

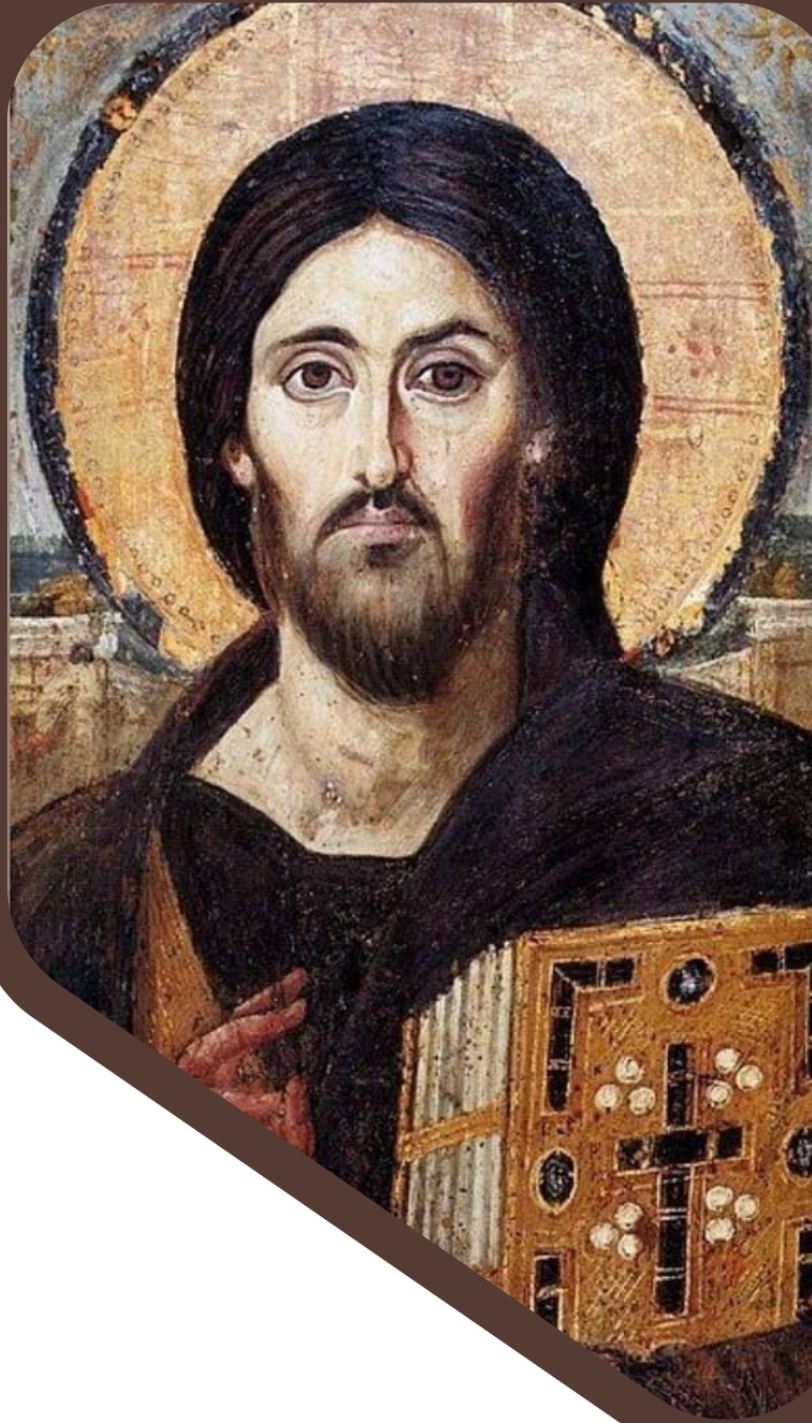


C A T E G O R Y | D E V E L O P I N G

Jesus Our Saviour GRADE 5

ORTHODOX SYRIAN
SUNDAY SCHOOL
ASSOCIATION

Diocese of UK, Europe and Africa



ORTHODOX SYRIAN
SUNDAY SCHOOL ASSOCIATION
OF THE EAST



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The Curriculum Review Co-ordinators team : Mr. Suresh Daniel, Mr. Simon Chacko, Mr. Vinod Philip, Mr. Robin Thomas and Dr. Febe Francis

Second Edition : January 2025

FOREWORD



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

DIOCESE OF UK • EUROPE • AFRICA •
UK REGISTERED CHARITY : 1139302

+ABRAHAM MAR STEPHANOS METROPOLITAN

MALANKARA HOUSE
35 HENMAN CLOSE
SWINDON SN25 4ZW
UNITED KINGDOM
TEL: +44 1793 921224
MOBILE: +44 7391 210127

E-MAIL: metropolitan@indianorthodoxuk.org
abrahamstephanos@mosc.in

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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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LESSON

1

Seasons of The Church

Lesson Goals :

- *I can understand that the Liturgical Calendar is a tool for a deeper focus on the life of Jesus Christ, the Saints, and the Church.*
- *I can understand the differences between the major and minor Feasts.*
- *I can understand the significance of the Liturgical Calendar and the seasons*



How do you celebrate your birthday? Our loved ones each year celebrate with you because they are happy you are in their life. In this same way, we celebrate not only the birth of Jesus every year but other important events of His life as well. The Liturgical Calendar helps us with this, and we are also able to grow closer to Christ through this yearly celebration as we also live through His life.

Our Church calendar celebrates the life of Christ with seven seasons: (1) Annunciation, (2) Epiphany, (3) Great Lent, (4) Resurrection, (5) Pentecost, (6) Transfiguration, and (7) the Holy Cross.

The seven seasons of the year set up by the Church Fathers are important and help us celebrate our faith. Each season includes important feasts and times of fasting, and they take us from the Creation of the World to the Second Coming of Christ and the Last Judgement. The seasons help us grow in our belief and encourage us to live like Christ. Just like the seven seasons in the year, there are also seven times each day called canonical hours when we pray, and seven days in a week. The prayer times and themes each day follow the same pattern as the seasons, helping to guide us in our spiritual journey.

Reflect

Look at the liturgical calendar pictured in the next page. Start from the beginning and follow it through. What month does it start in and what are the events outlined?

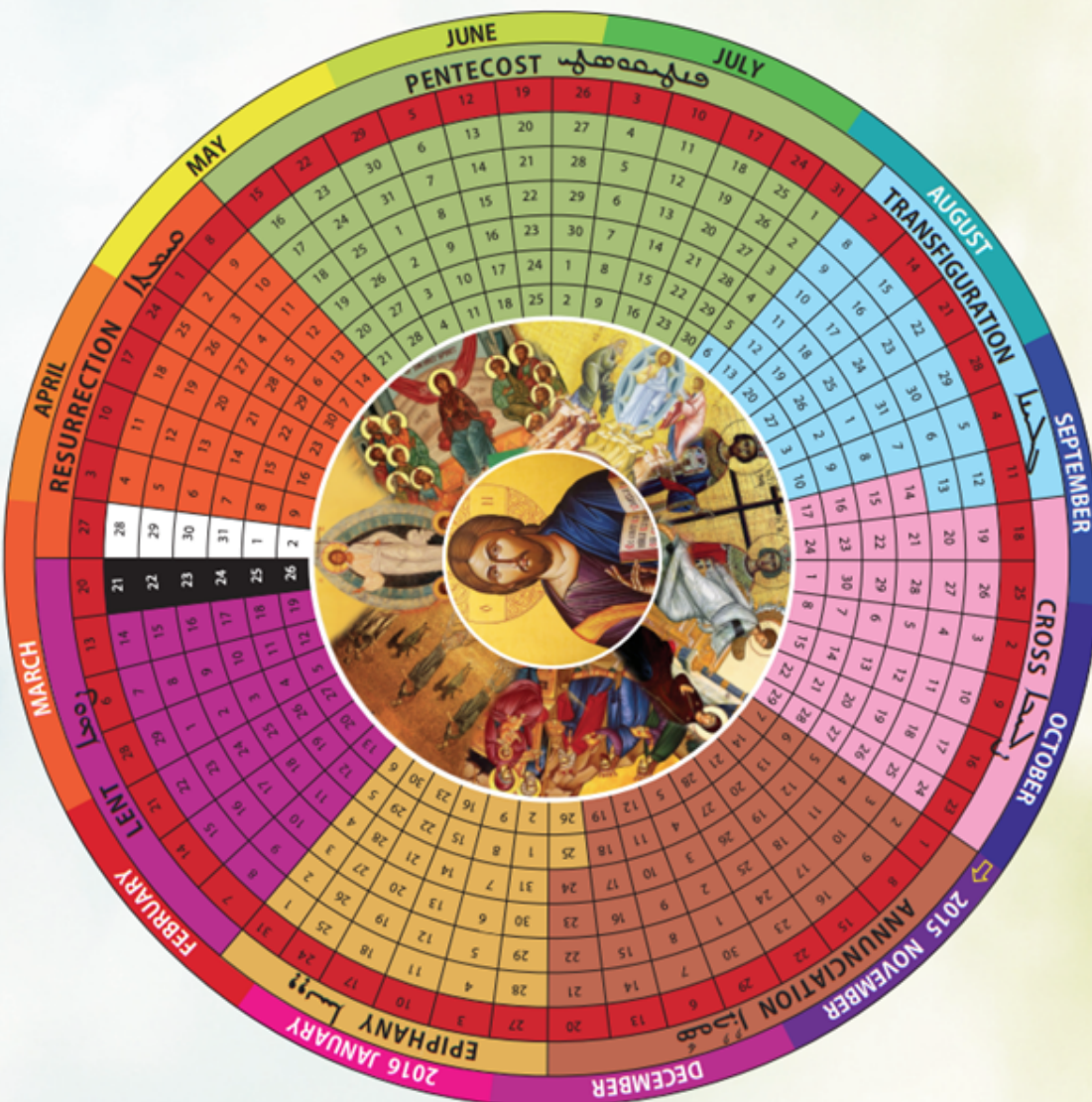
Fixed and Movable Feasts

Feasts are special days when we celebrate important events in the Christian faith. These celebrations can be divided into two types: fixed feasts and movable feasts. Fixed feasts happen on the same date every year, like Christmas on December 25th and the Epiphany on January 6th. On the other hand, movable feasts take place on different dates each year based on certain calculations and traditions. A **fixed feast** is a celebration that always occurs on the same day each year. For example, the Feast of the Nativity, also known as Christmas, is always celebrated on December 25th. Another example is the Epiphany (Denaha), which is celebrated on January 6th every year. These feasts have specific dates that do not change, making it easy for people to remember when to celebrate them.

Movable feasts, in contrast, do not have a set date and can change each year. For example, the Resurrection of our Lord (Easter) is a movable feast because it can be on different Sundays each



LITURGICAL HOUR



LITURGICAL WEEK

THE LITURGICAL YEAR IS ALSO DIVIDED INTO SEVEN SEASONS OR PERIODS.
EACH PERIOD OF AN YEAR, EACH DAY OF A WEEK AND EACH HOUR OF A DAY HAS SOME COMMONALITY IN THEIR THEME! THE SEVEN SEASONS /PERIODS ARE:

spring. Other movable feasts include the Ascension, which is celebrated 40 days after Easter, and Pentecost, which is 50 days after Easter. These feasts are based on calculations related to the date of Easter and have special meanings in the church's traditions.

Feast days are often preceded by fasting periods. Therefore, some fasting days are fixed, and some are movable.

Research

Take a look at the liturgical calendar and identify other fixed feasts.



Seven seasons of the liturgical calendar

The Liturgical Calendar is a schedule that guides us through seven main seasons such as Great Lent and Resurrection, which each last for seven weeks. Some seasons, like Annunciation and the Holy Cross, are even longer!

Learning Outcome Check

What is the importance of the liturgical calendar in the Orthodox Church? Provide an overview of the seasons of the Church.

1. Season of Annunciation (Suboro)



Annunciation to St. Mary

During this first season of our liturgical calendar, we reflect on St. Mary and her vital role in God becoming a man for our salvation. There is a Nativity fast of 25-days that prepares us for the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord (Yeldho or Christmas). This time helps us think about how we can also be obedient and open to receiving the Lord into our lives!

- The first Sunday is 'Kudhosh-Etho' (Sanctification of the Church), celebrated on the first Sunday after October 29th or the 8th Sunday before the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord.
- The next Sunday is 'Hudoth Idto' (Dedication of the Church), where we rededicate ourselves.

The remaining six Sundays before the feast of the Nativity of our Lord represent the events that happened before the Feast of the Incarnation of our Lord:

- Annunciation to Zachariah
- Annunciation to St. Mary
- St. Mary's visit to Elizabeth
- The birth of St. John the Baptist
- Revelation to St. Joseph
- The Sunday of Genealogy (Sunday before the Nativity of our Lord)

Do You Know?

Every Orthodox Church calendar celebrates the genealogy of Christ on the Sunday before Christmas.



2. Season of Epiphany (Denaha)

We remember during this season all those who showed us how to live like Jesus, including martyrs, saints, and beloved family members and friends who have passed away.

This celebration covers Jesus' life before he began teaching others which most believe spanned about 30-years. It includes events immediately after the Incarnation and leads to the Baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ by St. John the Baptist.

- 26 December is when the Church celebrates a Feast in honour of **St. Mary** who is Mother of God (Theotokos) and played a vital and special role in the Incarnation.
- 27 December is when we remember the **Feast of the Infant Martyrs**. These holy and innocent infant boys were slaughtered by King Herod after the birth of Jesus.
- 1 January is the **Circumcision/Naming of our Lord (Gazurthe)**.
- 6 January is the **Feast of the Baptism of our Lord (Denaha)**. Denaha means Divine Light. This feast is also called Theophany ("appearance of God") or Epiphany ("manifestation") because the Holy Trinity was revealed.
- 2 February is the **Feast of the Presentation in the Temple (Ma'altho)**
- The 3-day Nineveh fast begins 18 days before the Great Lent.
- The sixth Sunday of this season is dedicated to all the departed clergy.
- The seventh and last Sunday of this season is when we remember all the faithful departed.



Baptism of Jesus Christ

3. Season of Great Lent (Zawmo Raabo)

The Great Lent is an important time in the Orthodox Church. This special period comes just before Holy Week, when Christians remember the events of Jesus Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection. It covers about three years of Jesus' public ministry. The first Monday of the Great Lent is called *Shubqono* (reconciliation) which helps us participate in the Great Lent with the love of Christ in our hearts.

This season begins with Kothne Sunday (Wedding at Cana) and ends with Holy Saturday. It is seven weeks long and is divided into 2 parts.



Healing of the crippled woman

- The **first part** of this season is the 40 days of Holy Lent. During this time the healing miracles of Jesus are meditated upon to remind us of His Love and His desire to save us from Sin and death.
 - First Sunday of Holy Lent: Miracle at the wedding of Cana
 - Second Sunday of Holy Lent: Healing of the Leper (Garbo)
 - Third Sunday of the Holy Lent: Healing of the Paralytic (M'shariyo)
 - Fourth Sunday of the Holy Lent: Healing of the daughter of woman from Canaan (Knanoytho)
 - Fourth Wednesday of Holy Lent: Mid-Lent (Holy Cross will be elevated in the midst of the Church)
 - Fifth Sunday of the Holy Lent: Healing of the crippled woman (K'piptho)
 - Sixth Sunday of the Holy Lent: Healing of the blind man (Sam'yo)
 - Fortieth Friday: Jesus' 40 days of fasting, remembered
 - Saturday before Ooshana: Raising Lazarus from death
- The **second part** of this season is Holy Week, starts with the Triumphant Entry of our Lord into Jerusalem (Ooshana or Palm Sunday), followed by Passion Week and it ends on Holy Saturday (Saturday of Annunciation to the dead or Shabtho d'sbartho).



Crucifixion

4. Season of Resurrection of our Lord (Qyamtha)



Resurrection icon

This season is also seven weeks and begins with the Resurrection of our Lord.

- This season begins with Bright week with Holy Qurbana celebrated each day.
- The Feast of the Ascension of our Lord (*Sooloqo*) is 40-days after the Resurrection and always falls on a Thursday.

During this season we greet each other by saying “Christ is Risen!”, to which the other person responds, “Indeed He is Risen!”. This is a very joyous and victorious season as Christ defeated death!

5. Season of Pentecost (Siom Boorke)



Pentecost (Siom Boorke) is celebrated 50 days after the Resurrection. This season refers to the period of the growth of the Church. The Holy Spirit guided the Apostles as they spread the Gospel and established new churches. The thirteen-day Apostles Fast is observed in this season from 16 June to 29 June. This fast is in remembrance of the 12 Apostles and St. Paul (who preached to the Gentiles).

6. Season of Transfiguration (M'tale)



This season refers to the belief that those who suffer for the Kingdom will be glorified. On 6 August, the Church celebrates the Feast of Transfiguration (*M'tale*) of Christ.

The Dormition of the Theotokos (*Shoonoyo*) Fast is from 1 August - 15 August, ending with the Feast of Dormition of the Theotokos on August 15th.

7. Season of the Holy Cross (Sleeba)



Finding of the the
Cross

This season refers to the future as we await the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

On 14 September, the Church celebrates the **Feast of the Holy Cross** (*Sleeba*) as a commemoration of finding the true Cross on which Jesus was crucified. The Holy Cross represents victory of every baptised individual over sin.

The Liturgical Calendar In Our Daily Lives

The Liturgical Calendar is an important part of our Christian journey. It helps us grow spiritually and feel closer to God. Each holy feast day is not just about remembering past events; when we celebrate these days, we actively participate in the stories and events as if they are happening right now! The prayers and hymns we sing on these special days bring us closer to Jesus and help us understand His life better.

Learning Outcome Check

The Liturgical Calendar helps us grow as Christians.

Our Church has three different grades (or categories) of Feasts¹.

The first grade consists of the most important Feasts, including the Feasts of our Lord and all Sundays. These are days when we should take a break from our regular work to focus on worship and prayer. They are special times when we gather as a community to celebrate together and deepen our connection to God. Examples are Sundays, as well as Feasts such as the Nativity (Christmas) and the Resurrection (Easter). Sundays are particularly important. As Fr. Dr. Baby Varghese² highlights, "each Sunday is in fact called Qyamtha, for it is a weekly celebration of the Resurrection of Christ."

The second grade includes Feasts that come after specific times of fasting, like Great Lent. While these Feasts are not as essential as the first grade, they are still significant. It is important for everyone to make an effort to attend church on these days and to avoid working, so we can keep the spirit of reflection and joy alive in our hearts.

Finally, the third grade includes Feasts that honour Saints or local patron Saints. It is still necessary to attend church on these days, but people may also choose to do other activities, including working. Even though these Feasts are not as essential, they remind us of the lives of the Saints and encourage us to follow their examples in our daily lives. By participating in all these Feasts, we can grow in faith and become more like Christ.

Learning Outcome Check

What are the different grades of feasts?

Some of the feasts of St. Mary the Theotokos will come under categories of either 2 or 3. In general, even if the feast does not fall under the first category, it is better to observe and commemorate the feast days of Apostles, martyrs, prophets, confessors, saints, holy fathers, and blessed teachers, as it will be a blessing for us to do so.

Conclusion

The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church follows a special calendar based on the West Syriac tradition. This calendar is centred around the celebration of Jesus Christ's Resurrection, also known as Qyamtha. Every Sunday is considered a mini celebration of Easter because it reminds us of Christ rising from the dead!

¹K. Joshua, Fr. Dr. S. (2020). **Common Prayers: Pampakuda Namaskaram**. Malankara Orthodox Church Publications.

²Varghese, Fr. B. (2004). **West Syrian Liturgical Theology** (1st ed.). Routledge.

All Orthodox Churches emphasise important feasts like the Nativity (the birth of Jesus) and the Resurrection. However, each Orthodox Church may celebrate these events in different ways, reflecting their unique traditions and local customs. They can organise their calendars differently.

The calendar of the Eastern Orthodox Church begins with the Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos in September and ends with the Dormition of the Theotokos in August. This shows that there are different traditions within the Church, but it does not mean any calendar is wrong. Instead, these differences celebrate the beauty and diversity of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, which is alive in various cultures and histories all around the world.

The Orthodox Church believes in the one, genuine, and uncorrupted Faith that has been kept, entrusted, and delivered to us. This shapes our calendar which guides and helps us grow in our relationship with God.

Learning Outcome Check

Contrast West Syriac Liturgical calendar with that of other Orthodox Churches.

Review

Seasons of the liturgical Calendar

Annunciation

Epiphany

Great Lent

Resurrection

Pentecost

Transfiguration

Holy Cross

Reflection Questions

1. How can the Liturgical calendar help us organise our spiritual life and become more like Christ?
2. What are the seven seasons in the Liturgical calendar and why do we celebrate some feasts on different dates each year?
3. What season of the Liturgical calendar are we in now?

LESSON

2

She Who Carries the Whole Creation

Lesson Goals :

- *I can explain the significance of the Feast of the Annunciation to the Theotokos*
- *I can understand why St. Mary is considered the New Eve*
- *I can reflect on St. Elizabeth's announcement that St. Mary is the God-bearer*



The Feast of the Annunciation to the Theotokos

The Feast of Annunciation to the Theotokos (Suboro) is the only major feast celebrated twice in a year! On the Annunciation, the Archangel Gabriel visited the Virgin Mary to ask if she would become the mother of Jesus. This is in the Bible (**St. Luke 1:26-39**), and in many hymns and prayers of the Church. St. Mary is the **Theotokos** which means “God Bearer” in Greek. In Syriac, her title is **Yoldath Aloho**.

St. Mary was pure and humble, which is why God chose her. When the Angel told her that she would be the mother of Jesus, she replied, “I am the handmaid of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.” This shows that she was willing to accept God’s plan even though it would be hard.

St. Mary is a wonderful example for all of us. Because of her faith and obedience, she became the mother of Jesus. We honour her not just as the Mother of God, but also as a guide and protector for all Christians. The Feast of the Annunciation reminds us to listen and respond to God’s wishes in our own lives, just like St. Mary did.



Mother of God

The New Eve



St. Mary is called the “New Eve”. The first Eve disobeyed God and death entered the world. Because of her disobedience, God said that bringing children into the world would come with pain (**Genesis 3:16**).

However, St. Mary was obedient to God. By becoming the Theotokos, she brought life and hope to the world. Because of her willingness to follow God’s plan, the Saviour of all humanity was born to defeat death. Not only is St. Mary called the New Eve, but Jesus is the “new Adam” as he is the perfect man.

Many Church Fathers including St. Ephrem and St. Severus of Antioch highlight St. Mary as the “new” or “second” Eve in their writings and prayers.

Icons of the Theotokos



Annunciation to St. Mary

The Feast of the Annunciation icon illustrates the importance of this event and reminds us of the holiness of St. Mary.

The top of the icons shows the heavens and the Holy Spirit descending upon her. We also see the Angel Gabriel with his feet spread apart and his clothing flowing behind him. This shows he was rushing to share the Good News with Mary. In his left hand, he carries a staff (a symbol of a messenger), and his right hand reaches out towards St. Mary.

Icons show St. Mary seated or standing on an elevated seat to show her exalted position. In her left hand, she is holding purple and scarlet yarn as some ancient texts describe that she was making the colourful veil for the Temple in Jerusalem. What is important to learn is St. Mary’s willingness to serve God and that she is the true Temple of God as she carried Christ within her.

Her right hand is raised close to her chest showing her acceptance of God’s plan. The three stars on her forehead and shoulders tell us that she remained eternally pure and a virgin before, during,

and after the birth of Christ. This icon shows us how St. Mary, although startled at the greeting of the Angel, still accepted the will of God. We are encouraged to follow the example of St. Mary, the God-Bearer.



Visitation of St. Mary to St. Elizabeth

In the icon of the **Visitation of St. Mary to St. Elizabeth**, we see how St. Mary is the Mother of God. also learned from the Angel Gabriel that her cousin St. Elizabeth was also carrying a child who we know was St. John the Baptist. This was a miracle as St. Elizabeth was much older.

When St. Mary visits her, St. John the Baptist leaped with joy in the womb of St. Elizabeth (**St. Luke 1:41-45**).

St. Elizabeth refers to St. Mary as “mother of my Lord”. She confirms for all of us that St. Mary is truly the Mother of God.

The icon also shows how each child (Jesus and St. John the Baptist) responds to each other in the womb of their mothers. Jesus stretches His right hand to bless St. John who bows his head and folds his hands and legs to humbly receive the Lord’s blessing.

Our Prayers and Hymns

By understanding the title of Theotokos, or God Bearer, we see how St. Mary’s acceptance of God’s call not only fulfilled His divine plan for salvation, but also how she serves as an inspirational model of faith and obedience for us.

The Church also reminds us through hymns, prayers, and icons so that we can deepen our understanding of St. Mary’s unique place in our salvation. God became a man to overcome the effect of sin (death), and that was possible because of the purity and holiness of St. Mary. St. Mary’s response to St. Elizabeth (**St. Luke 1: 46-55**) is known as the **Magnificat** (Latin for the first word of the song) and is read regularly in our prayers, including on Sunday matin (morning prayer) of the Qyamtha season, and Lilio or Night prayer. This song is also almost entirely sung by Hannah, mother of Prophet Samuel [**1 Kingdoms (1 Samuel) 2:1-10**]. Even from the days of the Old Testament, God was preparing us for this special moment that St. Mary would become the Mother of God. The Magnificat is St. Mary’s hymn of praise to glorify the Lord for the blessing that He has set upon her.

Learning Outcome Check

Understand and reflect using the references in our Liturgical and prayer hymns about the significance of St. Mary’s role in the Annunciation.

Before the start of the Holy Qurbana, we sing “*As fire rested on the bush and it did not burn, so God descended and rested in the Virgin. He chose to take flesh from her, guarding her virginity!*”

This reminds us that God had spoken to Moses from a burning bush (Exodus 3), and just like the bush was burning but did not turn to ash, so to St. Mary was not consumed by the fire of Christ inside her womb.



There is a special **Quqlion** (intercessory prayer) to the Theotokos that has many songs to remind us of the importance of St. Mary’s acceptance of God’s plan. St. Mary’s obedience untied the knot of the curse that was always upon people, and shows that death was not God’s punishment but the effect of sin. These prayers and hymns on St. Mary also remind us that Jesus is fully man and fully God.

How does this relate to our daily lives?

The feasts of St. Mary, along with our prayers and hymns, remind us of God’s endless love for us and our duty to obey Him, just like St. Mary did. She was the first person to receive Jesus Christ and serves as a role model of courage, obedience, and faithfulness for all Christians. St. Mary is also the source of Jesus’ humanity,

allowing us the privilege of knowing God spiritually. As Jesus lived in her body, she is indeed the true Temple of God. Today, we are all called to be temples of God as well (1 Corinthians 6:19).

Remember

To venerate is not to worship. We worship God alone. We venerate St. Mary as she is holy and has Christ within her.



Reflection Questions

1. We should say “yes” to God in our lives just like St. Mary. Can you think of an instance where you had to make a difficult choice and chose to say “Yes” to God’s will?
2. Read the Magnificat (**St. Luke 1: 46-55**) and the song of Hannah (**1 Kingdoms 2:1-10**). Examine how the two are similar, and how Hannah’s Prayer found Its Fulfilment in Mary’s Magnificat.
3. We begin the Holy Qurbana with the following Pre-Anaphora prayer:

May Mary, who bore You
And John, who baptised You
Intercede for us, O Lord
Have mercy on us all.

Why do you think we start Holy Qurbana by remembering St. Mary?

LESSON

3

God Became Man

Lesson Goals :

- *I can understand the importance of the Incarnation as it relates to our salvation.*
- *I can understand that Jesus is fully divine and fully human.*
- *I can understand how the Feast of Nativity relates to our lives.*



The Nativity of our Lord (or Yeldo) is the birth of Christ as a man. In **St. Luke 1:31**, we hear about this when the Angel Gabriel announced to Mary, “*And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son and shall call His name Jesus*”.

This good news had been foretold many times in the Old Testament. **Isaiah 7:14** says that this Child will be born of the Holy Virgin. **Ezekiel 21:32** preached that God would rightfully appear to the world to restore the crown. **Jeremiah 33:27** said that Jesus would be from the lineage of King David.

Incarnation: God Took Flesh

The term “Incarnation” means to take on flesh. When we talk about the Incarnation of Christ, we mean that God became a human being. It is important to understand that the birth of Christ does not mean that He did not exist before. In fact, Jesus, the Son of God, is eternal, which means He always has been and always will be. As we say during the Nicene Creed, Jesus Christ is “the Only Begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds.” This means that Christ has always existed, but He chose to become human out of His great love for us.

“Kenosis” refers to self-emptying. When God the Son became a man, He was doing something very special—He was lowering Himself to our level. He fully embraced being human and lived among us. This self-emptying was so complete that He even sacrificed His life for our salvation. As we read in St. John 1:14, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” This shows how God came to live with us in a real way, just as any other person does.

Learning Outcome Check

Examine the Nativity of our Lord.

Throughout history, some groups have misunderstood the nature of Christ. For example, the Nestorians mistakenly said that Jesus had two separate persons, one divine and one human. Others, like the Monophysites, believed He was only divine.

The Orthodox Church emphatically teaches that Jesus is both fully God and fully man at the same time. Early Church Fathers such as St. Athanasius and St. Cyril of Alexandria strongly supported this understanding. They taught Jesus truly experienced everything that it means to be human. St. Cyril beautifully said, “The Son of God and the Son of Man - one Son!”

Learning Outcome Check

Establish solid understanding that Jesus is fully man and fully God.

Incarnation: The Act of Salvation

The Incarnation is more than the birth of Jesus. It was the beginning of His teachings, sufferings, and His glorification. St. Athanasius of Alexandria explained that God became man to die just like any person would. However, because He is God, death could not truly hold Him. In a homily on the Nativity, St. John Chrysostom tells us that Jesus took on our fallen human nature to save us. His death is significant because He chose to take on the weaknesses of our humanity, which began with the sin of Adam and Eve.

Learning Outcome Check

Identify incarnation as salvation.

When He rose from the dead, He provided salvation not just for our souls, but also for our bodies and spirits. God’s love becomes even more meaningful when we understand that He willingly “put on” flesh that had fallen because of the sin of Adam and Eve, and willingly died on the Cross. By His Resurrection, He saved us!

How does the Feast relate to our Lives?

It is important for us to understand there is only one God (**Deuteronomy 6:4-5**) whom we should love and worship with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength. It is through the love of God that our salvation comes, as nobody could save us from death other than God.

Every action of Jesus on Earth was for our salvation. He was born to die for us, to save us.

All of these acts show us that God was concerned for our body, spirit, and soul.

The Incarnation is one of the most powerful events in all human history. The fact that God became man is central to the Church. We must also remember that while Jesus became man, we should become like God. We should be a reflection of our Saviour. How can we become like God?

This is a hard concept to understand, but Christ explains it in **St. Matthew 5:48**, when He says, *“Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”*

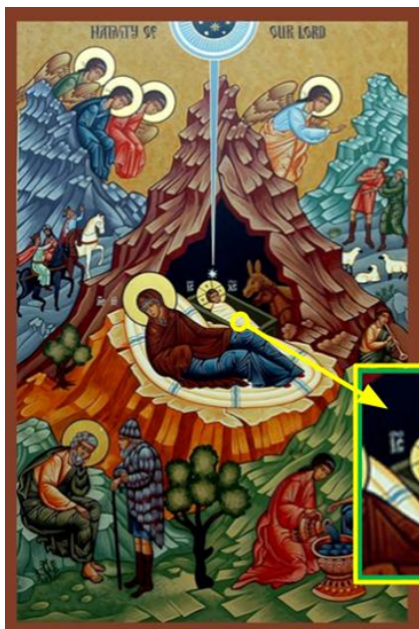
Jesus spent time teaching about God and helping people. He showed us love and mercy, and we need to show the same love and mercy to others. Whenever we show kindness to someone, speak to our friends about the love of God, help the poor, spend time with someone who is lonely, or pray for someone, we are being like Christ.

Remember

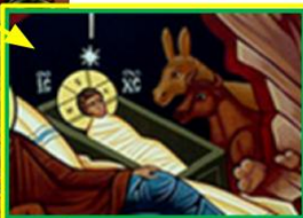
His miraculous birth, His wondrous signs, His suffering and death on the Cross, His rising from the dead, His ascension into Heaven and His promised Second Coming are all part of God's ongoing plan for the salvation of humankind.



The Icon of the Nativity of Our Lord



The Virgin Womb
to
The Empty Tomb



The icon on the left is the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Do you notice the way in which the infant Jesus is wrapped in swaddling cloth? This is an important teaching!

The cloth of the baby Jesus in the icon of the Nativity is the traditional burial shroud that bodies were wrapped in long ago. This is to emphasise that Christ was born to die for us! Even the manger

that Jesus is lying resembles that of a tomb. God loved us so much that He could not just let us die, but instead became like us to save us!

Reflection Questions

1. Find and discuss Bible verse that teaches Jesus is God and became man through St. Mary.
2. Find and discuss one liturgical hymn or prayer that teaches Jesus is God and became man through St. Mary.
3. Why was it so important for us to believe that Jesus is fully God and fully man?

LESSON

4

The New Covenant

Lesson Goals :

- *I can understand the concept of circumcision from the Old Testament.*
- *I can understand the relationship between the Old Testament practise of circumcision and the New Testament practise of baptism.*
- *I can discuss the meaning and historical implications of Jesus's name.*



Circumcision began in the Jewish tradition because of a direct conversation Abraham had with God. On the eighth day after birth, all Jewish males were brought to the temple for circumcision and naming. During this ceremony, a small piece of skin is cut off from the body of the baby boy. It is important to understand that circumcision is the symbol of God's covenant, and not the actual covenant itself.

Circumcision as a Symbol of the Covenant

A contract is an agreement between two people, but a covenant is a special promise made between God and His people. In Genesis 17, God speaks to Abraham and tells him that He will make a covenant with him and his descendants. This covenant has three important promises: first, Abraham will be the father of many nations; second, he and his family will inherit the land of Canaan forever; and third, his descendants will always be God's people. Circumcision is a special sign that shows a person has entered Abraham's family and is now under God's authority. In the Old Testament, circumcision also symbolised the removal of sin, allowing people to draw closer to God.

Jesus' Circumcision

The Feast of the Circumcision is celebrated on January 1st and is written in **St. Luke 2:21**.

God gave the Law of Circumcision to Abraham (Genesis 17:6-16) and now God (Jesus, who is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity) is experiencing this law. His example shows us how important it is to follow God's Law faithfully. Abram's name was changed to Abraham, for the Lord made him father of many nations. There are three instances where we see Christ shed His blood for us. The first is during His circumcision, the next during His prayer in Gethsemane, and lastly His death on the Cross. We can see Christ's love for His creation in these examples. He willingly bleeds to save us from our sins.



Circumcision of Jesus Christ

The Names of Christ

Our parents and elders play many different roles in our lives. They gave birth to us. They provide us with clothes, food, shelter, and love. They teach us discipline and pray for us. Each of the roles they play in our lives has a title. The same is true of Christ. He plays a role in everything we do. Many of the labels given to Christ have deep historical meaning. In **St. Matthew 1:21**, the name Jesus was given to St. Mary directly by the Angel Gabriel in a vision before His birth.

Learning Outcome Check

Explore the deeper meanings of the name(s) of Jesus.

Immanuel

Immanuel means God is with us. This is a very accurate description of Christ because He came and lived with us through the Incarnation. In **Isaiah 7:14**, the prophet, who lived 700 years before Christ, called Him Immanuel. It is important to remember that God with us does not simply mean He lived here during His earthly ministry. It includes everyone from the past, present, and future. God is always with us whether we are at home, school, church, or in our community. It is comforting to know that no matter what we are experiencing in life, Christ is always with us.

Remember

We are blessed to be adopted by God through Baptism, married to Christ through His Church, and helped by the Holy Spirit through the Pentecost.



Alpha and Omega

Alpha and Omega are titles Christ uses to describe Himself in **Revelation 1:8, 21: 6 and 22:13**. He tells us that He is the beginning (Alpha), and the end (Omega). This would be like Christ saying He is the A and the Z of today's alphabet. For Christians, this is comforting to know. Our friends and family play roles in our lives, but we know they will pass on one day and will not physically be with us always. However, we can always rely on Christ in our lives, as He will always be there. He never ceases to exist. In **St. Matthew 28:20**, Jesus says: "*And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age*". The central theme of this title is that Christ has been and will always be with us.

Bridegroom

Christ is often called the true bridegroom. The next obvious question would be, "Who is the bride?" **Ephesians 5:25-27** tells us that the bride is the Church. As members of the Church, we are the body - the Church. In the story of the ten virgins, found in **St. Matthew 25**, Christ is the bridegroom. In **St. Luke 5**, Christ is questioned about why His disciples were not fasting and His response is, "*Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them?*" We are blessed to be adopted by God through baptism, married to Christ through His Church, and helped by the Holy Spirit.

Marriage Service Hymns

Marriage Service Hymn 3 : Qolo

(eno no nuhro shariro — pathivrathayaam)

*When the hea-venly Bridegroom betrothed the – Faithful – and Holy Church
He then called - Simon and John and entru-sted her – to both of them
He made Simon the steward
And He made John the preacher
Calling and instructing them
To guard – the Church that He had purcha-sed with His – own precious blood*

Marriage Service Hymn 4: Sugitho

(omro 'idath qudsho – sabhayaam thiru sabhayaam)

*I the Church am the true bride
Of the Most Exalted One.
.
"I am bless'd," exclaims the Church,
"Who has truly betrothed me?
I worship the True Bridegroom
Who came down and betrothed me."*

Marriage Service Hymn : Eqbo

(yawmono - manavaraye mel)

*The Bridegroom – has prepared – a bridal chamber – for His Church
He has raised and – placed her above – the rulers and – heavenly hosts
In the heights, as He – had promised*

How does this relate to our everyday life?

Circumcision was an important tradition during the time of Abraham, and it was a sign that his descendants were part of his family. In the Old Testament, it represented a special promise, or covenant, between God and Abraham's family.

Learning Outcome Check

Interpret how circumcision was a covenant in the Old Testament.

However, in the New Testament, this tradition has changed.

Baptism is the Sacrament that now brings people into God's family, just as circumcision did before. While some may still choose to be circumcised, it is not required for the Christian Faith. What truly matters is being baptised, which helps heal us in body and soul and allows the Holy Spirit to live within us.

Jesus is the key connecting the Old and New Testaments, and He was circumcised as a baby and later baptised by John the Baptist. Circumcision was important in the past, but today Baptism is how we become part of God's family and join in worshipping His Holy Name!

Do You Know?

In the Old testament days, Circumcision was done on the 8th day. Today in the Sacrament of the Holy Baptism, there is a Liturgical act where the infant's name is written in the Book of Life. It is this name which is literally recorded in the Baptismal Register at the time of the Baptism and is representative of spiritual circumcision.



Reflection Questions

1. Why was it important that Jesus was circumcised and baptised?
2. Find one name of Jesus in the Bible and analyse the meaning.
3. Thinking of the hymn from the Marriage Service, how is the promise made to Abraham by God fulfilled by the Holy Church?

LESSON

5

Waters of Life

Lesson Goals :

- *I can understand that Denaha is not just a historical event but a timeless manifestation of the Holy Trinity.*
- *I can understand how the blessing of the water symbolises the purification and redemption of the fallen world.*



Denaha, also known as the Feast of the Epiphany or Theophany, is an important day in our Church calendar celebrated every year on January 6th.

On this day, we remember the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan. This event was special because it revealed the Holy Trinity to the world. Before this moment, most people did not fully understand who Jesus really was. When He was baptised, it was like a bright sunrise breaking through the darkness of night, showing everyone the truth about Him and His divine nature.

The word “Denaha” comes from a Syriac word that means sunrise or dawn. Just as the sun shines light into the darkness, Jesus’ baptism brought light to the world. When Jesus came out of the water, His light showed everyone the way out of the darkness of sin. This moment marked the beginning of His mission to help people understand God’s love and forgiveness. It is a reminder that even when things seem dark and uncertain, Christ’s light can guide us towards the truth.

Learning Outcome Check

Denaha is not just a historical event but the manifestation of the Holy Trinity.

During Denaha, we celebrate the revelation of the Holy Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. In the story of Jesus’ baptism, we hear God’s voice from heaven saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” At the same time, we see the Holy Spirit gently descending like a dove.

Remember

He emerged from the waters with His light shining forth revealing everything. His light sheds brightness on all those who sat in the darkness of sin.

This powerful moment shows us that all three Persons of the Trinity are united and play important roles in our faith. Denaha is not just a historical event; it is a celebration of God’s presence in our lives and His love for us through Christ.

The Baptism of our Lord



Icon of the Baptism of Christ

The Denaha icon is rich in theology and reveals more than what one would see of St. John the Baptist baptising Jesus in the River Jordan. Genesis 1:2 states that “The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the water”, and during the Baptism of our Lord we see the Holy Spirit hovering over Christ in the form of a dove. First, Christ baptised or washed the earth’s waters clean. During the sacrament of baptism, the candidate is fully submerged underwater.

The icon teaches that all the waters of creation are baptised in Him. As St. Gregory of Nyssa writes, “Jesus enters the filthy, sinful waters of the world, and when He comes out, He brings up and purifies the entire world with Him.”

Christ did not need to be purified through Holy Baptism as we do. Rather, Christ’s baptism is the purification and redemption of the fallen world. We see this in the two fleeing creatures at the bottom of Christ representing the demons, a reminder of **Psalm 76 (77):17** which says, “*The waters saw You, O God; The waters saw You and were afraid.*”

Learning Outcome Check

The blessing of the water symbolizes the purification and redemption of the entire fallen world.

Remember

“The heavens were opened to show us that our baptism will open the heavens for us. God is made accessible to us.”

St. John Chrysostom

Christ is the new Adam, and He is naked, just as Adam and Eve were both naked before they sinned and still in righteousness. The angels are seen to the side, waiting to clothe Him. St. John the Baptist is not looking at Christ but on the Holy Spirit descending like a dove.

The axe at the feet of St. John, serves as a reminder that we must bear the fruit of the spirit, or we will be chopped down like trees and thrown into the fire (**St. Matthew 3:10**).

Christ's Baptism Prefigured

In the Book of Joshua, the priests carried the Ark of the Covenant (**Joshua 3:17**), which held God's presence, across the River Jordan. After this, Joshua began to lead Israel, taking over from Moses. Jesus' name in Hebrew is "Yeshua" which translates to English as Joshua. Just like Joshua began to lead the people after they crossed the Jordan River, Jesus also started His public ministry after leaving the river. The Church also teaches us that the Ark is like St. Mary (the mother of God) as they both carried God within.

How does Christ's Baptism relate to our everyday life?



When we think about the baptism of Christ, we are reminded of God's immense love and care for us. Some people may believe that God is angry or punishing, but the truth is that God is a loving Father. In the Gospel, when God speaks, His words show how much He loves us. For example, in **St. Matthew 3:17**, God says about Jesus, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Imagine how you would feel if your parents said something like that about you—it would make you feel very loved and special! When God spoke these words to Christ during His baptism, it also revealed His love for each of us. As we read in **Galatians 2:20** "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." Through Christ and His baptism, we become part of God's family.

God's love is universal—it is for everyone, regardless of age. This means that baptism can take place at any stage of life! **St. Luke 3:23** tells us that Jesus was 30 years old when He started His public work after being baptised.

Some may assume that, because of Jesus' age, only older individuals can be baptised. However, this is a misunderstanding. Christ's baptism is different from the baptism we receive as faithful followers. Jesus came to save all people, and His own baptism makes every baptism special and holy, no matter how old the person is.

Remember

During Theophany we celebrate all three members of the Holy Trinity being revealed. The Father is present as He spoke and said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (**St. Matthew 3:17**). The Son is present as Christ entered into the waters. The Holy Spirit is present in the form of a dove that comes down from Heaven and rests upon Christ.



Christ referred to Himself as the “true light.” This is why we celebrate the Feast of Lights on 6 January; the day Jesus gave us His light. We are reminded of this light every time we light a candle during prayer. Christ brings His light to everyone, including us and it is our duty to share this light with the world through our thoughts, words, and actions.

Reflection Questions

1. Examine this hymn from the service of Denaha, and explain in your own words the teaching

Bless'd is the Light from Light
Who has enlightened the earth
By His great light, - and turned us from sin to the -path of life!
O God, have mercy!

2. What are some specific ways that the Holy Trinity is represented in Denaha?
3. Explain what it means when we say that the Baptism of Christ blessed the waters of the fallen world. .

LESSON

6

Eyes Have Seen Your Salvation

Lesson Goals :

- *I can understand the Feast of the Presentation in the Temple and where it fits into our Liturgical Calendar.*
- *I can explain how the creator of the law fulfilled the law.*
- *I can appreciate the Icon of the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple and identify St. Mary and St. Joseph's perfect offering, St. Simeon, and the prophetess St. Anna.*
- *I can reflect on how the Feast relates to our daily lives.*



Have you ever felt the joy of finally receiving something you longed for after waiting a long time? That feeling is truly special, almost like a prayer answered. This kind of patience is often rooted in faith and hope

In the Bible, there are characters who showed great patience, such as Simeon and the Prophetess Anna. They waited many years to see the Messiah, always believing that they would witness the Lord's coming. Every year, on 2 February, we celebrate the Feast of the Presentation of Christ to the Temple (St. Luke 2:22-39), also known as the 'Meeting of Christ.' This feast takes place forty days after the Nativity of Christ.

St. Simeon, the Receiver of God

Simeon was a just and devout elderly man. The Holy Spirit had told him that he would not die until he saw the Messiah. St. Luke wrote that Simeon was "waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him." Mary and Joseph first brought Jesus to the Temple for the presentation of their firstborn. The Holy Spirit guided Simeon to take Jesus up in his arms. He blessed God and said, "*Lord, now You are letting your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and glory to Your people Israel.*"



St. Simeon

Psalm 36:5 says, "Reveal your way to the Lord, and hope in Him; and He will do it." Simeon waited and trusted in the Lord for many years. He was so delighted to see the Lord! Simeon represents humanity waiting for the Saviour. He lived in anticipation of the Lord's coming. Today we live in

anticipation of the Lord's Second Coming. We know this will happen because in **St. John 14:3**, Jesus tells us *"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."*

St. Simeon's Prophecy



After receiving Jesus Christ, Simeon blesses Mary and Joseph and makes a prophecy to Mary. He tells her, *"Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."*

There are both good and bad parts to Simeon's prophecy. It did not stop Mary from providing Jesus with a normal, enjoyable childhood. Like Simeon, Mary had faith and hope in God. She prayed faithfully and hoped that her Son would be guarded from all difficulties.

Simeon, in his prophecy reveals to us Christ's suffering, death and His second coming. The sword that will pierce Mary's soul is the sorrow that she, as a mother, will experience seeing her Son on the Cross.

Learning Outcome Check

Breakdown St. Simeon's words to St. Mary and relate to what St. Mary must have gone through as the Mother of our Lord.

Presentation to the Temple



Icon of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple

Mary and Joseph present Jesus to the Temple as an act of pure obedience to God's laws. They brought Jesus to the Temple for the presentation of the firstborn in accordance with the Law of Moses as detailed in **Exodus 13:1-16**.

Along with the firstborn, Mary also had to offer a whole burnt offering as sacrifice for a mother's purification.

The law called for a lamb to be brought after 40-days, but if she could not afford this a sacrifice of turtle doves or pigeons was also accepted (**Leviticus 12:8**). Mary and Joseph offered two turtle doves.

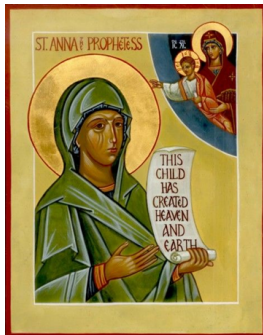
Mary and Joseph's offering to the Temple is both humble and perfect! While the turtle doves offer a beautiful symbol of God's love and humility, the act of presenting Christ to the temple is perfect as He is the pure Lamb of God.

The Jewish tradition of offering sacrifices as **sin offerings** is a foreshadowing of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the sins of the world. In **St John 5:46**, Christ directly tells us that the sin offering detailed in Leviticus is about Himself when He says, "For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me." The Letter to the **Hebrews 9:22** states, "And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission." Just as the sacrificial lamb makes atonement for sins, Jesus' blood takes away the sins of the world.

Learning Outcome Check

Investigate why doves were brought to be offered.

St. Anna, the Prophetess



An elderly woman, named Anna, was also present to witness Christ's first arrival at the Temple. She served God with fasting, continuous prayers and always remained in the temple. After she saw the infant Christ, she immediately "gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem."

Just as women are the first to proclaim Christ's resurrection, Anna is the first to proclaim Christ's redemption.

The Icon of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple

In the Icon of the Presentation of Christ to the Temple, we see Baby Jesus, St. Mary, St. Joseph, St. Simeon and Prophetess Anna. The presentation is done in front of an empty altar.

Jesus is given into the hands of Simeon as a sacrifice. He is placed at the centre of the altar, to represent the biggest sacrifice ever made for us. Today, this is represented in our church altars, as the Body and Blood of Christ take the centre place on the holy altar.



Presentation of our Lord

Learning Outcome Check

Analyse the Icon of the Presentation in the Temple.

Seeing Christ as a little man and not swaddled like a baby, shows our understanding of God becoming a human with full knowledge of His fully human and fully divine nature. Christ is shown giving Simeon a blessing. Simeon holds Jesus with both hands covered, showing his respect and humility towards the Saviour.

St. Mary, the Theotokos, is holding out her hands in a gesture of offering and humility. As always, the Theotokos points us to Christ. St. Joseph is behind St. Mary with a gesture of support. He has two turtle doves for offering. The Prophetess St. Anna is seen standing near Simeon and with a scroll. In Orthodox iconography, the scroll indicates prophetic wisdom given from God.

Learning Outcome Check

Dramatise Saints Simeon and Anna.

How does this Feast relate to our daily lives?

Even today, it is the practice of the Church that parents will bring their newborn child to Church usually after forty days. This is important as every child is a blessing and this is a way for the mother and father to bring their gift and receive a blessing from the Church.

This Feast is meaningful in many ways for all Christians. By teaching us to offer our “firsts” to the Lord, He is asking us to re-centre our focus and our priorities. We are called to participate in God’s goodness by offering our best self-back to Him.

We should remember that God offered us His firstborn Son. St. Simeon and St. Anna remind us of how we should respond to God’s blessings and offerings. St. Simeon receives God with open arms and an open heart. St. Anna shares the Good News to all who sought redemption. Through His words, blessings and love, God offers Himself to us every day. We need to

Learning Outcome Check

Correlate the Presentation to the Temple to the bringing of children to the Church for the first time.

Remember

By teaching us to offer our “firsts” to the Lord, He is asking us to re-centre our focus and our priorities. We are called to participate in God’s goodness by offering our best self back to Him.



decide how we wish to receive the Lord and what we will offer Him in return.

Reflection Questions

1. Read Genesis 22:8. How does that passage relate to the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord?
2. Read Psalm 51 (50 in OSB). What are the sacrifices acceptable to God?
3. What “firsts” can we offer to God?
4. Find and discuss one liturgical hymn and one prayer from the Holy Qurbana that relates to offering a sacrifice or making a presentation to the altar.

LESSON

7

A Humble King

Lesson Goals :

- *I can understand Jesus raising Lazarus from death and the relationship with his triumphal entry into Jerusalem.*
- *I can understand how the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem relates to the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy.*
- *I can explain why Jesus chose a donkey over a horse.*
- *I can identify the importance of the Feast of Palm Sunday.*



Palm Sunday, also known as the Feast of Palms, is a special feast where we remember Jesus entering Jerusalem on a colt while people shouted “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” and threw flowers into the air.

Just like the people did over 2000 years ago, we honour Jesus today by holding palm leaves and singing praises. The day before Palm Sunday is called Lazarus Saturday, and on this day, we remember how Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. These two celebrations are connected because Jesus showed His power over death by raising Lazarus, and later, He Himself rose from the dead on the third day. Many of the people who welcomed Jesus in Jerusalem had seen Lazarus being brought back to life, making this time even more significant for them and for us.

Lazarus is raised from death (St. John 11:1-44)

Lazarus, along with his sisters Mary and Martha, was a dear friend of Jesus. When Lazarus became very sick, his sisters sent a message to Jesus asking for His help. However, Jesus took two more days before He travelled to Bethany. By the time He arrived, Lazarus had already died and had been in the tomb for four days.

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she ran to meet Him and said, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now, I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.” Jesus replied to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

He then went to the tomb and raised Lazarus from the dead. The Church connects this to the promise that one day we too will be raised at the second coming of Jesus. You might wonder why Jesus waited to go to Bethany instead of coming right away when He heard the bad news. Jesus is both divine and human, and He knew that Lazarus would not stay dead forever. His decision to wait was meant to teach us about patience and faith, even when things do not go as we expect. The fact that Jesus raised Lazarus, who had been dead for four days, shows us He truly is God.

Consider

In St. John 11:35 we read “Jesus wept”. This verse shows us Christ’s human nature. When we feel grief, it is a natural human response to cry or weep. In the concluding hymn of our Lazarus Saturday service, we sing :

*Our Lord went to Bethany
To see His friend Lazarus
Our Lord wept for the dead man
And raised Lazarus to life.*



The Triumphant Entry



Icon of the Hosanna Feast

The icon of the Entry of our Lord to Jerusalem shows Christ as King in the centre. He is seated on the young donkey.

The prophet Zechariah had foretold this (**Zechariah 9:9**) - “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Proclaim it aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King comes to you; He is righteous and saving; He is gentle and mounted upon a donkey, even a young foal. He will utterly destroy the chariots out of Ephraim and the horse out of Jerusalem. The bow of war shall be utterly destroyed, and there shall be abundance

Learning Outcome Check

Explore how the Triumphant Entry fulfils Old Testament prophecy.



and peace among the nations. He shall rule over the waters as far as the sea and over the rivers to the ends of the earth."

With His right hand, Christ is giving a blessing and in His left hand is a scroll, symbolising that He is the living reality of all of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. Christ is the Anointed One who has come to redeem us from our sins and break the power of death that was over us.

A foal or colt that has never been ridden is untamed and would normally not be a suitable one to climb on. The colt reminds that all the people of all the nations will now be included in God's new covenant by death and Resurrection.

Learning Outcome Check

Explore the event in Biblical context and salvific history.

Christ is accompanied by His disciples, and also by people greeting him and crying "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, the King of Israel!" Remember, the word "Hosanna" means "Save, I pray" or "Save now". Children also greet Christ with palm branches and their garments laid upon the ground before Christ in honour of Him being the King. The city of Jerusalem is the walled buildings, and the temple is the building with the dome.

The disciples of Jesus were confused and did not understand what was going on. They knew that many Jews did not like Jesus and were even ready to stone Him just a short while ago. But because of the raising of Lazarus and hearing the Scriptures, many Jewish people were starting to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. Sadly, they misunderstood the teaching of the Messiah and thought He was to save them from their hard troubles with the Roman leaders. However, the true mission of our Lord Jesus Christ was much greater as He had come to defeat death and save all people.

Connection

In our Palm Sunday service, we also sing of Zechariah's prophecy.
*Zachariah, through – the Holy Spirit,
Cried out to Zion: - "Your King comes riding a colt."
Children and infants – cried aloud to Him:
"Hosanna on High, - Son of David, Hosanna!"*

Christ is King

When we think of a king, we often imagine someone wearing a crown, living in a castle, and leading a big army, usually arriving on a powerful horse. However, when Jesus entered Jerusalem, He surprised everyone by riding on a humble donkey.

In the days of the Old Testament times, a donkey symbolised peace and riding one showed that a person had peaceful intentions. Jesus, also known as the Prince of Peace, teaches us that being a king is not about being famous or powerful; it is about being humble, serving others, and helping those in need without expecting anything in return. This lesson reminds us that true greatness comes from serving God and others with love and humility.

How does Palm Sunday relate to our daily lives?

Palm Sunday is an important day for us to remember how we should welcome Jesus into our hearts and follow Him. It reminds us of the selfless love Jesus showed by willingly giving His life for us, encouraging us to be humble and think about how we can love those around us. Just like the Jews who needed to see Jesus's miracles, such as when He raised Lazarus from the dead, we should have faith in Him as our Saviour. We should be like the innocent children who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem by joyfully singing "Hosanna." This phrase means we honour and praise Him, acknowledging that He came to save us. Let us make this a part of our daily prayers and strive to let humility guide our words, actions, and thoughts, following Jesus as our example.

Reflection Questions

1. What does "Hosanna" mean, and why is it significant on Palm Sunday?
2. Analyse this hymn from Palm Sunday and how we believe Jesus is King:

On this day - the prophet - told to the daughter - of Zion:

*"Your King comes in humility
And He will ride upon a colt."*

Go forth to meet Him and sing praise!

3. Reflect on this hymn that we sing on Palm Sunday and discuss as a group what it means.

*You are the source of life, O – Son of the Most High!
The mortals drank from You and - no longer feared death
Lazarus and – Jairus's daughter;
The widow's son, – they all drank from_ You
These three prefigured for us – the Resurrection
For like them the dead will rise – and sing praise to Him,
Halleluyah, – their Resurrection!*

LESSON

8

The Sacrificial Lamb

Lesson Goals :

- *I can understand the Feast of Passover in the Old Testament and its importance to us as Christians.*
- *I can connect the celebration of Passover to the instituting of the Holy Eucharist.*
- *I can explain the Old and New Passover.*
- *I can have a deeper appreciation of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples.*



The **Feast of Passover** is celebrated on the Thursday of the Holy Week. In Syriac this special day is known as **Pesaha**, and in English **Holy or Maundy Thursday**. During the Feast of Passover, four important events take place before Jesus, the Lamb, is sacrificed: Jesus having the Last Supper with His disciples, Jesus washing the feet of His disciples, Jesus praying in the garden of Gethsemane, and His betrayal by Judas Iscariot. In this lesson, we will discuss the first two events.

Passover Festival in the Old Testament:

Passover is a sacred feast for Jews. In Hebrew, Pesach means the “passing over”. In the Jewish tradition, the feast of the Passover celebrates the beginning of the Israelites freedom from Pharaoh. The Lord protected the Israelites from the final plague, which was the death of firstborns, and He led them through the Red Sea while they were being chased by Pharaoh and his troops.

Learning Outcome Check

Examine how through Passover the children of Israel were delivered from bondage and suppression to freedom and deliverance.



The Death of the First Born

Pharaoh refused to free the Hebrew slaves because he feared they would soon mightily outnumber all Egyptians. The Lord heard the Hebrews’ cries for freedom. So, the Lord chose Moses to free His people from slavery and to lead them out of Egypt. Since Pharaoh refused to let them go, the Lord sent ten terrible plagues throughout the land of Egypt. As the Egyptians suffered through the nine plagues, Pharaoh’s heart continued to harden, and refused to free the Israelites.

For the tenth plague, the Lord told Moses that he will strike down the first born sons of the Egyptians. **Exodus 12:1-14** tells us that the Lord told Moses to tell the Israelites to kill a one-year-old male

lamb without blemish and place the blood of the lamb on the two doorposts and the lintel of the house.

During the night, the Lord passed through the land of Egypt and killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt - man and animal. He passed over the houses that had blood on the lintel and doorposts. This blood was the symbol for the angel of death to spare the Children of Israel from his sword. The Lord told Moses that this

should always be celebrated as a feast. Just like the blood of the Passover lamb saved the first born of the Children of Israel, the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, is saving us from eternal death.

Learning Outcome Check

Identify the importance of the blood of the lamb on door posts in connection with the Feast of Passover.

Passing through the Red Sea

Although the Israelites were freed after the tenth plague (**Exodus 14:15-31**), Pharaoh did not keep his promise. He and his army chased after the Israelites to bring them back. The Israelites saw Pharaoh and his army coming after them. They were now trapped between the Red Sea and Pharaoh's army. Then the Lord told Moses to lift up his rod and stretch his hands over the Red Sea. Suddenly, the water parted, and the Israelites walked on dry land through the sea. Pharaoh and his army followed. Once the Israelites were on the other side, Pharaoh and his army were in the middle of the Red Sea. The Lord told Moses to stretch out his hand over the Red Sea. Then the sea returned back upon Pharaoh and his army, killing them. This was another passing over from death for the Israelites.

Throughout the Old Testament, whenever the Israelites walked away from the ways of the Lord, He reminded them that He had freed them from slavery and that they were to turn back to the Lord. This can be seen in **1 Kings 10:17-19**, **Judges 6:7-10**, and **Jeremiah**

11:1-8. As written in the Old Testament, Jesus also celebrated the Old Testament Feast of Passover. He renewed this Feast which became the foundation of the Holy Qurbana that we celebrate today.

Learning Outcome Check

Examine the significance of Jesus celebrating Holy Qurbana.

The Mystical Supper

All four gospels and 1 Corinthians, have accounts of Jesus celebrating the Feast of Passover (**St. Matthew 26:17-29**; **St. Mark 14:12-25**; **St. Luke 22:7-38**; **St. John 13:1-17**; **1 Corinthians 11:23-25**). Following Jewish tradition, the disciples asked Jesus, their teacher, where they should prepare the Feast of the Passover. He instructed them on how and where to prepare the special meal. When evening came, Jesus sat down with His twelve disciples to eat the supper.

St. Matthew 26:26-29 tells us, *"And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, '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. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.'"*

This Passover Meal is called the Last Supper because it was the last meal Jesus had with His disciples before His Passion. It is also called the Mystical Supper. In the Divine Liturgy, the priest speaks the same words Christ said at the Last Supper. Jesus told us exactly how to celebrate the Eucharist. When we partake in the Body and Blood of Christ, we are united with Christ. We pray that we will be filled with the Holy Spirit. The Body and Blood bring us forgiveness and eternal life to those who humbly receive it. Just as the lamb's blood delivered the Israelites from the Angel of Death, Christ's Blood delivers us from our life trapped full of sin and death.

Learning Outcome Check

Relate the Feast of Passover to the Angel of Death passing over the children of Israel and the children of Israel passing over the Red Sea.



The Eucharist is the most important part of our worship. When we celebrate the Eucharist, the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ in a mystical, holy way. We must prepare ourselves before receiving the Body and Blood of Christ. Without proper preparation, we will sadly bring punishment upon ourselves. In **1 Corinthians 11:27-29**, St Paul says, *"Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body."*

Remember

The Eucharist is the most important part of our worship. When we celebrate the Eucharist, the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. The bread and wine we offer become the Body and Blood in a mysterious way.



The Old and The New Passover

The Old Testament Passover, as taught to Moses, was in many ways similar to the New Passover.

1. The Passover lamb, whose blood was smeared on the door-posts and lintel, was a male lamb without blemish. In **St. John 1:29**, John the Baptist saw Jesus Christ and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" Jesus was the lamb without blemish whose blood was shed on the Cross.
2. The blood of the lamb saved the Israelites' firstborn from death. Jesus Christ's blood saves us from sin and gives us eternal life.
3. The Israelites passed through the Red Sea and were delivered from slavery; we are saved through the baptismal waters. We understand that passing through the Red Sea was a "type" of Holy Baptism.

Importance of the Holy Eucharist in Our Lives:

When we receive Holy Communion, our life is renewed and we are in union with Jesus Christ, the giver of life. Sin is sickness that leads to our spiritual death. The Church is a hospital for sinners to receive healing. We are healed by receiving the Body and Blood of Christ in a worthy manner.

Just like the disciples experienced the physical presence of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem, today we experience His physical presence by receiving His Body and Blood. When we receive Holy Eucharist, Christ lives in us, and we live in Him (**St. John 6:56**).

Before we receive the Holy Eucharist, we shall examine our hearts. This includes repenting and confessing our sins and reconciling with one another. We prepare with prayer and fasting. We prepare by actively participating in the Holy Qurbana.

The Humility of Jesus

In Biblical times, foot washing was always an act of welcome done by a servant. In **St. John 13:3-17**, Jesus rose from the supper, wrapped Himself with a towel and washed His disciples' feet. This was an act of humility and love.

When it was Simon Peter's turn, he said, "You shall never wash my feet!" Jesus replies that if He does not wash his feet, he cannot have a part in His Kingdom. Simon then said "Lord, not only my feet but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet but is completely clean." Our whole body is cleansed through baptism, but we still sin which leaves us defiled and dirty. The Church provides the sacrament of Confession so we can be cleansed again. The feet washing represents the sacrament of Holy Confession by which we are cleansed of our sins.

The same God who raised people from the dead, fed the multitudes, and calmed the seas, also washed the feet of His disciples as if He was their servant. This is what it means to be humble. We may think of ourselves as older, or better than our brothers and sisters. However, Jesus shows us that we need to serve our brothers and sisters, like He served His disciples. Christ even washed the feet of Judas, even though He already knew that Judas was going to betray Him. Through washing the feet of His disciples, Jesus showed us His love, humility, and the truth behind His ministry.

Learning Outcome Check

Examine how the lamb of God takes away the sin of the world in the context of the Feast of Passover.

Icon of the Mystical Supper



Icons of the Mystical Supper with (a) Christ seated in the middle and (b) at the head of the table

There are several important icons of the Mystical Supper. Here are two common icons: one where Christ is seated in the middle of the table (left icon) and one where He is at the head of the table (right icon).

There are common teachings in both icons. In the Upper Room, Christ and His Apostles are seated for the Passover Meal. We see Christ giving the first Eucharist. *“Take, eat; this is my Body. Drink of it all of you; for this is my Blood of the New Covenant”* (St. Matthew 26:26-28). St John, His beloved disciple, is beardless, seated to the left of Christ and leaning towards Jesus while receiving a piece of bread. Judas Iscariot, the betrayer, is seated third from the left, and dipping his hand into the dish as he was told to in St. Matthew 26:23. The other Apostles are confused and talking amongst themselves, not fully understanding what had just happened or what comes next.

Many Christians have the famous painting by Leonardo Da Vinci. This is not an Orthodox icon, and we need to be careful as Da Vinci was Roman Catholic but had other ideas that may have influenced his paintings. When we compare his painting to the Icon of the Mystical Supper, we quickly understand why it is important for us to use the Icon for our spiritual growth.



In both the Da Vinci painting on the top and the Holy Icon on the bottom, we see the disciples' confusion about Christ's teachings at the Last Supper. Christ is seen as a calm, loving, Teacher. In Da Vinci's painting, the identity of individual disciples is unclear or incorrect. For example, St. John is supposed to be young, beardless, and reaching closer to Christ.

The absence of all halos (including the special halo only for Christ) makes it difficult to quickly identify Judas as the Apostle, the one who betrayed Christ. These are just a few of the reasons why it is important to study and learn from an Orthodox icon.

Icon of Jesus Washing His Disciples' Feet

After the Mystical Supper had ended, Jesus took a towel and wrapped it around His waist to wash the feet of the Apostles. In this Holy Icon, we see the Apostles confused but obeying. St. Peter, pictured with short curly hair, is distressed, with his right hand touching his head as he incorrectly

tells Jesus to wash his hands and head. The other disciples sitting behind Jesus are waiting for their feet to be washed. The other disciples sitting on the ground are removing their sandals.



Washing of the feet

Christ was teaching his disciples how to love others as He loved them and all of humanity. God's humility is clearly shown because Christ is the perfect example of how we should treat others.

Learning Outcome Check

Washing of the feet symbolizes the humility of Jesus.

Holy icons visually teach us the spiritual meaning and importance of these divine events. It's a reminder for us Christians, to look deeper into these events, as more than just historical stories.

What does this Feast mean for us in our daily lives?

Just as the blood of the lamb painted across the Israelites' door saved their firstborn from death, the blood of Jesus Christ saves us and gives us eternal life.

Just like the disciples experienced the physical presence of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem, today we experience His physical presence by receiving His Body and Blood. **St. John 6:56** tells us that when we receive Holy Qurbana, Christ lives in us, and we live in Him.

Isaiah 1:18 says, "*Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: although your sins are like crimson, I shall make them white like snow, and although they are as scarlet, I shall make them white like wool.*"

When we come to Jesus with a humble heart and bring our sins to the Lord, He is willing and able to wash us clean. Jesus loves us and accepts us dirty feet and all! He washes us clean.



Icon of Holy Thursday

Reflection Questions

1. In what ways can we see Jesus as our 'Passover Lamb' who delivers us from bondage?
2. How can we think about the significance of Jesus' sacrifice in relation to the lamb's blood that saved the Children of Israel from the Angel of Death?
3. In what ways did Jesus demonstrate humility, especially when He washed His disciples' feet?

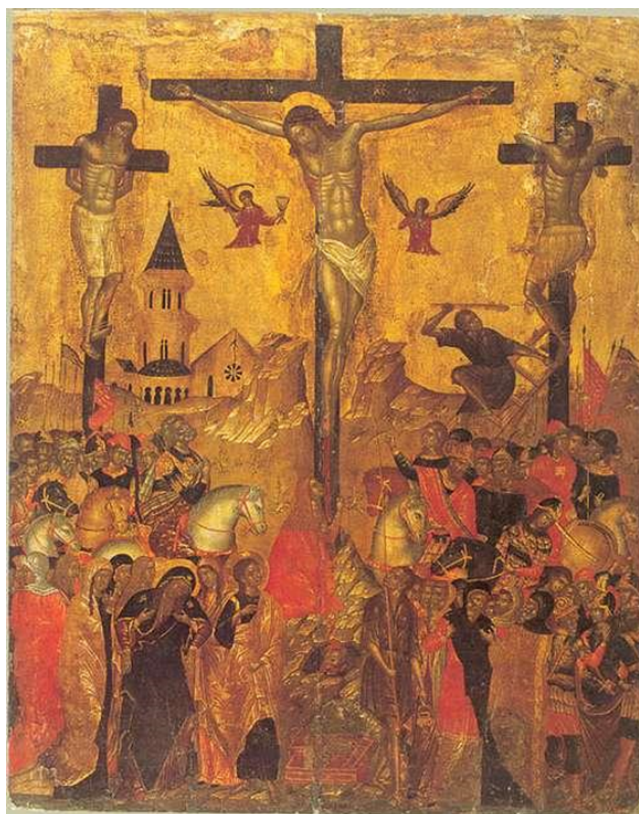
LESSON

9

For God so Loved the World

Lesson Goals :

- *I can explain the events taking place each hour during the Good Friday service.*
- *I can understand why Jesus offered Himself as the sacrificial lamb.*
- *I can comprehend the meaning of the Icon for Good Friday.*



“

Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do

.

St Luke 23: 34

My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?

.

St. Matthew 27:46

”

Great Friday is the day of holy sacrifice. On this day we remember and participate in everything that happened to Jesus - His Passion, Crucifixion, Death, and Burial. During the service, we stand at the foot of the Cross witnessing the passion and the love of our Lord just as St. Mary, His mother, and St. John, His beloved disciple, both did that day. The black veil covers the Altar and the Golgotha placed during Mid-Lent. This represents Christ's sadness, pain, and sorrow when He took the sin of the world upon Himself.

Christ Died for us

God made Adam in His own image, and gave him paradise to take care of and live in. In Genesis 2:16-17, He also gave one simple commandment to Adam saying, "You may eat from every tree in the garden; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you may not eat; for in whatever day, you eat from it, you shall die by death."



Death was never God's will. In the book of Genesis, we read that Adam and Eve disobeyed God but God's deep Love for man never changed. For Orthodox Christians, their expulsion from Paradise is seen as a sign of God's mercy. He did not want to see His children living forever separated from Him. Although sin caused death, Christ died on the Cross to defeat both death and Satan.

Learning Outcome Check

Summarize the events of each hour of Holy/- Great Friday.

Golgotha means skull or head in Hebrew. The Gospels record Golgotha as the place where Jesus was crucified adding the meaning of the place of the skull seen in St. Matthew 27:33, St. Mark 15:22, St. Luke 23:33 and St. John 19:17.

The Hours of the Good Friday Service

When we attend a Good Friday service, we think of the sacrifice Jesus made for us to have eternal life. Through each of these hours on Good Friday, we remember how Jesus suffered for us. Through prayers, hymns, and Scripture readings, each hour we meditate on the suffering our Lord endured to save the human race.

Midnight: Jesus is arrested



Arrest of Jesus

After Jesus celebrated His Last Supper and blessed the first Eucharist with His disciples, He went to the Mount of Olives to pray. There He told His three beloved disciples, Peter, James, and John, to watch and pray with Him as He prayed. Jesus returned three times to see what His disciples were doing. Sadly, each time they were found sleeping and had to be warned. As Jesus was scolding them, the chief priest's soldiers, along with Judas Iscariot, came with swords and lanterns to arrest Jesus publicly. Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss, signalling to the soldiers who He was. The soldiers arrested Jesus. He was taken to the high priests (Caiaphas and Annas) in the presence of the **Sanhedrin** which was a group of Jewish religious leaders that had the religious, civil, and criminal authority at the time.

Morning: The High Priest Holds Trial and Sends Jesus to Pilate



Trial of Jesus

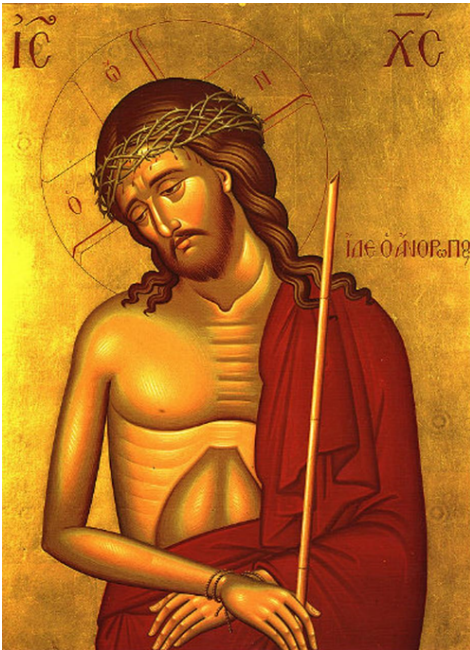
Morning prayer begins with the trial of Jesus. In St. Matthew 26: 57-75, Jesus was questioned by Caiaphas, Annas and the Sanhedrin. He was spit upon, beaten and wrongly charged with blasphemy for saying that He is the Son of God. Then Jesus was then taken to Governor Pontius Pilate for further questioning. Pilate found no fault in Him and told the chief priest that he could punish Jesus and let him go. The chief priest did not agree to this. When Pilate heard Jesus was from Galilee, he sent Him to Herod. Herod questioned Jesus, but the chief priests and scribes continued to make false accusations. He did not answer Herod's questions. Herod made Jesus wear a robe, mocked Him, and sent Him back to Pilate.

As Jesus was being questioned, Peter sat outside the courtyard. While he was there, people questioned him and asked if he was with Jesus. He denied knowing Jesus three times saying, *"I do not know the Man!"* After the third time denying Jesus, a rooster crowed, and Peter remembered what Jesus had said to him, *"Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times."* Peter went outside and wept bitterly.

Third Hour (9am): Pilate releases Jesus to be crucified

Pilate found no fault in Jesus but feared a riot if he didn't release Him. During the Passover festival, it was customary to release one prisoner. Pilate offered the crowd the choice to release either Jesus

or Barabbas, a notorious criminal. The crowd loudly disagreed and continued shouting “Crucify Him!” Reluctantly Pilate agreed and ordered Jesus to be crucified.



The soldiers took Jesus, stripped Him, and clothed Him in a scarlet robe. They placed a crown made of twisted thorn on His head and a long reed in His right hand. While kneeling before Him, they mocked Him, saying, ‘Hail! King of the Jews!’ The soldiers made fun of Him, spit on Him, and hit Him with the reed. Then He was led away to be crucified.

At the end of the Third Hour Service, we participate in the first procession of Great Friday.

The priest, in his vestments, carries the wooden Cross from Golgotha on his right shoulder. No bells are used during this procession, symbolising the mockery and insult Jesus endured. There are no celebration decorations because Jesus was given no respect when he carried His Cross to Golgotha.

This procession is traditionally held outside of the Church. Everyone makes one clockwise procession around the church while singing the beautiful procession song, remembering the weeping Hebrew women who follow from a distance.

Just like St. Mary who weeps for her beloved Son, this song brings tears to those who are really following the service:



*As He came from the city,
With the cross on His shoulders,
The Hebrew women gathered.
They wept bitterly for Him.*

*His mother stood from afar
With her friends surrounding her
Like a dove, she moaned with grief,
“Where my Son are You going?
My Belov’ed only Son,
Where are they taking You to?
Why did You give Yourself up
To the ungrateful people?
O my Son, woe be to me
Woe is me, my belov’ed.”
Bless’d is Your Passion for us,
And Your great humility!*

Sixth Hour (12pm): Jesus is crucified



Jesus is crucified in between two thieves. In the service of the Sixth Hour, we sing about the angels trembling with fear, the sun covering its face as the Son of God is being mocked, and even the rocks split open. At the sixth hour there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour (3 pm).

In the **Unitho** we sing about how even the tree pitied the Jews who hung Jesus. The mature tree cried as Jesus, her Master and Gardener, was now being crucified upon her.

Ninth Hour(3pm): Jesus dies on the Cross

In the Ninth hour, we hear the conversation between the two thieves who were crucified on either side of Jesus. The thief on the right cried, “Remember me, O my Lord When You come to Your kingdom!” The thief on the left said, “If this Man has a kingdom, why does He hang on the Cross?” Jesus told the thief on the right hand, “*Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.*” The true repentance of the thief on the right allowed him to enter Paradise.

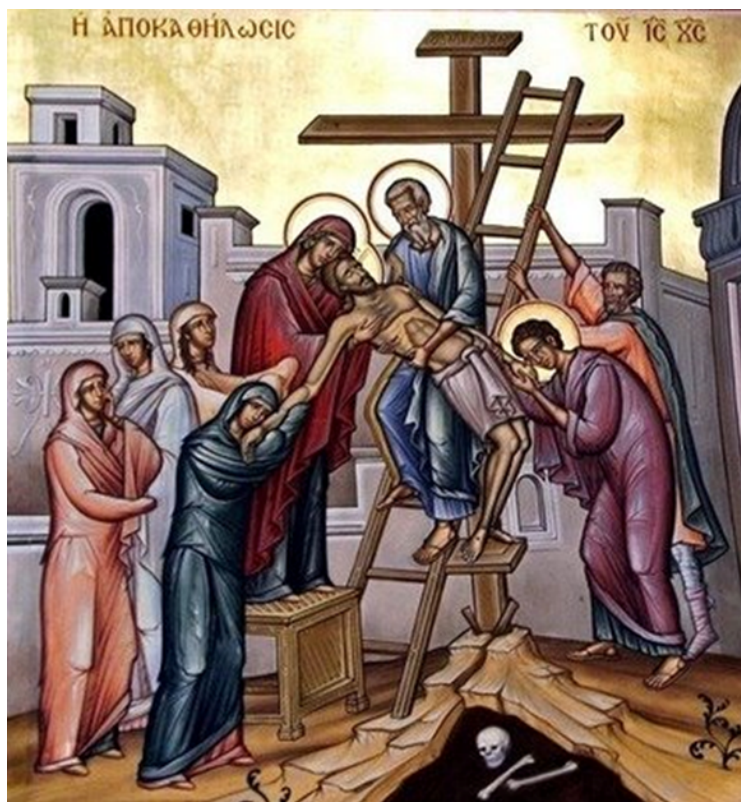
When Jesus tells the soldiers that He is thirsty, they use a sponge and a hyssop branch to give Him some sour wine, or gall. After drinking the gall Jesus yielded up His Spirit. He cried out with a loud voice, saying, “*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*” that is, “*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*” As Jesus yielded His spirit, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth quaked, rocks split, graves opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.

Since the next day was the Sabbath Day, the Jews did not want the bodies to remain on the Cross. They asked permission from Pilate to break the legs of those crucified and to have the bodies taken down. When the soldiers came to Jesus, He was already dead, so they did not break any of his bones. To be certain that He was dead, they pierced His side with a spear. Blood and water began to flow from His side which proved He was dead. The soldiers had unknowingly fulfilled the ancient prophecy that foretold the Messiah’s death in **Exodus 12:46, Numbers 9:12, Psalm 33:21, and Zechariah 12:10.**

Remember

When we attend a Great Friday service, we think of the sacrifice Jesus bore for us that we may have eternal life. Through each of these hours on Great Friday, we see how Jesus suffered passion for us. Through prayers, hymns and Scripture readings, each hour we meditate on the suffering our Lord endured to redeem the human race.





Nicodemus and Joseph take Christ down from the Cross

Veneration of the Cross

With permission from Pilot, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took the body of Jesus down from the Cross. To prepare the body for a proper Jewish burial, Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloe. Jesus was buried in a new tomb and sealed shut with a large stone rolled against the door. We remember that in the New Testament when Jesus was born, the Magi from the East brought myrrh as a gift for baby Jesus. Myrrh symbolises bitterness, suffering, hardship and foretold the death of Christ.

There are three parts to this service.

a. Veneration of the Cross: The faithful kneel in front of the Cross and ask the Lord to remember us when he comes again, just like the thief on His right side.

*We bow before Your Cross,
Which brought salvation for our souls,
And we - cry out with the thief, O Christ,
"Remember us when - You - come!"*

b. Carrying the Body of Jesus for burial: The second procession takes place when the Body of Jesus is being carried for burial. Only the Celebrant and the acolytes participate in this procession, as only a few people were present during His burial. The Celebrant performs the burial in the Altar Room. A new white cloth is used to wrap the cross, as Jesus was buried in a new tomb, as in **St.**

John 19:41. The priest and deacons wear their full vestments during the procession to bury Christ, who humbly laid His life to save mankind from death and Satan.

c.Exaltation of the Cross: This is the first time we sing the **Trisagion** - the “thrice holy” prayer, in remembrance of when Christ’s body was being taken to the tomb: one group of angels sang “Holy art Thou, O God,” another group sang “Holy art Thou, Almighty,” while a third group sang “Holy art Thou, Immortal,” and Joseph and Nicodemus cry out, “Crucified for us, have mercy on us!”

The Burial of Jesus

This service is performed by the celebrant and the acolytes inside the altar. The veil remains closed, while we chant **Kurielaison** (which means Lord, have mercy on us). The Cross, which was taken down from Golgotha is buried behind the altar with incense and perfume, just as St. Joseph and St. Nicodemus buried Jesus. The Great Friday service ends with the Qauma and the Nicene Creed. Finally, the faithful drink the bitter drink as a reminder of the sour wine that Jesus drank on the Cross.



The Icon for Good Friday

Jesus is nailed on the Cross with blood and water flowing from his right side. On top of the Cross are the Latin letters INRI meaning “THE KING OF THE JEWS.”

There is a skull at the foot of the Cross. Jesus was crucified in a place called Golgotha which means place of the skull. Tradition says that Jesus’ Cross was directly over Adam’s grave. On the left there are the Theotokos, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, and Salome. On the right is his beloved disciple John and the centurion who said, “Truly this Man was the Son of God!”

How does Good Friday relate to our everyday lives?

Even on the Cross, Jesus prayed for those who crucified Him. “*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do,*” **St. Luke 23:34**. On Great Friday Jesus suffered and died for our sins and on the third day He was raised from the death to conquer both sin and death.

Although it is a day of sorrow, it is also a day of victory and ultimate love. We come to church fasting, praying, and grieving the passion Jesus suffered. Remembering His suffering, we feel Christ’s love

Learning Outcome Check

Examine why Jesus took on Death for our sake.

for us as we sing every hymn and say every prayer. Even though Jesus suffered for our sins, it was all according to God's salvation plan for us to have total victory over sin and death. Christ's resurrection gives us our own resurrection in the time of His Second Coming, when we will all finally be united with Him forever.

Think

Even on the Cross Jesus prayed for those who crucified Him. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do," St. Luke 23:34. What do you think Jesus was trying to teach us through this action?



Reflection Questions

1. What were the seven sayings Christ said while on the cross?
2. Where in the Old Testament do we see a lamb being offered as a sacrifice?
3. After reading this lesson and understanding the Good Friday service, how would you answer if asked the question, "Why is the Good Friday service so long?"

LESSON

10

The Empty Tomb

Lesson Goals :

- *I can understand the concept of rest in the Old Testament (The Sabbath) and the New Testament (Holy Saturday).*
- *I can analyse the importance of Jesus having both a fully divine nature and a fully human nature.*
- *I can understand the importance of the Trisagion prayer.*



Holy Saturday is the day between Holy Friday and Qyamtha (Easter). Many other Christian churches misunderstand and overlook the importance of the Holy Saturday. They may experience the great sorrow of Holy Friday and then skip directly to the great joy of Qyamtha. However, in the life of the Orthodox Church, we value and observe Holy Saturday with high priority. We do not immediately replace the grief of the Holy Friday with the joy of Resurrection. Instead, On Holy Saturday we begin the transition from sorrow to joy.

On Holy Saturday, we remember Christ's descent into **Sheol**, the place of the dead. There He preached the Gospel to the departed. **1 Peter 3:18-19** says, "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison." As Christ entered Sheol, He searched for Adam and Eve and rescued them from death. He brought them back to Paradise to enjoy everlasting life in communion with God. Christ destroyed the emptiness of death through His death. Christ saved Adam and Eve from eternal death through His visit to Sheol on the Holy Saturday. So, as descendants of Adam and Eve, we live in the hope of resurrection because we confess our faith in Jesus Christ and lead a sacramental life.

A Day of Worship and Reverence

In the Orthodox Church, we believe that the Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled in the New Testament. Holy Saturday is an excellent example. The righteous people from the Old Testament times finally received the Gospel of salvation on Holy Saturday (**1 Pet. 3:18-20**).

They did not understand the Gospel until Christ came and directly preached to them. Therefore, worshipping Christ started among the dead, as He visited them on the Holy Saturday.

Learning Outcome Check

Interpret how Holy Saturday connects with Sabbath, the day of rest in the story of Creation.

From an earthly perspective, Holy Saturday was a day of rest for His human body. His body lay in the tomb, resting and awaiting His resurrection. Bodily rest does not mean inactivity. For example, our body rests when we sleep, but our soul remains active.



The three holy youths in the fiery furnace

Daniel 3:91-94 tells the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who refused to worship the golden image of the King of Babylon. In response, they were bound and forced into a furnace so that they could not escape. As the fire raged, the king looked inside and saw four men in the furnace instead of three. The fourth man looked to be the “*Son of God*” (**Daniel 3:92**). He set the three men free, for they walked out of the furnace unharmed. The fathers have repeatedly interpreted that the fourth person was Christ. Whenever the souls of faithful Christians are to suffer, Christ sets them free. The story of the three young men in the furnace reminds us that Christ has always existed, even before He was incarnated as a human being. Christ set the three men in the furnace free. Similarly, He also set the imprisoned souls in Sheol free (**1 Peter 3:19**).

Christ's Divine and Human Nature

There are several examples in the Gospels that prove Christ's human nature. Some examples are Christ weeping over His friend Lazarus, Christ being tempted by Satan three times, and Christ asking His Father not to let Him endure the Cross. In these examples, we see in Him common human qualities and responses.

Christ wept over his friend Lazarus who had died. He grieved which is a natural human response to death. **St. John 11:35** is the shortest verse in the Bible; it simply states, “Jesus wept.” Although simple in language, it is full of a relatable message. Even though Christ knew He would eventually raise Lazarus, He still felt sadness for his dear friend having to experience death. He, also, felt sympathy for Lazarus's sisters (Mary and Marth) as they wept.

When Christ entered the wilderness, He was tempted by Satan three times. Satan tried to tempt Christ with food as He was hungry, then Satan tested God's identity; and lastly, he tempted God's authority. As Christ lay on the Cross, he said, “I thirst.” Being thirsty and hungry are basic human needs. Later, the Roman soldiers pierced the side of Christ with a spear to make sure He was dead. As they pierced Him, blood and water rushed out from His now lifeless human body.

Christ is fully man and fully God. The beauty of the incarnation of Christ is that in everything He does, it is His Humanity and Divinity that together participate equally in it. When Jesus cried for Lazarus, He cried as God and Man, for His friend who had passed away. When Jesus turned water into wine, Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word of God, turned the water into wine. Thus, we can confidently say that God died for us on the Cross, even though Divinity cannot die. We cannot

Learning Outcome Check

Explain how Jesus died a real death on the Cross, but at no point in time before, during, or after does He stop being God.

separate Christ's Humanity and Divinity because everything Christ does, He does as both Man and God.

Trisagion Prayer

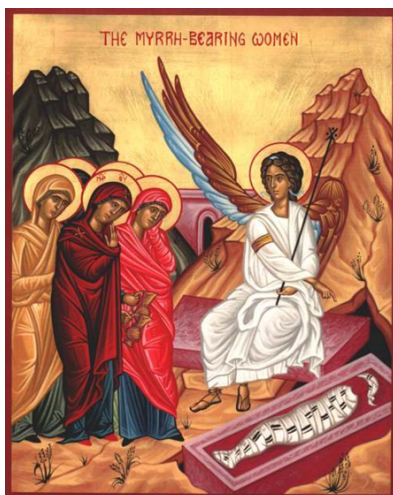
The Trisagion Prayer is the beginning prayer in the Qauma. The Trisagion prayer begins with "Holy art Thou, O God." According to St. Dionysius Bar Salibi, three angels descended to be with Christ during the burial of Christ. The first angel said, "Holy art thou, O God," the second said, "Holy art thou, Almighty," and the third said, "Holy art thou, Immortal." Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus responded to the Angels, "Crucified for us, Have mercy on us."

Learning Outcome Check

Associate the narrative where Joseph and Nicodemus receive the Trisagion Prayer from the Holy Angels with local Syriac tradition.

Like many prayers in the Orthodox Church, the Trisagion prayer has a connection to both the Old and the New Testaments. In **Isaiah 6:3**, we read about the vision of an angel who stands by the throne of God, crying out, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory." In **Revelation 4:8**, four living creatures are quoted as saying, "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come." During our Liturgy, all these elements exist. The Altar represents heaven and the throne of God, and the faithful singing the Trisagion prayer represents the angels. When we recite the Trisagion Prayer, we actively participate in the Heavenly Worship at the Throne of God.

Myrrh-Bearing Women



When the women arrived at Jesus's tomb to anoint His body the day after the Sabbath (**St. Matthew 28:1**), they found a young man standing near the empty tomb. The angel pointed to where Jesus had been laid and showed the women the burial clothes left behind. In the background is the Temple Mount, as the Crucifixion and Burial of Christ took place outside the walls. His tomb was carved from rock, and the angel had rolled the stone away but not broken the seal the Romans had placed. The women include St. Mary the Theotokos and St. Mary Magdalene

How is Holy Saturday Relevant to Our Everyday Life?

Let us imagine being the followers of Jesus on this day. They just witnessed Christ's suffering and death! They must have felt very scared and helpless. This was truly a dark hour for them. But like

the saying, “it is always darkest before dawn”, the dawn is the glorious Resurrection of our Lord and Saviour. Has there ever been a time when you felt sad and helpless? In times of difficulty, we might be tempted to abandon our faith. If we hold tight to our faith, the dawn (sunrise) will come as it did on Qyamtha. Our hope is in the Risen Christ!

Reflection Questions

1. Why did Christ suffer as a human on the cross to save us?
2. What lesson can we learn from the myrrh-bearing women about staying faithful until the end?
3. What can we learn from Christ about His resistance to temptations that we can apply in our lives?
4. Why do we remember the departed faithful on Holy Saturday?

We Live Because He Lives

Lesson Goals :

- *I can explain why the Feast of Resurrection is known as the Feast of Feasts.*
- *I can understand that Christ's resurrection changed the path of human history.*
- *I can analyse the verse from the Maneetho of Mar Severios ("He trampled death by His death and destroyed our death").*
- *I can understand how the Feast of Resurrection reflects on my daily life.*



The Feast of Feasts

Easter is the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ: the Feast of Feasts, and the climax of the Great and Holy Lent. Easter is known as Qyamtha in Syriac and Pascha in Greek. At the beginning of the Holy Qurbana in the Maneetho of Mar Severios, we sing: Jesus has trampled and killed death through His Resurrection. Therefore, Christians no longer fear death because Christ's Holy Resurrection is a celebration of death's defeat and man's hope for eternal and perfect communion with God. The Resurrection of our Lord is at the centre of our Christian beliefs. It is detailed in **St. Matthew 28:1-15**; **St. Mark 16:1-12**; **St. Luke 24:1-12**; and **St. John 20:1-18**. The Feast of Qyamtha is the ultimate feast of hope and the foundation of Christianity.

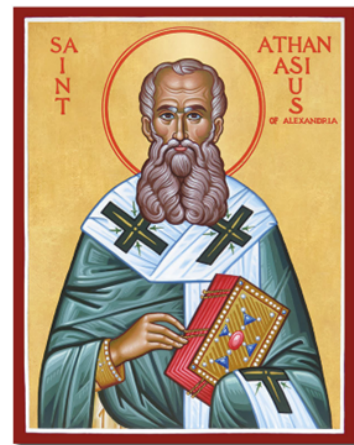
God Became Man

Jesus Christ is the eternal Word of God, God the Son, and the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. God became man to defeat death through His death and resurrection. He took flesh for only one purpose: to save us and to bring us back into a full relationship with God forever.

Death is the final enemy and was never in God's original plan for the eternal life of humans. Man was made in His image and likeness and created for everlasting life in Communion with God. However, as we see in **Genesis 3**, the disobedience of Adam and Eve caused death to enter our human lives. Adam and Eve's disobedience brought sin and death to God's beloved creation. Without God's salvation plan, death would have been the final end for every human being. Humanity would have had nothing to look forward to after death.

Many view this as "God's punishment", but God warned Adam and Eve of this fate. In **Genesis 2:16-17**, God said to Adam, "You may eat food from every tree in the garden; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you may not eat; for in whatever day you eat from it, you shall die by death." We understand and believe that God is love and that this was a warning from a loving Father to His beloved children.

This was not a “test” or any type of unreasonable rule given by a master to his servants. Rather, humans were spiritual infants and were not mature enough to taste the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God would have allowed the humans to taste the fruit at the appropriate time. His command was from a loving father who instructs his children to be careful. Death and permanent separation from God were the natural consequences of Adam and Eve’s disobedience. Their expulsion from Paradise and later events were because their loving Father was so saddened by His beloved son and daughter. They failed to trust him and instead chose to listen to the evil one.



St. Athanasius, in his masterpiece “On the Incarnation,” summarised that God could have chosen many other paths, but He chose the one that is the ultimate sign of His love for us. The Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ was for God to become fully man. As a man, he willingly sacrificed himself on the cross to defeat death.

We sing in the **Ma’nitho** of Mar Severus, “He trampled death by His death and destroyed our death”. As a result of Christ’s resurrection, death has been transformed and conquered. We see this also in our Qyamtha morning prayers when we sing:

*Christ is ri-sen from the dead
Trampling down death by His death!
Rejoice O beloved Church!
And exalt the Living One*

Christ’s resurrection changed the path of human history. Through faith in Christ, we are no longer permanently separated from God. Through death, we are united in perfect and everlasting communion with God. Death is no longer to be feared when we live in the hope of the resurrection of our Lord. Christ’s resurrection is the ultimate victory over sin and death.

Learning Outcome Check

Analyse the verse from the Maneetho of Mar Severios (“He trampled death by His death and destroyed our death”).

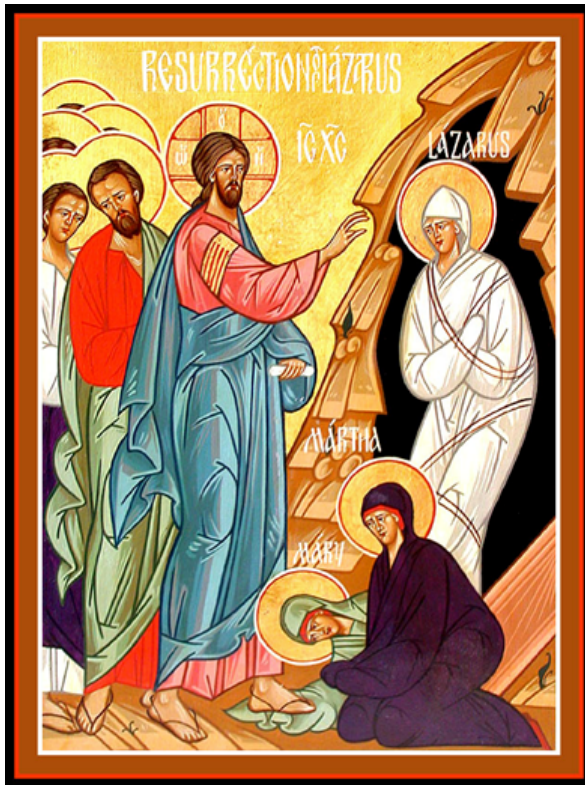
In **Hebrews 2:14-15**, St. Paul writes, “*In as much then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*”

I am the Resurrection and the Life

In **St. John Chapter 11**, we read about Lazarus, one of Jesus’ close friends who was very sick and was near his death. Mary and Martha, Lazarus’ sisters, were sad and waiting for Christ to come and save their brother. By the time Christ arrived, Lazarus had already been dead and in the tomb for four days. In **St. John 11:25**, Jesus tells Martha, “*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.*” Christ

is declaring His divine authority to raise the dead on the last day and in this world, too. He is telling us that, through Him, physical death is not the end of our existence. When He asks, “Do you believe this?” He is not only asking Martha, but also all of us.

After speaking with both Martha and Mary, Jesus calls Lazarus and says, “*Lazarus, come forth!*” (St. John 11:43). Lazarus comes out of the grave bound up in the grave clothes, with his face wrapped in a cloth. The Raising of Lazarus is an example of what Jesus can do for us. We can be renewed and brought back to life spiritually. We are born again spiritually through Christ.



The raising of Lazarus

It is important to notice that Lazarus comes out of the grave wrapped in grave clothes. Church fathers believe that this is because he will need them again. Lazarus’ resurrection is for his earthly life to continue, which will later end in his physical death. In St. John 20:5-7, when Christ resurrects, His grave clothes are left in the tomb because Christ’s resurrection changes the nature of death for everyone.

Remember

The Feast of Holy Resurrection is the climax of the Great and Holy Lent. It is the celebration of the defeat of death and man’s hope for eternal and perfect communion with God. The resurrection of our Lord is the centre of our Christian beliefs.



A Mini Qyamtha Every Week

The liturgical life of the Orthodox Church is cyclical. It is made up of three liturgical cycles: the yearly, weekly, and daily. The weekly cycle consists of the seven days of the week. Each day is dedicated to an important event in Christ’s earthly life or a revered saint. Sunday is dedicated to the Resurrection. This makes every Sunday a mini Qyamtha. Our prayers and liturgical hymns beautifully capture the events of Christ’s resurrection. In praise, we proclaim our faith and relive the events as if they were happening today. We experience the Feast of the Resurrection and all of the events of that day in real time.

Remember

Christ’s resurrection changed the path of human history. Through faith in Christ, we are no longer permanently separated from God. Through death, we are united in perfect and everlasting communion with God.



Remember

“He trampled death by His death and destroyed our death” and thus making every Sunday a day of renewal, new life, and victory over death.



In our Divine Liturgy, the first hymn that we sing in the public celebration of the Holy Qurbana is the **Ma'nitho**, or anthem, of Mar Severus. St. Severus of Antioch (A.D. 465-538) composed this entrance hymn as a beautiful summary of our doctrine of Christ. In it, we state our full belief in the purpose of the Incarnation of God the Word, His virgin birth, fully human and divine nature, crucifixion, and resurrection. We also pledge our belief in the Holy Trinity. When we sing this hymn, we boldly proclaim that “He trampled death by His death and destroyed our death,” thus making every Sunday a day of renewal, new life, and victory over death.

Harrowing of Hell



Icon of Resurrection

Learning Outcome Check

Understand and analyse the references of how Christ brings life in the hymns of the Resurrection Liturgy and Qyamtha morning prayers.

The Holy Icon frequently used on Resurrection Sunday is more accurately known as the Harrowing of Hell and is the victory of Christ over death. This icon is a wonderful visual to illustrate the hymns we sing during Holy Saturday and Resurrection Sunday, as well as the prayers of the Qyamtha season.

For example, in the centre, we see Christ pulling Adam from the tomb by the wrist rather than guiding him by the hand. To Christ's left, we see Eve with her hands held out in supplication, waiting for Jesus to act.

This not only shows their humble surrender to Jesus, but also that it was the direct will of God to save man from death! Christ pulls man from the death that we freely brought on ourselves when we ate the fruit.

This visual also illumines the Qolo we sing during the 3rd Hour of the Qyamtha prayers.

Qolo : Qyamtha 3rd hour

*On the first day
Which is the firstborn of days
Christ rose from death,
The firstborn of God
He raised with Him
Adam who is the firstborn
Of all mankind And made him ascend
Halleluyah
Praise to the Lord of Adam
Who delivered
The sons of Adam*

(Onnam naalaam ee njaayar..)

In the background are a multitude of departed souls. Among them are some of the righteous souls of the Old Testament. King David and his son Solomon are seen on the left wearing crowns. Near the centre is St. John the Baptist. On the other side is Abel, the son of Adam and the first man to ever die. He wears a shepherd's robe and has a cane. There are many more figures depicted in the icon to represent the blessed faithful who died before Christ suffered on the cross.

With this in mind, the Bothe D'Hasho hymn during the 3rd Hour of Holy Saturday is more striking!

*O Living One who tasted death,
Bless'ed are You – who was not corrupted
Today the just ones in – Sh'eol
Raised their heads and – sang glory to the heir,
And in their tombs – they praised the Son,
For He lowered Himself – to them
And visited – all the dead in their realm
You descended into – She'ol
To the prophets – who prophesied of You:
Adam, Abel, – Isaac, Jacob,
Moses, Joshua, Samuel, – David;
And Your light dawned – upon their bones, O Lord”*

Under the feet of Christ, the gates of **Hades**, the Realm of Death, are broken and thrown down. Death is often pictured as defeated and completely bound up, as at the bottom of the Icon. In **1 Corinthians 15:50-58**, St. Paul refers to Death as the defeated figure, “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” This reference is also used in our hymns to teach us the glory of Christ's victory. For example, in the concluding hymn of the Holy Qurbana on Resurrection Sunday:

*Satan and his friends, – both Death and Judas
were ashamed this day, – for Christ had risen
As the Son of God – was resurrected
Death was struck with fear; – Judas hanged himself
Halleluyah w'Halleluyah
Christ Who saved mankind – is worthy of praise*

How does this Feast Relate to our Daily Lives?

The Feast of Qyamtha is the ultimate feast of hope. It is the foundation of Christianity—the feast of feasts. The empty tomb allows us to live our lives knowing that Christ has already prepared a place for us and that, in death, we can be united in perfect communion with God. This does not mean that human death is not a sorrowful event. As humans, sadness and tears over the loss of a loved one are per-

fectly natural.



As Christians, we now understand that death is not the end, for Christ is the way to eternal life and communion with God. In **St. John 14:1-4**, Christ tells us, *“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know.”* Through Christ is the way all of our beloved departed went, and He is the way we also will go one day.

As Orthodox Christians, we know that Jesus is the light that causes all darkness to disappear. When the Source of all Life went down to the place of the dead, the result was Jesus’ victory over death, not death’s victory over Jesus. Death could not hold him. Since He lives, we too can face the challenges of daily human life without fear. We live because he lives.

Reflection Questions

1. Hypothetically, if the bones of the man named Jesus Christ were one day discovered and not authenticated to be genuine, would you still consider yourself Christian? Before answering, reflect on the writings of St. Paul in **1 Corinthians 15:14**, i.e., “And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless, and so is your faith.”
2. Analyse why the Resurrection of our Lord is the centre of our Christian Faith and the Gospel, and defend our purpose as a Christian after reflecting on St. Paul’s message in **1 Corinthians 15:20-22**, “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since through man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.”
3. How does the Resurrection of our Lord provide comfort for us when we experience a loss in our family, friends, or community?
4. Sing and discuss the Bo’utho of Mor Ephraim found on page 146 in the service book of the Divine Liturgy.

LESSON

12

In Great Glory

Lesson Goals :

- *I can understand and discuss the significance of the Feast of Ascension.*
- *I can discuss Ascension as it relates to the second coming of Christ.*
- *I can compare and contrast the Orthodox Ascension icon with the western paintings*



The **Ascension** of Jesus Christ into heaven is one of the most important events recorded in the New Testament. It takes place 40 days after the Holy Feast of Resurrection, or Easter. The word Ascension comes from Latin “Ascensionem” meaning “to go up” or “ascend.” In Syriac, the ascension is known as **Sooloqo**. The Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ to the heavens occurred when the angels in heaven were exalting and glorifying Him. St Luke the Evangelist describes the Ascension of our Lord in his Gospel **St. Luke 24:50-53** and again in the **Acts of the Holy Apostles 1:4-11**. The Ascension marks the completion of Christ’s glorification and lordship over all creation. Christ’s Ascension is so important to us because it helps us see that we have a place in heaven. At the incarnation, Christ brought His divine nature to human nature. With His Ascension, Christ brings human nature to the diving Kingdom.

Participation of the majority of our faithful at this Feast is often very poor, mostly because it falls on a Thursday. The Church holds this Feast with high importance and is viewed as enthronement and victory (**Acts 2:33-36; Acts 5:31; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Ephesians 1:20-23**) of our Lord Jesus Christ. The scripture makes the idea of Ascension and enthronement of Christ clear through the claim that Christ sat at the right hand of the Father in heaven. The icons and Liturgical hymns also emphasise the full meaning of the Ascension of Christ. For instance, the Creed speaks about the Ascension as “ascended unto heaven and sat at the right hand of God, the Father.”

God's Promise

St. Luke the Evangelist describes the Ascension of our Lord in his Gospel (**St. Luke 24:51-53**) and again in **Acts of the Holy Apostles (1: 4 -11)**. In **St. Matthew 28:16-20**, Jesus gives His Apostles and disciples the Great Commission where He blessed them and commanded them to wait for the fulfillment of the promise. What did the Lord Jesus promise? God promised to send a helper (**St. John 14:26, 16:13-15; Acts 1:4-5**) who abides with us forever, and He is God the Holy Spirit!

The Ascension foreshadowed the final event in salvation history: the glorious second coming of our Lord. **Acts chapter 1** tells us that after He taught the disciples, Jesus was taken to Heaven. As they watched Him, a cloud hid Him out of their sight. They continued to stare at the sky and two men dressed in white, who we know were angels, told them, “*Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up*

into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” (Acts 1: 11)

The ancient Church understood how critical this event was in the story of human Salvation. With His ascension, Christ’s earthly ministry was complete and, as promised, the Holy Spirit would come to strengthen the faithful to fulfil our purpose and calling as Christians.

Learning Outcome Check

Analyse Ascension through Scripture, Icons and Liturgical prayers/hymns.



The Ascension in Liturgy

Our Liturgical hymns share much deeper teachings and wisdom on the celestial celebration that occurred with the Ascension. This was a celebration by all the ranks of angels, where the heavens opened, and songs of praise and joy greeted Him. This praise not only reflects the joy in heaven but is also a recognition of Jesus completing His purpose on earth. He died for our sins through His Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection. Jesus’ human nature was revealed through His birth and His incarnation united His divinity to humanity. Through His Ascension, His humanity united with His divinity is seated at the right hand of God the Father in heaven forever. We proclaim in the Creed, “And on the third day, He rose again according to His will, and ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father, and shall come again in His great glory to judge both the living and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end;”

The concluding hymn sung on the Feast of Ascension beautifully summarises this teaching:

*Today, our Lord and Saviour
Ascends-into the Heavens.
The fiery angels praise Him
Who sits at God’s right hand side
Let us all glorify Him
Who has- redeemed us from death!*

This hymn reminds us of our purpose and how the Ascension completed the work of redemption by Christ (the Second Person of the Holy Trinity) and began the work of the Holy Spirit (the Third Person of the Holy Trinity) within us through Baptism and to all of creation. Acts 1:8 tells us, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” On the Feast of Ascension, we sing the Post-Gospel Hymn:

*With loud cries, all nations and races sing praises
For the Lord of all has ascended to heaven;
O Faithful Church - sing praise and rejoice;
Your beloved has ascended and
Set up the altar of resurrection in you,
And gave His Holy Body and Life-Giving Blood
Halleluyah - to save the whole word!*

The Ascension in Iconography



Icons of Ascension in old Syriac (a) and Coptic (b) style



The Ascension

Christ holds a scroll in His left hand, and He blesses everyone with His right hand. This gesture represents the love and teaching of Christ to us. Christ is the source of teaching of the Church and Christ is the message of the Church. The almond-shaped portion in the icon is the mandorla which illustrates the most important movement of the icon, and two angels carry it. The Theotokos and the Apostles in the foreground represent the Church awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Theotokos takes the centre of the icon below Jesus Christ. She is depicted as very calm and is accepting the Will of God. The gesture of Her hands is a gesture of prayer. She is calm, unlike the disciples who are confused about what is happening. In the right-hand corner of the icon, we see St. Paul whose face is partially covered and is not looking up to the sky. Although at the time of the Ascension, St. Paul was not yet a follower of Christ, his presence signifies the completeness of the Church.

Before the Ascension, in **St. Mark 16:15**, Christ commanded His apostles to 'go into all the world

and preach the gospel to every creature (**St. Mark 16:15**). St. Paul, by His preaching of the Gospel, brought countless people to faith. One could see the Ascension of Christ only if one had faith. These are some of the common characteristics reflected in all icons of the Ascension.

The Second Coming

The Ascension is a reminder of the Second Coming of our Lord. It is of such significance that the Nicene Creed reminds us as soon as we affirm the Ascension. As noted earlier, in **Acts 1:11** the angels said, "This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

Research

Can you find in the Nicene Creed about the Ascension and the Second Coming?



This is clearly seen when we study how Christ is depicted in the Ascension icon next to that of the Second Coming:



The icon on the left is from the Ascension icon and shows Christ in Glory seated. The full icon would show Him ascending with the angels. The icon of the right is Christ Enthroned with the angelic ranks of cherubim and thrones shown. The side-by-side comparison clearly shows the intentional depiction in the Ascension icon and is a reminder that Christ will come again to judge all.

Paintings and Icons



Ascension depicted in (a) a western painting and (b) in an icon

The image on the left is a Western painting of the Ascension whereas the right is an icon. What we see in the painting is the artist's self-interpretation of the event and one where the artist takes liberties to make the art more aesthetically pleasing. An icon on the other hand is sacred art that teaches us about Christ.

For example, Scripture reads that Jesus ascended and a cloud hid Him and using that alone one would think that Christ flew through the air until He was out of sight for those on the ground. The icon shows the mandorla being carried by the angels as they glorify Him. A “mandorla” is the almond or circular shaped detail behind Christ in this icon that looks like it has rays. This indicates that not everyone could see what was happening, but only those who had the “eyes of Faith” and were believers. It gives a much more powerful and deeper insight into the relationship between God and man. The painting does not show the mandorla, and makes it appear as if Christ is flying in the air! We also do not see angels in this painting, which is under the liberties of the artist.

Learning Outcome Check

Contrast the theology in the Icon of Ascension with that of the common Western painting.

St. Mary and St. Paul are not shown in the painting as it's an attempt to mirror the event at that moment in time as seen by a regular person. As Orthodox Christians, we cannot overlook the very important role that the Theotokos and St. Paul have in salvation history.

What does the Feast of the Ascension mean to our daily lives?

The Ascension of our Lord into heaven is the climactic event of His exaltation. It was a necessary step to continue His work through the Holy Spirit and the Church. In **Acts 2:16-21**, St. Peter recalls the words of the prophet Joel when he says, “I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh.” The Spirit is poured out on *us* through the exaltation of Christ! In **Acts 2:33**, St. Peter makes this connection when he says, “Therefore being exalted to the right hand of the God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.” Through Christ’s suffering, resurrection, and ascension, we now have a clear path to salvation through repentance and forgiveness of sins. **Acts 5:31** tells us, “Him God has exalted to His right hand to *be* the Prince and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.”

We can take comfort in knowing that the ascended and enthroned Christ loves us and is waiting for us. He gives us courage and the power to face life’s difficulties. We see this in **Acts 7:55-56** when St. Stephen is martyred. “But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, ‘Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!’”

The Ascension of our Lord points out a few things to us:

1. The disciples witnessed the divinity of Jesus and were commanded to go and preach about His life, death, and resurrection to the world.
2. Jesus assures the disciples and us that there will be intervention of the Holy Spirit to help.
3. Jesus precedes us into the Kingdom of the Father, assuring us that one day we will also be part of the glorious kingdom.
4. We remember that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father, and we repeat it every time we recite the Nicene Creed.
5. Jesus cares for and about us, just like our parents. Jesus stayed with us as humans and showed us how to live a life that is pleasing to God. He walked with His disciples, strengthened them in faith, and guided them on the path they should walk. Jesus encourages his disciples to continue this practise.

Reflection Questions

1. When did the Ascension of Jesus Christ take place?
2. The number 40 is an important number in the Bible. Can you find other events in the Bible that are tied to the number 40?
3. Where in the Nicene creed do we acknowledge the Ascension of our Lord?

The Fire of The Spirit

Lesson Goals :

- *I can examine the meaning of the sprinkling of water.*
- *I can describe and explain the tongues of fire.*
- *I can understand the sending out to preach the universal Gospel after Pentecost.*
- *I can explain Apostolic Succession in relation to Pentecost.*



The Gift of the Holy Spirit

The Feast of Pentecost (*Siom Boorke* in Syriac, Penticosthi in Malayalam) is celebrated each year on the fiftieth day after the Feast of the Resurrection of Christ (*Qyamtha* or Easter) and ten days after the Feast of the Ascension of Christ. It commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and the manifestation of the Church. Being filled with the Holy Spirit, the Apostles begin to speak in other languages. At the time, there were many people from all over the world living in Jerusalem, and they were amazed that they could each hear the Apostles preach in their own native language. On the day of Pentecost, around three thousand people are baptised as they embrace the message of salvation through Christ through the preaching of the Apostles. The Feast also represents the revelation of the Holy Trinity. These events are detailed in **Acts 2**.

Promises fulfilled

Several times throughout Scripture, the faithful are promised the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Old and New Testaments are beautifully connected in the hope of the Holy Spirit.

In the Old Testament, the prophets Joel, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel prophesied that the Lord would put His Spirit in the hearts of all His people rather than only the holy prophets and kings as in the old covenant. The prophet

Ezekiel makes the connection between water and the Spirit in **Ezekiel 36: 25-27** when he writes, "I shall sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be cleansed from all your uncleanness, and I will also cleanse you from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. I shall take the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I shall put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my requirements, and you will keep My judgements and do them."

Learning Outcome Check

Examine the meaning of the sprinkling of water.

In **Acts 2**, on the day of Pentecost, St. Peter quotes Joel's prophecy in his sermon to all those who dwell in Jerusalem when he says,

“

“But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy’”



Acts 2:16-18 ”

Jesus Christ repeatedly spoke about the gift of the Holy Spirit in his ministry.

- **St. John 7: 37-39** states, “On the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”
- In **St. John 14:16**, Christ says, “I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide in you forever - the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.”
- In **St. John 16: 13-14** Christ promises, “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority*, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare *it* to you.”
- In **Acts 1:5**, just before His ascension, Christ tells his Apostles, “For truly, John baptised you with water, but you shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

The Plan is completed

God's divine plan to bring man back to Him was completed at Pentecost. The making of creation was done by the Father through the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Image of God became incarnate and entered the world through Christ's Nativity. Creation was renewed when death was conquered through His resurrection. The Holy Spirit completed creation by coming into the hearts of men. On Pentecost, we are made members of the Risen Body of Christ. It is not a coincidence that the beginning of creation, the Resurrection of Christ, and the entrance of the Holy Spirit into man's hearts each occurred on a Sunday.

On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descends upon the Apostles in the form of tongues of fire. This fulfils the prophecy of John the Baptist in the Gospel of **St. Luke 3:16**, when he says that Christ will “baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” Fire is the most powerful element. It represents the uncreated power and energy of God.

Man's pride divides but the Holy Spirit unites

In **Genesis 11: 1-9**, Moses tells us about the Tower of Babel. The whole of creation spoke one common language. The people of Babel were united in their pride and wanted to make a name for themselves. They worked together to build a tower that they hoped would reach heaven. The Lord,

having seen them united in pride and rather than communion with Him, punished the people of Babel by confusing their language so that they may not understand each other. The Lord scattered them all throughout the earth, and they stopped building their city and their tower.

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit unites all of God's people by allowing them to hear the good news in their own native language. In the Sedro for the Second Service of Pentecost, we say, "Today, by the descent of the Comforter, the Upper Room has become a second Babel. Not as a punishment as it was in the confusion of tongues, as in the first one, but rather, by the power of the Holy Spirit, it has been enlightened by the light of grace so that the Apostles might become wise for the preaching of the truth."

Members of the Body of Christ

In his sermon to the multitude dwelling in Jerusalem, St. Peter defines the Christian life within the Church. He tells the people, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Upon hearing his message, three thousand people were baptised and added to the body of Christ.

Acts 2 concludes with a description of the life of the first church. The central elements of worship that were present from the beginning form the basis of our Orthodox Church today. The apostles "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers." Many wonders and signs were done through the apostles, and "the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."

Ten days before Pentecost, just before Christ ascends into heaven, He tells His apostles, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Filled with the Holy Spirit, the apostles were able to

Learning Outcome Check

Explain Apostolic Succession in relation to Pentecost.

courageously travel throughout the entire world to spread the good news and grow the body of Christ. As Orthodox Christians, we know that we practise the traditions and teachings of the Apostles. **Apostolic Succession** means that we can trace a direct line of ordination from Christ to the Apostles to our current church leaders. Christ makes the connection between His ministry to that of the twelve apostles in **St. John 17: 16-19** when He prays, "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them with your truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have also sent them into the world. And for their sakes, I sanctify myself so that they may also be sanctified by the truth." In our divine liturgy, the faithful are reminded of the Apostolic Succession through the prayer of absolution that is offered by the priest. "The authority which was entrusted by our Lord Jesus Christ to His holy apostles, and the holy apostles to the high priests, and the high priests to me, in my feebleness, I, who am weak and sinful, absolve you."

Icon of Pentecost



Icon of Pentecost

The icon of the Feast of Pentecost shows the Apostles sitting together in the Upper Room. They are seated in a semicircle, which shows the unity of the church. The tongues of fire are seen descending upon each one of them, signifying the descent of the Holy Spirit. Although St. Paul was not actually present on the day of Pentecost, he is depicted in the icon because of his great missionary work for the Body of Christ. Also present are the four evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, holding books of the gospel, while the other apostles are holding scrolls that represent the teaching authority given to them by Christ.

Learning Outcome Check

Investigate the meaning behind the tongues of fire.

In the centre of the icon below the Apostles, a royal figure is seen against a dark background. This is a symbolic figure, Cosmos, representing the people of the world living in darkness and sin and involved in pagan worship. However, the figure carries in his hands a cloth containing scrolls that represent the teachings of the apostles. The tradition of the church holds that the apostles carried the message of the gospel to all parts of the world.

How does this Feast relate to our daily lives?

The Holy Spirit is also known as the Comforter and the Spirit of Truth. Through the Feast of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit enters our hearts, purifies our souls, and brings us back into perfect communion with God. The Body of Christ, or the Church, is strengthened and nurtured in truth and love. Like the apostles, we can be energised and strengthened by the Holy Spirit to be witnesses for Jesus Christ.

Learning Outcome Check

Discuss the sending out to preach the universal Gospel after Pentecost.

Reflection Questions

1. When do we first receive the Holy Spirit in our lives?
2. How are Ezekiel's words connected to Baptism and Chrismation?
3. When and how are Ezekiel's words incorporated into the service of the Feast of Pentecost?
4. How does the Old Testament Pentecost compare to the New Testament Pentecost?

Lesson Goals :

- I can identify the important parts of the Icon of the Transfiguration
- I can relate this important event with the manifestation of the Holy Trinity
- I can illustrate how the Transfiguration is a symbol of sanctification



Transfiguration (M'tale)



Icon of Transfiguration

The Transfiguration of our Lord is known as **M'tale** in Syriac and Maruroopa Perunnal or Koodaara Perunnal in Malayalam. This great feast is celebrated every year on August 6th and is one of the major feasts in the Orthodox Church. The Feast commemorates the transfiguration of Christ on a high mountain, which, by tradition, we know as Mount Tabor.

The transfiguration is recorded in three of the four gospels (**St. Matthew 17:1-9**, **St. Mark 9:2-8**, **St. Luke 9:28-36**) and in the second letter of St. Peter (**II Peter 1:16-18**). Jesus took the Apostles St. Peter, St. James, and St. John with Him up a mountain, and while they were on the mountain top, He was transfigured. His face shone like the sun, and his garments became glistening white.

Moses and Elijah appeared with Christ, talking to him. On Tabor, the apostles saw the divine transfiguration of Christ, the manifestation of His majesty and glory. The Transfiguration of Christ is a revelation of His divine identity.



Jesus Christ in the Icon of Transfiguration

In the icon of the Transfiguration, we see Christ in the centre, as He should be in the centre of our everyday lives. Christ is also seen blessing us with His right hand and having a scroll in His left hand. The scroll is symbolic of the Gospel. Moses is standing on the left side of Christ, holding the books of the law. Elijah stands on Christ's right side, where John the Baptist—the new Elijah—stands in the icon of Christ's baptism. Moses and Elijah experienced God on mountains in their earthly lives (Moses on Mount Sinai and Elijah on Mount Carmel). At the transfiguration, they both experience God on Mount Tabor.



Moses and Elijah in the Icon of Transfiguration

Moses and Elijah's presence at the Transfiguration is an important detail that points to Christ and His role as part of the Trinity. Moses represents the law since he was originally given the Ten Commandments, and Elijah represents the prophets. Moses represents all the faithful who have departed since he experienced death. Elijah represents those faithful members alive in Christ, as Elijah was carried up to heaven and did not experience death. So, in the transfiguration, we have the faithful, both departed and alive, pointing to Christ as the Son of God.

The Holy Apostles in the icon are shown face-down under Christ. **St. Matthew 17:6** tells us, “When the disciples heard this, they fell face-down to the ground, terrified.” St. John is directly under Christ and prefigures where John will be when Christ is glorified on the Cross. St. Peter is kneeling and facing Christ, as he had confusedly asked about building tents. Without context, this sounds strange! St. Peter understood that the meeting of Christ with Moses and Elijah was like that glimpse of heaven which Moses had seen in the wilderness atop Mt. Sinai, from which he modelled the Tent of Meeting for the Israelites (Acts 7:38-44; Hebrews 8:5). St. James is shown falling backwards due to the brilliance of the Divine Presence.



Apostles in the Icon of Transfiguration

Learning Outcome Check

Analyse the Icon of Transfiguration.

Research

Read and discuss 1 John 1:5

A question that often arises is why Jesus took Peter, James, and John to the top of Mount Tabor and not all the disciples. St. John of Damascus writes that Peter was taken to show him that Christ's testimony was true and confirmed in the Father speaking at the Transfiguration. Jesus took James with Him because he would be the first of the apostles to die for Christ. He was essentially drinking from the same cup as Christ did. Jesus took John with Him so that after he had beheld God's glory, he would write in **St. John 1:1**, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

The Holy Trinity Manifested

The Transfiguration is seen as a theophany or a manifestation of the Holy Trinity. **St. Matthew 17: 5** tells us that the Holy Spirit appeared in a cloud, and the Father's voice was heard saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" The Son, Jesus Christ, is physically present.

Learning Outcome Check

Explore how Transfiguration is the manifestation of the Holy Trinity.

In the Transfiguration, we see several proofs of Christ as God. Throughout the scriptures, God is associated with light. Christ's clothes and face shone like the sun during the transfiguration. During the event of transfiguration, the Father says, "This is my beloved Son," and does not say, "This has become my beloved Son." This distinction proves that Christ did not become the Son of God at the Transfiguration, at Baptism, or at His birth, but that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have always been together; in other words, the Holy Trinity is eternal.

Sanctification

The transfiguration is a symbol that Jesus sanctifies us. It reveals to us that every human being can go through the process of *theosis* (an ancient Greek word). This means that we can become like God, and achieve holiness. **Revelation 22:5** says, "They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light."

As Christ presented Himself on Mount Tabor, the feast of Transfiguration motivates us to strive to be illumined by the Divine Light. It encourages us to be better Christians, love one another, and

love God, moving one step closer to our main goal of Salvation every day. In the Transfiguration of our Lord, it is revealed that our goal in life is to be transformed into the glorification of God. In **Matthew 5:48**, Jesus Himself states, “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in Heaven is perfect.”

The transfiguration and the baptism of our Lord have many similarities. Each instance included the Holy Trinity being revealed and God speaking almost identical words. When we underwent earthly baptism, we became sanctified, or set apart for a holy purpose. A question that usually arises is, “What does it mean to be transfigured?”. St. John Chrysostom wrote that Christ’s transfiguration revealed to the disciples a part of His Divinity, but only as much as they could comprehend. It also showed the disciples the indwelling of God within Jesus. Just as we are called to be sanctified during our baptism, we are also called to be sanctified during the transfiguration of our Lord.

The sanctification we undergo during baptism is not meant to be a single event. We go through baptism once during our lifetime, which starts the process of sanctification of our lives in its entirety. ‘Sanctification,’ thus, becomes an ongoing event in our lives. A practical way to think about this is in math class at school. If you only learned addition once in second-grade math class, how would that prepare you to succeed as you age? It wouldn’t. Addition is the foundation for subtraction, multiplication, and division. You would continue to apply and learn the processes of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division deeper to understand math. In the same way, our baptism is a form of sanctification, but every day we must transfigure ourselves to become more and more like Christ. St. Mary is a great example of being constantly transfigured. She achieved this because she spent her time after Christ’s resurrection in constant and unceasing prayer.

Learning Outcome Check

Illustrate how Transfiguration is a symbol of sanctification.

How does the Feast of Transfiguration relate to our everyday lives?

It may be hard to look at the Transfiguration of our Lord and understand why this is important to us in our everyday lives. Knowing how Christ was transfigured might seem confusing since He is God. We know that Jesus did not change at the transfiguration. His divine nature was revealed, but it was and is always the same. **Hebrews 13:8** says, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” Because we know that this is true, what we really should be thinking about the transfiguration is that not only Jesus was transfigured, but His disciples were also transfigured. The revelation of Christ’s divinity transfigured them into something that they were not until then. The Transfiguration story is placed in **Matthew 17**. In verse 22 of the same chapter, Jesus informs the disciples that he will be betrayed and killed. The disciples are distraught at these words from Jesus. The transfiguration encouraged the disciples to endure with Christ on the Cross. Just like us, the disciples needed to be transformed by God’s grace to face what lay ahead.

Reflection Questions

1. Why was the manifestation of the Holy Trinity relevant?
2. How can we be sanctified?
3. Is sanctification a one-time or ongoing process? Why?

LESSON

15

The Dormition of the Theotokos

Lesson Goals :

- I can explain the Feast of the Dormition of St. Mary, the Theotokos.
- I can understand the role of St. Mary in the ministry of Christ.
- I can connect the Dormition of St. Mary to the promise of everlasting life.



You must have heard about the **Shoonoyo** fast from August 1st through 15th. This fast is in preparation for the celebration of **Shoonoyo**, the Dormition of the Theotokos, or Daivamaathavinte Vaangippu, in Malayalam. The Feast commemorates the dormition, or "falling-asleep" of the Mother of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Our Church Fathers teach us to call the death of every faithful person a departure. The death of St. Mary is treated with even bigger respect and, thus, is called falling asleep. We maintain that St. Mary died and was buried. After burial, her body was taken to heaven. Therefore, the Feast also commemorates her assumption into heaven. This assumption was made with the body and soul of the Theotokos following the end of her life on Earth. St. Mary is awaiting the second coming of her Son, Jesus Christ, and will pass through the judgement. We seek her intercession, and we also pray for her salvation.

Her Life after the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ

St. John 19:25-27 says, "Now there stood by the Cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus, therefore, saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold your son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold your mother!' And from that hour on, that disciple took her to his own home."

Although Christ calls her "woman," He is using a term of deep respect, love, adoration, and affection for the times—the same word used when God created man and woman. When He tells St. John, "Behold your mother!" He is establishing St. Mary as the mother of all faithful people. He reinforces the importance of honouring our parents even in His physical death. **Acts 1:14** confirms that the Virgin Mary was with the Holy Apostles on the day of Pentecost. The tradition of the Church holds that she remained in the home of St. John the Apostle in Jerusalem, continuing ministry in word and deed.

Learning Outcome Check

Explain the significance of Jesus entrusting St. Mary to St. John the evangelist: "Woman, this is your son and Here is your mother", as well as perceive about St. Mary's life in Ephesus with St. John.

St Thomas Witnesses the Assumption of St Mary

While preaching the gospel in India, St. Thomas the Apostle received the inner call to return to the West for the impending departure of the Virgin Mary from this earthly life. Just as St. Thomas was not present when the Lord first appeared to the disciples after His resurrection, he was also not present at the Dormition of St. Mary. He arrived the third day after her burial, but had a vision of angels carrying her to heaven.

From the Post-Gospel Hymn on the Feast of the Dormition:

Learning Outcome Check

Identify St. Mary in connection with her death and translation/ assumption unto heaven.

Post-Gospel Hymn on the Feast of the Dormition

*Bless'ed Mary, by your death
The sky was filled with blessings
And the earth was made holy
At your death, Holy Virgin.
The angels rejoiced and sang
As your body was carried
Into the heights of heaven
Heaven received your body
Which had carried Christ our God!*

He was astounded to see her radiant, living body emerge from the tomb and ascend into the arms of the angels. He cried out to her in anguish, imploring her not to leave him desolate. Looking upon him with loving tenderness, the Virgin took from her waist the belt she habitually wore and threw it down to him with words of blessing.

Learning Outcome Check

Discover that St. Mary's body was buried and angels carried her body to heaven.

Carrying the precious relic of her belt, Saint Thomas hastened and announced to the grieving apostles all he had seen. Whereas he had doubted the good news of Jesus' resurrection and had received proof of its reality by being able to touch the resurrected body of his Lord, now it was Thomas who gave physical evidence that Mary, too, was alive for evermore. He and the apostles went to her tomb to find it empty, confirming everything Thomas had told them.

Learning Outcome Check

Capture the tradition of St. Thomas visiting St. Mary's body mid-air and the gifting of her girdle to him, while coming from India followed by St. Thomas' arrival in Jerusalem and the discovery of the empty tomb.

Saint Thomas took the Virgin Mother's belt with him to India, and there it became the most valued treasure of his disciples, whose descendants in time came to be known as Saint Thomas Christians.

Today, fragments of it are preserved in various places in Kerala, including St. Mary's Jacobite Syrian Church, Manarcad, and St. Mary's Orthodox Church, Kottayam (Kottayam Cheriapally).

Icon of the Feast of the Dormition



The icon of the feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos shows her on her deathbed. She was surrounded by Christ, angels, the Apostles, bishops, and women. Christ is standing in the centre, looking at His mother. He is holding a small child clothed in white, representing the soul of the Virgin Mary. Christ is depicted in his heavenly glory. His robes are golden, and there are angels above his head. Above Christ, we see the gates of heaven opened, ready to receive the Mother of God.

The Apostles are standing in reverence for the Mother of God. On the right, Saint Peter censes the body of the Theotokos. On the left, Saint Paul bows low in honour of her.

There are several bishops of the Early Church present, most notably St. James, the step-brother of the Lord and the first bishop of Jerusalem. They are shown wearing episcopal (bishop) vestments. The icon also shows several women present at the event. The women represent the members of the church in Jerusalem, including the women disciples.

How does this Feast relate to our daily lives?

The Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos is a feast of faith, hope, and love. Our participation in this feast and our preparatory fast from August 1-15 help us seek the intercession of the Theotokos and remember her life, death, and role in Christ's ministry. She is the true example of how to act in our day to day lives, as she was faithful to Christ all throughout her life. She was not only a mother to our Lord but also to the Apostles and to each of us. Through her love, St. Mary, the mother of all children of God, intercedes for us along our walk with Christ, and her life reveals the fulfilment of God's will in each of our lives. During the fifteen days fast, we offer hymns and special prayers venerating her and seeking her intercession, which culminate with the Divine Liturgy on the feast to commemorate the Dormition and Assumption.

Reflection Questions

1. What is the significance of St. Mary being the mother of all the faithful?
2. Reflect on the life of St. Mary as the God-bearer. How can we look to her example and learn how to bear God in our lives?
3. Reflect in your own words the significance of the Fast of Shunoyo. We remember the life of St. Mary; what are some ways we can
4. Analyse the meaning of Christ holding the soul of the Theotokos in His arms in the icon of the Dormition.

LESSON

16

Tree of Life

Lesson Goals :

- *I can interpret the Feast of the Holy Cross.*
- *I can explain the presence of the Holy Cross in the Old Testament*
- *I can understand and interpret the discovery of the Holy Cross by Queen Helen.*
- *I can recognise how the Holy Cross is a sign of peace and victory by which we are saved.*
- *I can explain how the Holy Cross provides protection from all evil.*



Why do we celebrate the Feast of the Cross?

Every year, on September 14th, the Orthodox faithful come together and celebrate the Feast of the Cross, known as Sleetba Perunal. During this feast, we commemorate the finding of the true Cross on which Christ was crucified. Why

is this important? Because for us, as Orthodox faithful, the Cross represents victory over death. The Cross is an armour and a wall that protects us. Genesis 2:16-17 tells us that the consequence of Adam and Eve's sin is death, "And the Lord God commanded Adam, saying, 'You may eat food from every tree in the garden; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you may not eat; for in whatever day, you eat from it, you shall die by death.'" As we know, Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. They were then sent out of the garden and mankind fell into sin and death. Genesis 3:24 reminds us that the Lord placed Cherubim in the garden to guard the other tree God mentioned, the Tree of Life. Being expelled from the garden was an act of God's mercy, as God said, "Lest they take also of the Tree of Life and eat and live forever [in this fallen state]."

Learning Outcome Check

Interpret the Feast of the Holy Cross



Through Christ's Death and Resurrection, however, we are now given access to the Tree of Life. Every time we participate in the Holy Qurbana we are partaking of the fruit of the Tree of Life, the Body, and Blood of Christ. In the sacrament of Holy Baptism, as the newly baptised and chrismated person receives Holy Qurbana, we sing, "Today, the fruit of Eden that Adam did not taste, is placed in your mouth with gladness." The fruit is the Body and Blood of Christ, and therefore the Cross is the tree from which He was hung. Thus, we celebrate the Feast of the Cross because through the Cross the power and wisdom of God have been revealed. It is through the tree or wood of the Cross that the faithful gain access to the Tree of Life.

Connection Between the Old and New Testaments

Typology is when events in the New Testament are prefigured or symbolised by events in the Old Testament. One of these types is the Holy Cross, which is prefigured multiple times in the Old Testament. Below are a few examples of these types:

Learning Outcome Check

Explain the presence of the Holy Cross in the Old Testament.

1. ***Blood Mark on the Door-posts (Exodus 12: 21-28)***

As we recall in the story of the Israelites, when Pharaoh refused to let the Israelite slaves be free, God sent ten plagues to Egypt. The last of these plagues was the Lord passing through the town at night and striking down the firstborn child of each family. Fortunately, the Lord had given Moses specific instructions so that the Israelite families would be saved. Per the Lord's instruction, Moses instructed the elders in Israel to sacrifice a lamb, take the blood of the lamb, and then paint it on their door posts. Any house that followed these instructions was spared, but those who refused to listen suffered. This example is a type of the Holy Cross because the sign with the blood of the lamb that saved the Israelites sees its fulfilment in the blood of Christ on the Cross. Through the sign of the blood on the door posts, the Israelites were saved, and similarly, through the sign of the Holy Cross, the faithful are saved.

2. ***Moses Parting the Red Sea (Exodus 14: 15-31)***

Another symbol of the Holy Cross is when Moses parted the Red Sea. When the Israelites were trying to escape the wrath of Pharaoh, Moses lifted up his rod and stretched out his hand over the sea to divide it. As a result, the children of Israel walked in the midst of the sea on dry land, which allowed them to escape Pharaoh and his army. In this example, the rod of Moses is seen as prefiguring the Holy Cross. Thus, the faithful also cross the sea of troubles with the help of the Holy Cross.

3. ***Bitter Waters Sweetened (Exodus 15: 22-25)***

In the book of Exodus, we read that Moses brought the people of Israel from the Red Sea and walked in the wilderness of Shur. For three days, they walked through the desert and found no water. Eventually, they reached a place called Marah, where they found water, but the water was bitter. They called the place Bitterness. Now the people of Israel started complaining that they had no water to drink, and Moses prayed to the Lord. The Lord showed Moses a tree, and Moses threw the tree into the water, which turned it sweet. In this example, the tree that was cast into the water prefigures the Holy Cross because, as this tree made the bitter waters sweet, allowing the Israelites to drink, so too does Christ's death on the Cross take away the "bitterness" of death.

4. ***The Copper Serpent (Num 21: 4-9)***

During their travels, the Israelites grew impatient and spoke against the Lord and Moses. Rather than realising they were in the Lord's care, they complained, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?" So the Lord sent venomous serpents among them. The serpents bit the Israelites, and many of them died. The Israelites realised they had sinned and came to Moses to save them. Moses prayed to the Lord, and the Lord instructed Moses to make a copper serpent and put it on a single pole. If anyone was bitten by a venomous serpent and looked upon the copper serpent, they would be healed and live.

During the Mid-Lent service, a stand known as the ***Golgotha*** or ***M'northo*** is placed in the middle of the nave, affixed with a Cross on top. The Golgotha's presence reminds us that we are on a journey

towards Christ and that Christ came down from heaven and dwelt among us. This is why, rather than being in the sanctuary, where the altar is, the Golgotha is placed in the middle of the nave, where the congregation gathers. Moses lifted up the copper serpent for the Israelites so that those who were bitten by the venomous serpents might look at it and have life. In the same way, we must also look at the Holy Cross so that those who are bitten by sin can look at it and gain eternal life by the Cross through Christ. **St. John 3:14-15** says, “And as Moses lifted the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

Discovery of the Holy Cross by Queen Helena

The search for and discovery of the Holy Cross first began when the Roman Emperor Constantine himself was conquered by the power and glory of the sign of the Cross. In A.D. 312, Emperor Constantine and his soldiers found

Learning Outcome Check

Discovery of the Holy Cross by Queen Helena

themselves about to enter into a decisive battle over the future of the entire Empire. On the evening before the battle, Constantine and his soldiers saw a Cross of light in the sky. When he inquired about the vision, he was told, “By this sign of life, you shall gain victory.” Constantine told his soldiers to mark their shields with the sign of the Holy Cross. The next day, Constantine was granted a great victory in the battle of Milvian Bridge. A year later, he made a deal with his co-emperor Licinius, a persecutor of Christians, to make Christianity and other religions legal in the Empire. They issued the Edict of Milan, which said:

“we saw would be for the good of many, those regulations pertaining to the reverence of the Divinity ought certainly to be made first, so that we might grant to the Christians and others full authority to observe that religion which each preferred.”

With this edict came freedom of religion in the Roman Empire. It would take some time, particularly on Licinius’ side of the Empire, but Christians would emerge from being heavily persecuted in the Roman Empire to now being able to worship openly.

Constantine’s mother, Helena, took it upon herself to find the Holy Cross of our Lord. According to tradition, in 326, Helena was told that there was a rabbi in Jerusalem who knew where the Cross would have most likely been buried. In that area, they found a plant with a strong fragrance and a very small but beautiful flower. They dug there and found three Crosses. A funeral procession was going through the area, and they took the three Crosses and touched them one after another on the dead young man. When the third Cross touched him, he immediately rose up. They immediately took that Cross to Jerusalem, where the bishop Maccarius lifted it up in the midst of the people so they could see and venerate it, and the people responded, Lord, have mercy upon us (Kyrie Eleison). This becomes the model for the exaltation of the Holy Cross done during festal celebrations in the Church. It is what is celebrated during the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross on September 14th.

The Importance of the Cross in our Lives

The Cross is important in our lives for many reasons. Just as Moses used his staff to save the Israelites from slavery, the Cross provides us protection from sin and death. Just as the copper serpent gave life to the Israelites bitten by the snakes in the wilderness, the Cross grants us salvation and life. Just as the Cross gave Emperor Constantine victory over his enemies, so too does the Cross save us from evil powers and gives us victory over them. The Cross is a sign of hope during our struggles and hardship. But it also reminds us of Christ's struggle during His crucifixion on the Cross and His Glorious Resurrection.

In the Eqbo of the Quqlion of the Cross, we sing:

Eqbo : Quqlion of the Cross

(Sleeba vennu vellunnu..)

The Cross conquered and conquers.

The Cross has conquered Satan.

May the Cross be a stronghold.

To all who confess the Cross

Likewise, in the Qolo of the Quqlion of the Cross, we sing:

Qolo : Quqlion of the Cross

(Moonamaniyilum..)

At the third hour and at all times we will honor

The life-giving Cross.

And we sign ourselves with it for it is our hope

And strong protection,

By night and day,

From the evil one and his powers

It delivers us

This understanding of the Holy Cross is why the Orthodox Church can boldly claim that the Holy Cross is a sign of peace and victory. Through it, we have been saved, and through it, we find glory. Through the Holy Cross, Christ has conquered Satan and achieved victory over death. The Holy Cross reminds us of our salvation in Christ, which can lead us to glory in Him.

St. Ephrem the Syrian tells us to make the sign of the Cross before we do anything, even when we walk out of the house, because the Cross will protect us from all evil, and Satan hates the sign of the Cross.

Learning Outcome Check

Recognize how “The Holy Cross is a sign of peace, a sign of victory, by the Holy Cross we all are saved and in it we all glory”

“

Mark all your actions with the sign of the life-giving Cross. Do not go out from the door of your house till you have signed yourself with the Cross. Do not neglect that sign whether in eating or drinking or going to sleep, or in the home or going on a journey. There is no habit to be compared with it. Let it be a protecting wall round all your conduct and teach it to your children that they may earnestly learn the custom”. Because of what the Sign indicates – the very Cross of our salvation – Satan hates it, and our using it makes demons flee.

St. Ephrem the Syrian ”

Venerating the Cross

The Cross is a symbol of salvation and eternal life is given to us by the Resurrection of Our Lord. We, the Orthodox Church, do not use a Cross with crucified Jesus Christ or with any writings on it, as the Cross represents the resurrected and ascended Lord. There are decorated Crosses being used in our churches as it conveys the message that the Cross is a symbol representing defeat over death and sin - a weapon to fight against evil. During certain Feast Day services, we see the celebrant bless the four corners of the world with the Holy Cross. This is not idol worship, but it reminds us that by Christ's death and resurrection, He conquered death and Satan, and has delivered us.

Learning Outcome Check

Explain how the Holy Cross is protection from all evil.

The Sign of the Cross

When we make the sign of the Cross, the tips of the three fingers are brought together, which represents our faith in the Trinity. The ring and little fingers are pressed against the palm, which represents the divine and human nature of Jesus Christ. Remember to make the sign of the Cross next time you say, “Glory be to the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.”

Icon of the Feast of the Holy Cross

The icon of the Feast of the Cross tells the story of how the Cross was found and of its exaltation.

On the left side of the icon, there is a church. This church is one of the churches built and dedicated by Emperor Constantine.

In the pulpit, Patriarch Macarius, the Bishop of Jerusalem, is elevating the Cross for everyone to venerate and see. Deacons are standing on either side, holding candles. Saint Helen, the mother of Emperor Constantine, is seen venerating the elevated Cross.



Reflection Questions

1. Why do you think we, as Christians, give so much importance to the Cross?
2. Explain why the Cross is also known as the tree of life in the Garden of Eden?
3. How will you relate Adam's sin to the Lord's Cross?
4. Look in the Service Book of the Holy Qurbana. Find and discuss at least one prayer during which we make the sign of the Cross. Reflect on the parts of the prayer at which we make the sign of the Cross.



**ST. THOMAS, THE APOSTLE OF INDIA
PRAY FOR US**



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

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