Session Seven

Sessions 7 - Acceptance of Faith

Objective

Children will learn about the acceptance of faith that young Mary, the Theotokos, showed when she agreed to God's plan for her life, and understand how Orthodox Christians relate to her.

Preparation

Leaders of this session can quickly read an article on the overview of the Theotokos in the Orthodox Study Bible (p. 135 New Testament only or p. 1361 in the 2008 addition with Old Testament) and an article on the Types of Mary in the Old Testament (p. 1228), to become more familiar with the Church's understanding of her role in our lives. Important themes of the reading are: Mary's purity and her unconditional obedience to God, her physical bearing of Christ our Savior gave us the privilege of bearing God spiritually within ourselves, and our veneration of her as the first among the Saints while worship is due to God alone.

It is also necessary to be familiar with and use terms which children can understand since the information that we have about the Theotokos is so vast. Please attain and read Mary the Mother of God by Dorrie Papadimitriou. This book will also be read to the children during the session.

Also, you will be able to familiarize yourself with the meaning of Acceptance of Faith by reading the following verse:

Luke 1:24-38 "Let it be to me according to your word"

Materials Needed

An Orthodox Study Bible for the leader
Wrapped drug store or dollar store gifts (gum, candy, pencils etc.) 1 per person One gift will be a card that has the word faith on it. It should also be wrapped.
Various paper icons of the Theotokos (with Christ, at the Cross of Christ, Her domition, The Annunciation, The Presentation, the Birth of Christ, Platitera, etc.)which can be found at :http://www.goarch.org/en/resources/clipart/icondetail.asp?i=125&c=Theotokos&r=panagia3
Enough paper color icons of the Mother of God with Jesus. One per child.
Whiteboard and dry erase markers or easel and markers
Mary the Mother of God by Dorrie Papadimitriou
Felt pieces that are at least 9 x 12 per person (Black or red/burgundy)
Icon of the Theotokos and another female saints that are the same size and no more that 3 x 5 inches, but may be smaller (1 set per person)
Scissors
Stick pins

Skewers (1 per person)
Pony beads (2 per person)
Fringe on long enough to surround 3 sides of the icon or thread that does not fray that can be cut into fringe (gold or red)
Tacky glue
Gold elastic cord

Opening Prayer *Trisagion (Thrice Holy)*
In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory to You our God, glory to You!

Heavenly King, Comforter, the Spirit of truth, everywhere present and filling all things, Treasury of blessings and Giver of life, come and abide in us and purify us from every stain and of Your goodness, save our souls O gracious Lord.

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us. (3x)

Glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forever to the ages of ages. Amen.

All Holy Trinity have mercy on us. Lord, forgive our sins. Master, pardon our transgressions. Holy One, visit and heal our infirmities for the glory of your name.

Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy.

Glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forever, to the ages of ages. Amen.

Our Father, Who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, On Earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Ice Breaker – Keeping the faith
This is a white elephant gift exchange with a twist. You will need drug store or dollar store gifts for each person such as gum, candy, pencils, etc. You will also need to wrap them or put them in opaque bags. The twist is that one gift will be a card that has the word faith on it. It should also be wrapped. Have everyone sit in a circle and put the gifts in the center of the circle. Have the first person pick a gift and open it. Each participant following will either pick a gift from the pile or trade for an already opened gift. The person who had their gift traded can then get one from

the pile or trade. A gift can only be traded twice. Make sure that no one eats any items until the game has ended. You may know your own rules to this game.

Discuss

How did you feel when you got a gift that you liked? Didn't like?
What did you think about getting the gift of faith?
(If someone traded it) Why did you trade your faith?
Was it what you expected when you were told you would be getting gifts?

State

Sometimes we get gifts that we were not expecting. We are faced with the choice to keep the gift, hide it in a closet, or keep it to enjoy it. Each of us is given many gifts from God. One of the most important gifts is our ability to believe in and trust in God and His will for us, this is the gift of faith. We are all given this gift, but it is up to us to accept it. We are going to read a story of Acceptance of Faith by a young girl. Now, please listen while I read aloud The Story of Mary the Mother of God.

Discuss

What did we learn about the Theotokos? *(Write on a white board)*
Give an example of her Acceptance of the Faith.
How did she learn about her faith? *(Through her parents and the temple elders)*
What can we learn from her example? *(Our faith is a gift that we should accept and hold onto, for God will prepare us for blessings and sacrifice that comes with it)*

As you may know, icons are windows to heaven. Icons tell a story of the person that they depict. We **venerate** icons as to ask for the **intercession** of the saint on our behalf. The use of color, size, people and background tell us about the life of the saint just as the book tells us with words. Mary the Mother of God has been called many names over the years and has had many icons that depict her. Let's take a look at some of the icons and talk about the different names that she has been given.

Discuss

Does anyone recognize this icon in our Study Bible on page 131?
Can you name some of the other names that she is called in our church? (*Mary, Virgin Mary, Mother of God, Theotokos, All Holy or Panagia, Life Giving Spring, etc.)*
Do you know what those names mean?
Let's look at the story of the Virgin Mary through other icons. Lets put them in order. What facts can we gather from her images to understand her life better? (ex: gold halo=holiness, tenderness in the way she holds Christ, her red clothing, her sacrifice, how she is holding Christ, who else is in the icon)

What is so special about the bond between a mother and her child? (*A child lives inside the mother and receives protection and nourishment from her; a mother teaches the child; a mother loves the child; the child needs the mother to survive; the child listens to the mother's advice and requests; the child inherits the parent's behaviors etc…)*
Why is her relationship with us so special? *(She is the Mother of God and therefore the mother of us all, we can ask her to intercede on our behalf through our prayers, etc)*

Arts amd Crafts – Theotokos Icon Banner

In keeping with the theme of the importance of mothers in our lives, especially the Theotokos, create a dual picture frame that will hold an icon of the Theotokos on one side and a photo of the child and his/her maternal figure on the other side. A variation of this project is to create an ornament-like frame of the same sort. To assemble, glue the icon and photograph back to back. Use the hole puncher to make a hole at the top of the icon/picture; then lace a ribbon through it and tie it into a bow. Hanging this from the rearview mirror in the car will remind mother and child that the love that they for each other is like that of the Virgin Mother and her Son and God. Either way, a real photograph of the children and their mothers/maternal figures would be best to use, so construct a creative way to get the picture taken or brought in from home.

It would be wonderful to offer these gifts for added blessings in a basket, before the icon of the Theotokos on the Iconostasis. Then they would be distributed after the Liturgy on the Feast of the Annunciation, March 25, for further meaning.

State

Today we each received a gift. Though it may not have been what we were expecting, we learn from the example of the Theotokos that the Acceptance of Faith is one of the greatest choices we can make. She showed us that our faith is a gift that comes with blessings and sacrifice. We can ask for her prayers so that she will intercede on our behalf as to give us strength to do God's will as she did.

Closing Prayer

Tenderness springs forth from you, O Theotokos, make us worthy of compassion. Look upon us sinful people, reveal your power forever as we hope in you and cry aloud: Hail! as did the Archangel Gabriel, Chief Captain of the Bodiless Powers. Amen.

Orthodox Prayer Book
Transfiguration Church
Lowell, MA

Expanded Ideas

Offer similar gifts to women in the church, as a reminder that all women can gain strength from such a predominant role model in the Church. Many of these ladies teach and serve within the community, mentoring other women by their service and acceptance of Faith.

Create a special gift for the clergy wife (wives) in the parish. Make it symbolic of her special role to all the children of the community, and in appreciation of her relationship as Presvytera.

With this information the group learned about the Theotokos, write a short story about her life. Share these with the whole group, and use them for a special project. Invite friends who are not Orthodox to a reading of the short stories written, or a creative festival about the Mother of God.

Write a pamphlet for visitors to the church to understand the place of Mary, as this is sometimes confusing to non-Orthodox as it may appear we are worshipping her. Along with digital images of the actual icons in your church, write short symposes about the theology behind the images of events in her sacred life.

Glossary

Theotokos – God bearer

Ever-Virgin – Always pure, chaste

Venerate – To honor (as an icon or relic) with ritual act of devotion

Worship – Literally, "to bow down." Commanded for God's People (1 Ch 16:29). In the Christian sense worship is the adoration of God through participation in the services of the Church, the highest act of a Christian.

Intercede (Intercession) – Supplication to God on behalf of another person. Such as the Theotokos intercedes on our behalf to God.

Panagia – All holy

Special Notes

Ask your priest to help you to order 7 day clear votive candles, assuming they are not on hand at church, for next session's arts and crafts project. Plastic is best, however, glass may be used as well. It is best not to use any colored candles.

Art and Crafts - Theotokos Icon Banner

Supplies Needed

Felt pieces that are at least 9 x 12 per person (Black or red)
Icon of the Theotokos and another female saints that are the same size and no more that 3 x 5 inches, but may be smaller (1 set per person)
Scissors
Stick pins
Skewers (1 per person)
Pony beads (2 per person)
Fringe on long enough to surround 3 sides of the icon or thread that does not fray that can be cut into fringe (gold or red)
Tacky glue
Gold elastic cord

Directions

Fold felt piece in half so that the fold is on the top. Lay icon on top so that there is ? in felt border on all four sides. Trace with a pencil and pin in place.
Cut out the felt making sure to leave the fold at the top.
Open up felt piece, marking the inside center line with a pencil
Glue fringe ? inches into the border of the bottom half of the felt piece. Don't pass the center line.
Cut a piece of skewer, ? longer that the top of the piece of felt
Put glue on side of the felt piece with the fringe. Do not put glue ? in from the center line.
Put skewer on center line and fold the top half over the bottom half with the glue. Make sure that the fringe is secure
Glue icons centered ? inch from the bottom and sides
Glue two pony beads on ends of skewer
Tie about 10 inches of gold elastic cord on either end of the felt, depending on the size of your icons

Family Notes - Acceptance of Faith

Today your child(ren) learned about the Acceptance of Faith by the People of Faith. They learned about the life of Mary the Mother of God and about her family. They looked at various icons of the Theotokos and talked about the different names that she is called in the church. To learn more about what we talked about, ask the following questions:

Models of Acceptance of Faith in March

St. Konon the Gardener (5)
Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (9)
Annunciation of the Theotokos (25)

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Activities

As a family, identify a woman in the church who is serving the Lord in an exemplary manner. Perhaps she has assisted your family in some way. Offer a gift or invite her over for dinner to let her know how special she is.

Invite a family or person from your parish who converted to Orthodoxy to spend time with your family. Ask them if they would be willing to tell their story of how they accepted their faith and became an Orthodox Christian.

Collect all of the icons of the Theotokos that you have in your home. Have your kids tell you what they learned about reading icons and about the life of the Theotokos. You may want to display the icons in an area where you pray in honor of the Annunciation.

For Further Information

The book The Story of Mary the Mother of God by Dorrie Papdemetriou was read to your children during the meeting. It is a nice book to have in your family library as well a wonderful gift for a God Child or someone named after the Panayia. For adults, A Celebration of Faith, Vol III: The Virgin Mary by Fr.Alexander Shemmeman is available at www.svspress.com. There are also a variety of titles at www.holycrossbookstore.com under the Religious Studies section of Books.

Session 7 Prayers

Opening Prayer *Trisagion (Thrice Holy)*

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy.

Glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forever, to the ages of ages. Amen.

Our Father, Who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come,Thy will be done,On Earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

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Closing Prayer

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