



ORTHODOX SYRIAN
SUNDAY SCHOOL
ASSOCIATION

Diocese of UK, Europe and Africa

CATEGORY I INTRODUCTION

Our Family in Church
GRADE 4



ORTHODOX SYRIAN
SUNDAY SCHOOL ASSOCIATION
OF THE EAST



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Grade 4

Category
Introduction

2024

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FOREWORD



**MALANKARA ORTHODOX
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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 textbooks. 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 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 endeavor. 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 recognize 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, curriculum coordinator, secretary & joint secretary, reviewers, trainers, and all team members, has 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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Glory to the Triune God!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Let's meet the George family.

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

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

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

True Worship

What is worship? How do we know that it is true worship? In this lesson, we will look at how God tells us to worship so that we can connect with Him. Though many other Christian groups love God, we show our love for God in the ways that He designed for our salvation. Not all Christian groups continue to follow these ways, and we love them and pray for them to join the fullness of Holy Orthodoxy. The Orthodox way of worshipping God has been retained by the Church since the time of the Holy Apostles, who learned it from Jesus Christ. Our ways of worshipping God are focused around the Holy Mysteries, or Sacraments. Now let's look at how these Mysteries connect us to God and the true worship of Him.

Vocabulary Words

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

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

Grace God's life in us

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



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

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

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

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

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

On Sunday morning, everyone in the George family is ready to go to Holy Qurbana, except for Tommy. Christina tries to help Tommy get ready, but he has so many questions! One by one, he rattles them off: “Didn't we pray last night? Why do we need to go so early? Why do



Moses and the burning bush

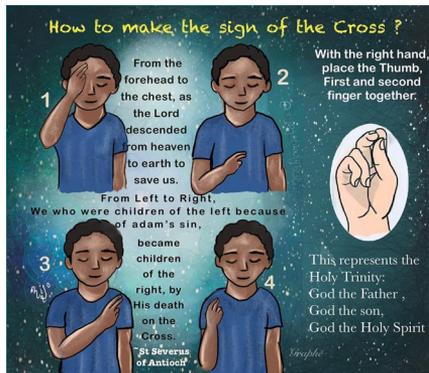
I have to wear fancy clothes? Why do we need to go to church to pray to God? Can we get McDonald's after?"

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

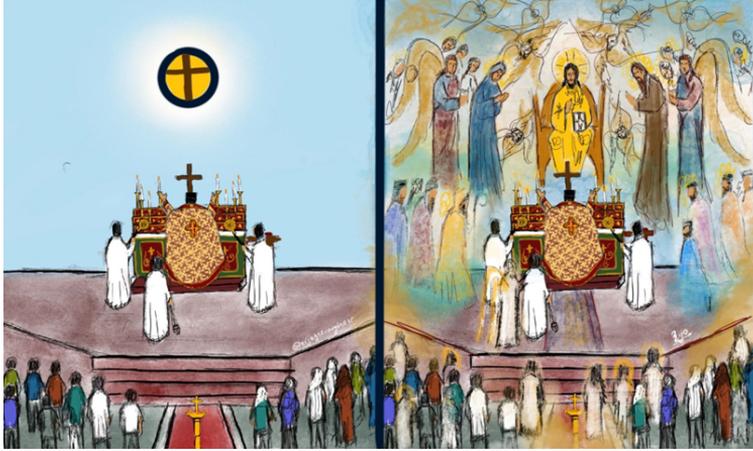
When the family arrives at the church, they take off their shoes. Tommy is grumbling about taking off his shoes,

but his dad tells him that this is just like Moses taking off his shoes before approaching the burning bush (**Exodus 3:5**). This captures Tommy's interest. He never thought about it like that!

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



Mr. George puts on a white robe and begins to help Alexander Achen, the



Shemashens (or Deacons), and other altar servers with morning prayers and Holy Qurbana. Each person who serves in the altar has a special role and part to play in assisting the priest and serving the Church. Mrs. George and the children take the HQ book out of their bag, find the right section, and sing their parts with Kochamma and the rest of the Church. Right after receiving the blessings, or kaimuthu, Christina tells Tommy that these songs are ancient and the church has been doing them for over 2000 years! The Church members stand up while they worship to help them stay alert and pay attention, as Jesus asked us to “keep watch” for His coming (**St. Matthew 24:42**). Tommy, after hearing his older sister explain why they go to church early in the morning, started paying more attention to these details.

Around noon, Holy Qurbana is over, and Sunday School begins after everyone

has a light snack. Alexander Achen always insists that if you receive Holy Qurbana, you must eat something right afterwards to break the fast. “Receiving Jesus Christ is a big festival, and there is no fasting after one has received Christ into you”, he told the children again today. Tommy wants to play right after the Holy Qurbana, and Achen won’t let him before finishing his snack.

At the Sunday School, Achen asks everyone a question: “Why do we celebrate Holy Qurbana in the Holy Altar Room?” Everyone was quiet for a while.

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

known in the Orthodox Church as the Divine Liturgy”, Achen says further.

Remember

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



Mrs. George teaches Christina’s class today. The textbook lesson talks about the five essential parts of Orthodox worship, which are praise, thanksgiving, repentance, supplication, and dedication. “We see each of these parts in the Holy Qurbana. During our worship, we sing praises to the one Lord our God, we thank God for what He has given us, we say we are sorry for our sins and mistakes, we ask God to take care of us, and we recite our beliefs together. In **Deuteronomy 6:4-5**, we learn that there is only one Lord our God and that we shall **“love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength [and mind]”** (St. Luke 10:27; St. Mark 12:30).”

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

They stop by the grocery store, and

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

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

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

Remember

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



“Well, God loves them anyway”, says Mrs. George to her daughter. Tommy starts to doze off. Seeing him start to sleep, Mrs. George continues in a whisper to her daughter, “By receiving the Sacrament of Holy Communion, we increase in God’s grace, which is His life in us, and He becomes physically a part of us, too. By participating in the Sacra-

ments, we grow closer to God and receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Not all Christians believe and practise the way we do, however. For us, we worship in our church every Sunday just like the Apostles did to remember the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

“How do we know that this worship is the right worship, Mom?” asks Christina again. Mrs. George stretches her hand and strokes her daughter’s hair. She feels happy that her daughter was seriously asking good questions. “We follow an Orthodox tradition of worship, dear,” she replies. “This means that we accept and closely follow the ancient traditional beliefs and customs that were established by Jesus Christ (**St. Matthew 16:16**). These traditions were practised by the Apostles themselves (**Acts 2:42–47**), and through many generations, they were

passed down to us (**Jude 1:3**). Our worship reminds us that Christ was both fully human and fully divine. Our worship allows us to live our faith in unity with the early Christians, our faithful departed, saints, and the angels in heaven”, she adds. “In other words, we know it’s right because we do what the church has done from the beginning, and that is directly from our Lord.”

Learning Outcome Check

Orthodoxy is the continuation of the Ancient Church.

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

Reflection Questions

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

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

The Liturgy and Sacred Traditions

What are liturgical traditions and the Divine Liturgy? What is Sacred Tradition? What are the main parts of the Holy Qurbana? In this lesson, we will learn about where the Holy Qurbana came from and how it has continued to this day. We will also focus on the main parts of the Divine Liturgy and the Sh'himo, which is the common prayer book used for private and family prayer at home as well as in the Church.

Vocabulary Words

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



The George family gathers to pray together every weekday using the *Sh'himo*, our book of daily prayers from the Syriac liturgical tradition. It is the common prayers that they pray at home or with the rest of the Church (the people). It includes the Qauma, the Nicene Creed, the Psalms of King David, many hymns written by the Syriac Church Fa-

thers, like St. Ephrem, and other beautiful prayers. Christina, who is 10, notices something about the Friday prayers. She asks her mother, “Why is there so much more about the Holy Cross in the Friday Sh'himo prayers than any other prayers during the week?”

Mrs. George answers, “The entire year in the life of the church follows a liturgi-

cal calendar that teaches us about the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lord. The liturgical calendar is a bit like the seasons of the year for Orthodox Christians and is also part of our journey to God. We also have a weekly calendar that guides us each day, so every Friday we remember the Cross of our Lord and God.”

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

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

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

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

That Sunday, Fr. Alexander spoke about where the Holy Qurbana comes from. He said, “We follow many special traditions, which means things handed down, that are unique to being an Orthodox Christian. These traditions help us grow in our faith and our knowledge of Christ and His Holy Church, so we can

grow closer to God. We call these the Holy Traditions, or Sacred Traditions. These were handed down from the Holy Apostles, who received them from Jesus Christ. They are holy.”

Learning Outcome Check

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

“The Holy Traditions He gave us include the liturgies, which we all work on in worshipping God. The most important Liturgy that we Christians fo-



The mystical supper

cus upon is the Divine Liturgy, celebrated on all Sundays and Feast days. The first time this was done was during the Lord's Passover, also called His Pesaha, and the Mystical Supper. Christ and His disciples prepared bread and wine for this Passover, which is a Jewish festival where an innocent lamb was sacrificed in remembrance of their deliverance from Egypt. While the others were eating something else, Jesus took the bread and blessed it, setting it apart and making it sacred. He said the words we Orthodox Christians will never forget. He said, "Take it, eat of it. This is My Body, which is broken for you and for many", and He also took the cup and said, "Drink from it, all of you. For this is My Blood of the New Covenant, which is

shed for many for the remission of sins."

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

Later that day, Christina's 5-year-old brother Tommy, spoke to the whole family during dinner: "I know that tradition means handed down, but *how* did they hand it down? Did they put it in a box and mail it?"

Christina answers, "Haha! Tommy, you are too funny! Holy Tradition is the Church family's way of life handed down, and it can't be put in a box. We keep it the same by having priests and

bishops who keep it the same for every generation, so that we experience the same Jesus Christ as the Apostles did. The Apostles ordained bishops, who ordained bishops, and so on, all the way down to the Orthodox bishops of our times, who keep the same faith.”



From the Liturgy of the Word

Mrs. George jumps in and says, “Good question, Tommy, and good answer, Christina. We have a tradition that St. James of Jerusalem organised the current Liturgy of Holy Qurbana. After Pentecost, the Holy Apostles, gathered to celebrate the Holy Qurbana Jesus Christ taught them. St. James was decided to be the main and first Archbishop of Jerusalem, appointed by the rest of the Apostles, and from Jerusalem, the whole Church grew and spread everywhere else. The Apostles all used the Holy Qurbana, or Divine Liturgy, with the same parts in every land they went to. And the first Christians in Jerusalem mostly spoke a language called Aramaic in their homes. Syriac, a dialect of Jesus’ own language, was also very important in the spreading of the Gospel, the Holy Qurbana, and all the Holy Traditions. We have received these Syriac liturgical traditions in India and are so grateful, as they connect us all the way back to the mother Church in Jerusalem. They gave us the Sh’hima, the Church calendar, and shaped the Holy Qurbana we have.”

Remember

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



Mr. George can’t resist jumping in with a little more, as the Holy Qurbana is so important to him, too. He said, “Yes, just like Jesus and the disciples prepared the offering of bread and wine, we do the same first, called Thuyobo (Preparation), which usually happens during the morning prayers before opening the curtain for the Altar procession. The Holy Qurbana has two main parts after the preparation, which are “The Liturgy of the Word” and “The Liturgy of the Eucharist”. This second part is also called the Anaphora, which is the lifting up of our minds, thoughts, and hearts to God the Father with the perfect offering of His only Son, Jesus Christ.”



From the Liturgy of the Eucharist

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

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

Do You Know?

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



Mr. George adds, “Jesus says, ‘Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe,’ so we believe what He said about it. That it simply is His Body and Blood, because He said so, and the priest’s prayers ask for it to be done the same way that the Apostles did. It has been handed down to us for 2,000 years now”.

Annual Liturgical Periods

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

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

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

Reflection Questions

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

More than a Book

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

Vocabulary Words

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

Koruyo Reader, this is officially one of the steps

Pentateuch The 5 books of Moses, also called the Torah

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

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



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

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

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

is the ultimate **authority** in our lives as Christians.”

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

“The Holy Scriptures are very important to our faith as Orthodox Christians and the Holy Bible is one of the most important traditions that came from our very own Orthodox Church. The Christians who lived during and just after

Jesus Christ only had the Old Testament scriptures, teachings, and traditions that they heard and learned from Jesus Christ Himself or from His Disciples. Even though the Holy Church began to spread after the Feast of Pentecost, it was not until many years after Jesus' death and Resurrection that the Holy Apostles even began to write down what Jesus Christ had taught them. It took at least 15 to 25 years or more before these New Testament writings like the Gospels and Epistles were even written down. In fact, until the 4th century (301-400 A.D.), there wasn't officially a "New Testament". So, even the Holy Scriptures are a collection of books that the Orthodox Church chose to be in one collection, which is the Holy Bible. It was inspired by the Holy Spirit and compiled by the Church, for the Church, to be read in the Church, and to be understood through the Church."

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

"These Scriptures are the written revelations or teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. So if you listen closely, every Sunday during the Holy Qurbana, we hear a lot of readings from the Bible. Right at the end of Sapro (also known as morning prayers), there are readings from the Old Testament. Right after that, in the Liturgy of the Word, a **Koruyo** (which means reader), a deacon, or other altar servants read the New Testament

epistles or letters from the North and South sides of the altar. Then, after that, the priest reads from one of the Gospels. The main difference between these two sections is that the New Testament focuses on the life of Jesus on earth and the life of the Church after Jesus's death and resurrection. In the Old Testament, Jesus has not yet come to earth and become incarnate. Even though Jesus' name is not mentioned in the Old Testament, all of the stories and lessons of the Old Testament point to and predict Jesus's birth, death, and resurrection."

Christina is furiously writing down as many details as she can, and seeing her enthusiasm, her father slows down so she can write a bit more comfortably.

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

"The Bible is one tool that God has

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

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

Remember

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

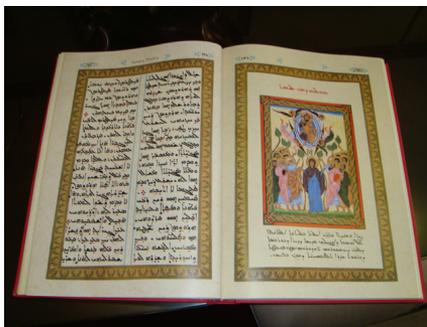


“Yes!” Says Mr. George. “And the Bible is a result of the Holy Tradition of the One, Holy Church. This same Holy Bible shows that, The authority is with the Church through the Apostles (St. Matthew 19:28), Bishops, and priests.

The Scriptures are the inspired truth of God in human words; the Church is the pillar and ground of that truth.” (Orthodox Study Bible, pg. 1636) (1 Timothy 3:15, “**The Church, which is the pillar and ground of Truth**”)

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

“Welcome everyone!” Mary Kochamma says enthusiastically, “And a blessed Sunday to you all! I’m so glad that you are all here as we continue to increase our education in the Holy Faith, focusing today on the Holy Scriptures, or Thiruvezhuthukal, or in Syriac, Ktove Qadishe. We often say ‘the Holy Bible’, but what does it all include there?”



“Our official version of the Bible is the Syriac Peshitta. Although this is the Bible we would like to use, it is hard to get a copy, so we can also use the Orthodox

Study Bible,” Mary Kochamma explains.

The Old Testament

Mary Kochamma then showed an Old Testament graph and said, “Let us take a closer look at the different parts of the Bible. Let’s start with the Old Testament

which are the books of the Old Witness from our spiritual ancestors, the Jewish people, or the Israelites. They kept the Old Covenant with God and prepared us by their way of life to receive the New Covenant in Christ and become the New Israel.”

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

Learning Outcome Check

What are the major sections of the Bible?

She continues to explain how all the **red-colored** books in the chart are called the **Pentateuch** in Greek: “These begin the revelation of God through the history of creation, the fall of man, and the first covenants between God and Adam, then Noah, then Abraham, and Moses,

and all their descendants. They would eventually be called “The People of Israel.” Next come the Histories, shown in **orange**. They are more histories of the People of Israel after they have become the Nation of Israel and were settled in the land promised to Abraham, but not settled until after Moses died. Joshua took over for Moses, so the collection of histories as a nation was recorded there.”

Mr. George said, “I am geeking out on this stuff!” Mrs. George looked at him sharply and said, “Shh!” Then she

smiled at him and whispered, “Me, too!” Sarah and Christina were speedily writing everything down in their notebooks, as were a row of boys and girls near them.

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

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

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

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

Mary Kochamma lovingly answered the question. “It does not mean fortune teller, either to the Jews or to us. A **prophet** is the mouthpiece of God, as many future events were predicted by many of them. Many of those predictions happened in many ways, and some are yet to come. The prophets’ writings are more about knowing God and knowing what He does, what He blesses,

and what He wishes for us to do to each other and to Him. Hence, the Holy Spirit guided them on what to say as mouthpieces of God.”

The New Testament

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



“Notice that now we are in the New Testament Books for the New Covenant with Jesus Christ as His Church. All these books were written by an Apostle or one of the seventy Disciples.”

“Here we have the four Gospels that tell of the story of the Incarnation of our God becoming like one of us and what He did for us. St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John wrote the four gospels. Acts of the Holy Apostles is next, and this book includes a history of

some of Christ's last days before His Ascension, of the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and how the Church continued under Christ's Apostles. The next fourteen books in green are the Epistles, or letters of St. Paul the Apostle. Next are the seven General Epistles by Saints James, Peter, John, and Jude. Finally, we finish with the mysterious book of Revelation, also written by St. John the Apostle. It is a liturgical book that is about the things that have been, are now, and will be since the time of Christ. We often hear of the 'end times', but Christ said that we were already in the end times 2,000 years ago, and we still are. This book tells us a lot about how angels and people worship God in heaven right now, and our Holy Qurbana is very influenced by St. John's vision, or revelation."

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

Mary Kochamma's presentation fin-

ished later that evening, and the George family was on their way home, smiling all the way. That class was helpful for Christina, as she was able to learn a lot. In the evening, she skimmed through her notes again to see that the Holy Scriptures speak of things seen in heaven and how we can see these same things in the Holy Qurbana too. When we sing "Holy, Holy, Holy", it is the song of the Seraphim in heaven that the Prophet Isaiah sees (Old Testament, Isaiah Chapter 6). One can also see the Angel with the golden censer offering incense to God at the Holy Altar in heaven (New Testament, Revelation 8:3), just as the deacon waves the censer with the incense around the Altar in the Holy Temple.

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

Learning Outcome Check

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

Reflection Questions

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

Forgiving Father

What is Holy Confession and how is it different from repentance? As Orthodox Christians, why do we confess our sins to a priest instead of just saying we are sorry to God in our hearts? Confessing our sins to a priest helps us become closer to God.

Vocabulary Words

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

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

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



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

Christina remembers one time at home when she wanted something that her parents would not get her, and she

said rude things about them behind their backs. She tells Alexander Achen, "I was so mad. I know we're supposed to respect our parents and elders, but it just came out when I was talking with my friends. I'm kind of afraid they'll find out that I said mean things about them behind their backs."

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

right?”

Christina nodded. “Yes, exactly!”

“And let me guess, you already thought about this and told God your sins in your heart, yes?” Christina nodded again.

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

Christina thought about it and answered, “Yes, I don’t feel so anxious or bad anymore, but you’re probably going to tell me to talk to my parents about it, right? So I don’t feel so far away from them?”

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

Remember

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

Remember

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



Parable of the Prodigal Son

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

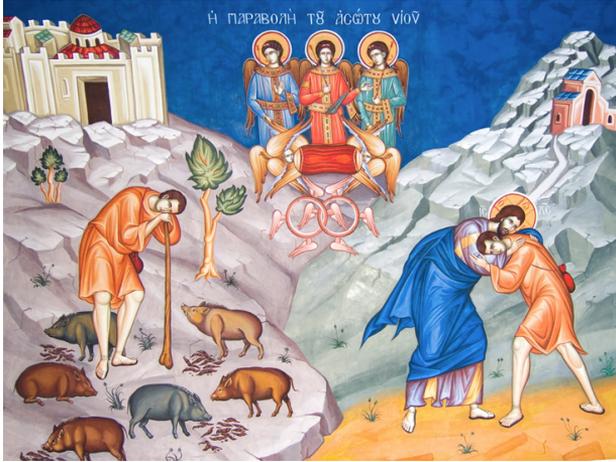
Learning Outcome Check

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

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

Confession and Repentance

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



Notice that the father in the parable is actually Christ Himself.

Remember

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



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

Learning Outcome Check

What is Confession and Repentance?

Christina remembers a conversation she had the other day with Sarah. Sarah's church does not believe in confessions to a priest. "Can't I confess to God directly? Why do we have to confess with a priest present?" she asks her mother. Mrs. George lovingly pulled her to her side and started to stroke her hair. She says, "In the early Church, confession was in the presence of the priest and the congregation at the same time; that is, one confesses one's sins in the presence of the entire faith community. Over time, the Church grew much larger, and this practise was modified so that the priest

“stood in” for the community as a witness to the penitents’ repentance, making it easier to confess. We can confess directly to God all the time, but very often we need help and advice in overcoming our sins, which is provided by the priest. When we confess, we are confessing to God in the presence of the priest, who serves as a “witness”. So, we are not confessing to the priest alone, but rather to God (James 5:16; St. Luke 12:8; St. Matthew 10:32). Just as we go to a doctor to get help with our physical sickness, we go to a priest to get help and guidance for our spiritual ailments.” Christina feels very tired, and slowly she falls asleep. Mrs. George tucks her up and retires for the day.

Mrs. George explains what she told her daughter. Then she has a question for her husband. “Who designed for us to give Holy Confession to a Priest?”

Think

Who is a penitent?



The Pentecost icon

Learning Outcome Check

What is the role of a priest in Confession?

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

The next morning, even before the children get up, Mr. George asks Mrs. George about the conversation she had with Christina before she went to bed.

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

of one who confessed to them would be forgiven or retained—something so important that Jesus would not have given it to anyone. What a great gift we have to be able to hear the words with God’s authority in the priest, “Your sins are forgiven!” Instead of hiding and thinking that God can’t or won’t forgive, we can come to God even in our sadness or doubt and know that God loves to for-

give the honestly sorry person.” Mrs. George has tears in her eyes, and so does Mr. George.

Remember

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



Reflection Questions

1. Why do we confess to a priest instead of just saying sorry to God by ourselves?
2. What’s the difference between confession and repentance?
3. Who committed the first sin?
4. Who decided that we should participate in Holy Confession with a priest?
5. Thinking about the loving father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, how can you relate the father in the parable to a priest or bishop during Holy Confession?

Two Become One

What is marriage in the Holy Orthodox faith, and what makes it so special? This Sacrament allows a man and woman to join together, just like Christ and His Church are joined together and become closer to God.

Vocabulary Words

Holy Matrimony Sacramental marriage in the Orthodox Church

Covenant An agreement or promise

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

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

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



Remember

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



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

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

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

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

"Riiigght," Tommy draws out, still

confused.

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

“Wouldn’t the man just be Adam?” Tommy interrupts.

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

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

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

Later, when the family is going to the church for the wedding, Tommy asks another question.

“So, what does it mean when Achen talks about Christ being the groom of the

Church?”

Christina says, “Achen once told us that St. Paul compares the love between the husband and wife to the love between Christ and the Church. So Christ is like the bridegroom, and the Church is like the bride. And in marriage, a husband is to be like Christ, offering himself to his wife and serving her, and the wife is to be like the Church following her husband’s guidance.”

Learning Outcome Check

What is the meaning of Holy Matrimony?

It’s quiet in the car for a little bit. “This is what I found in the Bible about marriage”, shouts Christina after, “**‘...from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh; so then they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no man separate.’** (St. Mark 10:6–9)” Mr. George feels proud of his daughter, and he turns his head towards her, saying, “That is how God defines marriage—that God has joined a man and a woman together in Holy Matrimony. Holy Matrimony is bigger than any contract; it is a **covenant** to make a family bond. It is how God gives His grace to unite a man and a woman and to make them into a holy family.”

Two Parts of the Holy Matrimony service

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



Learning Outcome Check

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

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

The blessing of the crowns is the central part of the marriage ceremony. In the Malankara Orthodox tradition, the crown is usually replaced by a chain with a cross pendant and is placed around the neck of the bride and groom by the priest.



The couple is given the “crowns” as they are now king and queen of their own kingdom on Earth (their household). As king and queen, they rule together in a loving way. Therefore, these crowns are to be worn by the husband and the wife forever.”

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



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



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

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

and their lifelong, inseparable bond."

Remember

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



"Wow, that is beautiful", Christina says.

"I saw the Achen then placing the **manthrakodi** upon Auntie Ann's head," Christina says.

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

This becomes too much for Tommy to understand. He finds the tasty ice cream after dinner and says to his mother, "When Auntie Ann comes to visit us with Uncle Zachary, can you buy the same ice cream we ate after the dinner on the wedding day?" Everyone laughs, and Mrs. George gives a loving kiss on Tommy's forehead.

Learning Outcome Check

What is the symbolism behind the minnu and the manthrakodi?



Reflection Questions

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

Better to Give Than to Receive

What does it mean to fast, and why is it so important in the Orthodox Christian Church? We fast regularly throughout the year to help us draw closer to Jesus Christ and to avoid sin. Fasting is one of our most powerful spiritual tools and has been a practise in the Holy Church since the days of Jesus Christ Himself, who fasted for 40 days in the desert and avoided all temptations of the devil. This lesson will include examples and definitions of fasting, different kinds of fasting, and the five major fasts we follow every year.

Vocabulary Words

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

Feast To celebrate, often with rich foods

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

Canonical Obligatory; agreed upon by the whole church

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

Kudosh Eetho Feast of the Sanctification of the Church



“

Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God

St. Matthew 4:4

”

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

her family's recipes. Mrs. George is making sambar again, and Christina cannot help but feel a little jealous of her friend Sara, who said she was going to bake cookies and eat candy as soon as school was out for break.

Think

Why do you think reading and studying the Word of God is just as important as eating food? Why is it necessary for our survival?



"I wish we could have something sweet after dinner. Or at least non-vegetarian food for dinner," Christina says.

Her mother smiles and says, "The **fasts** can be challenging. Waiting and **abstinence** take discipline, and it's hard to keep fasting when so many other people are throwing parties already. But Christmas is not for another week."

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

Group Talk

What do you think St. John Chrysostom means when he says "The fast should be kept not by the mouth alone but also by the eye, the ear, the feet, the hands and all the members of the body?"



"You're right, Christina, we fast a lot, and fasting prepares us to become more like Christ through prayer, sacrifices, and disciplining ourselves the way He did. It helps us to be thankful for what He has given us and to stay humble and close to Him," her mother says. "Fasting is also one of our most important spiritual tools. The Church has given us fasting, just like a doctor gives a prescription when you have an infection. It can be like medicine when we feel spiritually sick or stuck. It is a very powerful way for us to draw closer to our Lord Jesus Christ."

Learning Outcome Check

What are some of the different kinds of fasting we can do?

Remember, fasting is a spiritual discipline practised regularly by all Orthodox Christians. During most fasts, we avoid meat, fish, eggs, and dairy products. We might also abstain from sweets and other treats, as well as certain activities that may distract us from God, like social media, video games, or shopping. It is especially important during the fasts to avoid doing and saying things that are sinful, as those things separate us from God. As St. John Chrysostom says, "The fast should be kept not by the mouth alone but also by the eye, the ear, the feet, the hands, and all the members of the body."

As Orthodox Christians, we **fast** every Wednesday and Friday throughout

the year and before receiving Holy Communion. Fasting before Holy Communion is a way to prepare to receive Christ in the Eucharist and to remind us of our hunger for Him. Wednesday prayers and fasting are dedicated to St. Mary, the Mother of God, as a time to ask for her **intercession** (prayers on our behalf). Friday prayers and fasting are dedicated to Jesus Christ's crucifixion. The liturgi-

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

Learning Outcome Check

What are the five canonical (obligatory) fasts?



Fasting Periods

There are five **canonical** fasting periods:

<i>Canonical fasting periods</i>	
Nativity Fast	Fast before the birth of Jesus Christ; 25 days (December 1st until Christmas), ending at the Nativity. Holy Qurbana is celebrated on Christmas eve or Christmas morning.
Nineveh Fast	Commemorating Prophet Jonah's preaching and the repentance of the people of Nineveh. It foretells Jesus Christ's death and resurrection (3 days, landing 3 weeks before the Great Fast).
The Great Fast (also called Great Lent)	Fast in preparation for the Resurrection of our Lord (about 50 days). ("Lent" actually refers to the season of "Spring," but is often used to refer to this fast because it always happens in spring.
Holy Apostles Fast	Honouring the Holy Apostles, who fasted and went on their missionary journeys after Pentecost, this fast lasts for 13 days (June 16th–29th, which is the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul).
Dormition Fast	Fasting commemorates the falling asleep of St. Mary for 15 days (August 1st until August 15th), ending on the Feast of the Dormition of St. Mary, August 15th.

Remember

As Orthodox Christians we fast every Wednesday and Friday throughout the year and before receiving Holy Communion.



actual birthday. The birthday kid probably wouldn't like that!"

Mrs. George grins too and says, "Yes, exactly! Fasting is a beautiful way to grow closer to God and give Him glory, though it is also a way to prepare ourselves to be present with Jesus Christ when we celebrate His life and ministry."

There are many important **Feast** days in the Orthodox Church that help us remember important times in Jesus' life, His ministry, or other important saints and their works in the name of Jesus Christ. Some **feast** days are on the same date every year (like the Feast of the Nativity, Yeldho, or Christmas), and others are just around the same time every year.

Feasting Periods

As Christina and her mother continue to prepare the meal, Mrs. George says, "Maybe we should start thinking about what to make for the Feast of the Nativity".

Christina grins and says, "Yeah! You know, I guess it does make it more exciting to wait for a **feast** day by fasting. And if we had all the parties and ate all the best food before the **feast**, it would be like eating the birthday cake before the

Learning Outcome Check

Fasting is to avoid all or some kinds of food, drink or activity.

Remember

Below are examples of moveable feasts

<i>Moveable feasts</i>	
Palm Sunday (Hoshannah)	Jesus Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the Sunday before Resurrection Sunday
Feast of the Resurrection (Qyamtha, Easter)	Jesus Christ rose from the dead, defeating death
Feast of Ascension	Jesus ascends into Heaven (40 days after Resurrection)
Feast of Pentecost	The Holy Spirit comes down upon the Holy Apostles (50 days after Resurrection)



Remember

Below are examples of fixed feasts

<i>Fixed feasts</i>	
Feast of Nativity of our Lord (Yeldo)	Birth of Jesus Christ (December 25th)
Feast of Theophany of our Lord (Danaha)	Baptism of Jesus Christ (January 6th)
Feast of Lord's Temple Entry (May-altho)	February 2nd (40 days after Christmas)
Feast of the Annunciation to Mary (Suboro)	The announcement of the Incarnation by the Angel Gabriel (March 25th)
Feast of Transfiguration of Jesus	Change of appearance to a more spiritual state (August 6th)
Feast of the Dormition (falling asleep) of the Mother of God (Sunoyo)	August 15th
Feast of Holy Cross	September 14th (the discovery of our Lord's Cross by Queen Helena and Patriarch Macarius)



The main goals of **fasting** are the purification of our lives, the liberation of our souls and bodies from sin, and the strengthening of our love for God and His creation. Fasting reminds us of our many blessings and helps keep us from sin. Fasting is trusting in God that we

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

Reflection Questions

1. What is fasting? Identify different kinds of fasting.
2. What is the difference between fasting and feasting?
3. How do you practise fasting in your life?
4. Why do we fast on Wednesdays and Fridays?
5. Identify the five canonical feasts.

When St. Mary Fell Asleep

This lesson will explain the Dormition of St. Mary and how important this is to Orthodox Christians.

Vocabulary Words

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

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

Veneration To give great respect to something or someone

Intercession To act or ask for someone else on their behalf

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

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



Christina and Mr. George are helping at the Church. They are preparing for an upcoming Feast day with a classmate of Christina’s, Aaron, who had stayed late with them after Qurbana. Aaron and Christina are discussing something they heard from another person in their class about St. Mary, and Mr. George asks if he can help.

“Someone from my school told me that we can’t **worship** St. Mary and still be Christians,” says Aaron.

“But I thought we didn’t worship St. Mary.” Christina adds, “And I know we do not pray to St. Mary, but we pray only to Jesus Christ, the One God.”

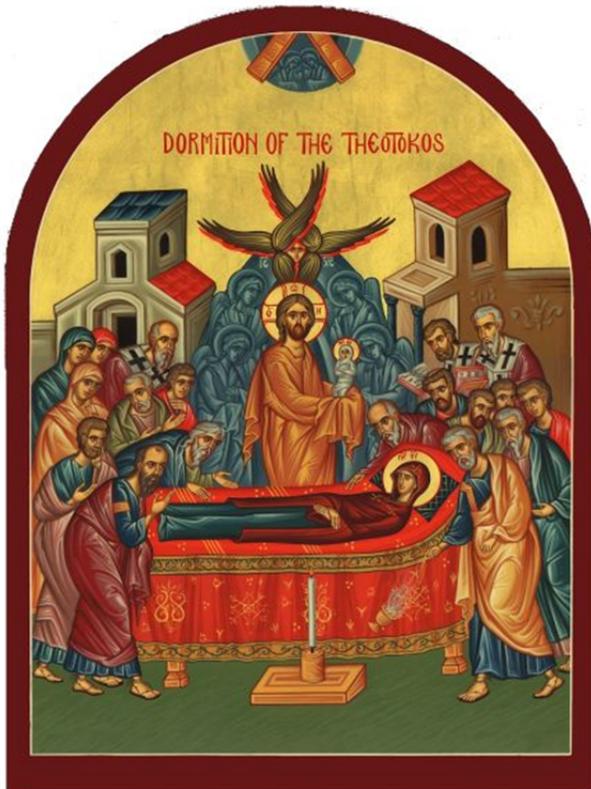
Mr. George nods and says, “That can

be confusing, but you are both correct. We do not worship St. Mary because we know she was a human being just like the rest of us, not a goddess. We do request to her and to all the saints for **intercession**. When we do this, we ask St. Mary to pray on our behalf to her Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Remember

“Though we do not worship St. Mary, she does hold a very special place among all the saints as the Mother of God, or Theotokos”





Dormition of the Theotokos

Learning Outcome Check

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

Continuing on with preparations, Mr. George adds, “Though we do not worship St. Mary, she does hold a very spe-

cial place among all the saints as the Mother of God, or Theotokos.”

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

“Of course *you* would remember anything about falling asleep!” Christina teases her friend and adds, “But didn’t he

say that's how we describe how St. Mary died?"

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

Learning Outcome Check

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

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

Remember

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

As Orthodox Christians, St. Mary is our model, and she is the very first human being to receive and believe in Jesus Christ. Her life of spiritual purity and devotion to God are examples we should all try to follow.

She is considered the first among the saints and blessed among women (St. Luke 1:28) as the person chosen to bear

Jesus Christ. For these reasons, Orthodox Christians **venerate** St. Mary, meaning we respect her and try to follow her example. She was a human being, like anyone among us, and therefore, St. Mary is considered the first member of the Holy Church. She bore Christ. All bishops, priests, deacons, and faithful come after her. At the same time, we do not worship St. Mary, for worship belongs to God alone. St. Mary, in other words, is not a goddess.

Learning Outcome Check

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

Learning Outcome Check

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

Orthodox Christians believe that when a person dies, the body and soul are separated. The body returns to the earth and decays, while the soul remains active because Christ is Risen and has defeated death. The barrier between living and dead has been destroyed due to the Resurrection of Christ. The souls of all believers go to the place of light, we believe, where they are active and continue to pray for us.

This is why we ask St. Mary for her intercession. St. Mary is the only person who died, was resurrected, and was taken into heaven other than Christ.

The Dormition of the Mother of God, remembered during the Shunoyo fast, refers to the death or “falling asleep” of St. Mary. The Orthodox Church has preserved the account of her death as being peaceful, as if falling asleep. Afterward, her soul as well as her earthly body were taken into heaven by the Angels as commanded by Jesus Christ.



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

We sing exactly this in the song after the reading of the Holy Gospel on the

feast day of Dormition. We celebrate The Dormition on August 15th.

Another important event to remember involved St. Thomas, the Apostle to India. At the time of St. Mary’s death, the other Apostles and disciples were nearby except for St. Thomas, who was far away in India.

St. Thomas had a vision from God of St. Mary’s death and started his journey to see her, but arrived too late. The funeral and entombment were over. According to St. Maximus the Confessor, St. Thomas arrived three days too late.

The other Apostles were expecting St. Thomas and were waiting by the tomb of St. Mary, and when St. Thomas arrived, he heard them singing. But he also heard the clear and sweet sound of the angels and begged them to open the tomb so that he could embrace the all-holy body of the glorious Theotokos.

Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the blessed Apostles listened and opened the tomb, worried about what they would see, and to their surprise, the tomb was empty! They found only the burial wrappings and the shroud in which they had laid her to rest, and the body of the Virgin Mother was not there. All the Apostles then understood that the late arrival of St. Thomas was for the revelation of this mystery, as it was for him that the tomb was opened and the Dormition of the Theotokos known. The Angels had started to carry the Mother’s body into heaven and St. Thomas miraculously was able to see and meet with the procession of Angels with the body of the

Mother of God in midair, says the tradition.

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

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



Zunoro or girdle (belt) of St. Mary

Reflection Questions

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

Shining Glory

Vocabulary Words

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

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

Perunnal Festival in Malayalam

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



Bible Verse

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

St. Matthew 17:2



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

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

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

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

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

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



Transfiguration

into heaven. There are many parts of the **Transfiguration** that show Christ is the Messiah and God.”

Jesus had just begun teaching His disciples that He would have to go to Jerusalem, and there He would suffer and die (**St. Matthew 16:21**). One day, Jesus went up to Mount Tabor to pray and took Peter, James, and John with him. As they were praying, Jesus transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His garments became white as light (**St. Matthew 17:2**). The disciples saw Moses and Elijah talking to Jesus. The disciples wanted to make three **tabernacles** (booths) for Jesus Christ, Moses, and Elijah. Suddenly, a bright cloud overshadowed them. They heard a voice from the cloud: “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Hear him!” (**St. Matthew 17:5**). The disciples were afraid and fell on their faces. Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Rise, and have no fear.” When they raised their heads, they could only see Jesus.

Learning Outcome Check

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

Alexander Achen continues, “When the disciples saw Moses and Elijah, Peter declared how good it was for them to be there and then said he wanted to build three **tabernacles** or tents. In Malay-

alam, tent is translated as **Koodaram**. This is why this feast is also known in the Malankara Orthodox Church as **Koodara Perunnal**, or Festival of Booths.”

Christina has one more question: “You said we’d learn about this later in Sunday School. When do we celebrate the Feast of **Transfiguration**?”

“The Feast of **Transfiguration** is celebrated on August 6th,” answers Fr. Alexander. “All three Synoptic Gospels tell the story of **Transfiguration** (**St. Matthew 17:1–8; St. Mark 9:2–9; and St. Luke 9:28–36**) shortly after Peter’s confession of faith that Jesus is the Messiah and Jesus’ first prediction of His Passion and Death. The disciples had become upset at our Lord’s prediction of His own Passion and Death. The purpose of **Transfiguration** was to encourage and strengthen the Apostles and to give hope for His Resurrection. The **Transfiguration** also clearly includes the Holy Trinity: Jesus Christ as the Son, God the Father as the voice from the cloud, and the Holy Spirit as the bright overshadowing cloud.”

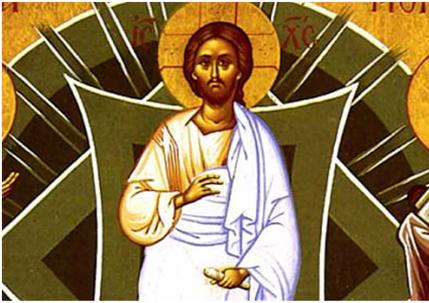
Did you know?

The Gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark and St. Luke are known as Synoptic Gospels. In Greek ‘synoptic’ means “together”. The three Gospels often have the same stories about Jesus and follow a similar order of events.

Learning Outcome Check

Transfiguration is celebrated on August 6th.

Tommy has been listening intently and decides to chime in, “I’ve seen a picture like what you described, Achen, an icon!” Christina leaps up and runs to the icon wall in their family prayer corner and, kissing the icon as she takes it from where it hangs, brings the icon of the **Transfiguration** to the group on the porch. She hands it to Fr. Alexander, who shows the different parts of the icon and how they represent the **Transfiguration**.



The centre of the icon is Jesus Christ blessing with His right hand and dressed in bright white robes. Because God is light, the bright shining of Jesus’ face and His robes all demonstrate that Jesus is God, one Person of the Holy Trinity. This also foreshadows Christ’s future glory when He ushers in the Kingdom of God as the Messiah.

Elijah and Moses stand at the top

of separate mountain peaks to the left and right of Christ. They are bowing towards Christ with their right hands raised in a gesture of intercession towards Him. Saint John Chrysostom explains the presence of these two fathers of the faith in the Old Testament. He states that Moses represents the Law because he received the Law, or Ten Commandments, from God. Elijah represents the Prophets and all those who are alive in Christ because Elijah never died but was instead taken up into heaven by a chariot of fire (IV Kingdoms OSB or II Kings 2:1–18). When Moses died, it was God who buried him, and nobody knows where his grave is (Deuteronomy 34:5–6). This means that Moses and Elijah were special people with reference to having seen the glory of God. Both Moses and Elijah had visions of God, and their presence during the **Transfiguration** shows the disciples that Jesus is the Messiah and the fulfilment of the Old Testament.



The Prophet Elijah appears on Christ's right-hand side.



Moses, who is seen holding the Ten Commandments, appears on Christ's left-hand side.



At the bottom of the icon, the Holy Apostles, Peter, James, and John have fallen backwards and covered their eyes

because the light was at first too bright for them. John in the centre prostrates. Peter is kneeling and raises his right hand towards Christ in a gesture expressing his desire to build the three **tabernacles**.

Learning Outcome Check

Explain parts of the icon of the Transfiguration.

In the **Transfiguration**, the apostles see all the glory present in the Kingdom of God through Christ. It was after this event that Christ would soon suffer on the Cross for our sake. This feast points us towards the glorious Second Coming and the promise of the Kingdom of God, where all creation will be transfigured and filled with the Light. This feast is important for all of us because the **Transfiguration** of Christ proves to us that we are able to be transformed by the glory of God.

Reflection Questions

1. What is Transfiguration and when do we celebrate it?
2. Why is Transfiguration also called Koodara Perunnal?
3. What is the significance of Moses and Elijah in the transfiguration Icon?
4. What is the significance of Transfiguration in our lives?

They Called Him Jesus

Why is the circumcision of Jesus such an important event in the life of the Orthodox Church? We remember the circumcision of our Lord Jesus Christ as His naming day. This festival also signifies the continuation of Orthodox Christian faith from the Jewish traditions Jesus was raised in.

Vocabulary Words

Baptism a ceremony of adoption into the Christian Church

Chrismation “to anoint” with the Holy Spirit.

Sin behaviour that separates us from the will of God.

Gazurthe circumcision; the naming of our Lord Jesus.

Jesus meaning “Saviour.”

Abba A Hebrew word meaning “Father”

Yahweh a name for God, meaning “I am.”



The Nativity Feast is past, and the George family is enjoying time off from school with one another. New Year’s Day is fast approaching, and Tommy and Christina are awaiting another fun celebration. Christina and Tommy have a new puppy, and they are discussing what they will name her.

“I still think we should name her ‘Kitty’” Tommy says with a giggle, “It would be funny!”

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

Mrs. George is listening to the dis-

cussion and says, “I think that’s a very good idea, Christina; names are important. Did you both know we are going to celebrate Jesus Christ’s naming day this coming Sunday?”

Christina frowns, looking confused. “I thought Fr. Alexander said this Sunday we were celebrating the circumcision.” Mrs. George nods and says, “Yes, that’s true; we are celebrating both.”

Mr. George wanted to chime in on the conversation, especially because he had the privilege to name his own children! He said, “When Jesus Christ was born, Jewish parents would name their chil-

dren on the eighth day. This was also the day boy children were circumcised, and we always remember it eight days after Christmas, on January 1st.”

Learning Outcome Check

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



Presentation of our Lord

That Sunday, during the Qurbana, Fr. Alexander gave a sermon on the circumcision and naming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He teaches that Jesus was circumcised in accordance with the Old Testament Law. All male infants underwent circumcision as a sign of God's Covenant with our holy forefather Abraham and his descendants [**Genesis 17:10-14, Leviticus 12:3**]. This was done on the eighth day, because the

eighth day is the first day of a new week. In the New Testament, the eighth day symbolises the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus rose from the dead on a Sunday, eight days after Palm Sunday.

Remember

Circumcision was the symbol of a covenant with God and a promise to walk in His ways.



Fr. Alexander explained to the congregation, “Circumcision was the symbol of a covenant with God and a promise to walk in His ways”. Boys of the Jewish faith had to receive circumcision on the eighth day after their birth. God did not command to circumcise girls. This was because they were included in the male circumcision. After Jesus's death and resurrection, He changed the way this covenant was made. Instead of circumcision, we are now baptised in His name, and this becomes our first covenant with God. Both boys and girls are baptised as infants, and by doing this, they become Christians. Baptism is also the first Sacrament we receive, and it allows us to be part of Jesus Christ's salvation.”

After Qurbana, Christina went to her Sunday school teacher, Mary Kochamma, and asked, “Today Achen said circumcision for the Jews has been replaced by baptism. And we also learned that baptism is like being born again into the Orthodox Christian church, so that our body and soul are

renewed. Didn't the baby also receive a new name?"

Remember

The name of Jesus means "Saviour"



Mary Kochamma smiled brightly and said, "Yes, that's right, Christina! Very good memory! In the Gospel of **St. Luke 2:21**, it is written, '**And when eight days were fulfilled to circumcise the child, his name was called Jesus, the name called by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.**' The eighth day after birth was the day a Jewish child received a name, so it was a very important day. Although Christians now baptise children to enter into a covenant with God, we still give them a special baptismal name to connect them to their Orthodox Christian faith."

"Cool! So Jesus' name is very special! Oops, I forgot what it means, though,"

Christina says a little sheepishly.

"The name Jesus means **Saviour**." Mary Kochamma gives Christina a quick hug, and they finish their lesson for that day.

On their way home, Tommy says to his sister, "Today Achen said Jesus had a lot of names like Emmanuel and the King. Maybe we could give the puppy a few names."

Christina gets excited and says, "That's a great idea! We can each have our own special name for her, and maybe we can give her a Christian name too."

Learning Outcome Check

Jesus means "Saviour"

Think

What are some other names you can think of Jesus?



Reflection Questions

1. Why was circumcision done on the eighth day?
2. What has circumcision been replaced with in the New Testament for Christians?
3. What does the name Jesus mean? Why are names important for Orthodox Christians?

From Death to Resurrection

Why is it important for Orthodox Christians to remember and pray for the departed? Why not just celebrate the life of the departed like so many of our non-Christian or Protestant Christian brothers and sisters do? Remembering and praying for the departed is an ancient practise that Jesus commanded us to continue in our Orthodox Christian faith. The funeral service in the Orthodox Church is a beautiful ancient practise that helps remind us of the hope in salvation and resurrection that we can have through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Vocabulary Words

Funeral A ceremony regarding someone recently deceased

Resurrection Coming to life from death



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

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

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

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

Mr. George smiles and says, "I know

mine are not quite like hers. She is a very special person."

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

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

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

Mr. George explains that Jesus' death and **resurrection** show that He has

power over death. Death is separation from God, and Jesus is the one who is always with His Father and His Holy Spirit! Jesus can't be separated from God, but we can because of our sin. Jesus entered into death so that He could reunite us with God. We do not have to fear death because Jesus has already conquered it and made eternal life possible for all.

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

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

"That's right, and Ammachi's funeral service that we attended this weekend shows us that in several ways," says Mr. George.

"Tell me more, Dad," Christina says, prompting her father.

"Funerals in our Church have three separate divisions. Men have a dedicated one with four services. So also, children under eighteen years of age and women have dedicated four-part services." Mr. George says while striking the hairs of Christina as she has her eyes tearing up. Beautiful memories about Ammachi are

going through her mind.

"Those services must be pretty long," says Tommy.

Mrs. George takes Tommy's hand and says, "Not really, and they are not conducted at the same time. The first two services are done on the days leading up to the funeral and may even be skipped. The third service is the farewell of the departed from the family, and the fourth one is the preparation of the departed for their final journey to the chamber of light by the Church. At the end of the fourth service, interring takes place, where the body inside the closed casket is prayerfully placed in a hole dug out in the soil. We call this place the grave. It is to this graveside that the Achen and family go to pray on memorial days." "So that is why we go to the graveside to pray for the departed, right?" Christina's voice reflects some discovery.

Learning Outcome Check

Explain the parts of the funeral service.

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

"I don't want to know," Tommy says uncomfortably. He does not like talking about funerals.

"I want to know," Christina says, expressing her displeasure at Tommy.

“Okay, don’t fight; I will explain to you, Christina,” says Mr. George.

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

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

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

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

“Yes!” says Mr. George. And St. James wrote that we should pray for one another (**James 5:16**); St. Paul wrote that we belong to the Lord whether we live or die (**Romans 14:8**) and that we are members of His Body (**Ephesians 5:30**). And in Hebrews, it is written that The Church is “the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God,” and that The

Church includes “tens of thousands of angels” and “the spirits of righteous people made perfect,” as well as those of us alive on earth (**Hebrews 12:22–24**). So you see many references in the scriptures reminding us to pray for the departed because they are still part of our Church and our family.

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

Mr. George nods and continues, “Because of Christ’s resurrection and victory over death, death does not end our membership in the Body of Christ. For neither “death nor life... will separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (**Romans 8:38–39**). Orthodox Christians remember that God “is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all are alive to Him (**St. Luke 20:38**). Therefore, we pray for both the living and for the “dead in Christ” (**1 Thessalonians 4:16**).”

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

Learning Outcome Check

Remembering the departed is an act of love.

Reflection Questions

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

The Ascension of our Lord

What is the Ascension, and why is it so important for us to remember? What does it mean that Jesus Christ rose from the dead and then Ascended into Heaven? After spending 40 days with the Apostles after His Resurrection, Jesus ascended into Heaven giving us hope for our lives in the world to come.

Vocabulary Words

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

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

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



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

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

Christina puts her finished homework away in her bag and says to her brother,

"Good question, Tommy! Jesus Christ is not like any other creature or person, because He is also God."

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

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

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

Mr. George smiles and says, "Well,



Ascension of Christ

Tommy, everything Jesus did during His life on earth teaches us something important, and that is true for His Ascension into heaven too. Jesus Christ appeared to the apostles after His resurrection in mysterious ways. For 40 days, He continued to appear to His apostles and followers."

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

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

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

sion, right?"

"Correct!" says Mr. George. "The Helper is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came 10 days after Christ's ascension, and that day is called Pentecost. Jesus wanted the Holy Spirit to come so that they would be filled with God's spirit. But to answer your original question, Tommy, Christ ascended into Heaven so that His believers would see Him raised in glory. When Christ comes again in the **second coming**, He will come in the same manner! He will come in glory, and we will recognise Him because we will see His glory. So now, we wait patiently for His return."

As they finish dinner, Christina shares some things she has learned in Sunday school. "The icon of the Ascension shows Jesus going up into heaven with angels at His side, and St. Mary is in the

very centre, still on earth.”

Learning Outcome Check

During the Feast of Ascension, Christ ascended into Heaven so that His believers would see Him raised in glory.

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

Learning Outcome Check

In the Ascension icon we see Jesus going up into heaven with angels at His side and St. Mary is in the very centre still on earth.

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

”Yes, Tommy,” says Mrs. George. “Then one of the angels told the apostles that this very same Jesus will come again in the same way they saw Him going into heaven (**Acts 1:11**). So you see, when Jesus left the earth by ascending into heaven, He left us with hope of His second coming. This may have been the last time Jesus appeared on earth, but it has a very special meaning for us as Orthodox Christians.”

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

Reflection Questions

1. How many days did Jesus spend with His Apostles after His resurrection?
2. What does it mean to us as Orthodox Christians that Jesus Christ ascended into heaven?
3. What does the ascension teach us to hope for?
4. Who did Jesus tell his apostles to wait for in Jerusalem?

The Promise Fulfilled

How do we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit to dwell among us on earth? We remember the Holy Spirit coming to us 10 days after the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. When The Holy Spirit came, He gave the apostles the ability to speak in different languages and to be understood by all. The Holy Spirit unites all people. Unlike when the Tower of Babel was built, the people were scattered and spoke different languages.

Vocabulary Words

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

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

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

Appa The way to address Dad affectionately in Malayalam

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



One day in school, Christina noticed how many different kinds of people were in her class beyond being classified as boys and girls. There were kids that looked very different from herself, some with darker skin, others with lighter skin, some with different hair, and even some with different accents! Christina thought that it was amazing that, although everyone was so different, they all got along and were friends.

The following Sunday, Christina was at Church and started thinking about her friends at school. The church service felt longer than other Sundays, and Tommy was getting restless as he was standing and trying to understand what was going on. He started to complain that he was tired. Christina grins at him with encouragement from her place next to their mother.

“I am tired of standing. Can I sit now?”

whines Tommy to his father.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Right, Tommy!” says Mr. George.

Learning Outcome Check

Pentecost is celebrated 50 days after Easter Sunday.

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

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

Mr. George smiles again and answers, “For the ancient Israelites, Passover and Pentecost marked the beginning and end of the grain harvest. That means the day



The Pentecost icon

of Pentecost was also a harvest festival for them.”

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

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

“That’s right!” says Fr. Alexander. “When the wicked people came together to build the Tower of Babel, God scattered them throughout many places and mixed up their languages. Then they spoke different languages and couldn’t understand each other. The opposite of that happened on the day of Pentecost. When the apostles gathered together to worship God, they spoke different languages but could understand each other.” Fr. Alexander smiles and says, “So Pentecost healed what happened in Babel through the Holy Spirit.”

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

Learning Outcome Check

How does the tower of Babel relate to Pentecost?

Do You Know?

The Holy Spirit was known to the Old testament writers, but a prophet named Joel first prophesied the coming of the Holy Spirit for all people, not just for Jews. He wrote, “Afterwards I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my Spirit” (Joel 2:28-29). The Holy Spirit is always with us, just as God the Father and God the Son are always with us, but at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came to dwell among us in a very special way. The Holy Spirit was sent to unite all people to God.

“Come here, children, I want to show you something,” says Fr. Alexander. In the icon depicting Pentecost, we see all of the apostles gathered in harmony and unity. The Tower of Babel, shown on one side of the icon, was destroyed in disunity. On the other side is shown the new spiritual building of the Church, through which anyone can reach the

Kingdom of God no matter where they come from or what language they speak!

There is an empty space at the centre of the circle of the apostles, and that place is for Jesus Christ, who told the apostles before He Ascended that He is with them always. There are 12 rays coming from the circle at the top of the icon, and these represent the Holy Spirit sending tongues of fire to each apostle, granting the gift of **tongues**. Finally, there is a figure at the bottom of the icon with

a crown and holding a cloth with 12 scrolls. This figure is Cosmos, who represents all people of the world who are in darkness, and the 12 scrolls represent the apostles who would bring light to all nations by spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Learning Outcome Check

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

Reflection Questions

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

A Place Set Apart

What is a Consecration, and why do we consecrate church buildings? Although we can pray anywhere, a consecrated church building becomes a House of God. We have a special service to transform a building into a House of God and this service has four parts to it. The Consecration of a church building clearly sets the worshippers to face the East when we pray.

Vocabulary Words

Consecration A dedication or setting apart for a special purpose

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

Mooron Also called Chrism; holy anointing oil



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

“I want to go back to sleep, Mama!” Tommy complained.

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

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

“What is a consecration anyway?”

Christina asked, sounding a little more awake now.

“A consecration is a dedication or setting something apart for a specific purpose. In this case, we will be participating in a church consecration. In other words, we are dedicating this church for the purpose of glorifying God. We will be praying in a special service to help the bishop and priests make this building into a special place for people to experience the presence of God,” Mrs. George explains. “Hmm. So, can other things be consecrated?” Christina asked. She is very awake now!

“That’s a really good question, Christina!” says Mrs. George. “Actually, each one of us is consecrated too!

As Christians, when we are baptised, we are also dedicated or consecrated for the purpose of living our lives for God.”

Learning Outcome Check

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



“Wow! I’m consecrated?” Tommy asks excitedly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Learning Outcome Check

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mrs. and Mr. George laugh. “The most important part of the service is the purification and sanctification of the altar. Because the altar is such an important part of our church and because it is so important to the Qurbana, there is special attention given to dedicating it,” Mrs. George explains.

“During the rest of the service, the entire church is prayed for and anointed with Holy Mooron,” adds Mr. George.

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

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

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

”Sure, what’s up?” Mr. George asks.

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

“That’s a really good question!” says Mr. George. “Christ himself said, **‘For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man’ in St. Matthew 24:27.** When Christ comes again, He will come from the east. Facing the east in prayer prepares us for Christ’s return. For this reason, our churches are built facing the east. The altar of the church is placed on the east side.”

Learning Outcome Check

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

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

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

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

closer to God,” Mr. George says proudly.

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

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

Reflection Questions

1. Name the 4 parts of a church consecration.
2. Why is the consecration of a church building important? What does it accomplish?
3. How are baptism and the consecration of a church building similar?
4. Why do we pray facing east?

Fathers and Mothers

Who are our Church Fathers and Mothers? Why is it so important for us as Orthodox Christians to remember these holy people? Our Orthodox Christian faith has been passed down to us by brave and faithful people. Some of these people lived during the first few hundred years of the Church after Jesus Christ's Resurrection. These Holy people worked tirelessly to teach the true faith and to keep others from changing it over time.

Vocabulary Words

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

“Good question, Aaron,” says Mary Kochamma. “‘Diptychs’ is a Greek word, also called ‘Thubdens’ in Syriac, and is a set of prayers we say during the Holy Qurbano.”

Aaron replies, “Oh yeah, that’s one of the times we get to sit down and take a break, right?” Christina giggles.

“Yes, we do sit during the Diptychs,” says Mary Kochamma. “But more importantly, we pray for all living and departed people and ask God to bless them. Some of those we pray for are the Doctors of the Holy Orthodox Church.”

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

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

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

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

“The Fathers and Mothers of our church were very brave and faithful. Even when others did not like Christians or when others tried to change the faith based on their own ideas, the Church Fathers and Mothers were steadfast; this means they spoke up and taught the true faith no matter what anyone else said.”

On their way home, Mrs. George asks Christina and Tommy what they learned in Sunday School.

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

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

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

“We learned about Church fathers and Mothers in Sunday school today,” answers Christina.

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

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

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

important things that are foundational to our faith as Orthodox Christians.”

Learning Outcome Check

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

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

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

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

The entire George family sings, remembering **Hebrews 13:7**

(Daivasuthanmarayiduvan)

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

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

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

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



Jesus Christ with children

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

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

Christina smiles and goes on, “There were also Fathers of the Councils, like St. Basil, whom we spoke about earlier, St. Athanasius of Alexandria, St. Gre-

gory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, St. John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, and Severus of Antioch. We remember them in the Diptychs, right?”

“Right!” says Mr. George. “They all fought to keep the one true Orthodox Faith. There were also monastic fathers and local fathers, and, of course, many church others who kept the faith and continued to teach us and help us heal our spiritual hurts.”

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

“October 17th is the feast of St. Ignatius of Antioch, who was known as ”Theophorus,” or the Bearer of God. In St. Matthew 18:1-5, Christ called a little child to him and taught everyone, saying:

”Unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Tradition has it that St. Ignatius was that child whom Christ called,” says Mr. George.

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

“We also have two church fathers from Kerala, India. One is Parumala Thirumeni, who was born on June 15, 1848, in the Chathuruthy family near Mulanthuruthy, Ernakulam, Kerala. At the age of 18, he was ordained as a priest and was later consecrated as Mar Gregorios. Because of his young age, everybody called him ”Kochu Thirumeni” (“Young Bishop”). Thirumeni’s life contributions defended and preserved the church that we are part of today. He

showed love towards all people, regardless of their religion, and truly reflected the love of Christ. He was a man whose example we can follow today,” says Mrs. George.



Parumala Thirumeni

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



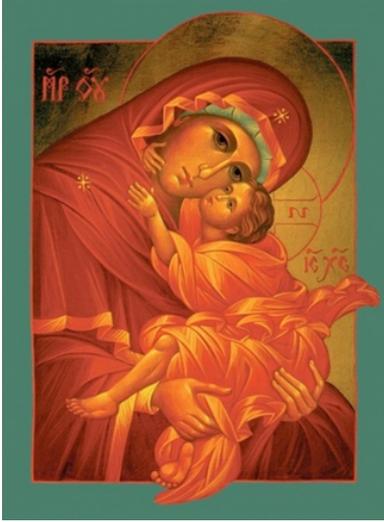
Vattasseril Thirumeni

Learning Outcome Check

Who are some of the main Church Fathers?

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

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



Mother of God



Jesus Christ with St. Photini

”Our mothers,” except for St. Mary or St. Helena, often do not appear in the liturgical prayers of the Divine Liturgy. Yet Orthodoxy has thousands of ’mothers.’ The Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles tell much of women’s activities and leadership in the early church. They served as founders of churches, **deaconesses**, apostles, teachers, preachers, and prophets. Thus, our church commemorates, among others, St. Hermione, healer and prophet; Saints Thekla, Apphia, Iounia, Priscilla, Mariamne, and Photini; and St. Phoebe, who was the first deaconess,” says Mrs. George.

St. Photini was the Samaritan woman that Jesus met at the well and asked for water. Jesus revealed who He was to her, and she preached to Samaritans. She is considered the first to proclaim the gospel of Christ. She was martyred and considered equal to the apostles.

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

”Thanks, mom and dad. You know so much about our faith!” says Christina.

Learning Outcome Check

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

Reflection Questions

1. Why do we remember Church fathers and Mothers? In what ways are they like spiritual doctors?
2. What is a Synod, and what did the Church Fathers do for these?
3. Name 2–3 of the Church Fathers and Mothers and describe what they did for the Church.

Monasticism: A Path to Holiness

Monastics choose to separate themselves physically from the world in some way so they can prayerfully devote themselves to God's work. They may still live around other people, even with other monastics, but they try to grow closer to God by living with fewer comforts and connections to the material world.

Vocabulary Words

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

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



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

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

At this, Christina bursts into laugh-

ter. Their dad, hiding a chuckle, turns to his children and says, "Well, Christina! How about you apologise to your brother and then explain to him what a monk is?"

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

Mrs. George joins the conversation and says, "All Christians are called to live a holy life and grow closer to God. Some

people do this by living a little apart from the world, and these Christians we call monastics.”

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

Learning Outcome Check

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

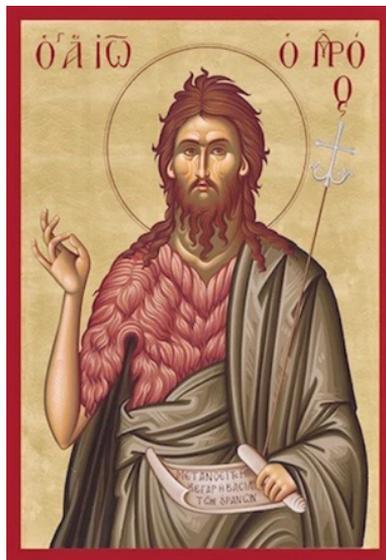
“The main characteristic of monastics is that they choose to separate themselves physically from the world in some way so they can prayerfully devote themselves to God’s work,” says Mr. George. “They may still live around other people, even with other monastics, but they try to grow closer to God by living with fewer comforts and connections to the material world.”

Learning Outcome Check

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

“Some monastics live by themselves completely,” continues Mr. George. “They are called solitary or Eremitic

monastics. Those monks who choose to live with other monks are called communal or Cenobitic monastics.”



St. John the Baptist

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

Mrs. George nods, “That’s right, it is truly a calling because it can be hard to give up the possibility of having a family.”

“What?” says Tommy, confused again. “They become orphans?”

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

characteristic of monastics.”

“Do I know any monastics?” Tommy asked.

Learning Outcome Check

The life of St. John the Baptist exemplifies monasticism.

“Hmmm. By the way, do you remember last week, at the consecration of the church, there was a monk? He was wearing a special head covering like Thirumeni and was in a black robe like Achens. He is a monk; we call them Rambachen. St. John the Baptist was a monk. He lived in the desert and spent time by himself focusing on growing closer to God,” Christina says. “He was called the forerunner because he preached about the coming of Jesus Christ to the Jews. He was the cousin of Jesus and knew Him while He was on earth. Also, he always ate honey and locusts.”

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

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



St. Mary of Egypt

“That’s right!” says Mrs. George.

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

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

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

ily members.”

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

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

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

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

Mrs. George continues, “Yes, all Christians practise some asceticism, like fasting from certain foods on certain

days. When we fast, we give up something we enjoy and add more time with God. Other examples of practising asceticism are when we try to discipline ourselves by praying regularly, by giving what we don’t need to the poor, and so on. Monastics may practise asceticism in even more ways, like living with very little.”

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

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

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

Reflection Questions

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

The Resurrection

What is the Resurrection, and why is it so important to Orthodox Christians? From the time of His birth, there were signs that Christ is our King, that He will die for our sins, and that He will rise from the dead. The icon of the Nativity demonstrates this in several ways. Before His Resurrection, Jesus Christ died on the cross on a Friday, which we remember as the Great Friday. Three days later, on Sunday, He rose from the dead, and this is the most important day we remember as Orthodox Christians every year.

Vocabulary Words

Nativity The birth of Jesus Christ

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

Great Friday the Friday Jesus Christ died on the cross

Pascha Easter; the Resurrection

Sheol hell or hades

Messiah king and saviour

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



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

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

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

Christina puts her pencil down and looks at her father curiously. "Okay, I guess that makes sense. God is greater than Time and creation because He



The Nativity Icon

made them. So why did Jesus go through all of that? Why did he grow, live, and die like the rest of us? And then why did He live again if we couldn't? So many of my friends say it's silly to believe that a man could be God."

Learning Outcome Check

Not everyone has the same faith and beliefs as we have.

Mr. George pats his daughter on the back in understanding and says, "You have amazing questions! And you're right, not everyone believes in Jesus Christ as a Saviour and God. The Orthodox Church has kept the history and Sacraments of our faith true all this time so that we remember and know who God is. Tommy, go get your icon of the Nativity of Our Lord, please, and bring it here." Tommy, who is playing on the piano in the living room, jumps from the piano bench and races to his room. He

comes back quickly with the icon of the Nativity.

Tommy hands the icon to his sister and says, "This is the Nativity icon. Nativity means 'the birth of Christ! My Sunday school teacher told us Jesus came from Heaven to be born and grow up just like us!" Mr. George nods and says, "That's right! God sent His only Son to become human through Mary, who conceived and bore Our Lord Jesus Christ. Then He grew up like a normal human, just like you and me, but He was also always God at the same time."

Christina points to the icon and says, "I see the angels in the background and the light shining down on Jesus. I know He was always the Son of God, one of the Holy Trinity. And he lived and then died as humans do." Mr. George again nods and continues, "Yes, exactly, and He chose to become human in order to save humans from sin. When the Son of God came down to live among us, He helped us to know Him so much better than we ever had before."

Christina looks at her father curiously again and says, "So God lived as one of us and taught us to know Him and how to be holy and how to repent from sin, is that right?"

"Yes!" says Mr. George, "and He also died like all creatures die. Of course, Jesus did not need to die because He was God. But He willingly lived and died like us. By dying on the cross, He sacrificed Himself for the sake of all of God's children, so that paradise would be opened to us again. On Pascha, He rose from

death, something a mere human cannot do."

"Pascha means Easter, right?" asks Christina. Mr. George smiles and says, "Yes, or Resurrection, our most important Holy feast. And it's important to remember what happened before the first Pascha. Jesus died on the cross on a Friday, then went to Sheol and preached to the dead there for three days, and then rose from the dead on Sunday." Christina looks confused, and Mr. George understands why. "Sheol is the 'place of the dead. It's where the souls of those who died were waiting."

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

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

"Jesus Christ did indeed die on the cross and was buried in a tomb on a Friday. This was the most important Friday in the history of the Holy Church because God Himself willingly died for us on this day. It is great because it came just before the Resurrection of Christ, the day our Lord and Saviour defeated death and reconciled all of God's children to Himself again. This is why we call the Friday before we celebrate the Resurrection 'Great Friday'. It is the day we remember how Our Lord suffered,



The Resurrection Icon

died, and was buried.”

Mrs. George then joins her family at the table and chimes in, “That’s right, and the next Sunday, three of Jesus’ disciples went to the tomb where He had been buried to anoint Him with oils and fragrant spices. The three disciples were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary, the mother of James. They showed amazing devotion to Jesus by wanting to tend to His body after his crucifixion, and one of the spices they brought was myrrh.”

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

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

Mrs. George goes on to say, “The wise men bringing Myrrh to Jesus at his birth was a **prefiguration** of His death. When the disciples arrived, they found the stone that had been covering the opening of the tomb had been rolled away, and Jesus’ body was gone. The women were very upset but even during this time remained faithful, asking “Where have they taken my Lord?”, showing their belief in Jesus Christ as the

Son of God (St. John 20:13–15). An Angel appeared and told them Jesus had risen from death and to go tell the other disciples. This moment was also prefigured in one of the gifts the wise men brought to Jesus after His birth: frankincense, which we use today in our liturgies as an offering to God.”

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

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

Mr. George continues, “This is why we always say the Nicene Creed every day,

including on Sundays. We are saying our statement of faith, or, in other words, what we believe. Remember, not everyone believes in Jesus, that He is God, and that He lived, died, and was resurrected. Our faith in Christ is special and ancient, and so we do things that others do not. This is why we only take Qurbano and other sacraments within our church community. It’s why we say ‘the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic faith’ ”.

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

“Hey!” says Tommy with a frown.

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

Learning Outcome Check

We only receive sacraments in the Oriental Orthodox Churches.

Reflection Questions

1. Why do we call the Friday before Easter Great Friday?
2. Why should we only receive sacraments like the Holy Qurbano within our church community?
3. Why do we call the Resurrection the **Feast of Feasts**?
4. Which parts of the Nativity icon point to the Resurrection of Christ?

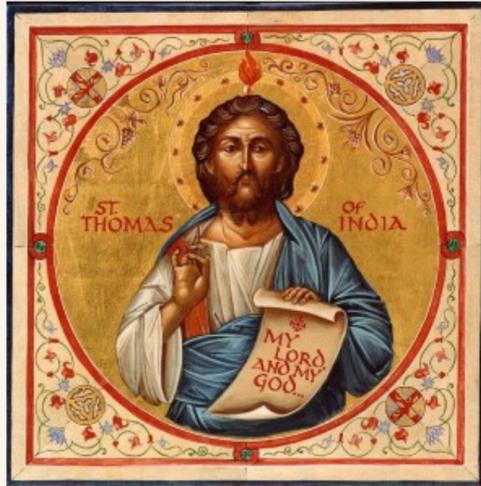
DEAR 4th GRADE READER

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

Gratitude

Reviewers : Grade 4

Mrs. Sumitha Kurian	Holy Trinity IOC CORK
Mr. Nobi Baby	St. Stephen's IOC WOKING
Ms. Beksy George	St. Mary's IOC BRISTOL



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