

### **The Mother of God "Vladimir" Icon**

Tradition holds that the "Vladimir Icon" was written by St Luke the Evangelist. He wrote the Icon on a board from the table on which our Lord Jesus Christ, His Most Holy Mother and the Righteous Joseph ate their meals. In 450, the sacred Icon was taken from Jerusalem to Constantinople. At the beginning of the 12th Century the Icon was transferred from Constantinople to Kiev and installed in the women's monastery of Vyshgorod. Soon the Icon was glorified by producing great miracles.

Prince Andrew Iurievich Bogolubsky, during his travels, saw a miraculous vision of the Mother of God directing him to take her Icon from Kiev (Vyshgorod) to the city of Vladimir. He fulfilled this task with great piety in 1160 and installed the holy Icon in the Church of the Holy Dormition in Vladimir (northeast of Moscow). From that time this icon became known as the 'Vladimir Icon' and was to be the source of many new and great miracles.

The feast of the Icon is celebrated three times during the year: May 21st, the day on which the memory of the Theotokos Vladimir Icon helped to save Russia from the invading Crimean-Mogay Horde of Makhmet-Grey; June 23rd, in memory of the saving of Russia by the miraculous protection of the Mother of God from the Golden Horde's Khan Akhmet in 1480; and on August 26th, to commemorate the Meeting of the Wonder-working Vladimir Icon in 1395, during the invasion of Moscow by the Tatar forces of Tamarlane.

(taken from [http://www.oca.org/pages/orth\\_chri/Feasts-and-Saints/iconsmpoymiracles.html#vladimir](http://www.oca.org/pages/orth_chri/Feasts-and-Saints/iconsmpoymiracles.html#vladimir) )

In memory of the protection rendered by the Most Holy Theotokos and the appearance of the Tikhvin Icon of the Heavenly Protectress, the Holy Church instituted June 26th as a feastday in honor of the Tikhvin Icon.

## **5 Closing Prayer**

Select one or more of the Troparia for the closing prayer.



