



Entry into the Temple

Study Guide - Level 3 (Grades 6–8 / Ages 11–13)

November 21

Lesson Format

- Intro / Summary of the feast
- Review the epistle and gospel readings
- Review festal hymns of the day
- Read front page of handout together
- Use study guide content for discussion and Q&A on this week's topics
- Complete activities on inside pages of handout
- Recap / Review of the feast

Tips & Hints

- Use as few or as many of the questions and explanations found in the study guide based on ages of the youth, helping them discover how the Orthodox Faith can be a part of their daily life.
- Watch for the 🦋 in the handout for topics/questions which might spark conversations with participants.
- It's recommended to use open-ended questions, encouraging young people to think, share their experiences or ideas, and strengthen their relationship with Jesus Christ and His holy Orthodox Faith.
- Questions, ideas, feedback, and suggestions can be directed to the publisher at orthodoxjourneys@gmail.com

✦ Overview

Going to church is an important part of being an Orthodox Christian.

We may pray, fast, and celebrate the feasts and fasts at home, but it's when we come together in community, in God's house, that we experience the fullness of our Orthodox Faith.

Today's feast celebrates when the Virgin Mary was brought to the temple, where she lived until her betrothal to Joseph.

She holds an extra special place for us, because she is the Mother of the Son of God: Jesus Christ.

As members of Christ's Church, we can learn from the Theotokos by her example. Tradition tells us that when her parents brought her to the temple, she ran up the steps with joy, and lived in God's house with that same love and holiness.

When we come to church, it can be a joyous occasion every time, being surrounded by our family, friends, relatives, the saints, the Mother of God, and especially God Himself!

Our church is where we glorify and give thanks to God for the blessings received, most importantly, the Eucharist. The Body and Blood of Jesus Christ fills us with the spiritual nourishment to live godly lives when we are at home, school, at our jobs, with friends, or by ourselves.

Let us pray to the Most Holy Virgin Mary, that she will watch over us every day of our life!

☑ Goal

After completing this handout, youth should be able to articulate the following:

- What we celebrate/commemorate on the feast of the Entry of the Virgin in the Temple.
- Be familiar with the festal theme songs (apolytikion/troparion and kontakion).
- Understand what is featured in the festal icon.
- Why the feast is important, and celebrated annually in the church.
- Understand why the Virgin Mary is important in our lives.
- Know why this feast is relevant to us today.
- How the Church encourages us to live Godly lives regardless of age or situation.

✦ Apostolos / Epistle and Gospel Readings

Open the bible and have someone read the Apostolos/Epistle and another student read the Gospel lesson for the day.

Epistle/Apostol: Hebrews 9:1-7

Talk about the epistle reading:

Today's epistle was written by St. Paul. It is one of the books (or letters) found in the New Testament of our bible.

1) Ask: "What was the author of today's epistle talking about?"

Possible Answers

- The Old Testament scriptures details how the temple was established by God
- The temple was considered to be the dwelling place of God
- The temple symbolically foreshadows the Virgin Mary who becomes the Mother of God
- Mary remains ever-virgin, because she only gave birth to Jesus Christ

2) Ask: "How is the message of this epistle apply to our lives?"

Possible Answers

- The temple of God is found in each of us, as we are called to have God present in our daily lives and actions, especially with others
- The temple of God is also present as the physical church where we worship God
- We are encouraged to come to church for divine services whenever possible, giving thanks to God for what we received, and to give glory since we worship Him
- The temple - whether ourselves or the church building - is holy, meaning we show respect, compassion, and care for both the church and ourselves
- We can be like the Virgin Mary who dedicated her life to God

Gospel: Luke 10:38-42; 11:27-28

Talk about the Gospel reading:

Today's gospel was written by St. Luke.

It is one of the 4 written accounts of the life of Jesus Christ, found in the New Testament of our bible.

1) Ask: "What took place in today's Gospel reading?"

Possible Answers

- Jesus visits a house and one sister does all the work while the other sister just sits and listens to Him
- Martha is showing proper hospitality, while Mary is hanging on Jesus' every word
- A woman says that Jesus' mother is blessed because she bore Him; but Jesus tells us that true blessedness comes from hearing the Word of God and keeping it

2) Ask: "Why is this important for us living in the 21st century?"

Possible Answers

- Jesus teaches that, doing things like housework, homework, hospitality are important, honorable things, but hearing the word of God is more important
- We should follow Him, because Heaven/the New Jerusalem is our true home, anywhere we live here is simply temporary
- The woman in the crowd is saying that Jesus' mom is blessed
- Jesus says that any person – including His mother – is blessed because they listen, hearing God, choosing to live by those teachings

Hymnography

Have someone read the Troparion/Apolytikion and Kontakion on the handout.

Review: Troparion (tro - par - ee - ohn) or Apolytikion (ah - po - lee - tee - key - ee - ohn) and Kontakion (kon - tahk - ee - ohn) are theme songs for each feast, celebration, or saint.

Troparion and **Apolytikion** are names for the same hymn. **Kontakion** is a separate hymn expanding on the ideas proclaimed in the Troparion or Apolytikion, where the last line is used as a refrain during some services.

Both hymns describe what or who we're celebrating, and how this event or saint is important to our lives as Orthodox Christians.

These are celebratory hymns, rejoicing in God's mercy and wonders.

1) Ask: "What do the hymns teach us about the feast?"

Possible Answers

- The arrival of the Virgin Mary in the temple prepares her to become the Mother of God
- Angels glorify Mary for being holy and without sin
- The church has many names to honor Mary: Temple, Chamber, Virgin, Treasure of glory, Fulfillment, Abode of Heaven, Preview of the Good News
- Mary's entire life is preparation for giving birth to Jesus Christ, therefore all generations call her blessed
- Mary is presented to God by her parents, offering their daughter for service to Him

2) Ask: "How can the message of the hymns apply to our lives?"

Possible Answers

- We celebrate and honor the Theotokos by singing these festal hymns
- Mary chose to live without sin, and we can pray to her for help to live the same way
- Mary accepted God's plan (during the visit from the Archangel Gabriel at the Annunciation), therefore she is blessed with God's grace
- Mary's holiness makes it possible to receive God in her body

A Closer Look

After reading the front page of the handout, discuss and explore the themes below. Related questions can be found within the lesson.

Opening Review

Today we celebrate the feast of the entry of the Theotokos into the Temple. This took place when Mary was only 3 years old, and was brought by her parents, Ss. Joachim and Anna to the holy temple in Jerusalem.

As one of the twelve great feast days of the church year, it is an important day for all Orthodox Christians to celebrate and honor the Virgin Mary as our spiritual mother.

What is This Feast About?

Joachim and Anna were very old when Mary was born. Before Anna had become pregnant with Mary, she prayed to God, asking for the blessing of a child.

Did you know?

In Jewish society, to live without any children or descendants was a source of shame and ridicule, and understood to be a sign of punishment from God. So for Joachim and Anna to have a baby when they were nearly elderly, was a very special sign from God that He looked favorably upon them!

Anna promised that if God blessed them with a child, they would dedicate that child to God. Today's feast highlights their commitment and faithfulness to God. They fulfilled their promise in gratitude and we honor them for that faithfulness.

Ask: As a feast honoring the Holy Mother of God, how is this day a reminder that Mary is the perfect example for living a Christian life?

Possible answers:

- Mary kept God at the center of her life
- Mary attended divine services in the temple
- Mary devoted herself to God through prayer
- Mary humbly accepted God's will
- Mary used her talents to make liturgical cloths for the temple worship
- Mary was peaceful, loving, and gentle

Ask: When did we celebrate the birth (Nativity) of the Virgin Mary?

Possible answer:

- September 8

We know from the feast of her birth, that God had a special plan for Joachim and Anna, and that Mary was born according to His plan of salvation for humanity.

By bringing Mary to the temple, Joachim and Anna played another part in God's plan.

Ask: Did Joachim and Anna know that Mary would give birth to a Son, and that He would be Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

Possible answer:

- No

Even without knowing any of the things which would occur in Mary's life, Joachim and Anna were faithful to God. They lived in gratitude to God for the blessings they received.

They were also patient, trusting that God would provide for their needs. They were accepting of God's will, even if it was different from what they expected. And when God did provide, they were joyous and grateful to God, obediently bringing Mary to the temple.

God accepted Mary, loving and caring for her by sending angels to care for her in the temple. He cares for us in the same way in our lives!

What Does This Mean for Us?

We can trust God like the Virgin Mary: living according to His commandments and doing what is expected of us without needing to know the big picture.

It means we sometimes might feel inspired, and other times frustrated. There might be moments where God's hand is clearly in our life, and other times which don't make sense, possibly causing us to doubt God.

But that's ok!

Like the Virgin Mary, we can say "Be it done to me as you say," living in obedience to God. We can question God, asking for guidance and the strength to have faith in Him. That's how we learn to deepen our faith in God.

By making an effort to follow God, we become His followers by allowing God to act in our lives.

Ask: Does this mean we wait for God to give us a sign of what to do?

Possible answers:

- Sort of, but we can't do nothing, we also need to act, reflecting on what is right
- Maybe, if we are willing to listen for God's voice in our actions, even if it's not what we expect or want
- As long as we're not self-focused and think we're in charge
- If we take some initiative, praying and following the teachings God has already given us

Faith and Trust

Faith in God means we live according to His teachings while obeying our parents and teachers. As we grow older and take on more responsibility, it's still possible, we can rely on the basics of our Faith to do more, especially what is necessary for our salvation.

This feast commemorates when the young child Mary was received by Zachariah the High Priest, and blessed to live in the temple in Jerusalem.

The Virgin Mary would reside in the temple, cared for by angels who ministered to her needs, and helping other young maidens (unmarried virgins) who wove the special robes and draping used in the temple.

Ask: While we don't live at church, how can we we can make our home there?

Possible answers:

- Coming to the divine liturgy and other services
- Becoming familiar with the teachings of the Faith
- Singing and chanting
- Serving in the altar
- Praying at church and at home
- Receiving the Eucharist

It's valuable for us to remain connected to the life of the church through the feasts and fasts, keeping an active prayer life and living as Orthodox Christians wherever we are.

A New Kind of Temple

When Mary enters the Temple, she was cared for primarily by the prophet and high priest, Zachariah., later to become the father of St. John the Baptist. Some say that when the Theotokos entered the temple, things changed.

How is this Important for us?

Before, the focus was on the Temple as a holy place where God dwelled. But as we know, Mary was going to become the Mother of God, and God became man through Christ.

This means that we no longer needed a temple building, but the temple came to be found in each of us, as children of God.

It was expected that Mary would live in the temple until her betrothal.

Did you know?

This is a fascinating feast because, while there is no biblical record or mention of this feast, there are many passages predicting and prophesying the events of the Theotokos' entry into the temple.

In the Book of Psalms, we see the following verse:

"The princess is decked in her chamber with gold-woven robes, in many-colored robes she is led to her king, with her virgin companions, her escort, in her train. With joy and gladness they are led along, as they enter the palace of the king." (Ps 45)

Like the Theotokos, whose entry was part of a greater plan from God, our lives are also part of something bigger. It may have been very strange and different to go from living with your parents to suddenly living in a temple.

But the Theotokos was faithful and loved God, and she trusted His will. The things that take place in our lives, whether expected or unexpected, are part of a bigger plan for us.

If we embrace them, and give glory to God, we can live as the Theotokos did: with faith and love.

Wrap Up

Today's feast is a reminder that God is faithful to those who follow His commandments. He blesses those who have patience and trust Him. The entry of the Virgin Mary into the temple is not some random event or even something of minor significance.

Because the Theotokos is the mother of our God and Savior Jesus Christ, her entry reminds us that we too need to prepare ourselves every day, so we can receive Christ into our hearts and our daily lives.

Ultimately, if we do what God asks of us, we can bring glory to His Name, and by our choices, live in this world with mercy, compassion, and humility, striving to be peaceful, forgiving, and loving Christians making the world a better place by our involvement, prayers, and action.

Handout Activities

In the handout for the feast, there are a variety of activities which can be completed:

Front Page: Read the introductory text, sharing the message about the feast with the young people answering their questions about the Theotokos, what the feast celebrates, and how it relates to their lives.

Read the festal hymns and scripture readings, using the content on pages 1 and 2 of this study guide to understand their meanings.

Page 2: Read through the *Whos' Who in the Icon*, answering questions about the icon, who is portrayed, and what's taking place.

The Entry into the Temple icon has a lot of people and two main activities shown: Zachariah receiving the Virgin Mary, and when she is seated in the Holy of Holies, being ministered to by angels. By completing the blanks, students can choose from the word list, identifying what's shown in the icon, and why this feast is important to celebrate, and serves as an affirmation of the Incarnation of Christ.

Page 3: Answer the trivia questions about the feast, and read through the "Big Words" relating to the feast. Discuss with young people how often they hear these words during divine services or within our prayers.

The goal of this section is to help young people move beyond just repeating and saying the words of our prayers and services, helping them understand and internalize what we believe as Orthodox Christians.

Page 4: Understanding the Feast: explore the liturgical texts of the feast, having students articulate in their own words what the hymns teach us. The texts describe historical events as well as the theological teachings of the church. Their answers will be used on page 5 to visualize the texts - relating what we sing/read in church to our daily lives.

Review the liturgical texts selected from the divine services for the feast. These texts can be read in class, and also encouraged to be read on the eve and day of the feast.

As with other Great Feasts, the Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple is celebrated for more than one day. However, unlike other Great Feasts which have 8 day celebrations, the Entry's leavetaking or apodosis is celebrated on November 25, because we're in the preparatory season of advent, leading up to Christmas. See the link below for texts for the feast

It's worth noting, that beginning with today's feast, we begin to sing hymns from Christmas, during the canon of Matins. Unlike Pascha, where we wait in anticipation until midnight to say "Christ is risen!", we are already proclaiming "Christ is born!" in the liturgical services, anticipating the birth of our Lord and Savior in Bethlehem.

Page 5: Use *In Your Own Pictures* as a way to visualize the liturgical texts on page 4.

Page 6: This drawing of the Nativity icon can be used for coloring by young and old alike. By creating our own icons, we synthesize our thoughts and knowledge of the feast with our understanding of Jesus Christ and what He means to us as our God and Savior.

Icons, even those printed in black and white (and colored with crayons, markers, paints, etc.) are sacred images, and should be treated with respect. Even those colored by the youngest of children have a sacred use and should not be simply tossed in the garbage after the feast.

Icons help us make a connection with God, as they teach us about His incarnation, therefore, we honor them with prominent places in our homes, and gently save them for use on the feast in future years.

On The Web

Learn more about the feast on the internet:

Homily on the Feast:

By St. Gregory Palamas

<https://www.oca.org/fs/sermons/sermon-on-the-entry-of-the-theotokos>

About the Feast of the Entry:

<http://ww1.antiochian.org/feast-entrance-theotokos>

Liturgical Texts for the Entrance into the Temple:

<https://files.oca.org/service-texts/2020-1121-texts-yy.docx>

Liturgical Hymns for the Entry into the Temple:

Sung in a variety of languages and melodies

<https://youtu.be/lagV1w8ZyJ8>

In English:

<https://youtu.be/VlIsCA8Nu4I>

