



CATEGORY | INTRODUCTION

Our Family in Church GRADE 4

ORTHODOX SYRIAN
SUNDAY SCHOOL
ASSOCIATION

Diocese of UK, Europe and Africa



ORTHODOX SYRIAN SUNDAY SCHOOL ASSOCIATION OF THE EAST



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Category
Introduction

2025

OSSAE : DIOCESE OF UK, EUROPE & AFRICA

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON SERIES
GRADE 4

Publication Information

OSSAE - Orthodox Syrian Sunday school Association of the East
The Malankara (Indian) Orthodox Church

Acknowledgements: This publication is based on the original work prepared by the Joint Curriculum Committee of the Diocese of South-West America and the North-East American Diocese of the Malankara (Indian) Orthodox Church.

Adaptations for the UK, Europe & Africa region were made by the Curriculum Review Co-ordinators, OSSAE-Diocese of U.K., Europe & Africa, with the permission of the Joint Curriculum Committee of the Diocese of South-West America and the North-East American Diocese, to tailor the content to local needs and preferences.

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Second Edition : January 2025

FOREWORD



**MALANKARA ORTHODOX
SYRIAN CHURCH**(INDIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH)

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No. E-015/AMS/2024

11 January 2024

FOREWORD

As we embrace the dawning of a new era in the Sunday School of our Diocese, it is with profound gratitude and joy that we introduce the newly launched Syllabus & text books. This milestone is not merely a culmination of efforts but a new beginning, charting a course for faith-filled learning.

Special recognition is due to the Director Fr. Jacob Mathew and the team of dedicated authors of the Diocese of Southwest America of our Church who have tirelessly woven this tapestry of knowledge and devotion. Their commitment to creating a curriculum that speaks to the heart of our tradition is truly commendable.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to His Grace Zachariah Mar Nicholovos and His Grace Thomas Mar Ivanios, our Metropolitans, whose blessings and guidance have been the bedrock of this endeavour. Their spiritual leadership has been a guiding light throughout this year-long journey of preparation and transition.

Our teachers, those steadfast beacons of knowledge, deserve a resounding acknowledgment for their adaptability and perseverance, ensuring a smooth transition to this new curriculum. Their dedication to the spiritual growth of our youth is a testament to their faith and love for the Church.

In line with the Apostle Paul's exhortation in Titus 1:9 (NRSV), "He must hold firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it," we recognise the pivotal role of sound teaching in nurturing faith. This verse echoes the mission of our Sunday School - to steadfastly impart the truth of the Gospel, fostering a resilient and enlightened community of faith.

To the teachers and students embarking on this sacred educational journey, may you be filled with enthusiasm and wisdom. May your hearts and minds be fertile grounds for the seeds of divine knowledge to flourish.

The significance of the Sunday School in our community cannot be overstated. It is here that the foundations of faith are laid, where the stories and teachings of our church come to life, and where the future guardians of Orthodoxy begin their spiritual journey.

A special word of gratitude is extended to Fr. Anoop M. Abraham, Vice President of the Sunday School for the Diocese. His leadership, along with the Director Mr. Simon Chacko, Curriculum Coordinator Mr. Suresh Daniel, Trustee Dr. Baby Cherian, Secretary Mr. Vinod Philip & Joint Secretary Mr. Robin Thomas, Text books Layout & Designer Dr. Febe Francis, Liturgical Advisory Panel Fr. Rohith Skariah, Fr. Aswin Kallopara, Icon & Image Advisor Fr. Jeelson Varghese, Media wing support Fr. Varghese Mathew, Fr. Stanly David James, Web & online updates: Mr. Byju John, All the reviewers from various parishes across the Diocese, trainers from the American & UEA Dioceses, and all team members, have been instrumental in bringing this vision to fruition.

As we conclude, let us move forward in the spirit of Orthodox tradition, with hope and prayer that these textbooks serve not only as vessels of knowledge but also as lanterns lighting the path towards spiritual maturity and devotion.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

+ Metropolitan Abraham Stephanos

IN SEARCH OF
'WHAT CANNOT
BE SEEN'
2 COR. 4:18

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Glory to the Triune God!

I would like to express my deepest gratitude and sincere appreciation to all those who have contributed towards the development of this Orthodox Sunday school textbook for the new curriculum. It has been a long and challenging journey but with the help and support of many individuals and organizations, we have finally reached this milestone.

First and foremost, I would like to thank our Diocesan Metropolitan H G Abraham Mar Stephanos for His Grace's tireless effort to reform our Sunday School to meet the needs of our future generation by implementing the new curriculum and heartfelt gratitude to all the officials and key personalities of Northeast and Southwest American Diocesan Sunday Schools who are the backbone of this new curriculum and Talmido.

Great appreciation to all the curriculum development committee members of our diocese for their selfless efforts in editing a comprehensive and relevant textbook that caters to the spiritual needs of our Sunday School students. Your dedication, expertise, and commitment to the project were crucial in bringing this book to fruition. Special thanks to the clergy members of our diocese who generously shared their knowledge, wisdom, and experiences in shaping the lessons and activities in this book. Your input has helped to create a well-rounded curriculum that reflects the teachings and traditions of our Orthodox Faith.

I am also grateful to the head teachers and teachers who took the time to review and provide valuable feedback on the content and structure of the textbook. Your insights and suggestions have greatly enhanced the quality of the material and have made it more engaging and accessible to our young learners.

I would also like to acknowledge the role of Holy Episcopal Synod and OSSAE officials for their unwavering support and encouragement towards this new curriculum. It is with their guidance and vision that we were able to compile a textbook that aligns with the goals and objectives of our Holy Church and Diocesan Sunday School education.

Finally, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to the students who will be using this textbook. Your enthusiasm and eagerness to learn about our faith is what motivates us to continue improving and developing resources for your spiritual growth.

In conclusion, I would like to thank everyone who has been a part of this journey and has contributed in any way towards the creation of this Orthodox Sunday school textbook. May it serve as a valuable resource for many generations to come and may it inspire and nurture the faith of our young Orthodox students. Thank you all for your support and dedication.

Fr Anoop Abraham Malayil
Vice-President OSSAE – UK Europe and Africa

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Let's meet the George family.

Mr. and Mrs. George have two children. **Christina** is 10, and **Tommy** is 5 years old. Each week, the Georges attend St. Thomas Orthodox Church, where they uncover new mysteries. They start preparing on Saturday night to attend Holy Qurbana on Sunday mornings. Afterwards, they go to Sunday school, and each week the George children learn amazing things about God and His Holy Church.

They learn from their Achen (or priest), **Father Alexander**. They also learn from his wife, **Mary Kochamma**.

They help each other and show the love of Jesus Christ. Let's follow the George family to uncover the great mysteries of God and the practises of His Holy Church each week.



LESSON

1

True Worship

What is worship? How do we know it is true? In this lesson we see worship is how we show our love for God. We also learn Orthodox worship was kept by the Church since the time of the Holy Apostles and given to us by Jesus. All Christians love God, but to be in communion with Him is through the teachings and the Holy Mysteries. We will explore how Sacraments connect us to God and understand true worship.

Vocabulary Words

Orthodox “Right worship”, “right glory”, “straight path”, “correct belief”

Sacraments/Mysteries A visible sign of an increase in God’s grace

Grace God’s life in us

Sh’himo Syriac word meaning “the common” prayers of each day, prayed privately or as a community with others. Also spelled Shehimo.



It’s Saturday night and the George family is at home. Mr. George calls his family to the prayer wall and then the family begins saying evening prayers from the **Sh’himo**. Mrs. George reads the Gospel reading for the evening.

A restless Tommy asks his mother, “Why can’t we watch a movie tonight?”

Mrs. George sets the Bible in her hands down on the coffee table in front of her while giving Tommy a knowing look. “Remember, on Saturday evenings we get ready for the Holy Qurbana, Tommy.”

Christina nods and says, “That’s how we get ready to be with God in a special way.”

When they finish praying, the family says goodnight to one another and goes to bed early so that they can wake up energized and ready to worship God.

On Sunday morning everyone in the George family is ready to go to Holy Qurbana, except for Tommy. Christina tries to help Tommy get ready, but he has so many questions! One by one he rattles them off, “Didn’t we pray last night? Why do we need to go so early? Why do I have to wear fancy clothes? Why do we need to go to church to pray to God? Can we get McDonald’s after?”

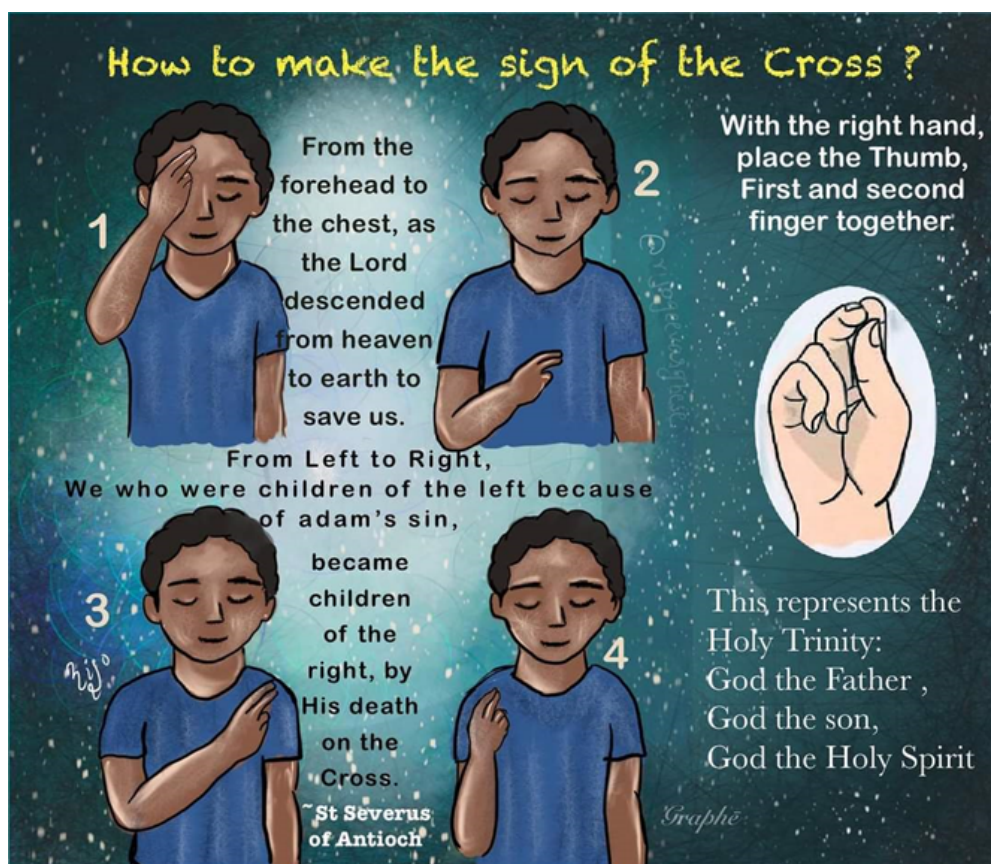
Christina responds by asking, “Tommy, do you know how worship began at the beginning of the Bible? God showed Moses how the heavens were arranged to worship Him (**Genesis 1:1, Psalm 19**). The prophet Isaiah also saw this vision,” says Christina, ignoring his other questions. “In Sunday School last week, Alexander Achen taught us that Jesus Christ taught the Apostles to celebrate Holy Qurbana to remember Him. Do you know, this is also in the Bible in the book of Acts (**Acts 2:42**). They celebrated it every Sunday! So that’s why we do it. It’s how the church has always done it. There’s a lot to see and do!”

When the family arrives at the church, they take off their shoes but Tommy grumbles about having to do so. His dad reminds him that Moses, also, had to take his shoes off before approaching the burning bush (**Exodus 3:5**). This captures Tommy’s interest. He never thought about it like that!



Moses and the burning bush

Then they each make the Sign of the Cross and pray: **“In reverence will I enter Your house and offer my vows to You.”**



Mr. George puts on a white robe and begins to help Alexander Achen, the Shemashens (Deacons), and other altar servers with morning prayers and Holy Qurbana (HQ). Each person who serves in the altar has a special role to play in assisting the priest and serving the Church. Mrs. George and the children take their HQ books out from their bag, find the right section and sing their parts

along with Kochamma and the rest of the Church. Right after receiving the kaimuthu (blessings), Christina tells Tommy that these church songs are ancient and have been sung for over 2000 years! The Church members remain standing while they worship, to help them stay alert and pay attention, just as Jesus asked us to “keep watch” for His coming (**St. Matthew 24:42**). After hearing his older sister explain why they go to church early in the morning, Tommy started paying more attention to these details.

Around noon, Holy Qurbana is over and after a light snack, Sunday School begins. Alexander Achen always insists that if you receive Holy Qurbana, you must eat something right afterwards to break the fast. “Receiving Jesus Christ is a big festival and there is no fasting after one has received Christ into you”, he told the children again today. Tommy wants to play right after the Holy Qurbana, but Achen insists he finishes his snack first.



At the group Sunday School session, Achen asked a question: “Why do we celebrate Holy Qurbana in the Holy Altar Room?” Everyone was quiet and no answers were given.

Achen answered the question himself: “The altar and Holy Qurbana are the replica of heaven, and our worship is a way to give ourselves fully to God. The Holy Qurbana, or Eucharist, is how we worship God with the whole Christian Church, angels, saints, martyrs and our own loved ones who have died. Eucharist means ‘thanksgiving’ and is also known in the Orthodox Church as the Divine Liturgy”.

Mrs. George teaches Christina’s class today. The textbook lesson talks about the 5 essential parts of Orthodox Worship, which are Praise, Thanksgiving, Repentance, Supplication, and Dedication. “We see each of these parts in the Holy Qurbana. During our worship:

1. We sing praises to the one Lord our God
2. We thank God for what He has given us
3. We say we are sorry for our sins and mistakes
4. We ask God to take care of us
5. We recite our beliefs together.

In **Deuteronomy 6:4-5**, we learn that there is only one Lord our God and that we shall “love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength [and mind]” - **St. Luke 10:27; St.**

Mark 12:30).”

While driving back, Christina tries to remember her lesson for the day. She remembers that today’s lesson also teaches that “by participating in the five parts of Orthodox worship and attending the Divine Liturgy every Sunday, we show God our love and live our faith. We also participate in Holy Sacraments, all of which are closely related to the Eucharist.”

They stop by the grocery store and Mr. George goes inside to get a loaf of bread while Mrs. George, Christina, and Tommy choose to stay in the car. While waiting for her dad, she asks her mother, “Mommy! What happens to the people who do not participate in the Holy Sacraments?”

Mrs. George replies, “That is a good question. Sadly, not everyone believes that they need to participate in the Holy Sacraments, but we believe that Christ commanded us to do so, and that God is present in the Sacraments in an incredible way. Sacraments help us live our lives to the fullness, and to cope with the problems that we may face.”

“I feel sorry for those who chose not to come to the Church today”, says Christina.

“Well, God loves them anyway”, says Mrs. George to her daughter. Tommy starts to doze off. Seeing him start to sleep, Mrs. George continues in a whisper to her daughter, “By receiving the Sacrament of Holy Communion, we increase in God’s grace, which is His life in us, and He becomes physically a part of us, too. By participating in the Sacraments, we grow closer to God and receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit. However, not all Christians believe and practice the way we do. For us, we worship in our church every Sunday just like the Apostles did to remember the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

“How do we know that this worship is the right worship, Mom?”, asks Christina again. Mrs. George stretches her hand and strokes her daughter’s hair. She feels happy that her daughter was asked such important questions.

“We follow an Orthodox tradition of worship, dear,” she replies. “This means that we accept and closely follow the ancient traditional beliefs and customs that were established by Jesus Christ (**St. Matthew 16:16**). These traditions were practised by the Apostles themselves (**Acts 2:42-47**), and through many generations, it was passed on down to us (**Jude 1:3**). Our worship reminds us that Christ was both fully human and fully divine. Our worship allows us to live our faith in unity with the early Christians, our faithful departed, saints, and the angels in heaven”, she adds. “Our Lord directly taught the Apostles and the early Church first how to worship. The Church has been practising this same worship from the beginning and now we do too.”

Mr. George comes back with the groceries and sees Tommy asleep. He jokes, “Our worship is beautiful and true, but afterwards, we all need a nap!”

Remember

There are five essential parts of Orthodox worship; praise, thanksgiving, repentance, supplication, and dedication.



Remember

Our worship reminds us that Christ was both fully human and fully divine. Our worship allows us to live our faith in unity with the early Christians, our faithful departed, saints and the angels in heaven.



Learning Outcome Check

Orthodoxy is the continuation of the Ancient Church.



Reflection Questions

1. Identify two ways in which our worship during Holy Qurbana is similar to that of the ancient Church and is a continuation of heavenly worship.
2. Name one of the five essential elements of Orthodox Christian worship.
3. Why is it important to attend Holy Qurbana (Divine Liturgy) every Sunday?
4. Find where we say the following response during Holy Qurbana to the throne of God surrounded by the angelic choir that worships God and the vision of the prophet Isaiah (**Isaiah 6:3**):

*Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God Almighty
By whose Glory the heaven and earth are filled,
Hosanna in the highest!*

LESSON

2

The Liturgy and Sacred Traditions

What is Sacred Tradition? Are there parts of Divine Liturgy? In this lesson we learn more about the Holy Qurbana. We will also focus on the main parts of the Divine Liturgy and the Sh'himo, which is the common prayer book used for prayer at home and the Church.

Vocabulary Words

Liturgy “The work of the people”, special occasions of worship to God, where one receives Grace from God.

Tradition “Handed down”, “kept from before”.

Sacred “Holy”, “set apart”, “consecrated”

Qurbana “The offering,” “the sacrifice,” “the oblation.”

Anaphora “The lifting up” (another name for The Liturgy of the Eucharist)

Qauma This is the beginning of all prayers in the Syriac Tradition.

Martyrs Followers of Christ who were persecuted, tortured, and killed because of their Faith

Confessors Like martyrs, these followers of Christ were tortured for their faith but survived



The George family gathers to pray together every day using the **Sh'himo**, our book of daily prayers from the Syriac liturgical tradition. It is the common prayers that they pray at home, or with the rest of the Church (the people). It includes the Qauma, the Nicene Creed, Psalms of King David, many hymns written by the Syriac Church Fathers like St. Ephrem, and other beautiful prayers. Christina, who is 10, notices something about the Friday prayers. She asks her mother, “Why is there so much more about the Holy Cross in the Friday Sh'himo prayers than any other prayers during the week?” Mrs. George answers, “The entire year in the life of the church follows a liturgical calendar that teaches us about the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lord. The liturgical calendar is a bit like the seasons of the year for Orthodox Christians and is also part of our journey to God. We also have a weekly calendar that guides us each day, so every Friday we remember the Cross of our Lord and God.”

“But Jesus Christ was crucified once, on one Friday. Why do we pray about the Cross every Friday?” asks Christina.

Mrs. George answers her, “Just like the yearly liturgical calendar follows the life of Christ, so does our week in the Shehimo prayers. And just like the liturgical calendar and the prayer week follow the life of Christ, so does each individual Divine Liturgy. Just like the morning reminds us of the sun, so every Friday reminds us of the Cross of our Lord God, and every Sunday reminds us that He rose from the dead.”

Remember

Just like the yearly liturgical calendar follows the life of Christ, so does our week in the Sh'himo prayer. And just like the liturgical calendar and the prayer week follow the life of Christ, so does each individual Divine Liturgy.



<i>General Sh'himo Prayer Themes For Each Day of the Week</i>	
Sunday	Resurrection
Monday & Tuesday	Repentance
Wednesday	Theotokos (St. Mary, the God-bearer, Mother of God)
Thursday	The Holy Apostles, The Saints
Friday	The Holy Cross, The Martyrs, and the Confessors
Saturday	The Faithful Departed

Mr. George was listening to the whole conversation and chimes in, “Sunday Qurbana is a Holy Tradition that also remembers the whole life of Christ, from His birth to Resurrection, Ascension, and even focuses on awaiting His glorious coming again.”

That Sunday, Fr. Alexander spoke about where the Holy Qurbana comes from. He said, “We follow many special traditions, which means things handed down, that are unique to being an Orthodox Christian. These traditions help us grow in our faith, in our knowledge of Christ and His Holy Church, and to grow closer to God. We call these the Holy Traditions, or Sacred Traditions. These were handed down from the Holy Apostles who received them from Jesus Christ. They are holy.”

Learning Outcome Check

Understand the basic context of Liturgy as well as liturgical tradition.

“The Holy Traditions He gave us include the Liturgies, which we all participate in, as we worship God. The most important Liturgy that we Christians focus upon is the Divine Liturgy, celebrated on all Sundays and Feast Days. The first time this was done was during the Lord’s Passover, also called His Pesaha or the Mystical Supper. Christ and His disciples prepared bread and wine for this Passover. This Jewish festival honors the innocent lamb that was sacrificed in remembrance of their deliverance from Egypt. While the others were eating something else, Jesus took the bread and blessed it, setting it apart (making it sacred).

He said the words we Orthodox Christians never forget. He said ‘Take, eat of it. This is My Body which is broken for you and for many’...and He also took the cup and said, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is My Blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.’

“...So Jesus Christ our God made this the great feast of our people, the Church. Liturgy is what the family of God does. It is simply part of the family life of God, and we need it to be who we are, One with Him, one with each other, as He designed for our life and salvation.”

Later that day, Christina’s 5-year-old brother Tommy, spoke to the whole family during dinner, “I know tradition means something that was handed down, but how did they hand it down? Did they put it in a box and mail it?!”

Christina answers, “Haha! Tommy, you are very funny! Holy Tradition is the Church family’s way of life handed down, and it can’t be put in a box. Our priests and bishops keep the traditions the same for every generation. Therefore, we experience the same Jesus Christ as the Apostles did. The Apostles ordained bishops, who ordained bishops, and so on, all the way down to the Orthodox bishops of our times, who keep the same faith.”

Do You Know?

Holy Tradition is how the Holy Spirit chooses to work through the Holy Church. First set up by the Old Testament way of life by the Jews, the people of Israel, who listened to the Holy Spirit, then revealed by Christ and the Holy Spirit in the New Testament way of life called the Holy Church, the New Israel.



The mystical supper

Mrs. George jumps in, “Good question, Tommy, and good answer Christina. We have a tradition that St. James of Jerusalem organized the first Holy Qurbana. On the first Wednesday after Pentecost, the Apostles were all ready to celebrate the first public Holy Qurbana after Jesus Christ ascended to heaven. This is why all the Qurbanas in the Holy Church came from the original Qurbana there in Jerusalem, calling it the Liturgy of St. James. He was decided to be the main and first Archbishop of Jerusalem, appointed by the rest of the Apostles...”

“...From Jerusalem the whole Church grew and spread everywhere. The Apostles all used the Holy Qurbana which is also called the Divine Liturgy. They had the same parts - Liturgy of the Word and Liturgy of the Eucharist. They did this in every land they went to! The first Christians in Jerusalem mostly spoke Aramaic language in their homes. Syriac, a dialect of Jesus’ own language, was also very important in the spreading of the Gospel, the Holy Qurbana, and all the Holy Traditions. We received these Syriac liturgical traditions in India, and are so grateful, because they directly connect us to the mother Church in Jerusalem. They gave us the Sh’hima, the Church calendar, and shaped the Holy Qurbana we have.”



From the Liturgy of the Word

Mr. George just had to add a little more, because the Holy Qurbana is so important to him, too. He said, “Yes, just like Jesus and the disciples prepared the offering of bread and wine, we do the same first, called Thuyobo (Preparation), which usually happens during the morning prayers before the opening of the curtain for the Altar procession. The Holy Qurbana has two main parts after the preparation, which are “The Liturgy of the Word” and “The Liturgy of the Eucharist”. This 2nd part is also called the Anaphora, which is the lifting up of our minds, thoughts, and hearts to God, the Father, with the perfect offering of His Only Son, Jesus Christ.”

Christina says, “Oh yeah! We first receive Jesus the Word through hearing Him in the Gospel. In the Liturgy of the Eucharist, we receive Jesus the Word, His Holy Body and Blood, in the form of bread and wine!”

Tommy is a bit confused. “How does the bread and wine become Jesus’ Body and Blood?” Christina answers, “The priesthood of Jesus Christ is in the Achen. In the Liturgy of the Eucharist, Achen calls down the Holy Spirit and the bread and wine is transformed in a mysterious way that our eyes cannot see.”

Mr. George adds, “Jesus says ‘Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.’ So, we believe just as Jesus said, that this is His Body and Blood. The priest’s prayers ask for everything to be done, just as the Apostles did. Church traditions have been handed down to us for over 2,000 years now.



From the Liturgy of the Eucharist

Annual Liturgical Periods

Orthodox Christians also follow a liturgical calendar, meaning we have feast days, fasts, readings, and prayers that both teach and help us to remember the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

<i>Annual Liturgical Periods</i>	
Period 1	Annunciation/Nativity
Period 2	Epiphany
Period 3	Great Lent
Period 4	Resurrection
Period 5	Pentecost
Period 6	Transfiguration
Period 7	The Holy Cross

Just like we remember birthdays, anniversaries, and other meaningful days during the year, the order of our liturgical calendar helps us remember important parts of Jesus Christ's ministry.

Reflection Questions

1. Name a few of our Orthodox Liturgical traditions.
2. What are the two main parts of the Divine Liturgy after Thuyobo/Preparation?
3. What is the name of the original Liturgy of the Church, which began in Jerusalem?
4. How does the Holy Spirit work in the Holy Church?
5. How did we receive the same Holy Qurbana from Jerusalem, the mother Church?

LESSON

3

More than a Book

What is the Bible? In this lesson, we will look at how the Holy Bible is from the Church and connected to Holy Qurbana and our way of life. Everything the Church does is supported by the Bible.

Vocabulary Words

Holy Bible The Holy Scriptures written by the Church, for the Church, to be read in the Church

Koruyo Reader, this is officially one of the steps

Pentateuch The 5 books of Moses, also called the Torah

Prophet Mouthpiece of God who often had future events revealed to him/her in order for the people to turn back to God

Authority The final document or person with undisputable information or evidence has the final word on any disputes.



After a long Friday at school, Christina heads home for the weekend. It was a stressful week with tests and extracurricular activities. While she waits for her dad to pick her up, she notices her friend, Sarah, with her Bible open and reading intently. Christina decides to join her and strike up a conversation.

“Hey Sarah, you’re reading the Bible! Which part are you reading right now?”

“Hey Christina! I’m reading Genesis in the Old Testament. It’s the first book you know?” Sarah answers proudly. “I’ve been trying to study the Scriptures more because our pastor says the Bible is the ultimate **authority** in our lives as Christians.”

Christina is confused. As soon as she gets home, she grabs her notebook, a pen, and asks her father about the Orthodox Christian beliefs about the Holy Bible and if it is the “ultimate authority” in all Christian lives. Her father smiles and begins to explain.

“The Holy Scriptures are very important to our faith as Orthodox Christians and the Holy Bible is one of the most important traditions that came from our very own Orthodox Church. The Christians who lived during and just after Jesus Christ only had the Old Testament scriptures, teachings, and traditions that they heard and learned from Jesus Christ Himself or from His Disciples. Even though the Holy Church began to spread after the Feast of Pentecost, it was not until many years after Jesus’ death and Resurrection that the Holy Apostles even began to write down what Jesus Christ had taught them. It was at least 15 to 25 or more years before these New Testament writings like the Gospels and Epistles were even written down. In fact, until the 4th Century (301-400 A.D.), there wasn’t officially a “New Testament”. So, even the Holy Scriptures are a collection of books that the Orthodox Church chose to be in one collection, which is the Holy Bible. The Bible was inspired by the Holy Spirit and compiled by the Church and for the Church. It is to be read and understood in the Church, and also because of the Church.”

Christina writes as much as she can in her notebook and says, “Hold on, Appa, you’re going too fast. Okay, got it.... okay, keep going, Appa.” Mr. George laughs as he continues,

“These Scriptures are the written revelation or teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. So, if you listen closely, every Sunday during the Holy Qurbana, we hear a lot of readings from the Bible. Right at the end of Sapro (Morning Prayers), there are readings from the Old Testament. Next, in the Liturgy of the Word, a **Qoruyo** (reader), a deacon, or other altar servants read the New Testament epistles or letters from the North and South sides of the altar. Then the priest reads from one of the Gospels. The main difference between these two sections is that the New Testament focuses on the life of Jesus on earth and the life of the Church after Jesus’s death and resurrection. In the Old Testament, Jesus has not yet come to earth and become incarnate. Even though Jesus’ name is not mentioned in the Old Testament, all of the stories and lessons of the Old Testament point to and predict Jesus’s birth, death, and resurrection!”

Christina is eagerly writing down as many details as she can. Seeing her enthusiasm, her father slows down so that she can write comfortably.

“For example,” he continues, “in the Old Testament you remember that there is a story about the prophet Jonah who was swallowed by a great fish and stayed there for three days and three nights. Although Jesus Christ was never in the belly of a sea creature, he was buried in the earth for three days, right? Just like Jonah. After His Crucifixion, Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Meanwhile, and after his three days in the belly of a great fish, Jonah was returned to the land. This is just one Old Testament story that points to Jesus Christ. There are countless ways the Old Testament prepares us to understand who Jesus Christ is. The Bible is one book among our Scriptures that teaches us how much God the Father loves us and how he will save us through God the Word, His Son, Jesus Christ.”

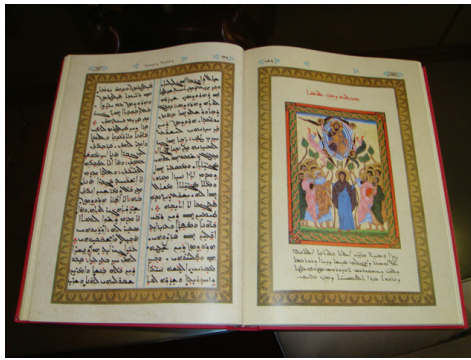
“The Bible is one tool that God has given us to help us learn more about who He is. The best and ultimate way that God reveals or teaches us about Him is through Jesus Christ Himself, and He mostly does this through the witness of the Holy Church. In the Gospel of St. John chapter one, we learn that “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” When God became man, Jesus Christ, He gave us the clearest picture of Who God is.”

Remember

The Bible is one tool that God has given us to help us learn more about who He is. The best and ultimate way that God reveals or teaches us about Him is through Jesus Christ Himself and He mostly does this through the witness of the Holy Church.



Suddenly, it all makes sense to Christina. “So, the **Holy Bible**, our Holy Scriptures, are really all about Jesus, who is the Word of God. And this Bible is the Bible the Church put together?!!” Christina is amazed. She had never learned this history before.



“Yes!” Says Mr. George. “And the Bible is a result of the Holy Tradition of the One, Holy Church. This same Holy Bible shows that the authority is with the Church through the Apostles (St. Matthew 19:28), the Bishops, and priests. The Scriptures are the inspired truth of God in human words; the Church is the pillar and ground of that truth.” (Orthodox Study Bible, pg. 1636) (I Timothy 3:15, “**The Church, which is the pillar and ground of Truth**”)

That Sunday at St. Thomas Orthodox Church, Mary Kochamma led an educational class for all the families about the main sections of the Holy Bible. The Georges are in attendance, and they invite Christina’s friend, Sarah, too. Christina and Sarah are both interested in learning more.

“Welcome everyone!” Mary Kochamma says enthusiastically, “And a blessed Sunday to you all! I’m so glad that you are all here, as we continue to increase our education in the Holy Faith, focusing today on the Holy Scriptures, Thiruvezhuthukal, or in Syriac, Ktove Qadishe. We often say, ‘the Holy Bible,’ but what does it cover?” “Our official Bible is the Syriac Peshitta, but it is hard to get a copy, so we will use the Orthodox Study Bible. Every Bible has two main parts - the Old and the New Testament,” Mary Kochamma explains.

Learning Outcome Check

What are the major sections of the Bible?

The Old Testament

Mary Kochamma then said, “Let’s start with the Old Testament which are books of witness from our spiritual ancestors, the Jewish people, or the Israelites. They kept the Old Covenant with God and prepared us by their way of life to receive the New Covenant in Christ and become the New Israel.”

The Books of the Law	Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, & Deuteronomy
The Books of History	Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Kingdoms (1 Samuel), 2 Kingdoms (2 Samuel), 3 Kingdoms (1 Kings), 4 Kingdoms (2 Kings), 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, 1 Ezra, 2 Ezra, Nehemiah, Tobit, Judith, Esther, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, & 3 Maccabees
The Books of Wisdom	Psalms, Job, Proverbs of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Wisdom of Solomon, & Wisdom of Sirach
The Books of Prophecy	Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Baruch, Lamentation of Jeremiah, Epistle of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, & Daniel

She continues to explain how the Books of Law (red coloured in the chart) are called the **Pentateuch**

in Greek, “These begin the revelation of God through the history of creation, the fall of man, and the first covenants between God and Adam, then Noah, Abraham, finally Moses, and all their descendants. They would eventually be called ‘The People of Israel.’ Next come the Books of History (shown by orange). They are more histories of the People of Israel who eventually settled in the land promised to Abraham but only settled after Moses died. Joshua took over for Moses, and the collection of histories of Israel as a nation were then recorded there.”

Mr. George said, “I am excited about all this stuff!” Mrs. George looked at him sharply and said, “Shh!” Then, she smiled at him and whispered, “Me, too!” Sarah and Christina were speedily writing everything down in their notebooks, as were a row of boys and girls near them.

“The green colours show the books labelled as ‘The Books Wisdom.’ These contain the Psalms of King David that you pray in the Sh’himo, for instance.

“I love the book of Psalms”, Sarah whispered into Christina’s ears. “Me too”, Christina responded with a smile. Mary Kochamma paused for a second and smiled at the whispering children. She continued because she did not want her train of thought to get interrupted.

“You see, the story of Job, and other poetical books like Proverbs contain teachings about how you can be wise and become holy. These books help us to grow up and know right from wrong. They also contain so many prophecies about Jesus Christ becoming Man. Finally, the Books of Prophecy (blue section) marks the writings of the prophets.

“A prophet is a fortune teller, right?”, one of the senior women asked. Christina was seriously taking notes and she could not see who that was although she really wanted to.

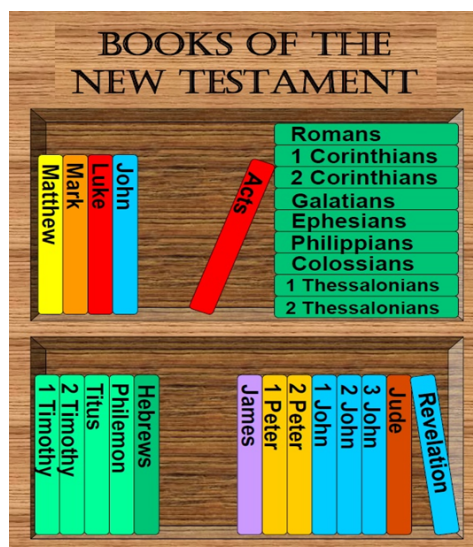
Mary Kochamma lovingly answered the question. “A **prophet** is the mouthpiece of God. It does not mean fortune teller, although many future events were predicted by many of them. Many of those predictions happened in many ways, and some still are to come. The prophets’ writings are more about knowing God, and knowing what He does, what He blessed, and what He wished for us to do to each other and to Him. Hence, the Holy Spirit guided them with what to say as mouthpieces of God.”

The New Testament

Then, Mary Kochamma projected a graph of the New Testament and spoke again on the sections within.

“Notice that now we are in the New Testament Books, learning about the New Covenant between Jesus Christ and His Church. All these books were written by an Apostle or one of the seventy Disciples.”

“Here we have the four Gospels that tell of the story of the Incarnation of our God becoming like one of us, and what He did for us. St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke and St. John wrote the four Gospels. Next, is the Acts of the Holy Apostles which includes history of Christ’s last days before His Ascension, descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and how the Church continued under Christ’s Apostles. The next fourteen books in green are the Epistles, or letters of St. Paul the Apostle. Then comes the seven General Epistles by Saints James, Peter, John,



and Jude. Finally, we finish with the mysterious book of Revelation, also written by St. John the Apostle. This liturgical book is about the things that have been, are now, and the things that are to be since the time of Christ. We often hear of the ‘end times,’ but Christ said that we were already in the end times 2,000 years ago, and we still are. This book tells us a lot about how both angels and people are now worshiping God in heaven. Our Holy Qurbana is, also, very influenced by St. John’s vision, or revelation.”

Mary Kochamma completed the evening with references from the Holy Bible that are still used as prayers and actions in the Holy Qurbana. She mentioned that, in the Holy Qurbana, the priest touches the Chalice and Paten from above, just as Moses struck the rock from which water came forth (Numbers 20:11). “The priest is asking God to come to us in the Eucharist, because just as Christ is the Rock of Faith, He is our Living Water to quench our thirst”, she said.

Mary Kochamma’s presentation finished later that evening, and the George family was on their way home, smiling all the way. That class was helpful for Christina, as she was able to learn a lot. In the evening, she skimmed through her notes again to see that the Holy Scriptures speak of things seen in heaven, and how we can see these same things in the Holy Qurbana too.

When we sing “Holy, Holy, Holy”, it is the song of the Seraphim in heaven that the Prophet Isaiah sees (Old Testament, Isaiah Chapter 6). One can also see the Angel with the golden censer offering incense to God at the Holy Altar in heaven (New Testament, Revelation 8:3), just as the deacon waves censer with the incense around the Altar in the Holy Temple.

Learning Outcome Check

Can you give an example of how Scripture is used in the Holy Qurbana?

Christina was also happy because she could share that learning with her friend from school, Sarah. She was worried at first, but realized that there was nothing to fear, only beautiful things to learn. Christina learned that there was a treasure trove of more things to learn from this book - this Holy Tradition of the Orthodox Church.

Reflection Questions

1. What are the two main parts of the Bible, and explain how the two parts are different?
2. Give one example of how the Old Testament is used during the Holy Qurbana.
3. Give one example of how the New Testament is used during the Holy Qurbana.
4. Give one example of how the Holy Bible points to the Holy Qurbana in heaven.
5. Like Christina, what is one goal you can set to learn more about God?

LESSON

4

Forgiving Father

What is Holy Confession and how is it different from repentance?

Why do we confess our sins to a priest instead of just saying we are sorry to God in our hearts?

Because it helps us become closer to God!

Vocabulary Words

Holy Confession To say our sins or mistakes to God, with the help of a priest, so that we can turn away from our sins

Repentance To be sorry and to turn away from sin and towards God

Humility To believe God's opinion of you is more important than anyone else's, including your own; making yourself lowly, not prideful



It is a Saturday evening, and the George family is attending evening prayers in preparation for Sunday. Before prayer starts, Christina is waiting her turn for **Holy Confession**. She is nervous, but her mother gives her encouragement and goes to sit on the other side of the room where she cannot hear. Christina takes a deep breath and begins to recount the sins and behaviours she has struggled with since her last confession.

She remembered what Alexander Achen told her about **humility** the last time she confessed her sins and thought about how she acted to her parents. When it is her turn, she tells Achen - "I was so mad! I know we're supposed to respect our parents, but I said bad things about my parents when I was talking with my friends."

"You make a good confession Christina, and I see that you are afraid of your parents finding out about your choices." He paused for a couple of seconds, giving time for Christina to review her own actions. He continued... "See my child, we are called to respect and obey our parents and to not gossip. It also leaves you feeling anxious and farther away from your parents, am I right?"

Christina nodded, "yes exactly!"

"And let me guess, you already thought about this and told God your sins in your heart, yes?"

Christina nodded again.

Alexander Achen asks, "Does it feel different saying it out loud to me?"

Christina thought about it and answered, "Yes, I don't feel so anxious or bad any more, but

Remember

Confession is an examination of our conscience and trying not to make the same mistakes again.



Remember

We confess our sins out loud to the priest as a representative of Christ on earth to stay close to God and receive special forgiveness.



you're probably going to tell me to talk to my parents about it, right? So, I don't feel so far away from them?"

Alexander Achen smiles and says "That's right. We confess our sins out loud to the priest as a representative of Christ on earth to stay close to God and receive special forgiveness." Christina tells both Alexander Achen and God that she is sorry for her sins. Achen instructs her to read Psalm 140 (141) every day that week to help her avoid that sin in the future.

Parable of the Prodigal Son



Fr. Alexander comes to visit the Georges on Tuesday evening. As soon as Tommy sees Fr. Alexander at the door, he is full of happiness. He likes the stories Fr. Alexander always shares.

After greetings, they all sat around the coffee table. Mrs. George offered Fr. Alexander coffee and cookies, and he happily accepted. "Story time!" shouted Tommy with two cookies in his hand. He was sitting on the carpet right next to Fr. Alexander, ready to listen to him. "Tommy! Let Fr. Alexander have his coffee first", said Mrs. George. As usual, Fr. Alexander smiled with love and gave Tommy a special gaze. Today, the story was about the Prodigal Son.

"This parable is about a son who has decided that he didn't want to wait for his father to die before he received his inheritance, so he asked for it early." Fr. Alexander started. "His father gave it to him, and he went off and spent it all carelessly. Soon, he had nothing. He realized that his father's servants had more than him, and that the pigs at his house had more to eat than him."

"The pigs had more to eat than him! That is not possible", says Tommy in disbelief.

"Yes, Tommy, that is how it was", he replied with a smile.

Fr. Alexander continues with his story. “So, he began his return to his father with the plan to say, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Make me like one of your servants.”

“I know the story. The father was waiting for him at the gate”, says Christina. Tommy doesn’t like Christina interrupting. He looks at her in a bit of annoyance but does not say anything.

“The father was clearly waiting for his son to return because when he saw him from far away, he literally ran to him and “fell on his neck!” The father was extremely happy that his son had returned and kissed him even before the son could say a word”, Fr. Alexander continues.

“Didn’t I tell you, Tommy?” Christina also gets excited now.

“Yes, Christina, the father in this parable loved his son dearly and he forgave him when the prodigal shared his words to express his sorrow. The son showed humility, and the father showed love even before the son would speak and he responded to his son’s words with love. This father is like God the Father and the son is like humanity”, Fr. Alexander says, looking at her.

“This is exactly how our Heavenly Father feels about us! The imagery here is a reflection of what happens during Holy Confession. He created us and He loves us and is always eagerly waiting for us to return to Him for His Grace and Forgiveness”, he says again looking Christina into her eyes. Her eyes start to tear up, thinking of her own confession the other day. For a moment, she thought about the love of God the Father, who forgives her sins.

Learning Outcome Check

How does the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Loving Father) relate to confession?



Confession and Repentance

Soon, Fr. Alexander leaves and Christina is ready to go to bed. Mrs. George asks her why she is a little quieter than usual. Mrs. George understands why and she gives a hug to her daughter and says: “God is love, and therefore, God forgives. Adam and Eve, by eating the forbidden fruit, committed the first sin. They disobeyed God, which is what we do every time we commit a sin. When we sin, we are not happy and not comfortable with ourselves because we know we did something wrong. Once we understand our mistake, we need to apologize to those who we have wronged, and to God Who made and loves them, too.” “Hhmmm...” says Christina.

Remember

Through obtaining God’s forgiveness, we become closer to Him. It is a sacrifice, an act of humility, and giving up our pride.



Her mother continues: “This is the first step towards a confession. Confession is an examination of our conscience and trying not to make the same mistakes again. We must show **repentance** and the willingness to do right to have God’s forgiveness. Through obtaining God’s forgiveness, we become closer to Him. It is a sacrifice, an act of humility and giving up our pride. God does not want to punish us; he just wants to forgive us and save us.”

Learning Outcome Check

What is Confession and Repentance?



Christina remembers a conversation she had the other day with Sarah. Sarah's church does not believe in confessions to a priest. "Can't I confess to God directly? Why do we have to confess with a priest present?", she asks her mother. Mrs. George lovingly pulled her to her side and started to stroke her hair. She says, "In the early Church, confession was in the presence of the priest and the congregation at the same time; that is, one confesses one's sins in the presence of the entire faith community. Overtime, the Church grew much larger and this practice was modified so that the priest "stood in" for the community as a witness to the penitent's repentance, making it easier to confess, not harder. We can and do confess directly to God all the time, but very often we need help and advice in overcoming our sins, which is what the priest does.

When we confess, we are confessing to God in the presence of the priest who serves as a "witness". So, we are not confessing to the priest alone, but rather to God with the priest witnessing this Holy Sacrament/Mystery (James 5:16; St. Luke 12:8; St. Matthew 10:32). Just as we go to a doctor to get help with our physical sickness; we go to a priest to get help and guidance for our spiritual ailments." Christina feels very tired and slowly she falls asleep. Mrs. George tucks her up and retires for the day.

Learning Outcome Check

What is the role of a priest in Confession?

Who Designed for Us to Give Holy Confession to a Priest?

The next morning, even before the children get up Mr. George asks Mrs. George about last night's conversation with Christina before she went to bed. Mrs. George explains what she told her daughter. Then she has a question for her husband. "Who designed for us to give Holy Confession to a Priest?"

Mr. George thinks about it and answers: "The answer is Jesus Christ Himself. He is the One who gave His Priesthood to the Holy Apostles by giving them a special ordination to do it. Remember what Jesus Christ did, shown in the following verse: "...He breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'" (St. John 20:22-23).



Jesus ordained them and gave them the authority to say and witness because the sins of one who confessed to them would be forgiven or retained - something so important that Jesus would not have given it to anyone. What a great gift we have to be able to hear the words with God's authority in the priest, "Your sins are forgiven!" Instead of hiding and thinking that God can't or won't forgive, we can come to God even in

Remember

Just as we go to a doctor to get help with our physical sickness; we go to a priest to get help and guidance for our spiritual ailments.



our sadness or doubt and know that God loves to forgive the honestly sorry person.” Mrs. George has tears in her eyes and so does Mr. George.

Reflection Questions

1. Why do we confess to a priest instead of just saying sorry to God by ourselves?
2. Who decided that we should participate in Holy Confession with a priest?
3. Thinking about the loving father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, how is the father in the parable like our priest?

LESSON

5

Two Become One

What is marriage in the Holy Orthodox faith? What makes it so special? In this Sacrament, a man and woman join together just as Christ and His Church are together. As a married couple, they grow closer to God.

Vocabulary Words

Holy Matrimony Sacramental marriage in the Orthodox Church

Covenant An agreement or promise

Genesis The first book in the Old Testament, the creation story

Minnu A small gold pendant stylized as a heart with a cross on it

Manthrakodi The bridal sari given by the groom's family, which serves as the veil for the bride



It is a busy day in the George family household because Mr George's youngest sister, Ann, is getting married! Mr. and Mrs. George are really busy welcoming their friends and family. Christina helps as best as she can, but Tommy looks upset.

"I don't like weddings. I have to wear such scratchy clothes and stand for so long," he whines.

Christina says, "But it's so much more than just a wedding! Holy Matrimony is one of the Holy Sacraments of the Orthodox Church, in which a man and woman are united by the Holy Trinity, to follow Christ and to raise a faithful and holy family. So, it's another special way we can become close to God." Tommy looks unsure, so Christina continues.

"See, in the book of **Genesis**, we learn about the story of the first family. You know God created man in His own image and likeness, right?"

"Riiigght," Tommy draws out, still confused.

"Yeah so, when God saw that he was lonely, God wanted to give him a companion. So, he put the man into deep sleep, and-"

"Wouldn't the man just be Adam?" Tommy interrupts.

"I'm getting there, hold on," Christina responds, "Anyway, He put Adam into a deep sleep and made the woman, Eve, out of him and brought her to the man. When the man saw the woman for the first time, he said: '***This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore, when a man leaves his father and mother and joins his wife, they shall become one flesh***' (Genesis 2:23-24).

"I heard this story in the Church the other day," Tommy whines, "But, why do I have to wear these scratchy clothes because of that?" Tommy was still not convinced.

Remember

Holy Matrimony is one of the Holy mysteries (Sacraments) of the Orthodox Church in which a man and a woman are united by the Holy Trinity to follow Christ and raise up a faithful, holy family.



It's Mrs. George who replies to Tommy this time, "The mystery of marriage in the Church gives a man and a woman the ability to become one spirit and one flesh in a way that no human love can provide by itself. Auntie Ann is going to become one with Mr. Zachary. This is a great and happy occasion, so you have to participate in the happiness of your Auntie okay? So, get up and go get ready now."

Later, when the family is going to the church for the wedding, Tommy asks another question. "So, what does it mean when Achen talks about Christ being the groom of the Church?"

Christina says, "Achen once told us that St. Paul compares the love between the husband and wife to the love between Christ and the Church. So, Christ is like the bridegroom, and the Church is like the bride.

Learning Outcome Check

What is the meaning of Holy Matrimony?

And in marriage, a husband is to be like Christ, offering himself to his wife and serving her, and the wife is to be like the Church following her husband's guidance."



It's quiet in the car for a little bit. "This is what I found in the Bible about marriage", shouts out Christina, **"...from the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together let no man separate."** (St. Mark 10:6-9)"

Mr. George feels proud of his daughter, and he turns his head towards her, saying: "That is how God defines marriage, that God has joined a man and a woman together in Holy Matrimony. Holy Matrimony is bigger than any contract - it is a **covenant** to make a family bond. It is how God gives His grace to unite a man and a woman and to make them into a holy family."

Two Parts of the Holy Matrimony service

They reach the Church. Mr. George puts on his white gown and goes up to help the Achen with the service. Christina gets a copy of the service book being distributed among the faithful. They read in the book: “In the Orthodox church, the marriage service is divided into two main parts: The Blessing of the Rings and The Blessing of the Crowns.



The ring is the sign of the betrothal (or engagement) of man and woman to unite them and live together as husband and wife. The priest puts the rings on the fourth finger of the right hand of the bride and groom. Since a ring has no loose ends, it signifies the permanency, and the lifelong nature of the relationship expected from the couple. The call is to love each other always.

The blessing of the crowns is the central part of the marriage ceremony. In the Malankara Orthodox tradition, the crown is usually replaced by a chain with a Cross placed around the neck of the bride and groom by the priest. The couple is given “crowns” as they are now king and queen of their own kingdom on Earth (their new royal family) which they rule in love. These crowns are to be worn by the husband and the wife forever.”



Minnu is a small gold pendant stylized as a heart with a cross on it.



Manthrakodi is the bridal sari given by the groom's family.

After the blessing of the crowns the Achen takes the **minnu**, blesses it and asks Mr. Zachary to tie it around the neck of Auntie Ann. Tommy is curious to see what is happening. He leans towards the front and watches the tying of the knot so closely. He later asks Mrs. George whether she also wears a minnu around her neck. She shows Tommy her minnu, which she always wears.

Tommy touches the minnu and feels the embedded cross on the heart shaped gold leaf. Christina also wants to see the minnu closely now. Mrs. George then tells Christina, "According to Malankara Orthodox tradition, the groom ties the minnu around the neck of the bride. The minnu is suspended on seven threads drawn out of the manthrakodi. The seven strands represent the bride, the bridegroom, the couple's parents and the Church. It remains there for one week until the Groom's mother cuts the thread, and the minnu is moved onto a chain. It represents that the groom is accepting her as his own and their lifelong inseparable bond."

"Wow, that is beautiful! I saw the Achen then placing the **manthrakodi** upon Auntie Ann's head." Christina says.

"That is another symbol of groom's acceptance of his responsibility to care for and cherish his bride. The placing of manthrakodi upon the bride's head by the priest symbolizes Rebecca who took a veil and covered herself when she first saw Isaac," Mr. George chimes in while entering into the conversation. He continued, "Did you notice that the service ends with husband and wife holding their right hands together, and the Achen tells them they are together now in the name of the Lord? The priest stands as the mediator between God and the couple while the congregation stands as witnesses."

The conversation becomes too much for Tommy to understand. He finds the tasty ice cream after dinner and says to his mother, "When Auntie Ann comes to visit us with Uncle Zachary, can you buy the same ice cream we ate after the dinner on the wedding day?"

Everyone laughs and Mrs. George gives a loving kiss on Tommy's forehead.

Learning Outcome Check

What are the two parts of the service of Holy Matrimony?



Learning Outcome Check

What is the symbolism behind the minnu and the manthrakodi?



Remember

Holy Matrimony is bigger than any contract -
It is a covenant to make a family bond.



Reflection Questions

1. Name the two parts of Holy Matrimony and summarise what happens during each part.
2. What does "Minnu" symbolise?
3. What does "Manthrakodi" symbolise?

LESSON

6

Better to Give Than to Receive

What is fasting? It is a powerful spiritual tool that has been used even before during the Old Testament days. Orthodox Christians fast regularly to avoid sin and grow closer to Jesus.

Vocabulary Words

Fast To avoid all or some kinds of food, drink, or activity

Feast To celebrate, often with rich foods

Abstinence the practise of complete avoidance of particular food/activities for a particular period of time

Canonical Obligatory; agreed upon by the whole church

Intercession To act or ask for someone else, on their behalf

Kudosh Eetho Feast of the Sanctification of the Church



28fig15 Christina and her mother are cooking together in the kitchen. It is the beginning of winter break from school.

Christina enjoys cooking and learning the family recipes. Mrs. George is making the Indian dish called “sambar” though. Christina feels a little jealous of her friend Sara as she was baking cookies and eating candy during this break.

“I wish we could have something sweet after dinner. Or at least some meat for dinner,” Christina exclaimed! Her mother smiles and says, “It is a fast today. I know it is not easy and sometimes not fun. Waiting and abstinence take discipline and it’s hard to keep fasting when so many other people are throwing parties already. But Christmas will be here soon, next week.”

As they chop vegetables, Christina says, “I know we **fast** just like Jesus fasted for 40 days in the desert. But why do we fast so much and so often? Why not just before Easter or something?”

“You’re right, Christina. We fast a lot because fasting prepares us to become more like Christ through prayer, sacrifice, and disciplining ourselves just like He did. It helps us to be thankful for what Jesus has given us and to stay humble and close to Him,” her mother says.

Think

Fasting is not the same as dieting! The true fast is more than just not eating certain types of food.



“Fasting is also one of our most important spiritual tools. Just like a doctor gives a prescription when you are sick, the Church recommends fasting. It can be like medicine when we feel spiritually sick or stuck. It is a very powerful

Learning Outcome Check

Definition of fasting



way for us to draw closer to our Lord Jesus Christ.” Remember, fasting is a spiritual discipline, practised regularly by all Orthodox Christians.

During most fasts we avoid meat, fish, eggs, and dairy products. We might also abstain from sweets and other treats, as well as certain activities that may distract us from God, like social media, video games, or shopping. It is especially important during the fasts to avoid doing and saying things that are sinful, because those things separate us from God.

As St. John Chrysostom says, “The fast should be kept not by the mouth alone but also by the eye, the ear, the feet, the hands and all the members of the body.”

As Orthodox Christians, we **fast** on most Wednesdays and Fridays, and always before receiving Holy Communion. Fasting before Holy Communion is to prepare to receive Christ and reminds us of our hunger for Him. Wednesdays are dedicated to St. Mary to ask for **intercession** (prayers on our behalf) from the

Theotokos (Mother of God). Fridays are dedicated to Jesus Christ’s Crucifixion.

The liturgical calendar of the Orthodox Church includes many **fast** periods as well as **feast** days, beginning with the Feast of Sanctification of the Church (**Kudosh Eetho**).

Learning Outcome Check

What are the five canonical (obligatory) fasts?

Canonical Fasting Periods

<i>Canonical fasting periods</i>	
Nativity Fast	In December for 25 days before the Nativity (birth) of Jesus Christ and ends when Holy Qurbana is celebrated on Christmas.
Nineveh Fast	3-day Fast before the Great Lent in honor of Jonah’s preaching and the repentance of the people of Nineveh. Jonah’s story also foretells the death and resurrection of Jesus.
The Great Fast (also called Great Lent)	50-day Fast to prepare us for the Resurrection of our Lord. “Lent” means “Spring” and is often used to refer to this fast as Easter Sunday is in the Spring.
Holy Apostles Fast	13-day Fast in June to remember the Holy Apostles, who fasted and went on their missionary journeys after Pentecost and ends with the Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul.
Dormition Fast	15-day Fast in August to remember the falling asleep (Dormition) of St. Mary the Theotokos (Mother of God, or God-bearer).

Feasting Periods

Christina smiles and says, “You know, I guess it does make the feast more exciting after fasting. It would be like eating the birthday cake before the actual birthday. That would not be fun!”

Mrs. George smiles too and says, “Yes, exactly! Fasting is a beautiful way to grow closer to God and give Him glory, though it is also a way to prepare ourselves to be present with Jesus Christ when we celebrate His life and ministry. Maybe we should start planning our Christmas meal now!”

The main goals of fasting are to purify us, to free our souls and bodies from sin, and to strengthen our love for God and His Creation. Fasting reminds us of our many blessings and helps keep us from sin.

Fasting is trusting in God, that we actually have enough. Fasting distances us from sin and enables us to understand God's grace more. By avoiding some of the things that make life easy or comfortable we can grow in faith and love for our Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflection Questions

1. What is the true definition of fasting?
2. What different ways can you practice fasting in your life?
3. Take one of the five canonical fasts and find the Orthodox Icon for the associated feast.

LESSON

7

When St. Mary Fell Asleep

Why do Orthodox Christians talk about St. Mary so much? Because she is the Mother of God! The Dormition of St. Mary needs to be understood as it very important to our lives.

Vocabulary Words

Dormition “The Falling Asleep”/ death of St. Mary

Worship To acknowledge as God by offering your whole body and soul in prayer and action

Veneration To give great respect to something or someone

Intercession To act or ask for someone else on their behalf

Shunoyo Syriac word for the departure of the soul of the blessed Virgin Mary

Holy Zunoro The Holy Girdle or Belt of St. Mary, also known as the Girdle of Thomas, is a relic of the Mother of God



Christina and Mr. George are helping at the Church prepare an upcoming Feast Day. Christina’s classmate, Aaron, also stayed to help. Aaron and Christina are talking about what they heard about St. Mary from another person in their class, and Mr. George asks if he can help.

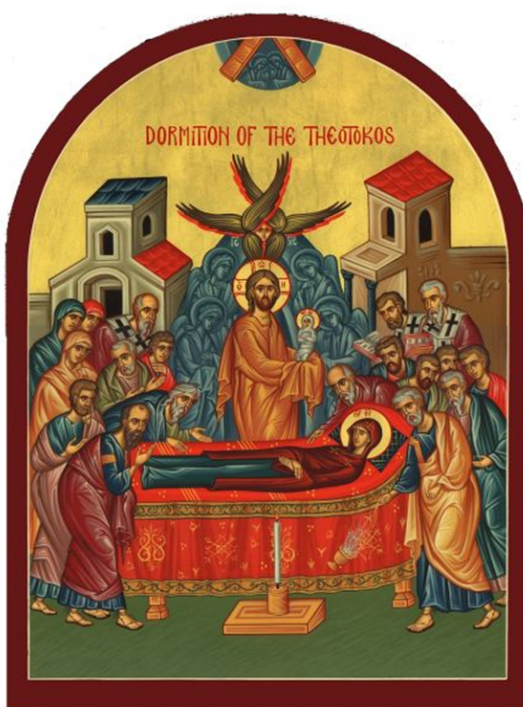
“Someone in my school told me we cannot **worship** St. Mary and still be a Christian. They said it was wrong,” says Aaron. “But I thought we don’t worship St. Mary.”

Christina adds, “I know we do not pray to worship St. Mary as we worship only the One True God.”

Mr. George nods and says, “I know it is confusing as you are both correct. We do not worship St. Mary because we know she was a human being just like the rest of us. She is not a goddess or supernatural!

But we do pray to her and all the saints for **intercession**. We do this to ask her to pray for us just like we ask our friends to pray for us!”

Continuing on with preparations, Mr. George adds, “Though we do not worship St. Mary, she



Dormition of the Theotokos

does hold a very special place among all the saints as the Mother of God, or Theotokos.”

Aaron chimes in excitedly and says, “Yeah that’s what Fr. Alexander was teaching us about last Sunday! He talked about how St. Mary fell asleep and said that’s why we’re fasting right now.”

“Of course you would remember anything about falling asleep!” Christina teases her friend and adds, “But didn’t he say that’s how we describe how St. Mary died?”

Mr. George laughs, “Yes, that’s called **the Dormition of St. Mary** and Aaron you’re right as well, we are following the **Shunoyo** fast. On August 15th we’ll celebrate St. Mary’s body and soul being taken up into heaven.”

The Shunoyo Fast lasts for 15 days starting on August 1st. We follow this fast with a special emphasis on remembering the holy life of St. Mary, the Mother of God.

St. Mary is our role-model of faith. She is the very first human being to receive and believe in Jesus Christ. Her life of purity and devotion to God are examples we try to follow.

She is considered the first among the saints and blessed among women (St. Luke 1:28) because she was the person chosen to bear Jesus Christ. For these reasons, we **venerate** St. Mary and honour her. We also try to follow her example as she was human like us! We do not worship her as worship belongs only to God.

When a person dies, their body and soul are separated. The body returns to the earth and decays while the soul remains active because Christ is Risen and has defeated death with the Resurrection. We believe the souls go to the place of light where they are active and continue to pray for us. This is why we ask for intercession.

But St. Mary is special! She is the only person other than Christ who died and was resurrected and taken into heaven! This is the Dormition of the Mother of God, remembered during the Shunoyo fast. It refers to the death or “falling asleep” of St. Mary. The Church believes her death was peaceful as if falling asleep. Afterwards, her soul and her earthly body were taken into heaven by the Angels as commanded by Jesus Christ.

Learning Outcome Check

St. Mary is a regular human being and she is not a goddess.

Learning Outcome Check

On August 15th we celebrate St. Mary’s body and soul being taken up into heaven. This is called the Dormition of St. Mary.

Remember

We venerate St. Mary, meaning we respect her and try to follow her example.

Learning Outcome Check

We do not worship St. Mary, rather venerate her and seek for her intercession.

Learning Outcome Check

During the Shunoyo fast, we remember the death or “falling asleep” of St. Mary.

We also remember during this time St. Thomas, the Apostle to India. When St. Mary died, the other disciples were nearby except for St. Thomas who was far away in India. He had a vision from God of St. Mary's death and started his journey to see her but sadly arrived too late for the funeral and entombment. St. Maximus the Confessor wrote he arrived late by three days.

The other Apostles were singing by the tomb of St. Mary. When he arrived, St. Thomas heard the clear and sweet sound of the angels and begged them to open the tomb.

Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the blessed Apostles listened and opened the tomb but worried what they would see. To their surprise, the tomb was empty! They found only the burial wrappings and the shroud in which they had laid St. Mary to rest. The body of the Virgin Mother was not there. Then, all the Apostles understood that the late arrival of St. Thomas was the reason for the revelation of this mystery. The tomb was opened and the Dormition of the Theotokos was discovered because of St. Thomas' actions. The Angels had carried the Mothers' body into heaven. St. Thomas miraculously was able to see and meet with the procession of Angels, with the body of the Mother of God in mid-air, says the tradition.

The Mother of God gave St. Thomas her belt, which he took with him on his journeys. Even after her death, St. Mary continues to be a most important saint and an example of holiness in the Orthodox Church.

The Orthodox Church has preserved the **Zunoro**, or the girdle of St. Mary in several parishes including St. Mary's Jacobite Syrian Cathedral in Manarcad (near Kottayam), India.



Icon depiction of the giving of the girdle to St. Thomas



Zunoro or girdle (belt) of St. Mary

Reflection Questions

1. What is Dormition?
2. How many days is the Shunoyo Fast, and when does it start?
3. When do we celebrate Dormition?
4. Why do we venerate St. Mary? How is veneration different from worship?
5. What is intercession?

LESSON

8

Shining Glory

The Transfiguration shows us that Jesus is the Son of God and One in the Holy Trinity, and that Christ's ascension into heaven would be coming. The Church remembers and celebrates this important event every year.

Vocabulary Words

Transfiguration A change or transformation; Christ was transfigured on Mt. Tabor

Tabernacle A tent or booth used for worship; in Malayalam known as *Koodaram*, also understood as Shelter

Perunnal Festival in Malayalam

Ascension The act of rising up, for Christians referring to rising into Heaven



Transfiguration



"And He was transfigured before them: His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light."



St. Matthew 17:2



The George family is sitting on their porch on a fall Saturday evening. Fr. Alexander and Kochamma are with them, for evening prayer and after dinner tea. It is getting colder, the leaves are changing colours and falling from the trees.

Tommy sighs and says, “I can’t wait until there are enough leaves for me to make a pile and jump in them!”

Christina laughs and says “I love Fall too. Especially when the colours change. Each leaf can change into so many different colours.”

Mr. George chimes in, “it’s quite a miracle. It reminds me of the account from the Bible of the **Transfiguration** of Jesus Christ.”

Christina looks at Fr. Alexander, and says, “You mentioned the **Transfiguration** in Sunday school a few weeks ago but said we will study it later. Could you tell me about it now?”

Fr. Alexander puts his tea down and nods eagerly, “Of course! **Transfiguration** is one of the major feasts in our Church. It foretells the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ as God and His **Ascension** into heaven. The **Transfiguration** shows Christ is the Messiah and God.”



Transfiguration

The Feast of Transfiguration is celebrated on August 6th and found in all three Synoptic Gospels (St. Matthew 17:1-8, St. Mark 9:2-9, and St. Luke 9:28-36).

Learning Outcome Check

Transfiguration is celebrated on August 6th.

Jesus had taken His closest disciples - St. Peter, St. James, and St. John - up to a Mount Tabor to pray. While they were praying, something amazing happened: Jesus’ face shone brightly like the sun, and His clothes became dazzling white. During this time, Moses and Elijah appeared and spoke with Jesus.

Learning Outcome Check

Explain what Jesus, Peter, James, John, Moses and Elijah did during the Feast of Transfiguration.

The disciples were astonished and wanted to build three tents for Jesus, Moses, Elijah to honour them. Suddenly, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and they heard a voice from the cloud saying, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” The disciples were scared and fell to the ground, but Jesus came and touched them, telling them not to be afraid. When the disciples looked up, they could only see Jesus.

The Feast of Transfiguration is special because it shows Jesus’ divine glory and prepares the disciples for the difficult times ahead. It reminds us that Jesus is not just a teacher, but the Son of God.

The appearance of Moses and Elijah teaches us about the connection between the Old Testament and Jesus.

The presence of the Holy Trinity is also witnessed in this event: Jesus as the Son, God the Father as the voice, and the Holy Spirit as the cloud.

Alexander Achen continued, “In Malayalam, tent and booth is translated as **Koodaram**. This is why this feast is also known in the Malankara Orthodox Church as **Koodara Perunnal** or the Festival of Booths.”

Christina had one more question, “Why is the Feast of **Transfiguration** so important?”

“The purpose of **Transfiguration** was to encourage the Apostles and give hope of His Resurrection,” answers Fr. Alexander. “The **Transfiguration** also clearly shows the Holy Trinity. Do you remember the icon?”



Tommy was listening and chimed in, “I remember the icon!” Christina leaps up and runs to the icon wall in their family prayer corner. Kissing the hanging icon, as she brings it to the group on the porch. She hands it to Fr. Alexander, who shows the different parts of the icon and how they represent the **Transfiguration**.

The centre of the icon is Jesus Christ blessing with His right hand and dressed in bright white and gold. God is light, and the bright shining of His face and His robes all demonstrate that Jesus is God.



The Prophet Elijah appears on the right-hand side of Jesus



Moses is holding the Ten Commandments and appears on the left-hand side of Jesus

Elijah and Moses bowing to Christ with their right hands raised. Moses represents the Law because he received the Ten Commandments from God. Elijah represents the Prophets and all those who are alive in Christ because Elijah never died and was taken up into heaven by a chariot of fire. Moses and Elijah were special as they saw the glory of God. They also showed the disciples that Jesus is the Messiah.



At the bottom of the icon are the Holy Apostles (Peter, James, and John) who have fallen backwards and covered their eyes because the light is at first too bright for them. John is in the centre, Peter is kneeling on the left raising his right hand toward Christ showing he wanted to build three **tabernacles**, and James is on the right.

In the **Transfiguration**, the Apostles see the full glory of the Kingdom of God through Christ. After this event, Christ would suffer on the Cross for our sake. This feast reminds of the glorious Second Coming and the promise of the Kingdom of God where all creation will be transfigured and filled with the Light. The **Transfiguration** of Christ teaches us we will also be transformed by the glory of God by becoming like Him through the teachings of the Church.

Learning Outcome Check

Explain parts of the icon of the Transfiguration.

Reflection Questions

1. When do we celebrate the Transfiguration?
2. Can you find Moses and Elijah in the Transfiguration Icon? What do they show us?
3. What happened at Transfiguration?

LESSON

9

They Called Him Jesus

The circumcision of our Lord Jesus Christ is an important event in the Church as it was His naming day. This festival also shows the Christian faith connects to the Jewish faith that Jesus was raised.

Vocabulary Words

Baptism a ceremony of adoption into the Christian Church

Chrismation "to anoint" with the Holy Spirit.

Sin behaviour that separates us from the will of God.

Gazurthe circumcision; the naming of our Lord Jesus.

Jesus meaning "Saviour."

Abba A Hebrew word meaning "Father"

Yahweh a name for God, meaning "I am."



Presentation of our Lord

Now that the Nativity Feast is over, the George family is enjoying some time off from school and work with one another. New Year's Day is next week and the children are awaiting this fun celebration. Christina and Tommy have a new puppy and are discussing what they will name her.

"I still think we should name her 'Kitty'" Tommy says with a giggle, "it would be funny!"

Christina laughs too but shakes her head, "I want to give her a name that means something special."

Mrs. George is listening to the discussion and says, "I think that's a very good idea Christina, because names are important. Did you both know that this Sunday, we are going to celebrate Jesus Christ's naming day?"

Christina frowns, looking confused. "I thought Fr. Alexander said this Sunday we are celebrating the Circumcision?" Mrs. George nods and says, "yes that's true, we are celebrating both."

Mr. George wanted to chime in on the conversation, especially because he and Mrs. George had the privilege to name them! He said "When Jesus Christ was born, Jewish parents would name their children on the eighth day. This was also the day boy children were circumcised, and we always remember it eight days after Christmas, on January 1st."

Learning Outcome Check

This is when babies in the Jewish tradition would be given their names

That Sunday, Fr. Alexander gave a sermon during Holy Qurbana on the Circumcision and naming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He explained how according to Old Testament Law all male infants (including Jesus) were circumcised, as a sign of God's Promise with Abraham and all his descendants (**Genesis 17:10-14, Leviticus 12:3**).

Learning Outcome Check

The naming of our Lord is always celebrated on January 1 because this is the eighth day of birth. This is a continuation of Jewish tradition.

Circumcision was done on the eighth day as in days of the Old Testament the eighth day was the first day of a new week after the seven days of creation. Today, the eighth day reminds us of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ as He renewed all creation (Revelation 21:5).

Fr. Alexander explained in his sermon, "Circumcision was the symbol of a covenant with God and a promise to walk in His ways". Boys in the Jewish faith had to receive circumcision on the eighth day after their birth. God did not command to circumcise girls. This was because they are included in the male circumcision.

But after Jesus's death and resurrection, God changed the way this covenant was made. Instead of circumcision, we are now baptized in His name and this becomes our first covenant with God. Both boys and girls are baptized as infants and by doing this they become Christians. Baptism is also the first Sacrament we receive, and it allows us to be part of Jesus Christ's salvation."

After Holy Qurbana, Christina went to her Sunday school teacher Mary Kochamma and asked, "Today Achen said circumcision for the Jews has been replaced by baptism. And we also learned that baptism is like being born again into the Orthodox Christian Church, so that our body and soul are renewed. Doesn't the baby also receive a new name?"

Mary Kochamma smiled brightly and said, "Yes that's right Christina! Very good memory!"

In the Gospel of St. Luke 2:21 it is written 'And when eight days were fulfilled to circumcise the child, his name was called Jesus, the name called by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.'

The eighth day after birth was the day a Jewish child received a name, so it was a very important day. Although Christians now baptize children to enter into a covenant with God, we still give them a special baptismal name to connect them to their Orthodox Christian faith.”

“Cool! So Jesus’ name is very special! Oops, I forgot what it means though,” Christina says a little sheepishly.

“The name Jesus means Saviour.” Mary Kochamma said, giving Christina a quick hug as they finished their lesson for that day.

On their way home, Tommy says to his sister,

“Today Achen said Jesus had a lot of names like Emmanuel and the King. Maybe we could give the puppy a few names.”

Christina laughed and said, “Maybe we can give her a Christian name too!”

Learning Outcome Check

Jesus means “Saviour”

Reflection Questions

1. Why was circumcision done on the eighth day?
2. What has circumcision been replaced with in the New Testament for Christians?
3. What are some other names for Jesus?

LESSON

10

From Death to Resurrection

Orthodox Christians remember and pray for our departed because we believe Jesus teaches us to do this. The Orthodox funeral service gives us hope in salvation and our resurrection through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Vocabulary Words

Funeral A ceremony regarding someone recently deceased

Resurrection Coming to life from death



It is a sad day for the George family. They are gathering after the **funeral** and burial of their beloved Ammachy. Mrs. George brings out the old family photo albums. Christina searches her laptop for more recent photos of their Ammachy.

"I'm going to miss her laugh the most," says Christina as she looks at a picture of Ammachy laughing at a family gathering.

"I'm going to miss her hugs," says Mrs. George with drops of tears in her eyes.

"I'm going to miss her cookies!" adds Tommy as he eats a chocolate chip cookie Mr. George made the day before.

Mr. George smiles and says, "I know mine are not quite like hers. She is a very special person."

Christina looks at her father and says, "I like how we say that she is a special person because she's still part of our family, right?"

Mr. George nods and says, "That's right, Christina. Even though Ammachy passed over to God, we remember that Christ is the 'the way, the truth, and the life.' Our God is life, and Ammachy worshipped Him... so she is alive in Him."

"So, Dad," Christina asks, "I know Fr. Alexander said Jesus made death meaningful, but how does that work again?"

Mr. George explains that Jesus' death and the **Resurrection** proved that He has power over death. Death is separation from God, but Jesus is the one who is always with His Father and His Holy Spirit! Jesus can never be separated from God, but our sins can separate us from God. Jesus entered into death so that He could reunite us with God. We do not have to fear death because Jesus has already conquered it and made eternal life possible for all.

"That makes sense. So, death doesn't have to be scary? Because we're going to be resurrected too? Like Lazarus?" Christina still looks a little confused.

"Sort of," chimes in Mrs. George. "Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead as one of His many miracles on earth. By raising Lazarus, Jesus proved that He is God because He has power over death. However, eventually, Lazarus did die, just like all humans. But the final resurrection at the end removes death forever. At that time, when we are resurrected, we will live on with Christ."

“That’s right, and Ammachy’s funeral service that we attended this weekend shows us that in several ways,” says Mr. George.

“Tell me more, Dad,” Christina says, prompting her father.

“There are 3 different types of Church Funerals. Men have a dedicated funeral with four services. Children under eighteen years of age and women have dedicated four-part services too.” Mr. George says while stroking Christina’s hair. Her eyes are tearing up, as beautiful memories of Ammachy race through her mind.

“Those services must be pretty long,” says Tommy.

Mrs. George takes Tommy’s hand and says:

“Not really, and they are not all conducted at the same time. The first two services are done on the days before the funeral and may even be skipped. The third service is the farewell of

the departed from the family. The fourth service is the Church’s preparation of the departed for their final journey to the chamber of light. At the end of the fourth service, the body inside the closed casket is prayerfully placed in a hole dug out in the soil. We call this place of burial the grave. It is at this graveside that the Achen and family go to pray on memorial days.” “Oh! So that’s why we go to the graveside to pray for the departed,” Christina’s voice reflects some discovery.

“Yes, my dear,” says Mr. George. “Do you want to know what the Church prays there in these services?,” continues Mr. George.

“I don’t want to know,” Tommy says uncomfortably. He does not like talking about funerals.

“I want to know,” Christina shows her displeasure at Tommy. “Okay, don’t fight, I will explain to you, Christina,” says Mr. George.

“I am going to bed,” says an already tired Tommy and he leaves the room.

“In these four parts of prayer, the main theme is three-fold. The Church prays to God to always remember the departed. Secondly, the Church prays to God to accept our prayers so that the departed inherit the Kingdom of God, and until then the Kingdom of God comes, may they be resting in the bosom of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Lastly, the Church asks the Almighty God to listen to their prayers for all of us.”

“Orthodox Christians have prayed for their beloved departed since the days of the early church. We are still members of that same Orthodox Christian Church. The departed and the living have both received the Body and Blood of Christ. Thus, we are one with God and with each other, the living and the departed,” chimes in Mrs. George.

Christina is getting more enthusiastic, and she asks, “Does the Bible command us to pray for the departed?”

“Yes!” says Mr. George. “And St. James wrote that we should pray for one another (**James 5:16**), St. Paul wrote that we belong to the Lord whether we live or die (**Romans 14:8**) and that we are members of His Body (Ephesians 5:30). In the Book of Hebrews, it is written that The Church is the “the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God” and that The Church includes “tens of thousands of angels” and “the spirits of righteous people made perfect” as well as those of us alive on earth (**Hebrews 12:22-24**). So you see, many references in the Scriptures remind us to pray for the departed because they are still part of our Church and our family.”

Christina looks cheerful and says, “Right! So, we’re all still connected and part of the Church, even those who have passed away!”

Learning Outcome Check

Explain the parts of the funeral service.

Mr. George nods and continues, “Because of Christ’s resurrection and victory over death, death does not end our membership in the Body of Christ. For neither “death nor life [...] will separate us from the love of God which is

in Christ Jesus our Lord” (**Romans 8:38-39**). Orthodox Christians remember that God “is not the God of the dead, but of the living – for all are alive to Him (**St. Luke 20:38**). Therefore, we pray for both the living and for the “dead in Christ” (**1 Thessalonians 4:16**).”

Mrs. George adds, “And one of the ways we show our love for one another is to pray for one another. Praying for our departed is also an act of love for those who have passed over to God.”

Learning Outcome Check

Remembering the departed is an act of love.

Reflection Questions

1. Can you name the parts of the funeral service?
2. Why is praying for our faithful departed so important to Orthodox Christians?
3. How is prayer for the departed an act of love?

LESSON

11

The Ascension of our Lord

*Why is it important to reflect on the Ascension?
It fills us with hope for the life awaiting us in the world to come!*

Vocabulary Words

Ascension to rise higher; Jesus Christ's rising into Heaven from earth

Holy Spirit the third person of the Holy Trinity; the Comforter; the Helper; the Paraclete

Second Coming Jesus' return to the world when He brings His followers into His Kingdom



It's a bright and sunny day and Christina is sitting in the backyard doing her homework. Tommy is in the yard playing with their puppy. He throws a ball high in the air, over and over, and the puppy chases it. They laugh and play until Mrs. George calls them in for dinner.

"I have a question," says Tommy with a sudden frown on his face. "How is it that every time I throw my ball in the air it comes back down but when Jesus went up into the air He just kept going until He got to Heaven? Why doesn't anything else do that?"

Christina puts her finished homework away in her bag and says to her brother, "Good question Tommy! Jesus Christ is not like any other creature or person, because He is God."

"So, He gets to cheat?" asks Tommy in a surprised voice.

Christina laughs. "He's not cheating Tommy. Jesus Christ can do anything because He is God. You know, He wants us to go up into Heaven too? That's called **Ascension**."

At the dinner table Tommy explains to his parents that he understands Jesus ascended into Heaven but he adds, "Why did He do that? Why not just appear in heaven if He could do that any way He wanted to?"

Mr. George smiles and says, "Well Tommy, everything Jesus did during His life on earth teaches us something important, and that is true for His Ascension into heaven too. Jesus Christ appeared in mysterious ways to His apostles and followers for 40 days past His resurrection."

"Wow!" Tommy exclaimed, "but why did He leave? Why not just stay with His followers?"

Mr. George continues, "Well Tommy, even the Apostles didn't want Him to leave. In fact, they were asking Him the same question! But Jesus told them that He must leave so that the Helper (**St. John 16:7**) can come. Do you know who the Helper is, Tommy?"

Tommy taps his nose and thinks. "Umm, oh! The **Holy Spirit**! The Holy Spirit came down soon after His Ascension, right?"

"Correct!" says Mr. George. "The Helper is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came 10 days after Christ's ascension, and that day is called Pentecost. Jesus wanted the Holy Spirit to come so that they would be filled with God's spirit."

But to answer your original question Tommy, Christ ascended into Heaven so that His believers would see Him raised in glory. When Christ comes again in the **second coming**, He will come in the same manner! He will come in glory. So now, we wait patiently for His return.”



Ascension of Christ

As they finish dinner, Christina shares some things she has learned in Sunday school. “The icon of the Ascension shows Jesus going to heaven with angels at His side and St. Mary is standing in the very centre, still on earth. See how calm she is while others have questions!”

“That’s right,” says Mr. George. “After Jesus said those things to the apostles and to St. Mary, He blessed them and then rose up into the sky in a cloud (**Acts 1:9**). As the disciples watched Him go, two angels suddenly appeared to them and asked them what they were looking at (**St. Luke 24:51; Acts 1: 10, 11**).

“I’ve seen those angels! Those are the angels standing next to St. Mary, right?” asks Tommy.

“Yes Tommy,” says Mrs. George. “Then one of the angels told the apostles that this very same Jesus will come back again, in the same way they saw Him going into heaven (**Acts 1:11**). So you see, when Jesus left the earth by ascend-

Learning Outcome Check

Symbolism in the Ascension icon.

Learning Outcome Check

Describe the Feast of Ascension.

ing into heaven He left us with hope of His second coming. This may have been the last time Jesus appeared on earth but it has a very special meaning for us as Orthodox Christians.”

Mr. George begins to clear the dinner dishes and adds, “and those angels taught us something else important too. That we don’t always need to watch for signs or try to predict the second coming of Christ. Instead, we can have faith that He will come again just like He left.”

Reflection Questions

1. How many days did Jesus spend with His Apostles after His resurrection?
2. What does the ascension teach us to hope for?
3. Who did Jesus tell his apostles to wait for in Jerusalem?

LESSON

12

The Promise Fulfilled

During the building of the Tower of Babel, the people were scattered and spoke different languages. But when The Holy Spirit came, He gave the apostles the ability to speak in different languages and be understood by all. The Holy Spirit unites all people.

Vocabulary Words

Pentecost “fiftieth day” in Greek; the celebration of the Holy Spirit coming to dwell among us.

Procession Procession is progression, when a multitude, headed by the clergy, goes forth in regular order. ‘Procession’ also means proceeding from a place or a person. E.g. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father.

Qurbana This is a Syriac word derived from the verb “Kareb,” which means gifts, offerings, and present. We also call it the Divine Liturgy.

Appa The way to address Dad affectionately in Malayalam

Speaking in tongues Or the gift of tongues; this ability was given to the apostles to speak in different languages and to be understood by everyone.



One day in school, Christina was observing her classmates. Some looked very different from her, some had darker skin and others with lighter skin, some with different hair, and even some with different accents! Christina thought that it was amazing that although everyone was so different, they all got along and were friends.

The following Sunday, Christina was still thinking about her friends at school. The church service felt longer than other Sundays, and Tommy was getting restless as he was standing and trying to understand what was going on. He started to complain that he was tired. Christina smiled at him with encouragement from her place next to their mother knowing the reason why it was a longer service. It was the Feast of **Pentecost**!

“I am tired of standing. Can I sit now?” whines Tommy to his father.

“We must stand when the clergy and altar servers make the **procession** while sprinkling us with water to receive the Holy Spirit,” says Mr. George.

Tommy is excited when he hears about the water. He remembers this from last year and thinks it is fun to get wet when Fr. Alexander splashes them with the branch and holy water.

After the Holy **Qurbana**, Tommy asks, “What language was Fr. Alexander speaking when he said prayers in all the different directions with the Cross?”

Christina answers brightly, “It’s Syriac, the ancient language of our early Church. It is also a version of the language which Jesus spoke! I can read the translation in English to you from the special book for **Pentecost** if you like?”

“Oh yeah, I saw **Appa** using that special book,” says Tommy. “It got a little wet when the priest sprayed us with water,” and laughed.

“It will dry,” says Mr. George as he joins them after the Qurbana. “What are you kids talking about?”

Christina explains, “Tommy didn’t know what language they spoke during the Pentecost service. Do you know what they were praying for, Tommy?” she asks.

“No,” says Tommy, “I just know that when Qurbana is extra long, I have to stand longer,” he whines. “But that also means something special is happening, right? That’s why we have special books for extra services?”

“Right, Tommy!” says Mr. George.

“50 days after the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday, the apostles had gathered in the name of Jesus Christ to pray in the house of St. Mark. This is the same place they had their last supper with Jesus. It was ten days after Jesus ascended into Heaven, and the apostles were sad, and they missed Jesus. As they gathered and prayed, a wind began to blow, and tongues of fire rested on each apostle. They were filled with the Holy Spirit, the comforter, and the advocate from God, just as Jesus had promised (**St. John 14:15-17; 16:13-14**). Do you know the promise of Jesus never fails? Of course, the Lord kept His word. After this, the apostles had the gift of speaking and being understood in different languages, and everyone present there could also understand each other. In the New Testament, this event marks the arrival of the Holy Spirit into the Church”, says Mr. George with a happy smile.

Learning Outcome Check

“Was there another reason they gathered together on the 50th day?” asks Christina. “I mean, God usually chooses numbers that have meaning, right?”

Pentecost is celebrated 50 days after Easter Sunday.

Mr. George smiles again and answers, “For the ancient Israelites, Passover, and Pentecost marked the beginning and end of the grain harvest. That means the day of Pentecost was also a harvest festival for them.”

As the George family talks, Fr. Alexander joins them and chimes in on the conversation. “Do you remember the story of The Tower of Babel from the Old Testament, Christina?” asks Fr. Alexander.

“Yes, that’s when they sounded like blah blah to each other,” chuckled Christina.

Learning Outcome Check

“That’s right!” says Fr. Alexander. “When the wicked people came together to build the Tower of Babel, God scattered them throughout many places and mixed up their languages.

How does the Tower of Babel relate to Pentecost.

Then they spoke different languages and couldn’t understand each other. The opposite of that happened on the day of Pentecost. When the apostles gathered together to worship God, they spoke different languages but could understand each other.” Fr. Alexander smiles and says, “So Pentecost healed what happened in Babel through the Holy Spirit.”

“And that must have made the apostles able to talk with people all over the world. Then they could travel to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ!” says Christina excitedly. “I always wondered how St. Thomas could speak with everyone in India when he came to spread the Word!” Christina had another amazing thought. Maybe it’s because of the work of the Holy Spirit that people of all different types get along at school! How exciting!



“Come here, children, I want to show you something,” says Fr. Alexander. In the icon depicting Pentecost, we see all of the apostles gathered in harmony and unity. The Tower of Babel, shown on one side of the icon, was destroyed in disunity. On the other side is shown the new spiritual building of the Church, through which anyone can reach the Kingdom of God no matter where they come from or what language they speak!

Learning Outcome Check

What are some of the meanings we see in the Icon of Pentecost?

See the empty space at the centre of the circle of the apostles in this icon? That is for Jesus Christ, who told the apostles before He Ascended that He is with them always. Some icons also show St. Mary to remind us that the Church is the Body of Christ.

And the 12 rays coming from the circle at the top of the icon represent the Holy Spirit sending tongues of fire to each apostle, granting the gift of tongues. Finally, there is a figure at the bottom of the icon with a crown and holding a cloth with 12 scrolls. This figure is Cosmos, who represents all people of the world who are in darkness, and the 12 scrolls represent the apostles who would bring light to all nations by spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

In the story of Pentecost, we learn about the amazing gift of the Holy Spirit, who came to unite everyone together with love and understanding. The Holy Spirit helped the Apostles speak in many languages so they could share the message of Jesus Christ with everyone. The Holy Spirit brings people from all backgrounds together, helping us in the Holy Church become more like Christ. Pentecost reminds us that no matter where we come from or how we speak, we can all be part of God’s family and work together to share His love with the world!



The Pentecost icon

Reflection Questions

1. What is the name of the ancient language of our early Church?
2. Why do we celebrate Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit to dwell among us, 50 days after the Resurrection of Jesus Christ?
3. Describe one part of the icon of Pentecost and what it means.
4. Who is the other Helper that Jesus promised would come in **St. John 14:15–17**?

A Place Set Apart

Why are church buildings consecrated when we can pray anywhere? Consecration is a special service that transforms a church building into the House of God.

Vocabulary Words

Consecration A dedication or setting apart for a special purpose

Eucharist Also called Holy Communion; consecrated bread in which God dwells

Mooron Also called Chrism; holy anointing oil



It is early on a Saturday morning and the George family is piling into their car to go to a church **consecration** for a parish in a nearby city. The children are a bit cranky as they would rather be sleeping in!

"I want to go back to sleep Mama!" Tommy complained.

"I know we don't always agree, but I'm with Tommy on this one," said Christina with a yawn.

"I know it's early and we've got a long drive ahead of us, but aren't you all a little curious about what we are about to see? You have never participated in a church consecration before," said Mrs. George with an encouraging smile.

"What is a consecration anyway?" Christina asked, sounding a little more awake now.

"A consecration is a dedication or setting something apart for a specific purpose. In this case, we will be participating in a church consecration. In other words, we are dedicating this church for the purpose of glorifying God.

We will be praying in a special service to help the bishop and priests make this building into a special place for people to experience the presence of God," Mrs. George explains.

"Hmm. So, can other things be consecrated?" Christina asked. She is very awake now!

"That's a really good question, Christina!" says Mrs. George. "Actually, each one of us is consecrated too! As Christians, when we were baptized, we were also dedicated or consecrated for the purpose of living our lives for God."

"Wow! I'm consecrated?" Tommy asks excitedly.

"Yes, you are honey. We all are!" Mrs. George says, smiling.

Mr. George adds, "and that means our bodies are houses of God too (**I Corinthians 3:16**). When the priest waves his hands over the bread and wine during the Holy Qurbana, he consecrates the bread, meaning God comes to dwell in the bread in a special way. So, every time we take Holy Communion, or the **Eucharist**, God comes into our bodies and dwells in us too."

Learning Outcome Check

What is the difference between the House of God (consecrated Church) Vs. House of Prayer (non-consecrated Church)?

Christina looks thoughtful for a moment and then says, “Dad, you know, now that I think about it... I have been to a church building consecration before. Remember we went to one when I was really young?”

“Oh yes! That’s right. Do you remember anything from that day?” Mr. George asks.

“The only thing I remember is that the bishop kept putting oil everywhere,” Christina answered truthfully.

“Yes, anointing with **Holy Mooron** or holy oil is definitely a big part of the consecration service,” Mrs. George agrees. “But there is a lot more to it. In fact, the consecration begins even before the church starts to be built.”

“How is that possible?” Tommy asks. “How can something be consecrated if it’s not even built yet?”

Mr. George answers, “Well, before the church starts to be built, a prayer is said to lay the foundation stone on which the church is built. During this service, a hole is dug where the foundation stone is supposed to be laid. The bishop carves a cross on the stone and blesses it in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The bishop then lays the foundation stone in the hole. After this is done the construction of the church begins.”



“That’s actually really cool!” exclaims Christina. “Even before anything happens, we dedicate the foundation of the church to God.”

“Exactly. In a way this helps us remember to keep God at the centre of our lives always. The laying of the foundation stone shows that this is true for the building of our churches too. Everything is built on and for God,” Mr. George explains.

“What else happens?” asks Christina, leaning forward in her seat.

“I want to know more about the oil,” says Tommy. “Where does the bishop put it during a consecration?” He is fully awake now too.

Mrs. and Mr. George laugh. “The most important part of the service is the purification and sanctification of the altar. Because the altar is such an important part of our church and because it is so important to the Qurbana, there is special attention given to dedicating it,” Mrs. George explains. “During the rest of the service, the entire church is prayed for and anointed with Holy Mooron,” adds Mr. George.

“And remember how we were talking about how Christians are consecrated during baptism?” asks Mrs. George. “Another similarity between a church consecration and a baptism is that Holy Mooron is used during both. As Christians, we are anointed with Holy Mooron during baptism. And during a church consecration, the church building is anointed with Holy Mooron.”

“Yes, we consider the church building to be a living thing, just like us. That’s why we use Holy Mooron for the consecration of both,” Mr. George finishes.

Christina looks thoughtful again. “All this talk about churches and how they are built and consecrated has me thinking about something that I never understood.”

“Sure, what’s up?” Mr. George asks.

“Why are our church buildings built facing the east? Why is the east so important?” Christina asks.

“That’s a really good question!” says Mr. George. “Did you ever think that everyone including the priest prays facing towards the Holy Altar and facing East? Christ himself said ***For as the lightning***

comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man’ in **St. Matthew 24:27**. When Christ comes again, He will come from the east. Facing the east in prayer reminds us of Christ’s return. For this reason, our churches are built facing the east. The altar of the church is placed on the east side.”

Mrs. George adds with excitement, “In fact, did you know that we also pray facing the east? The altar in every Orthodox Christian church building faces east and we also place icons on an eastern wall of our homes.”

Learning Outcome Check

Facing the east in prayers prepares us for Christ’s return.

“Cool! I didn’t know that. So, it’s like we have a mini church building in our house! I feel like everything we do in the church means something!” Tommy exclaims.

“Yup! I am so glad you noticed that. Sometimes it might seem like we are doing things randomly, but the more we learn, the more we see how everything has a special meaning that points us closer to God,” Mr. George says proudly.

“It looks like we’re here! Are you all ready?” Mrs. George asks.

As the family gets out of the car, Christiana says “I have to say, I am excited to see all of this in action.” Tommy nods in agreement and the George family enters the new church building to participate in the consecration service.

The consecration of a church building is a very special process that involves four important parts - Laying of the foundation stone of the Church, consecration of the Church, anointing the Holy Altar and Sanctuary with Holy Mooron, and then celebration of Holy Qurbana.

Learning Outcome Check

What are the four parts of the consecration of the Church?

Laying the foundation stone symbolizes our dedication to keeping God at the centre of our church and our lives. Next, the Holy Altar is carefully purified and sanctified, highlighting its significance for our worship. Finally, the bishop anoints the entire church with Holy Mooron, showing that it is set apart as a place where God dwells among us. Each of these steps reminds us that our church is not just a building; it is the living House of God where we gather to pray, worship, and grow closer to Him. Understanding these parts helps us appreciate the sacredness of our church and the importance of our own consecration as Christians.

Reflection Questions

1. How is the building of a church made holy?
2. How is the consecration of a Church like Baptism?
3. Why do we pray facing east?

LESSON

14

Fathers and Mothers

Who are the Orthodox Church Fathers and Mothers? Why is it important for us to remember them? Our faith has been given to us by brave and faithful people who worked and prayed to teach the true faith!

Vocabulary Words

Kochamma “Little mother,” an Orthodox Christian priest’s wife.

Diptychs also called Thubdens, are prayers for the living and departed recited during the Holy Qurbano service.

Doctors of the Church Church Fathers and Mothers of the Holy Orthodox Church who taught the faith through prayerful meditations and contemplation

Deacon/Deaconess “Servant” in Greek; a clergy member who helps priests and bishops serve the Church.

Synod Bishops in charge of keeping the rules of the Holy Church.



The Holy Qurbana has ended, and it is time for Sunday School. Mary Kochamma is teaching Christina’s class today. After an opening prayer, **Kochamma** asks her students what they know about the Church Fathers and Mothers. Christina raises her hand eagerly and Kochamma calls on her to answer.

“I know we remember them during the **Diptychs** of the Qurbana,” Christina says happily.

“Diptychs! That’s a funny sounding word!” says Aaron, one of Christina’s classmates. “What are Diptychs?”

“Good question Aaron,” says Mary Kochamma. “Diptychs’ is a Greek word, and we usually call them ‘Thubdens’ which in Syriac. These are a set of prayers that we say during the Holy Qurbano that starts with, ‘Again we’”

Aaron replies, “Oh yeah, that’s the one time we can sit down and nobody yells at us, right?” Christina giggles.

“Yes, it is OK to sit during the Diptychs,” says Mary Kochamma. “But we must remember we are supposed to pray during that time for all living and departed people and ask God to bless them. Some of those we pray for are the Doctors of the Holy Orthodox Church.”

Christina raises her hand to ask another question. “Who are the **doctors of the Church**? Do they take care of the bishops when they’re sick?”

Mary Kochamma smiles and says, “That’s a great question! ‘Doctors’ is another name for the Fathers and Mothers of the Holy Church. These men and women are especially important to us because they helped keep our faith even when others were trying to change it.”

Christina, Aaron, and the rest of the class nod and take notes as Mary Kochamma continues.

“During Holy Qurbana, did you hear the **deacon** say, ‘Let us remember all those who, before them, and with them, and after them, have kept, entrusted, and delivered to us the one, genuine, and uncorrupted faith?’” asks Mary Kochamma. Her students nod.

“The Fathers and Mothers of our church were very brave and faithful. Even when others did not like Christians or when others tried to change the faith based on their own ideas, the Church Fathers and Mothers remained dedicated and strong; this means they spoke up and taught the true faith no matter what anyone else said.” On their way home, Mrs. George asks Christina and Tommy what they learned in Sunday School.

Tommy speaks excitedly, “We learned about a bishop named Basil!” He continues, “He helped write the Nicene Creed that we say during the Qurbana and did other cool stuff, even for a guy named after a plant.”

Christina laughs and then asks, “Appa, is St. Basil a Church Father?”

Mr. George replied, “Yes, he is Christina. Why do you ask?”

“We learned about Church Fathers and Mothers in Sunday School today,” answers Christina.

“That’s great! It sounds like you both learned about important Fathers and Mothers in our Orthodox Christian faith!” says Mr. George. “St. Basil did support the writing of the Nicene Creed and also, spoke up against others who tried to make their own ideas about Jesus Christ more important than what had already been passed down by the apostles. There were many others, and we remember some of them during the Diptych prayers.”

Tommy speaks up again, “I remember some of those. They sound like important people!”

Mrs. George laughs and says, “Yes, they are! During the first several hundred years of the Church many people had different ideas of who God is and how Christians should live. A group of bishops called the **Holy Synod** were in charge of keeping the church rules and the faith clear for the people. So, they came together in several councils and made sure everyone knew the true identity of Jesus Christ and agreed on the many important things that are foundational to our faith as Orthodox Christians.”

Learning Outcome Check

Participants of the Holy Synods, that defined and refuted the faith of the Church, are main Church Fathers

“And many of those holy bishops are the main Church Fathers,” adds Mr. George.

“So why are they called ‘doctor’? I didn’t hear anything about healing or medicine,” says Tommy.

Mr. George answers, “The fathers and mothers we’ve been talking about are also known as the doctors of the Church. They give us prescriptions for our spiritual healing. Moreover, doctor here also means a very learned person in spiritual truths. Many of them continue to teach us through the prayers they passed on and the stories of their lives. Every Sunday and whenever we participate in the Holy Qurbana, we sing hymns that remind us that the faith we know today was preserved, defended and handed down to our generation by our forefathers. Do you remember how the hymn goes?” The entire George family sings, remembering **Hebrews 13:7**

(Daivasuthanmarayiduvan)

*Through our offerings and our pray'rs
We make good mem'ry of our fathers.
Who in their life taught us to -
Be children of God
O Son of God, raise them up
In the heavenly kingdom with the -
Righteous and the just in the -
World which has no end
Lord, have mercy upon us and help us!*

Tommy decided to sing this song extra loud, and Christina laughed. Christina says, “You know, it’s really neat how we remember and honor the important people in our Church.”

“Yes, these Fathers and Mothers are examples for us who show us that it is possible to live a life dedicated to God and to seek Him in all that we do,” says Mrs. George.

When they arrive home, Christina pulls out her notebook to show her parents some more of what she learned in Sunday School.

“There were different kinds of Church Fathers,” says Christina. There were the apostolic fathers, who lived during the time of Christ and in the following years. They were the apostles and the disciples of the apostles who received teachings from Christ Himself.”

Learning Outcome Check

Who are some of the main Church Fathers?

Tommy leans over her notebook and says, “Wow, you learned a lot today!”

Christina smiles and goes on, “There were also Fathers of the Councils, like St. Basil who we spoke about earlier, St. Athanasius of Alexandria, St. Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, St. John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, and Severus of Antioch. We remember them in the Diptychs, right?”

“Right!” says Mr. George. “They worked so hard to keep the one true Faith taught by Christ. There were course many other men and women who also worked to keep the faith and to teach the truth. Even though we remember by name some Saints we should remember everyone even those we don’t know their names.”

“Who is the church father we remembered today? St. Ignatius?” asks Christina.

“On October 17th we remember St. Ignatius of Antioch, who was known as “Theophorus” or the Bearer of God. Did you know the Church says that in St. Matthew 18:1-5, the little child that Christ called to him was St. Ignatius?”

“Wow! I didn’t know that we knew about that child,” says Christina.





Parumala Thirumeni

“We also have two Church fathers from Kerala, India!

One is Parumala Thirumeni who was born on June 15, 1848, in Chathuruthy family near Mulanthuruthy, Ernakulam, Kerala. At the age of 18, he was ordained as a priest and later a bishop as Mar Gregorios. Because of his young age everybody called him “Kochu Thirumeni” (“Young Bishop”). Thirumeni defended and preserved the church that we are part of today. He showed love towards all people regardless of their religion and truly reflects the love of Christ. He was a man whose example we can follow today,” says Mrs. George.



Vattasseril Thirumeni

“The other local Church father is Saint Geevarghese Mar Dionysius of Vattasseril (Vattasseril Thirumeni), who was the Malankara Metropolitan of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church for twenty-five years. In addition to the daily prayer and fasting, Thirumeni spent much time in private prayers and silent meditations behind closed doors. In spite of his busy schedule, he was also able to focus on three to four lessons from the Holy Bible every day. He was a living saint. He followed Christ’s instruction to pray when we are alone, not just when we go to Qurbana” says Mrs. George.

“We learn so much from you mom, who are the church mothers?” asks Christina.

St Mary is, of course, the first “mother” of the Orthodox Church. Her intercession is in countless hymns and prayers in which Orthodox Christians sing Mary’s praises and appeal to her maternal love for help and protection. When we look at the life of Theotokos, she fulfilled all the roles without being ordained and is considered as the greatest among all saints. We are all called to be like her in whatever stage we are in life.

“Other women do not appear often in our liturgical prayers and songs but know that there are thousands of women saints! The Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles shows us that women were leaders in the early church. They served as founders of churches, deaconesses, apostles, teachers, preachers and prophets. Our church also remembers many like St. Mary Magdalene, St. Yulithi, St. Macrina (the elder sister of Basil and St. Gregory of Nyssa), St Hermione, St. Thekla, St. Photini, and St. Phoebe who was the first deaconess.” says Mrs. George.



Mother of God

Christina puts her notebook away after writing down a bit more of what her parents shared.

The Church Fathers and Mothers were truly great teachers and leaders of the Holy Church. They dedicated their lives to spreading the teachings of Jesus Christ and defending our Orthodox faith, often facing challenges and opposition.

By living prayerful lives and sharing their wisdom, they showed us how to connect with God and follow His path. Their teachings and examples remind us that faith is not only about believing but also about acting with love and courage. As we remember these holy men and women, let's strive to follow in their footsteps, learning from their commitment and devotion as we grow in our own faith journeys.

Learning Outcome Check

Church Fathers are great teachers and leaders of the Holy Church, who taught the faith through prayerful meditations and contemplation.

Reflection Questions

1. Can you name one Saint from the 5th Diptych (Thubden)?
2. Who are the Saints from India?
3. What are the 3 Synods mentioned during Holy Qurbana?

LESSON

15

Monasticism: A Path to Holiness

Monastics choose to separate themselves physically from the world in some way so they can prayerfully devote themselves to God's work. Monastics grow closer to God by living with fewer comforts and connections to the material world.

Vocabulary Words

Monasticism a calling in which you separate yourself physically from the world and do not marry in order to be closer to God.

Asceticism practices that take self-discipline, like fasting, that help us grow closer to God



It's been a long week with school and homework, but it is finally Friday at the George house. Usually, Christina and Tommy get along just fine, but tonight, they are having a hard time agreeing on what their parents should order for dinner. Tommy wants pizza and Christina wants tacos. Frustrated, Christina stomps and shouts, "I am going to become a monk, so I don't have to deal with you!"

Tommy turns around with his eyes as wide as two tennis balls and cries, "Daaaaddyyyy!!!! I don't want Christina to become a monkey!" he wails.

At this, Christina bursts into laughter. Their dad, hiding a chuckle, turns to his children and says, "Well Christina! How about you apologize to your brother and then explain to him what a monk is?"

Christina is still laughing when she gives Tommy a hug. She says, "I'm sorry for saying I didn't want to deal with you Tommy. And I didn't mean that I want to be a monkey. I was just frustrated and wanted to be alone and stop arguing. I said I wanted to be a monk because many monks live by themselves.

Mrs. George joins the conversation and says, "All Christians are called to live a holy life and grow closer to God. Some people do this by living a little apart from the world. These Christians are called monastics."

"So, do monks not like people or something? Why do they go off to live by themselves?" Tommy asks, still confused.

"The main characteristic of monastics is that they choose to separate themselves physically from the world in some way. This is so they can prayerfully devote themselves to God's work," says Mr. George.

"They may still live around other people, even with other monastics, but they try to grow closer to God by living with fewer comforts and connections to the material world."

"Some monastics live completely by themselves," continues Mr. George. "They are called solitary or Eremitic monastics. Those monks who choose to live with other monks are called communal or Cenobitic monastics."

“I remember a bishop coming to visit once,” says Christina. “He said becoming a monastic is a calling, and not something people do without giving it very serious thought because it is a big commitment.”

Mrs. George nods, “That’s right, it is truly a calling because it can be hard to give up the possibility of having a family.”
“What?” says Tommy, confused again. “They become orphans?”

Learning Outcome Check

Monasticism is a calling in which you separate yourself physically from the world and do not marry in order to be closer to God.

“No, they don’t lose the family they already have,” says Mrs. George. “But they choose not to get married or have children of their own. That’s the other main characteristic of monastics.”

“Do I know any monastics?” Tommy asked.

“Do you remember last week at the consecration of the church, there was a person wearing a special head covering like Thirumeni, and was in a black robe like Achens? He is a monk, we call them Rambachen.

Learning Outcome Check

Some monastics live by themselves completely. They are called solitary or Eremitic monastics. Those monks who choose to live with other monks are called communal or Cenobitic monastics.

St. John the Baptist was also a monastic! He lived in the desert and spent time by himself focusing on growing closer to God,” Christina says. “He was called the Forerunner because he preached about the coming of Jesus Christ to the Jews. He was the cousin of Jesus and knew Him while He was on earth. Also, he always ate honey and locusts.”

Learning Outcome Check

Life of St. John the Baptist exemplifies monasticism.

“That’s true. And remember, there are also female monastics like St. Mary of Egypt. She lived a very sinful life but then repented and went to live in the desert so that she would not be tempted any more,” adds Mrs. George.

“That is pretty cool,” says Tommy. “So, monks live away from the world and that’s how they try to grow closer to God?”

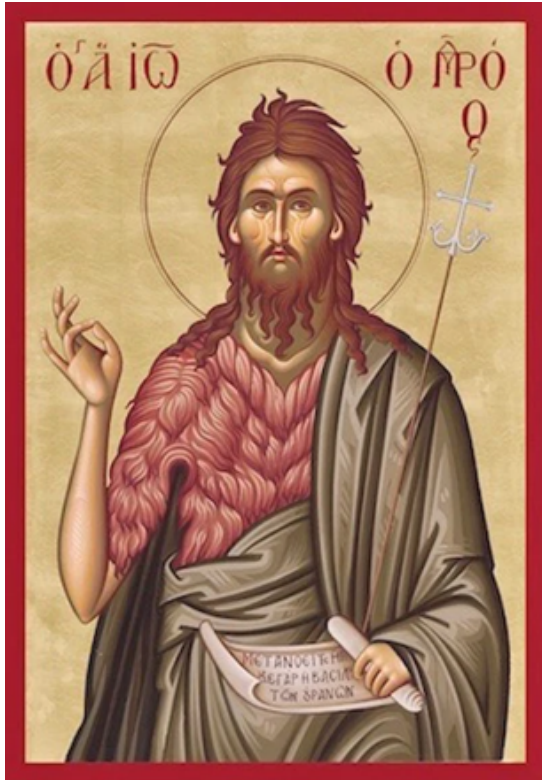
“That’s right!” says Mrs. George.

Christina looks thoughtful and asks, “So, is being a monastic better? Because monks separate themselves from the world?”

Mr. George shakes his head and says, “No, one is not better than the other. Both being married and being a monastic are callings, and both have challenges. But both ways are good and holy.”

“Yes,” adds Mrs. George. “Being a spouse and parent can be challenging because there are other people to care for and sometimes, we put one another’s needs before our own. We are often called to sacrifice for the sake of our family members.”

Christina looks sheepish and says, “Like having to agree on what’s for dinner.”



St. John the Baptist



St. Mary of Egypt

Mrs. George smiles and says, “Exactly! But married people grow closer to God by studying the Scriptures, participating in the Holy Qurbana, and raising their children to love Jesus Christ. Monastics also study the Scriptures and participate in the Holy Qurbana, but have different kinds of challenges, like living with less and sometimes it is hard to be alone without family. They may be challenged by a greater degree of **asceticism**.”

“Oh geez, another big word. What does that mean?” asks Tommy.

“I think I remember that one,” says Christina. “Asceticism is like denying yourself things, is that right? Like training yourself to grow closer to God.”

Mrs. George continues, “Yes, all Christians practice some asceticism, like fasting from certain foods on certain days. When we fast, we give up something we enjoy and add more time with God. Other examples of practising asceticism are when we try to discipline ourselves by praying regularly, by giving what we don’t need to the poor, and so on. Monastics may practice asceticism in even more ways, like living with very little.”

“You know how you said that becoming a monastic is a calling?” Tommy asks. “How do you know if God is calling you to do that?”

Mr. George tousles Tommy’s hair and says, “You have to spend a lot of time talking to God in prayer and He will answer that question for you in time. It can also help to talk with a spiritual advisor, like Achen or Mary Kochamma.”

“Well, we can at least practice asceticism right here and now,” Christina says. “Instead of ordering out, I’ll make mac and cheese!”

Reflection Questions

1. What does it mean to practise monasticism?
2. Name 2 monastics from this lesson.
3. What does it mean to practise asceticism? How can we do this in our lives today?
4. Do you have to become a monastic in order to live a holy life? Why or why not?

LESSON

16

The Resurrection

*What is the Resurrection? Why is it so important to Christians?
The Church teaches us why!*

Vocabulary Words

Nativity The birth of Jesus Christ

Resurrection To rise from death; when Jesus Christ rose from the dead; also the feast of feasts or the day we celebrate Christ's resurrection from death; also called Pascha.

Great Friday the Friday Jesus Christ died on the cross

Pascha Easter; the Resurrection

Sheol hell or hades

Messiah king and saviour

Prefiguration a foretelling; a signal of what will come in the future



Christina is studying at the kitchen table while her parents discuss plans for the Holy Resurrection Feast this Sunday. She looks troubled, and Mr. George sits down to ask her if anything is wrong.

Christina says, "Oh, it's fine. It's just, I've been thinking about the Resurrection Feast. We are learning things in biology about how plants and creatures grow, live and die and I don't understand something. How could Jesus live after He died?"

Mr. George nods his head and answers, "I understand that can be confusing. God created the world which we can often understand better through the study of science. But God can do anything as He is the Creator. He does not have to follow the rules of science in the way creation does."

Christina puts her pencil down and looks at her father curiously. "Okay, I guess that makes sense. But then why did Jesus have to go through all of that? Why did he grow, live and die like the rest of us? And then why did He live again if we can't? So many of my friends say it's silly to believe that a man could be God."

Mr. George pats his daughter on the back in understanding and says "you have amazing questions! And you're right, not everyone believes in Jesus Christ as our Resurrected Saviour and God. The Orthodox Church has always kept the history and true Sacraments of our faith that we remember and know who God is.

Learning Outcome Check

Understand that not everyone has the same faith and beliefs as we have.



Tommy, go get your icon of the Nativity of Our Lord, please and bring it here."

Tommy, who is playing on the piano in the living room, jumps and races to his room. He comes back quickly with the icon of the Nativity.

Tommy hands the icon to his sister and says, “Nativity means ‘birth of Christ’! My Sunday School teacher told us Jesus came from Heaven to be born and grow up just like us!”

Mr. George nods and says, “That’s right! God sent His only Son to become human through Mary who conceived and bore Our Lord Jesus Christ. Then He grew up human, just like you and me, but He was also always God at the same time.”

Christina points to the icon and says, “I see the angels in the background and the light shining down on Jesus. I know He was always the Son of God, and one of the Holy Trinity. He lived and died as humans do.” Mr. George again nods and continues, “Yes exactly. And He chose to become human in order to rescue all people from sin. When the Son of God came down to live among us He helped us to know Him so much better than we ever had before.” Christina looks at her father curiously again and says, “So God lived as one of us, taught us to know Him, how to be holy, and how to repent from sin. Is that right?”

“Yes!” says Mr. George, “and He also died like all creatures die. Of course, Jesus did not need to die because He was God. But He willingly lived and died like us. By dying on the Cross, He sacrificed Himself for the sake of all of God’s children. This was so that paradise would open up to us again. On Pascha, He rose from death, something no person could ever do.”

“Pascha means Easter, right?” asks Christina. Mr. George smiles and says “Yes, or Resurrection. It is our most important Holy Feast of the year. And it’s important to remember what happened before the first Pascha. Jesus died on the Cross on a Friday. Then went to Sheol and preached to the dead for three days. Finally, He rose from the dead, on a Sunday.” Christina looked confused and Mr. George understood why. “Sheol is the ‘place of the dead’. It’s where all the souls of those who had already died were waiting.”

Tommy abandons the piano again and races to the prayer wall, where he finds the icon of the Resurrection. Christina smiles at him and pulls out a chair for her little brother.

“I know this part too!” Tommy shouts excitedly. “When the disciples went to the tomb to find Jesus He was not there because He had come back to life!” Mr. George asks Tommy to sit with them and continues:



The Nativity Icon



The Resurrection Icon

“Jesus Christ died on the Cross and was buried in a tomb on Friday. God willingly died for us, but He defeated death!

The Resurrection is when Our Lord and Saviour reconciled all of God’s children to Himself again.”

Mrs. George joins her family at the table and chimes in, “On that Sunday, three women went to the tomb where He had been buried to anoint Him with oils and fragrant spices. They were St. Mary Magdalene, St. Joanna, and St. Mary the mother of James. They loved Jesus and wanted to care for His body after his death. One of the spices they brought was myrrh.”

“Hey! Myrrh was one of the fancy presents!” shouts Tommy.

Christina laughs and says “right, that was one of the gifts the wise men brought to Jesus after his birth. What does that mean?”

Mrs. George goes on saying “the wise men bringing myrrh to Jesus at His birth was a **prefiguration** (foretelling) of His death. When the disciples arrived, they found the stone that had been covering the opening of the tomb had been rolled away and Jesus’ body was gone. These three women were very upset but even during this time remained faithful, asking “where have they taken my Lord?”, and showing their belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God (**St. John 20:13-15**). Angels appeared and told them Jesus had risen from death and to go tell the other disciples. This moment was also prefigured in one of the gifts the wise men brought to Jesus after His birth: frankincense, which we use today in our liturgies as an offering to God.”

“I love the smell of incense,” says Christina. “So, by rising from the dead, Jesus Christ showed that He is really God even though he was also human, lived and died like a human.”

“Yes!” say Mr. and Mrs. George together. “His Resurrection is the most important part of our history as Orthodox Christians. It is the most important part of our faith,” says Mr. George. “This is why the Resurrection is called the Feast of Feasts. It is our celebration and remembrance of Jesus Christ coming to earth to live as one of us, His crucifixion, death, and resurrection.”

Mr. George continues, “This is why we always say the Nicene Creed every day, including on Sundays. We are saying our statement of faith, meaning what we believe. Our Church is part of the Oriental Orthodox Churches, and we all

believe the same. But remember, not everyone believes that Jesus is God and that He resurrected. Or they believe some other things that are different. Our faith in Christ is special and has ancient traditions that others do not. This is why we only take Qurbano and other sacraments within our church community. It’s why we say, ‘the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic faith’.”

Christina smiles at her family and says “thanks Amma and Appa, I think I get it now. God became one of us, that we could know Him better. It was not because He had to, but because He loves us so much. I love you both too!”

“Hey!” says Tommy with a frown.

Christina hugs him and says, “I love you too Tommy,” and Tommy grins.

Learning Outcome Check

We only receive sacraments in the Oriental Orthodox Churches.

Reflection Questions

1. Do you remember the Nicene Creed?
2. Is the Resurrection of Christ the most important event to our Christian life?
3. Can we receive Holy Qurbana in other Oriental Orthodox Churches?

DEAR 4th GRADE READER

Thank you for joining the George family, as they uncovered many mysteries of God and learned about Holy Orthodoxy. With their mother and father, their priest, and their Kochamma, Christina and Tommy learned amazing things about the one true faith. We hope you have enjoyed learning with them!





ST. THOMAS, THE APOSTLE OF INDIA
PRAY FOR US



O S S A E
Diocese of UK, Europe and Africa

SECOND EDITION
2025