# Session Four

# HEROES OF FAITH

### Session 4 - Heroes of Faith

# **O**BJECTIVE

JOY Children will learn about our relationship with the Saints, our true heroes of faith, by making comparisons with make believe heroes. They will explore the ways we celebrate and honor their heroism and faith, and how they get their "powers."

### PREPARATION

The goal is to help participants know the saints as super heroes to all Christians. In order to make a solid comparison, this session compares Saint Nicholas to Spiderman.

It will also be helpful to look into the storyline of superheroes such as The Hulk, Kim Possible, The Powerpuff Girls, etc. Be sure the superheroes are familiar to children in your JOY Ministry, simply through conversation with them ahead of time.

You may also familiarize yourself with the following scripture verses which help us to understand how Saints are heroes of faith:

Hebrews 11:1-3 – "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for," Romans 1:8:16-17 – "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ..." James 5:16 - "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."

### MATERIALS NEEDED

Large icon of St. Nicholas

Copy of Opening and Closing Prayers (1 per child)

Copy of Family Notes (1 per child)

Pictures of 4-6 common superheroes, both male and female

A Picture of Spiderman

White construction paper

Crayons or markers

A hat and small pieces of paper with superheroes names

White Board and markers

Paper mache ornament shapes (1 per person) found at most major craft stores

Paper Icons at least 4 x 5 in. (2 per person) their Patron Saints or those children often see in church

Pencils, Scissors, Sponge brushes (1 of each per person)

Pencils to trace ornament shape onto icon

Tacky glue or Modge Podge

Christmas colored ribbons? in. wide or ric rac

Glitter, sequence or metallic paint pens for decorating

Paper plates, to share glue

Butcher paper or table cloth for easy clean up

# HEROES OF FAITH

# **OPENING PRAYER** Trisagion Prayers (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.

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 - "3, 2, 1, Flash"

Break the participants up into 4 to 6 groups depending on attendance. Each group will be given the name of a superhero, which they will keep secret from the other groups. You will call one member of each group up to pull the name of their superhero out of a hat. They will go back to their groups and organize themselves to create a tableau or motionless performance of the superhero. They may include other characters or surroundings, by using their bodies to create the scene. Give each group 5 to 10 minutes to prepare. Each group will come up to the "stage" and get into position. You will announce "3,2,1, Flash" and everyone will freeze in place. The other groups will then guess which superhero's life they are acting out. Give the other groups 60 seconds to guess. You will continue until all of the groups have gone. You may make a contest out of the game if you would like and give a prize to the group that guesses the most correctly or just let the groups guess without a reward.

# HEROES OF FAITH

# STATE (Paraphrase in your own words)

Today we will explore the Heroes of Faith by using the Saints as example. The Saints are the superheroes of our faith. Like the Superheroes, people of faith turn to the Saints for help when then get into tough situations. Usually, superheroes are people who use powers that they have to help people and lead them away from harm. Here are the pictures of the superheroes that you acted out in the tableau. Let's talk about them. (Show them the pictures one by one)

# **DISCUSS** (accept all answers and reflect back)

What do you think all superheroes have in common? What are their differences? (List on a white board)

Describe some of the special powers and talents superheroes have and how they got them.

Do they use these powers for good things? When have you seen them use their powers for evil? How did they find their way back to good?

Do you have a favorite superhero? Tell me a little bit about him/her.

# STATE (Paraphrase in your own words)

This is the story of Peter Parker. He was typical young adult and a science student at a university. During an experiment he was bitten by a radioactive spider. He quickly developed super powers. At first he chose to use his superpowers for his personal gain. He had the opportunity to stop a robber with his super posers but he chose not to do it. He felt that since he wasn't the victim, it wasn't his responsibility to do the right thing. That same robber went on to kill Peter Parker's uncle, his uncle who raised him as a son. Peter Parker felt guilty that he used his super powers selfishly. He learned that with great power comes great responsibility.

# **Discuss** (accept all answers and reflect back)

Who is this superhero? What more can you tell me about him?

Did Peter Parker start out as a superhero? What did he do with his powers initially? What changed in him that he decided to use his new powers to help others?

What kinds of powers does Spiderman have? How does he use them to fight off evil? Who has he helped?

### **STATE** (Paraphrase in your own words)

Now we are going to talk about a different kind of Superhero, the Superheroes of faith (Hebrews 11:1-3), the Saints. We know that Saints strive to live a life based on Christ, and always strive to become Christ-like. There are many types of Saints, the ones who die for their faith are called Martyrs. They show witness to Christ even when someone wants them to deny Him. The word martyr actually means witness. Many saints were persecuted because of their beliefs. Because of their faith and trust in God, they are often associated with the performing of miracles. Some peo-

# HEROES OF FAITH

ple became saints because they lived a holy life with their family and friends as an example to each of us who are living in the everyday world. Like us, many of the saints were born into Christian families who taught them in the ways of the Lord. Some saints were not born as Christians, and may have even done some bad things (ex. St. Paul persecuted Christians), but became Christians later in life.

### **Discuss**

What is a Saint? (Accept all answers and then return to responses that emphasize the saints as those who follow Christ and His teachings.)

How do we know these people followed Christ and His teachings? (Because the church has passed down their stories through the generations. Many miracles are often associated with them)

Who can become a Saint? (Any baptized Christian has the potential of becoming a Saint)

Can you name some Saints? Can you name any Saints that are celebrated this month?

A Feast Day is a day the Church sets aside to remember the day a Saint died. People named in their honor celebrate this Feast Day, or their Name Day. Almost everyone in the Greek Orthodox Church who is baptized or chrismated is named after a Saint. You may have the same name as your grandparent, uncle, aunt, cousin, or friend, but your name was given at your baptism because it is a name that we got when we became Christians. We are given names of saints because we like to be and need to be reminded of people who did great things for Christ. These people are called our Patron Saints. We celebrate their memory and blessings for the year to come on our Name Day. We try to live our lives by their example.

# **Discuss** (accept all answers and reflect back)

Do you know your Patron Saints name? When is their Feast Day Celebrated? What do you know about your Patron Saint?

Why do we say that these people are heroes of our faith? Why would we look up to them? (Emphasize responses that include: Saints have complete faith and trust in God; Saints show gentleness and love in the face of difficult times and suffering; Saints show the power of God; etc.)

If you don't have a patron saint, when would you celebrate your feast day? (All Saints Day which is the Sunday after Pentecost Sunday...if you become a saint one day, someone may take your name for their feast day)

BIBLE READING (NKJV) (Distribute bibles to each child and help them to find the verse)

Romans 1:8:16-17 – For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

# HEROES OF FAITH

### **Discuss**

According to this verse, what "powers" might we say that Saints have? Do we have these same "powers"?

Where do these "powers" come from?

How are they revealed?

### **READ** (Paraphrase in your own words)

Now we are going to hear the story of a true Superhero Saint. "Saint Nicholas was born in Patra in Lycia towards the end of the third century, to Christian parents who had long been childless. From infancy, he showed his love of virtue and his zeal for observing the ordinances of the Church by abstaining from his mother's breast on Wednesdays and Fridays until the evening. Pious and inclined to silence, he was educated in theology and, while still young, was ordained priest by his uncle, Archbishop Nicholas.

For many years, vigil, fasting and prayer were the virtues he excelled in, but from the time of his parents' death and his giving away his inheritance to the needy, the virtue of almsgiving became his greatest glory to God. He regarded himself merely as the steward of goods which belonged to the poor and took particular care to keep his good deeds secret, so as not to lose the heavenly reward (cf. Matthew 6:7). On three occasions he secretly left gold enough for the marriage portions of three maidens whom their debt-ridden father intended to give up to prostitution. When the man eventually discovered his good deed, Nicholas made him promise, as he valued his salvation, to tell no one of it.

God recompensed him through the charismata and miracles for which he became renowned in the sight of men. On pilgrimage to the Holy Places he twice by his prayer calmed the winds that imperiled the ship he was sailing in.

Soon after his return, an angel made known to the synod of bishops, meeting to elect a shepherd for the nearby city of Myra, that they should choose Nicholas—which they did, to the joy of the people. During the last great persecution under Diocletian and Maximian (c. 305), Saint Nicholas was thrown into prison where he continued to confirm his spiritual flock in the faith. With the accession of Constantine, he was very zealous for the destruction of idolatrous temples and for driving out the demons that inhabited them. Among the Fathers gathered at Nicaea in 325 for the first Ecumenical Council, Nicholas was one of the leading champions of Orthodoxy against the impious heresy of Arius, which had so swiftly sprung up to trouble and divide the holy Body of Christ.

He saved the city of Myra from famine by appearing to the master of a vessel laden with corn, and telling him to discharge his cargo at the harbor there. Later the man

# HEROES OF FAITH

of God saved the lives of three Roman officers unjustly accused of conspiracy, by appearing in a dream to the Emperor Constantine and to the perfidious Prefect Avlavius. Full of gratitude to the Saint for their deliverance, the three soldiers became monks.

On many other occasions after his death [December 6, 334 AD] as well as during his lifetime, Saint Nicholas has miraculously assisted ships in distress and people making voyages, and so is venerated as the protector of all who sail the seas. Thus, one day during a gale, he appeared at the helm of a ship in distress and brought it safely to port; and on another occasion, he rescued a passenger who fell overboard crying, "Saint Nicholas, help me!" and at once found himself at home surrounded by his astounded family.

When he fell asleep in peace his people lamented the loss of their pastor and their providence, through whom they had received so many benefits, but the angels and Saints rejoiced to receive the meek Nicholas among them. His holy relics, placed in a church built in his honor at Myra, were venerated by crowds of pilgrims every year."

What is the name of the person that you might know that St. Nicholas has become know as today?

We read that St. Nicholas was very pious as a young child and enjoyed prayer and solitude. Describe what happened to St. Nicholas that was similar to Spiderman that changed his life to helping others? Can you name some of the good acts he did?

How did St. Nicholas fight off evil and those who persecute?

Can you tell me about some of the miracles that St. Nicholas has performed? What gives him these "powers"?

### **STATE**

Just like we ask for help from our families, we ask for help from the Saints. They intercede for us, like Saint Nicholas did for sailors in distress, asking God to protect them. We look to the Saints as our very own family in Christ. We remember how the Saints lived, for and with Christ, showing others the great power He gives them. We venerate the Image of God in them. To venerate means that we honor their memories and admire their examples. We seek their help because they were no different than us. They were people who lived like us. When they were faced with hard things, they prayed and relied on using special gifts from God. In daily life, they chose to live by His power, which made every decision filled with faith. We can venerate the saints by offering prayers for them, kissing their icons, lighting candles and attending liturgy on their feast day.

# HEROES OF FAITH

### **ARTS AND CRAFTS –** Superhero Saints Ornaments

In honor of The Nativity of Christ and our Superhero Saints, we will be making icon ornaments that we can put on our Christmas tree. Wait until I have given all of the directions before starting. Remember to show care in cutting out the saints that you chose for the ornaments as to preserve as much of the Saints face and body as possible.

# STATE (paraphrase in your own words)

The Saints did not get power from a spider bite like Spiderman. A Saint's power to endure persecution and to believe in God while facing danger and death comes from God Himself. The Saints, unlike superheroes, didn't have to use violence to defeat the enemy because they had the most powerful Force of all to give them strength, the God of Love. Even though some the Saints would be tortured and killed, their insistence on loving their enemies and their faith in God made them vehicles through which the Almighty God Himself could work miracles. So because they had faith they were victorious and thousands would convert to Christianity upon seeing the power of God working in them.

Even though a Spiderman-type character may be able to do amazing things for people, a Saint, like Saint Nicholas, was a real person like you and me who lived a life in Christ. By the grace of God, through faith in Christ, living His commandments, and participating in the Eucharist and other sacraments, we too can become Saints.

Remember that when the Saint's die in this life, they don't stop praying for us. It's like they cheer us on so that we can do our best. In God's kingdom the Saint's hear our prayers and they pray to God on our behalf. They are closer to God than we are (spiritually speaking) and God hears their prayers on our behalf: "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." (James 5:16)

Of course, the greatest of all superheroes is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ Who we need to strive toward everyday.

### **CLOSING PRAYER**

Saintly One, (St. Nicholas) in Myra you proved yourself a priest; for in fulfilling the Gospel of Christ, venerable One, you laid down your life for your people and saved the innocent from death. For this you were sanctified as One learned in divine grace.

Kontakion of St. Nicholas (Third Tone) - Narthex Press

Saint (list Patron Saints of all in the group), Holy Mother of God, and all the Saints, who have pleased God in your lives; pray to Christ our Lord that we might live this day in peace, love, and humility.

# HEROES OF FAITH

Pray unto God for us, O Holy Saints, well-pleasing to God, for we turn to you who are speedy helpers and intercessors for our souls. Amen.

Orthodox Prayer Book Transfiguration Church Lowell, MA

### **EXPANDED IDEAS**

**Invite a superhero** or two to enter into dialogue with the Ministry Group. They may want to be in costume. In the midst of it all, reveal the powers of those within the group that are admirable and help people live toward Christ.

Throw a **Saintly Super Hero Party** to raise awareness of the forces that stand with the faithful when they stand with God. Ask kids to come dressed as their favorite saints and prepare a few words describing their life.

Have children develop **super hero saints comic books**. They can record episode after episode of the world laughing at them or trying to hurt them because they are faithful.

Have children draw their favorite superhero. Have them fold construction paper in half lengthwise. Ask the children to draw a picture of their favorite superhero on the left-hand side. Remind the children to leave the right side blank, so that they can use the other side to draw their favorite saint. Have them list the qualities of their superhero. On the right side of the paper, have the children write the heading "Saints are Superheroes." Ask them to list the qualities that make a Saint someone to really admire.

# **G**LOSSARY

**Faith** – Belief and trust in and loyalty to God. Belief in the traditional doctrines of a religion.

**Feast Day** - The early Christians used to meet on the name-day of a saint, which in practice usually was the day of his death. These gatherings took place either around the tomb of the saint or in the church, which kept and preserved his holy relics, or in churches with great historical and theological significance. Such a gathering, called a feast-day or festival (Panegyris), commemorates the memory of the saint.

**Intercede** (Intercession) – A prayer asking a Saint to petition Divine help

**Martyr** – People who sacrificed their lives and fearlessly confessing Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Savior of mankind.

**Patron Saint** – A Member of the Triumphant Church of Christ chosen by a person, organization, town, city or country, as their special intercessor and advocate in Heaven.

# HEROES OF FAITH

**Saint** - Holiness or sainthood is a gift (charisma) given by God to man, through the Holy Spirit.

**Venerate** - The Orthodox honor the saints to express their love and gratitude to God, who has "perfected" the saints.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Saints of the Orthodox Church by George Bebis, PhD. may be found at http://www.goarch.org/en/ourfaith/articles/article8044.asp

Orthodox Saints, 4 volume series by Fr. George Poulos

www.marvel.com, www.cartoonnetwork.com, www.nick.com/all-nick/nicktoons

### SPECIAL NOTES

For January's meeting order Christ in the Old Testament by Niko Chocheli

### ARTS AND CRAFTS - SUPERHERO SAINTS ORNAMENTS

### SUPPLIES NEEDED

Paper mache ornament shapes (1 per person) found at most major craft stores

Paper Icons at least 4 x 5 in. of St. Nicholas or Patron Saints (2 per person)

Scissors (1 per person)

Pencils to trace ornament shape onto icon

Tacky glue or Modge Podge

Christmas colored ribbons? in. wide or ric rac

Glitter, sequence or metallic paint pens for decorating

Sponge brushes (1 per person)

Paper plates, to share glue

Butcher paper or table cloth for easy clean up

### **DIRECTIONS**

Prepare tables with coverings before participants arrive.

Explain that all directions will be given before anyone will begin.

Pass out paper mache ornaments, sponge brushes, glue, scissors, and pencils

Pass out icons. Have participants choose two icons each.

Have them carefully trace the shape of the ornament onto the icons, preserving as much of the saints faces and bodies as possible. Cut out the icons.

Use Sponge brushes to paint on glue and adhere icons to both sides

Use ric rac, ribbons or glitter to cover any remaining paper Mache that is visible.

If time permits, participants can cover icons will Modge Podge to give them a sheen.

# HEROES OF FAITH

### FAMILY NOTES - HEROES OF FAITH

Today your child(ren) learned that the Saints of our church are like Christian superheroes, Heroes of Faith. They discussed their patron saints and when their feast days or name days are celebrated. They also talked about St. Nicholas and how he used his "powers" of faith to help others. To find out a little of what they learned, ask the following questions:

What are ways that we can venerate the saints?

What did St. Nicholas have in common with Spiderman?

Why are the saints good role models?

### Models of Heroes of Faith in December

- St. Barabara (4)
- St. Nicholas the Wonderworker (6)
- St. Spyridon the Wonderworker (12)
- St. Herman of Alaska (13)

The Prophet Daniel and the Three Holy Youths (17)

St. Juliana and her 630 Companion Martyrs (21)

# ACTIVITIES

Collect icons of all of the Patron Saints of your family members and place them on the wall surrounding and icon of Christ. If you don't have a patron saint you can celebrate on All Saints Day, the Sunday after Pentecost

Copy the stories of all of the Patron Saints of your family members and read them together. Create an imaginary Superhero Saint that combines the strengths of all of the saints

Celebrate family name days by attending Liturgy as a family. Read the story of the Patron Saint and set the icon on the table as you read. Invite your child's friends over to celebrate. You may want to celebrate their name day at school for a child who has a summer birthday

In the Slavic Orthodox Churches, a Slava, or family feast day is celebrated on the day that the family first became Christian. Families celebrate all together on this day. You may pick the day that you converted to Orthodoxy or the baptismal day of the father or mother

### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

A great recourse on saints for your family library is Fr. George Poulos' <u>Orthodox Saints Volumes 1-4.</u> For more on the life of St. Nicholas, you may purchase <u>The Life of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker</u> by Nina Seco and illustrated by Ruth Duckworth. Both titles are available at holycrossbookstore.com.

# HEROES OF FAITH

### **SESSION 4 PRAYERS**

**OPENING PRAYERS** Trisagion Prayers (Thrice Holy)

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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)

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For Your 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

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Kontakion of St. Nicholas (Third Tone)

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Pray unto God for us, O Holy Saints, well-pleasing to God, for we turn to you who are speedy helpers and intercessors for our souls. Amen.

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