




28th Sunday After Pentecost

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

Lesson Format

- Opening Prayer
- Intro / Recap of last week's lesson
- 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 pages of the handout
- Preview of next week's lesson
- Closing Prayer

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

Today is the Twenty-eighth Sunday after Pentecost.

Last Week

We heard about a man who invited people to a banquet and they made excuses to not attend.

God invites us to attend a foretaste of His heavenly banquet: the divine liturgy, being part of His Church. How do we respond to God's invitation?

This Week

We hear a list of many names, people who were the earthly ancestors of Jesus Christ. While He is the Son of God, having always existed, Christ's earthly life is woven into the history of humanity as recorded in the bible.

We are reminded in this reading that Christ is the descendent of Abraham, David, and many other people - good and bad, and at the fullness of time - born of the Virgin Mary, all of it, according to God's plan.

God's wisdom and love for us is not some random act, but is part of His plan, designed for us to participate in the glory and majesty of His Kingdom for all eternity.

When we have moments of doubt or confusion regarding of what to do in life, prayer is an ideal way to ask for the strength and faith to be like Saint Joseph the Betrothed.

He was obedient to God, caring for Mary's needs, showing her love and kindness in circumstances he didn't completely understand. His faith in God, like ours, leads back to God, knowing the Father will provide for our needs through His Son: Jesus Christ.

Next Week

The celebration of the Nativity continues by honoring St. Joseph the Betrothed, St. James, the Lord's brother, and St. David, the prophet and ancestor of Christ. Their lives can be examples for our place in God's plan of salvation in the 21st century.

✓ Goal

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

- What today's scripture lessons tell us about Jesus Christ as the Son of God.
- The message and application of today's hymns (the apolytikion/troparion and kontakion).
- Understanding what God is asking us to do as His followers.
- What we believe as Orthodox Christians and how God is present in our lives.
- Identify ways to live in the 21st century.
- How the Church gives us encouragement to live godly lives regardless of our circumstances or amount of faith.

📖 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: **Hebrews 11:9-10, 32-40**

Gospel: **Matthew 1:1-25**

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 is the author of today's epistle/apostol talking about?"

Possible Answers

- St. Paul reviews the lives of the saints and figures of the Old Testament
- He explains that their faith in God resulted in becoming part of the history leading to Christ's birth
- Abraham and his heirs endured tortures and being strangers in a foreign land through faith
- The Epistle says the faith of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Moses carried them through times of struggle
- God's promise of Salvation is fulfilled in the birth of Jesus Christ, which unites all of human history

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

Possible Answers

- We are recipients of God's blessings as members of the Church: Christ's Body
- Even though we are born centuries after Christ lived on earth, we are still recipients of God's plan
- Like many figures in the Old Testament, we need to remain faithful to God when faced with attacks and sufferings
- God provides for our needs and ensures we have whatever is necessary to be with Him in Paradise

Talk about the Gospel reading:

Today's gospel was written by St. Matthew.

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

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

Possible Answers

- The gospel tells of the genealogy or ancestry of Jesus Christ
- There were 42 generations from the first Patriarch, Abraham to Christ's birth of Mary
- The gospel explains what happened at the birth of Christ: Joseph, faced with the challenge of Mary's sudden pregnancy, was assured by an angel that the child would be called Jesus, and would save people from their sins
- Christ's birth fulfilled a prophecy spoken long before His birth
- Joseph did as the angel of the Lord commanded him in obedience to God

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

Possible Answers

- Obedience to God helps us live godly lives, potentially helping God bring the world to salvation
- As Orthodox Christians, we are united through the Church to the generations of people in the Old Testament
- Each of us plays an important role in God's plan, we can pray to God that He will guide us to our role
- Christ's birth is wonderful because it provides us with an opportunity to encounter God, knowing Him through His mercy and love

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 resurrection?"

Possible Answers

- The many figures of the Old Testament who are Jesus Christ's earthly ancestors were faithful to God's promise
- With God's mercy, they were able to withstand horrible circumstances, even unto death
- These saints and holy people pray to God for us
- The three holy youths (Ananias, Azariah, and Mishael) were obedient to God, rejecting the worship of earthly idols
- The Theotokos fulfills the prophecies of the Old Testament relating to the ancient cities of Bethlehem and Ephratha

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

Possible Answers

- Whatever our role in life, we can play a valuable role in the Church
- We don't need to be famous or well known to be Orthodox Christians
- The struggles and trials faced by Christ's earthly ancestors can be examples for us of obedience and faithfulness to God
- We glorify God in our hymns and prayers for being born of Mary

A Closer Look

After reading the front page of the handout, discuss and explore the themes below based on today's gospel lesson. Questions are interspersed with the text.

Opening Review

The gospel reading we heard in church today is always read on the Sunday before Christmas.

It provides us with the genealogy of Jesus Christ, his earthly ancestors. While it sounds like a list of weird and hard to pronounce names of people who lived a long time ago, there is a reason we hear this reading.

The gospel of St. Matthew begins with these very important words about our Lord, calling Him: "the Son of David, the Son of Abraham." (Matt. 1:1)

Ask: Why is it important to know Christ is the decendent of all of these people?

Possible Answers:

- The reading connects the Old Testament with Jesus Christ
- It shows Christ isn't some random guy claiming to be the Son of God
- Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise God made concerning a Messiah

Setting the Stage

Matthew, as an Evangelist and Apostle is writing for a predominantly Jewish audience in the early years of the Church, after Christ's Ascension. His gospel intends to inform the nation of Israel, that the Messiah has come, and the Messiah is Christ!

Even though we're not Jewish, the message is still for us, because we need to know and understand that Jesus becoming human is part of God's plan for us.

Matthew begins his gospel by presenting Jesus' earthly ancestry showing that his lineage leads back to the Patriarch Abraham. And his gospel will eventually describe the events of Christ's life, betrayal, crucifixion, death, and resurrection. The audience he's writing to had either seen or heard many of these events. So the genealogy provides the context to understand Who Jesus Christ is.

Ask: Who are the important names in today's scripture reading?

Possible answers:

- Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Patriarchs)
- Judah (of the Twelve Tribes)
- Jesse (Father of King David)
- David, Solomon (Kings of Israel)
- Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the deportation to Babylon (587-539 BC)
- Joseph (the betrothed of the Virgin Mary)
- All of the names listed

In this reading, we hear not only the major figures of the Old Testament, but even those who were murderers (David), a prostitute (Rahab), and non-Jews (Ruth). Christ's earthly ancestors aren't all wonderful - but they represent all of humanity, and God's love for humanity is generous towards everyone, not just a few people.

It is no accident all of these figures were related, as it was said in the Old Testament that Judah, the son of Jacob, would be the one of the Prophet Joseph's brothers to carry on the lineage of kings.

The genealogy of Christ reminds us that *each of us* plays an important part in the life of the church today. In the same way, the **Great Commission** given by Christ to His disciples at the end of Matthew's gospel (28:18-20), is given to each of us as part of our responsibility as Orthodox Christians:

"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"

Matthew's entire gospel is for our understanding and benefit. We might someday be a missionary working with the Orthodox Christian Mission Center, or we might live an ordinary life, either way, we can still take Christ's words and remember how each of Jesus' earthly ancestors were faithful to God in their lives and contributed to His plan of Salvation.

Their lives and experiences made it possible for Christ to be born in the world. What can we do to fulfill the Great Commission?

A Prophecy for the Future

After the gospel reading lists all of the ancestors, it shifts to tell us Christ isn't just the Messiah because He has the right lineage or ancestry.

The prophets spoke of Christ across many generations. One in particular, Isaiah, proclaims a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, "and they shall call his name Immanuel" and Matthew (1:23) quotes directing from Isaiah (7:14).

Ask: What would it be like to hear of something great happening some day in the future, yet never being able to see it take place in your own life? What do you think that would be like?

Possible Answers:

- It might be really hard to accept or believe
- Might be disappointed to never see that great thing
- Sad to never witness it
- Create a reason to help prepare for that future event
- Might create some excitement for what is to come

We can tell from today's reading that Christ's birth was not ordinary. God's plan took not one, two, or five generations, but forty-two generations!

This means many generations lived, knowing of the promise, but never able to witness the prophecy being fulfilled. There were probably some who were unaware of their role in it!

Ask: Knowing that the birth of Christ was the result of God's plan over forty-two generations, how should we react when something doesn't happen for us in the amount of time we expect?

Possible Answers:

- We're not God, and don't have the perspective He does
- Our frame of reference is pretty small compared to God
- We might have to make some effort and have faith in God
- God will provide for our needs when He knows it's right for us and our salvation
- We have to be patient and focused on God, trusting that He will provide for our needs

What Does This Mean For Us?

In our own lives, God is working wonders. We might not always see them, but God is present and with us.

Ask: How can we respond when we do experience God's grace in our daily life?

Possible Answers:

- Pray for ourselves and others
- Give thanks
- Keep doing the things commanded by God

- See the joy in life
- Love others in a godly way
- Repent before God, forgive others
- Go to church, offer a candle in thanks, receive the Eucharist

Each of us has a responsibility to be faithful to God, learning all we can through the Church to be the best possible Orthodox Christian we can be in our daily life.

God's Plan for Salvation

From the start of the book of Genesis and the founding of the world, God's relationship with His creation is an expression of His love.

We were created in God's image: to love, think, be creative, express compassion for others, and ultimately, be in communion with God.

While the human image was distorted through the sin of Adam and Eve, God's plan of Salvation was set in motion immediately, to restore that image.

History recounts the path winding its way to that very special moment when the Archangel Gabriel came to Mary, announcing she would be overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, and give birth to a Son: Jesus Christ.

The historical record found in the Old Testament is more than an account of the story of the Hebrew people. It's paving the way for Christ's earthly ministry, preparing the people of God to know and receive the Son of God.

Ask: What's at the center of the timeline of human history?

Possible Answers:

- The crucifixion
- The death and resurrection of Christ
- The life of Jesus Christ

The crucifixion of Christ redeems humanity from the curse of Satan. While the earthly ancestors of Christ lived before the crucifixion, we exist on the other side of the crucifixion and resurrection.

God's Relationship With Us

Through Christ, we are united to each of those people who lived before His Incarnation, and also to the countless saints who have lived since then, and to all of the people who will come after us.

In our own lives, God is present, whether we feel it or not.

Ask: How is God present in our lives?

Possible Answers:

- Moments of love
- A feeling of peace
- Calm acceptance without anxiety
- Grace-filled moments of compassion
- A kind word, a hug, a smile
- A feeling of solitude

God acts in His way, at His time, to provide what we need. When we get distracted or lose focus on God, we become anxious, worried, scared, trying to control or manipulate situations through force or manipulation.

These are deceptions from the devil, doing his best to separate us from God. We need to redirect our life through patience and prayer to nurture that relationship with God, being faithful, and ready to respond to His presence in our lives.

Our faithfulness to God begins with ongoing learning through the Church. For our own growth, and to someday pass on to future generations.

Wrap Up

As we draw closer to the Nativity of Our Lord this week, let us remember that Christ's birth was a miraculous event in our world, and it should also be the same in our own lives.

Christ's birth can only be explained through the love and grace of God.

Nearly nine months ago, we celebrated the Annunciation by the Archangel Gabriel to Mary.

Now, Mary and Joseph are drawing closer to Bethlehem to abide by an earthly census, but also to usher in God's plan of Salvation.

While we cannot explain why and how God works wonders in our lives, we can remember the faithfulness of the earthly ancestors of Christ, especially the Virgin Mary.

Ask: How can you think of ways to better trust God in times where things do not make sense?

Possible Answers:

- We might experience things which are confusing, yet seem to have a deeper meaning - pray to God for discernment
- Talk with our parents for guidance when things are confusing
- Talk with our priest when facing spiritual struggles
- They may talk about trusting in something bigger than themselves.

Being faithful to God's commandments and teachings doesn't mean everything will make sense or give us a sense of calm. That's ok.

Ask: Now that we've talked about today's reading, are you thinking about the genealogy in a different way? Isn't it amazing how all of these major Old Testament figures are connected to one another and to us?

Possible Answers:

- Might have known about some of them, but never really made the connection
- Didn't make the connection to the Christian Church or to us

- There must be some interesting or fascinating stories to explore
- I've heard the reading, but didn't know why they're important

These individuals are important, because we're seeing them as part of a bigger picture. Just like us and our role in the Church!

Our struggles to understand and accept God's plan for us is healthy and can ultimately lead us to a deeper relationship with God that will transform who we are, and how we live.

God's plan will take time to understand and accept, as long as we realize as humans, it's impossible for us to fully comprehend God's plan, especially if we're not listening to Him. That's where faith is so important.

What is possible for us, however, is to trust God, and to put our faith in His plan for our lives like Mary: through faith and obedience.

Ask: How can the Nativity of Christ remind us of the power of inexplicable wonder?

Possible Answers:

- If we get focused on our lives without "looking up," we forget there's a lot going on around us
- Our participation in the life of the Church is vital for us to be part of something bigger - God's plan
- It's more than a coincidence that 42 generations, wise men from Persia, shepherds, and a Roman census all took place in exactly the right way for Christ to be born in Bethlehem

The Nativity of Christ shows us that even if 42 generations go by, trusting in God's plan is worth the time and effort.

This is why we come to church on Christmas to participate in the divine liturgy and receive the Eucharist.

Sure the presents, gifts, and time with family and friends are enjoyable - but if they become the focus of our Christmas, at the expense of coming to liturgy, then what does that say about our relationship with God?

Thankfully, we don't have to wait that many generations to experience the joy and blessings of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the big picture, that something incredible has already happened.

It's our opportunity to approach and kneel before the icon of the Nativity, glorifying God for His great mercy and love.

It's time for us to add our voice and lives to those who have come before us, praising God and giving thanks to Him.

Handout Activities

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

Front Page: Read the introductory text, ensuring the young people understand the message and theme for this Sunday. Read the gospel and epistle/apostolos, and hymns of the day, using the notes on pages 1-3 of this study guide as reference.

Page 2: My Advent Planner: The full Advent Planner is available in the lesson for the 23rd Sunday after Pentecost. This is the last week before the feast of our Lord's Nativity. The goal is to have students make an active effort to do spiritual activities during the 40 days leading up to Christmas.

Pages 2-3: My Family Tree: This activity can be introduced and started during class, and completed at home or during the Christmas school break with family members. Help the students fill the boxes with information about each member of their family. Students can use blank space on the page to include siblings, step-parents, or other relatives.

Pages 4-5: My Family Album: Students can place photos of their family into the frames, or draw pictures in each space.

Be sure to send us a link as well, so we can showcase your creativity and celebrate the talents of your young people. Email the link to us at: orthodoxjourneys@gmail.com

Be sure to include students' first name, ages, parish, city, and state/province.

Saints of the Week

Let's explore the feasts and saints commemorated during the coming week.

December 20 – St. Ignatius the God-bearer lived in the earliest days of the Christian Church, being a disciple of St. John the Theologian and the second bishop of the city of Antioch.

He refused the commands of the Emperor Trajan to sacrifice before idols, and was sent to Rome to be fed to wild animals.

En route, he wrote letters which have been preserved to this day, encouraging Christian behavior. He was devoured by lions, as a martyr for our Lord.

December 20 - St. John of Kronstadt was a parish priest who actively engaged the faithful in northern Russia during the 19th century.

Caring for the needy, poor, and criminals, St. John saw Christ in everyone he encountered. He often came home without shoes or much clothing, having giving it to the poor.

His entire priesthood and life was spent encouraging the faithful to be active in the Church, receiving the Eucharist and being an image of Christ to the world.

December 20 - 23: The four days before Christmas Eve are called the Forefeast of the Nativity, during which we are called to fast more intensely, preparing ourselves to receive the new-born Christ child.

December 22 - St. Anastasia lived in the era of Christian persecutions, caring for those persecuted for their Faith.

Her knowledge of medicine made it possible to provide care and healing for the wounds of the persecuted Christians.

St. Anastasia was arrested yet unwilling to bow down before idols, was martyred for her faith in God.

December 24 - The nun-martyr Eugenia lived in Alexandria, Egypt in the 2nd century, as a secret Christian.

Through her pious life, she was blessed with the ability to heal. St. Eugenia lived a simple life, helping young women and those persecuted for the Faith.

When she was arrested and brought to the temple of Diana to worship the idol, the statues collapsed. The Roman soldiers tried many ways to kill her, but each attempt failed.

Our Savior appeared to St. Eugenia one day, telling her to have courage, because she would enter the Kingdom of God on the day of His birth. She was martyred on December 25.

On The Web

Learn more about topics from this week's lesson on the internet:

Homily on the 28th Sunday after Pentecost (9:23 min)

<https://youtu.be/HpuHotcl1hc>

About the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers

<http://ww1.antiochian.org/node/18658>

What Does the Name Jesus Mean?

<https://antiochpatriarchate.org/en/page/jesus-what-does-this-name-mean/2326/>

Christ's Family - Our Family

<https://www.goarch.org/-/christ-s-family-our-family>

