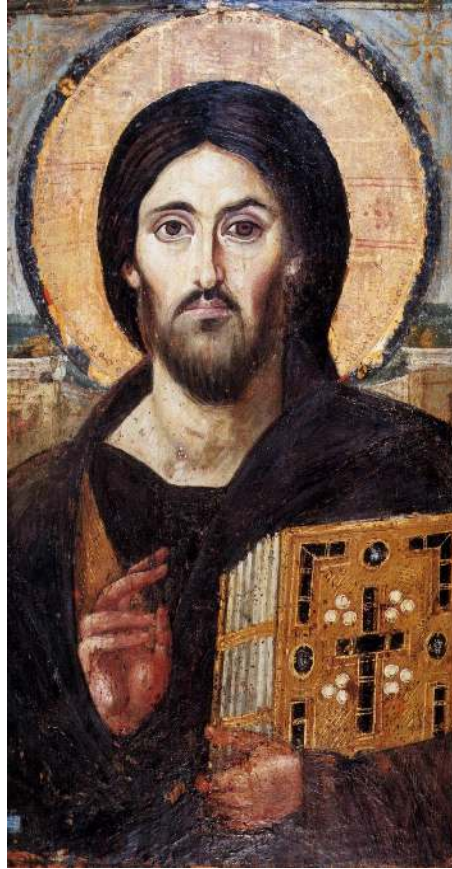




Diocese of South-West America
Sunday School

5th Grade Jesus Our Savior



Table of Contents

Midterm Exam (December/January): Lessons 1-8

Final Exam (May/June): Lessons 9-16

	LESSON	PAGE
1	THE MESSIAH	2
2	THE WORD	4
3	WHO IS JESUS?	6
4	SIGNS OF THE KINGDOM	8
5	GOD CALLS US TO HIS KINGDOM	10
6	IMMANUEL: GOD WITH US	13
7	GOD BECAME MAN	15
8	ORIENTAL ORTHODOX	17
9	LORD, TEACH US	19
10	BEHOLD, YOUR KING	21
11	LENTEN JOURNEY: GOD CALLS US	23
12	THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST	25
13	THE EARLY CHURCH	27
14	SAINT STEPHEN	30
15	SAINTS PETER AND PAUL	32
16	SAINT THOMAS	35

LESSON 1 - THE MESSIAH

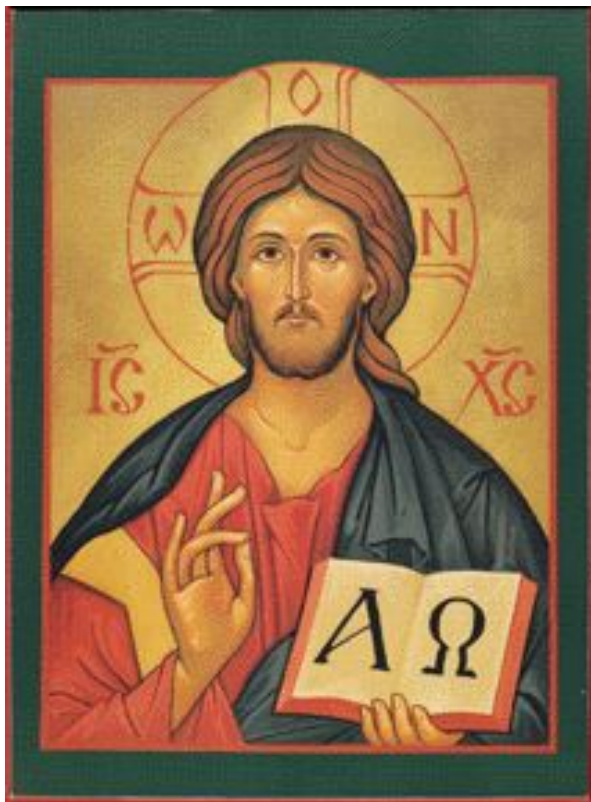
OBJECTIVE: STUDENTS WILL UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF MESSIAH THROUGH THE EXPLORATION OF VARIOUS BIBLE PASSAGES

In Orthodox Churches, we hear the readings of the genealogy on the Sunday prior to Christmas and on the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Begin this lesson by reading **St. Matthew 16:13-20**.

In this passage, we see Jesus asking His disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” This question defines Christianity. Peter’s response to Jesus’s question is that He is, “The Christ, the Son of the Living God.” This response by Peter is given only through deep understanding, divine revelation and faith.

Christ literally means “Anointed One.” In Hebrew, it is also the word for “Messiah”. The center of Christianity is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.



We know that the Gospels address the life of Christ. The Gospels are located in the first four books of the New Testament. The first book, St. Matthew, begins by talking about the genealogy of Jesus Christ. **Genealogy** is the study of families and their history. Studying genealogy allows us to discover how families are related to one another.

Turn to **St. Matthew 1: 1-8**. Here, St. Matthew writes about the genealogy of Jesus Christ, which starts with Abraham. In **Genesis 12:3 & 28:14**, we see that God promises to bless the tribes in all the earth through Abraham.

This promise is fulfilled through Christ, at which the genealogy in St. Matthew ends.

Not only do we see the Messiah spoken about through the genealogy of Christ in the Gospels, but we also see the Messiah being spoken about a long, long time ago. Many prophets foretold of the coming of the Messiah. The prophet Isaiah writes about many Messianic prophecies, as well as foretellings of the coming of a king to save the people from all evils and to grant them joy and salvation. In the Book of Psalms, the coming of the Messiah is foretold through verses.

Prophecies, in terms of the Scripture, are divine revelations that are given by God through His just and righteous men in order to guide His people. These prophecies are what had sustained the Israelites through all their suffering. By the time of Christ's birth, there were many people who were awaiting His coming on earth.

Through these various Bible references it is evident that the Messiah is spoken about throughout the Bible. It is important to recognize that the term Messiah is referring to Christ, our Savior.



Lesson 2 - The Word

OBJECTIVE: STUDENTS WILL IDENTIFY AND DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE FOUR GOSPELS (MATTHEW, MARK, LUKE AND JOHN).

We know Jesus Christ by many names. Jesus Christ is the only Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity, and the Word of God. He became **incarnate** (born of a woman to become human) in order to save man from death and to fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament that we mentioned earlier in lesson 1.

The Holy Bible is also called the Word. Through the Word, Christ announces the Good News of Salvation to the world.

The Bible contains four gospels. **Gospels** contain the records of what Christ did and said during His time on earth. Although the gospels do not include every part of Christ's life, they are definitely enough to share with those who desire to hear the faith. In fact, "these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His Name" (**St. John 20:31**). The four gospels include St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke and St. John, in that order. The first three gospels are called **Synoptic Gospels** because they have many similarities in the way they are written, presented and themed. The fourth gospel is the Gospel of St. John, which is known as the **Theological Gospel**. Continue reading below to find out more information about each of the gospels.

The Gospel according to St. Matthew

Saint Matthew, who was also called Levi, was a tax collector until Jesus called him to be His disciple. Matthew writes the Gospel somewhere between AD 50 and AD 70. St. Matthew's Gospel includes many themes. One such theme is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy. Matthew definitively shows how Christ fulfills the Old Testament through His incarnation and life on Earth. Another theme in the Gospel of St. Matthew is the revelation of the kingdom of God. Throughout the Gospel, Jesus reminds us that the Kingdom will be made perfect during His Second Coming. Finally, in St. Matthew, we see a theme of the call to discipleship through the beginning of the Church.

The Gospel according to St. Mark

Saint Mark, also called John Mark, a native of Jerusalem was an eyewitness to many miracles of Jesus. The Gospel of St. Mark was written sometime shortly before AD 70. In St. Mark, we see a common theme of the suffering Messiah. St. Mark writes much about how Christ, although filled with power and authority, is also suffering on earth. Christ is

the Son of God who heals, forgives and casts out demons but He also possesses a full humanity that we are able to see through the sufferings that St. Mark writes about in this Gospel. We also see a theme of mystery. Throughout all He does on earth, it is only after the Resurrection that His followers identify and recognize Him as truly God. Finally, just like St. Matthew, St. Mark also has an underlying theme of discipleship. The word “disciple” is not seen in the Gospel, yet we see true discipleship in those who take up their crosses and suffer with Jesus.

The Gospel according to St. Luke

Saint Luke, a Gentile convert, is the only non-Jewish author. His Gospel is the only gospel that is addressed to an individual (he writes to Theophilus, a Gentile and new believer). St. Luke was written sometime between AD 70-80. One of the themes of St. Luke’s Gospel is prayer. Throughout this Gospel we see prayer through righteous men and women, and even Jesus Himself. Another theme is the activity of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is seen throughout this entire Gospel. Finally, this Gospel shows a deep concern for sinners. Luke talks about Jesus’s love for sinners and goes on to discuss the hope of their repentance and forgiveness.

The Gospel according to St. John

Saint John, the son of Zebedee, is also referred to as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” This Gospel was written around AD 96. Some of the themes of St. John include the Trinity and glory. John talks directly about the nature of the Trinity and of the three Persons in One nature. He also directly discusses the glory of God through Christ’s earthly ministry. Another theme of this Gospel is spirituality. St. John writes about spiritual warfare and about the kingdom of God versus the fallen world. St. John also, throughout the Gospel writes of the sacraments. John talks about such sacraments and the importance of them such as that of baptism and the Eucharist. Finally, St. John stresses community and the Church. True followers of Christ believe in Jesus Christ, are bound in unity with Him and express Christ’s love.

Even though the four Gospels are written with different themes, they share the same message and are all equally important in teaching us what Jesus has said and done during His time on Earth.

Lesson 3 - Who is Jesus?

OBJECTIVE: STUDENTS WILL UNDERSTAND THAT TO KNOW
JESUS WE MUST BECOME LIKE HIM



The center of Christianity is Lord Jesus Christ. However, we often struggle with understanding Jesus .. is He God? Or is He man?

In **Matthew 16:13-20**, we see Christ Himself asking His followers, “Who do you say that I am?”. It was St. Peter who answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God”.

This proclamation of Faith is what the Church believes and teaches today – we know who Jesus is, and believe and confess that He is God and He is Man. He is the one that the prophets and saints of the Old Testament wrote about, and He is the one that healed humanity of their sickness and defeated death by His death and resurrection.

In his **Gospel, John** gives a specific and definitive explanation of who Christ is – “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (1:1). “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (1:14)

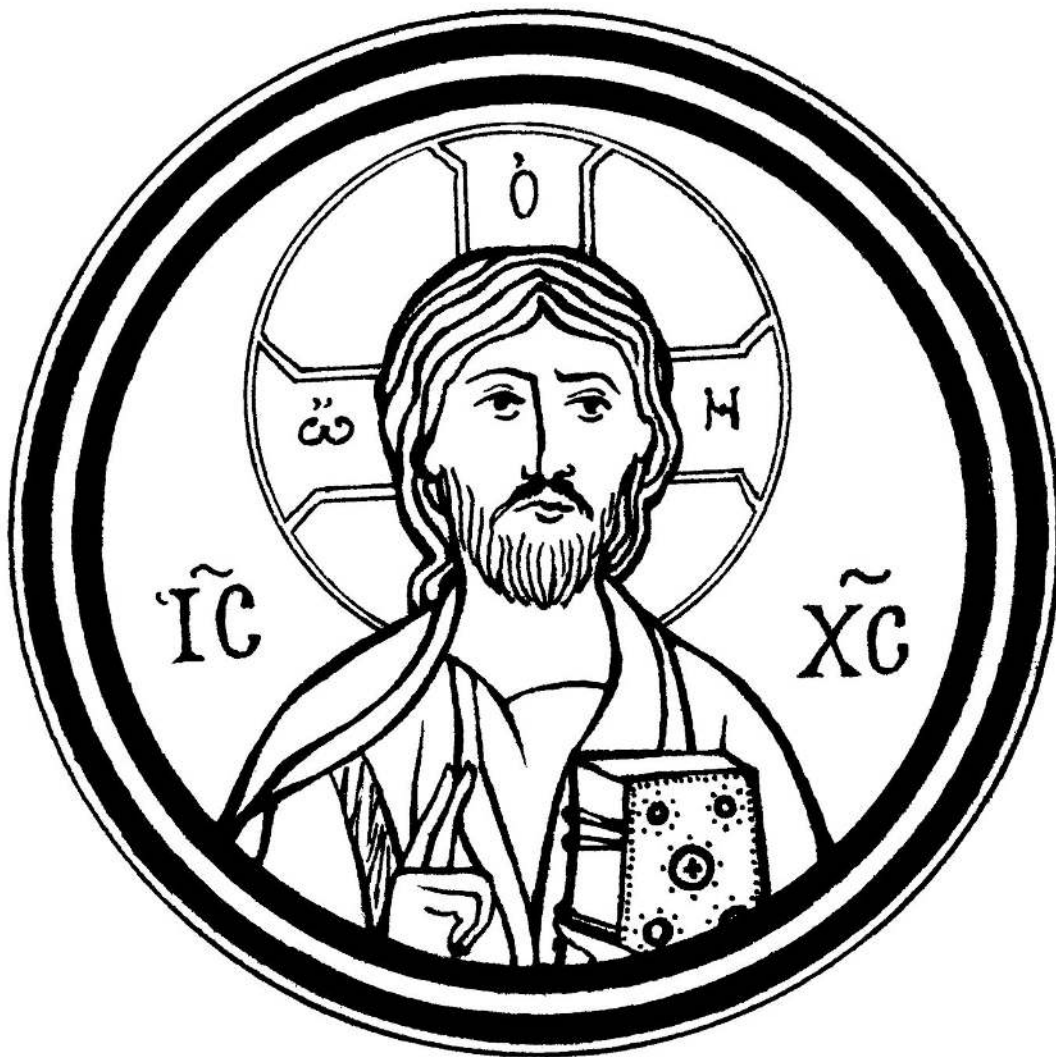
He is God, for He was with God before all time. Clearly, Jesus did not first come into existence at the first Christmas! But He is also man who assumed flesh through St. Mary, who therefore is the Mother of God. Any other explanation for St. Mary would incorrectly describe Jesus!

The best explanation is given in the Nicene Creed, and is the reason we regularly proclaim this Statement of Faith. The Creed provides the backbone of our faith. Anything outside of the Creed should bring about cautiousness, as anything new or different would contradict the witness of St. Mary, the Apostles and His first disciples who knew Jesus better than any other living person.

As Christians, we also must know Jesus.

For since God became man in Christ, and we are united with the Church that is the Body of Christ (**1 Corinthians 12:12-26**) through Holy Baptism, we experience Jesus in His fullness in our lives.

We bear witness by choosing to become like Jesus, and are strengthened through Sacraments such as the Holy Qurbana. By being like Jesus, we become saved. By being like Jesus, we can truly understand who Jesus really is.



Lesson 4 - Signs of the Kingdom

OBJECTIVE: STUDENTS WILL RECALL MIRACLE STORIES FROM THE BIBLE AND DEMONSTRATE HOW SUCH HEALINGS TEACH US ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

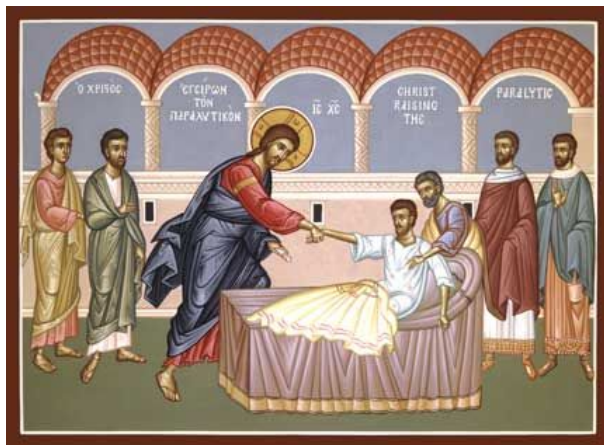
Centuries ago the Prophet Isaiah foretold the signs of the Kingdom of God. During His ministry on earth, Jesus Christ performed many miracles which attest to the power of God and reveal signs of His glorious Kingdom. Follow along and we'll dive deeper into just some of those signs performed by Jesus Christ.

Miracles

(1) Jesus Casts out Demons (St. Matthew 8:28-9:1)

At that time, when Jesus came to the other side, to the country of the Gergesenes, two demoniacs met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way. And behold, they cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?" Now a herd of many swine was feeding at some distance from them. And the demons begged him, "If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of swine." And he said to them, "Go." So they came out and went into the swine; and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and perished in the waters. The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything, and what had happened to the demoniacs. And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their neighborhood. And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city.

(2) Jesus Heals the Paralytic (St. Matthew 9: 1-8)



At that time, Jesus got into a boat, crossed over and came to his own city. And behold, they brought to him a paralytic, lying on his bed; and when Jesus saw their faith he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven. And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming." But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say 'Rise and walk?' But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" -- he then said to the paralytic -- "Rise,

take up your bed and go home.” And he rose and went home. When the crowds saw it, they marveled, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

(3) Jesus Heals a Blind Man (St. John 9: 1-38)

At the time that Jesus was passing, He saw a blind man who was blind from birth. Our Lord Jesus told His disciples that He was the Light of the world and then He spit on the ground. He put the clay that the spit made onto the man's eyes. He told the man, “Go, and wash in the pool of Silo'am.” The man obeyed Jesus and was healed. He was now able to see, when he had not been able to his entire life. Nobody could believe what they heard and saw. Finally the man said, “I am the man who was blind. Jesus healed me and now I can see!” The neighbors took the man to the Pharisees. The Pharisees were upset because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath day and they argued about whether or not Jesus was from God. They asked the man's parents for confirmation as to whether he had really been blind. The parents said, “Yes! He was always blind. We don't know how he can see now.



Ask him—he is old enough to answer for himself.” Again, the Pharisees asked the man about Jesus. The man said, “All I know is, that though I was blind, now I can see. God listens to people who follow Him. If this Man was not from God, He could not have healed me.” The Pharisees were angry when the man said this. They threw him out of the synagogue. Our Lord Jesus heard that they had thrown the man out. He found the man and asked him, “Do you believe in the Son of Man? He said, “Lord, I believe!” and he worshiped Him.

Throughout all of these miracle stories, we see that physical healing leads people towards spiritual cleansing as well. In the Old Testament period, sickness was considered to be a punishment for sin. So, the healing was sought from God (**Psalms 41:3-4**) in order to be forgiven of sins. By believing in Jesus Christ, we are promised of our deliverance from sin and salvation of our souls. This happens through the Church, which is a visible expression of the Kingdom of God. For example, Confession, Prayers for healing, the Eucharist and the Holy Anointment of the sick help gain pardon of sin, and healing. As we accomplish the ministry of healing and show the love and compassion of God, we participate in the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

Lesson 5 - God Calls Us to His Kingdom

OBJECTIVE: STUDENTS WILL DEFINE A PARABLE AND WILL RECOGNIZE LESSONS FROM EACH OF THE PARABLES.

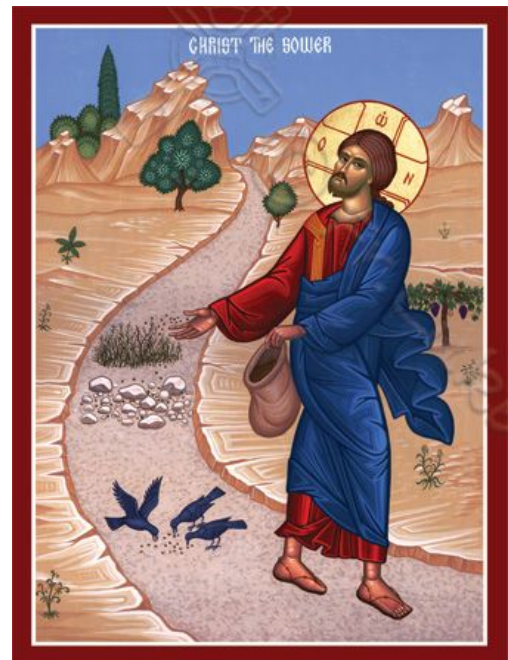
The Kingdom of God is the command of God. He must rule us in our words, our thoughts and our actions. Jesus Christ incarnated to establish the Kingdom, to grant us entrance into His Kingdom, and to teach us how to live in the Kingdom.

Jesus often taught the people about the Kingdom through parables. A **parable** is an illustration in the form of a simile or metaphor in which a simple comparison is turned into a story. Parables convey messages very easily by attracting our attention and raising our curiosity because they are images drawn from daily life in the world in order to represent and communicate the deep things of God. Read the following parables and see how Christ tells us to live, in order that we may one day be called into His Kingdom.

The Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13: 1-23)

In this parable, Christ speaks of the word of God like a seed which is cast to the ground. We see the seeds on the path as those who hear but are taken away by the devil. The seeds on the rock are those who hear the Word, receive it but have no root through prayer and the life taught by the Church and therefore fall away, as well. The seeds that fell among the thorns are those that hear but then fall away into the pleasures and riches offered by the world. Finally, there are seeds that fell among good soil. These are the believers who hear the Word, hold it fast and bring forth fruit with patience.

Christ uses this parable to teach us that although we, as Orthodox Christians have received God's grace in our lives, how will we respond to that which has been graciously given to us? Will we take our faith for granted and decide that there are more important matters besides prayer, repentance, and serving others? Will we be content with our lives bearing no fruit due to our laziness or things of the world that distract us? We know that the Kingdom of God is given to those seeds that fall on good soil.



Parable of Seeds and Weeds (Matthew 13: 24-30)

This parable builds off the previous parable of the sower. Here, Christ speaks of the enemy who sows his own seed (the weed) among the seed of Christ (the wheat). Sometimes in our lives, the weeds may seem similar to the wheat that Christ sows. In other words, the devil will attempt to resemble the truth in order that we may believe his lies and follow Satan. This parable points to the presence of good and evil in the world. There are people who make good choices and sometimes, there are people who may make poor choices. There are also good and bad elements within ourselves too. People who had accepted the Word may still reject it and accept the evil elements of Satan in their life. Ultimately, in the end, at the harvest time, the weeds will be gathered and burnt. The angels will gather the good harvest into His Kingdom. We, in our lives, need to strive to chase after the Word of God and reject the devil.

Parable of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven (Matthew 13:31-33)

This parable directly speaks of the Kingdom of God which was sown as a small mustard seed. This mustard seed has the potential to grow into a big plant. Jesus Christ sowed the seeds which have now grown into a very big plant bearing fruit. If we allow the seed of the Kingdom to grow in us, it will grow tremendously. Christ talks about the effect of a little yeast for the whole amount of dough. A little bit of yeast goes a long way, just as the Kingdom of God has the ability to continue spreading. We can be leavened with Christ's Word, which can in turn leaven others into following and becoming like Christ.

Parable of the Net (Matthew 13:47-50)

This parable stresses how we will all be judged during the Second Coming, in order that we may enter His kingdom. The idea that God would gather the good and reject the bad, is further clarified in this parable. A man cast a net and collected good and bad fish. He gathered the good and threw away the bad, just as Christ will do.

Parables of Hidden Treasure and Precious Pearl (Matthew 13:44-46)

These parables talk about the grace of God. These treasures are hidden but when a man finds the value of Christ and His Church, he sees the importance of surrendering all things to receive Christ. These treasures are hard to find by those immersed in the world, but we must realize the wonders of pearls and treasures; that is the Kingdom of God.

Parable of Birds and Lilies (Matthew 6:24-34)

In this parable, Jesus talks about how we must be like the carefree birds and lilies that do not worry about their lives. God provides for all of His creation and we must not be

anxious but we must trust in God. We must seek His Kingdom and believe that He provides.

Through all these parables, we can see that it is important that we seek the Word of God and prepare ourselves to enter His Eternal Kingdom. This is the example of the Saints of our Church, and why we should try and be like them.



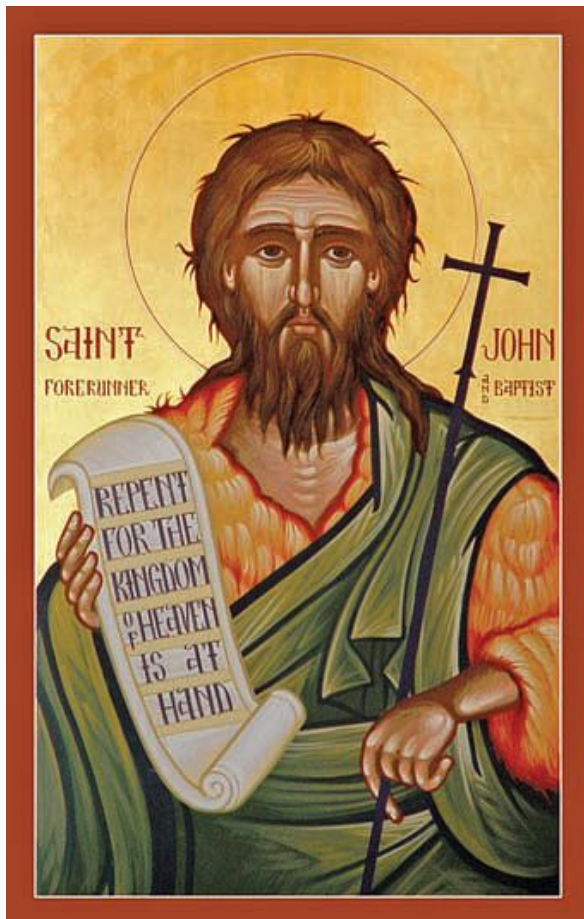
Lesson 6 - Immanuel - God with Us

OBJECTIVES: STUDENTS WILL IDENTIFY THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST, RECALL THE STORY OF THE ANNUNCIATION TO ST. MARY, AND RECOGNIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE COMING OF THE LORD.

Before Christ was born into this earth, many were preparing for the coming of Christ. Many prophets had already foretold of the birth of Christ. Some had foretold of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, who prepared the way for Christ. The virgin Mary was preparing for the birth of her Son, the Savior of the world when she received the announcement of the coming of the King.

St. John the Baptist, Forerunner to the King

St. John the Baptist is known as the forerunner to the King. He too, was prophesied about in the Book of Malachi in which Malachi writes, "Behold, I will send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come into His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, whom you desire" (**Malachi 3:1**). The messenger refers to John the Baptist, whom the Lord sends in order to prepare way for the coming of the Messiah. Turn to St. **Matthew 11:10** and see how the prophecy becomes fulfilled.



St. John the Baptist gave people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sin. He brought many to the Lord. He was born to Zachariah the priest and Elizabeth during their old age. St. Luke records, "Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord" (**Luke 1:6**). He was filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb. He preached the coming of the Kingdom of God. His message was: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near" (**Matthew 3:2**). He asked the people to "prepare the way of

the Lord, make his paths straight" (**Matthew 3:3**). Those who came to St. John the Baptist to be baptized in the river Jordan repented and confessed their sins. Thus, he prepared the people of Israel for the King.

Annunciation - the announcement of the birth of the King



In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to a virgin named Mary, the daughter of Joachim and Anna. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph of the house of David. Angel Gabriel appeared to her and announced that she was highly favored in the sight of God, and that she would bear a son and he shall be named Jesus. The angel continues: "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end" (**Luke 1:32-33**).

Mary was awe struck at this and asked the angel how it would take place, since she was unmarried. The angel replied that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and she would give birth to the child. Mary humbled herself, and said: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (**Luke 1:38**). Here, Mary shows her obedience to God. She believes in the incarnation of Christ as the work of God. Mary hears the will of the Lord and she obeys God.

The angel appeared also to Joseph in a dream and said "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit" (**Matthew 1:20**). Joseph obeyed and took her with him.

We know *Immanuel* to mean "God with Us." Before even the birth of Christ, we know that God is with us. We see St. John the Baptist and Mother Mary's faith in the coming of the Savior and we should pray that we can have that same obedience and faith in Christ our God.

Lesson 7 - God Became Man

OBJECTIVE: STUDENTS WILL RECALL THE COMING OF THE LORD ON EARTH.

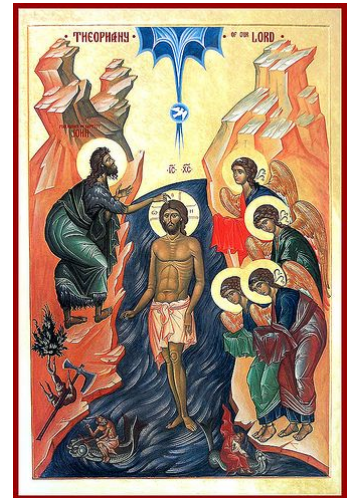


Birth of Christ (St. Luke 2:1-20)

The Birth of Christ is also known as the incarnation of Christ. Christ becomes **incarnate**, or takes on the nature of a human in body and in nature. During the Feast of the Nativity, we remember the importance of Christ's existence on this earth as fully man and yet, fully God. Christ humbles Himself and lives among us sinners, that He might fulfill the will of God and save us from this fallen world of sin.

Baptism of Jesus (St. Luke 3:21-22)

God's word led St. John the Baptist through all of the country around Jordan preaching the baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins. Jesus went from Galilee to the River Jordan to be baptized by John. When Jesus Christ came out of the water and prayed, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him as a dove. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:17)



The Temptation of Jesus

Then the Holy Spirit led Jesus to the desert. Jesus fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry. The devil approached Him and said, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." (Matthew 4:3). But He answered the devil: "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4).

When the devil realized that he failed in tempting Jesus, he took Jesus to the temple. He asked Jesus to throw Himself down to prove that He was the son of God. Christ could have done this and just led ordinary people towards Him this way, but the

Son of God had to prove His love in suffering and sacrificing for others. He knew this was not the right way or time.

Then the devil tried to tempt Jesus in another way. He led Jesus to a very high mountain. He showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. He asserted himself to be the master of all those things in the world. He told Jesus that if He would fall down and worship the devil, he would give all those to Jesus. Jesus refused the kingdom of the world. God's Kingdom is not one of earthly power or possessions but in a world eternal, filled with glory and peace.

Jesus drove away the devil saying: "Begone, Satan! for it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve'" (**Matthew 4:10**).

Through these temptations, Jesus shows us how we can fight the evil one. While the devil may tempt us into pleasures of this world, we must remember how Christ stayed strong to fight the devil. We can conquer such evil through our own prayer life, fasting and by following the Word of God.

Learning about how God became man and what Jesus did during His life on Earth is important to us as we face the world that surrounds us. It is important to remember that although Jesus Christ is fully God, he always lived fully as man during His time on earth.

This means He does fully relate and understands the problems that we go through in our daily lives. Following Christ means taking our crosses and our burdens to God and letting God have complete reign of our lives. To follow Jesus, we will have to face all sorts of difficult times and decisions. Jesus Christ says, "And he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it" (**Matthew 10:38-39**).



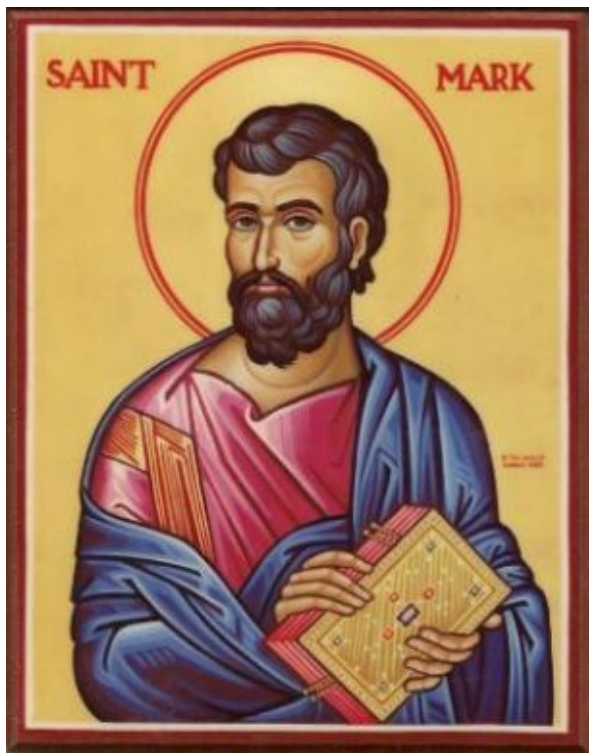
Lesson 8 - Oriental Orthodox

OBJECTIVE: RECOGNIZE ST. MARK AND ST. GREGORY
AS FATHERS OF THE ORIENTAL ORTHODOX CHURCH

Oriental Orthodox Churches have been consistently marked by persecution and massacres throughout the times of the Byzantine, Persian, Muslim and Ottoman powers. The sufferings shape the lives of many believers, and yet the life of the cross has not led them to walk away from the Church.

The Oriental Orthodox churches include the Ethiopian, Coptic, Armenian, Syrian, Indian and Eritrean Churches. Many of the members of these churches live in Ethiopia, Egypt, Eritrea, Armenia, India, Syria and Lebanon as well as in other parts of the world. The Oriental Orthodox are part of the ancient church, which was founded during the early times of the apostles.

St. Mark, The Evangelist of Egypt



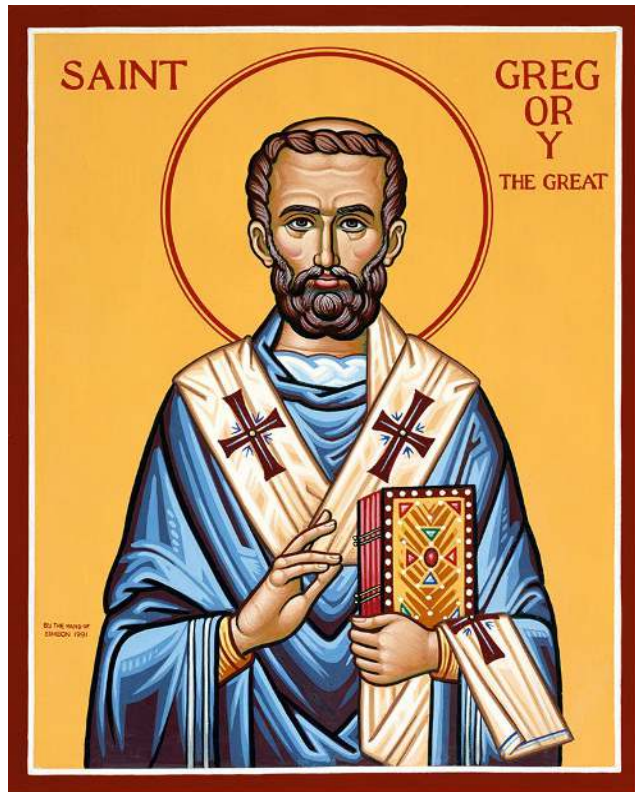
The holy and glorious Apostle and Evangelist Mark is numbered among the seventy apostles. He is the founder of the Church of Alexandria. He is also known as a founder of the Coptic Orthodox Church, with whom the Indian Orthodox Church share Holy communion.

St. Mark's surname was John. His house was the first Christian church. He was born in Cyrene and was called Mark after his family had moved to Jerusalem. St. Mark was close with St. Peter, and visited his house often, from whom he learned much about the Christian teaching.

One day, St. Mark and his father Aristopolus were walking near the Jordan river, when they found two raving lions. In order to save his son, Aristopolus ordered Mark to save himself and escape. Mark, having faith in God

stayed and prayed, “O, Christ, Son of God, protect us from the evil of these two beasts and terminate their offspring from this wilderness.” Soon after he prayed that prayer, the beasts fell dead and Aristopolus soon believed in Christ as a result of his son.

The Light-Bearer In Armenia: St. Gregory the Illuminator



Our father among the saints Gregory the Enlightener, also known as Gregory the Illuminator, was the religious leader associated with establishing the Christian identity of Armenia. Armenia became the first country to establish itself as a Christian nation. The Armenian Church falls under the Oriental Orthodox churches and therefore, we are in communion with the Armenian Church.

St. Gregory was born around the year 257. His father was killed because he assassinated his kinsman King Khosrov. To escape persecution from this as he grew, Gregory was taken to Caesarea where he was raised a Christian. In about 280, St. Gregory returned to

Armenia and entered the service of King Tiridates III, who was the son of Khosrov. Unfortunately, Tiridates was not accepting of Christianity and commanded Gregory to renounce his faith. When he did not do so, Gregory was put into prison where he was tortured. Overtime, Tiridates developed an illness and suffered. Eventually, through the prayers of Gregory, Tiridates was cured, his heart softened and he rejected idols and preached about the glory of Christ.

Reading and learning about the life of the saints show us the importance of great faith. Our forefathers and the great saints of the Church had such incredible, strong faith and were willing to risk their life in this world for Christ. They believed and trusted in the protection of God and the plan that God had for their life. Likewise, we should model the forefathers of our Church and ask them to pray for us so that our lives might resemble theirs.

Lesson 9 - Lord, Teach Us

OBJECTIVE: STUDENTS WILL RECOGNIZE HOW CHRIST TEACHES US TO PRAY.

Throughout Scripture, Christ teaches us to pray. He speaks to His people of prayer, and He even models prayer through His own life. Our Lord is our ultimate Teacher, and we learn through Him.

Lord, Teach Us To Pray (Matthew 6:5-15; 7:7-12; 26:36-45)

Jesus, the Son of God, dedicated the early morning hours with His heavenly Father in prayer. Through prayer, He began and finished His ministry. Through prayer, He continued His relationship with His heavenly Father. Through prayer, He gained the strength and courage to face the most difficult situations in His life. He showed us a perfect pattern of how we should live our ordinary life with the heavenly Father.

During the time of Jesus, many were content with their public prayers, which they prayed in order to show others that they were praying. However, Jesus taught His disciples not to babble like others while praying. Instead, He tells them to pray to the Heavenly Father in secret. True prayer is a dialogue, and not a monologue, which establishes an intimate relationship with God. This means that prayer needs to be a two-way communication between us and God. It may seem like God cannot hear us and that we cannot hear him sometimes, but God listens to our prayer. St. Matthew writes, "But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (**St. Matthew 6:6**). Intimate prayer allows us to connect with the Lord and open our hearts to him. Jesus Christ models intimate prayer, as He himself often went alone to a hill, desert or garden to pray.

Lord's Prayer

"In this manner, therefore, pray:

Our Father in heaven,

Hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts,

As we forgive our debtors.

And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.” **(St. Matthew 6:9-13)**

This prayer dedicates mankind to the glory of God, as seen in the first sentence, “Hallowed be Your name.” The six petitions that follow help man become like God. “Your kingdom come,” is a prayer for obedience. “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” tells us that in addition to obedience, we must follow the example of Christ and live to the will of God. “Give us this day our daily bread,” is where we pray for the nourishment and fulfillment of the body, mind and soul. We ask for forgiveness for our sins when we say, “Forgive our debts and sins as we have forgiven our debtors.” We see here that forgiveness is mutual as we must forgive others in the same way we know Christ forgives us. We pray for protection from suffering, tests, and temptations that are beyond our control when we say, “Lead us not into temptation.” Finally we pray that God, “Delivers us from evil.” This prayer is for the protection from Satan himself. Christ Himself teaches us to pray in this manner.



Jesus Christ at Gethsemane

The 'Portrait of Jesus Christ at Gethsemane' has been a focus of meditation for Christians through the centuries. Here we see Christ, in total grief, submitting Himself in obedience to the will of God, His Father. Here we have to note the relationship that Jesus had with the Father. He was talking to God personally about His grievances and willingness. Is this relationship with God possible for us? We are also able to pray to God, using the model that Christ sets for us at Gethsemane. We too should pray on our knees in a personal, intimate prayer to God. Our relationship with the Lord strengthens through prayer.

As we read Scripture, take note of what Christ teaches us. Particularly in the Gospel, Christ shows us how to live, how to pray, how to treat others and how to submit to the Kingdom through His life and words.

LESSON 10 - BEHOLD, YOUR KING

OBJECTIVE: RECOGNIZE HOW JESUS IS DIFFERENT FROM A TYPICAL KING, AND RECALL THE STORY OF JESUS ENTRANCE INTO JERUSALEM.

Behold, Your King Comes To You (Mt. 1:11)

Have you ever seen a royal procession? A procession for a king or queen? Perhaps not. A procession for a royal being would be one filled with high-end decoration, horses, chariots drawn by horses, regiments of soldiers, music and huge crowds. But Jesus, the true King, made His royal entry into Jerusalem in a different way. Continue reading to find out the entrance of Jesus, the King, into Jerusalem.

The Majestic entry of Jesus

At the time when Jesus made his triumphant entry, Jerusalem and the surrounding neighborhood were packed. Many people had come to participate in the feast of Passover.

Christ foresaw the cross, His death, and He knew that it was His last Passover. He wished to present Himself as the King. The Jews expected the Messiah, when He comes, to appear in all glory and power, defeat all enemies and deliver them from oppression. They expected something grand, something of a royal presentation. However, the kingship of Jesus was not as they imagined. Jesus was the King of Peace. His Kingship was of humility and sacrifice.

The King Enters Triumphantly

On His way to Jerusalem, Jesus reached Bethpage, a village on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. He sent two of His disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me.... They brought the donkey and the colt, and put their garments on them, and he sat thereon." (**St. Mark 11:2**). It is significant that He chose a donkey to ride on. This contradicts typical thoughts of a king on a horse with dignity and grandeur. It is seemingly unfit for a King to be riding a donkey, no doubt.

He could have chosen a horse. The choice of donkey shows the nature of His kingship. A horse is for a warrior king. But a King on a mission of peace would ride on a donkey, the symbol of simplicity, peace and humility. He mounted the donkey and went to Jerusalem accompanied by His disciples and a very great multitude. Prophet Zechariah foresees the victorious entry of the Messiah into Jerusalem and says how it differs from that of an ordinary king.

The prophet says:

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Lo, your king comes to you;
triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on a donkey.
on a colt, the foal of a donkey. **(Zechariah 9:9)**

The prophet's prophecy is fulfilled at this time of the entrance of Christ.

The reception to the king

The crowd received Jesus as a king. The reception was simple and spontaneous. They spread their garments on the road. They held branches of the palm trees. Spreading of white garments and waving of palm branches denote the coming of a triumphant king **(2 Kings 9:13 and Revelation 7:9-12)**. The crowd was filled with joy. They greeted their king shouting: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest! **(Matthew 21:9)**.

The word *Hosanna* is a statement of Joy. It means: "Lord, save us, we pray," or "Save us, we beseech Thee." It proclaims that the Lord is their Savior and king. Jesus the king was making His way to the cross. There, He offered Himself for the salvation of mankind.



The cross is His throne. His kingship lies in His humility and sacrifice. We see the royalty of the Heavenly King through these Scripture readings and especially through Christ's entrance in Jerusalem.

Lesson 11 - Lenten Journey: God Calls Us

OBJECTIVE: RETELL THE STORY OF JUDAS BETRAYING CHRIST AND PETER DENYING CHRIST, AND BETTER UNDERSTAND TRUE REPENTANCE.

During the Lenten season, we walk with Christ and remember all that Christ went through during His ministry and time on earth. We specifically remember His betrayal and His denial as a way for us to remember the proper way to come running back to God after we sin. We can be like Judas Iscariot, who lets sin overtake him, or we can be like Simon Peter and face true repentance for the forgiveness of God.

Behold, The Son of Man Is Betrayed (Matthew 26:36-27:1-10)

Jesus knew that the hour had come when He would be betrayed and handed over to the high priest to be crucified. He knew that one of His disciples would betray Him and that all His disciples would fall away from Him at that crucial hour.

Jesus Betrayed

Judas Iscariot entered the garden accompanied by a crowd with swords and clubs, sent by the chief priest and elders of the people. Judas betrayed Jesus by calling Him, "Hail Master!" and kissing Him. This was the sign he had given to the soldiers to identify Jesus from among His disciples. The soldiers then arrested Jesus. Jesus was betrayed by Judas, one of His twelve disciples, for thirty pieces of silver. When Judas found that Jesus was condemned to death by the authorities, he was filled with remorse. He brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priest and elders saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood" (**Matthew 27:4**). But they refused to accept the coins back as well as the responsibility for his action. Unfortunately, Judas threw away the pieces of silver into the temple and went and hanged himself due to remorse and despair.

Peter denied Jesus three times

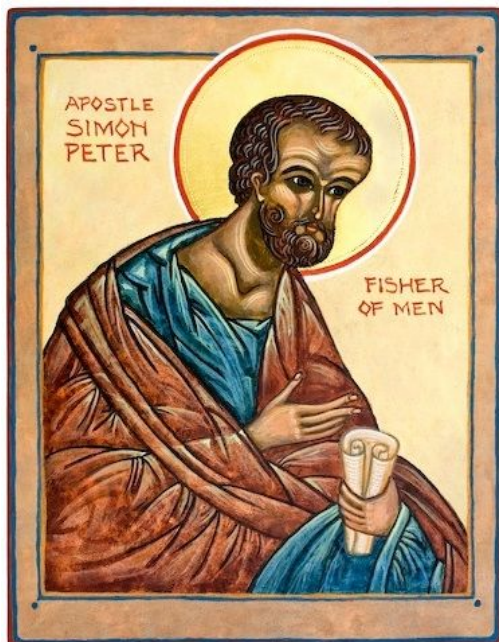
Another sorrowful incident was when Jesus was denied by Peter, one of the twelve apostles. After the arrest, Jesus was led to the palace of the high priest for trial. Peter followed Him and anxiously waited outside the courtyard to see what would happen to his master. A maid who passed by, seeing Peter remarked, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean". But Peter denied it saying, "I do not know what you mean." Again, another maid made a similar comment. Peter denied Jesus for the second time with an oath, "I do not know the man." Then some bystanders repeated the same suspicion. Peter denied Jesus for the third time saying, "I do not know the man" (**Matthew 26:74**). Then Peter heard the cock crow. He remembered the words of Jesus, who told Peter earlier, "Truly, I say to you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times,"

(Matthew 26:34). The thought that he had denied his beloved master was unbearable to him. He went out and wept bitterly.

True repentance

Judas's betrayal was deliberate and calculated. It was motivated by greed. He could not experience God's forgiveness and love. The betrayal continued to haunt and torment him and no ray of hope and faith entered his heart. The darkness and despair led him to kill himself. Judas was seized with remorse, but he did not repent.

On the other hand, in the case of Peter, he repented with tears. He believed that the Lord would forgive him. In fact, his denial was not deliberate. It was a sense of fear and insecurity that made him deny Jesus. Ultimately, he loved Jesus. He made a mistake out of fear-- he did not have the courage to acknowledge his allegiance to Jesus and face persecution. But when Peter realized that Jesus had foretold of his denial, he was deeply hurt. The streams of tears that ran down his cheeks relieved him because of Peter's true repentance.



During the Lenten season, and at all times, we must be like Peter. We observe the fast during the Lenten season to remember all that Christ went through during His time here on earth. His trials and tribulations show us the ultimate sacrifice that God the Father made for us, who are weak and sinful. We are a fallen people, we are sinful and we make mistakes. The important thing is that when we come to Christ with our mistakes and our sinful nature, we repent with our tears and our sorrows. If we allow sin to overtake us and not let hope and faith enter our hearts, then sin will reign in our lives, like Judas. If we are like Simon Peter, who repent and comes running back to Christ waiting with open arms, then God shines His grace on us and we are forgiven of our sins.

Lesson 12 - The Second Coming of Christ

OBJECTIVE: DISCUSS IMPORTANCE OF PREPARING
FOR THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST.



Vigilance or watchfulness is an important characteristic of our life in the Kingdom of God. We do not know when the Lord will come and we also do not know how long our time on earth will be. That's not to say that we should be scared, but rather we should rejoice in the acknowledgement that our life after death can be one in His Kingdom. Therefore, we should always be watchful and prepared to receive Him at any time. When the Lord comes, He will take us to the kingdom in its fullness. We have already entered into the Kingdom of God through Holy Baptism and it is up to us to continue growing as part of His Kingdom. We must fill our mind with the beautiful hope for the Second Coming of our Lord. Jesus Christ taught us the necessity of watchfulness and holiness through several parables. We remember what parables are from lesson 5. Continue reading to discover how Jesus talks about His Second Coming through the use of parables.

Parable of ten maidens (St. Matthew 25:1-13)

Read **St. Matthew 25:1-13**.

This parable talks about the need to be spiritually prepared for the Second Coming of our Lord. The Church is often compared to a bride who is prepared to be married to Jesus Christ, the bridegroom. So, like a bride waiting for union with the bridegroom, we have to wait and watch in the hope of the final reunion with Christ. We might never know what time that might be, and that is why it is so important that we continue to stay united with Christ during our lives on earth. It is vital that we continue being watchful and prayerful. The fullness of Christ, our bridegroom is yet to come.

Parable of the Wedding Feast (St. Matthew 22:1-14)

Read **St. Matthew 22:1-14**.

In this parable, the Kingdom of God is compared to a wedding feast. We are invited to share in the joy of the kingdom. But, in order to enter that joy, we need to adorn ourselves with white garments of righteousness. In the Book of Revelation, we find that the Church is pictured as the bride clothed with fine linen, bright and pure, ready to receive Jesus Christ, the bridegroom. St. John then says: "The fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints" (**Revelation 19:7-8**). As we wait for the Lord, we must prepare ourselves by making our life holy and pure.

Both the above parables are centered on a wedding feast. The first one teaches how we should be watchful and vigilant while we wait for the coming of Jesus Christ. The second one points to the fact that we should be holy and righteous in our life so that we can enter into the kingdom of God with Jesus Christ. Once again, we do not know at what time or hour Christ will come again for His final judgment. It is then necessary that we remain watchful and ready. We need to remember to be prayerful, to partake in the sacraments of the Church, to repent of our sins so that we remain in unity with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Lesson 13 - The Early Church

OBJECTIVE: EXPLAIN THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH AND THE FOUR CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EARLY CHURCH.

Start off this lesson by reading the story of the Pentecost in **Acts 2:1-13**.



On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was given to the disciples and the Holy Church was born. The Holy Spirit's intervention made a complete change in the lives of ordinary people. The status differences between the poor and the rich as well as the Gentiles and the Jews were removed by the new spirit of devotion, love, and fellowship.

According to Acts of the Apostles, there are four main characteristics of the early Church that made the early Christians a true worshipping community. A precise and valuable account of it can be seen in **Acts 2:41 -47** and **4:31 -37**.

The four characteristics of the early Church are listed in the Acts: "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." (**Acts 2:42**)

1. Apostles' teaching

The apostles were the eyewitnesses of Lord Jesus Christ's life and ministry in this world. They witnessed His suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. They experienced the power of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The apostles were also given the authority by Jesus to teach and make disciples, preach, heal the sick, forgive sins, and to baptize the believers in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The early Christians knew the apostles were true followers of Christ. They found the model of Christian living in the lives of the apostles. Therefore, the early Church gave the apostles' teachings a unique place by obeying and following their teachings.

2. Fellowship

The most intimate and complete quality of the early Church is its characteristic of fellowship. The early Christians met regularly to have fellowship together. Through fellowship, everyone was considered equal. They were selfless, caring and compassionate to one another. St. Luke, the author of the Acts of the Apostles, wrote: "And all who believed were together and had all things in common" (**Acts 2:44**). The company of all believers was of one heart and soul, and shared the spirit of service. Through the fellowship, the early Christians were able to encourage and support the needy ones among them.

3. The Breaking of Bread

As Jesus Christ commanded in **St. Matthew 26:26-28**, the early Christians continued to celebrate the New Passover, (the New Covenant or the Holy Qurbana) which was established by Jesus at the Last Supper. Apostle Paul clearly states: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" (**1 Corinthians 10:16**). The participation in the Body and Blood of our Lord is fellowship between Jesus Christ and the believers. The believers, who are the Church, are the Body of Christ. In the Early Church, the believers brought the bread and wine. This concept motivated the early believers care for each other in fellowship.

4. The prayers

The early Church was a praying Church; their hearts were filled with prayers and praises to God. They attended the temple to worship the Lord daily. Gradually they introduced the reading of Scriptures, singing of the psalms, and preaching the word of God into their worship schedule. The early Christians/early Church regularly gathered together and worshipped the Lord by following the apostles' teachings, by having fellowship, by celebrating our Lord's Last Supper by the breaking of the bread, and by praying for each other. Their willingness to obey the apostles and elders show humility and submission to each other. Fellowship, love and care for one another and for the needy, the participation in the Holy Mysteries of our Lord, and the constant prayers and glorifying of our Lord are all characteristics of the early Church. Along with the blessings of the Holy Spirit, these qualities molded them to be brave enough to proclaim the Gospel of our resurrected Lord Jesus Christ throughout the world, even in the midst of oppositions and great persecutions.

The early Church carried out the will of the Master in letter and spirit. The disciples started their work first in Jerusalem, where the Church was born. They spoke the word of God boldly, healed the sick, raised the dead and baptized those who believed in Jesus Christ in the name of the Holy Trinity. Just like the Holy Church devoted themselves to the teachings of the Church, fellowship with one another, participation of the Eucharist and prayers, we too as part of the ancient Church, continue to live like the apostles once lived before us. Our Orthodox Church is the same as the Church of the first Christians described in the Acts of the Holy Apostles.



Lesson 14 - Saint Stephen

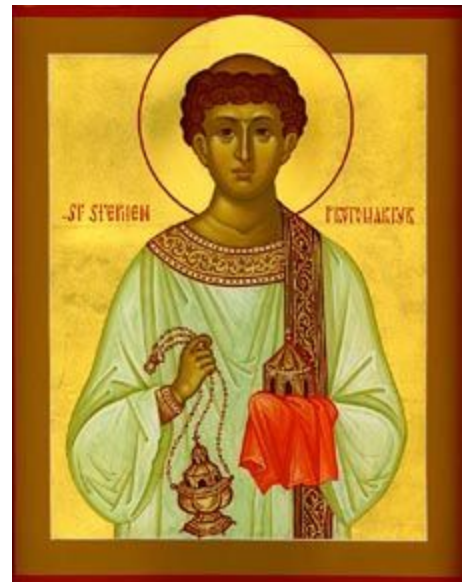
OBJECTIVE: STUDENTS WILL RECALL THE STORY OF THE LIFE OF SAINT STEPHEN.

Jerusalem was the birthplace of the first Christian Community. After the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, many were added to the Christian Church. "All who believed were together and had all things in common" (**Acts. 2: 44**). They sold their possessions and distributed them to all according to their need. At first the apostles themselves were doing the work of distributing things to the needy.

As the members increased, the apostles could not attend to the needs of people properly. Also they found it difficult for them to carry out the work entrusted to them. Their mission was to preach the gospel.

Again, there were Jews who spoke Greek and some who spoke Hebrew among the Christians. There arose a complaint from the Greek speaking Jews against the Hebrew speaking Jews that the former's widows were not well looked after. This situation forced the apostles to find some devout men who could be entrusted with these works.

"And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables" (**Acts 6:2**). The apostles explained the new situation and asked them to pick out from among them seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom that they might appoint them to that duty. This would help the apostles to devote themselves to prayer and preaching the word of God. Seven men were chosen. They were brought before the apostles. They prayed and laid their hands upon them. They are the first deacons of the early Church.



The word 'deacon' means 'servant'. We have deacons also in our present day Church. We see them helping the priest or bishop in worship. The deacon is a link between the bishop or priest and the congregation. He calls the congregation to prayer and reminds them of the importance of the various parts of the worship that follows. He helps the priest and the bishop in carrying out their pastoral works.

The first among the seven deacons was Stephen. He was a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit and full of grace and power **(Acts. 6:5-8)**.

Some Jews who disputed with Stephen could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke **(Acts 6:10)**. The people seized him and brought him before the Council of the Jews, the Sanhedrin. There Stephen made a powerful speech and established the salvation history that started with Abraham, continued through Moses and David, and reached its perfection and realization in Jesus Christ. Hearing this, the people were enraged against him. But he was full of the Holy Spirit. He had then a vision of the glory of God. He himself says about that: "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God."**(Acts 7:56)**



The enemies dragged him outside the city and stoned him to death. As they were stoning him, Stephen prayed: "Lord Jesus, receive my Spirit." Then he knelt down and prayed for his adversaries: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" **(Acts 7:60)**.

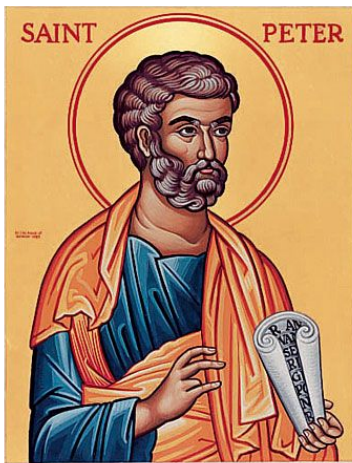
This prayer of Stephen reminds us of the prayer of Jesus on the Cross. We can look at the life of St. Stephen as a model for our lives. We can ask St. Stephen to pray for us, and learn from him how to love and forgive others.

Lesson 15 - Saints Peter and Paul

OBJECTIVE: RECALL STORIES OF THE LIVES OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL. STUDENTS WILL EXPLAIN HOW THEIR LIVES CAN BE A MODEL FOR US.

In this chapter, you will learn about some of the forefathers of our Church, St. Peter and St. Paul. These two men lived their lives for Christ and are great examples of the lives that we ought to be living this day. We ought to be living a life that is completely committed to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

St. Peter



Peter was a native fisherman of Bethsaida, a village near Lake Tiberias. He was introduced to Jesus by his brother Andrew (**John 1:41-42**). He was the eldest of the apostles and therefore revered by all. Peter, as well as James and John, had the privilege to be with Jesus at several important occasions. Peter sometimes appears as the representative of the apostles. “Peter” was the name given to him by Jesus. Simon was his former name. “Peter,” or “Cephas,” means “rock.” His faith in Jesus Christ was as firm as a rock. Yet in the face of tribulations Peter failed to adhere to his faith, as we recall the story of Peter denying Christ.

Peter and the other apostles were completely changed after the descent of the Holy Spirit. They were ready to face any opposition for their Lord. Peter's speech on the day of Pentecost portrays his boldness (**Acts 2**). The disciples scattered after the martyrdom of Stephen. The Church spread to other towns around Jerusalem. As a result, Christian communities were established in Judea, Samaria, Lydda, Joppa and Caesarea. Peter was the leader of missionary activities in these places.

Peter stayed primarily in Jerusalem until his arrest by King Herod. When in prison, he was visited at night by an angel and released (**Acts 5:17-42**). We don't know much about Peter after his release from prison. We know he was present at the council in Jerusalem. After that, tradition tells us that he had been to Rome and to many other places where he preached the word of God. It is probable that Peter visited Rome. It is believed that Peter suffered martyrdom in Rome during the persecution of Emperor Nero (64-67 A.D.). One tradition says that he was crucified head downwards to satisfy his own desire to be in the posture of kissing the feet of the crucified Lord. His feast day

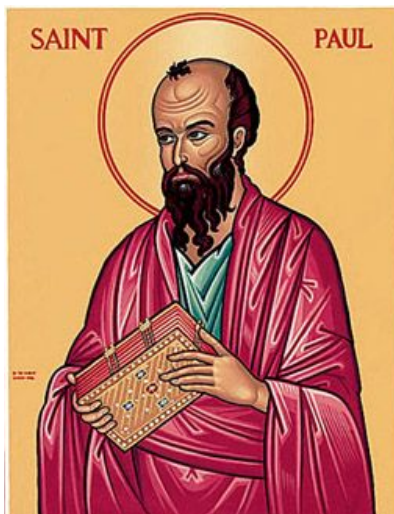
as well as that of Paul is June 29. Let us not forget to ask St. Peter to pray for us and for our relationship with our Heavenly Father, as Peter's faith was as firm as a rock.

St. Paul, The Apostle of The Gentiles (Acts. 9:1-31)

In the previous lesson about St. Stephen, we learned that one of his persecutors was a man named Saul. We later learned that Saul eventually became one of the greatest Christian Missionaries in our history.

Saul wanted to persecute the Christians in Damascus and therefore, with authority from the high priest, he arrested many Christians. On his way to Damascus, an amazing incident took place that changed Saul's life forever. As he was nearing the city, he saw a very bright light from the sky, flashing all around him. This light blinded his eyes and he fell down. He heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The voice said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting". The guards with Saul saw the dazzling sight but did not hear the voice. When Saul got up from the ground, he could not see. His companions led him by the hand to Damascus. He remained there blind for three days and all that time he did not take any food or drink.

In Damascus, there lived a disciple named Ananias. The Lord told Ananias in a vision to go to Saul and heal him of his blindness. Ananias was astonished to hear this as he had heard that Saul was one of the worst enemies of the Church. Ananias obediently went to the house where Saul stayed. He placed his hand on Saul and said, "Brother Saul,... be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately Saul was able to see again.



Ananias baptized Saul, and Saul transformed his life and became a fervent follower of Jesus Christ. Saul later changed his name to Paul. Paul became the great missionary of the early Church.

After his conversion into Christianity, Paul comes into contact with Barnabas, an active Christian worker. Barnabas and Paul came to Antioch and preached the Gospel. Paul led a good life after his conversion, bringing many to Christ.

Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, during which time he endured a long imprisonment. According to tradition, Paul died a martyr in Rome on the same day of the martyrdom of St. Peter. Paul, before being martyred writes, "the

time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day” (**2 Timothy 4:6-8**). Just like the other saints we learned about in prior lessons, let us not forget to ask St. Paul to pray for us. We can ask St. Paul to pray that our hearts and minds might be open to receiving the fullness of the wonderful Father.



Lesson 16 - Saint Thomas

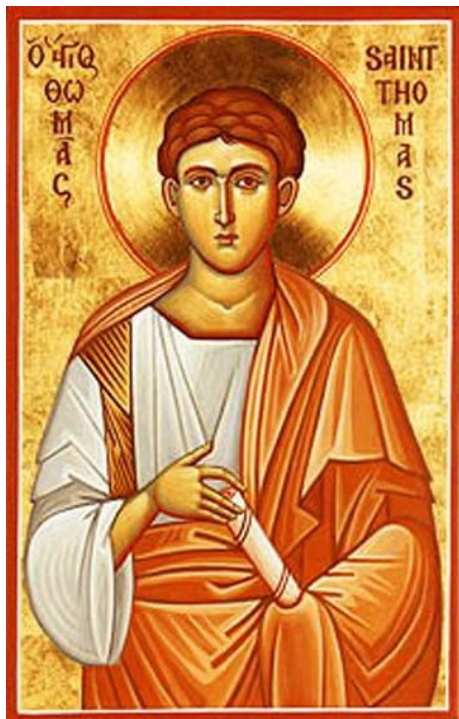
OBJECTIVE: EXPLAIN WHY ST. THOMAS IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE INDIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH.

St. Thomas, the Apostle of India

What we know of Thomas, one of the twelve disciples, comes from the four gospels and what has been passed down through ancient traditions of St. Thomas Christians in India.

In John's Gospel, we see two accounts of Thomas that are very important. The first comes from **John 11:16** "Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "let us also go, that we may die with Him." This statement is a prophecy of his own future martyrdom. It also illustrates the path that all believers must take -- that we *die* daily to the world for the sake of following Christ.

The second account that we remember is from **John 20:28** "And Thomas answered and said to Him, 'my Lord and my God!'" This statement is a powerful declaration of faith. The doubt of Thomas is described as blessed because it was not a doubt of resistance to truth, but one that desperately desired a truthful answer-- a 'doubt which gave birth to faith' when the answer was revealed. The Conversion of Thomas' doubt into faith led him to the clearest confession of Christ's divinity, addressing Jesus as *My Lord and my God*.



Thomas came to confess Jesus Christ as "Lord and God" – a greater confession of faith than any of the Apostles had previously uttered.

Sometimes this confession of faith is held in Thomas' hands in icons depicting him, though more commonly it is the scroll denoting his rank of Apostle that is shown. The most striking thing about the Eastern Orthodox icons of St. Thomas is he is shown as a beardless youth, as he was a teenager (like St. John) when he walked with Jesus. The youthfulness of the

Apostle Thomas is something worthy of consideration when thinking about his “doubts”.

However, in the paintings and icons we see of St. Thomas in India, we see him as a bearded older man. The disciples were sent all over the world to spread the Good News, and St. Thomas was the Apostle sent to preach the Gospel in India. As Indian Orthodox Christians, we are more familiar with the older, bearded image of St. Thomas.

Thomas was sent to India and he landed at Cranganore in Malabar in A.D. 52.. He preached among the Malabarians. Many families, including several Brahmin families, converted to Christianity. He established churches in seven locations: Maliankara, Palur (Chavakkad), Parur, Gokamangalam, Niranam, Chayal, and Kurakkenikollam (Quilon).

According to tradition, we believe that St.Thomas ordained bishops from four families - Pakalomattom, Sankarapuri, Kalli and Kaliyankal.



Martyrdom of St. Thomas

When he returned from his journey he was stabbed to death at a place now known as St. Thomas Mount near Mylapore in Madras in A.D. 72. His mortal remains were entombed there. Later, his remains were taken to Edessa in Persia in the fourth century. The Orthodox Church in India observes two feast days of St. Thomas. One is on December 21, the day when St. Thomas died. The other feast day is on July 3 commemorating the transfer of the relics of St. Thomas to Edessa. The Church that St. Thomas founded in India still remains and expands. Kerala is the largest Christian populated state in India. There are over 1.5 million Orthodox Church members in India.