

Sunday School Syllabus

Year 5



COPTIC ORTHODOX DIOCESE *of* LONDON

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I Believe in One God

A Trinity is His Nature

Bible References: Genesis 1:26, Deuteronomy 6:4, Matthew 28:19, Luke 1:35 and 1 John 5:7.

Lesson Aim:

To gain an understanding of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

Lesson Objectives:

Know: The doctrine of our Christian faith.

Feel: The importance of staying within the Church's teachings and avoiding foreign beliefs and ideas.

Practice: Learning the Orthodox Creed and understand.

Memory Verse:

"For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one."
(1 John 5:7)



Lesson Content

We believe in one God – the Father, The Son, and the Holy Spirit - these are **one in divine essence, not three**. The Father is the Origin, the Son is begotten from the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. All three hypostasis are equal in divine essence and glory, none are greater than the other.

However, all 3 hypostasis have different actions:

- **The Father:** is the **Origin** and **Creator**, He created heaven and earth and all things seen and unseen.
- **The Son:** is the **Word** of God (**Logos** of God). He is the **Redeemer/Saviour** who took flesh, and died for our salvation.
- **The Holy Spirit:** is the **Life-Giver**, the **Comforter**, He spoke by the prophets. He **declares** to us the things of God.

[Servants, please present this diagram to the students and explain it]

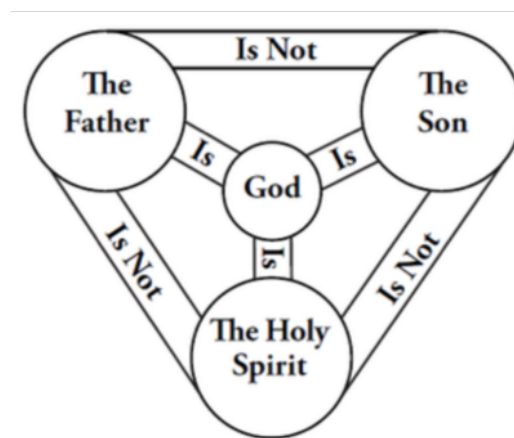


Diagram illustrates the 3 hypostasis of the Holy Trinity who are one in divine essence; but they have distinct actions.

The Holy Trinity existed since eternity, and was declared to us in the Old Testament, in Genesis chapter 1:

“In the beginning God **created** the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1)

“God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.” (Genesis 1:3)

“And the **Spirit** of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” (Genesis 1:2)

The Heresy of Arius

A bishop named Arius was teaching false teachings; Arius denied the Divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ; he considered that Christ was not consubstantial with the Father and that He was created.

The Church refused his teachings and held an Ecumenical Council (a big meeting) in a city called Nicea in the year 325 AD. Many bishops from all around the world attended this council. Pope Alexandros also attended, and he took with him his disciple St Athanasius who was a deacon at that time. St Athanasius played a very important role in explaining the divinity of the Holy Trinity from the Holy Bible.

The Council decided the following:

- Arius was excommunicated due to his false teachings and refusal to repent of his sins.
- The council decided to sum up the Christian faith in a crystal clear definition, and so the Nicene Creed was written, which says:

"We believe in **one God; God the Father** the Pantocrator, Who **created** heaven and earth, and all things seen and unseen. We believe in **one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Only-Begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages. Light of Light; True God of True God, begotten, not created; of One Essence with the Father, by whom all things were made...** Yes, we believe in the **Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father...**"

Key Words

Essence: 'substance' (e.g. the essence of the Holy Spirit is 'divine')

Hypostasis: 'persons of the Trinity' (e.g. the 3 hypostasis (3 persons of the Trinity) are, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit)

Divine / divinity: 'relating to God'

Heresy: A belief or action that disagrees with the principles/doctrine of the Church

Application



Exercise

- Learn the Creed and understand the statements of our faith.
- Beware of false teachings that are not in line with the teachings of our Church.

THE HOLY TRINITY			
	Father	Son	Holy Spirit
	Fatherhood <i>(The Origin)</i>	Sonship <i>(Begotten from the Father)</i>	Procession <i>(Proceeds from the Father)</i>
Truth	The Truthful <i>(the Source of truth)</i>	The Truth "I am the way, the truth , and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6)	The Spirit of Truth "The Spirit of truth , whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you." (John 14:17)
Wisdom	The Wise "To God our Saviour, Who alone is wise , be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen. (Jude 1:25)	The Wisdom "...but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." (1 Corinthians 1:24)	Spirit of Wisdom "The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. (Isaiah 11:2)
Love	The Lover "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world." (John 17:24) ['You loved me' → The Lover]	Love By this we know love , because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (1 John 3:16)	Spirit of Love "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." (2 Timothy 1:7)
Power	The Powerful "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." (Matthew 6:13)	The Power "but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." (1 Corinthians 1:24)	The Spirit of Power "But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the LORD..." (Micah 3:8)

The table illustrates the unity of the Holy Trinity as one God. For example, if we speak of a person, we can say that:

The truthful person, speaks with truth, and we can say he has the spirit of truth

The wise person, speaks with wisdom, and has the spirit of wisdom

The lover (a loving person), speaks with love, and has the spirit of love

The powerful person, speaks with power, and has the spirit of power



The Strength of The Faith

By Faith the Walls of Jericho Fell Down

Bible References: Mark 2:1-12 and John 4:46-53, Joshua 5-6.

Lesson Aim:

- To learn that if we have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, nothing will stand in our way.
- To learn that we must trust and do what God is telling us, even if we do not understand now. The two stories in the lesson show that we win if we submit to God.

Lesson Objectives:

- Know:** We must have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and God has a plan for all of us.
- Feel:** Peace and calmness because God always takes care of us.
- Practice:** Obey the commands God gives us through the Bible, our father of confession and other wise people in our life.

Memory Verse:

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"
(Hebrew 11:1)

"By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days."
(Hebrews 11:30)



Background Information for the Servant

Levels of Faith by H.H. Pope Shenouda III

There might be a person “who is weak in the faith” (Romans 14:1) or “little faith” (Matthew 8:26). Another person needs to “perfect what is lacking in [his] faith” (1 Thessalonians 3:10). A third is “slow of heart to believe”, like the two disciples of Emmaus (Luke 24:25). There may also be another who is not “not a novice” (1 Timothy 3:6). Some may be described as on whose “faith grows exceedingly” (2 Thessalonians 1:3) or they “abound in everything—in faith” (2 Corinthians 8:7). Another “continues in the faith, grounded and steadfast” (Colossians 1:23). Someone may be “steadfast in the faith” (1 Peter 5:9). One may be “rich in faith” (James 2:5). Above all those “full of faith” (Acts 6:5). The Lord said about some “great is your faith” (Matthew 15:28).

There is a strong faith in which “signs will follow those who believe” (Mark 16:17), faith that “could remove mountains” (1 Corinthians 13:2) and a greater faith which makes everything possible: “all things are possible to him who believes” (Mark 9:23).

Concerning all this, what is your position in faith? Are you a true believer? Do you have “faith working through love”? (Galatians 5:6). Do you grow in faith? Is your faith strong and great? We must remember that you need prayers so “that your faith should not fail” (Luke 22:32).

Brethren, “examine yourselves as to whether you are in faith. Test yourselves?” (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Undoubtedly, the word ‘faith’ bears deep meanings.

Faith by H.H. Pope Shenouda III

Faith is not just a set of rigid beliefs that we learn from theology and teachings of the church. Rather, faith is a deep inner conviction and complete confidence in God, His attributes and His work. Our faith in God, His existence, care and protection gives us inner peace and comfort in the heart and in the mind. It gives us confidence that God exists and He cares about us more than we do about ourselves. Therefore we have to live in this peace and continue in it.

The believer never becomes disturbed because anxiety contradicts faith; faith in God’s love, care and protection. If one believed in God’s existence everywhere, one would have an inner feeling of the holiness of any place, since God is always there. They feel secure in the presence of God, and also feel the necessity to be precise in all their actions, knowing that God sees, hears and observes all their deeds. In every sin, one says with the righteous Joseph, “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:9).

Someone who has faith understands that God reads one’s thoughts and knows the secrets of their heart, their intentions and feelings; such faith grants them modesty in their thoughts and feelings, making them bashful of God who examines all these emotions.

One’s faith in the world to come and the day of judgement when they give an account of all their deeds, thoughts, feelings and sayings makes them sure that this world is perishing. One then sees the need to be prepared for that fearful day working for eternal life after death. One keeps this thought in their heart saying with David, “Lord make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am.” (Psalms 39:4).

Faith is not just to be mentally convinced but is an action inside the heart, to lead one through their whole life. It is not a specific moment where man accepts God. It is a life-time job, where one lives in confidence that, “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1).

Therefore, the word faith, in most cases, means the whole Christian life with all its beliefs and deeds.

Lesson Content

Have you ever been in such a tough situation and you had no idea how you were going to get out of it? Maybe you were having a difficult time at school, at home, or someone you love was very sick and there was no medicine to make this person better. How would you feel? Lost? Confused? Worried? Would you lose hope? Today, we are going to explore how if we have faith in God, everything will work out to our advantage, no matter what happens as our life is in His hands.

What is faith?

Faith is the strong belief in the power of God. If we have faith in God, we can even move mountains, as our Lord Jesus said (Matthew 17:20). In the Old Testament, Abraham had faith in God: When God ordered him to leave his home town and relatives and go to where God was going to tell him, he obeyed, he did not even hesitate. His faith told him that God will take care of him, no matter what: **"By faith Abraham obeyed** when he was called to go out to the place which he would afterward receive an inheritance. And he went, **not knowing** where he was going." (Hebrews 11:8).

Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. **"By faith we understand** that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible." (Hebrews 11:3). This shows us that by faith we understand things that are not seen through the evidences which are seen. For example, when we look at creation around us, the sun, the moon, the sky, etc, we can understand and have faith that there is a Creator who is God.

Faith influences the behaviour of people towards God. People who have faith do things that show their belief in God. For example, Abraham had faith: **"By faith Abraham obeyed** when he was called to go out to the place which he would afterward receive an inheritance. And he went, **not knowing** where he was going." (Hebrews 11:8). Please read about the faith of the important personalities in the Old Testament as mentioned in Hebrews 11, and give some of these examples to the students.

Tell the two stories from the Bible: "Healing the Paralytic at Capernaum" (Mark 2:1-12) and "A Nobleman's Son Healed" (John 4:46-53).

Healing the Paralytic at Capernaum

After a few days, our Savior entered Capernaum and it became known that He is in one of the houses (which may have been Peter's house). A large crowd came to the house to the extent "that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them" (Mark 2:2). Four men came carrying a paralytic seeking the power of the Lord Jesus to heal him. The paralytic was heavy, they came a long way and when they arrived they could not reach Jesus because of the crowd. It was easy to give up, but they did not. Their faith was strong. They insisted on having the sick man brought in front of Jesus somehow. "They uncovered the roof where He was. And when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.' " (Mark 2:4-5). These four men represent the church. Having strong faith in her Lord, she feels responsible to go and bring the world which is paralysed by sin before the healing power of Christ.

A Nobleman's Son Healed

Our Lord Jesus was in Cana of Galilee. The sick person was in a different city; he was in Capernaum. The nobleman came to Cana of Galilee seeking Jesus to come to Capernaum and heal his son. " 'Sir, come down before my child dies!' Jesus said to him, 'Go your way; your son lives.' So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way." (John 4:49-50). The man believed in Jesus' power to heal even without touching the sick child or going to Capernaum. That was just by the word that He spoke.

St Peter had gone a long way in his faith. At one point in time he denied that he knew Jesus in front of a servant. However, after he gained the strength of the Holy Spirit in Pentecost, he was able to witness without any fear in front of the highest Jewish council that Jesus is the Messiah.

Judas Iscariot did not have faith although he saw all the miracles that Jesus did, but still he betrayed Jesus and loved money more than Him.

Imagine that there is a very tall, strong, brick wall. Now imagine that someone told you that if you walk around this wall a few times, and then shout as loud as you can, this very strong, tall wall would just crumble and fall. Would you believe this person? Would you do it? Well, this is exactly what happened to Joshua. Let us explore this story together...

"After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, it came to pass that the Lord spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying: 'Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them - the children of Israel... as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you.' " (Joshua 1:1-5).

The Israelites laid siege around the city of Jericho. They camped around it, so that no one could go in or out. Then the Lord instructed Joshua how to capture the city. The priests carried the ark around the city walls, preceded by seven priests blowing rams' horns. The armed soldiers went ahead of the trumpeters and the rearguard followed the ark. Joshua told the people to be silent as they marched. They marched around the city in this manner once a day for six days. Then on the seventh day, they marched around seven times. During the seventh march, the priests blew the trumpets and all the people shouted as loud as they could. The walls of the city collapsed, and the Israelites walked right into the city and they seized it and defeated the inhabitants. Those inhabitants were non-believers of God.

We have to trust the word of God even if we do not understand it. Follow what has been said and you will fully understand later. The Israelites, under the leadership of Joshua, obeyed what God told them to do in order to capture Jericho. It did not make sense that encircling Jericho, walking around it and blowing horns would make the walls of the city fall, but they did. This is the power of faith.

At the Wedding in Cana of Galilee, St Mary asked the Lord Jesus on behalf of the people to give them wine because they ran out of it. Jesus said to them, " 'Fill the waterpots with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them 'Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast.' And they took it." (John 2:7-8). The people in the wedding had faith and obeyed Jesus by filling the water pots with water. It does not make sense that filling the water pots with water would help to get wine, but they did it anyway. With God everything is possible even if we cannot understand now or even if it does not make sense, but let us obey.

Let us praise the Name of the Lord because He takes care of us as He did with the Israelites.

"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:29).

Application



Exercise

- A strong faith in God can even make miracles happen. Have that kind of faith and see. God will never let you down. Let us not question the word of God. Let us only obey, believe and act.
- As the four men carrying the paralytic did not give up despite the several difficulties they faced, we must never give up. We must do our best and have faith that God will have everything work to our advantage no matter what happens.
- One also has to ask himself or herself: What is the reality concerning the strength of my faith? Let me make this a regular prayer asking God to enhance my faith. Lord give me "the hope of righteousness by faith" (Galatians 5:5).
- As we grow up we will understand more about what God is telling us to do. All we have to do now is trust God and obey Him.
- If we have faith, we must not worry about anything because we believe that our life is in God's hands. Hence, a true believer in God's will always has peace.



How to Grow in your Faith?

Bible References: Mark 9:17-31, James 2:14-26.

Lesson Aim:

- To learn that in order for us to grow in our faith, we have to ask the Lord in our prayers to strengthen our faith.
- To learn the importance of good works that should accompany our faith. One must make a move forward towards God.

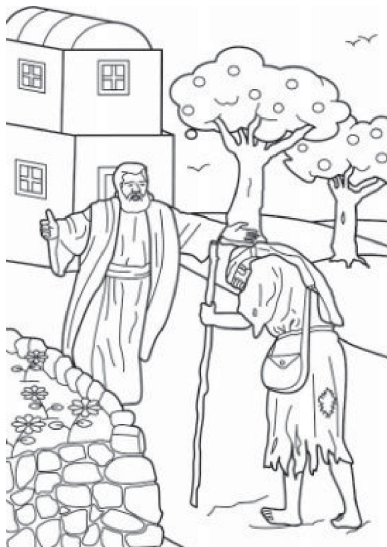
Lesson Objectives:

- Know:** The importance of our faith in Jesus Christ and Faith is not true faith without works.
- Feel:** At peace at all times because we have faith that God is always present with us.
- Practice:** Talking to God on a regular basis and having faith that we are in His hands and being Christ-like in all of your actions.

Memory Verse:

"Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"
(Mark 9:24)

"Faith without works is dead".
(James 2:26)



Lesson Content

Last week we talked about the walls of Jericho and how they fell because of the faith of Joshua and the Israelites. We learned that even if we do not understand what God is telling us to do, all we have to do now is have faith by trusting God and obeying Him, because we will understand more as we grow up.

We also learned that God will have everything work to our advantage. We now know that having faith is so important: The more faith you have, the more power from God that you will get. But, wait a minute! How do we even get this faith? Have we ever thought about that? Today, we will learn how to grow in our faith.

Tell the story of the father who brought his son, who was possessed by a mute spirit, to the disciples then to Jesus (Mark 9:17-31). Some key points from this passage include:

Jesus Calls All of Us: Jesus said to the boy's father, "Bring him to Me." (Mark 9:19). There is no doubt that the father knew that Jesus could heal his son, so Jesus said "Bring him to Me". We go through the same thing: We have an issue or a need and we try everything to have the problem solved or the need fulfilled on our own and soon realise that all our efforts go down the drain, all our struggle is in vain. We realise that we need to involve God in everything we do, He wants us to ask Him and to open the door to Him by our own free will. Here, our Lord Jesus is telling you, "What are you waiting for? Bring this problem or this need to Me."

Jesus Wants us to Believe: Again Jesus said to the boy's father: "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." (Mark 9:23). Do we have faith? Things can happen only if we have faith. In fact Jesus is saying: "Sir, The problem is not whether I can heal your boy or not, the problem is whether or not you have faith that I can heal him." Of course, the father had some faith, otherwise he wouldn't have brought his boy to our Lord. However, he did have some doubts too. For many long years he had met one frustration after the other; he had taken his child from one doctor to another and none could help, he had tried all kinds of medicine but none could cure his son. He even brought him to Jesus' disciples, and even they could not cast away the mute spirit. The father was very honest when he spoke to the Master: "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). This is one of the shortest prayers in the Bible, but it was very honest, very sincere and very strong. He was saying: "I have faith but my faith is not strong enough Lord, strengthen my faith." We should take the example of this father and always recite this prayer.

Open a discussion with the children and ask: How do we grow in our faith? How do we strengthen our faith? The answer is: By prayer. Be persistent in our prayers. Make it honest, sincere and strong. But how?

How do we make our prayers very honest, very sincere and very strong? Or, putting the question in a different way: Why do we sometimes feel that our prayer is weak? A practical reason may be that we pray at the end of the day, when we are tired and very sleepy, when we pray in the morning, we are rushing to get ready to go to school and sometimes we pray even without thinking.

It is good that we pray, but we want our prayers to be sincere and meaningful, we want to feel that we are improving and growing in our faith, in our behaviour and in our spiritual life. Some ways we can do that include:

- Take some time off before you pray. Jesus said: "When you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly." (Matthew 6:6). After you read your Bible and before you pray, prepare yourself for prayer.
- Count your blessings so that you can thank God for them one by one if possible (maybe record them in your diary). Remember what we said about the life of thanksgiving and how important it is.
- Remember the sins that you committed that day and the things that displeased God. When you pray, mention them before God and ask for His forgiveness, ask Him to help you evaluate your day and overcome the sins you have committed.
- Remember all the people that you want to pray for: the poor and the hungry; those who we have not seen at church in a while; those who are sick; the Bishops and Priests; our Sunday School teachers; our friends and family and many more. Finally, ask the Lord to strengthen our own faith.

Now, I am sure our prayers will be very honest, very sincere and very strong.

"Don't just stand there, do something."

We have previously discussed the faith of Abraham. He had strong faith that God would provide him with what he needed, but what if he had not obeyed God and had not left his home? How could he have shown that faith? God praised him because he even showed his faith by his deeds, by his obedience to God's command and by taking a step forward.

The father who had a son possessed by a mute spirit had faith that Jesus could heal his little boy, but he still needed to be asked to bring the boy to Jesus. We said that this, sometimes, happens to us. We have all the faith that God can do the miracle but we stand there doing nothing. We have to take a step forward.

The four friends who brought the paralytic to our Lord had strong faith that Jesus could heal him. This faith that made them persist and not give up in spite of all the obstacles they met. What if they had that faith, but they didn't go through the trouble of bringing the paralytic to Jesus? They took a step and moved forward.

Even the nobleman who couldn't bring his sick boy to Jesus to heal him acted on his faith and went to Jesus on behalf of his son. He took a step and moved forward.

Joshua had great faith in God especially after God told him, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you." (Joshua 1:5). His faith assured him that God would give him the city of Jericho, but he didn't let his faith stop there. He obeyed God and he led the Israelites and encircled the city for seven days as God ordered him.

What are these examples telling us? They are telling us the following: Have faith, do our part, obey God, use your talents and leave the rest to God.

St James

If we see somebody who does not have clothes to wear or food to eat, and we tell them: "Go, put on some clothes and get something to eat so that you won't get sick" but we don't give them clothes or food what is the use? Would our advice give him the warmth and the satisfaction that Christ would give? We must remember to be Christ-like in all of our actions.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, Abraham was known for his faith, why? Not because he said that he had faith but because, when he was asked to sacrifice his only beloved son Isaac, as hard as it was on him, he obeyed.

In James 2:14-26, these examples are trying to give us a message: they are telling us that faith is not faith if it stands alone without good deeds, our faith has to be accompanied by good works. To grow in faith means to grow in good deeds: "Without God, man cannot do and without man, God will not do."

Who is the Greatest?

The mother of two of the most beloved disciples of our Lord, John and James, asked of Him, one day, "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom." (Matthew 20:21). They believed that He was the Messiah, that is why they asked that. The other Disciples, when they heard them request that, they began to be angry at them for their selfishness, and they were also angry with themselves for not thinking about these positions first. So Jesus our Lord solved the problem by putting this principle very clear. He said that, in My Kingdom, "whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all." (Mark 10:43). The thing that makes you great in the sight of God is faith which is shown through good works.

How Can I Serve?

God is putting great importance on the little talent that you have or the service that you can do. The little service that a person with one-talent can do equals, in God's eyes, the great service that a person with five-talents can do. Christ our Lord praised the poor widow who only put two coins in the synagogue's offering box because she put everything she had into the donations.

God might have given us only a little human understanding or a little compassion or a little kindness or even a little faith and maybe our gift for prayer is small, but use these little talents and they will grow, because if you bury them and you will lose them. In other words, your talents, whether they are big or small, use them or lose them.

Remember the story about the fig tree. After 3 years without producing fruit, the owner gave order to cut it down. But, because of the plea (or the intercession) of the gardener, it was given a one-year grace it either bears fruit, or be cut down. Just to stay alive is not enough, we have to produce. This lesson is for every Christian, young or old.

You can use your talents, for example, to help others, or pleasing your parents, or doing something for the church, or sacrificing a meal a week and giving its worth to the hungry, or giving up drinking for a month and sending the money to the poor. There are unlimited ideas and projects of service that one can think of. Try to help the students to express out their thoughts concerning this subject.

Application



Exercise

- Before we pray, we must prepare ourselves for prayer.
- Remember to pray for others.
- Ask for the intercessions of a special saint to help us in our spiritual journey.
- To grow in faith means to grow in good deeds too. Take a step forward towards God and let Him help you.
- In your preparation for prayer, find out whether or not you are using the talents which God has given you. How are you using them? What more can you do? Thank God and ask Him to help you to grow more and do more.



Prayer

Meditate on the following prayer, live it, and pray it at the level of the children.

Please God, strengthen my faith so that I can take the sufferings and the pains without complaining to please You. Strengthen my faith so that I can stand strong against all the temptations that face me, so that I can feel secure being beside You, getting the protection I need, the help I need, the forgiveness I need, the peace I need and the wisdom and guidance I need. Amen.



Our Holy Bible is Inspired by the Holy Spirit

The Faith of Dionysius the Patriarch

Bible References: 13th of Paramhat Synaxarion

Lesson Aim:

The Holy Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit

Lesson Objectives:

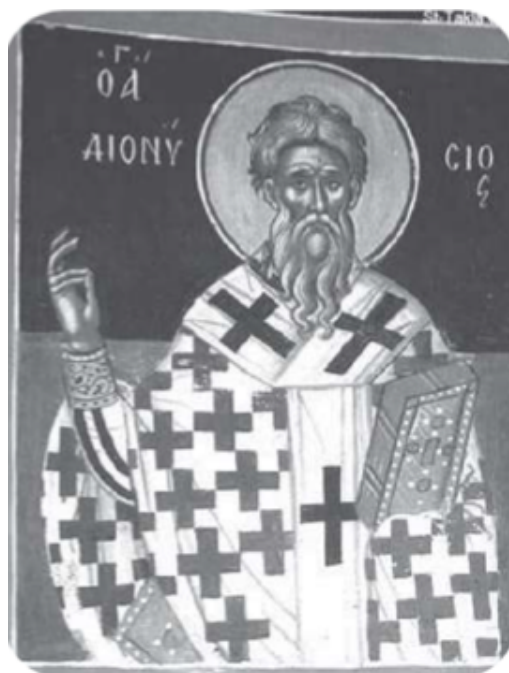
Know: The story of Dionysius, the Patriarch's, life.

Feel: The importance and power of a Christian faith that is grounded in Holy Scripture.

Practice: Reading the Holy Bible and getting enlightened by its teachings and relevance.

Memory Verse:

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."
(2 Timothy 3:16)



Lesson Content

Saint Dionysius the Great, the 14th Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St Mark

Orthodoxy means "the righteous faith". Orthodox Christians receive their faith as it was received by those who personally accepted it from Christ when He was incarnate on Earth. The Orthodox Church is now the only church that has preserved its faith without distortion or alteration through the ages, despite the attacks and challenges it has met over time. In this lesson we will get to know a righteous saint from the great Patriarchs of the Orthodox Church who laboured to preserve the Orthodox faith. This saint is called "Father Dionysius" and he is the 14th Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St Mark.

The beginning of his life was a bit strange. His parents were star worshippers of the Sun and they put emphasis on teaching him all the knowledge of that sect.

One day a Christian old woman passed by him, who had with her some pages of a book containing an Epistle of St Paul the apostle and offered it to him to buy it. When he read it he found in it strange sayings and unusual knowledge. He asked her: "For how much will you sell it?" She said: "For one dinar of gold." He gave her three dinars and asked her to find the rest of the pages of the book and he was willing to pay her double. She went and brought him more pages. Having read them through he found the book to be still incomplete, he asked her to search for the rest of the book. She told him: "I found these quires among my father's books. If you want to acquire the complete book, go to the church and there you can find it."

He went and asked one of the priests to show him what is called the Epistles of Paul. He gave it to him, read it, and memorized it. Then he went to St Demetrius the twelfth Pope, who taught and instructed him in the facts of the Christian faith then baptised him. He became well rehearsed in the doctrine and knowledge of the church, and Anba Demetrius appointed him a teacher for the people.

When Anba Demetrius departed and Anba Heraclas (Yaroklas) was enthroned, he appointed him as a deputy to judge among the believers and entrusted him to administer the affairs of the patriarchate.

When St Heraclas departed, all the people agreed to appoint this father Patriarch. He was enthroned on the first of Tubah (December 28th, 246 A.D.) during the reign of Emperor Philip who was a lover of the Christians, and he shepherded his flock with the best of care, nevertheless, he suffered much tribulations. When Decius rose up against Philip and killed him, and reigned in his place, he incited persecution against the Christians. Decius slew many of the patriarchs, bishops, and believers. This father endured much suffering during that time. Decius died and Gallus reigned after him, and persecution quieted down during his reign.

When Gallus died and Valerian reigned in his place, he renewed the persecution severely against the Christians, and his men seized Abba Dionysius and imprisoned him. They asked him to worship the idols but he refused saying: "We worship God the Father, and His Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit the One God." They threatened him, killed few men in front of him to terrify him but he was not afraid. They banished him and shortly after, they brought him back and told him: "We have been informed that you consecrate the offering secretly by yourself." He replied: "We do not forsake our prayers day or night" then he turned to the people present around him and told them: "Go and pray and if I am away from you in the body, I shall be with you in spirit." The governor became raged and returned him to exile.

When Sapor, king of Persia, overcame Emperor Valerian and seized him, his son Gallienus, who was wise and gentle, took over the empire. He released all the believers who were in prison and brought back those who were in exile. He wrote to the Patriarch and the bishops a letter to assure their safety in opening the churches.

In the days of this father, certain people arose in the Arabian countries saying: "That the soul dies with the body, and on the day of Resurrection, it shall be raised up with it." He gathered against them a council and anathematised them. When Paul of Samosata denied the Son, a Council assembled against him in Antioch, this Saint was not able to attend for his age. He wrote a letter to the council, rich with wisdom, explained in it the corrupting opinion of this heretic, and stated the true Orthodox belief. He finished his good strife, and departed in a good old age on (March 8th, 264 A.D.), having sat on the Apostolic Throne seventeen years, two month and ten days.

It was reading the Holy Bible that brought Pope Dionysius to the Christian faith and turned him into the great Father of Orthodoxy that he was.

The Holy Bible

What does the Bible consist of?

The Bible consists of two testaments: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is made up of 49 books including the Deuterocanonical Books (which are not available in most of the Bibles we have today but available in a separate book). Our Church uses the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Old Testament, which includes the Deuterocanonical Books). The New Testament is made up of 27 books written after the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When was the Bible written?

The first Scriptures in the Bible are more than 3500 years old. Moses wrote the first 5 books of the Bible in around 1445-1400 BC and St John wrote the last book of the Bible around 98 AD.

Who wrote the Bible?

God inspired around 40 different authors to write down the word of God. They all differed in their circumstances, education, vocation, location and time. Among them is St Luke the physician, Daniel the minister, Matthew the tax collector and Peter the fisherman.

Where was the Bible written?

The Bible was written across 3 different continents (Asia, Africa and Europe). Parts of the Bible were written in a king's palaces (Solomon), as well as in the midst of the desert (Moses), in the middle of battlefields (Joshua), in the pastures (David) and many other places.

The Unity of the Bible

Despite the fact that the Bible had many writers and was written in many different locations and across many different eras, the content of the Bible works in harmony in a way that defies all logic and reason. The Bible delivers one unified message of love, one focused story of Salvation and one God. That is because the Bible is the inspired word of the Holy Spirit.

The Structure of the Bible

Old Testament:

- **5** Books of Law (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy).
- **12** Books of History (Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I Samuel, II Samuel, I Kings, II Kings, I Chronicles, II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther).
- **5** Books of Wisdom (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs).
- **5** Books of Major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel).
- **12** Books of Minor prophets (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi).

Deuterocanonical Books:

- II Esdras (Prayer of Manasseh).
- Tobit.
- Judith.
- I, II, III Maccabees.
- Wisdom of Solomon.
- Wisdom of Sirach.
- Baruch.
- Epistle of Jeremiah.
- Complete Book of Daniel.
- Complete Book of Esther.
- Complete Book of Psalms (including Psalm 151).

New Testament:

- **4** Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John).
- **1** Book of History (Acts).
- **14** Epistles written by St Paul (Romans, I Corinthians, II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I Thessalonians, II Thessalonians, I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews).
- **7** Epistles (James, I Peter, II Peter, I John, II John, III John, Jude).
- **1** Book of Prophecy (Revelations).

What evidence is there that indicates the Bible is the Divine Inspired Word of God?

- There is scripture in the Bible itself that testifies that the Bible is the Word of God: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16).
- The scriptures surpass the knowledge of the writers themselves. How could Isaiah write in full knowledge that "It is He who sits above the circle of the earth" (Isaiah 40:22), when everyone at the time believed that the Earth was flat?
- The fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies in the New Testament, especially those that describe events surrounding Jesus' life for example, the prophecy that Jesus will be born of a virgin in Isaiah 7:14: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel"; or the prophecy that Jesus would ride into Jerusalem on a colt, the foal of a donkey (Zechariah 9:9).
- Despite writing in different times, the writers are in complete agreement in their teachings and prophecies. If the Bible was a series of lies, then how could so many writers across thousands of years maintain and agree to commit the same lie? Also, the writers are very candid about their own shortcomings, like David who committed murder and adultery and Peter who denied Christ 3 times.
- The Bible is understood by all kinds of people around the world, whether educated or otherwise.
- The Bible has a strong effect on all kinds of people emotionally and spiritually.
- The unity of the books of the Bible, as mentioned above.
- Scientific knowledge mentioned in the Bible that surpasses the knowledge and technology of its time (for example, the Bible mentioned that the Earth was round before scientists discovered it).

Evaluation

Did the children get the aim of the lesson?

Objective	Can the children...	Notes
Know	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know who Pope Dionysius is and know his life story. • Know the structure of the Bible, when it was written and by whom. 	
Feel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel confident in the strength and reliability of the Orthodox Church and its faith. 	
Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read the Bible every day and appreciate its application in your life. 	



Contentment and Thanksgiving

Job the Righteous

Bible References: Job.

Lesson Aim:

To understand the importance of contentment and thanksgiving,

Lesson Objectives:

Know: God is good at all times.

Feel: The power of God's protection.

Practice: Offering God reverence and thanksgiving.

Memory Verse:

"The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord."
(Job 1:21)



Lesson Content

Present the lesson as a role play:

Narrator: Job was from the Land of Uz and loved God very much. He was married and had 7 boys and 3 girls. Job was very wealthy and had a lot of livestock. He was a righteous man among people. The Lord was always by his side and blessed him in everything he had. He was loved by his children and loved by God. Job and his family would meet daily and Job would sacrifice one of his animals so that God would forgive any sins his children committed. One day the angels were talking to God when Satan appeared among them.

God: Where have you come from?

Satan: From the Earth on which I walk.

God: Have you visited my servant Job? There are none like him on the Earth for he is a righteous man.

Satan: He is only righteous because of all Your blessings and all the things You have given him, but if You were to reach out Your hand and strike him and all he has, he would leave You and no longer serve You.

God: Alright, I leave everything that Job has in your power, do what you wish with it all on one condition: you do not harm Job.

Narrator: The first thing Satan did was kill all of Job's livestock. When Job's children gathered in one house, a great wind came and blew the house down on them, killing them all. Job confronted God, crying to him and praying, saying "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord". So instead of turning away from God, as Satan thought he would, Job was content with what he had and gave thanks to God, acknowledging that his possessions were not his but the Lord's. On another day, the angels were speaking to God when Satan appeared among them again

God: Where have you come from?

Satan: From the Earth on which I walk.

God: Have you visited my servant Job? There are none like him on the Earth for he is a righteous man, and has remained faithful to Me. The trial you inflicted on him was pointless.

Satan: Job might be able to be deprived of his possessions, but I bet that if I hurt his bones and flesh he would surely turn his back on You.

God: Fine, I give you authority over his bones and flesh, do with them what you wish on one condition: you spare his life.

Narrator: So Satan went to Job and covered his flesh in sores, boils and open wounds. When his wife saw him, she cried to him saying "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!" Job replied to her saying "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" Despite all his suffering, Job did not sin against God. God allowed Job to suffer so that Satan could see that he was wrong. Even though Job had his moments of weakness and questioned God, he remained faithful, praying for strength and giving thanks despite his suffering. Job remained faithful to God and thanked him even in times of suffering, God restored to him more than what he had. The Lord gave him 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 oxen and 1,000 female donkeys. He also blessed him with 7 sons and 3 daughters. Job lived 140 years and saw his children and grandchildren for 4 generations before passing away.

Evaluation

Did the children get the aim of the lesson?

Objective	Can the children...	Notes
Know	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remember the name of the land Job was from. Remember how many children he had. Remember the dialogue between God and Satan. Understand why God allowed everything to be taken away from Job. 	
Feel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appreciate the great love and faithfulness Job had for God despite his suffering. 	
Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thank God for everything at all times. Remind others to be thankful for everything the Lord gives them 	



A Strong Character in Honesty

Elijah and the Prophets of Baal

Bible References: 1 Kings 18.

Lesson Aim:

To introduce the First Book of Kings.

Lesson Objectives:

- Know:** The importance of not giving up on the truth, no matter what the situation.
- Feel:** The power of standing up to honesty.
- Practice:** To hold on to and stick to honesty, not to fear, as well as not to getting involved in matters that do not concern us.

Memory Verse:

"How long will you falter between two opinions?"
(1 Kings 18:21)



Background Information for the Servant

Who is Elijah?

Elijah is a Hebrew name meaning 'My God is Yahweh'. He is a great prophet who lived in the Northern Kingdom (the Kingdom of Israel), the Southern Kingdom is called the Kingdom of Judah. He was also known as Elijah the Tishbite because he was born in the village of Tishbe, but has lived in Gilead. Elijah was well known for his asceticism and for wearing a garment made from animal hair and a leather belt (2 Kings 1:8). He spent most of his time in the desert living with God, and was known for saying, "As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand..." (1 Kings 17:1).

Elijah is the voice of truth that God had sent to confront the evil that Ahab, King of Israel, had brought on to his people when he married Jezebel, the idol worshipper. Ahab was weak in character, so she was able to lead him to idol worship and he set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal, which he had built in the town of Samaria.

The Bible describes the event, "And Ahab made a wooden image. Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him." (1 King 16:33).

Jezebel and the prophets of Baal that she brought managed to sway the people into worshipping idols; there was no greater evil than what Jezebel and Ahab did. However, there was no prophet as brave, fiery, and strong in honesty as Elijah. Elijah confronted Ahab with strength and bravery:

1. When he told Ahab that the rain will not fall unless he says so.
2. When God had ordered him to return to stand in front of the king 3 years later, because God was going to bring rainfall.
3. When he gathered the nation to declare to them the truth, about who the true God is. "And Elijah came to all the people, and said, 'How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.' But the people answered him not a word." (1 Kings 18:21). He told the people that he is the only remaining prophet of the Lord, whereas there were 450 prophets of Baal. Even though he was alone, he was supported by the power of God, and he declared the truth. He ordered the prophets of Baal to offer their sacrifices and he offered a sacrifice to God after repairing God's Altar that had been broken down. The God who answers by fire is the true God. Indeed, the fire of the Lord fell and consumed Elijah's burnt sacrifice, and all the people fell to their knees and worshipped God saying, "The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!" (1 Kings 18:39).
4. When he ordered the people to kill the prophets of Baal, which caused Jezebel to hunt him down in order to kill him.

Elijah was worthy of hearing God and speaking to Him (1 Kings 19:9-18), it was he who was taken up to heaven by a chariot of fire in front of his servant Elisha. He remains a symbol of bravery and strength in confronting evil. John the Baptist was said to have the power and spirit of Elijah (Luke 1:17).

Lesson Content

Ahab was one of the Kings of Israel, he married Jezebel the idol worshipper who worshipped an pagan god called Baal. Jezebel had a strong character unlike Ahab. She led Ahab to worshipping idols, and, in turn, he also led his people to idolatry.

The king who God ordained over His people built a temple and an altar for idol worship, and the evil queen, Jezebel, brought pagan prophets and priests for this temple and led the people into idol worship.

God sent Elijah, a great prophet, to bravely confront this king and his wife. Elijah stood in front of the king and told him that God will punish him and the people by a drought. After 3 years, God commanded Elijah to return to Ahab because the Lord will bring rainfall. Remember to mention how the ravens fed Elijah (1 Kings 17:1-7).

How was God going to send the rain when the people still worshipped idols? What was the point? Therefore, before rainfall came, the brave prophet had to announce to everybody who the true God is, so that he could lead the people to God first then rain would fall (repentance first). Let's consider what Elijah did...

Note to Servant: try to make the discussion interactive.

The situation was risky, Elijah asked Ahab to gather all the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel (there were 450 Baal prophets). He confidently told all the people there, to offer a sacrifice to their god (Baal) and ask him to respond. Whilst Elijah would also offer a sacrifice and pray to the real God. Whichever God would respond with fire, He would

be the true God. Elijah asked them to start first because there was a lot of them, so they took a bull, prepared and offered it, then they called on the name of Baal "O Baal, hear us!" (1 Kings 18:16), they cried out to Baal and danced as usual from morning till evening, but there was no response.

Elijah told them to scream harder, perhaps their Baal god was asleep, so they screamed more, but as expected there was no response. They even cut themselves and bled, as was their custom, but there was no response.

So, Elijah repaired the old Altar on which sacrifices were offered to God, he used 12 stones (which represents the 12 tribes of Jacob) to build the Altar in the name of the Lord and built a trench around the Altar. He cut up the sacrifice [bull], laid it on the wood, then poured water on it three times until the trench was full of water.

Elijah said a strong prayer to God (distribute Bibles to the children so that they can all read it together), then fire of the Lord came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifice and dried up the water. This happened in front of everyone and all the people who saw this fell on their knees and worshipped God, saying "The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!" (1 Kings 18:39), and they got rid of the prophets of Baal.

Application



Comprehension Questions

- What evil things did Ahab and his wife do?
- Describe Elijah's bravery when he stood before the king.
- What did Elijah do in front of everyone to prove that our Lord is God?
- Be able to explain that it was God who sent the fire from heaven.



Exercise

- Recite the verse of the Memory Verse.
- Stick to telling the truth without fear.
- Attend Bible study groups if available.
- Be consistent in your prayers.



Prayer

Meditate on the following prayer, live it, and pray it at the level of the children.

My Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, thank You. My Lord Jesus, You are the Truth, and You always teach Your children to be honest and to stand up for the truth. Give me the strength and courage to live truly as Your child, to do everything to please You, and for Your image to resonate clearly in my life. Amen.



“The Lord is my Shepherd, I Shall not Want”

Psalm of David: Psalm 23

Bible References: Psalm 23:1-6.

Lesson Aim:

This is the second lesson on the Psalms of David. In this lesson we learn that the Lord takes care of us. The feeling that the Lord is always present and He takes care of us is very comforting.

Lesson Objectives:

Know: God is always present.

Feel: God's strength in your life.

Practice: Seeking God as your refuge at all times, especially at your times of trouble.

Memory Verse:

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want”
(Psalm 23:1)



Background Information for the Servant

God Exists By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

A problem by itself, without God, could cause trouble for some; but a problem, with the presence of God, would not cause trouble.

Hope in God and His interference gives the heart joy and confidence. As the Apostle said, "Rejoicing in hope" (Romans 12:12).

Was the lions' den scary to Daniel? Surely it was not as he said, "My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths" (Daniel 6:22).

Was the fiery furnace a source of loss for the three youths? No it was not as there was a "fourth... like the Son of God" (Daniel 3:25), walking with them in the midst of the fire.

Did Goliath, the giant, look scary to David? He was scary to the army of soldiers who faced Goliath without God. As for David, he was strong and did not fear Goliath and his threats because he had God with him in the battle. He said, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand" (1 Samuel 17:45-46).

God being with us is the reason for our confidence. God's name is a strong fortress that the righteous take for a refuge:

- "The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul. The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore." (Psalms 121:7-8).
- "I have set the Lord always before me; because He is my right hand and I shall not be moved." (Psalms 16:8).

Truly, seeking God and allowing Him to be involved in your life will solve any problem. Some examples include:

- In God's name, Elijah faced Ahab.
- In God's name, Moses and Aaron faced Pharaoh.
- In God's name, Paul faced Festus and Agrippa.

The Lord was the strength for these Saints and others like them. The Psalmist said, "The Lord is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation" (Psalms 118:14) and, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear?" (Psalms 27:1). We deal with God and not with people. We set God in front of us in all our problems and He gives us strength.

If you weaken one day, it means you have forgotten God's strength.

Lesson Content

By examining the meaning behind Psalm 19, we learned that the heavens and earth which God created declare His glory and that He gave us His word in the Holy Bible to live by and give us light and strength and salvation.

Are you ever afraid of anything? We all fear something.

So, today, we will learn the meanings behind Psalm 23, which we can always remember in times of fear.

The Lord is my shepherd

Our Beloved Jesus is the Good Shepherd, He said: "I am the good shepherd." (John 10:11). He gives spiritual and material gifts to His people. He hovers over them and protects them from the devil and the enemies.

I shall not want

This is an expression of the complete confidence that God is taking care of us. I do not want or need anything because I am the temple of God and God is inside me. If I lose all, I will not care because I have God Himself within me.

He makes me to lie down in green pastures

The spiritual green pastures include:

- The word of God contained in the Bible which fills my hungry soul.
- The church with all her sacraments.
- The Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus which I eat and drink to continue my spiritual growth.

He leads me beside the still waters

The water is usually used for both washing and drinking:

- For washing: He (the Good Shepherd) led us to baptism through which we were cleansed from our sins (read 1 Peter 3:21).
- For drinking: He gives us the living water in the Holy Communion. Both the pasture that the sheep eat and the water that they drink are the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ which we eat and drink (read John 4:14, John 6:35 and John 6:53-56).

He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake

The Good Shepherd helps to get me back to Him through repentance and the Sacrament of Confession. Observing this sacrament leads me to righteousness and rest. Here you can mention the story of the Prodigal son, and how the father (God) waits for his repentant son to return, and how does he receive him. All these blessings are given to us because of Jesus' name and not because we deserve them.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death

The shadow of death means suffering and temptation. It also means the death of the body. We, the sons and daughter of God, do not fear death because through the death of the body we go to a better life; but the death of sinners is an eternal death or eternal damnation. As long as God is with us, even if we die, we live.

I will fear no evil; For You are with me

God is with us so we do not fear evil, persecution, death or anything and we can go through the shadows of death with great courage because the Good Shepherd is with me.

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me

The rod of the shepherd does two things:

- It beats and drives away the enemies of the sheep (the wolves). Through the Cross (the rod) our Lord did beat the devil and gave us victory over sin, over demons and over death.
- It keeps the sheep within the fold, and even if one goes astray it brings it back. This is what the crucifixion does for us; even if we sin it gives us salvation and through it we return to the fold of the redeemed children of God.

The staff is used for support and the Cross is our support. It is for us, the believers, the source of power and strength (read 1 Corinthians 1:18).

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies

The table is great because of the greatness of what is on it. In our case Jesus Himself is presented to us on the table (the altar) to strengthen us against our enemies.

You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over

We were anointed with the Chrism (the Myron) to receive the Holy Spirit. This great blessing filled us with joy like what happened on the day of Pentecost when the Disciples were full of joy to the extent that some people even thought they were drunk.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever

The house of the Lord is similar to the place where the sheep enter and find shelter. In the House of God we enjoy inner peace and comfort. When we get tired from the world and all its problems and tribulations we must rush to the House of God where we find rest. Originally in the church, the believers used to go twice daily to church: in the morning before they go to work and in the evening after they return from work - what a comforting exercise!

Application



Exercise

- Today, we learn the lesson which St Paul learned and lived by when he wrote: “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31). Since we have God with us we fear no evil, but each one of us can journey through life confident that “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13).
- When we have problems at school, home or with anyone in the community we live in, we must remember that God is present and He cares. Without this feeling, the burden of the problems will be too much for us.



I am influential in my Family, Church and Community

Esther

Bible References: Esther.

Lesson Aim:

To be influential in our family, church and community.

Lesson Objectives:

Know: The places that need improvement in our family, church and community; and propose solutions.

Feel: The power of fasting and prayer for their family, church and community.

Practice: Being consistent in fasting and prayer.

Memory Verse:

Blessed be the Lord, who has not given us as prey to their teeth. Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped.

(Psalms 124:6-7)



Lesson Content

This story begins when King Ahasuerus appointed someone called Haman as his prime minister. Haman was an evil man and had everyone worshipping him, bowing down before him. Only Mordecai, who was secretly a Jew, the palace's doorkeeper, refused to bow down to Haman. Haman found out that Mordecai would not bow to him because he was a Jew and only worshipped God. He grew a hatred for the Jews and decided to eradicate them from the kingdom.

Haman went to the king and told him that the Jews were a problem in his kingdom and did not follow the king's orders. Haman convinced the king that the Jews should be put to death, and so the king gave him the authority to do what he wanted to the Jews.

Haman sent a decree to all the districts in the kingdom telling them that by order of the king, on a specified day, they must kill all the Jews in their district, young and old. He marked this decree with the king's seal and sent it all over the kingdom.

When the Jews in the kingdom heard this decree, they cried out and mourned grievously. They prayed to God to rescue them. Mordecai cried out to the Lord, tore his clothes, wore sackcloth and prayed fervently. Mordecai had raised his uncle's daughter after she was orphaned. Her name was Esther. The king had fallen in love with her and appointed her as queen of the kingdom. Mordecai had beseeched Esther to keep her Judaism a secret, fearing her life. After Haman's decree, Mordecai sent a letter to Esther asking her to speak to the king, telling her that perhaps this is why the Lord had brought her into the king's palace, so that she may save their people.

Esther replied to Mordecai saying, "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that any man or woman who goes into the inner court to the king, who has not been called, he has but one law: put all to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter, that he may live. Yet I myself have not been called to go in to the king these thirty days." (Esther 4:11).

Mordecai beseeched her saying, "Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:13-14).

Esther asked Mordecai to ask all the Jews to fast with no food or drink and pray for 3 days before she attempts to confront the king. After 3 days of fasting and prayer, Esther went to see the king. He was very happy to see her and gifted her a gold scepter as a sign of his approval. This was the first miracle.

When the king asked Esther what she wanted, Esther requested that he and Haman come to the banquet that she is organising. The king accepted her invitation and went to the banquet with Haman. The king was very pleased with the banquet and told Esther that he would grant her any request she makes of him, even if she requested half his kingdom. Esther simply requested that he and Haman attend another banquet the following day. At this point, no one knew that Esther was a Jew or that she was related to Mordecai.

When Haman entered the palace, he saw that Mordecai still refused to bow down to him. Enraged by this, he ordered that a wooden gallows be made, plotting to convince the king at the banquet to hang Mordecai.

That night, the king could not sleep so ordered that the palace's chronicles be read to him. In them was recorded that Mordecai had once saved the king's life by reporting that he overheard of a plot to assassinate him. The king insisted that Mordecai be bestowed many gifts to honour him: a royal robe, a horse and royal crest. He ordered Haman himself to deliver these to Mordecai. To his utter humiliation, Haman followed the king's orders and paraded Mordecai through the city, announcing his honour to all.

The king and Haman attended Esther's banquet. Again, the king enjoyed his time and was very happy. He asked Esther to make any request of him that he may grant it. Esther told him that there was a man plotting evil against her and conspiring to kill all her people. When the king asked her who this man was, Esther told him that it was Haman. The king became enraged and went to find Haman. Haman heard of this and went to Esther to plead for his life. When the king returned and saw him with her, his anger increased and he had him taken away. One of the king's servants told him of the gallows that Haman had built, telling him that he had planned to hang Mordecai on it. The king ordered that Haman be hung on the gallows he built for Mordecai.

After this the king rescinded the decree sent out by Haman, saving the Jews from persecution. The Jews carried on living in the land in joy and gladness.

Evaluation

Did the children get the aim of the lesson?

Objective	Can the children...	Notes
Know	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remember the main figures in the story. Remember the main events of Esther's story Remember the lesson's Memory Verse. 	
Feel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand Esther's importance in the protection of her people. Acknowledge that God had a plan for Esther to be in the palace to save her people. 	
Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Try to be a positive influence on your family, church and everyone around you. Use fasting and prayer as a source of strength and connection to God. 	



I Enjoy Partaking in Church Fasts

The Church Fasts

Bible References: Esther 4:16, Daniel 9:3 and Acts 13:2.

Lesson Aim:

To understand the importance of the fasts of the Church.

Lesson Objectives:

Know: The fasts of the Church and the meaning of the word 'Paramoun'.

Feel: The importance of fasting and abstinence.

Practice: Being committed to fasting every Wednesday and Friday and taking part in all Church fasts.

Memory Verse:

"However, this kind does not go out except by fasting and prayer."
(Matthew 17:21)



Lesson Content

Do you know why we fast? Through fasting, we attempt to recapture Paradise in their lives by refraining from those carnal practices, taking away all distractions from God. The power of fasting can move mountains. Our Lord Jesus Christ taught us this when He fasted for 40 days and 40 nights in the desert and overcame Satan's temptations. Jesus said that fasting and prayer expels demons from our hearts, and that is why the Church gave us fasts to partake in to strengthen our spiritual lives.

When the Pharisees asked Jesus why the disciples were not fasting, He said to them that they will fast when He dies and rises again (that is why we do not fast during the Holy Fifty Days between the Feast of the Resurrection and Pentecost as we relive the days that Christ was with the disciples and didn't allow them to fast).

When we partake of the Eucharist we do not eat or drink at all during the nine hours preceding the partaking of the communion or from midnight of the previous night, whichever is longer, to prepare to receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There are different types of fasting: some are totally vegan and some allow fish. Some people are encouraged to strictly abstain from food and drink for a while if they can endure it: the original tradition of the Church is for this period of abstinence to begin at midnight and last through sunset (or to strictly abstain between midnight and a certain time in the day, depending on each individual's strength and spiritual needs based on advice from our fathers of confession). For many, fasting is more likely to end at noon (the hour when Christ was placed on the Cross) or three o'clock on the afternoon (the hour when Christ died on the Cross). Strict abstinence is also expected to be kept on Great Friday between midnight and the end of the Great Friday prayers (usually around 6pm). There is no abstinence on Saturdays and Sunday because we remember the Sabbath and the Resurrection.

We must always remember to ask our father of confession for advice before we start any fast.

Fasts of the Church

Vegan Fasts (Without Fish):

- **Every Wednesdays and Friday, except for during the Holy Fifty Days between the Feast of the Resurrection and Pentecost:** We fast every Wednesday in commemoration of Christ's betrayal by Judas Iscariot and every Friday in commemoration of his crucifixion.
- **The Fast of Great Lent and the Fast of the Holy Week/Pascha (Passion Week):** this fast is 55 days and was originally separate but Church Fathers combined it for the spiritual benefit of the believers: 7 days is a preparation week, 40 days commemorates the 40 days Jesus fasted in the desert, 1 day is for Lazarus Saturday (the day before Palm Sunday) and 7 days is for the Holy Week/Pascha (Passion Week).
- **The Fast of Nineveh or the Fast of Jonah:** we commemorate the three days that the people of Nineveh fasted in repentance after Jonah's call for them to repent. These three days are a direct parallel of and a prophecy about the three days that Christ spent in the tomb, just like the three days Jonah spent in the belly of the fish. The fast of Nineveh begins on a Monday, two weeks before the Monday that marks the beginning of Great Lent. This fast was borrowed from Syriac Christianity, as one of the Patriarchs of Alexandria of Syriac descent (Pope Abraham of Alexandria, the 62nd Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St Mark) decided to adapt it for the Church of Alexandria.
- **Paramoun of the Nativity (Christmas):** 1-3 days of abstinence until sunset before the Feast of the Nativity (depending on which day the Feast falls on). "**Paramoun**" is a Greek word that precisely means "extraordinary preparation/continuously ready or watch/vigil" (like the word Paramount in English), which signifies something of great concern or importance.
- **Paramoun of the Theophany/Epiphany:** 1-3 days of abstinence until sunset before the Feast of the Theophany/Epiphany (depending on which day the Feast falls on).

Vegan Fasts (With Fish):

- **The Fast of the Advent or the Nativity Fast:** we fast 40 days preceding the Nativity on 29 Koiak (January 7, which also falls on 28 Koiak in leap years). The 40 days correspond to the 40 days that the Moses fasted on the mountain before receiving the Ten Commandments from God (the word of God); we know Christ is the Word of God, we fast in preparation of receiving the Word of God in flesh at the Feast of the Nativity. An additional 3 days were added at the beginning of the 40 days of Advent during the 10th century to commemorate the three days that we fasted before God awarded them the miracle of moving the Mokattam Mountain. The three added days are considered a separate fast rather than part of the Fast of Advent.
- **The Fast of the Apostles:** this fast varies in length from two to six weeks (15 to 49 days). It begins on the Monday following the Sunday of Pentecost and extends to the feast day of Saint Peter and Paul the Apostle

on 5 Epip (July 12). This fasting period commemorates the struggles of the Apostles to preach Christianity to the world.

- **The Fast of the Dormition of the Mother of God:** we fast for 15 days and precedes the Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God. This fasting period is fasted to ask for the intercessions of St Mary.

Evaluation

Did the children get the aim of the lesson?

Objective	Can the children...	Notes
Know	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remember the Church's fasts. • Describe the different kinds of fasts. • Explain why the Church appoints times of fasting. • Remember the Memory Verse. 	
Feel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciate the importance of fasting. 	
Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partake in Church fasts. • Fast on Wednesdays and Fridays. 	



God is Ready to Forgive

Elijah Talks to King Ahab

Bible References: 1 Kings 21.

Lesson Aim:

God is ready to forgive our sins if we repent, confess and take communion. In this lesson we will learn that the human anger and greed can lead the individual to huge sins.

Lesson Objectives:

Know: If we repent, God will forgive us.

Feel: God's abundant mercy.

Practice: Regular meetings with our fathers of confession to seek guidance and forgiveness.

Memory Verse:

"For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You."
(Psalms 86:5)



Background Information for the Servant

Human Anger By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

Sometimes, a Holy anger happens for the sake of God; this anger does not have nervousness and loss of temper, rather, it has Holy zeal. Our Saintly fathers, have many sayings on dispraising anger.

James, the Apostle, spoke on the topic of anger saying, "for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God." (James 1:20).

St Aughoris said, "The prayer of the angry is defiled and rejected incense and the offering of the angry is unaccepted" He also said that "Anger is an action of the insane... It makes humans like beasts... the eyes of the angry are evil, full of blood, while the face of the gentle is radiant and his eyes look with dignity."

St Agathon used to say, "Even if the angry raised the dead, it is not accepted by God and nobody will come forward to him."

An elderly man said, "The one whose heart is not saddened when his brother disputes with him is like the angels. If he disputes with him, too, he later and reconciles immediately. This is the action of strugglers. On the other hand, he who upsets his brothers, gets angry with them and hatred settles in his heart, is a follower of the devil, disobedient to God and God will not forgive his sins as far as he does not forgive the sins of his brothers..."

St Ephram the Syrian said, "The wrathful kills himself. He is a stranger to blame and has poor health because his body withers all the time. His spirit is sad and is hated by all."

St Ephram also said, "He who hides envy in his heart is like the one who keeps a serpent in his lap. Smoke drives the bees away and hatred drives knowledge away from the heart."

St Isaiah said, "Anger desires to achieve what you want by force, without exercising humility."

St Augustine said, "What is anger? It is the desire for revenge... If God, despite our offences, does not wish to wreak vengeance on us... do we ask for revenge for ourselves and sin against God everyday?!"

St Gregory, the Bishop of Nyssa said, "Anger makes the black bitterness spread all over the body."

St John of Assiut said, "the weapon of anger hurts its possessor... anger in the heart is like a woodworm in timber."

If we refer to the Holy Bible, we will find that it says, "Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools." (Ecclesiastes 7:9). It also says, "Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go" (Proverbs 22:24).

Lesson Content

Are any of us perfect? Is there any human being that is perfect in the whole world? No one is perfect other than our Lord, so we will always make mistakes and commit sins. But then what? Today we will talk about what we all have to do as soon as we commit any sin, by learning about King Ahab of the Old Testament.

Please read 1 Kings 21 with the children and explain as you go along.

Naboth is murdered for his vineyard: King Ahab, who was very rich, wanted to take the vineyard of the poor man called Naboth in return for another vineyard or for money. Naboth refused both offers because he inherited the vineyard from his father and it was so dear to him. Ahab was angry and his wife, Jezebel, prepared a wicked plan that would lead to the killing of Naboth. With false witnesses who said that "Naboth has blasphemed God and the king" (1 Kings 21:13), the people stoned Naboth and he died. When Ahab heard that Naboth was killed, he went to take possession of the vineyard.

The Lord condemns Ahab: The Lord sent Prophet Elijah to Ahab telling him what the Lord intends to do in punishing him, his wife Jezebel and all his family. "So it was, when Ahab heard those words, that he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning." (1 Kings 21:27). Then the Lord said to Elijah, "Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days; but in

the days of his son I will bring the calamity on his house." (1 Kings 21:29). God knew in advance that his son would be very bad. "Ahaziah the son of Ahab became king over Israel in Samaria in the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned two years over Israel. He did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father and in the way of his mother and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin" (1 Kings 22:51-52).

Why did King Ahab want to take the property of Naboth? He wanted more. Wanting more materialistic things is a sin and leads to more sins. Our Lord Jesus advised us not to care for materialistic things. Jesus said, "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?" (Luke 9:25). King Ahab did not care about other people. He was very angry and in his anger he fell in huge mistakes. Jezebel thought that nobody would know about the purpose of her wicked plan, but nothing can be hidden from God because He sees and knows even the secrets of one's heart and He is the One Who judges every person.

What did Ahab and his wife do when they heard that Naboth is dead? They were very happy and they rushed to take possession of his vineyard. However, after listening to Elijah, Ahab humbled himself before God and God promised not to bring evil in his days. There are several examples in the Bible of people who repented and were forgiven by God, some include:

- **David:** Read 2 Samuel 12:1-15 and briefly explain it to the children. "So David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' And Nathan said to David, 'The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die.' " (2 Samuel 12:13).
- **Peter:** Read Mark 14:66-72 and briefly explain it to the children. Peter denied the Lord Jesus to a servant girl. When the rooster crowed and Peter remembered the word that his Beloved Jesus had said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you that today, even this night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times." (Mark 14:30). Then Peter wept and repented and he was forgiven.

Application



Exercise

- We must humble ourselves before God as He is always ready to accept us. The important thing is that we must be serious about our repentance and our request to receive His forgiveness.
- When the Lord Jesus came to Earth, He did not come just to give us commandments, He came to unite us with Him.



The Promise of the Coming of the Messiah as Mentioned in the Old Testament

Lesson Aim:

To illustrate the promise of God about the coming of His only Begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ for our salvation. For many generations the whole world had been waiting for the Saviour to come until He actually came.

Lesson Objectives:

- Know:** That the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ was prophesied in the Old Testament.
- Feel:** Gratefulness for the love that God has shown us.
- Practice:** Always give thanks to God by say the Prayer of Thanksgiving.

Memory Verse:

"Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh".
(1 Timothy 3:16)



Lesson Content

We have been speaking together about the fruits of the Holy Spirit. These fruits are virtues we all, as Christians, want to try hard, to achieve. However, how did we become Christians in the first place? Wasn't it because Christ came to save us, His children? Let us then talk about how God saved us.

God's Plan for the Salvation of Man

Adam fell in sin and died. His sin was inherited by his offspring. God, because of His mercy, prepared a plan for salvation. The sin was against God who is unlimited, it was necessary for someone unlimited to die for that sin. An angel or a prophet could not do that to fulfil God's justice. There is no unlimited entity except God who does not die. So, due to the mercy of God and His love, He found that He must take flesh and die with this flesh to save man and hence satisfy both the justice of God and His mercy: "Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Psalms 85:10).

Christ is God Incarnate

Thousands of years before His coming, the prophets of the Old Testament foretold many things about Jesus Christ. Isaiah prophesied saying: "For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6).

The Meaning of the Incarnation and Redemption

"The Word became flesh" (John 1:14): in this lies the ultimate joy of the Christian faith. The same Incarnate Lord is both perfect God and perfect man. He came down from Heaven to redeem the earth, to unite man with God for ever. St Irenaeus wrote "the Son of God became the Son of Man, that man also might become the Son of God." In that lifting up of human nature into an everlasting communion with the Divine Life, the Fathers of the early Church unanimously saw the very essence of salvation, the basis of the whole redeeming work of Christ.

The Incarnation is the Best Proof of God's Love for Us

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only Begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). With the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, He came down to our world to raise us to heaven. "At that day you will know that I am in My Father and you in Me, and I in you" (John 14:20).

Application



Exercise

- God proved His great love for us by coming to us for our salvation. Can we go to Him as He came for us? Let us live our life with Jesus.
- When the Lord Jesus came to our world, He did not mean just to give us commandments. He meant to unite with us and give us heavenly power.



Our Talents and How to Use Them

The Parable of the Talents

Bible References: Matthew 25:14-30.

Lesson Aim:

To learn that God gave us talents and we should use them effectively.
We must use our talents to grow spiritually as well as in our daily lives

Memory Verse:

"Enter into the joy of your Lord".
(Matthew 25:21)



Background Information for the Servant

Serious Work by H.H. Pope Shenouda III

The Bible says, "Cursed is he who does the work of the Lord deceitfully" (Jeremiah 48:10). The one who works for the Lord must, "Be faithful until death" (Revelations 2:10). Faithfulness is a principal condition for service

With this seriousness, the Apostles witnessed for the name of Christ, and they were, "Preaching the Kingdom of God... with all confidence, no one forbidding [them]." (Acts 28:31). "And with great power, the Apostles gave witness... and great grace was upon them all." (Acts 4:33).

As a result of this serious, honest and faithful work, the kingdom of God spread. Listen to what God said to the Angel of the Church of Ephesus. "I know your works, your labour, your patience... and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary." (Revelation 2:2-3).

Serious work is built on faith: The more your faith in the weight and importance of your work is true and complete, the more serious your work will be. Leniency in work is an evidence of lack of faith and its importance.

Serious work indicates a sense of responsibility: Just as what Joseph, the faithful, did stockpiling wheat, fully aware that the life of many depends on his honesty. So it is with the spiritual service: the life of many depends on the honesty of the servant. If he neglects his service they become lost.

Serious work is controlled from one's inner self: It is controlled by one's own conscience and the voice of God inside them. This control is due to their love and holy zeal. They work seriously because "Time is short" and every minute counts, with any delay or negligence having its dangers.

Serious work is always successful: It is a perfect work because seriousness brings work to perfection. Perfect work is a successful work. It was said about the righteous man, "And whatever he does shall prosper" (Psalms 1:3).

Serious work does not slow down till completed: It does not believe in fatigue and does not seek rest. Its performer does not rest until the work is finished and he tastes its fruits, like Eliezer, Abraham's servant, who would not rest till he took Rebekah wife for his master's son. And when they asked him to rest, he answered "Do not hinder me" (Genesis 24:56).

Lesson Content

Begin by involving the students in a discussion: We have many talents, correct? What are some of your talents? Who gave us these talents? Today, we are going to talk about a story the Lord Jesus once told about three servants who received talents from their Master, what they did with these talents, and what happened to them after. Let us read the Gospel according to St Matthew 25:14-30 with the each other and discuss its contents.

In this parable, the Master gave his servants his endowments; to the first he gave five talents, to the second he gave two talents and to the third he gave one talent. He gave "to each according to his own ability" (Matthew 25:15). This means that the Master was not biased toward any of them, but he gave the endowments according to his knowledge of their own abilities. This teaches us not to be proud when we encounter the less talented because all talents are given from one source, "God". St Paul said "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all" (I Corinthians 12:4-6).

God does not look at the profits, but He looks at the honesty of his servants in using their talents. The problem of the man who had one talent was that he was lazy and lived his life inactively.

Profit brings profit, loss brings loss and sin brings sin. The man who had five talents, as he made a profit (5 more talents), His Master told him, "I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord" (Matthew 25:21). Similarly there was also the man who received the two talents. The man who was endowed with the one talent, however, neglected his talent and lived his life in a lazy manner and lost the talent which he had from God. Not only that, but he fell in the sin of insulting his Master by saying, "Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed" (Matthew 25:24). The life of laziness led him to commit a sin against His Master.

The reward for those who used their talents was "Enter into the joy of your Lord" (Matthew 25:21) and the punishment

for the lazy servant was to “cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 25:30).

God created each of us and gave us a message or a mission here on earth. Our duty is to figure out our role in order to benefit ourselves, our families, our church, and our communities. **“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”** (Ephesians 2:10) And in order to fulfil our role, we should say, **“Lord, what do You want me to do?”** (Acts 9:6)

Everyone has talents.

Who am I? Why did God create me? What does He want me to do? God gives everyone different talents such as qualifications, abilities, time, etc..., according to our potential. He expects us to use them to benefit ourselves, our communities, and all of humanity until He comes again.

It doesn't matter the number of talents we have; what matters is our faithfulness in using them wisely.

It is your responsibility to find out what your talents are. Otherwise, you would be living without a goal and will resort to non-edifying means of occupying your time. What is a talent?

A talent is every gift or every chance given to us from God. We must use it for His glory, the good of others, and for our own benefit. No one can say they do not have any talents; God gave talents to every human being.

Types of talents:

General Talents: a free divine gift given to all people such as...	
1- Life:	“for to me, to live is Christ” (Philippians 1:21).
2- Time:	We are all given the gift of time, 24 hours a day. We can appreciate it and invest it wisely, or we can neglect and waste it. Be careful, your time is your life; how you use it affects your eternity.
3- The body:	We must care for it and keep it healthy as it is a gift from God.
4- The mind:	Guide it and nurture it with what will edify and enlighten it.
5- Emotions and feelings:	Discipline them to be used in a constructive and useful way.
6- Health:	It is a gift that sometimes is only appreciated by those who lack it. Do you look at your health as a gift from God? Care for your health and use it to serve others.
7- Being a Child of God:	Do you ever think of giving thanks for being a member of the church of God and for being God's child? The greatest gift is being God's children.
8- Personal Gifts:	Such as playing music, photography, drawing, acting, sculpture, singing, being sociable, poetry, writing, positivity in life, peacefulness, being active, etc..

You must discover your talents and invest them. Hiding the talents is not humility, but it is like the servant who buried his talent in the “parable of the talents.”

We should give one tenth of all that we have to God. No matter how small it is, we must give back to the church (and to the poor) part of what God gave us.

How to discover your talent?



1. Examine and ask yourself:

You are the most capable of understanding yourself.
So, know yourself and discover what's in you.

What do you like to do? How do people describe you? etc...
Try something new to find out what you can do.



2. Read and research:

Reading opens your eyes to a lot of things; you can find out what fields interest you by reading and researching.



3. Ask others:

People around you can help you discover yourself. Ask those people around you whom you trust; those you know are experienced and who care for your well-being and listen to their guidance. This person can be your father or mother, your servant, your parents, your brothers or sisters, your true and faithful friend, etc..



4. Try new things:

You might find your talent by trying a new activity that you enjoy.



5. Don't compare yourself to others:

Your talents are your very own special and unique talents.
God can use even a small talent for His glory.



6. Develop your talent:

By learning and studying and by continuous practice and exercise.

“Do not neglect the gift that is in you.” (1 Timothy 4:14) for “Every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” (Matthew 3:10)

Application



Exercise

- We must do our best at school. Let us learn from the present moment to use at least part of our energy or talents to serve our Lord Jesus. If we give to the poor and needy, we are actually giving Jesus Himself.
- We must also do our best at home and participate in doing house work with the rest of the family members. We can help in cooking, cleaning, tidying things up and helping our younger sisters and brothers.
- Most importantly we have to use our talents to grow spiritually and have a place in heaven. How? By “Serious Work”. Take praying (in concentration) seriously, read the bible (in respect and concentration) and come regularly to church. In all of these spiritual practices, one has to fully utilise his or her talent. Also in serving the church, one has to utilise his or her full ability.



They Offered Him Gifts “Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh”

Bible References: Matthew 2:1-12

Lesson Aim:

To understand the meaning of these gifts.

Memory Verse:

“When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy”
(Matthew 2:10)



Background Information for the Servant

Who are the wise men?

All the historical sources indicate that the wise men are some of the very famous people of Persia. They are experts in Astrology (the Science of the Stars).

History and tradition indicate that the wise men were three: Kasbar, Milikour and Balshaser. Accompanying them were a great number of people to the extent that king Herod was very troubled when they came to Bethlehem. They had one question, "Where is the Christ born, the king of the Jews?"

The wise men came to Jerusalem when Jesus was about two years old. As indicated in Matthew 2:11 "and going into the house they saw the **child** with Mary His mother." Therefore, they did not go to the manger. In the same night, the angel appeared to Joseph and told him to take Jesus and Mary to Egypt. Therefore, Herod killed all children up to two years old after he knew from the wise men the time in which they saw the star. The wise men saw the star on the same night Jesus was born, but it took them a lot of time to prepare and travel this very long distance using camels.

Lesson Content

Gold, frankincense and myrrh: what are these? (Gifts that the wise men gave to Baby Jesus).

Why did the wise men give Jesus these gifts?

Today, we are going to learn about these wise men, and will explore why these gifts were given, and what they represent.

Start by reviewing who the wise men are. Emphasise that they came from far away and they arrived when Jesus was about two years old. We call them the wise men because they knew a lot about history and the stars.

Indeed, the Incarnation of the Word of God had the prophets talking about it in different ways for a long time before it happened. Despite that, the majority of the Jews ignored that completely. Therefore, God put them to shame when the foreigners (or the gentiles) came and accepted the Messiah as the Son of God. The wise men, by worshipping Jesus as a baby, were, in a way, themselves the beginning of the Gentiles' church. The shepherds were Jews and the wise men were Gentiles. The shepherds came to Him from a short distance but the wise men came from a faraway country. The shepherds were almost illiterate and poor, but the Wise men were sophisticated and rich. What is this simple fact telling us? It tells us that our Lord Jesus, by His coming, broke all the barriers between people; the barriers of race, colour or faith.

With the guidance of the Holy Spirit they carried these meaningful gifts to the Lord Jesus to indicate something. It indicates that the new born baby was not just one more baby coming into the world but He is different. Then the gifts presented to Him should be different also from what was usually presented to a newborn. The gifts were gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Gold:

Gold is a symbol that the new born is a great King. This is despite the fact that, by His own free will He had a very modest place of birth, i.e. a manger. He is a spiritual King whose Kingdom is not of this materialistic world. As He is a spiritual King, the people who believe in Him and in His Kingdom must be spiritual people and not of this world. And as the Cross was His way to achieve for us His Kingdom, then the people who follow Him have to go through the Cross. As St Paul said "... if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together." (Romans 8:17) The suffering is only external but the hearts of the believers are in continuous joy and peace. Let us pray that God will show us His kingdom so that He will become the king of our hearts.

Frankincense:

They offered Him frankincense as a symbol of His priesthood. David prophesied about Jesus Christ and said: "The Lord has sworn and will not relent, you are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." (Psalm 110:4). As Melchizedek was a priest who did not inherit the priesthood so also was Jesus. **The meaning of priest is a "middleman"**. Therefore we have an Advocate: the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Son of God. The Son of God returned Adam to paradise by satisfying the justice of the Father for Adam's sin.

Myrrh:

The Myrrh here is a symbol of the suffering that He was going to accept as the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29)

Application**Exercise**

What is our gift to Jesus Christ our Lord while we celebrate Christmas? He only wants our hearts. After we give Jesus our hearts, then we can give everything to Him easily: we can give money, time, talent and service for the Church and for others; we can witness to Him everywhere we go by our word and deeds; and we can win people for His Kingdom.



The Lord Jesus Established the Sacrament of Baptism

Bible References: Matthew 3:13-17, John 1:18-34, John 3:1-13

Lesson Aim:

To learn that our Lord Jesus established the Sacrament of Baptism by water and Holy Spirit through His own baptism.

Memory Verse:

"The Heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove"
(Matthew 3:16)



Background Information for the Servant

The Baptism of Jesus Christ - January 19 (According to the Julian Calendar)

Geographical Setting

At the very end of the Jordan River and just before it pours its waters into the Dead Sea, there is a shallow area in the river that could be crossed by wading called now the ford of 'Bethabara' (the crossing way). There, for many years merchants and travellers from Arabia, Persia and India have crossed the river on their way to Jerusalem, Egypt and Africa. It is a very rugged spot. During the summer, the heat is terrible, the air is heavy and the surface of the Dead Sea is in the colour of lead. There too was located the lost cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (read Genesis 13-19). The smell of Sulphur still hangs in the air as if to remind man forever that "... the wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23)

Winter is a bit better because a cooling breeze blows down the Jordan Valley in the evening to replace the heat of summer.

Introduction

In the wilderness of Judea, one day, a prophet or a messenger of God appeared around the year AD 30. He was a strange, rough looking man. His only garment was a camel skin caught at the waist by a strip of leather. His food was locust leaves and wild honey. He cried to everyone who passed by and, out of curiosity stopped a moment to listen: "The reign of God is about to begin. Right now, God has His axe set ready at the base of the tree of your life. Unless you repent of your wicked ways, and submit your life to His rule, He will chop you down and throw you into the fire."

However, there was a happy side to his preaching. Everyone, who truly repented would be forgiven. But, how would the repentant be forgiven? John preached a baptism of repentance for the remission of sin. The word 'baptism' is derived from the Greek word '*baptismos*', which means 'immersion'.

It is important to note that John baptised people with water — for repentance from their sins, so that they can change their sinful ways and go on to lead a holy life, in the hope that God will forgive them. However, John's baptism cannot forgive sins — only the blood of Christ can forgive sins. Therefore, only baptism with the 'Holy Spirit and fire' can forgive sins.

Crowds Come to John the Baptist

In the early Jewish tradition, and until the coming of the Messiah, God used to send every hundred years or so a prophet to preach to the Jews to return to their God and to foretell about the coming of the Messiah, the Saviour who would release them from their bondage. When John the Baptist appeared at the Jordan River, it was more than 300 years since the Jews had a prophet to tell them, "Thus says the Lord ..." The Jews were waiting for either another prophet or the Messiah Himself. Therefore, the word spread like fire through the land, "There is a new prophet preaching at the Jordan ford. There is a message that has come from God."

The Baptism of the Messiah

People crowded to see and listen to the new prophet. Among the crowds were the rich and the poor, the officials of the church and those of the government, the sophisticated and the plain ordinary people. As they listened, their consciences awoke and they remembered their past sins. They streamed into the water to be baptised by John ... to be cleansed from their sins.

One day, someone asked another, "Can this be the promised Saviour, the Messiah?" In few minutes, everyone was asking the same question. Right away John answered: "I am only a voice crying in the wilderness, a voice preparing you for the coming of the Saviour. Soon, someone will come after me, someone greater than I am that I am not fit to untie His shoes. He will baptise you with the fire of the Holy Spirit."

Among the crowds, there was a stranger from a faraway city called Galilee. He also stepped into the water to be baptised. But this particular man was different from all other men, This man alone has no sins. He is the only man who does not need to be baptised. Why then does he join the wicked and the sinners at the water's edge? This thought came to John himself, and the Baptist said to Jesus Christ: "It is I who needs baptism from you, and yet You come to me?" But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him.

Something else happened at His baptism. After His immersion into the water, as Jesus was standing, suddenly above His head the heavens opened, as if a crack happened in the sky, and the Holy Spirit descended in the shape of a dove and rested on Him. At that moment God the Father Himself said: "This is my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Read Matthew 3 and Luke 3)

Epiphany in the Orthodox Church

We in the Orthodox Christians consider this event, the Baptism of Jesus Christ, one of the major Feasts of the Church. It is called the 'Epiphany' which in Greek means 'showing forth' or 'manifestation'. In this event, Jesus Christ was not only declared by God the Father to be His only Begotten Son; but also it shows forth the three Persons of the Holy Trinity; the Father speaks from heaven, the Son in the Jordan River being baptised, and the Holy Spirit descends from heaven taking the shape of a dove.

On Epiphany Eve, and just before the Divine Liturgy, a special service is held in the Orthodox Church. It is called the 'Lakan' which means 'the blessing of the water'. This is to commemorate the blessing of the water of the Jordan by having Christ baptised in it and by having the Holy Spirit descending on our Lord. In this service, the priest asks God's blessing of this water. He says: "Bless this water that is set before thee and give it the blessing that you gave to the Jordan by the descent of the Holy Spirit... Let it be a fountain of blessing, a holy gift, a healer of the sickness of the body and the soul ... and a blessing to the homes, ..."

At the end of the service, the priest blesses the people with that water by crossing their foreheads three times.

Lesson Content

How many times were you born? Once? Or Twice?

In fact, all Christians are born twice!

The first time, we were born of our parents.

The second time, we were born of God.

So, we all have two birthdays!

When were we born this second time? (When we were baptised).

Today, we are going to learn about the very first time the sacrament of baptism was performed, and for whom.

Describe in detail the baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ by St John the Baptist. Our Lord Jesus Christ stayed in Galilee after He came back from Egypt and when He was about thirty years old, He came from Galilee to John at the Jordan River to be baptised by him. "And John tried to prevent Him saying, 'I have need to be baptised by You, and are You coming to me?' But Jesus answered and said to him 'Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness.'" (Matthew 3:14-15) When the Lord Jesus had been baptised the **Heavens Opened** and the Holy Spirit descended like a dove and the Father's voice was heard saying "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Therefore the Holy Trinity was revealed (or manifested).

The word Epiphany is a Greek word and it means Manifestation.

In many instances in the Holy Bible, we find the Lord Jesus teaches about something, practises it Himself to bless it and then He delivers it to His Disciples and the church to do it and gain all the heavenly powers in it. This was what happened to Baptism. He taught about it, practised it Himself (although He did not need that) and then He gave it to us as a very important Sacrament.

When Jesus Christ was baptised by John He established the sacrament of Baptism in the church. John proclaimed about Jesus' baptism that "He (i.e., Jesus) will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire." (Matthew 3:11)

The baptism of St John was for repentance only. But the baptism of Jesus Christ is a new birth by the Holy Spirit. **(Now please mention the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus, John 3:1-13).** The Lord Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (John 3:5)

The Lord Jesus explained to Nicodemus that baptism could not be understood by the human mind but only by seeing the effects on the new born, i.e., the Christians and their lives. Jesus used the example of the wind which we do not know exactly from where it is coming or where it is going but we only see the effects.

Before Jesus ascended to heaven He said to His Disciples "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising

them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19-20)

St Augustine said that we have two births: a physical one, i.e. being born for this world, and a spiritual one, i.e. being born for the Kingdom of God.

In our Orthodox Creed we say "we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins." This teaches us that a Christian is baptised only once. When a person is baptised he becomes purified from the original sin of Adam and from any other sin committed in his life until his Baptism. Whatever sins committed after his Baptism, they are forgiven through the Sacrament of confession. Once he is purified of his sins through Baptism, he is actually born anew, born in a new life, born in a life of blessedness and of son ship to God. When a person is baptised, he or his parents or godparents, on his behalf, declare his rejection of Satan and all his wicked deeds, and declare also his acceptance of Jesus Christ as his personal Lord, King and Saviour committing himself to be His faithful follower. Then he is dressed in white clothes as a symbol of his newly attained purity. Then a Cross is put around his neck to remind him of what Jesus said "whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his Cross, and follow Me." (Mark 8:34)

Application



Exercise

- When we were baptised, each one of us became a child of God. God declared then that He accepted you as His son or daughter. Now comes the time when you should declare to God that you also accept Him as your God to Whom you, in complete obedience, submit your life.
- Besides, since Baptism is being born of God, then why don't we celebrate our Baptismal Day as we do with our birthday. This practice would keep reminding us of our identity as the children of God.



The Life of Prayer (I)

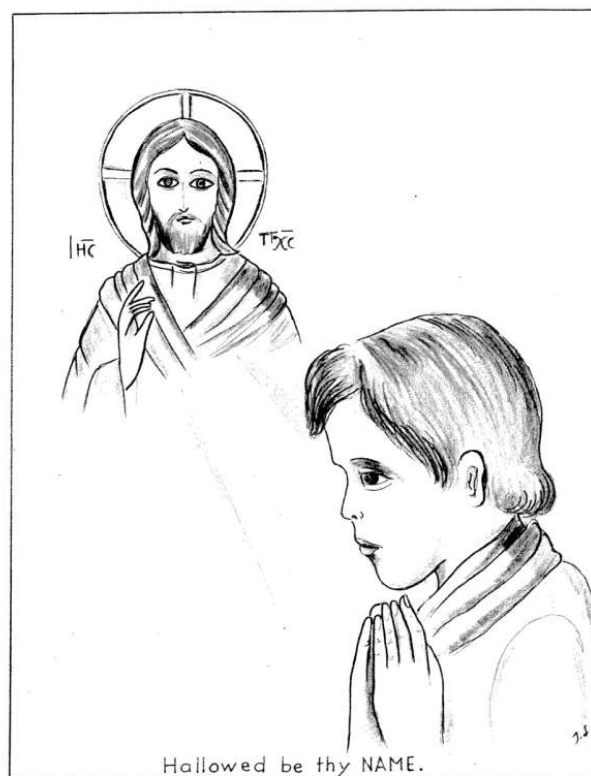
Definition and Kinds of Prayer

Lesson Aim:

In this lesson we learn about the definition of prayer and its power and source. We also learn about specific useful prayers like: Kyrie-eleison, the Lord Jesus' prayer, tears in prayers and the flash prayers.

Memory Verse:

"Lord, teach us to pray"
(Luke 11:1)



Background Information for the Servant

The life of prayer according to the Coptic Orthodox Tradition

(A) What is Prayer?

Prayer is the spontaneous perseverance of a man to stand in the presence of God, and it is also the divine desire from God to invite man to be seen in front of Him.

Prayer is similar to the umbilical cord in connecting man and God just as a baby is connected to and nourished by the umbilical cord in his mother's womb.

A king has numerous armies, soldiers, and officers, but only a few of them stand in the king's presence for his honour. Just as the king "reflects" on his soldiers who are so honoured, so God "reflects" upon those who stand in the state of prayer for His Glory.

Exactly as Moses came down from Mt. Sinai after having neither eaten nor drunk anything for forty days and nights, his face shone to the extent that the people were not able to look at his haloed face and asked him to put on a veil.

During our Lord Jesus' visit with Mary and Martha, Martha was complimented for she toiled to serve the Lord; but Mary, who sat down at Jesus' feet, was quite fortunate for she chose to remain in a state of attention in front of the Lord Jesus.

The seductive devil never stops fighting us to put out the fire of prayer, lest we should defeat him, because he knows that prayer is our victorious weapon.

When we cease to pray, covetousness, concupiscence, and lust will easily overwhelm our hearts, and we will be taken by surfeiting, laziness, and worldliness. When we pray, there is another result: the treasures of heaven and its mysteries and all the kingdom's keys are made available. Prayer touches the secret springs of deity as the last pick of the miner may break open a hidden treasure or a deep cavern set with dazzling jewels.

Sometimes it is difficult to pray and the lack of prayer sometimes makes it harder, and a call for strength and power is needed.

Prayer is the Fortification of the Soul

"A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, spring shut up, a fountain sealed." (Song 4:12)

The soul in the state of prayer looks like a "garden enclosed", neither robbers nor strangers can pass through it. Therefore, when a man prays he should never allow his mind to stray from the thought of Christ. A man who prays will never accept any false religion or teaching that is not according to the Bible.

The soul in the state of prayer is a well spring shut up, its depth or its waters are not made turbid by the boisterous frolic of horses or by the tread of the farmer, the spring only mirrors the image of its viewer, her lover, who is the spouse of the soul. It does not reflect or accept any strangers. This is what prayer is; when we dedicate ourselves to our Lord only. His image is deeply engraved in our hearts and should cleanse.

The soul in the state of prayer is a fountain sealed. This simply means that the riches of the life of prayer are not measured by externalities of the life of saints, but by its depth. For example, the huge tree with its sweet fruits does not belong to the **visible** huge trunk above the earth but to the **invisible** roots inside the earth, and as the tree's roots are long and deep inside the earth so also should man have a long and deep inner life of prayer.

(B) The Power of Prayer

In the war between Israel and Amalekites it came to pass when Moses held up his hand that Israel prevailed, and when Moses let down his hand, Amalekites prevailed. Man can never prevail in his spiritual war against the world and over its lusts without prayer.

In launching a submarine, the pressure of a baby's finger is sufficient to put into operation the ponderous machinery by which the submarine majestically slides on to the ocean waves. So if we dare to pray, we can put into operation

all the providential machinery and all the purposes of God, which are to be executed and which are in suspense until we pray!

We have to pray no matter how faint we feel. The unloaded gun is horrifying to the enemy.

The Three States of Prayer

a) Love: At first, love is the beginning of prayer, for our Lord was incarnated and became man, sharing our lowly nature according to his love for mankind, and by love we can transcend to the heavenly life.

b) Sanctification by Prayer: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." (Matthew 5:8)

c) Fullness by Prayer: Our Lord Jesus showed Himself alive (to His Disciples) after His passion by many infallible proofs. He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, which He said, "you have heard from Me." (Acts 1:4)

(C) The Source of Prayer

I. The Bible: The first source of the life of prayer is the Bible. Our prayer will be sweet and acceptable if it is scriptural and according to the Bible.

If the sources of prayer are dried up, then irrigate the heart by meditation. By meditation we can hear our Lord speaking to us inside our hearts. "My son, keep your father's command, and do not forsake the law of your mother, bind them continually upon your heart, tie them around your neck. When you roam, they will lead you; when you sleep, it shall keep you, and when you awake, they will speak with you." (Proverbs 6:20-22)

II. Meditation as a Source of Prayer: Meditation is sharing the Lord in His journey of life, especially during His Incarnation.

The spiritual elder, Fr John Saba, said that in meditating on His incarnation "we fly with the birds in the purity of His sky, and swim with the fish in the seas of His splendid Glory, and delight in His Holy Name as with a sweet in our mouth."

"Carry the infant Jesus in your embrace as His mother, St Mary had done before."

"Offer Him your best gifts as the Magi, and worship Him with the shepherds, praise Him with the angels, and carry Him in your arms as did Simeon, the Elder."

"Flee with Him to the land of Egypt, and follow all the stages of His childhood; for if we love Him, we should be one with Him and the savouring of His immortal body will give life to our mortal body."

"Follow the Baptist to the Jordan River to fill your eyes with His dazzling Glory during the Epiphany Theophany."

"Go with Him to the wilderness and cast away your lusts, for the Lord was fasting for you, and be quiet as the beasts were quiet under His feet, who enjoyed their creator and served Him."

"Follow Him to the Cross and share His suffering."

"Awake early and go when it is dark to the sepulchre with the Marys to see His empty grave."

"Wait with the Disciples in the Upper Room to see His appearance which is the light of light."

"Hear Him calling you, come nearer to me."

"Let your hand touch His wounds and be not of little faith, but be believing."

"At last, incline your ear to hear Him saying, 'peace be with you, and be fulfilled of the Holy Spirit.'"

Let me conclude by saying, "if the sources of prayer are dried up, irrigate the heart by meditation on the Incarnation of the Word made flesh."

In the Old Testament, the Lord accepted only ruminant animals to be His sacrifice and did not accept any other animals.

The reason for this is that the ruminants store food in their stomachs and from time to time regurgitate it for entertainment and to enjoy the delicious food. This is similar to the mediator, who delights in the word of the Bible, and he recalls it from time to time as he meditates on the word day and night, as the ruminants does to get his utmost satisfaction. "Blessed be the man who delights in the law of the Lord; and in His word meditates day and night." (Psalms 1:3)

III. The daily hourly prayers as a source of Prayer: The daily prayers offered by the Fathers of the church for all faithful Christians are seven, as was said by King David: "Seven times a day do I praise Thee of your righteous judgement." (Psalms 119:64)

These seven prayers correspond to certain times of the day and night as arranged by the Apostolic Fathers in the books of the Apostolic Tradition, i.e., the Didache. The same is mentioned in the texts of Ibn El Assal and in Chapter 16 of the Book of Mesbah El Zolma, "The Lamp of Darkness".

The following is a schedule of the canonical house and the reasons for their specification.

Every hour begins with a prayer of Thanksgiving and Psalm 51, "Have mercy on me, O God..."

Then follow the Psalms corresponding to the canonical meaning of the Hours.

Following the Psalms is a chapter from the Gospel and the Gloria, then the Trisagion.

The Intercession of the Holy Mother.

The Creed.

Also **Kyrie-eleison** (Lord have mercy) is said forty-one times. After the **Kyrie-eleison** follows the "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of Sabbath".

Last is the Prayer for our Absolution.

"Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me, a sinner" prayer This is a short prayer as a swift arrow split off into the sky to attend in front of the Lord. It is an acceptable prayer, because it calls upon the good name of our good Saviour, Jesus Christ. "For there is no other name under heaven given among men, by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

When we are aware that we are always in the presence of God, we worship Him, honour Him, and speak with Him.

The rule of the Jesus Prayer

Repeat the Name of our Savior Jesus Christ, hundreds of times every day, whether you are walking, resting, eating, or at work, for the continuous repetition creates a habit of prayer and the habit creates a permanent life of prayer. "Men always ought to pray and not lose heart." (Luke 18:1)

At the beginning of your encounter with the Jesus Prayer, your mouth and tongue may not be used the repetition of the prayer. Also, you may feel despair and become unable to complete it, but the continuity of this prayer bursts forth as a spring of sweetness which would never dry up.

After much practice with this prayer, the tongue stops talking and the heart absorbs the prayer and repeats the invocation easily without resistance and without audible utterance.

This prayer shall speak to you when you are awake or asleep. "I sleep, but my heart is awake; it is the voice of my beloved! He knocks." (Songs 5:2)

Upon completion of this prayer, the Holy Spirit abides in the heart through the name of Jesus Christ and transfers this good name into the image of our Saviour. By Him, we shall be transformed into the image of His Glory.

Tears in Prayer

From the continuity of the invocation of the Name of Jesus Christ come forth tears. They come not by force, but easily as a response to real prayer.

Tears are the secret fountain flowing out of the eyes as rivers of living water which had been sealed.

It is difficult to write about the life of tears. Who can interpret or have the knowledge of the language of tears, because tears are our own feelings melted in a spot of tears.

Tears are the only tongue which has been understood by the whole world. Tears, as a tongue, speak all languages. When the tongue becomes perplexed and is unable to make one speak, then the heart will talk fluently by the tongue of tears.

A true expression of true feelings comes by tears. Tears wash the heart by the water of repentance, and revive the weak souls, as dew refreshes the tree's leaves.

Sometimes, uninformed people account tears as an example of mockery. They ignore the power of tears. Whereas our Lord can never be defeated by anything of his creation, our tears can overcome Him. "Turn your eyes away from me, for they have overcome me." (Song 6:5)

Finally, the Holy Spirit carries the explosive springs of pure tears to represent us in front of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Our Lord keeps these tears nearer and dearer to Him. He lets not one drop of our tears fall down. Instead, He will gather our tears and preserve them to intercede before Him. (Psalms 57:8)

APPENDIX A

The sayings of the fathers

When the sun rises the beasts hurry to their dens and hide. So is the effect of prayer. It is the ray that falls, enlightens our thoughts, and every beastly ignorance which are our sins and lusts dissipate and vanish. (St John Chrysostom)

We only have to pray in courage and in concentration, because prayer expels the power of Satan and the evil spirits will disappear. (St John Chrysostom)

The prayer of the righteous is a key to the heavens. Its power is omnipotent. It is a shield for our souls, the assign of every virtue, the ladder on which we ascend up to the heavens and to the fullness of God. It is the work of angels and the foundation of faith. (St Augustine)

Man enters to pray, kneels, and his heart is filled with divine power. His soul rejoices with God as a bride rejoices with her bridegroom. (Abba Macarius the Great)

It is not difficult for a human who is busy all day with worldly affairs to spare an hour for prayer, when the subconscious dives to the depths of worship and contemplation in the other world of eternal life in deep pleasure, soothing his thoughts and elevating himself above worldly desires, when he sublimates and rises up then. (Abba Macarius the Great)

At these moments a cloud of fascination spellbinds his thoughts and veils them from the earthly thoughts. And he meditates into heavenly matters and indiscernible realities until he distills his thoughts into prayer, and all he can say then is, "I wish my soul goes out with my prayer." (Abba Macarius the Great)

APPENDIX B

The sayings of the fathers

Upon the advent of monasticism among the Egyptian monks, the concept of meditative life was at its apex. The early Fathers adopted this principal aspect and practised meditation to guard themselves against the pitfalls of the flesh. (St John Chrysostom)

They lived in solitude in their separate cells mostly in isolation. But when they congregated in groups inside the walls, they started to lose the magnificence of meditation. It is a known fact that any activity that forces a monk to relinquish his solitude to perform any duty — particularly with others — dissipates his mental concentration and blunts the power of visions he is exercising. (St John Chrysostom)

Whenever your tears run down your eyes during prayer do not be vain. Behold it was prayer that granted you these tears, and led the way to sincere confession to soften God's heart toward you. Beware not to make tears your goal because they are there to ventralise lusts. Do not desire tears for their own, lest you should enrage Him who gave it. (Nibs, the Sinaite)

* **Note:** This article is taken from Fr. Marcus Bishay's book, "The Life of Prayer", St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church, Chicago 1978.

Lesson Content

What are some of the things you do every day? (Eat, sleep, brush your teeth, read the Holy Bible, pray, etc.)

As Christians, we should pray every day.

Today, we want to learn, in depth, about this thing we call "prayer", which we are supposed to do every day.

Introduction: The Lord asks us to pray: "...men always ought to pray and not lose heart." (Luke 18:1)

"Pray without ceasing." (Thessalonians 5:17)

"The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16)

A) What is prayer?

Prayer is the spontaneous perseverance of a man to stand in the presence of God, and it is also the Divine desire from God to invite man to be seen in front of Him. When a man prays he should never allow his mind to stray from the thought of Christ. So when we pray we must dedicate this time for our Lord only.

B) The Power of Prayer:

Mention the story of Moses who held up his hands that Israel may prevail over Amalekites.

Prayers can do miracles: The church was praying for St Peter in the prison (please read Acts 12:1-12).

C) Sources of Prayer:

The Bible: The first source of the life of prayer is the Bible. Our prayer will be sweet, acceptable and effective if it is scriptural or Biblical. In the Bible we find various model prayers uttered by many spiritually gigantic personalities. Some of these prayers we can and should use because they speak most eloquently to our needs, and some we can learn a lot from. For example: the Psalms of David form a collection of excellent prayers, the Lord's prayer which the Lord Jesus Christ Himself taught us, and other prayers such as the prayer of Jonah to the Lord his God from the fish's belly.

Meditation as a source of prayer: Meditate upon the life of our Lord on earth, His humility in His birth and pray to be humble, His forgiveness to others even those who crucified Him and pray to learn to forgive, His meekness, His love, His compassion. His service, His prayer ...etc. Meditate also upon the Biblical events, the two men who went up to the Temple to pray, the one who asked for God's mercy was accepted but not the boastful prayer of the Pharisee; the ten lepers who were healed, only one came back to give thanks to the Lord. Is praising God a part of our prayers? Our Church puts a great emphasis on the prayers of praise...Indeed; meditation is an excellent source of prayer.

The hourly prayers as a source of prayer: These are the daily prayers offered by the Fathers of the Church and they are seven as David said "Seven times a day I praise you, because of your righteous judgement." (Psalm 119:164)

Every hour has the following:

- Prayer of thanksgiving
- Psalm 51, "Have mercy on me, O God..."
- Psalms
- A selection from the Gospel
- Litanies
- The Gloria
- The Trisagion

- The intercession of the Holy Mother
- The Creed
- Also Kyrie-eleison (Lord have mercy) is said 41 times
- The Kyrie-eleison is followed by "Holy, Holy, Holy..."
- Last is a Prayer for our Absolution.

Kinds of Prayer:

The "Kyrie-eleison" - "God have mercy upon me" prayer: Mention here the prayer of the Pharisee and that of the tax collector. The tax collector stood far and said "God be merciful to me, a sinner." (Luke 18:13) Jesus said that the tax collector went home purified from his sins but not the Pharisee. His prayer did not benefit him. Please read Luke 18:9-14.

The "Lord Jesus" Prayer: To know the strength of this prayer, you have to try it. The prayer is one word, "JESUS".

Tears in prayer: This comes as an expression of repentance and love to God.

Obstacles to deep prayers:

1) The person is lukewarm: "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So, then because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth." (Revelation 3:15-16)

A person is lukewarm, not hot, when he does not have a deep spiritual relationship with God but, like many so called Christians today, he gives part of his life and devotion to God and the other part to the world. Also, he is lukewarm when he prays to God without being aware of his sins and without repenting from them.

2) Formality of the prayers: With some people, prayer becomes a habit that is done without even thinking. This should not be the case with us. We have to pray with understanding and spirit. When we sing in the church or at home let us put our hearts and minds into that hymn or that song.

3) God is only on the surface of our life: If we are living all day long away from God, forgetting Him, falling into sins, being immersed completely in worldly matters ...etc, it becomes very hard for us, at the end of the day, to come back to God and have a real deep intimate prayer. We must practice remembering God often during our day and having even "flash" prayers and short communications with Him.

4) Too much involvement in the world: Don't be too involved in the world. Leave room for God in your life. Make sure that this room is becoming larger and not smaller.

Application



Exercise

- When we pray we must stand before God the Almighty with great awe, honour and respect, and, in discipline of mind and thought, we must concentrate on what we pray for and what we meditate upon.
- We need three kinds of prayers: (1) Personal prayers, (2) Family prayers and (3) Prayers in the church.
- Let us try our best to have effective prayers. In order to do that we have to remove the four obstacles mentioned above.
- To benefit from prayers we have to pray many times during the day. The flash prayers, the prayer of the name of Jesus and the prayers of Kyrie-eleison.



The Life of Prayer (II)

The Canonical Hours of the Agpeya

Lesson Aim:

Learn the importance of praying with the Agpeya.

Lesson Objectives:

Know: The different canonical hours of the Agpeya and their symbolism.

Feel: The importance and benefit of praying with the Agpeya.

Practice: Living with God in prayers all day long. Our day should consist of studying, eating, playing, exercising, helping our parents at home and, most importantly, praying.

Memory Verse:

Seven times a day I praise You.
(Psalm 119:164)

Background Information for the Servant

Schedule of the Canonical Hours and Their Symbolism

The First Hour — Morning Prayer (6am)

This is also called the 'Matins' Prayer. It is arranged to be prayed at dawn, when the first light appears. At this hour we praise the Lord for shedding His light upon us and bringing us to this day. We ask Him to keep us during the day free from sin and help us pass through the day in peace. The Gospel of this hour is from John 1, —In the Beginning was the Word and the Word was with God,... That was the true light which gives light to every man who comes into the world...but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

The Third Hour — Terce (9am)

This hour corresponds to the time in which the Holy Spirit came upon the Disciples at the Feast of Pentecost. During our prayer we beseech the Lord for our fulfillment of the Holy Spirit.

The Sixth Hour — Sext (12pm)

At this hour our Lord was crucified on the Cross, and our prayer is to share His suffering. "O You who on the sixth day and at the Sixth Hour was nailed on the Cross, because of the sin which Adam committed in paradise."

The Ninth Hour — None (3pm)

At this time our Lord gave up His soul. "O Thou, who commended Thy Spirit into the hands of the Father when Thou hung on the Cross at the Ninth Hour...and when the thief saw the Chief of life hanging on the Cross, he said, —Had not the crucified one been God incarnate, then would the sun have not hidden its light, nor the earth shaken. Therefore, O Thou my Lord, remember me when Thou I You come into Thy Kingdom."

The Eleventh Hour — Vespers (5pm)

This hour is arranged so that we thank God Almighty for all His blessings during the day and implore Him to guard us against the contingencies of the night and from the evils of Satan.

The Twelfth Hour — Compline (6pm)

This is arranged to be prayed before we go to sleep in thankfulness of God, who helped us pass through the day in peace. We ask Him to keep us from any evil during the night and we remember God in our hearts. As the prophet says, "When I remember you on my bed, I meditate on you in the night watches, because you have been my help, therefore, in the shadow of your wings will I rejoice" (Psalms63: 6-7).

The Midnight Prayer (12am)

This is a long prayer consisting of three services. It begins with the prayer, "Arise, O children of the light, to praise the Lord of Hosts, that He may grant us the salvation of our souls. When we stand before you bodily, remove from our minds the sleep of inadvertence. Give us, O Lord, alertness so that we realise how to stand before you in prayer. Bless ye the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord, who, by night stand in the house of the Lord..." This service also contains one of the Psalms (119), and a reading from the Gospel of St Matthew 25:1-13, "Then the kingdom of heaven shall be linked to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom..."

The Meaning of the Psalms

Because the words of the Bible are the breath of the Holy Spirit, the Psalms are the agreeable language of love, and have been accepted as inspired by the Holy Spirit to be the delicacy of language between two lovers, the Holy Spirit and man. The Psalms are an inspiration to have a journey with our Lord, to acknowledge the whole creation, visible and invisible.

Through the Psalms, the Holy Spirit elevates us above our limited perspective to participate with the angels in their praises, to shout with the Cherubim and the Seraphim, "Holy, Holy, Holy", and to transcend through the Holy Spirit the mists, which are the shadow of the Lord's feet and the clouds, which are the Lord's chariot. The spiritual journey enables us to walk beside the Lord upon the wings of the angels. The Holy Spirit is a wise and gentle companion, who has undertaken to guide us to our destination.

By means of the Psalms, the Holy Spirit carries us across many darksome woods and forests, where the sun has seldom penetrated and where wild beasts have their lair. Lying under the Lord's care, we pass over paths paved with flint so sharp and slabs of rock so slippery, that when we feel tired the Holy Spirit will leave us to contemplate alone in the long stretches of dreary desert where the glare blinds and the sunbeams cut like swords.

From the Gloria, the reading is "Realise, O my soul, the awfulness of that day and wake up. Light your lamp with the oil of joy, for you know not when the voice will proclaim unto you: "Behold the bridegroom cometh".

After the midnight prayer, we awake to praise and glorify the Lord and to greet the light of the morning. The Midnight Prayer is to adorn the church with praises and ourselves in order to welcome the advent of Emmanuel and to participate in His Holy Communion.

Lesson Content

How many times do you pray every day? Once? Twice?

When do you pray? In the morning, before you eat your meals? What about before you sleep?

Well, if you were to follow the Agpeya, we would pray seven times every day as the Psalm says "Seven times a day I will praise You." Last time, we learned that we must stand before God, with honour and respect and to pray with concentration. Today, we are going to learn about the significance of each of the hourly Agpeya prayers, so that we learn how to pray every day, all day long.

Please use the Agpeya (Canonical Hours) to illustrate the seven daily prayers. Urge each of the children to have his or her own Agpeya.

The Morning Prayer (Matins)

Let us get up early and say this prayer: we thank God for shedding His light upon us and ask Him to protect us all day long. Let us give special importance to the Morning Prayer and put our whole day in the hands of God.

The Prayer of the 3rd Hour (9am)

We ask that God may fill us with the Holy Spirit like what happened at this same time on the Day of Pentecost. If we are busy at this time, we can pray a part of it even in silence.

The Prayer of the 6th hour (12pm)

We remember that our Savior Jesus Christ was crucified for us at this hour.

The Prayer of the 9th hour (3p.m.)

Jesus gave His soul into the hands of the Father. We remind ourselves that at any time our life could be taken away from earth. Therefore, we pray God to help us be prepared all the time for that hour.

The Prayer of the 11th hour (5p.m.)

We thank God for all His blessings to us during the day.

The Prayer of the 12th hour (6p.m.)

This is the prayer before we go to sleep.

The Midnight Prayer

This is a long prayer consisting of three services. In this prayer we praise the Lord. It is a good idea for the family to pray together at least the prayer of the 12th hour from the Agpeya before going to sleep.

If it is impossible for us in the regular days to pray all these prayers during the day because of school, can we say these prayers completely on Sundays or Saturdays or during vacation? During the regular week days at least we can say portions of each hour.

Application



Exercise

What do we learn from this lesson?

- Let us practice to live with God in prayers all day long. Our day should consist of studying, eating, playing, exercising, helping our parents at home and, most importantly, praying.
- We must pray using the Agbeya because it makes your prayers much deeper and meaningful.



Psalms of David

Psalm 19 the Heavens Declare the Glory of God

Bible References: Psalm 19:1-10

Lesson Aim:

To get familiar with the Psalms of David. In this lesson we learn to glorify God through the beautiful nature that He created and the commandments of God contained in the Holy Bible.

Memory Verse:

"The heavens declare the glory of God."
(Psalm 19:1)



Background Information for the Servant

God's Love for Us by HH Pope Shenouda III

How great is God's love for us. It's enough to say that God is Love... And "we love Him because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19)

He loved us before we were, therefore He created us...

Because of His love for us, He created us after His image and likeness.

He prepared everything for us before we were created. He raised the Heaven to be a roof and paved the Earth so we can walk on it. He made the light, water, plants and paradise... Then He created us.

When we fell in sin, He prepared for us a way of salvation.

Due to His love for us, He sent prophets to guide us and gave us a conscience and a written Law to enlighten our insights.

It was His love for us that made Him incarnate, take our nature and bless this nature in Him. On our behalf, He obeyed the Law and pleased God the Father by presenting a God-fearing image of humanity.

Due to His love, He died for us, "The just for the unjust." (1 Peter 3:18)

He became a love-offering on the Cross. He carried the sin of the whole world and washed it with His blood. "The One without sin was considered sinful, for our sake," and paid the whole price on our behalf.

"... Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end." (John 13:1)

And, "Greater love has no one than this, to lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13)

Because He loved us, He said, "No longer do I call you servants, but I have called you friends." (John 15:15) He also called us brethren and, "... in all things He had to be made like His brethren." (Hebrews 2:17) We became sons of the Heavenly Father, "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God." (1 John 3:1)

To show His love for us, He said, "... I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20) "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them." (Matthew 18:20)

His love is also shown in His protection, care and guidance for us in everything.

Lesson Content

The Psalms is a book of prayers which was written by David the prophet and others under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

St Athanasius said that the Psalms (without the parts written as prophecies about our Lord Jesus) can be considered by the reader as his own words of prayers written for his benefits. They contain meditations to help us praise the Lord in all occasions of our lives.

Psalm 19: The power and mystery of God is revealed to the saints by two methods:

Method 1: (The first part of Psalm 19, namely verses 1-6). The book of creation through which we know the power of God. "The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork." (Psalm 19:1)

Method 2: The Law of God contained in the Holy Bible which tells us about God (the second part of Psalm 19, namely verses 7-14). "The Law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." (Psalm 19:7)

Method 1: The Book of Creation

The heavens are speaking of the glory of God, i.e. they declare the power of God. This is a reply to the people who do not believe in God. If heaven is made by the hands of God, can you imagine how great God is?

The firmament in heaven proclaims the handiwork of God. All the creatures look down to the earth, except man who was created to look up to heaven. The firmament has a cycle which goes on in an accurate and perfect way day after day and night after night silently and even without being noticed.

Night comes after day and the sun comes every morning and appears to the whole world as a beautiful bride coming out of her hiding and as a strong man happy with his victories. During the day the whole world enjoys the light and the heat of the sun. All these always glorify the Lord who created and organised them all.

Therefore, heavens, firmament and sun are silent preachers of God to all nations and tongues.

Therefore, we thank the Lord who created all these for us.

Method 2: The Law of the Lord Contained in The Holy Bible:

David says that the word of God is a source of life for the believers. The word of God reveals the glory and mystery of God.

Psalm 19:7-14 gives the Holy Bible six characteristics:

- Perfect: The law of the Lord is perfect which means nothing is added or deleted from it. It is given for "the conversion of the soul."
- Sure: The testimony of the Lord is sure. The Bible is sure in its hope, salvation and testimony of God. The Bible cannot lie and its benefit is "making wise the simple."
- Right: The precepts of the Lord are right. They teach the right way leading to goodness and they avoid the false way leading to wickedness. Their benefit is "rejoicing the heart". Therefore, the Law of the Lord gives continuous happiness because it changes us from wickedness to righteousness.
- Pure: The commandments of the Lord are pure. They are light to our feet so that we do not stumble in darkness. They enlighten our eyes.
- Fear of the Lord: The fear of the Lord is clean. It cleanses, purifies and makes white the heart and mind of man. Yes, the fear of the Lord endures forever and leads to eternal life.
- True and righteous altogether: The law of the Lord is true and righteous altogether.

All these six characteristics of the Law of God contained in the Holy Bible have various fruits for our souls: they give wisdom, they give joy, and they give light for our minds and our thoughts.

In other words, David is telling us that the Law of the Lord, the testimony of the Lord, the statutes of the Lord, the commandment of the Lord, the fear of the Lord and the judgements of the Lord, all these are, for us, more precious than gold and all the precious metals of the world. Keeping them is sweeter than honey and gives us a great reward.

The word of God helps the person who knows it. It saves him from sins both hidden and manifest. These sins, whether they are hidden evil thought, pride or lustful desires or manifest evil and wrong doings, the word of the Lord preserves him from them all. The Lord is indeed our strength and salvation.

Application



Exercise

What do we learn from this lesson?

- In His great love for me, God has created the heavens and the earth which declare His glory.
- He also gave me His word in the Holy Bible to live by and to be my light, my strength and my salvation.
- There is His great love for me, He came to be united with me and raise me to heaven.



The Divine Liturgy - (I)

Lesson Aim:

This is the first lesson of a three-lesson series on the Divine Liturgy. The purpose of this series is to familiarise the students with the Divine Liturgy, so that they can participate more in it, enjoy it and gain spiritually from it.

Memory Verse:

"I was glad when they said to me, Let us go into the House of the Lord."
(Psalm 122:1)



Background Information for the Servant

The Divine Liturgy - (I)*

The Evening and Morning Prayers of the Raising of Incense

This practice goes back to the early church and is mentioned in the teaching of the Apostles (the Didache). Every day the priest and lay men congregate in the church morning and evening for prayer. In this way they begin the day with prayer and end it with the Lord's blessing and the prayer of the priest on their behalf.

It is a continuation of the Old Testament practice of Incense Offering which God commanded Moses and the Children of Israel to follow (Exodus 30:34-38). An example of this is mentioned by St Luke in his Gospel (Luke 1:8-11) when he wrote about the annunciation of St John the Baptist. It was mentioned that when the Lord's angel appeared to Zacharias, the priest, he was burning incense inside the temple and the people were praying outside. The place of the altar of incense where incense is raised (burned) was in the Holy in front of the veil that stands before the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies. There God dwelt between the two Cherubim so that when the priest prayed and offered incense his prayer rose up to God who received it as sweet smelling offering from His people.

People may object and ask: Why should the Old Testament practices be adopted in the church of the New Testament? This objection may be answered by the following points:

- The practices were ordained by God Himself and cannot therefore be altered or dismissed.
- Christ clearly stated that He did not come to change the law but to fulfil it.
- It is true that some Old Testament practices were discontinued in the New. When this happened, however, the practice was replaced by a greater sacrament for which the earlier practice was only a symbol. For example circumcision was replaced by Baptism. Blood sacrifices were replaced by the bloodless sacrifice of the Eucharist, etc.

Raising of Incense is alluded to in the practice of the Heavenly New Testament Church, as seen in the Book of Revelation. There St John saw a lamb standing, as if slain, (symbol of the Eucharist Sacrament) before whom the twenty four elders (priests) fell down having each a golden bowl full of incense which are the prayers of the saints. (Revelation 5:6-14, 8:3-4)

It is also worth noting that the place for burning incense, as practised in the Old Testament is called "altar of incense" despite the fact that only incense is offered on it and no blood sacrifices. This is so because praise and prayers are also called sacrifices to God. "Let my prayer be set before you as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice." (Psalm 141:2)

*Note: This article is taken from "Athanasius" magazine, The Church of the Virgin Mary and St Athanasius, Mississauga, Canada, June 1983

Lesson Content

When does the Divine Liturgy begin? (Sunday Morning)

No, in fact, the Divine Liturgy begins on Saturday night with the Vespers prayers.

Unfortunately, many of us do not attend this portion of the Divine Liturgy. The reason is, most likely, that we do not understand what these prayers are all about.

Today, we are going to learn about the beginning prayers of the Divine Liturgy, the Evening and the Morning Raising of incense.

Definition of the Divine Liturgy:

It is a journey towards Heaven. We enjoy it through our fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ, as we are united with Him.

Outline of the Liturgy:

It has two parts:

Part I: Vesper (Evening Raising of Incense) and Matins (Morning Raising of Incense)

Part II: The Eucharist and it consists of 3 parts:

- The Offering of Oblation
- The Liturgy of the Catechumens
- The Liturgy of the believers "Anaphora"

In this lesson (I) we will concentrate on the Vespers and Matins. In lesson (II) we will concentrate on the Offering of Oblation and the Liturgy of the Catechumens. In lesson (III) we will concentrate on the "Anaphora".

The prayers of the raising of incense:

This practice goes back to the early church and is mentioned in the teaching of the Apostles (the Didache). It is a continuation of the Old Testament practice of Incense Offering which God commanded Moses and the children of Israel to follow (Exodus 30:34-38). An example of this is mentioned by St Luke in his Gospel "According to the custom of the priesthood, his lot (Zacharias) fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord ...Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of **incense**." (Luke 1:9-11)

When we look at the incense while the smoke is going up, we can see our prayers going up to God, accepting them as the sweet aroma of incense, David had the same thought when he prayed: "Let my prayer be set before you as incense." (Psalm 141:2)

In the Vespers:

First we pray from the Agbeya "three hours of prayers: None, Vespers and Compline."

Then we pray and sing hymns from the "Psalmody". The Psalmody contains scriptural hymns, Doxologies (i.e. praises and SONGS of glorification to God) and Theotokions (i.e., hymns in honour of the Theotokos, the Mother of God). Every day of the week has its own special hymns and Theotokions. In the Psalmody as well, there are calls addressed to the whole world: visible and invisible, rational and irrational to praise the Lord the Creator. Thus before starting the Liturgy the whole congregation participates with all the creation in singing hymns of praise to the Savior.

Then Abouna starts the service of raising of Incense with the Thanksgiving Prayer. (Please bring with you your Divine Liturgy book and Psalmody).

Then we use the Psalmody again for some Hymns for St Mary, the Arch-Angels and some selected Saints.

Then the Gospel Litany by Abouna and then the Gospel reading.

After the Gospel reading, Abouna prays the litanies : for the peace of the church, for the Pope of our church and for our meetings and our homes.

Then the closing of the Vespers prayers by Abouna, the benediction and dismissal.

In the Matins:

The Matins is very similar to the Vesper, but is carried on Sunday morning while the Vesper is carried on Saturday evening. So, for the Matins we pray the "Prime" from the Agbeya and the part from the Psalmody is much longer than that of Vesper, with a larger number of long and beautiful hymns.

Benefits of Vespers and Matins:

It is a preparation for us to be able to enjoy the Eucharist and spiritually benefit most from it. It is also a call for the saints and the heavenly powers to participate with us in it.

Our Coptic Church is indeed the church of praise to God. She is the richest church in her SONGS of praise and hymns of glorification. These can capture both the soul and the mind because of their depth. They can also raise the spirit to the highest level of spirituality. David said "Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise." (Psalm 84:4)

Application



Exercise

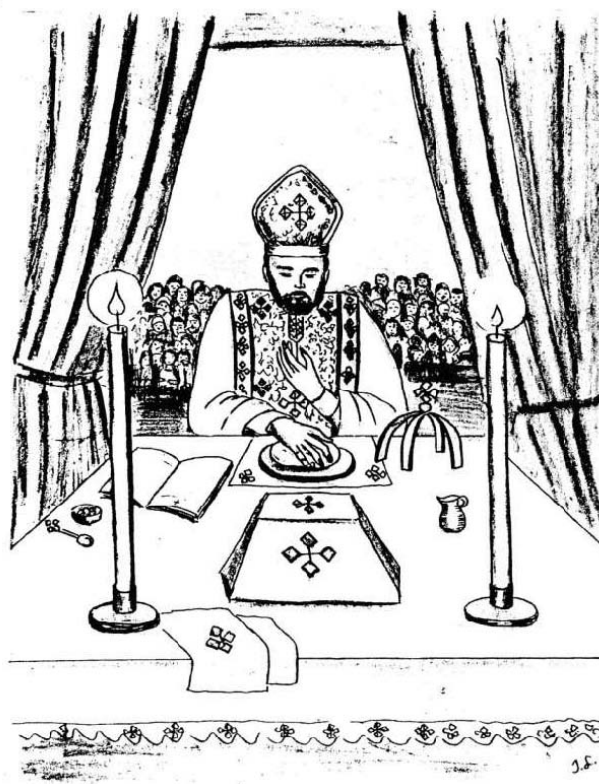
We do make lots of preparations when we are about to undertake an important task such as exams, parties whether they are birthdays, weddings, anniversaries, or the like, going on a trip or even vacationing. In the same manner, but most important, we should prepare ourselves, spiritually, for participating in the Divine Liturgy which is in fact the meal of the Last Supper with the Disciples and a multitude of saints having Christ Himself at the head of the table (Altar) as our Host. Let us attend the Vespers and Matins regularly as an important preparation for that great spiritual event.



The Divine Liturgy - (II)

Lesson Aim:

This is the second lesson of a three-lesson series on the Divine Liturgy. The purpose of this series on the Divine Liturgy is to familiarise the students with the Divine Liturgy, so that they can participate more in it, enjoy it and gain spiritually from it.



Background Information for the Servant

The Divine Liturgy –II*

I was glad when they said to me: Let Us Go into the House of the Lord (Psalm 122:1) The Procession of the Lamb

Do you remember what we discussed in the previous lesson?

About Abouna choosing one of the loaves of the OBLATION BREAD, which is now called the LAMB. We also learned that the LAMB will become the BODY OF CHRIST through the prayers of the church.

Now do you remember the story about the Old Testament people, and how they used to bring an animal SACRIFICE if they wanted to confess their sins? The priest used to receive the people's confession while they put their hands on the head of the SACRIFICE. The sins of the people were then carried by the SACRIFICE and it actually died instead of the sinners. When Christ came He became our SACRIFICE. We call Christ the LAMB of God that carries the sin of the world. Christ took all our sins and died instead of us, becoming our SACRIFICE.

After Abouna chooses the LAMB, he puts his hand on it confessing both his sins and the sins of all God's people. Abouna takes all the sins that we confess in front of him and puts them all on the LAMB of God that carries away the sins of the world. Abouna says in a low voice: "Grant O Lord that this SACRIFICE be acceptable unto Thee for my sins and for the ignorance (sins) of Thy people."

Then Abouna prays for all the people that ask him to pray for them; he prays for the sick, for those who have problems, for those looking for work, for the whole church, and particularly for those who asked him to pray for them. Now if you want Abouna to pray for you or for any member of your family, or one of your friends; what would you do? You guessed the right answer! You have to be in church before the PROCESSION OF THE LAMB, and you have to tell Abouna that you want him to pray for you or for anyone else.

While Abouna is praying, the whole church is also praying one of the prayers of the AGPEYA: Holy Holy Holy! Lord of Hosts! Heaven and Earth are full of Thine Holy Glory!

At the end of the prayer, Abouna wraps the LAMB in a VEIL and carrying it above his head, he stands at the door of the Sanctuary saying: "Glory and Honour, Honour and Glory unto the Holy Trinity; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

In doing so, Abouna is imitating Simeon the Elder who went to the temple, took the baby Jesus in his hands, and blessed God (Luke 2:25-32). Abouna then goes around the altar, the deacon also follows Abouna, carrying the WINE CRUET with a VEIL.

This PROCESSION (going around the altar) is a symbol of the coming of the LAMB, God's Only Begotten Son into the world. All the people should bow during the procession. If you want to know the reason for this you should read Hebrews 1:6.

We greet the coming of Christ into our world by singing the beautiful hymn: This is the day which the Lord hath made, ... blessed be He that Cometh in the name of the Lord.

The Divine Liturgy -II*

I was glad when they said to me: Let Us Go into the House of the Lord (Psalm 122:1)

Last time we spoke about the PROCESSION OF THE LAMB and we said that it is a symbol of the coming of the LAMB OF GOD into the world. After the PROCESSION we sing the Hymn: Alleluia, this is the day which the Lord hath made. Then Abouna holds the Lamb in his left hand, and the Deacon holds the wine cruet on a VEIL, in his right hand. The deacon brings the wine cruet close to the LAMB.

Abouna then blesses the LAMB and the wine by Crossing them three times; in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The deacon responds: Amen, following each blessing.

The word "Amen" is a Hebrew word that means "so be it" or "so shall it be". It is said after each prayer to show that we sincerely meant what we said.

Now the people respond by singing the Hymn ZuxaPatrie, KeEiu, KeAgioPnevmati ...This is a Greek hymn that gives Glory to the Holy Trinity; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; now, at all times and forever and ever. Amen!

Meanwhile, Abouna will put the Lamb in the PATEN under the ASTERISK, and later, he will put the wine in the CHALICE and mingle it with some water. Then he starts praying the THANKSGIVING PRAYER: Let us give thanks unto the beneficent and merciful God.

This is a very important prayer in our church. Whenever we have a service we start with this prayer. We say it at the beginning of the Offering of Incense, at the beginning of Baptism, Marriage service, Funeral service, and even when we pray the prayers of the Hours from the AGPEYA, we start by praying the THANKSGIVING PRAYER.

When this is over, Abouna says a short prayer in a low voice, asking God to accept the offering of bread and wine, bless them, and sanctify them, so that they become the Body and Blood of Christ. Then he covers the LAMB in the PATEN by placing a VEIL on the ASTERISK. He covers the CHALICE with another VEIL, then he spreads a large VEIL on top of both the PATEN and the CHALICE. This large VEIL is called the PROSPHERINE.

He also places another small VEIL folded in the shape of a triangle on top of the PROSPHERINE.

The most senior deacon in the SANCTUARY helps Abouna in spreading the PROSPHERINE. If there is another priest in the SANCTUARY, he does this instead of the deacon. This is the RUBRIC for spreading the PROSPHERINE. Do you still remember the meaning of the word RUBRIC? If you have forgotten, turn back to the previous lessons!

While spreading the PROSPHERINE Abouna prays in a low voice. He prays for the church, for our POPE, and last of all for himself, asking God to forgive him his own sins. He then bows and kisses the ALTAR, then stands up and goes to the north side of the ALTAR, the deacon also goes before him. When they both reach the north side of the ALTAR the deacon bows then raises his head before Abouna who blesses him by touching his forehead. Then everybody leaves the SANCTUARY. Now everybody in the church will bow to receive the ABSOLUTION. Abouna says the ABSOLUTION while he is standing and holding the Cross. The ABSOLUTION is our permission to participate in the DIVINE LITURGY. Although we receive the ABSOLUTION through Abouna's mouth, it comes to us from God. God gave Abouna the authority to deliver the absolution to us.

The Divine Liturgy

Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light to my path (Psalm 119:105)

The Liturgy of the Word

The part of the service that follows the ABSOLUTION, is called THE LITURGY OF THE WORD. Liturgy means a common prayer, a prayer in which many people participate. We call this part of the service THE LITURGY OF THE WORD, because here we hear the word of God, readings from the various books of the Bible. In-between these readings, we sing Hymns.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD starts with a beautiful Hymn: This is the Censer of pure gold ...because while we sing, Abouna offers Incense on the altar, while one of the deacons is standing across from him holding a Cross. They both go around the altar while saying prayers in a low voice.

After this Abouna offers Incense in front of the Sanctuary door, saying more prayers, while the people sing another hymn: the Intercessions. When we pray this hymn, we ask the Mother of God, the angels, and the saints to pray for us that God may forgive us our sins.

Incense is a symbol of the prayers of the saints, that is why Abouna offers Incense around the church while we sing this hymn.

The readings from the Bible start by the PAULINE EPISTLE, a reading from one of Saint Paul's letters (Epistles). Saint Paul wrote letters to some churches where he preached in the name of our Lord. He also wrote letters to one or the other of his disciples.

Then comes a reading from the CATHOLIC EPISTLES. The word Catholic means universal or belonging to the whole world. We call these letters Catholic because they were written by the Apostles to the whole world and not to a particular church or a disciple.

The next reading is from the ACTS OF THE APOSTLES. This is one of the books of the Bible which tells us about all the wonderful things the Apostles did after Christ ascended to heaven. Sometimes we call this reading THE PRAXIS, a Coptic word which means ACTS.

The reading which follows the PRAXIS is from the SYNAXARION, or the book of THE CHRONICLES OF THE MARTYRS AND SAINTS. It is not a part of the Bible, but it is very important! It tells us about the wonderful things that the Saints which followed the Apostles did. Some of those saints gave their lives for Christ's sake. We call these saints MARTYRS. Some of the saints were not killed, but they suffered a lot for Christ's sake. These are the CONFESSORS. The hymn that follows the SYNAXARION is called the TRISAGION. This is a Greek word (TRIS = three, AGION = Holy). The TRISAGION is a Greek hymn that starts with the words: Agios O Theos, AgiosEsSheros, AgiosEsThanatos ...Holy God, Holy the Almighty, Holy the Immortal. That is why we call it the TRISAGION: 3 times Agios (3 times Holy).

The final and most important reading of all is the reading from the GOSPEL. We should always stand when we hear the GOSPEL reading. A few verses from the PSALMS are read before the GOSPEL.

*Note: This article is taken from "Athanasius", magazine, the Church of the Virgin Mary and St Athanasius, Mississauga, Canada, July, 1983

Lesson Content

Last week we learned that we should prepare ourselves spiritually for participating in the Divine Liturgy, and that attending the Vespers and Matins is an important part of preparing to attend the mass.

Today, we want to learn more about the next part of the Divine Liturgy: the Offering of the Oblations and the Liturgy of the Catechumens.

In this lesson we will concentrate on the Offering of the Oblation and the Liturgy of the Catechumens.

The Offering of the Oblation:

It is the starting point of a journey to heaven. It guides the church throughout this journey. It also indicates that the church must offer her whole life as a sacrifice to and through the Lord, who has sacrificed Himself for her sake.

Please describe the details as per the background information to the servant above.

The Thanksgiving:

Whenever we have a service we start with this prayer. Please describe what Abouna does during the Thanksgiving Prayer using the background information for the servant provided above.

The Liturgy of the Catechumens (or “the liturgy of the word”):

It consists of a selected readings from:

- **The Pauline Epistles:**
A reading from one of St. Paul’s epistles.
- **The Catholic Epistles:**
Catholic here means “universal”. We read a selection from the epistles of the Apostles written to the whole world (James I and II, Peter I, II and III, John and Jude).
- **The Acts of the Apostles:**
It tells us about all the wonderful things the Apostles did through the actions of the Holy Spirit in them. We call this reading PRAXIS.
- **The Synaxarion:**
The Chronicles of the saints and martyrs. This is followed by the Trisagion. Let us sing it together.
- **The Gospel:**
This is the most important reading. We read a selection from one of the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
- **The Sermon:**

* **Note:** This is the end of the Liturgy of the Catechumens.

Application



Exercise

What do we learn from this lesson?

When we attend this part of the service let us focus on:

- During the offering of the bread and the wine, we are actually doing as the Disciples did during the meal of the Last Supper. We present to Christ bread and wine, He consecrates and transforms them and gives them back to us as His Holy Body and Blood.
- During the Liturgy of the word, let us listen attentively to the readings and the sermon. The word of God purifies our heart, as Jesus said to His Disciples “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.” (John 15:3)
- Let us all participate in singing hymns. This way we can be more affected and grow spiritually deeper and deeper. We have to think about what we are singing as well.



The Divine Liturgy - (III)

Lesson Aim:

This is the last lesson of a three-lesson series about the Divine Liturgy. The purpose of this series on the Divine Liturgy is to familiarise the students with the Divine Liturgy; so that they can participate more in it, enjoy it and gain spiritually from it.



Background Information for the Servant

The Divine Liturgy - (III)*

Now all things are of God, Who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:18)

The Prayer of Reconciliation

"O Great and Eternal God Who formed man in in-corruption, and death which came into the world by the envy of the Devil, Thou hast abolished through the life-giving appearance of Thine Only Begotten Son, our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ."

These are the opening words of THE PRAYER OF RECONCILIATION. This is the prayer that reminds us that once we were enemies with God, but now, we are the friends of God.

You see, when God created Adam and Eve, He told them not to eat of the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God warned them: if you eat of that tree, you shall surely die.

And guess what Adam and Eve did! They disobeyed God.

Now, God had to be true to His word and Adam and Eve were condemned to die because they disobeyed God. Not only Adam and Eve but also all their children had to die because of the sin Adam and Eve committed in Paradise. A very sad situation. Isn't it? Well, God thought so too! So, in order to save Adam, Eve and all their children, God sent Jesus Christ, His Only Begotten Son into the world. Christ came and took the punishment instead of all of us. Christ died on the Cross so that we can have Eternal Life and become Eternal like Him! That is why Christ is called God's Lamb that carries away the sin of the world.

When Adam disobeyed, God became Cross with all human beings. When Christ came and took the punishment, God was no more Cross with human beings.

Now, when two persons who were Cross with each other makeup and become friends again, we call this RECONCILIATION.

That is why Saint Paul tells us that God reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, His Only Begotten Son.

When God reconciled us to Himself, He also gave us an example to follow. God teaches us to be reconciled to each other. This means that if one of our friends is Cross with us, we should always try to make peace with him or her.

This becomes very important before participating in the Liturgy, and partaking of the communion.

In order to make sure that no one in the church is bearing a grudge against another, we greet one another with a Holy ASPASMOS (a holy kiss). This is a symbol that we are all reconciled to each other. Only people who are reconciled to each other are allowed to take part in the service of the Liturgy, and receive without falling into damnation, God's heavenly and immortal gifts, the Body and the Blood of Jesus Christ.

*Note: This article is taken from "Athanasius" magazine, the Church of the Virgin Mary and St Athanasius, Mississauga, Canada, August, 1983.

Lesson Content

For the last two weeks, we learned about the Vespers and Matins prayers (that attending them was important part of our preparation for attending the liturgy on Sunday). We also spoke about the Offering, when Christ consecrates and transforms the bread and wine into His Holy Body and Blood, and the Liturgy of the Catechumens, when we listen attentively to the readings and the sermon.

Today is the final lesson about the Divine Liturgy when we will learn about Anaphora, the final part of Liturgy.

The last part of the service mentioned in the previous lesson has the following parts:

- **The litanies** (the three intercessory prayers):

The church lifts up her heart to the Divine throne asking God to bestow peace upon the church "Intercession for Peace", to strengthen her ministers in all the ranks of the priesthood "Intercession for the fathers" and to

bless her meetings "Intercession for the congregations".

- **The Orthodox Creed:** also known as the Nicene creed in reference to the council of Nicea (AD 325) or as the Athanasian creed in reference to St Athanasius the apostolic (AD 296-373), the 20th Patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt.
- **Pre-Anaphora:** the word Anaphora (or Eucharist) means "lift up" which means actually **the church is entering into a heavenly and Divine experience.**

The pre-Anaphora is the prayer of reconciliation. "Reconciliation" here refers to:

a) Reconciliation with God through the death, resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ: "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." (Romans 5:10)

b) Reconciliation with one another before taking the Holy Communion: "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." (Matthew 5:23-24)

- **Anaphora (or the Eucharist):** (please use the Divine Liturgy book)
 - It starts with praising the name of the Lord who created heaven, earth, sea, and before Whom stand the angels and all the heavenly powers.
 - Then Abouna prays saying Holy, Holy, Holy our God Who created man and put him in Paradise. After this, Abouna, on behalf of the congregation, remembers before God the history of man's fall through his disobedience and God's plan for his salvation through the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, His birth, His death for us, His resurrection, His ascension into heaven and His promise to come back to judge everyone according to his deeds.
 - Then the Crossing of the bread and the wine three times each so they become by the action of the Holy Spirit in them Jesus' Body and Blood.
 - Then the seven prayers (or Intercessions) for the peace of the church, for the fathers, for the priests, deacons and congregation, for God's mercy upon us, for the safety and salvation of the whole world and our city, for the plants, the weather and the waters, and for those who offered the oblations.
 - Then the commemoration of the Fathers and Saints of the Church.
 - Then the introduction to the partaking of the Holy Communion. We bow for the Holy Body of Jesus and His precious Blood.
 - Then the Fraction Prayer (breaking of the Holy Body).
 - The Lord's Prayer.
- **The Confession:**

That **this** is the Body of Jesus Christ, born from our Lady St. Mary, crucified in this Body and resurrected with it on the third day. This Body is given for the remission of our sins and eternal life for whomsoever partakes of it.
- The Holy Communion
- Psalm 150 "Praise the Lord for ..."

Final blessings with sprinkling of water, the Benediction and dismissal. Then we go home nourished by the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ our Lord and becoming partakers of the Divine nature, therefore we are able to say with Saint Paul that "Christ lives in me".

Application



Exercise

When we attend the Divine Liturgy, we must be in full respect and attention because Jesus Christ Himself is with us on the altar. In one of the Fraction prayers, Abouna says "Today on this table is present with us Emmanuel our Lord, the Lamb of God who carries the sins of the entire world."



My Beautiful Church

The Sacrament of Holy Communion (The Eucharist)

Bible References: John 6:25-59

Book References:

- HG Bishop Mettaous, "The Spirituality of the Rites of the Holy Liturgy"
- Fr John Salama, "Precious Pearls in explaining the rituals and beliefs of the Church"
- Deacon Dr Mikhail Maxi, "Encyclopaedia of Coptic Church Rituals (Parts 2 and 3)"

Lesson Aim:

To learn about the Seven Sacraments, and specifically Holy Communion which we receive in the Eucharist.

Lesson Objectives:

- Know:** About the Sacrament of Holy Communion, and to learn the rituals of the Church.
- Feel:** The importance of taking the Body and Blood of Christ.
- Practice:** Feeling the presence of the Lord on the altar during the Divine Liturgy, and respecting the sanctity of the House of God.

Memory Verse:

"For My flesh is real food, and My blood is real drink. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood remains in Me, and I in him."
(John 6:55-56)

Lesson Content

Why must we partake in the Body and Blood of Christ? This is what we will learn together.

What is the meaning of 'Sacrament'?

A Sacrament is when the Holy Spirit descends to change a substance visible to us, into something that is not visible. We cannot see it, that's why it is called a 'mystery' or a 'sacrament', but we have faith, which is the "...substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1)

The church has seven Sacraments:

1. Baptism
2. Holy Myron
3. Holy Communion (Eucharist)
4. Repentance and Confession
5. Unction of the Sick
6. Marriage
7. Priesthood

Four of these Sacraments are essential to our salvation. Without those four, we cannot reach the Kingdom of Heaven. These four are: Baptism, Holy Myron, Holy Communion and Repentance and Confession. Not all of us will receive the Sacrament of Unction of the Sick, Marriage or Priesthood.

Baptism – is the gateway to all other Sacraments. We cannot partake in any of the other six Sacraments without Baptism.

Holy Communion (Eucharist) – is the crown of all Sacraments.

Priests are the keepers of the Sacraments – only they have the divine authority to invoke the Holy Spirit to descend.

How do the Sacraments happen?

The priest prays and invites the Holy Spirit to descend on a substance (e.g. water, oil, bread etc) to convert it or specialise it into a specific Sacrament:

Baptism: the Holy Spirit descends on the water, by being immersed in the water three times in the name of the Holy Trinity, the person being baptised dies with Christ, is buried with Christ, and rises up with Christ. It is a second birth.

Holy Myron: the Holy Spirit or tongues of fire – by being anointed with 36 crosses by the Holy Myron oil immediately after baptism, we receive the Holy Spirit to dwell upon us and confirm us in Christ.

Holy Communion (Eucharist): the Holy Spirit descends on bread and wine to convert it into Body and Blood of Christ.

Confession: the Holy Spirit descends to separate the person from sin.

Unction of the Sick: the Holy Spirit descends on the oil, so it gives a consolation to the sick person, hope, healing (in terms of comforting), and conserving them.

Marriage: the Holy Spirit descends on two people to unite them together.

Priesthood: the Holy Spirit descends on a man to specialise/dedicate him to serving God as a priest. He is then given the authority to officiate the Sacraments of the church, doctrines, and others. Married priests are the only ones who have received all seven sacraments.

What is the meaning of the Sacrament of Holy Communion (Eucharist)? Why was it called as such? Does it have other names?

The church refers to the Sacrament of Holy Communion in Coptic as the 'Eucharist' which means 'giving thanks'; i.e. the Sacrament is one of gratitude. It was called as such because our Lord Jesus Christ on the day of establishing this Sacrament 'took bread, gave thanks and broke it' (Luke 22:7-19). Also because this Sacrament is the greatest

expression of gratitude by the Church to Christ for His incarnation, death and resurrection, and His body which we eat. It is also referred to as *Holy Communion* (coming together in union), *Breaking of Bread*, *Lord's Supper*, and *Anaphora*.

When did the Lord Jesus set up this Sacrament?

The Lord, glory be to Him, established this Sacrament on the night of the last supper with His disciples after He ate with them the Passover for the last time. Passover itself was a symbol of the Crucifixion. He took bread, gave thanks and broke it and said: "this is My Body which will be given up for you, do this in remembrance of me." He also took the cup of wine, gave thanks and said: "this is My Blood of the new covenant which will be shed for many for the forgiveness of sins." So the Body of our Lord Jesus, and His Blood on the altar, are the same Body given up on the Cross and the same Blood shed on the Cross. He who resurrected is also the same sacrifice on the Cross - it is all one unique sacrifice.

Are the bread and wine on the altar really the Body and Blood of Christ?

The Holy Communion on the altar is a holy and real presence of the death of Christ on the Cross. During the Divine Liturgy, the priest calls upon the Holy Spirit to descend on the bread and wine, and the essence of the bread and the wine turn into the real Body and Blood of Christ. But we receive it in the form of bread and wine so that we are able to eat and drink it. (Bishop Raphael gives the analogy of the iron tablet: a person takes iron vitamins in the form of capsules because he cannot swallow actual iron bars). Thus we eat our Lord's real Body and Blood in the form of bread and wine.

The Lord Jesus Christ first tells us in John 6 that His Holy Body and precious Blood should be eaten for eternal life, He said this a long time before the Lord's Supper. The disciples found this difficult to understand, when He first said to them, "whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:54). They may have wondered, how could He give us His Body to eat? How do we eat it? On the day when He broke the bread at the Lord's Supper, He said to them "take this bread and eat it for it is my Body", then they understood that He will give them His body in the form of bread.

What is the significance of eating Christ's Body and Blood (the importance of Holy Communion)?

It gives us eternal life, as the Lord Jesus Christ said to His disciples "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst." John 6:35.

With Holy Communion we gain **purity** (spirit, body, soul) and **abide (remain) in Christ** as the branch abides in the vine. The Lord said: "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is real food, and My blood is real drink. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood remains in Me, and I in him." (John 6:54-56).

Also in the Divine Liturgy we say: "Given up for us for our salvation, remission of sins and eternal life to those who partake of Him", we also say "We partake of your holies unto the purification of our souls, bodies and spirits."

Redemption and remission of sins: as the priest says in the last confession during the Divine Liturgy: "it is given for us for salvation and the remission of sins and eternal life to those who partake of Him." By repentance and Confession before the priest we are granted the remission of the sins we have confessed, but in Communion we are granted remission of sins that we are unaware of. In the Revelation of St John, he saw a multitude of saints in heaven standing before the throne of God, wearing white clothes and holding palm leaves. One of the elders asked him if he knew who these were, so he answered him saying: "these are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Revelation 7:13-14)

It gives unity to the Church: such that the whole church becomes one with Christ "We who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one loaf." (1 Corinthians 10:17)

What should we do before receiving Holy Communion?

Reconciliation with God and people is important, and it is essential for partaking in Holy Communion. Our Lord pointed to this by saying, "therefore if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift." (Matthew 5:23-24). So, if you were the offender, go and reconcile to whoever you

offended. If you were the one offended, protect your heart from hatred and grudges.

As for the physical preparation of our bodies, it is essential to be prepared through fasting. The church requires us to fast from midnight (no eating/drinking past midnight), if we are going to have Holy Communion the next day. We should also approach Holy Communion with a repentant heart.

We thank the Lord for this great Sacrament. In His perfect love, the Lord breaks Himself and gives us to eat and live.



Christ and the Establishment of His Kingdom (I)

The Lord Jesus faced Satan and Defeated Him

Lesson Aim:

This is the first lesson in the series: 'Christ and the establishment of His kingdom.' The purpose of this series is to learn from the life of our Lord Jesus and follow His example in our daily lives. In this lesson we learn how our Lord Jesus faced Satan and defeated him as one key element in the establishment of His Kingdom. Through fasting, prayer, and partaking in the Holy Sacraments (repentance and confession and Holy Communion), we may defeat Satan.

Memory Verse:

"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness."
(Matthew 4:1)



Lesson Content

Does anyone know how to defeat Satan?

We have been learning about the Divine Liturgy and how we should behave during it. But what about the rest of the week? How do we learn how to behave in our lives outside of Church?

Jesus Christ teaches us how to behave, He teaches us that through fasting, prayer and knowing our Bible, we may defeat Satan.

Jesus' life up to 30 years of age

Jesus Christ (the Word of God) took flesh and lived on earth as a man, He experienced human life except for sin. During His childhood with the Virgin Mary, He helped St Joseph the Carpenter, to whom His mother was betrothed. In doing this, Jesus blessed the work with its different types. In fact a true Christian should do his best in studying and doing his homework. He went to the Synagogue to be among the teachers and discuss things with them. He worked in Nazareth until the age of 30. He helped His family and obeyed His parents.

Preparation of Jesus' Ministry

Before He started His ministry, our Lord Jesus did the following preparations:

- He was baptised by John the Baptist. He did not need to repent and be baptised, but He wanted to fulfil all righteousness and teach us that we too have to be baptised. After He was baptised He came from the Jordan River and was filled with the Holy Spirit.
- He spent 40 days in the wilderness, fasting and praying to teach us how to prepare to do things: by fasting and prayer.

Satan Tempts Jesus in the Wilderness

Satan was puzzled/baffled by Jesus, he did not know that Jesus is the Son of God.

"Man shall not live by bread alone"

After our Lord Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights, He became hungry (as any person may become hungry) and Satan wanted to make use of our Lord's need for food.

Satan: "If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." (Luke 4:3)

Jesus: "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'" (Luke 4:4)

"You shall worship the Lord your God"

Satan wanted to tempt Jesus for the second time. He took Him up the mountain and showed Him the world that was known at that time. Satan explained to Jesus that the entire world with its glory could be His and under His authority.

Satan: "Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours." (Luke 4:7)

Jesus: "Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'" (Luke 4:8)

"You shall not tempt the Lord your God"

Satan did not give up after the Lord Jesus defeated him in the previous two temptations. Satan found that our Lord Jesus defeated him using the word of God ("it is written..."), and Satan wanted to use the same weapon that Jesus used. Satan took Jesus to the side of the altar of Solomon and asked Him to let Himself fall to prove that He is the Son of God.

Satan: "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here, for it is written [in Psalm 91:11] 'He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you and in their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'" (Luke 4:9-11)

Jesus: "It has been said, 'You shall not test the LORD your God.'" (Luke 4:12)

The devil departed temporarily for a while, then returned to tempt Him later, even when the Lord was on the Cross. "He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God." ... "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us." This time, instead of quoting scripture, Jesus fulfilled scripture by dying on the cross as 'it is written.'

Jesus wanted to teach the people how to judge things correctly. A person should not ask God for things that are incorrect or with no purpose and then blame God. For it is incorrect to blame God by throwing yourself from a high place defying God and saying: Lord you can save and protect me. Here the person is to be blamed and not God.

Note how Jesus always answered by "It is written...", all the things He answered were quotes from the Old Testament (Deuteronomy), He used the words of the scripture to defeat Satan. We too as Christians can use verses from the Bible to defeat Satan.

For example, when we are tempted to lie, we remember God's teaching and say it is written in the Bible "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth...) (Ephesians 4:29). If we are tempted to hate someone, it is written in the Bible "...love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven..." (Matthew 5:44-45)

The word of God is our sword, and faith in that word is our shield.

Fasting and prayer are also powerful weapons for spiritual warfare.

Application



Exercise

What do we Learn from this Lesson?

- Jesus Christ showed us the way to defeat Satan by fasting, praying and keeping the word of God. We must also practice the holy sacraments (Repentance and Confession and Holy Communion).
- We must be careful about the partial meanings of what Satan says which can appear to be correct, but they are actually wrong.
- Remember the devil does not give up, no matter how long it takes. He kept on tempting the Lord Jesus for forty days, and in spite of his failure, and God dismissing him, he left for a while then returned to tempt Him, even when the Lord was on the Cross. Therefore we must always be alert and keep the spiritual tools mentioned above. We do not fear the devil's combat, the grace within us is much stronger than the tricks of the devil, the Holy Spirit that works inside us is able to defeat the devil.



Christ and the Establishment of His Kingdom (II)

Appointing the Twelve Disciples, and His Teaching.

Lesson Aim:

This is the second lesson in the series — 'Christ and the establishment of His kingdom'. The purpose of this series is to learn from our Lord Jesus' life and follow His example in our daily lives. We learn about the Lord's choice of His Disciples, how he interacted with people and the wisdom of Christ in His teaching.

Memory Verse:

"Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach."

(Mark 3:14)

"So all bore witness to Him, and marvelled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth."

(Luke 4:22)



Lesson Content

Why did the Lord Jesus select His Disciples?

- Jesus chose His Disciples to teach them so that they could become witnesses.
- The Disciples would become Apostles to preach to the whole world.

From which type of people did the Lord Jesus choose His Disciples?

The Lord Jesus chose His Disciples from the average class of people. None of them held a great position in the society or had great knowledge. The society at that time had a lot of knowledgeable people who were affected by the philosophies of the Greeks and the Romans. Jesus chose His Disciples from the simple and poor type of people.

Some of them were fishermen: for example Peter, Andrew, James and John. He said to them, "Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). They did not hesitate. They left the ship, the nets and the fish and followed Him.

Some of them were tax collectors. Tax collectors were hated by the society because they took too much money from people. Jesus called Levi and named him Matthew. Matthew left all the money and followed Jesus.

Relationship between the Lord Jesus and His Disciples

The Disciples recognised that Jesus is the Messiah, whom they (and the Jews) were waiting for. Philip said to one of his friends about Jesus "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote Jesus of Nazareth." (John 1:45)

The Disciples were with Jesus all the time during His ministry and He was devoted to instructing them, explaining the parables and teaching them to pray, fast and love other people even their enemies. Therefore the life of our Lord Jesus Christ gave strength to His Disciples and made from them new personalities and they were ready to preach the kingdom of heaven after they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Our Lord Jesus Christ sent His Disciples under His supervision. He invited the twelve Disciples and sent them two by two to preach His message and urged them not to carry anything for the road. They preached the people to repent and they healed a lot of people. Please read in the class Mark 6:7-13. When the Disciples had problems or temptations, Jesus showed them how to solve them. For example, when they asked Him, who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (they probably thought that Jesus' kingdom was earthly), Jesus invited a young boy and set him in the midst of them and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:3-4)

After Jesus' resurrection from the dead Jesus asked His Disciples to go and preach to the whole world and baptize people in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. They were responsible and gave their mission 100% of their efforts.

How did Jesus Christ teach the disciples and other people?

What if you know of someone who knows everything about everything? Wouldn't you want this person to teach you everything as well? Who is a person like that? (Christ)

Jesus' preaching continued for around three years. He went around doing good deeds, miracles and teaching the people. Then He suffered on the Cross on behalf of the human race, died and resurrected in glory. Therefore, all the life of Jesus Christ was a declaration of the glory of God incarnate.

Jesus was called "The Good Teacher"

He was both teaching His Disciples privately and with other people as well. They were surprised at His words. "So all bore witness to Him, and marvelled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth." (Luke 4:22)

Our Lord Jesus Christ was teaching in a new way to which the people were not used. He was speaking to them in simple language that was understood by the general public, yet it stemmed from His Divine wisdom. He was speaking to them with authority. He was speaking to them using parables that were realistic and easy for them to understand. Sometimes He was discussing these parables with them.

Teaching by Parables

A parable is said to simplify certain spiritual meanings. For example:

- The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) to illustrate who is the true relative.
- The prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) to illustrate that God accepts repentance.

Teaching by Individual Discussion

For example:

- The Samaritan woman (John 4:5-42). Jesus indicated to the Samaritan woman that He was the Christ that the World was waiting for.
- Nicodemus (John 3:1-3). Jesus illustrated to Nicodemus the basics of faith and the new birth from the water and the Spirit.

The Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:1-48 (Basis for Christianity)

Explain portions of it. Let the students read portions of it in the class and explain.

Who are the sons of the kingdom?

- The poor in spirit, i.e. humble.
- The people who mourn, i.e. because of their sin.
- The meek, i.e. low voice and humble.
- The hungry for righteousness.
- The merciful.
- The pure in heart.
- The people who work for peace.

All these groups will have places in the Kingdom of God.

Which group do you belong to?

Do you belong to the pure in heart or the poor in spirit or the merciful, etc?

Application**Exercise**

What do we Learn from this Lesson?

- The teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ are different from any other teachings. They are the teachings of God Himself. We must give them our utmost attention.
- We must listen to the Lord's teachings and apply them in our daily life, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." (James 1:22)
- The Lord's teaching was filled with gracious words and heavenly wisdom. We must ask God in our prayers to give us heavenly wisdom and blessings. We need these for our benefits and for serving the church.



Christ and the Establishment of His Kingdom (II)

The Lord Jesus showed His Divine Glory by His Miracles and His Transfiguration

Lesson Aim:

This is the second lesson in the series — 'Christ and the establishment of His kingdom'. The purpose of this series is to learn from our Lord Jesus' life and follow His example in our daily lives. We learn about the Lord's choice of His Disciples, how he interacted with people and the wisdom of Christ in His teaching.

Memory Verse:

"Lazarus, come forth."
(John 11:43)



Lesson Content

The Authority of the Lord Jesus Christ

The people were astonished at Jesus' teachings and they realised that He differed in His teachings from the scribes "for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes." (Matthew 7:29) As the multitude found out His authority in teaching, they also found out about His authority in performing several miracles. Jesus our Lord was wandering around in all cities doing good deeds: healing the sick, forgiving sins of those possessed by devils, raising people from the dead and controlling nature.

Jesus Christ's authority and power over sickness

There are several miracles mentioned in the four gospels:

- The healing of the leper (Matthew 8:2-4)
- The healing of the man born blind (John 9:1-41)

Note: ask the students to add more.

Jesus' authority over death

There are several people whom the Lord Jesus raised from the dead, one of whom was Lazarus (John 11:1-44).

Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha, were friends of our Lord Jesus Christ. They enjoyed His care and love. When Lazarus was sick, the two sisters sent to Jesus telling Him about their brother's sickness. They believed in Jesus Christ and His power of healing. Lazarus was in Bethany in the vicinity of Jerusalem. But Jesus did not go fast enough to Lazarus' house; Jesus knew with His Divine ability that Lazarus died. Then Jesus said to His disciples "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up." (John 11:11) Jesus meant that Lazarus is dead and that He was going to raise him up. As Jesus came near Bethany, Martha went to meet Him and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You." (John 11:21-22) With this faith, Jesus went to the tomb where Lazarus was buried for four days. Jesus asked the people to remove the stone from the front of the tomb. Jesus looked up to heaven, prayed and cried loudly "Lazarus, come forth." (John 11:43) The dead came out with his hands and legs tied up. So, Jesus asked the people to loosen Him and let him go.

In this miracle Jesus emphasised that He is the Son of the Living God and that He is the Resurrection and Life. This miracle also shows that faith does miracles and even if God allows problems to happen, He shows us a way, through His Divine power, to overcome any problem.

Note: ask the students to add more.

Jesus' authority over nature

- Jesus rebuked the wind: "Even winds and sea obey Him." (Read Matthew 8:23-27)
- Jesus walks on the water: "It is I, have no fear." (Read Matthew 14:22-36)

Jesus' authority on forgiveness

Jesus' forgiveness for the paralytic carried by four men: "Your sins are forgiven" (Read Mark 2:1-12)

Jesus' ability to create

Jesus created eyes which had not existed before, for the man born blind, and He created them out of mud. (Read John 9)

Summary

In summary: the teaching and the miracles of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, were expressions of His Divine authority. Hence Jesus formed His kingdom by defeating Satan, by selecting His Disciples and by His glorious teachings and miracles.

Note: St John the Evangelist at the end of His Gospel wrote, "This is the disciple who testified of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." (John 21:24-25).

The Lord Jesus' Transfiguration on the Mountain

The Lord Jesus took Peter, James and John up the mountain, and Jesus was praying. All of a sudden His garment became intensely white. Moses and Elijah came and started to talk to Him. The three Disciples were very afraid. They were also very happy to see the very white garment and the radiant Body of Christ. They wanted to stay on the mountain so St. Peter said, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here." St Peter asked for a cover. Then a cloud overshadowed them. A voice came from heaven saying "This is my Beloved Son. Hear Him." This shows that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God by the declaration of heaven.

Application



Exercise

What do we Learn from this Lesson?

- Let us make all our requests known to God in our prayers. He is our Heavenly Father. With faith and prayers, God gives us all what we need and a lot more.
- Neither an Angel or a prophet or a father were entrusted with our Salvation. But God Himself came for us with tremendous power and authority to save us. Glory be to Him. Let us praise His Holy Name.
- As the Lord Christ showed the power and glory of God, He also gave His Disciples, Apostles and the Church today to be very powerful (i.e. heavenly power).



Holy Week

Its Day-to-Day Events

Lesson Aim:

To follow day-by-day the events of the Holy Week which are filled with spiritual feelings and memories.

Memory Verse:

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another."
(John 13:34)



Lesson Content

There is one very special, important week to Christians everywhere. Does anyone know which week that is? (Holy Week)

Holy Week is the holiest week of the year. Every day of that week, different events took place. Today, we will learn the daily events of Holy Week, as well as how we should behave during the week.

Importance of Holy Week: This week is called the Holy Week or *Pascha* Week. The word 'Pascha' is a Hebrew word which means the 'Passover'. That refers to the passage of the Angel of Death over the houses of the Israelites that had blood of the Passover lamb painted on them. Christ is our Passover.

This week carries memories of the immediate events which led to the most important event in the history of man since creation, namely, the salvation of the world. Our church has selected for this week readings from both the Old and the New Testaments. Those particular readings are full of emotions, feelings and reflections about the relationship between God and man. The Hymns too are full of deep spiritual meanings.

The whole week is dedicated to the suffering of our Lord Jesus and it is not permitted to pray the common funeral services on the dead in the church (only water, blessed on Palm Sunday for that purpose, is sprinkled on the casket of the deceased). Also, no baptism is performed during this week.

The church is decorated in black, remembering our sin for which our Lord Jesus Christ died. We are sad not because our Lord Jesus died, but because of our sins.

Our saintly Fathers from the early centuries of the church until now used to live this week in full devotion and dedication to prayers, fasting and reading the Bible.

The sequence of this week (which is the last week before our Lord's Resurrection as our church celebrates it) is as follows:

Saturday

The Passover feast of the Jews was near, and many went from the country up to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves.

Jesus arrived at Bethany six days before the Passover (John 11:55-57)

Jesus had supper in Bethany at Mary and Martha's house. The love of Mary (Lazarus' sister) for our Lord Jesus was expressed clearly. She was poor but she took very expensive ointment and anointed the feet of Jesus. Jesus explained that she anointed His feet because there would be no chance to anoint Him after He died on the Cross and before His burial. "She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial." (John 12:1-7)

Palm Sunday - Mark 11:1-11

The next day (after being anointed at Bethany) Jesus came to Jerusalem and entered the city as a victorious King of Peace. Then He entered the Temple and drove out the buyers and sellers. At the end of Sunday, Jesus went back to Bethany and slept there.

Palm Sunday is one of the seven great major feasts pertaining to our Master Jesus Christ. On Palm Sunday our hearts rejoice, and we hold Palm branches in our hands to celebrate this occasion. We remember that the Lord Jesus Christ entered Jerusalem victoriously at the end of His declared ministry, after He served the people with spiritual words and miracles.

Jesus knew that His enemies in Jerusalem would kill Him after five days, in spite of that, He still entered the city. He entered the city not in a hidden way, and not in a defeated way, but in a victorious way. This was to prove that He gave Himself up of His own will. So He entered the city in a procession having His Disciples and the multitude singing and praising Him. He entered as the King of Peace.

Hosanna means 'save us'. The Disciples and a great multitude were singing 'Hosanna', acknowledging Jesus as the Saviour and giving Him glory and honour. "Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

Although Jesus entered the city as a victorious king, He did it in a very humble way:

He did not own a colt to ride to the city, so He sent two of His Disciples to borrow one from the village saying: "The Lord needs it." He is God the creator and He has shown Himself in need.

He entered riding a colt not a horse. Kings used to ride horses when entering the cities for war. So, Jesus chose to enter the city to declare His victory in a humble way by riding the least thing that the people used for transportation: a colt, "Tell the daughter of Zion, Behold, your king is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Matthew 21:5).

In spite of this humility, Jesus knew by His Divine power that there was a colt at the entrance to the village, and that its owner would willingly give it to the two Disciples.

When Jesus arrived at Jerusalem, there was no palace prepared for Him. So, Jesus went directly to the Temple. When He arrived, He found people buying and selling goods in the Temple. He drove them out saying: "My house is a house of prayer." (Luke 19:46) This is also symbolic that our Lord Jesus has the power to drive away all sin from our life, just as He did in the Temple.

Everything that our Lord Jesus did or was done for Him was in a humble way but it had great effect, power and strength that could not be matched by any worldly power: His birth from a virgin in a manger and what the shepherds and the wise men did, how He lived, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." (Matthew 8:20) He did not have even a tomb of His own when He was crucified, but was buried in a borrowed tomb.

Monday

On His way from Bethany to the Temple on Monday morning, "...Jesus was hungry. He saw a fig tree by the side of the road and went to it, but found nothing on it except leaves, so He said to the tree you will never again bear fruit, at once the fig tree dried up." (Matthew 21:12-19, Mark 11:12-19, Luke 20:1-8).

Jesus cursed the fig tree which had no fruits but was full of leaves. He cursed this tree because usually the fruits would appear with the leaves. This represents the state of a person who lacks the Fruit of the Holy Spirit. If we pretend to be good and holy but we are indeed leading a concealed fruitless and sinful life, this lesson speaks to us.

Tuesday

On Tuesday morning Jesus came back to the Temple from Bethany with His Disciples and found the fig tree that He had cursed had dried out. When His Disciples saw the dried tree, they were astonished, so He talked to them about faith.

The Synagogue authorities questioned Jesus' actions, miracles and authority and His answer to them. (Matthew 21:23-32, Mark 11:27-33, Luke 20:1-8). They started plotting to kill Him.

On Tuesday evening, Jesus left the Temple and went back to Bethany. He did not intend to enter this Temple again after He said to the Jews "See, your house is left to you desolate; till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'" (Matthew 23:38-39).

Wednesday

Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests to betray Jesus. They promised to give him thirty pieces of silver.

We have to be honest and faithful to God and people. Do not betray anyone. Judas Iscariot sold his Master for money. The love of money is the cause of so many evils.

The preparation for the Last Supper (Mark 14:10-16).

Covenant Thursday

Covenant Thursday is one of the very important days in Church. This is the day on which Christ celebrated the Passover with His disciples, washed their feet, and also instituted the Sacrament of Holy Communion (Eucharist). On this day also, Judas Iscariot betrayed His Master, surrendering Him to the Jews.

1. Jesus washed the feet of His disciples - the Church celebrates this important event with the Lakkan Prayers, then the priest(s) wash the feet of the congregation.
2. Jesus Christ established the Sacrament of Holy Communion - the Church celebrates this with a Divine Liturgy for the first time during the Holy Week of Pascha, and most of the congregation partake in Holy Communion.
3. The Lord's care for His disciples, His last farewell speech to them and prayer for them.

Jesus washed the feet of the Disciples

"So He got up from supper, laid aside His outer garments, and wrapped a towel around His waist. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel that was around Him." (John 13:4-5) Christ the Lord washed the feet of His disciples on Great Thursday, before Holy Communion, and said to them "now you are clean."

Perhaps He wanted to give us a lesson in humility and love – for how could the great teacher Himself bend down to wash feet? How could God Himself bend down to wash feet that were created by His own Hands?

Perhaps there are lessons to be learned about the water itself – if we reflect on it, water is symbolic of purification and cleansing; it is symbolic of life, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

The washing of feet substitutes the washing of the whole person. The Lakkan of Covenant Thursday signifies the purity that should precede Holy Communion.

The Church first washes the feet of the congregation, then says to them "here, you are now clean" then presents them to have Holy Communion. This does not mean that we come to church on Covenant Thursday for our feet to be washed without being repentant.

Our Lord established the Sacrament of Holy Communion

On Covenant Thursday, our Lord Jesus celebrated the Jewish Passover with His disciples; then set up the Sacrament of Holy Communion (Eucharist) and said: "do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). Here we are until today, following His holy commandment.

Amidst the joy of the Passover, He let them know that His Body and His Blood will be shed for them and for many, for the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24) and He said: "this is the blood of the new covenant."

He didn't leave them to be taken by surprise when this event happens, but wanted to let them know beforehand. The Passover celebrated on Thursday symbolised the real Passover of the new covenant that is slain for us on the Friday. This New Testament Covenant sealed by the Blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and is considered a 'covenant of grace.' A 'covenant of grace' is sealed with God's promise to save mankind (the New Covenant).

The Lord told the disciples about some of the events that will take place.

"All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night." (Matthew 26:31-32). He also warned Peter that he would deny Christ three times before the rooster had crowed twice. He also told them that when He is raised, He will meet them in Galilee. That evening, the Lord retreated to the Garden of Gethsemane, and as He prayed, His sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground. An angel of the Lord came to strengthen Him proclaiming, "Yours is the power, Yours is the glory, Yours is the blessing, Yours is the majesty, O Emmanuel, our God and King." For this reason, the Church has established this praise in every hour of the prayers of Pascha week.

Good Friday

This is the subject of the next lesson (see filler lessons). If next Sunday is Palm Sunday, please give a summary of the lesson here.

Application



Exercise

What do we Learn from this Lesson? We have to be extremely quiet during the Holy Week. Let us focus our home Bible readings on the parts about the life of our Lord Jesus in His last days on earth in the flesh. We must fast and dedicate a lot of time for prayer.

Weeks 2-3 of April:

No lessons due to Palm Sunday
and the Feast of the Resurrection.



The Lord Jesus Granted His Disciples Peace in the Upper Room and The Effect of the Resurrection of Christ on Us Now

Bible References: John 20:19-23, Luke 24 and Matthew 28

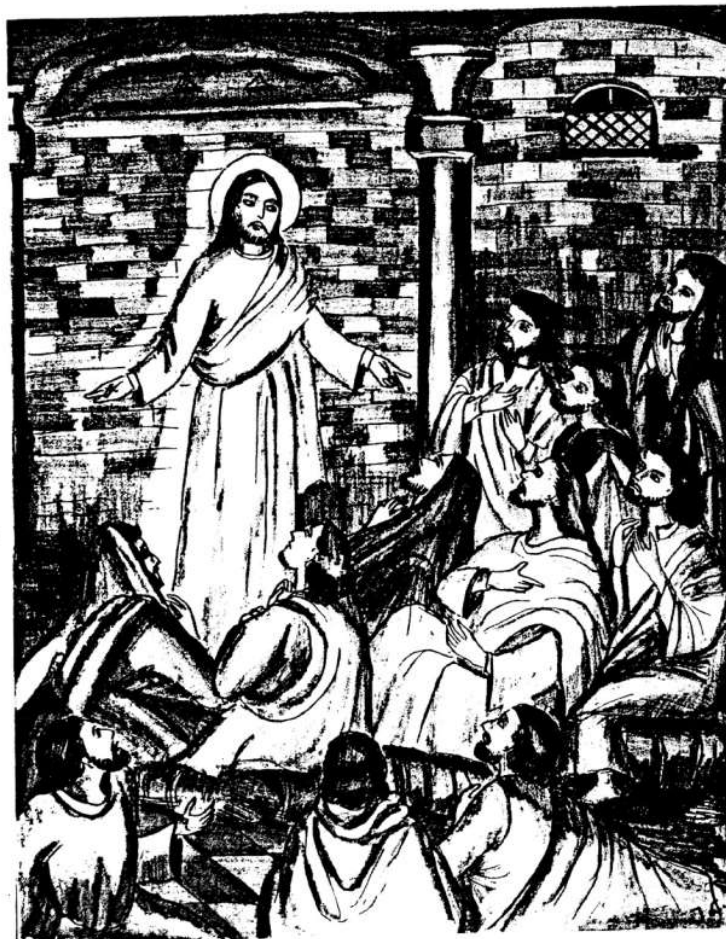
Lesson Aim:

To show that the Resurrection of our Beloved Jesus changes the fear into peace in our life.

Memory Verse:

"Jesus said to them, 'Peace be with you.' "
(John 20:21)

"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life.' "
(John 11:25)



Lesson Content

The Lord Jesus Granted His Disciples Peace in the Upper Room

Can you think of situations or things that make you afraid? What about the disciples? Can you think of anything that could make the disciples afraid after the crucifixion of Christ? Christ knew His disciples were afraid, but He wouldn't just leave them to be that way. Today, we will learn how Christ replaced the fear the disciples had, with His peace.

Please read with the students John 20:19-23.

The Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and His appearance after the Resurrection carry with them several spiritual meanings that are essential for the development of our relationship with God. The Resurrection fills the hearts of the believers with:

- (a) **Hope** in the Lord's work with us.
- (b) **Courage** in the face of death which has become the means for the true Christian to acquire that eternal joy in God's Kingdom.
- (c) **Peace** because the Lord is with us, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)

Also the appearance of our Lord Jesus after His Resurrection is a declaration of His glory, an emphasis of His Divinity and a clear confirmation of the truth of His teachings that He is One with the Father and that He is the Messiah Who saves His people from their sins.

It was evening time and Jesus' Disciples were together in the upper room except Thomas, They were afraid of the Jews because of the news that was spreading that Jesus had risen from the dead. With the darkness of the evening, their fears were enormous. They were afraid that the Jews might attack them.

The Lord in His love did not blame the Disciples for their fears which were an evidence of their human weakness and lack of faith. This teaches us not to blame others.

"The Disciples were glad when they saw the Lord." (John 20:20) Indeed they needed Him. When they saw Him after His Resurrection their faith was restored and strengthened because of the evidence that Jesus was truly the Son of God. With this newly acquired faith, their fears of the Jews completely disappeared. This teaches us that our meeting with Jesus Christ always produces abundant joy and divine peace.

We can see the work of God through our reading of what He did with and for the Disciples. In the midst of all the fears in the world, Christians must have peace of mind and heart.

Jesus Christ our Lord bestowed the Holy Spirit upon His Disciples and commissioned them to preach the good news of His salvation to the whole world, proclaiming the fact of His Resurrection which they have experienced themselves, and inviting all to the worship of the Incarnated living God Who conquered even death to grant us eternal life. He also gave His Disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit to have authority of forgiving or retaining the sins of people saying "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (John 20:23) Our church priests still maintain this authority to forgive sins.

Only then, after the Disciples had talked to Jesus in the upper room, they could accept the Cross. After the suffering of the Cross, there is always the resurrection and the life. As St. Paul said "Provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him." (Romans 8:17)

As the Lord Jesus entered the upper room with the doors closed, He also left the room with the doors closed in front of His Disciples. In the same way he appeared to them at various occasions for forty days.

The appearance of Jesus after the resurrection was not only to strengthen the faith of His followers (and ours) that He is the Son of God, but also to comfort and abolish human's worries and sufferings as: the fears of the Disciples, the sadness of Mary Magdalene and the doubt of Thomas.

In our liturgy we pray for the peace of the world. Also Abouna prays several times saying "Peace be with you."

The Effect of the Resurrection of Christ on Us Now

What are some of the symbols of Easter? (Easter bunny, coloured eggs, etc.?) Is that all that Easter is about? What is Easter all about? (Christ resurrecting from the dead). More than that, Christ's resurrection from the dead affects our lives, personally.

First, describe the events of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ very early on Sunday morning. This is why during our Easter-Evening in our church, the Divine Liturgy finishes after midnight.

Jesus rose from the dead while the big stone was still at the gate of the tomb.

Resurrection gives us the proof that there is life after death. This lets man, while living on earth, prepare himself for this new life. This life is eternal and cannot be won except through the grace and the saving power of the Resurrected Christ.

As Jesus arose from the dead, He helps us to live a life of resurrection, a life of victory over fear, over despair, over sin and even over death itself, He said "I am the resurrection and the life."

Also, after we die, Jesus will accept us in Paradise. At the end of the world when He comes to take us, the righteous and the faithful will rise and take on celestial bodies and be with Him in the Kingdom of heaven. Therefore, death is only a transfer (as our church believes) from this life to a better life in Paradise. "He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces." (Isaiah 25:8)

With Jesus's Resurrection, He opened the gates of Hades and saved the saints of the Old Testament, like Adam, Abraham and David, and transferred them to Paradise. Before that, all those spirits were kept by the devil in Hades, but Jesus descended into Hades and delivered them from the powers of the devil and gave them freedom in Paradise.

If we live the life of resurrection, various signs must appear in our lives

- The first sign is that we love Jesus very strongly.
- The second sign is that we love our brethren.
- The third sign is that we see 'all things work together for good', because we see every event from a heavenly viewpoint.

The sources of the life of resurrection are Faith in the words of Christ.

- Participation in the death and resurrection of Christ which take place during Baptism wherein we are buried and risen with Him in a mystery beyond the grasp of reason.
- Bearing the Cross and participating in suffering and death with Christ, so that we become partakers in His resurrection and glory.
- Easter is the greatest celebration in our church. Our church which has been in existence for more than twenty centuries, bases its life and worship on the resurrection. The martyrs and the saints of the church were always ready to die for their faith. The resurrection gave them the courage to the extent that they never feared death.

Application



Exercise

What do we Learn from this Lesson?

- Peace was the best gift that our Beloved Jesus on His resurrection gave to His Disciples and to us. We must attain peace at all times because our living God is with us. He protects us, takes care of us and gives us victory over fear, worry, despair, sin and even death.
- The Resurrection of our Lord gave a new life to man. We have to live a life of resurrection and victory by defeating the devil and declaring Jesus the King of our life.



The Life of Saint John the Evangelist

Lesson Aim:

To study the life of Saint John the Evangelist and learn from it.

Memory Verse:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God."
(John 1:1)



Background Information for the Servant

Sixteenth of Bashans (around May 24th) is the feast of the departure of St John the Evangelist.

Activities to Introduce the Lesson

You can use one of the following ways to introduce the lesson:



Discussion

Opening Questions:

1. How many gospels are there? (Four)
2. Who wrote them? (Matthew, Mark, Luke, & John)
3. Since the 24th of May is the Feast of St John, we want to study his life and learn from it.

Lesson Content

He is John the son of Zebedee and his father was rich. "And immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after Him." (Mark 1:20) He was living in Galilee but he also had a house in Jerusalem. He was working as a fisherman.

His mother's name was Salome and she was one of the ladies who were serving Jesus with their money. "And many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, were there looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, **and the mother of Zebedee's Sons.**" (Matthew 27:55-56)

John had a brother who was a Disciple of Jesus. His name is James. James was the first of the twelve Disciples to be martyred. "Now about that time Herod the king stretched his hand to harass some from the church. Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword." (Acts 12:1-2) James gained the crown of martyrdom and eternal life where there is joy with Jesus. Herod, on the other hand, had to face his horrible future. Herod was killed; his sinful actions followed him to Hades where he faced everlasting suffering.

The Lord Jesus called John and his brother James "Sons of thunder" because of their great courage.

John the Evangelist was first a disciple of John the Baptist. When he heard from John the Baptist about Jesus, he followed Jesus and became one of His Disciples. He was the beloved Disciple who put his head on his Master's shoulder in the last supper.

John attended the questioning of Jesus by the Jews. He also went with St Mary to the Cross and he took her to live with him at his house. "When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the Disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold your son!' Then He said to the Disciple, 'Behold your mother!' And from that hour that Disciple took her to his own home." (John 19:26-27) St Mary then became the spiritual Mother for all the believers of Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus corrected the thinking of John three times:

1. "Then John answered and said, 'Master we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow with us.' But Jesus said to him, 'do not forbid him, for he who is not against us is for us.'" This teaches us that Jesus does not approve of sectarianism especially in the church (Luke 9:49-50). He wants all to be one in Him. Please read John 17:20-21.
2. "And when His Disciples James and John saw this (A Samaritan village rejecting Jesus), they said, 'Lord do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?' But He turned and rebuked them, and said, 'You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.'" This teaches us that the kindness of Jesus is well beyond the kindness of man (for example Elijah who commanded the execution of the prophets of Baal who were opposing God - 1 Kings 18:20-40.)
3. When John and James asked Jesus "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your Glory." (Mark 10:37) He answered them "Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all." (Mark 10:43-44) This teaches us to be humble and serve others. We must not be selfish.

After Pentecost, John remained in Jerusalem with St Mary until she passed away, then he went to Asia Minor and established seven churches (Revelation 1 & 2). He was persecuted and was exiled in an island called Patmos. There he wrote the book of Revelation in the year 95. He wrote his Gospel in the year 98. He wrote the 3 letters in his last days before he rested in the Lord. He reposed in peace when he was more than 90 years old.

The main goal in his Gospel is to prove that Jesus is the Son of God Who was with the Father and the Holy Spirit before all ages.

Application



Exercise

What do we learn from this lesson?

- Love God and love all people too: St John the Evangelist wrote about love more than anyone else. "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us." (1 John 3:1) "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." (1 John 4:11)
- Follow Jesus to the Cross! ... Suffer with Him and for Him.
- Honour the Virgin St Mary ... Like St John, take her for your own spiritual mother ... Let her be your intercessor before God.

Hail to St John

In the Name of the Father and the Son
Hail to the Church

Hail to St John
Who became known as

When Christ first found him
with Zebedee his father

St John was a fisherman
He left all behind

John and James were zealous
Christ called them Boanerges

A true disciple
And taught us that

That was a mystery
O you reflector

The heartbeat of Christ
When you laid your head

And The Holy Spirit
The house of the angels.

Our Intercessor
the Beloved Disciple.

He was mending the nets
and his brother James

Until he met the Lord
when Jesus said, "Follow Me."

for the Lord's service
the "Sons of Thunder".

you learned from your Master
God is Love.

that you explained to us
Of Christ's great love

you were worthy to hear
On the Lord's chest.



The Throne of God

St John's Vision of Heaven

Bible References: Revelations 4 and 21

Lesson Aim:

To contemplate the magnificence of heaven and the things God has prepared for us.

Lesson Objectives:

Know: The beauty of heaven that awaits us.

Feel: The longing to go to heaven.

Practice: Asking to go to heaven, and to thank God for what He has prepared for us there.

Memory Verse:

"He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son."
(Revelations 21:7)



Lesson Content

[Read Revelations 4 together]

[Show an image of the Throne of God whilst explaining, or have the children look at the icon in the Altar.]

What is our goal in life, what are we waiting for? *To get ready to go to heaven and be with our Lord Jesus Christ.*

The Bible indicates a number of people who have seen the heaven open, such as St John in Patmos, Jacob whilst escaping his brother Esau (Genesis 12:28), St Steven whilst being stoned (Acts 7), and Ezekiel in captivity (Ezekiel 1).

Saint Paul saw heaven, he saw amazing things that he could not describe, he tells us *"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."*

Saint John saw a vision of the Throne of God and wrote it down in Revelations 4.

St John, one of the twelve disciples, had been exiled to the island of Patmos because he taught about Jesus. While on Patmos, God gave John a vision of the final days of earth, and a vision of heaven, its door open so the apostle could see inside. In his vision of Heaven, John heard the voice of an angel of God calling upon him to enter Heaven to find out of things to come.

Throne surrounded by a rainbow - the vision drew John into a trance in which he was shown the Throne of God, in His divine brilliance and majesty, surrounded by a rainbow, symbolizing the fulfilment of His promise never to flood the earth again. God's everlasting covenant never to destroy the earth with a flood again was sealed with a rainbow in the clouds (Genesis 9:9).

The One Who sits on the Throne - St John described the One who sits on the Throne like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance. These are precious stones that used to line the ephod of the Jewish priests. Jasper stone is as clear as crystal, it symbolises the glory of God (Rev 21:11), His magnificent holiness, and the simplicity of His love for humans, not holding grudges and wanting revenge. Sardius stone is as red as fire, it symbolises His fearsome nature and His justice.

The Twenty-four Elders - around the Throne were twenty-four elders/priests wearing white robes and golden crowns. The 24 priests are symbolic of the 12 tribes of Israel from the Old Testament, and the 12 disciples from the new testament.

Seven Lamps of Fire - were burning before the Throne, these are the 7 Spirits of God, the 7 sacraments working for our sake to give us eternal life, which starts with baptism – the sea of glass like crystal before the Throne.

Four Incorporeal Creatures - around the Throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle.

The four creatures symbolise the four gospels, that is, looking at Christ from 4 different angles:

Man - St Matthew's gospel was written for the Jews who were waiting for the offspring of a woman who will save them – this depicts Christ the man in the image of a man (perfect man without sin).

Lion - St Mark's gospel was written for the Romans, who value power, thus the symbol of a lion depicts Christ the powerful King.

Ox - St Luke's gospel was written for the Greek people, who loved philosophy, thus is depicted by the ox who serves its people, and symbolise Christ the servant.

Eagle – St John's gospel writes about the divinity of Christ, this is symbolised by an Eagles who flies high everywhere.

Full of eyes - the four living creatures, each having six wings, and carry the Throne. They were full of eyes around and within. The eyes symbolise the possession of knowledge of the present and future mysteries. And they do not rest day or night, saying: *"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!"*

Worshipping God - the 24 priests can't bear this glorious sight, so they get off their seats, take off their crowns and put them at God's feet. They fall down before Him who sits on the Throne who lives forever saying, *"You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created."*

What else did St John see? (Revelations 21)

Saints from all corners of the world who fought the good fight, wearing white, holding palms, standing before the Throne, praising God. St John asked the angel who are those? Those are the ones that came from the great tribulation and washed their clothes in the Blood of Christ (Revelation 7:14).

Amongst many other things, he saw a new city called 'Holy Jerusalem', coming down from God, decorated and beautiful like a bride going to meet her groom. He heard a voice saying, *"This is God's dwelling with people". This is where we live with Christ and He with us.*

God will wipe away all tears and hardship that people went through whilst on earth. In there, there will be no death, crying or pain.

The One sitting on the Throne said, *"Behold, I make all things new."*

"It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Revelations 21:6-8)

Conclusion: We see the beautiful image of the Throne painted before the Altar in church. The icon is often referred to as 'Christ the Pantocrator' (Ruler of life) and the 'Bosom of the Father'. It reminds us of the beautiful eternal life with Christ that we await.



Being Ready for Heaven

Parable of the Ten Virgins

Bible References: Matthew 25:1-13

Lesson Aim:

To study one of the parables about the Kingdom of God in order to understand what we must do to be in a ready state when our Lord comes.

Lesson Objectives:

Know: The parable of the Ten Virgins.

Feel: The importance of time in our lives, and to always wait for the Groom (the Lord Jesus Christ).

Practice: Planning and managing our time, and benefitting from it.

Memory Verse:

"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."
(Matthew 25:13)



Lesson Content

What would you do if you knew that Jesus Christ is coming to visit us? (*listen to children's ideas*)

What would you then do if you find out that He is coming but will be a little delayed?

What if you knew He is coming but have no idea when and what time – what would you do?

At the time of His ascension the angels confirmed to the disciples that He will come again when they said: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11)

In His Second Coming, our Lord Jesus Christ will take all those who are ready to live with Him in eternal joy in heaven, this is what our teacher St. Paul talked about in his epistle:

"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." (1 Corinthians 2:9)

Kingdom of Heaven – we are now living in the kingdom of heaven, after baptism, and are awaiting the kingdom of God. We live in the kingdom of heaven whilst we are here on earth by abiding in Christ; washing our sins and sanctifying ourselves by the Blood of Christ (our relationship with the Altar), keeping the commandments of God (our relationship with the Bible) and keeping watch.

Kingdom of God – is holy and pure, no evil or sin can exist there, that is why Christ wants us to be saints.

[The servant begins to introduce the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, and points out the necessity of always being in a ready state for Heaven, discussing the ways of getting ready (good works, true worship)]

This parable was told by our Lord Jesus to His disciples on His last day in the temple. He entered the temple (the Tuesday of His last week on earth before His crucifixion). When He came out of the temple, His disciples started to ask Him about the kingdom of Heaven and His Second Coming.

[Read the parable together, Matthew 25:1-13]

The parable of the Ten Virgins is relevant to the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus and teaches us how to prepare for Him. The Church reads this parable every day in the midnight prayer so that every person who prays will remember to prepare for the coming of our Lord Jesus like the wise virgins.

Our Lord Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven is like 10 virgins (5 wise and 5 foolish) who went out to meet the bridegroom.

The bridegroom is our Lord Jesus because the parable talks about the Second Coming.

The virgins who took their lamps are all the believers who received the Sacraments of Baptism and Myron.

The number 'five' refers to the five senses. The senses are like gates that we have to watch and use in the right way.

How To Be Ready To Enter The Kingdom Of Heaven

Through the Sacrament of Baptism we become children of God and through the Sacrament of Myron (when we get anointed with Myron oil) we become a temple of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit enlightens, sanctifies us and consecrates us for the Lord. The word consecrate means that we are the Lord's and we should live our life in purity. For example, the vessels of the Altar, are anointed with the Holy Myron and are consecrated for the Altar, we cannot use them for anything else.

The First Step For The Preparation We should be consecrated to God (born again through Baptism and anointed with the Holy Myron) and live our lives as God's children.

The wise are all who live a life of getting prepared and have one goal which is to enter the kingdom of heaven.

The foolish are all who do not get prepared in their lives and do not have the kingdom of heaven as the goal of their lives.

The parable differentiates between the wise and the foolish virgins with the amount of oil in their lamps. The wise had oil in their lamps, they also had extra oil in their vessels while the foolish did not have enough oil in their lamps nor had any extra oil.

The oil is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives which allows us to bear fruit.

After the person is born again through the Sacrament of Baptism and becomes the temple of God through the Sacrament of Myron, he/she can:

1. Either strive and make every effort in his life to be filled with the Spirit and fulfil God's commandment that says, "be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18), and be like the wise virgins.
2. Or be careless about his life and do not work hard. By doing this, this person disrupts the work of the Holy Spirit in them and not fulfil the commandment that says, "Do not quench the Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 5:19), and be like the foolish virgins.

How to be like the wise virgins?

To be like the wise virgins we need to endure and be watchful all the days of our lives. We do this through prayers, fasting, almsgiving, partaking in the Holy Communion, reading the Bible and do good deeds that strengthen our relationship with God.

The Second Step For the Preparation

We need to strive to grow in our spiritual life and strengthen our relationship with God. The parable tells us that both the wise and the foolish virgins were waiting for the bridegroom (the Lord Jesus) but when He was delayed they both slept.

'Sleeping' refers to death. 'Midnight' means that the time is not known, it is not a definite time but it refers to the Second Coming. 'A cry' is the sound of the angels announcing the arrival of the bridegroom. 'The oil' is the good deeds coming from the spiritual endurance.

At that time the foolish virgins' lamps were going out because they did not have enough oil. They asked the wise virgins to give them some of their oil "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out", but the wise virgins refused!

They refused because the request was wrong in the first place. No one can give their spiritual fight to someone else. For Example you cannot ask your friend to give you some of his marks in a test because you will fail! You cannot ask someone to give you some of his prayers because you do not pray!

That is why the wise virgins said, "No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves."

When the foolish went to try to buy oil (after it was too late) the bridegroom came and the wise went with him to enjoy eternal joy and live with Him forever in His kingdom. Then the door was closed. When the foolish came back and found the door closed, they called out for someone to open the door (meaning they wanted another chance) but the Lord said to them "I do not know you". These words are the result of the life they lived away from God and ended up in being unprepared to meet Him.

At the end of the parable our Lord Jesus gave us a commandment which will show us the third step for the preparation.

**"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."
Matthew 25:13**

The Third Step For The Preparation

We should always be ready as we do not know the time when our Lord Jesus will come. Our chance on earth to live a life worthy to enter the Kingdom of Heaven ends when our life ends.

"Watch" - our Lord is asking us to be careful throughout our lives and to be ready for His coming because:

- The devil is always trying to draw people away from God
- The body is weak and sometimes we are lazy to pray or to do any spiritual deeds. That is why it is very important for us to train our bodies, develop self-control and spiritual discipline.
- No one knows the time of our Lord's Second Coming.

Conclusion: The oil is all the spiritual work that we should fill our lives with. We fill our lamps by loving God, praying, fasting, repenting and confessing, partaking in the sacrament of Holy Communion, loving and serving others, all the days of our lives on earth.

[servant: give the children the below activities to do at home in their own time. If time permits at the end of class, go through an example with them of how to do it]

Application



Exercise

Exercise 1 – Task Prioritisation

Make a list of all the activities you do every day/week, e.g. going to school, watching TV, using the computer, after-school sport, doing homework, and whatever else you do during your week. Then write how many hours you spend on each of the activities that you mentioned, e.g. *playing on computer (1 hr)*, *studying (2 hrs)*.

Place each activity in the suitable place on the line diagram below. Example, think is this activity important and urgent, important and not urgent, less important but urgent, not important not urgent.

After you have done that, ask yourself the following questions:

1. *Which area do I spend most of my time?*
2. *If I were to be wise, which space should I spend my of my time?*
3. *Why do I delay my spiritual activities? Is it because I don't think it is important or urgent?*
4. *What do I think about that?*

Exercise 2 - Plan for the Week

Let's practice organising our day – time is a talent from God, so let's use it wisely. Look at the timetable below and write down when you will do each activity, so that you do not forget to do it, and time wastes away on less important things. You can add more boxes if you need to.

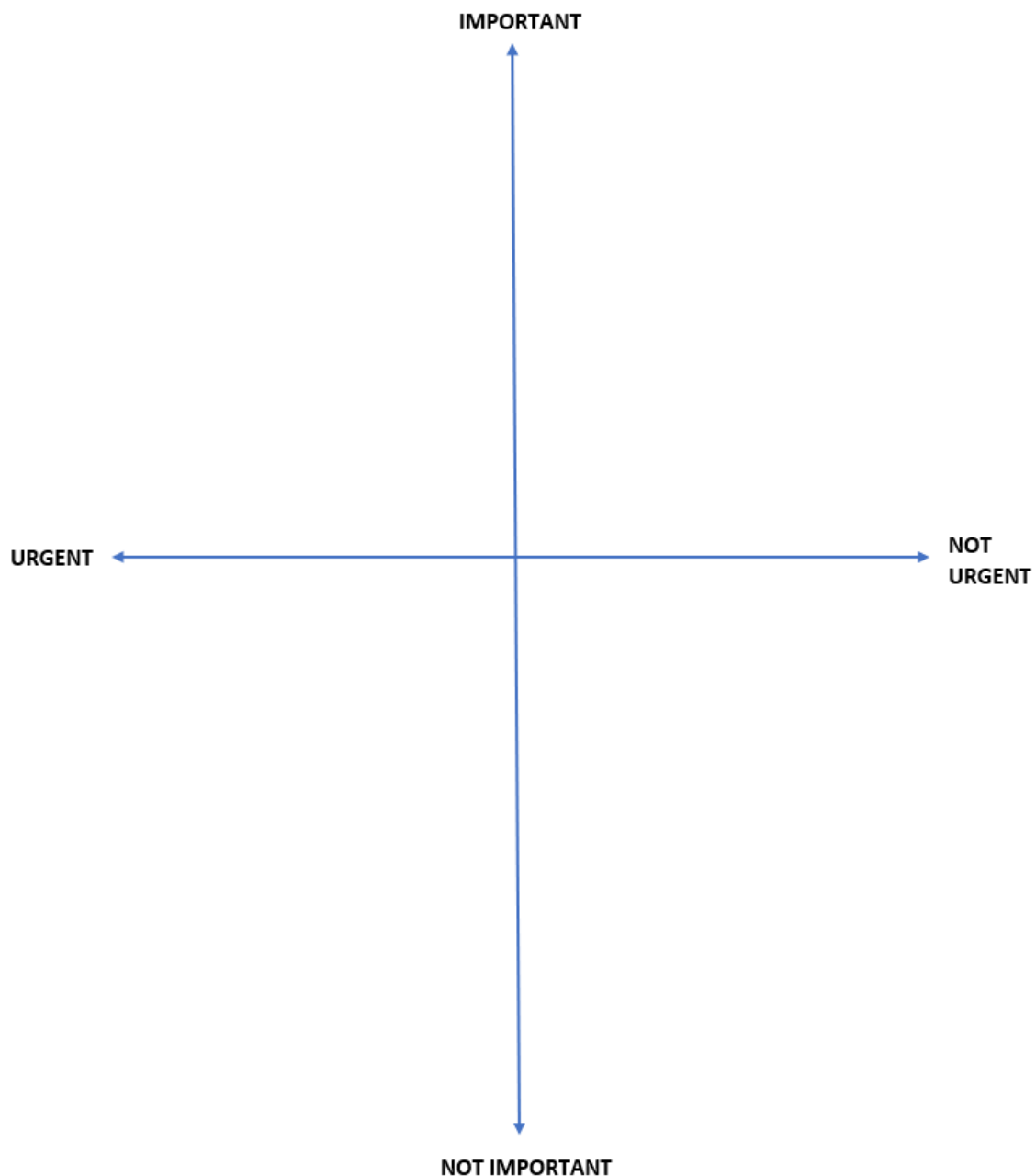
Homework Exercise 1 - Task Prioritisation

Make a list of all the activities you do every day/week, e.g. going to school, watching TV, using the computer, after-school sport, doing homework, and whatever else you do during your week. Then write how many hours you spend on each of the activities that you mentioned, e.g. *playing on computer (1 hr)*, *studying (2 hrs)*.

Place each activity in the suitable place on the line diagram below. Example, think is this activity important and urgent, important and not urgent, less important but urgent, not important not urgent.

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Activity	Example	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Sleep [at least 8 hrs a day]	e.g. 9pm-7am							
Prayer [3 times a day, 15 mins each time]	e.g. <i>Before school</i> <i>Afternoon</i> <i>Before bed</i>							
Bible Reading [30 mins daily]	e.g. <i>Genesis 1</i>							
General Reading [10 mins]	e.g. <i>book on the planets of the solar system</i>							
Holy Liturgy [once a week]	(tick)							
Exercise Activity [at least 30 mins per day]	e.g. <i>football, cycling, skipping, walking with family</i>							
Fun Activity [depends how much time is left]	e.g. <i>computer game, TV, art</i>							
Studying [depends on school work]	9-3pm <i>Maths, Art project, English</i>							



The Ascension Feast

Blessing of the Ascension

Bible References: Luke 24:44-53, Acts 1:1-2 and 6-11

Lesson Aim:

To learn about the blessings of the ascension in our life.

Memory Verse:

"I go to prepare a place for you."
(John 14:2)



Background Information for the Servant

Notes on the Ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ

Nobody has ever risen from the dead and ascended to heaven except the Lord Jesus Christ Son of God.

The ascension of Jesus after His resurrection is proof of His Divinity.

When Jesus talked to Nicodemus He told him "No man has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven." (John 3:13)

So the Lord Jesus, when He was speaking with Nicodemus, He was in heaven at the same instant.

But Jesus ascended with our flesh, which He took from the Virgin Mary, that is with my flesh and yours. Hence, Jesus blessed our bodies and opened the gate of heaven for us.

"And raised up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 2:6)

He ascended into heaven so that we could realise that our true place is in heaven. We should be thinking about heaven and should not let the things of the world control our lives.

We can remember the ascension in the following:

- Every time we pray the Lord's prayer and say "Our Father who art in heaven..." we realise that Jesus meant that praying should be to our Father in heaven.
- During The Divine Liturgy, when we stand close to the altar, we are considered as if we are standing in heaven.
- Every time we neglect the world and concentrate on Jesus we ascend to heaven with all our being.

Activities to Introduce the Lesson

You can use one of the following ways to introduce the lesson:



Discussion

Opening Questions:

1. Christ died for us on the Cross, and then He resurrected from the dead. Is that the end of the story? Did Christ remain on earth after that?
Well, yes, but only for forty days, after which He ascended to Heaven, His real home.
2. What about us? Is earth our real home, or is Heaven?
Today, we will explore what the ascension of our Lord Jesus teaches us.

Lesson Content

Describe at first the events of the ascension as mentioned in Luke 24:44-53 and Acts 1:1-2, 6-11.

Our Lord Jesus Christ continued to appear to His Disciples for forty days after His Resurrection. These repeated appearances were sufficient to remove any doubt about His Resurrection and His victory over death. The Disciples then went to the whole world and proclaimed the Resurrection of our Lord as they had witnessed it. At the end of the forty days, Jesus appeared to His Disciples for the last time. He explained to them "that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." (Luke 24:44) "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day." (Luke 24:46) "And you are witnesses of these things." (Luke 24:48)

Ascension is not just a historical event that we celebrate once a year forty days after Easter.

The ascension of our Lord Jesus to heaven has various spiritual lessons for us. Some of them are as follows:

- The ascension of Jesus to heaven helps us to lift our eyes to heaven. Our help comes from there, our future is there and our God, the Almighty One dwells there. That is why when we pray we say "Our Father Who art in heaven..." After His Ascension, heaven has become the dwelling place for our Lord Jesus Christ. We lift up our eyes and hearts to Him when we give Him thanks, ask Him for forgiveness or when we are in need spiritually or otherwise.

- The ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ indicates to us that our future is not here on earth, it is in heaven:
 1. Man after his fall in sin thought that earth is his final destination. Therefore the Jews were waiting for Christ to come and give them an earthly kingdom. But our Lord explained to them "My kingdom is not of this world." (John 18:36)
 2. The ascension of our Lord Jesus in the flesh which He took from our human nature, emphasised to us that the true place of the believers is in heaven. Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you Myself, that where I am, there you may be also." (John 14:2, 3) This means that we are granted a good place in heaven, because Jesus will take us with Him in the second coming and we will be with Him forever.
- The ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ resulted in granting us the Holy Spirit:
 1. Jesus promised His Disciples that if He did not go to heaven, the Holy Spirit the comforter will not come "Nevertheless I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you." (John 16:7)
 2. Our Lord Jesus asked His Disciples before He ascended to heaven not to depart from Jerusalem but to wait for the fulfilment of His promise, the sending of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-8).
 3. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are granted for us to be able to defeat the devil in our spiritual struggles.
- The Ascension of our Lord strengthened the faith of the Disciples. It helped them to mature in their faith. When our Lord was with them in the flesh, they were, except for very few times, only observers. They merely stood by while He was teaching or performing miracles. When He ascended to heaven, they had to take the full responsibility of preaching the Gospel of Salvation to the whole world. Give the example of the mother who looks after her child. If she continually carries him, he will never walk on his own. But if she trains him and then leaves him to depend on himself, he matures. However, she can still advise him. Similarly, the Holy Spirit advises and leads us.
- The scene of the ascension which the Disciples witnessed remained in their minds giving them strength and joy. That is why they met persecution and suffering not only without fear, but with joy looking ahead for the eternal life awaiting them in heaven.

St Stephen said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." (Acts 7:56) So, Stephen got the strength to withstand all the suffering because of what he saw.

Application



Exercise

What do we learn from this lesson?

- Train yourself to always lift up your eyes and your heart to heaven where Jesus Christ ascended to prepare a place for you.
- Try always to be prepared spiritually for that moment when Christ calls on you. Don't let the temporary comforts and pleasures of this world make you lose your eternal place with God in His Kingdom.

Christ ascended to prepare a place for you.

Six weeks kept free for
Coptic Festival programme.



I am Faithful

The Concept of Faithful Stewardship: Parable of the Unjust Steward

Bible References: Luke 16:1-13

Book References:

- HH Pope Shenouda III, "Many Years with People's Questions – Volume 1"
- HG Bishop Youssef, Sermon:
<https://www.orthodoxsermons.org/sermons/parable-unjust-steward>

Lesson Aim:

We are expected to be good stewards here on earth of God's resources, and we will be required to give account of our stewardship.

Lesson Objectives:

- Know:** That God is the owner of everything, nothing belongs to us, we are stewards of the things we have (given to us by God).
- Feel:** The need to be faithful in looking after the things that God has entrusted us with.
- Practice:** Giving generously and doing good deeds, as well as giving account of our stewardship regularly on earth, and receiving forgiveness for our mistakes.

Memory Verse:

"And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?"
(Luke 16:12)

"You cannot serve God and mammon."
(Luke 16:13)



Lesson Content

God is the master and owner of everything, He has appointed us as stewards over His resources, and He is expecting us to be wise and faithful in our stewardship. One day, Christ will demand an account of our stewardship.

Read this part together, from Luke 16:1-13

The Parable of the Unjust Steward

16 He also said to His disciples: "There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. ² So he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship, for you can no longer be steward.'

³ Then the steward said within himself, 'What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig; I am ashamed to beg. ⁴ I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.'

⁵ So he called every one of his master's debtors to him, and said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' ⁶ And he said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' So he said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' ⁷ Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' So he said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' And he said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' ⁸ So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light.

⁹ And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home. ¹⁰ He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. ¹¹ Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? ¹² And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?

¹³ No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

Christ told this parable to teach us the importance of acting faithfully with integrity in whatever we do, whether it relates to ourselves or others, "And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?" (Luke 16:12)

Christ told us the parable of a steward who worked for a rich man, he was responsible for managing the rich man's money, just as in life we are responsible for looking after things that God has given us. However, the steward was dishonest, he wasted his master's goods. When the rich man heard about this, he fired the steward from his job and asked him to give account of the work he has been doing.

The steward, knowing that he was about to lose his present position in life, took steps to insure his future. He called each of his master's debtors and reduced their debt to an amount they could pay. He did this so that they would, out of gratitude, receive him into their houses once he lost his stewardship. Christ commended this wise steward for using unrighteous mammon to make friends.

How did the Lord commend the unjust steward?

The Lord did not commend all his actions, He only commended his wisdom, "so the master commended the unjust steward because he had done wisely." This man was prepared for whatever the future might bring him before he was discharged from his stewardship. This readiness in this parable symbolises the readiness that we should have toward eternity before we depart from this world.

The Lord, by this parable admonishes us by the wisdom which the people of the world have.

So if the people of this world (such as the unjust steward) in spite of their sins, have such wisdom then the sons of God should also have it. For immediately after praising the unjust steward on his wisdom He said, "for the sons of

this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light.' (Luke 16:8) The Lord is reproaching us by the parable of the unjust steward who being a son of this world, knew how to be ready for his future.

We need to bring up an important point in this parable and other parables like it:

There is a specific point of comparison, not a generalised one.

For example if we praise the lion, we do not praise its savageness and wilderness but we praise its strength and courage. If we describe a man as a lion we do not mean that he is an animal or a savage, but we praise him for his strength and courage. Also in the parable of the unjust steward the praise was for one specific point only which is the wisdom of being ready for the future, not his other qualities.

Here we give another example to clarify this point: The serpent, which is the cause of the calamity and fall of the human race, the Lord found a nice thing about it that we might adopt, He said:

"Be wise as serpents..." (Matthew 10:16)

Does that mean that we should be like the serpent in everything? While it is a symbol of wickedness, evil and cunning. The only point that God praised in the serpent is the wisdom, so the resemblance is only limited to this quality, as with the unjust steward.

What is Unrighteous Mammon?

Mammon means material or worldly wealth. Mammon can be anything in which we trust and serve – other than God. Jesus Christ said, "You cannot serve God and mammon." Mammon is not true riches - true riches are those found in Jesus Christ.

Money and wealth in itself are not evil, however it is how this wealth is mis-managed, and where it leads us, that makes it unrighteous (e.g. greed, corruption, hoarding money and not giving).

Money as a material blessing belongs to God, we have been entrusted as stewards to use it for 'just causes', such as having enough for our daily living, and returning a portion to the Lord (through tithe and offerings), to be used for His purposes in this world, such as for the work of the Church and aid of the poor and needy. When we don't use money for this purpose, deprive those who deserve it, not offer tithe, and keep it to ourselves, it becomes 'unrighteous money' (unrighteous mammon).

It is important to remember God's portion, He said, **"Will a man rob God? Yet you robbed me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithe and offerings."** (Malachi 3:8) Let's think, do we have unrighteous mammon that we should have offered for God's purposes?

Christ told us to use unrighteous mammon for good work, **"And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home."** (Luke 16:9) For example, if we use unrighteous mammon to give to the poor and needy (and it doesn't have to be just money, could be any form of support), they will intercede on our behalf, and ask God to bless us. When we show mercy to others, we will obtain mercy on judgement day, when we have to give account of our stewardship.



Exercise

What can I do to be a good steward?

Examine ourselves during our prayers and quiet time - have we been faithful with what God has entrusted us? Stewardship is not just about money, it includes many things such as our talent, time, families, careers, spiritual lives – all resources given to us by God.

Ask God to search our hearts and help us to be faithful and wise stewards – without Him we can do nothing. If we rely on our own ability we will fail, we must rely on His grace. He will enable us.

Plan for our eternal future – we often plan for our future here on earth, such as our schooling, career, marriage, family life, retirement etc. It is important to also plan for our eternity, by serving God, being wise, faithful and righteous.

Do good, be rich in good deeds, be generous givers, share with others. This way we save up treasures and real riches in heaven.

Guard God's word – treasure the Christian faith that has been passed on to us, and pass it on to others. Reject false doctrine and worldly practices that are against the Church's teaching.

Believers guard the faith by studying God's word and obeying it - daily pursue a deeper knowledge of God.

Communicate with our spiritual father to give account of our stewardship here on earth. When we **confess**, we are giving an account of our stewardship. God will forgive us if we acknowledge our mistakes.



The Apostles' Feast

St Peter and St Paul

Book References:

- HG Bishop Youanis of Gharbia, "The Era of the Apostles" - Arabic

Lesson Aim:

To study the life of St Peter and St Paul in the commemoration of their martyrdom on 5th of Abib (July 12). As God supported them He is very willing to help us.

Memory Verse:

St Paul: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."
(Galatians 2:20)



Background Information for the Servant

The Martyrdom of St Peter and St Paul, the Apostles

Peter was from Bethsaida, and he was a fisherman. The Lord chose him on the second day of His baptism after He chose Andrew his brother. He had fervent faith and strong zeal. When the Lord asked His disciples: "Who do men say that I am?" So they answered, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:13-20) After he received the grace of the Holy Spirit, he went around in the world preaching of the crucified Christ, and he converted many to the faith. God wrought great and innumerable signs and wonders by his hands. He wrote two catholic Epistles to the believers. When he came to the city of Rome, he found there St Paul the Apostle. Through their preaching, most of the people of Rome believed, so Nero seized Peter and commanded to crucify him. Peter asked them to crucify him head downwards, and he delivered up his soul into the hand of the Lord.

As of St Paul the Apostle, he was born in Tarsus two years before the advent of the Savior. He was a Jew, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. He was well learned in the Law of the Torah, and he was jealous for it. He persecuted the Christians.

When they stoned St Stephen, Paul was guarding the clothes of those who were stoning him. He took from Caiaphas, the high priest, letters to the synagogues of Damascus, to bind the Christians and bring them to Jerusalem. As he journeyed, he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." Then He ordered him to go to Ananias in Damascus, who baptised him, and he received his sight at once. He was filled by the grace of the Comforter, and he proclaimed boldly the Faith. He went around in the world preaching of the crucified Christ. He suffered much beatings, imprisonment, and was bound with fetters, some of which are mentioned in the book of the Acts of the Apostles and in his Epistles.

He went to Rome and proclaimed the Faith there and many believed by his hands. He wrote for them the Epistle to the Romans which was the first of his fourteen Epistles.

Finally, Nero seized him, tortured him severely and ordered his head cut off. While St Paul was passing along with the executioner, he met a damsel who was a kinswoman of the Emperor Nero, and who had believed through him. She walked along with St Paul, weeping, to where they carried out the sentence. He comforted her and asked her for her veil. He wrapped his head with the veil, and asked her to return back. The executioner cut off his head and left it wrapped in the veil of the young girl, and that was in the year 67 AD. The young girl met the executioner on his way back to the Emperor, and asked him about Paul and he replied, "He is lying where I left him and his head is wrapped in your veil." She told him, "You are lying, for he and Peter had just passed by me, they were arrayed in the apparel of kings, and had crowns decorated with jewels on their heads, and they gave me my veil, and here it is." She showed it to the executioner, and to those who were with him. They marvelled, and believed on the Lord Christ.

God wrought by the hands of Peter and Paul many great signs and wonders, that they even carried the sick out into the streets ... that as Peter came by ... his shadow might fall on them ... and they were all healed. (Acts 5:15) The handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from Paul's body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them. (Acts 19:12)

Lesson Content

Describe at first the events of the ascension as mentioned in Luke 24:44-53 and Acts 1:1-2, 6-11.

Greetings to our saintly Apostles through whom we obtained the faith. They are called in the Bible "church's pillars".

To hand us the faith, they suffered all kinds of persecution which St Paul describes saying "in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in sleeplessness, in fasting." (2 Corinthians 6:4-5)

Greetings to those strong in spirit who stood in front of kings, emperors and governors of both Jews and Romans. They came out victorious.

Greetings to those who were chosen by the Lord from the whole world to carry His message and preach His name to the whole world.

Greetings to our Apostles who were filled with the Holy Spirit. They totally submitted to the Holy Spirit who guided them, strengthened them and even spoke on their tongues.

Greetings to them for the Cross that they had carried and the blood that they had shed for the sake of faith and for our sake.

July is the month of the Apostles.

St Peter:

Our Beloved Jesus called Peter who was a fisherman, to follow Him (Matthew 4:18-19).

St Peter was the Disciple who declared that Jesus is "the Son of the living God".

St Peter was one of the three Disciples present during the Lord's transfiguration (Matthew 17:1)

At the last supper, like the rest of the Disciples, our Lord Jesus Christ washed St Peter's feet (John 13:6-7).

St Peter followed the Lord Jesus to Gethsemane, but could not keep awake so he slept while the Lord Jesus was praying (Matthew 26:40).

St Peter, being eager to defend his master, cut off the ear of one of the servants of the high priest (John 18:10-11).

St Peter was so frightened and denied that he knew the Lord Jesus (John 18:25-27).

When St Peter heard the rooster crow, he remembered his sin of denying the Lord Jesus (Matthew 26:75).

St Peter was one of the two Disciples who went to the tomb and found that He had risen from the dead (John 20:1-10).

On Pentecost St Peter preached to the whole crowd gathered there, and he, along with the Disciples, baptised that day a crowd of about three thousand people (Acts 2:14).

St Peter healed a crippled man by the power of the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 3:1-7). Then Peter said to the Lame Man, "Silver and Gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." (Acts 3:6)

St Peter told Ananias and his wife about their sin of lying to God (Acts 5:1-11).

Tabitha was raised from the dead by the name of the Lord Jesus through the prayers of St Peter (Acts 9:36-42). "Tabitha arise". And she opened her eyes, and when she saw and when she saw St Peter she sat up.

St Peter wrote 2 Epistles (letters) to the believers.

St Peter was martyred for the sake of his beloved the Lord Jesus Christ.

The time and manner of the apostle's martyrdom are less certain. According to the early writers, he died at or about the same time with St Paul, and in the Neronian persecution, AD 67, 68. All accounts agree that he was crucified. Origen says that Peter felt himself to be unworthy to be put to death in the same manner as his Master, and was, therefore, at his request, crucified with his head downward.

St Paul:

St Paul's name was Saul before he became a Christian. He was a Jewish Pharisee and used to hate the Christians, persecute and arrest them.

On his way to Damascus to arrest more Christians, the Lord talked to him (Acts 9:3-9). "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

A disciple named Ananias baptised him and restored him his sight (Acts 9:10-19).

The Lord told Ananias, "Go, for he is a **chosen vessel of Mine** to bear My name before Gentiles, Kings, and the children of Israel." (Acts 9:15)

For the sake of the Gospel he suffered a lot.

St Paul had three major missionary trips, through which many people accepted Christianity.

St Paul wrote 14 Epistles (letters).

At the end, at Nero's command, he was beheaded for the sake of his Beloved the Lord Jesus Christ.

[An excerpt from the Coptic Synaxarion]

Finally, Nero seized him [St Paul], tortured him severely and ordered his head cut off. While St Paul was passing along with the executioner, he met a damsel who was a kinswoman of the Emperor Nero, and who had believed through him. She walked along with St Paul, weeping, to where they carried out the sentence. He comforted her and asked her for her veil. He wrapped his head with the veil, and asked her to return back. The executioner cut off his head and left it wrapped in the veil of the young girl, and that was in the year 67 AD. The young girl met the executioner on his way back to the Emperor, and asked him about St Paul and he replied, "He is lying where I left him and his head is wrapped in your veil." She told him, "You are lying, for he and Peter had just passed by me, they were arrayed in the apparel of kings, and had crowns decorated with jewels on their heads, and they gave me my veil, and here it is." She showed it to the executioner, and to those who were with him. They marvelled, and believed on the Lord Christ.

God wrought by the hands of St Peter and St Paul many great signs and wonders, that they even carried the sick out into the streets ... that as Peter came by ... his shadow might fall on them ... and they were all healed. (Acts 5:15) The handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from St Paul's body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them. (Acts 19:12)

What do we learn from St Peter and St Paul's lives?

1. They loved Jesus very heartily. Let us pray that God fills our hearts with His love. Then, like the Disciples, we, through our Christian behaviour and conduct, bring glory to the name of our Lord Jesus.
2. The apostles suffered a great deal to hand down the faith. We too have to preserve the faith of our fathers, and take an extra step towards helping others to know the true Christianity.
3. We can see from the life of both St Peter and St Paul that they had weaknesses. No one is perfect. But the Lord helped them a lot. He can help us too. We must never lose hope.

What became of the remaining Apostles?

Through information from tradition or the writings of early Christian historians, we know that the other apostles spread to different parts of the world to preach the good news of the salvation of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit of God led them and spoke by them. We do not have precise details of where and how each of them preached and lived, due to a lack of accurate historical documentation. There is more clarity on St Paul's journey for instance, due to the documented accounts from St Luke in Acts, and from the 14 epistles that he wrote in the New Testament.

We know that the other apostles were also diligent in following what Christ commanded them before His ascension, "And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.' " (Mark 16:15) We can be sure that their journeys and labours also involved great hardships, dangers, victories, fasts, prayers, tears, and shedding of their blood to spread the faith. It is thought that all of the apostles, apart from St John, were martyred for their beloved Lord Jesus Christ.

May their prayers be with us, and Glory be to God forever. Amen.



Serving Others

The Good Samaritan

Bible References: Luke 10:25-36

Lesson Aim:

To put our knowledge of the teaching of Christ into action by being compassion and merciful towards others, serving the needy, regardless of their race, age, gender, or religious sect.

Lesson Objectives:

- Know:** It is not enough to know the Bible, but it is important to live it and implement it.
- Feel:** Compassion and love towards others who need help, just as Christ did.
- Practice:** Taking action on opportunities to do good, serve others and be merciful.

Memory Verse:

"When He saw him, He had compassion on him."

(Luke 10:33)

"Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me."

(Matthew 25:40)



Lesson Content

The Good Samaritan is a much loved parable, you may have heard of many humanitarian charities and organisations in the world who have adopted this name.

Read Luke 10:25-36 together:

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

²⁵ And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

²⁶ He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?"

²⁷ So he answered and said, " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbour as yourself.' "

²⁸ And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live."

²⁹ But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?"

³⁰ Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³² Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. ³³ But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴ So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' ³⁶ So which of these three do you think was neighbour to him who fell among the thieves?"

³⁷ And he said, "He who showed mercy on him."

Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

An expert in the Jewish law asked Jesus Christ what he should do to inherit eternal life. This is an important question that Christ was asked a few times in the Holy Bible. Since the man was an expert in the law and knew the Books well, Christ asked him what the law says about inheriting eternal life. The man told Christ the verse from Deuteronomy 6 (" 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbour as yourself.' "). Christ told him to do this [do what is written in the law], and he will be saved. This means that it is not enough to know the law but to live it and implement it. It seems that the man knew the law but did not necessarily implement it. He was sure he loved God, but what about his 'neighbour'? In order to justify himself, he asked Jesus Christ, "And Who is my neighbour?." After Christ told him the parable of the Good Samaritan, He asked the man 'who in the parable is the neighbour?', the man replied that the person who showed mercy in the parable, is the neighbour. Jesus told him to "do likewise".

What does the parable really mean? It has a metaphorical meaning, and a practical meaning

Metaphorical symbolism

1. **The man was coming from Jerusalem into Jericho**, he was attacked by thieves, they wounded him, stripped him of his clothes, and left him half dead.

Jerusalem is the holy city. The person travelling is symbolic of any human being going through life from birth till the day they depart. The Bible tells us that the route from Jerusalem down to Jericho is rough and barren, it has caves and thieves used to hide out in the caves.

During a person's spiritual journey, they may pass by difficult routes.

2. **Spiritually, thieves are symbolic of Satan and his followers.** Satan is the first thief in the world who robbed man from paradise, stealing his purity, innocence, and simplicity, depriving man from living with God in perfect harmony. Satan caused man to be kicked out of paradise and to receive a penalty.

The thieves not only robbed the man, but they stripped him of his clothes, symbolic of man being stripped of his righteousness, innocence, and a life of holiness. "[you] do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." (Revelations 3:17) Thus, God's reward is to cloth man with righteousness and restore him, "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments."

3. **The thieves wounded the traveller.** The Bible tells us that sin, "...cast down many wounded, And all who were slain by her were strong men." (Proverbs 7:26)

As we walk through life, we do not know when, how, and where these spiritual thieves will attack, mislead, or deceive us, "There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death." (Proverbs 14:12)

4. **The thieves left him half dead.** This is symbolic of a man being left in a critical spiritual state, incapable of saving himself and needing someone to save him. Spiritual death is the separation from God.
5. **A priest passed by, then a Levite passed by,** but they did not help. This could be neglect in pastoral care, or perhaps they were busy with other services.
6. **A good Samaritan passed by.** The Good Samaritan in this parable symbolises Christ Himself, or Christ in the form of His servants.
7. **The Samaritan bandaged the wounds and poured oil and wine.** Oil symbolises the Holy Spirit, whilst wine is symbolic of the sacrament of Eucharist (Holy Communion). He lifted him on his animal (perhaps this is the vehicle of faith) taking him to an inn (that takes him to Church). The Samaritan gave the innkeeper two dinariis, these could be symbolic of the Bible and grace, or the Church's teachings and sacraments. He told them to look after the man until he returns. Just as the Church and her sacraments preserve us till the second coming of Christ.

Some practical points

- The Samaritan is a stranger from Samaria, with different religious doctrine to the Jewish law. Samaritans only believed in the 5 Books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), they disregarded all the other Books. There was strong hatred between the Jews and Samaritans, the Jews regarded the Samaritans as unclean and had no dealing with them.
- Christ conveyed the Samaritan in the parable as a good man. He commended the Samaritan man's kindness, but not his doctrine / religious beliefs. Just as He commended the Unjust Steward's wisdom, but not his unjustness.
- Christ cared for the weak, those who were despised and degraded by people, sinners, tax collectors etc, He wanted to gather them to Himself. Christ came to save the despised Samaritans from the hatred of the Jews, gather them to Himself and lead them to the true faith. He spoke well of the Samaritans and broke down the barriers between them and the Jews.
- The Samaritan acted in a selfless way, he put the needs of the injured man first, and gave everything he had. He did not worry about himself or his own comforts (e.g. what if thieves come to attack him too, what if others think that he killed the Jewish man), he did not care that the man was Jewish (their enemies). When he saw the wounded man, he had compassion. The virtue started in his heart before he tended to the wounds. He would have had oil and wine with him for his journey in case he needed them, but he gave them up for the injured man. His eyes looked with compassion, his hands tended to the wounds, he used his body to lift the man on his animal, whilst he walked on foot in the rough route until they reached the inn, he stayed the night with the man and took care of him, he gave his money to the innkeeper (he also involved others in doing good work). Two dinariis were probably all that he had, he was not a rich man, he did not arrive in a horse carriage led by horsemen. Also, two dinariis would have been 2 days' salary (in Matthew 20, the landowner gave the labourers one denarius a day). The Samaritan man was a faithful steward over mammon and used it to do good.
- The parable is a reproach to the law expert for learning the law but not living by it or implementing it. Jesus Christ gave the lawyer and example of a stranger who puts the law into practice [Good Samaritan].
- The Good Samaritan is a symbol of Christ who came to save those who were dead in their sins "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." (Luke 5:31-32). He did not just give two dinariis, but gave His life, blood, and His Kingdom.

**Exercise**

Mercy for the poor and needy has to start with love and compassion. We do not serve others because it is a chore in the Christian community – it is a work of love and compassion. The heart feels compassion first, then the rest of the good deeds follow. Love is like light – light shines in every place and every direction, it does not distinguish between one person or another.

If you come across an appropriate opportunity to do good, do not over-think it and wait too long, because the devil is likely to make us hesitant and put us off taking action.



St Mary

Her Symbols and her Titles

Book References:

- HH Pope Shenouda III, "St Mary" - Arabic
<https://www.suscopts.org/pdf/StMarytitles.pdf>

Lesson Aim:

To understand St Mary's symbols and titles in the Bible, as well as her role as an intercessor.

Lesson Objectives:

- Know:** The titles and symbols of St Mary, and know which Bible verses point to these.
- Feel:** The motherhood, love, care and intercession that St Mary has for us.
- Practice:** Honouring St Mary in our prayers and asking her to intercede on our behalf to her beloved Son. Take part in some of St Mary's doxologies.

Memory Verse:

"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb."
(Luke 1:42)

"At Your right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir."
(Psalm 45:9)



Lesson Content

The Church believes that the Virgin has a special status. She is the Lord's mother and she is our mother, so she deserved to be the Faithful Mediator, as she knew our needs and His intentions. We have no excuse for our sins. Through you we ask Him who was born of you. O Mother of God, the Virgin as your intercession is powerful and acceptable (Refer to the third Hour prayer). That is why Christians put her picture in their houses, and pray for her intercession before her beloved Son. The Bible emphasises the fact that Jesus Christ is our only Mediator and Advocate "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." (Hebrews 7:25, 1 John 2:1) - but this is redemptive intercession for the forgiveness of sins, but the intercessions of the Virgin St Mary, St John the Baptist, and the angels are requests for God's mercies (Give examples from the Bible). One of the most prominent evidence of the intercessions of Mary the Virgin is the miracle of turning water into wine at the wedding of Cana in Galilee (John 2: 1-5). Her intercessions are mentioned in the daily melodies of the month of Kiahk and the prayers of the Divine Liturgies. There are many titles for St Mary, and symbols in the Old Testament.

Her Titles

1. The Queen who sits at the right hand of the King, "At Your right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir." (Psalm 45:9). This is why in her icons, she is painted on the right hand of Christ. During the Divine Liturgy we refer to her as 'our mother and queen'.
2. Our Mother the Virgin Saint Mary, " 'Behold your mother!' And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home." (John 19:27).
3. Jacob's Ladder – a link between heaven and earth (Genesis 28:12).
4. The 'Bride' She is the true Bride of our Lord. The prophecies about her have been fulfilled, Psalms 14, 20 and 22.
5. The Beautiful Dove – recalling the beautiful dove that brought Noah an olive leaf as a symbol of peace, showing that God has saved them from the flood (Genesis 8:11). Likewise, St Mary carried tidings of salvation through Christ.
6. The Cloud (light cloud)– this is how the prophecies saw her coming into the Land of Egypt.

Title relating to her motherhood to Christ:

7. The Theotokos – this title was added at the Ecumenical Council in Ephesus in 431 AD (See Nestor's heresy below). Also, this is what St Elizabeth called her "Mother of my Lord" (Luke 1:43).
8. The Golden Censor – "ti-shori 'nnoub" in Coptic, as well as Censor of Aaron, carrying the burning coal. The coal is a symbol of the humanity of Christ, and the fire is a symbol of His Divinity. The censor is a symbol of St Mary's that carried the divinity united with the humanity. The fact that the censor is gold point to her magnificence and purity.
9. The Second Heaven - just as the Heavens are God's dwelling, God the Son dwelt in St Mary's womb.
10. The City of God – "Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God!" (Psalms 87:3).
11. The Vine – that carried the fruit of life, Jesus Christ.

Similar title relating to her motherhood:

12. Mother of the True Light – since Jesus Christ has been called "The true Light which gives light to every man." (John 1:9).
13. The Golden Lampstand - because she carried the Light (Christ).
14. Mother of the Holy – when the angel proclaimed the birth of Christ to her, he said, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:35).

15. Mother of the Saviour – Jesus Christ is the Saviour of all mankind. He was called 'Jesus' because He saved His people from their sins, "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21).

Symbols of St Mary

16. The Burning Bush seen by Moses – (Exodus 3:2).
 The Burning Bush seen by Moses
 The prophet in the wilderness
 The fire inside it was a flame
 But never consumed or injured it
- The same with the Theotokos, Mary
 Carried the fire of Divinity
 Nine months in her holy body
 Without blemishing her virginity
17. Ark of the Covenant – the ark was made from Acacia wood that is slow to decay and overlaid with pure gold from the inside and outside (Exodus 25:10,22). This is symbolic of her purity and greatness.
18. The Golden Pot (of Mana) – Mana was a symbol of Jesus Christ, because He is the Living Bread coming down from heaven, whoever eats from It, lives by Him. He is also the Bread of Life (John 6:32,48,49).
19. Aaron's Rod that budded (Numbers 17:7-8) – she blossomed and yielded a Child miraculously. Although Aaron's rod did not have life, it still blossomed and yielded ripe almonds. This is also a symbol of St Mary's virginity, conceiving and giving birth miraculously without the seed of man.
20. The Tabernacle of Meeting; Tabernacle of Moses – the glory of God used to descend and fill the Tent of meeting, and God also filled St Mary's womb.
21. The Holy of Holies - this is the inner sanctuary within the Tabernacle. No one was allowed to enter except the High Priest once a year to offer the blood of sacrifice and incense. God descended on St Mary once for the redemption of all mankind.
22. The Ever Virgin – St Mary remained a Virgin even after giving birth to our Lord. She was regarded as a wife to Joseph according to the angel, and she remained engaged to him and remained a Virgin all her life. As for Jesus' brothers whom the Bible mentioned, they are his cousins, his mother's sister's Sons. In the east they call the relatives brothers (Refer to Matthew 27:55, Mark 15:40, John 19:25). They are the Sons of Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary's sister who was also called Mary.

There are many more descriptive names, titles and symbols of our beloved St Mary. You can find an extensive list here <https://www.suscpts.org/pdf/StMarytitles.pdf>

The Mother of God - The Heresy of Nestorius

- Nestor claimed that Christ has two separate and distinct natures that are **not united**, and therefore St Mary should not be called the Mother of God. He believed that each nature has a role and they alternate according to the act He did. When Jesus was doing miracles, He was the Son of God. When He suffered, hungered, thirsted and when He died, He was the human being, the son of Mary - **Nestorius rejected the union of the human and divine natures**. He called it a connection, and said that the Virgin cannot give birth to God, since the created cannot give birth to their Creator, and claimed that what was born of flesh is nothing but flesh. As a result of his claim to separate the divine and human nature of Christ, he denied St Mary's title of Theotokos, "The Mother of God" but claimed that she was just the "Mother of Jesus".
- An Ecumenical Council was held in Ephesus in the year 431 AD where Pope Cyril, the Pillar of Faith, rejected Nestor's ideas and answered him and said, that our Lord Jesus Christ is God the Word incarnate with complete humanity and complete divinity - **His humanity and His divinity are united without mingling, confusion or alteration**.
- St Cyril used the analogy of the union of iron and fire: In the case of ignited iron, we do not say that there are two natures: iron and fire, but we say iron united with fire. Similarly, we speak about the nature of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Incarnate God, and we do not say "God and man". In the union of iron with fire, the iron is not changed into fire or fire into iron. Both are united without mingling, confusion or alteration.
- The Holy Spirit sanctified St Mary's womb so the Son born from her would not inherit the original sin. She gave birth to God incarnate, both natures were united in her womb from the very beginning of this miraculous conception. That is why the church calls her "the Mother of God".
- Pope Cyril and fathers of the Coptic Church revealed the corruption of Nestor teachings about the nature of Christ, and fought hard to defend the faith it resulted in the excommunication of Nestor and his followers.
- The Introduction to the Creed was added **"We exalt you the Mother of the true light..."**



God's Covenant with Abraham I

Bible References: Genesis 12, 13 and 14

Lesson Aim:

This is part I in a series of two lessons about God's covenant with Abraham. From this lesson we learn that God wants to enter into a friendly relationship with us. He is not interested to give us orders.

Memory Verse:

"So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him."
(Genesis 12:4)



Activities to Introduce the Lesson

You can use one of the following ways to introduce the lesson:



Discussion

Opening Questions:

- What is a covenant? (A promise between two people/parties)
- Did you know that you and I have a covenant with God?

Today, we will learn about this covenant and the covenant that God had with Abraham.

Lesson Content

Abram is the number ten son of Shem the son of Noah. The word "Abram" means honoured father. God later on changed his name to Abraham which means father of many nations "No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations." (Genesis 17:5)

God called Abram:

Abram used to live with his family in Ur of the chaldeans (close to Iraq). God called him to leave his family and the house of his father to another land to be given by God. In this land God promised to bless him and make him a great nation.

God does not neglect even one person who is faithful in the whole city. In Ur of chaldeans the people were worshipping idols and the whole environment was ungodly. God found one heart which was anxious to meet Him, so God invited Abram to go out so that He can make from him a holy church.

This invitation is to every person to depart not from a specific place or specific house but to have his heart depart from the love of money and the world to be able to meet the heavenly Lord. It is an invitation to all generations.

Abram obeyed God:

Abram believed what God told him, although he did not know the new land and also he used to love his original land. Abram took with him his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot. He took with him also all that he owned. On his way to Canaan, God repeated his covenant with Abram to bless him and give him the land.

Abram in Egypt:

There was a famine in the land where Abram lived, so he went to Egypt. Abram had to deny that Sarai was his wife because he was afraid that they might kill him and take his wife for she was beautiful. Although Abram made a mistake in not saying the truth, God made a plan to save him. Pharaoh took Sarai intending to take her as his wife. God afflicted Pharaoh and his house. Pharaoh realised that Sarai is Abram's wife and gave her back to him. Abram took his wife and Lot and left Egypt.

Abram and Lot:

Abram went back to the original land where he built an altar, He and Lot his nephew became very rich, Lot's people and Abram's people started to argue about the cattle and the possessions. Abram wanted to keep peace with his nephew, "So Abram said to Lot, 'Please let there be no strife between you and me.' " (Genesis 13:8) Abram applied a very important principle which our Lord Jesus taught us "But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two." (Matthew 5:39-41) Lot selected the land beside the Jordan River and Abram lived in Canaan. The kings living around Lot wanted to take what Lot had. So, they fought Lot and defeated him. Abram knew about this and went to fight the 5 kings and defeated them and restored Lot's possessions. On his way back from the war, Melchizedek, King of Salem, brought out bread and wine (he was priest of God most high) and blessed him. Melchizedek was a symbol of Christ.

Abram refused to take a human reward:

Abram was entitled to take a reward for his efforts to restore the possessions of Sodom. But Abram said to the king of Sodom "I will take nothing" (Genesis 14:23). Abram was victorious in the war and he was entitled to take everything, but he did not. He refused any human reward and knew that he would receive a heavenly reward.

Application**Exercise**

What do we learn from this lesson?

- As God took care of Abraham, He takes care of us in every instant of our lives. We just have to obey Him similar to Abraham who left his land as God told him, not knowing where to go.
- Let us learn to seek rewards in heaven for the good deeds that we do. Can we practice to reject rewards here on earth, in return for heavenly rewards?
- We have to correct our feelings towards God. God is not interested in giving us orders or judging us. God wants to be our friend as He was a friend of Abraham.



God's Covenant with Abraham II

Bible References: Genesis Chapters 15,16,17,18,20, 21 and 22

Lesson Aim:

This is part II in a series of two lessons about God's covenant with Abraham. As we enter into a friendly relationship with God, nothing can be difficult for us. We only have to be patient.



Activities to Introduce the Lesson

You can use one of the following ways to introduce the lesson:



Discussion

Opening Questions:

- Can anyone here walk on water?
- How about healing the sick: Can anyone here do that?
- So, some things are just impossible for us to do, right?

Well, with God, nothing is impossible.

Last week, we learned that God will always take care of us, and that we just have to obey him; that is our covenant with God.

Today, we will learn more about Abraham and how God did things for him that were just impossible for anyone else to do.

Lesson Content

As Abraham entered into a covenant with God, he entered into a deep friendship that was so dear to God. As St James said "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness and he was called the friend of God." (James 2:23) This unique friendship shows the love of God to his Sons.

The promise of the birth of Isaac:

Abraham was impatient to see God's promise fulfilled. So Sarah told him to take their slave Hagar as his wife to give birth to a son for him. He had a son and named him Ishmael and blessed him. But the Lord told him "from Sarah I give you a son". One day, when he was sitting in front of his tent, the Lord and two angels visited him and the Lord promised to give him a son from Sarah. Read Genesis 18:1-15. He believed the promise of God and he got a son and called him Isaac.

But Sarah his wife laughed when she heard the promise of God to give them a son because she was too old. God said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh... Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Genesis 18:13-14)

The faith of Abraham:

After he got his son Isaac, the Lord wanted to test his faith. He asked him to take his beloved son and offer him to God. Abraham obeyed. He took his son and went to the place where God guided him, to offer his son. On the way, Isaac asked his father, "My father... Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" His father answered and said that God would send the lamb.

When he took the knife to kill his son, an angel from heaven came and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" Abraham answered, "Here I am" And the angel said "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." (Genesis 22:11-12). Abraham found a lamb tied in the woods and offered it to God.

Many characters of the Old Testament were a symbol of our Lord Jesus Christ. Among them was Isaac, Abraham's beloved son, who went with his father carrying the wood for the burnt offering on his shoulder and came back alive. He was a symbol of our Lord Jesus Christ who also obeyed His Father, carried His cross, was crucified and died, but rose from the dead.

Isaac was Abraham's only son from Sarah. God said to Abraham take your only son Isaac.	Our Lord Jesus is the only begotten Son (John 3:16).
Isaac did not do anything to deserve death.	Our Lord Jesus is without sin and does not deserve the punishment of death (1 John 3:5).
Isaac carried the wood of the burnt offering and walked to the land of Moriah	Our Lord Jesus carried the cross and walked to Golgotha.
Isaac was bound and laid on the altar.	Our Lord Jesus' hands and feet were nailed to the cross.
Isaac obeyed his father when he bound him and laid him on the altar.	Our Lord Jesus Christ obeyed to the point of death, even the death of the cross, with His own will on our behalf. His will was His Father's will.
Isaac returned to his house alive.	Our Lord Jesus Christ resurrected from the dead and ascended to heaven.

Applications from the life of Abraham:

- In his treatment with Lot he kept peace.
- He obeyed God in every command that God asked him to do.
- Jesus taught us saying, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." (Matthew 7:7). Sometimes we pray and God does not give us what we want immediately. But we have to be patient. God is going to give us all what we need as long as it is good for us, and lots more but in due time. This was what happened with Abraham. He prayed to God to give him a son. It took too long but God answered Abraham's prayers after teaching him a lesson in patience.
- In every place to which Abraham went, he built a **tent** and an **altar**. The tent is to live in and the altar is for prayer and presenting offerings.

Application



Exercise

What do we learn from this lesson?

- No matter how difficult the problems we face (for example school exams, or sickness of a member of the family ...etc.), "With God nothing will be impossible." (Luke 1:37)
- Let us pray to God and let all our needs be known to Him. Then we leave the time and the method of answering our prayers for Him. He knows what is best for us.
- The Lord is our best friend. His ultimate goal with us is to enter into a friendly relationship with Him. Thus we benefit.



The Commemoration of the Saints

Lesson Aim:

To learn about God's Saints and benefit from them.

Lesson Objectives:

Know: The saints intercede for us and they are our friends.

Feel: That we are one family with in the Body of Christ with all of the saints.

Practice: Having a saint who we are friends with, whom we have as a personal intercessor.

Memory Verse:

"Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her."

(Matthew 26:13)



Background Information for the Servant

Our Friends in Heaven

"Assuredly I say to you, wherever this Gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told for a memorial of her." (Matthew 26:13).

A long time ago, before Christ was crucified, a woman came to the house where Christ was staying. She brought along with her a bottle of very expensive perfume and poured the perfume on Christ's feet. Christ was so pleased with what the woman did, that He told His Disciples that whosoever they preached the Gospel, they must tell the story of this woman, so that people will always remember what she did. Although the woman is in Paradise now, we still remember her whenever we read the Bible.

In the same manner, we also remember all God's Saints that have pleased Him with their good deeds since the world began. We do this in our Liturgy when we mention the communion of the Saints. We remember the Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We remember the Prophets like Moses and Elijah. We also remember the Evangelists. How many Evangelists do you know? What are their names? We also remember the martyrs, and the Confessors, and all the spirits of the righteous that became perfect in their faith.

Of course, when we think of the Saints, first of all we think of the Queen of all Saints: the All-Holy, Ever-Virgin Theotokos (Mother of God) Saint Mary. Then we remember Saint John the Baptist, who baptised our Lord Jesus Christ and the greatest man ever born of a woman. Do you know who said that? We also remember Saint Stephen, the first Martyr. Then we remember Saint Mark; who preached Christianity in Egypt, and also became a Martyr. Then we remember all the other Saints listed in the Communion of Saints.

All those Saints we remember in our Liturgy are our friends in Heaven! They all love us, and always pray to God on our behalf. That is why in many of our Hymns we ask them to pray for us, or ask God to have mercy upon us through their prayers. After the Commemoration of the Saints, we pray for all the people who have fallen asleep. We pray that God may find them worthy to be with Him in Paradise. We pray for them because we love them and we care for them. They are also our friends.

Isn't this a wonderful kind of friendship? We on earth pray for our friends in Heaven, and at the same time, our friends in Heaven pray for us! After all, what are friends for?

Remember to take a The Holy Euchologion (Book of Divine Liturgies) with you to the lesson.

Lesson Content

In this lesson we learn about how our Church remembers and honours the saints, and also learn about the life of one of the saints, St Julius of Aqfahs.

To 'commemorate' the saints means to remember, honour and celebrate them.

We remember all the saints as the Lord Jesus commanded, for example, the woman who poured the perfume on His head, "Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her." (Matthew 26:13).

Our Church has strong roots, like the saints who preserved the faith for us. With God's help and protection, they were able to confess their faith even if it meant giving up their lives (martyrdom). Their great love for God was the reason many people believed and became Christian. We need to know their amazing stories and learn from them.

St Mary the holy ever-virgin Mother of God, who in truth, gave birth to God the Word, is above all the saints, angels and heavenly bodies, she is the Queen who sits at the right hand of the King. St John the Baptist is the Forerunner, the Friend of the Bridegroom (Christ), and is described by Christ as the greatest man ever born of a woman.

The saints and martyrs are our intercessors in heaven. We ask St Mary and St John the Baptist, to intercede on our behalf, for God's mercies. We ask the saints to pray for us before our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our Church honours the saints by:

- Naming churches after them.

- Celebrating their feasts.
- Painting their icons to remind us of their good works and their example.
- Lighting candles in front of their icons – they are the light to the world.
- Abouna offers incense in front of their icons.
- Singing praises about them.
- Remembering them during the Divine Liturgy.

During the Divine Liturgy, there is a section called 'Commemoration of the Saints' in which a list of saints are remembered. We remember St Mary the Mother of God; the first Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob); the Prophets (like Moses and Elijah); the apostles; the evangelists (the Gospel writers); martyrs; confessors; and all the spirits of the righteous that became perfect in their faith. A long list of saints are mentioned during the Divine Liturgy. This commemoration reflects the unity of the Church between those who are on earth and the departed.

After the Commemoration of the Saints, Abouna mentions the names of the departed persons, praying that God may repose their souls in the paradise of delight. This prayer reflects the feeling of love and gratitude towards our beloved who departed.

St Julius of Aqfahs

There is a great saint who collected the stories of many of the martyrs of our church. His name is St. Julius of Aqfahs, he is called the biographer of the martyrs.

St Julius was born to a rich Christian family in the town of Aqfahs. He moved to Alexandria around the time when Emperor Diocletian began persecuting Christians. St. Julius visited the Christians in prison to help and encourage them. He helped take care of them and bandaged their wounds.

St Julius made sure he was present when someone was martyred so he could take their bodies, honour them and return them to their hometowns. He had 300 young men that helped him, they travelled to many places to bury the martyrs and write their stories.

The Lord kept him for the purpose of writing the stories of martyrs as a remembrance for future generations. When it was time for him to get martyred, the Lord appeared to him and told him to go to the governor of Samanoud and confess his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The saint did as the Lord told him and accepted all the torture by the governor with joy because the Lord Jesus Christ was with him and strengthened him. Many people believed because of the miracles they saw and St Julius' strong faith, including the governor of Samanoud himself.

At the end, St Julius was martyred on the 22nd day of Coptic month of Thoout (October 2).

His story and all the stories of the saints can be found in the **Synaxarion**, a book that has all the feasts celebrated in the church according to the Coptic Calendar. New stories of the saints and martyrs continue to be added to it, so that we can learn from them.

Application



Exercise

The saints intercede on our behalf before the throne of God; their prayers and intercessions are well received and heard by Him. We must have a good relationship with the saints, and ask them to pray for us.

We remember the saints and we study their lives, in order to follow in their footsteps. St Paul said, "Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct." (Hebrews 13:7)



The Cross is a Symbol of Salvation

The Passover Lamb

Bible References: Exodus 12.

Lesson Aim:

To understand that the Passover Lamb as a Symbol of Christ's salvation.

Lesson Objectives:

Know: The story of the Passover Lamb as a symbol of Christ's Crucifixion.

Feel: God's love for His people in both the Old and the New Testament.

Practice: Thanking God for His love as part of their prayers.

Memory Verse:

"For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us."
(1 Corinthians 5:7)



Activities to Introduce the Lesson

You can use one of the following ways to introduce the lesson:



Group Workshop

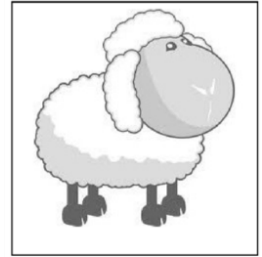
Let's Make a Lamb

Materials:

- Paper.
- Child-Friendly Scissors.
- Watercolours.
- Cotton.
- Small Ziploc Bags.

Method:

1. Print an image of a lamb onto pages of A4 paper. The image should take up one half of the page.
2. Distribute the materials (Child-Friendly Scissors, Watercolours, Cotton and a Small Ziploc Bag) to your students, and giving each student an A4 page with the image of the lamb.
3. Ask the children to fold their A4 page in half, then ask them to cut out the lamb while keeping the two halves of the paper connected. Ensure you supervise the children while they use the scissors.
4. Ask the children to stick cotton around the lamb (this will be useful as the cotton will absorb the red watercolours later on).
5. Ask them to mix red watercolour paint with water and put it in their small ziploc bag, then ask them to stick the bag at the lamb's neck.
6. Instruct your students to keep the lamb to use later in the lesson.



The Passing of the Angel of Death

Materials:

- Cardboard.
- Colouring Pencils.
- Red Watercolour Paint.
- Paintbrushes.

Method:

1. Instruct the students to draw a picture of houses next to each other on the cardboard using the colouring pencils.
2. The red watercolour paint symbolises the blood of the slain lamb. Show the students how the Israelites marked their doors with the blood of the slain lamb and ask them to use the red paint to mark the doors of the houses in their picture.

Lesson Content

In this lesson we will learn about the power of the Cross in salvation, and consider the symbolism of the Cross in the Old Testament.

The Cross on which our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ died for our sins, is a universally symbol for Christianity. It symbolises God's great sacrifice, an offer of salvation to all of humanity and the promise of the Resurrection.

There is a power in the signing of the Cross, which the devils dread. All the pains of the devil to ruin human beings, has been lost by means of the deliverance which was realised on the Cross. Therefore Satan dreads the sign of the Cross, on the condition that the signing of the Cross is done with faith and reverence. Saint Paul said: **"For the message of the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."** (1 Corinthians 1:18). That is why a Christian fortifies himself with the signing of the Cross.

Symbol of the Crucifixion in the Old Testament - The Passover Lamb (Exodus 12)

The people of Israel (God's people) were slaves to the Egyptians for 430 years. They cried to God who heard their prayers and sent Moses to set them free. He told Moses to go to Pharaoh and ask him to set the people of Israel free, but Pharaoh refused.

God sent plagues on the Egyptians and each time Pharaoh asked Moses to pray to God, to remove the plague. However each time Pharaoh would change his mind and refuse to set them free, until the tenth plague.

Because of Pharaoh's hardness of heart, God told Moses that every firstborn in the land of Egypt will die, from the house of Pharaoh to the servants, and even the animals. The people of Israel must offer a lamb, without blemish, male and of the first year. Every family should slay it at the same time and put its blood on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the house where they eat it, so that the people of God would not be affected by the plague.

"...when I see the blood, I will pass over you." (Exodus 12:13)

They should eat the meat that night roasted in fire, with bitter herbs with unleavened bread. They shouldn't break any of its bones or keep what remains of it until the morning, whatever remains should be burnt with fire. (Exodus 12:46-47)

God told Moses and Aaron that this day should be a memorial and they should keep it as a feast to remember what God did for them. This feast is called Passover because the children of Israel passed from slavery to freedom.

The Passover lamb is a symbol of the Crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ

The Passover Lamb	Our Lord Jesus Christ
A lamb is led to be slaughtered	Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who was crucified for us. "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter." (Isaiah 53:7)
Without blemish	Our Lord Jesus Christ is without blemish. "...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." (1 Peter 1:19)
Is killed instead of the people	Our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified for us. "Behold! The lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29)
Its blood is put on the two doorposts and on the lintel to save the firstborn of the house	The precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ cleanses us and saves us from eternal death. "Without shedding of blood there is no remission." (Hebrews 9:22)
Is roasted in fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs	Our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross. The bitter herbs are a symbol of the bitterness of sin.
None of its bones are broken	None of the bones of our Lord Jesus Christ were broken. The soldiers did not break the legs of the two thieves who were crucified with our Lord, but when they came to Jesus, He was already dead, so they didn't break His legs.
Should not keep what remains of it until the morning	The body of our Lord Jesus Christ was taken off the cross on the same day of His crucifixion.
Everyone in the house should eat from the lamb	We must eat the Holy Body of our Lord Jesus Christ and drink His Blood to be united with Him.
The feast was celebrated every year as a memorial of their salvation from Pharaoh's slavery and the new life	Our Lord Jesus Christ saves us from the slavery of the devil and gave us a new life. We abide in Christ by continuing to partake of the Holy Eucharist.

More symbols...

The lamb must be under the care of the Israelites from the 10th day until the 14th day of the month: our

Lord Jesus Christ entered Jerusalem on the 10th day of the month (Palm Sunday) and was arrested on the 14th day of the month (Covenant Thursday).

The lamb must be slain in the evening: It was in the evening that Jesus was arrested. It was also in the evening that the people cried out to Pilate saying "...crucify Him!" and "His blood be on us and on our children." (Matthew 27) Our Lord also gave up His spirit on the Cross on the ninth hour, and remained hanging on the Cross until the eleventh hour.

None of the lamb should be left until the morning: This was a sign that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was not going to be left on the Cross until the morning.

No foreigner shall eat of the lamb: Just as anyone who is not baptised in the Church cannot partake in the Holy Communion, of the Body and Blood of Christ.

For these reasons, the Cross represents the greatest love story of God to humanity, and that's why we find the Cross everywhere in the Church.

Application



Exercise

Regularly partake in the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ – our real Passover Lamb.

Cross ourselves with the sign of the Cross frequently and with faith, in the morning, in the evening, before meals, on the way to school, in the street, before going to bed, when we are afraid, and contemplate on the power of the Cross.

When we make the sign of the Cross, and concurrently say: "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit," we also declare our faith in the Holy Trinity, our belief in the incarnation and redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ.



Prayer

Meditate on the following prayer, live it, and pray it at the level of the children.

O Lord, You endured the injustice of the wicked, You gave Your back to be scourged, You gave Your cheeks to be slapped. For my sake, O my Master, You did not turn Your face from the shame of being spat upon. (Divine Liturgy of St Gregory).

Grant me, O my Saviour, to consider Your suffering my treasure, the crown of thorns my glory, Your sorrows my joy, Your bitterness my sweetness, Your blood my life, and Your love my pride and my thanksgiving. (Annual Fraction to the Son). Amen.

Evaluation

Did the children get the aim of the lesson?

Objective	Can the children...	Notes
Know	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remember the 10 plagues. Remember the terms of the Passover lamb and their symbolism. Remember the lesson's memory verse. 	
Feel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appreciate and thank the Lord in prayer for His sacrifice for us. Understand the sacrifice our Lord made for us on the cross. 	
Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participate in the lesson's activities. Consistently partake in Holy Communion. 	

Weeks 3-4 of September:

Two weeks kept free for
Coptic Festival revision and exam.



The New Year, How Do I Start?

Lesson Aim:

To understand how to make a good start to the new year.

Lesson Objectives:

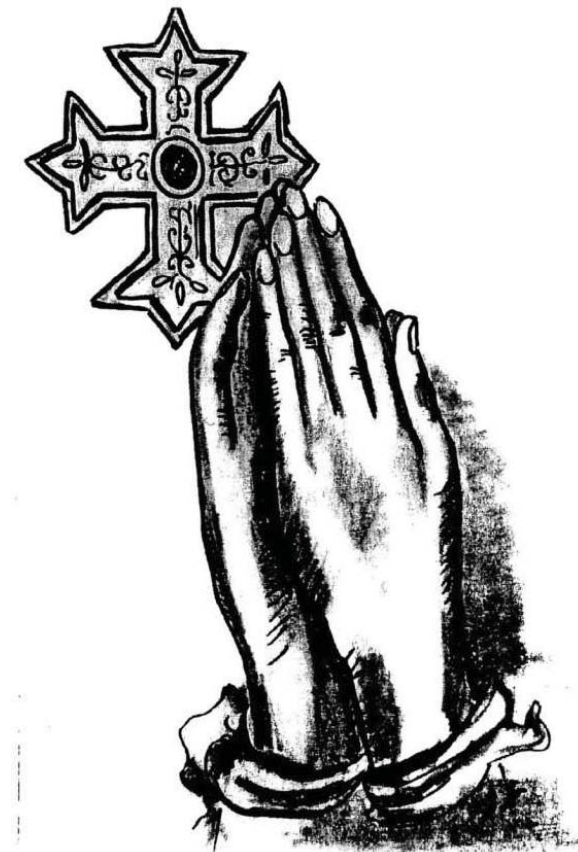
Know: Jesus has allowed us to have a fresh start at any time.

Feel: Eager to start the New Year and improve upon the previous years.

Practice: Being disciplined in your Spiritual Rule and your New Year's Resolutions.

Memory Verse:

"And the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out"
(John 6:37)



Background Information for the Servant

A Prayer for the New Year By H.H. Pope Shenouda III

Lord, make it a blessed year, a pure year to please You. A year in which Your Spirit prevails and joins in working with us. Hold our hands and guide our thoughts from the beginning of the year till its end. Let this year be Yours, to please You.

It is a New Year, spotless; let us not tarnish it with our sins or impurities. Lord, be with us in every work we intend to do this year. Silent we will be and you will do everything. Let us rejoice in all Your deeds, and say with John the Evangelist: "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." (John 1:3).

Let this year, O Lord, be a happy year. Put a smile on each face and gladden every heart. Let Your grace emerge in our trials and help those who are tempted. Grant us peace and quietness of mind. Give those who are in need, cure the sick and console the grieved.

We do not ask You, God, only for ourselves but we ask for the whole, because they are Yours. You created them to rejoice in You. Then make them happy with You. We ask You for the Church, for Your mission, that your word may reach every heart. We ask you for our Country, for the world's peace that Your Kingdom may come everywhere.

Let it be a fruitful year, full of goodness. Every day and every hour has its own work. Do not allow a futile moment. Fill our life with activity, work, and production. Grant us the blessing of a productive and holy toil. Let the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with us in all our deeds. We thank you, God, for you have kept us till this hour and granted us this year, that we may bless you.

Lesson Content

Have you ever done something wrong, and wished you could go back and erase it? Have you ever written a test and wished you had more time to study for it to do better than you did? Time is something that when it passes, you cannot ever get it back. But every new minute, hour, day, month or year you get is a chance to do better and be better than you were before. It is time God gives us to grow. Many people make New Year's resolution. What are some of your resolutions? Let us explore what resolutions we can make so that we grow spiritually this year.

How can I start on the spiritual road in the new year? Who takes the first step? My Lord Jesus or I? What are some good things I should do and what are some bad things I shouldn't do?

Who makes the start?

The start is made by God. Christ came for us and gave us new life when we were dead in our sins; Christ died for us. Therefore, Jesus made the start and He is still working. He said: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock, if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him and he with Me." (Revelations 3:20). When we were baptised we gained the new birth in the new life with the Lord Jesus. Hence, this gift was given to us. We only have to open the door now for our Lord Jesus to enter and stay in our life. We have to answer our Lord Jesus who is knocking at our door. We have to listen to His voice in the Bible and truly live out His commandments. We have to regularly attend the Divine Liturgy to be in communion with Him.

Let us rise and go back to Jesus

If we have left the Lord and His commandments, we should do as the Prodigal Son did. Let us rise and go back to the father. Let us be determined to leave our sins, repent and confess. When we walk towards Jesus, He will welcome us back and will take away the old clothes (the sin) and give us the clothes of righteousness. "Today, If you will hear His voice do not harden your hearts." (Hebrews 3:15). Let us pray and repent whole-heartedly, let us have a frank and merciless honesty with ourselves, let us admit all the wrong in ourselves, let us confess our sins in our private prayers to God and openly to the priest to receive the absolution and let us start a new chapter in our life with the start of the new year.

What might hinder us from starting now?

We are probably delaying our repentance because we do not want to give up a sin. Let us hold on to Jesus as our personal Savior and ask Him to help us. We may be afraid of what other people will say about us if we changed our ways and followed Christ. Moses preferred to even suffer affliction and follow the Lord rather than to enjoy himself in the palace of the king, as did many of the Saints we hear of in our Church.

A good way to start

Sit alone. Think of God's bountiful mercies and blessings to you. Meditate on Jesus' love to you personally, shown continuously in multiple ways. Then you will find yourself saying: I love Jesus and I whole-heartedly submit myself completely to Him and take Him as my Lord, my Savior and my king. I give Him my heart and my life. This is a good way to start the new year.

Application**Exercise**

- As we say good-bye to a year that is gone without return, let us consider the factors that made us stumble at times. Let us put these factors in the hands of God and pray to Him to help us overcome any deficiencies in our life.
- Let us commit ourselves to God. Let us pray a lot and ask God to work with us in everything.



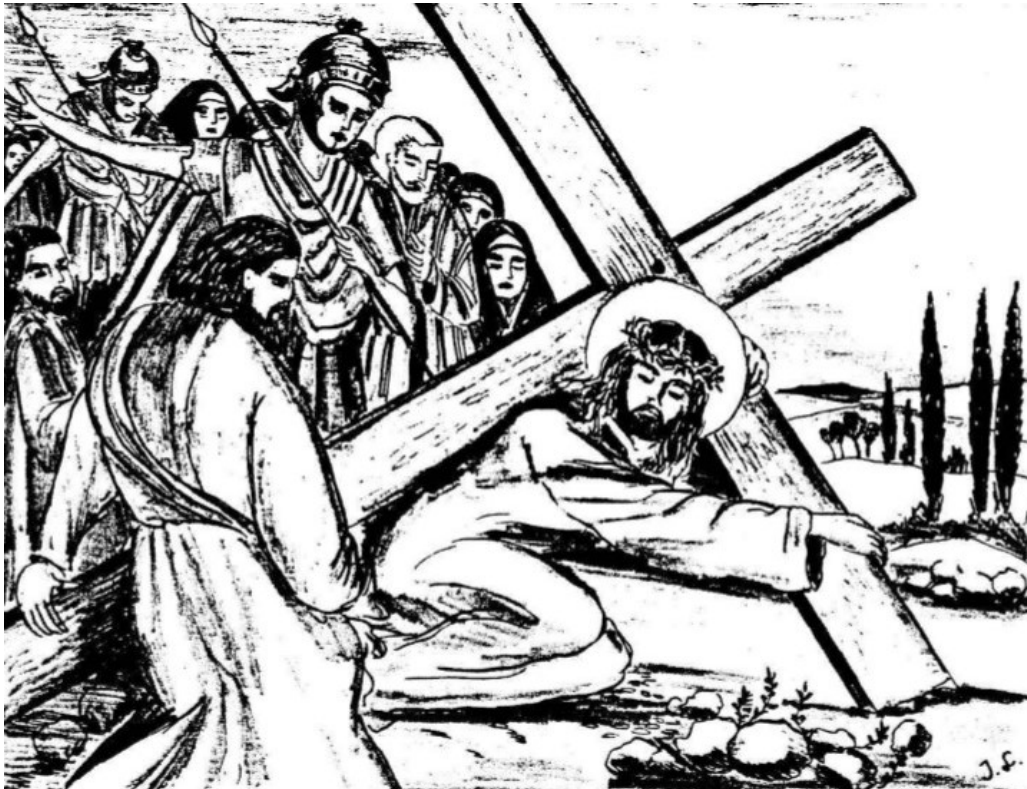
Good Friday

Lesson Aim:

To show a general description of the hourly events of Good Friday and what spiritual lessons do they teach us.

Memory Verse:

"They came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name, him they compelled to bear His Cross."
(Matthew 27:32)



Lesson Content

Every year, only once a year, there is a very long service we all come to attend at church. Does anyone know what that day is? (Good Friday).

The prayers on that day may seem very long, but once we understand the events of that day, they become very meaningful to us. So, today, we are going to learn about the four major events that led to Christ suffering to save us.

Why do we call it 'Good', when Jesus died on it? because of the atoning sacrifice of the Lord as Saviour of the world. the day on which we celebrate our salvation and freedom from the bondage of Satan and sin.

The trial from 6-9 a.m.

- The second trial of Jesus in front of the chief priests.
- The third trial in front of Pilate (Luke 23:1-7)
- The fourth trial in front of Herod (Luke 23:8-11)
- The fifth trial in front of Pilate for the second time (Luke 23:11-25)

On Friday, Jesus began to be judged in front of a series of councils. The chief priests convened together and condemned the Savior so that they might deliver Him to Pilate to kill him. False witnesses came forth to falsely accuse Him. The "fierce witnesses" mentioned in Psalm 35:11 specifically refers to these false witnesses at the trial of Christ.

It was an unfair trial. Pilate and Herod declared that they did not find anything worth crucifying Jesus for. Pilate's second trial, he declared to the Jews "...I have found no fault in this man concerning those things of which you accuse Him..." (Luke 23:14) However, Pilate gave Jesus to the Jews and did not pursue what he believed in.

To the Golgotha carrying the Cross: 9 a.m.-12 p.m.

- First words: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." (Luke 23:34)
- Second words: "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in the Paradise." (Luke 23:43)
- Third words: "Woman, behold your son!.. Behold, your mother." (John 19:26-27)
- Fourth words: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46)
- Fifth word: "I thirst." (John 19:28)
- Sixth word: "It is finished." (John 19:30)
- Seventh word: "Father into Your hands I commend my Spirit." (Luke 23:46)

Crucifixion was a practised method of death for slaves and murderers. When a person is crucified, he suffers a lot. Any move causes a lot of pain in the whole of the body because of the nails in the hands and the feet. Also, the blood which accumulates in the lungs presses on the heart and causes tremendous pain that is unbearable.

"And they put up over His head the accusation written against Him: THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS." (Matthew 27:37) They wrote this statement in the three languages that were popular at that time: Hebrew, Greek and Latin. Pilate intended by writing this to insult the Jews because they crucified their king. The heads of the Jews objected to this, but he did not care and said to them "Whatever I wrote, I wrote." It is interesting to note that the title which the Wise men gave Jesus 'king' at His birth, was the same given to Him by Pilate at His death.

The events from 3 to 6 p.m.

- A soldier plunged his spear into Jesus' side, water and blood came out.
- The tombs opened and the curtain hanging in the temple was torn into two from top to bottom.
- The rocks cracked and the land shook. The leader of one hundred soldiers gained faith.
- The burial of the Son of God.

When Christ breathed His last, darkness came over all the land from the sixth to the ninth hour.

Elaborate on the powers and miracles that happened during these hours: The earth shook and the rocks cracked, the tombs opened and from Jesus' side water and blood flowed out. (Matthew 27:51-53)

The Romans' conduct was to leave the crucified bodies on the crosses for the birds to prey. The Jewish people used to throw the bodies in a pit where garbage and sewerage were to be burnt. Joseph of Arimathea requested Pilate to let him take Jesus' holy body. Nicodemus, who disagreed with the Assembly on their condemnation of Jesus (John 7:50-52), helped Joseph for the burial with perfumes and pure linen, as predicted by Isaiah.

We pray Lord have mercy (*Kyrie Eleison*) 400 times: 100 times in each direction (East, West, North and South) then East again 10 times so that God may have mercy upon the whole world.

Application



Exercise

What do we Learn from this Lesson?

The sufferings of our Lord are the price of our salvation for which we are rejoicing. No words can be spoken! We contemplate Your sufferings and Your pierced side while we stand at the Cross, the source of our rejoicing.



Repentance is the Way to Heaven

Saint Moses the Strong

Book References:

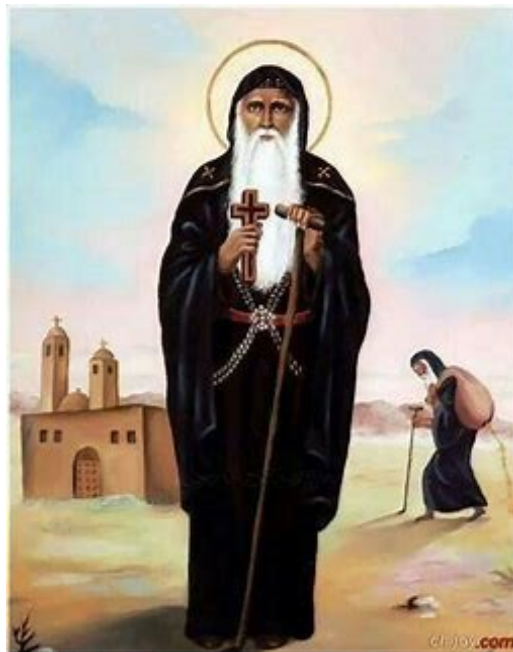
- Synaxarion of 24th Paoni

Lesson Aim:

To get to know the life of Saint Moses the Strong who inspires us to live a life of repentance and confession to lead us to heaven.

Memory Verse:

"Do not delay to turn back to the Lord, and do not postpone it from day to day."
(Sirach 5:7)



Lesson Content

St Moses the Strong (also called “the Black” or “the Ethiopian”) is one of the most beloved saints in our Coptic Church. This great saint offers us a strong example of true repentance and complete change from the depth of sin to a holy life.

In his early life, St Moses was a slave to people who worshipped the sun. He was a mighty man who loved to eat and drink excessively. Moses developed a horrible reputation and was suspected so often for committing local crimes that his master could no longer control him and eventually let him go. St Moses then joined a gang and became the leader of seventy bandits. He killed, robbed and committed all evil. No one could stand up before him, or challenge him. On many occasions, he lifted up his eyes to look to the sun and to talk to it saying, “O Sun!! If you are God, let me know it.” Then he said, “And you, O God, whom I do not know, let me know you.”

One day, he heard someone saying to him, “The monks of Wadi El-Natroun know the real God. Go to them and they will tell you.” Instantly, he rose up, girded his sword and went to the wilderness of Shiheet or *Scetis*. He met St Isidore (Isidoros) the priest, who was frightened when he saw him, because of his appearance.

St Moses comforted him by saying that he came to the monks so that they might let him know the real God. St Isidore took him to St Macarius the Great, who preached to him and gave him the basic Christian teachings. However, the Divine Light was too much for the newly converted St Moses, who was heavily burdened with sin. Frequently, he exploded in tears, and had to find relief in kneeling before his guide, St Isidore, and confessing his sins. When the time for his baptism came, St Moses confessed all his past evil deeds publicly in the church. During his confession, St Macarius saw a tablet that was all black representing the sins of St Moses. An angel was seen wiping off every sin as it was confessed by St Moses, until finally the tablet was completely white.

For St Moses, the white robe he received after baptism, and the monastic lifestyle did not mean that he entered into an easy monastic life. The devil fought him intensively with his old habits of excessive eating, drinking, and fornication. He informed St Isidore about everything which came upon him in his fight with the Enemy. He comforted him and taught him how to overcome the snares of the devil.

It was told about him, that when the elders of the Monastery slept, he used to go round to their cells and take their water pots and fill them with water which he brought from a well at a far distance from the monastery. After many years in spiritual struggle, the devil envied him, and struck him with a sore on his foot which made him sick and bed-ridden. When he knew that this was from the devil, he increased in his asceticism and worship, until his body became as a burnt wood. God looked to his patience, healed his illness, and removed all his pains.

The blessing of the Lord came upon him. After a while, he became the Father and the spiritual guide of 500 brothers, who elected him to be ordained a priest. When he came before the Patriarch to be ordained, the patriarch wanted to test him by asking the elders, “Who brought this person here? Cast him out!” He obeyed, and left saying to himself, “It is good what they have done to you, O black one.” The Patriarch, however, called him back and ordained him a priest.

Like the other Desert Fathers, St Moses based his spiritual life and teaching upon the Scriptures. One of his famous sayings was Four virtues aid the young monk: continuous meditation on the word of God, watchfulness, fervent prayer and considering himself as nothing. One of his other sayings may summarize his spirituality: Humility of heart precedes all virtues, and the desire of the belly is the source of all passions. Pride is the basis of all vices and love is the origin of all goodness.

Once the Fathers of Scetis were holding a council to reprimand a monk who had committed a fault. St Moses was invited, but he refused to attend. The priest went to him, and said, “Come, for the people are expecting you.” St Moses arose, took a basket filled with sand that had a hole in the bottom of it, carried it on his shoulder and started walking towards the council. When the monks saw him coming with the bag of sand, with sand pouring out of the hole, they asked him the reason of his behaviour. He said to them, “The sand you see running from the bag represents my sins which are always following me, and yet, today I am coming to judge the errors of my brother.” When they heard this, they left the council and every monk went to his own cell, as none could judge that monk.

Some time later, barbarians entered the monastery to kill St Moses with seven other brothers. However, St Moses refused to escape and said “The words of our Saviour must be fulfilled: ‘All who take by the sword will perish by the sword’” (Matthew 26:52). The seven disciples decided to stay with him. Meanwhile, a certain monk who was hiding saw an angel in the midst of his brethren, holding a crown and waiting. The monk went out and also gained

the Kingdom and the crown of martyrdom.

The monks of El-Baramous Monastery at Scetis have faithfully kept the body of St Moses, which remains to this day beside the body of his spiritual father, St Isidore inside the main church of the monastery.

May his blessings and prayers be with us all. Amen.

Some of St Moses's sayings on repentance:

"He who remembers his sins and confesses them does not sin often, but he who does not remember his sins and does not confess them will perish by them."

"Dear beloved, as long as you have a chance to repent, return and offer to Christ a sincere repentance. Hasten before the door is shut and you weep in bitter tears. Hasten and intend on repenting for Christ wants the salvation of all people and their coming to know the truth. He is waiting for you and will accept you, to Him is the glory forever, Amen."

"Four virtues that the mind needs at all times: to pray constantly with prostration of the heart, to fight thoughts, to consider oneself a sinner, not to condemn anyone."

Conclusion

We see how repentance has changed the life of a thief and murderer into a great saint and a father to many monks. We should therefore reflect on our own lives, offer repentance on all the sins we have committed, such as swearing and cursing, hurting or hitting others, cheating or lying. These acts prevent us from enjoying the kingdom of heaven. Let us repent to God and ask for His forgiveness, and confess our sins in front of a priest.



The Angels Save Lot from Sodom

Bible References: Genesis 18 and 19

Book References:

- HH Pope Shenouda III, Sermon on Lot - Arabic

Lesson Aim:

To understand how Lot's life change after he left his uncle Abraham, living in the midst of evil, Abraham's intercession on Lot's behalf, and getting saved by God.

Lesson Objectives:

Know: The Lord always tries to save his children from evil and danger.

Feel: Evil is all around us in today's society, from lying and stealing, drugs, violence and many other things. God calls us to be holy people set apart, not to be influenced by the wicked culture of the world.

Practice: Inviting God's will in our lives, and ask Him to choose for us as He sees fit.

Memory Verse:

"Escape for your life."
(Genesis 19:17)



Lesson Content

Abraham was Lot's Uncle. They went out together from their land to a land that the Lord promised to show them. They stayed together for sometime during their trip until they decided to separate. Abraham stayed in the land of Canaan.

Lot was attracted by the beautiful land of Sodom it was like a paradise in his sight, well-watered, fertile and green. He dwelt near Sodom until he started mixing with their people and living in the land. However, the people of Sodom were wicked and did evil things. We know that God hates sin.

In a visit to Abraham, the Lord told Abraham that He is going to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham asked the Lord will spare the city should fifty righteous people be found within it, to which the Lord agrees. Abraham then pleaded for mercy at successively lower numbers—first forty-five, then forty, then thirty, then twenty, and finally ten—with the Lord agreeing each time. However, not even ten righteous people were found over there. God sent two angels to destroy the city.

Lot was sitting by the gate of the city. When he saw two men approaching, he stood up and ran to meet them. He bowed to the ground before them and said to them, "Sirs I am here to serve you. Please come to my house. You can wash your feet and stay the night." He kept on urging them, and finally they went with him to his house. Lot ordered his servants to bake some bread and prepare a fine meal for the guests. Before the guests went to bed, the men of Sodom surrounded the house. They called out to Lot, "Bring your guests out to us." Lot refused to bring his guests out lest the people should do harm to them. Lot went outside, he tried to calm them but in vain. They said to him, "Out of our way, or we will treat you worse than them." They pushed Lot back and moved up to break down the door, but the two angels inside reached out, pulled Lot back into the house, and shut the door. Then they struck all the men outside with blindness, so that they could not find the door.

Who were Lot's guests?

Why did they come to Sodom?

Will the Lord save Lot?

The two angels said to Lot, "If you have anyone else here, sons, daughters, sons-in-law, or any other relatives living in the city get them out of here. You know that Sodom's evil is great and that wage of sin is death. God has sent us to destroy the city with fire. As for you [Lot], run for your life and get out of this city, you and all whom you have, your sons-in-law, your sons, your daughters go and warn them. Lot went out to tell his sons-in-law who were married to his daughters about God's plan to destroy the city", but they did not listen to him.

At dawn the angels tried to make Lot hurry. They said, "Take your wife and your two daughters and get out so that you may not lose your lives." When Lot hesitated and lingered, they took him, his wife and his two daughters by hand and led them out of the city saying, "Run for your life... Do not look back and do not stop in the valley. Run to the hills so that you won't be killed." Lot told the angels that he will go to a nearby city called Zoar to be safe. The angels waited till he had reached the safe place, then they destroyed the city with fire. The Lord ordered Lot and his household not to look back. Lot's wife looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt. Smoke arose from the city, like smoke from a huge furnace, the city was completely destroyed. Only Lot and his two daughters survived. Lot left Zoar and went to the mountains, he lived in a cave with his daughters.

Why did God deal with Sodom and Gomorrah this way?

In Genesis 18, the Bible says the following: "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave, I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me; and if not, I will know." This tells us the seriousness of their sins. Sodom and Gomorrah were so evil, their sins were at a despicable level that the remainder of the inhabitants of the earth had not experienced such wickedness.

In this case, it is God's responsibility, as a righteous and loving Judge, to put an end to evil when needed. Although He remains patient and compassionate for long times allowing humanity to return to Him, when sin attains a certain level, He rightly takes action to put an end to the evil. Failing to do this may cause greater harm to others.

Remember that the text states that the creation is the one that cried out to God. Other souls are also involved in

this story. Not only those in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Application



Exercise

- Sadly, the Bible tells us that “Lot chose for himself...” (Genesis 13:11) and went to Sodom, where as Abraham let God choose for him. Let us not fall into Lot’s mistake by choosing things for ourselves - always ask God to choose.
- When Lot was with Abraham he was near the altar, when he moved, he left the altar.
- Do not be deceived by outer appearance like Lot who looked for material goodness rather than spiritual goodness, he chose the land that looked like paradise but its inhabitants were evil. Always consider what the spiritual implications.
- Psalm 1 tells us “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly , nor stands in the path of sinners , nor sits in the seat of the scornful ; but his delight is in the law of the Lord...” Unfortunately Lot did not follow this, by being in Sodom, he put himself with the ungodly, in the path of sinner. He started mixing with the people, and married his daughters from their men.
- St Peter tells us about Lot, “for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds” (2 Peter 2:8), yet Lot did not leave he remained there, even when Abraham saved him the first time.
- “Escape for your life” - everyone know from where sin enters our doors, whether it’s by hearing or seeing bad things. We must be vigilant and guard our eyes, ears, tongue and mind.



Jesus Heals Blind Bartimaeus

Bible References: Mark 10:46-52.

Lesson Aim:

To understand the Lord Jesus' power to heal our spiritual blindness and to be able to see the heavenly kingdom which is prepared for us.

Lesson Objectives:

- Know:** How faithful Bartimaeus was even though he could not see.
- Feel:** Faith and trust in Our Lord Jesus Christ, as He is above all things.
- Practice:** Praying to God from the depths of our hearts with full faith that He will hear us.

Memory Verse:

"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"
(Mark 10:47)



Lesson Content

Can you see?

Can you see everything?

Can you see Heaven?

Can you see God?

Many of us are actually blind and cannot see at all. We cannot see the things that are really important in life: Christ. Read the Gospel according to St Mark Chapter 10:46-52, explain and discuss with the children its contents.

This miracle of healing blind Bartimaeus was the last declared miracle that our Lord Jesus did before His triumphant entry into Jerusalem (Mark 11:1-11) and all the events that led to His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension to heaven. Jesus performed this miracle of opening the eyes as His last one before crucifixion to emphasise the need for all human beings to have spiritual sight and the ability to see and appreciate the heavenly kingdom. There are so many people who have eyes but they cannot see and have ears but cannot hear. We mean by this that they are spiritually blind and spiritually deaf; thus, they cannot accept the word of God.

Bartimaeus was miserable because he was blind; he could not see the sun, the sky, the trees, his family, his friends... people had to lead him to walk, he was also poor and people had to give him money.

When Bartimaeus heard that the Lord Jesus was around, he thought that this was his chance of a life-time. He shouted "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Mark 10:47). This shows that Bartimaeus had faith that Jesus was the Messiah for whom the Jews were waiting, to come from the descendants of King David. This is the reason why he called Jesus "Son of David". It was also known that when the Messiah comes, He will open the eyes of the blind "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped" (Isaiah 35:5). There were so many people around Jesus, but one of them had faith in Jesus' power and presented his needs to Jesus asking for His mercy. Bartimaeus was shouting and the people around him could not stop him from calling Jesus.

Jesus is kind and powerful and we must learn to ask Him for our needs, as the Psalm says: "Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord" (Psalms 130:1). King Saul wanted to kill David (the author of this Psalm) by any means, but David cried from the depths and God protected him. Let us cry from the depth of our hearts as David did and Bartimaeus did.

When an individual is baptised he or she obtains spiritual understanding: "we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding" (1 John 5:20). We have to maintain this pure understanding that we get when we are baptised. If we lose it because of sins we gain it through repentance and confession. This is why repentance is considered a "second baptism" because through repentance Christ will open up our spiritual eyes (i.e. understanding) to know the truth just as He gave sight to Bartimaeus.

Application



Exercise

- Our Lord Jesus Christ, who opened the eyes of the blind man so that he could see Him and follow Him, is also able to heal our spiritual blindness in order to see Him in His loving kindness and follow Him. Let us cry from the depths of our heart to our Lord as Bartimaeus did.
- We have to ask our Lord Jesus in our prayers to give us depth and understanding of His Word when we read the Holy Bible so that we can get a clear message from Him. Then, we can truly live by His Word in our daily lives, love Him from the depth of our hearts and love all people as well.