

Blessed is the Kingdom: An Orthodox Church School Curriculum



Lesson 10 3rd-5th grades

Icons and Relics: A Cloud of Witnesses

Objective: Students will understand the role icons and relics play in their faith and worship.



Opening Prayer

O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth who art everywhere and fillest all things. Treasury of Blessings, and Giver of Life: Come and abide in us, and cleanse us from every impurity, and save our souls, O Good one.

Liturgy Links

<https://www.oca.org/media/video/20th-aac-thursday-morning-divine-liturgy>

One is Holy

Skip to 1:47:07-1:47:32 for this portion

Supplies Needed

- Glass jar with lid
- Ice cubes
- Boiling water
- Aerosol spray hairspray
- Black paper

Lesson Introduction

5 min

Start by **asking**:

Have any of you ever ridden in an airplane and looked out the window when you were up in the sky? If so, what did you see?

Take answers, and then **lead** them to "clouds". Then **continue**:

How did being surrounded by clouds feel? (Peaceful, quiet, eerie, out of this world) Today we are going to create a cloud together.

Complete the Cloud Experiment as follows:

1. Pour the boiling water into the jar, and swirl the water in the jar to heat the edges of the jar.
2. Turn the lid upside down, so you have a lip to hold the ice cubes in, then place ice cubes in the lid.
3. Spray the aerosol spray hair spray into the jar, then place the upside down lid on top of the jar.
4. Hold the black paper behind the jar for optimal viewing of the cloud forming. Once the cloud has formed feel free to remove the lid and watch the cloud float out of the jar.

Then **ask**:

Do you see how the cloud filled the jar? It surrounded the edges. It filled the whole jar. Today we are going to learn about the cloud of witnesses that join us in worshiping.



Lesson—25 min

Supplies Needed

- Printable pages of the interior of Orthodox churches
- Printable page of a reliquary
- Bible
- Picture of your family
- Information about your parish antimension and the relic contained in it
- One per student--Printed iconostas & iconostas icon page
- Glue sticks

Teacher Resources

OCA Essential Orthodox Christian Beliefs: A Manual for Adult Instruction

<https://www.oca.org/cdn/PDFs/2023-0609-EOCB.pdf>

Chapter 5 The Communion of Saints in the Orthodox Church

5 Minute Bonus

Orthodox 360 Church Tours

<https://orthodox360.com/360-tours/>

Visit the above webpage and go on a 360 tour of an Orthodox Church.

Start by **saying**:

Let's look at some pictures of the inside of Orthodox churches. (Show the printable pages of Orthodox churches) What do you notice when looking at these pictures? If you were standing in each of these churches, what would be surrounding you?

Take answers, then **say**:

Icons cover the interior walls of our Orthodox churches so that we are surrounded by Saints. We are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses.

Read Hebrews 12:1, then **say**:

The icons of Saints that surround us are there to support us in our path to become more like Christ.

Show a picture of your family, and then **ask**:

Here's a picture of my family. This hangs in my house, and I have others like it. Do you have pictures of your family hung up at home? If you visit your grandparents, do they have pictures of their family hung up? Why do you think our mom or dad or grandparents do this?

After **hearing** answers, **say**:

They love us and miss us. The pictures remind them of those that support them and help them. Just like our parents and grandparents, the church loves its family and wants to have their pictures on its walls. It helps to keep the Saints that we love in our lives and memories.

Icons are like sacred or holy windows into heaven, and so we venerate or honor them. Just like we would kiss members of our family, we kiss icons to send them the love we feel toward the person pictured. How do we venerate an icon?

Take answers, and then **explain**:

We approach quietly and calmly, and then we cross ourselves, say a brief prayer, and gently kiss the icon. Where do we kiss the icon? (on the hand, feet, or clothing, but not the face)

Why wouldn't we kiss the face? (It's too personal or forward. We follow the examples in the Bible of people washing others feet or just touching Christ's clothing.)

Practice venerating an icon as a class, and then **ask**:

Sometimes we venerate a relic of a Saint too. What is a relic?

Lesson Continued

Additional Teacher Resources

Icons

<https://www.oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/worship/the-church-building/icons>

Altar Table

<https://www.oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/worship/the-church-building/altar-table>

Lives of the Saints

<https://www.oca.org/saints/lives>

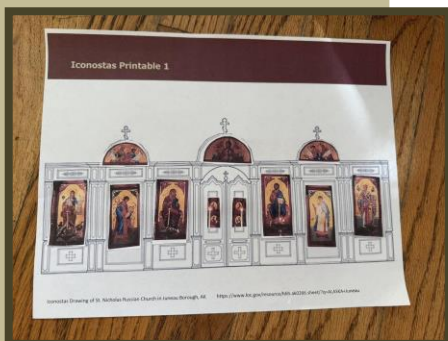
Supplemental Ideas

Cloud Spotting

Head outside to look at the sky and spot some clouds. You can even make a Cloud Viewer by cutting a rectangle out of the center of a piece of construction paper.

Family Portraits

Have students bring in a picture of their family. Discuss how their family members support each other.



Take answers, and then **say**:

A relic is a piece of a bone of a Saint. It's a small piece that is saved in a reliquary or a small chest.

If you have any in your parish, **share** these with your class, **discuss** the Saint that is honored, and **venerate** the relics. If you do not have any in your parish, **share** the printable picture of a reliquary. Then **continue**:

Relics help to remind us that death is not the end. Our connection with Christ continues. In fact, every Church has a relic. In order to serve Liturgy, every Church needs to have a piece of a bone of a martyr. It is sewn into the back of the antimimension or cloth that covers the altar table. Antimimension means "instead of the table". The relic in it reminds us that the Church is built on the lives of God's holy people or Saints.

Prior to class, find out which Saint is included in your parish antimimension. Using the Lives of the Saints resource, you could prepare to tell your students about this Saint.

Finally, **pass out** the iconostas printable page and cut out iconostas icons page. **Ask**:

In all the churches we looked at today, they all had one of these. Do you know what this is called? (Iconostas) This is an icon screen that shows our connection to Christ, His mother, and all the angels and Saints. It helps show our unity with God. The icon of the Theotokos and Child and the icon of the glorified Christ stand on either side of the royal doors.

Have the students **glue** these two icons into place on their iconostas printable. Then **continue explaining and gluing on the following**:

On the royal doors between Christ and Mary are the four evangelists who wrote the Gospels. Do you know their names? (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John)

Beside Christ and Mary are angels. Then on Mary's side is John the Baptist and on Christ's side is St. Nicholas. These spaces generally hold a Saint that is important to the parish or area that the parish is located in.

Finally, we have Mary above the royal doors with her hands raised appealing to God in prayer. This would typically be above the altar area. Other areas on the iconostas would be filled with additional Saints.

Lesson Activities

Cloud Dough—10 min

Supplies needed: hair conditioner ¼ cup per student; corn starch ½ cup per student; 2 Ziploc bags per student; cookie cutters or play dough scissors/knives if desired

Dump together ¼ cup hair conditioner and ½ cup corn starch per student into a Ziploc bag. Securely close bag, then have student mix it by squishing the bag. Add more of either as needed to get best consistency. It should be more dry than wet, but not crumbly.

Once mixed allow students time to be creative and play with their cloud dough. Package their portion for them to take home. Remind them of the cloud of witnesses or Saints that surround them.



Cloud of Witnesses Relays—10 min

Supplies needed: large bowl; large bag of cotton balls; one spoon per student; one clothespin per student

Relay 1: Give each student a clothespin. Sprinkle the cotton balls on the floor around the room. Give the class one minute to collect as many cotton balls as they can using only their clothespin. Place them into the bowl to create a “Cloud of Witnesses”.

Relay 2: Give each student a spoon. Again sprinkle the cotton balls on the floor around the room. Give the class one minute to collect as many cotton balls as they can using only their spoon. Again place them into the bowl to create a “Cloud of Witnesses”.

As time allows have them try again with less or more time. Or see how long it takes them to collect ALL of the cotton balls.



Closing Thoughts— 5 min

Ask: *Who surrounds us? (The Saints) How do we venerate or show love to the Saints? (Kiss icons or relics)*

Have each student practice venerating an icon one more time before leaving class.

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!

Church Interior Printable 1



Christ the Saviour Cathedral, Miami

Church Interior Printable 2



St. Nicholas Orthodox Church in McKees Rocks, PA

Reliquary Printable 3

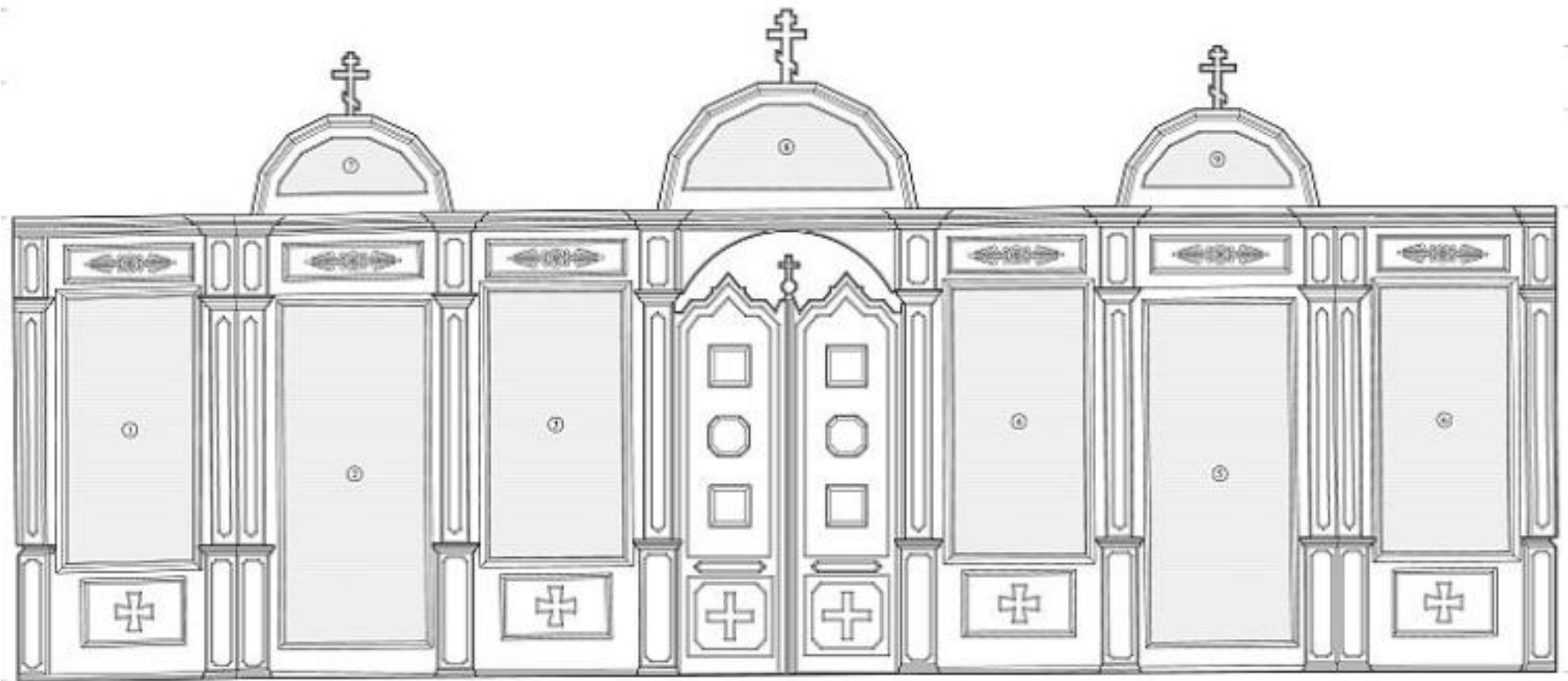


Relics of St John Maximovich



Holy Apostles Orthodox Church in Mechanicsburg, PA reliquary boxes

Iconostas Printable 1



Iconostas Printable 2

