



GOYA

Y<sup>2</sup>AM  
Ministry Plan  
2019-20

Finding Christ  
Through Gratitude (January 2020)



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# EFFECTIVE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

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3. **implement** the **practices** of effective Christian ministry

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# LEARNING SESSION ONE

JANUARY 2020

## **Finding Christ Through Gratitude**

### **MONTH:**

January 2020

### **GOAL:**

To learn about gratitude

### **OBJECTIVE:**

To identify moments where God is working in their lives, and choose to show gratitude

### **ESTIMATED DURATION:**

45 minutes

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## SUPPLIES NEEDED:

1. blank paper for each participant
2. pen for each participant
3. copies of the Akathist of Thanksgiving:  
[http://www.saintjonah.org/services/  
thanksgiving.htm](http://www.saintjonah.org/services/thanksgiving.htm)

## OPENING PRAYER

*In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*

*Lord, allow us “to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice,” one that is, “holy and acceptable to God for this is Your true and proper worship.” Allow us “not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of our minds.” So that we may be able to “test and prove what is God’s will, His good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

*Amen.*

*(a passage from Romans 12:1-2)*

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## ICEBREAKER:

*10 minutes*

Tell us your name, and what comes to your mind when you hear the name Lazarus.

### **Remember:**

*It's always helpful to start with an activity to help participants relax and allow community to build. Early in the session, focus primarily on getting participants to open their hearts and connect with what's happening in the group. This is an opportunity to encourage participants to share their honest opinions and thoughts, as well as listen to those of others. Take this time to connect with what's important to them, and to understand what they've connected with.*

## ACTIVITY 1: PRAY THE AKATHIST

*10 minutes*

Pray this Akathist together by having each participant read each verse, one-by-one, or break participants into small break-out groups, depending on how many Youth Workers are present to facilitate. Give each group a few verses of the akathist to read.

**Note:** *“This Akathist, also called the “Akathist of Thanksgiving,” was found among the effects of Protopresbyter Gregory Petrov upon his death in a prison camp in 1940. The title is from the words of Saint John Chrysostom as he was dying in exile. It is a song of praise from amidst the most terrible sufferings attributed to Metropolitan Tryphon of Turkestan.”*

### **Debrief:**

- Can you relate to this in any way?
- What type of situation was Fr. Gregory in when he wrote this?
- How could someone in a prison camp be thankful for so many things?
- What are some negative or tough situations where you could see yourself giving thanks in this way?

## ACTIVITY 2: DISCUSSION

*10 minutes*

Pass out a piece of paper and a pen to each participant. Ask participants to reflect on their past week or month and a time where they were frustrated. Write about it. When participants have finished writing, ask the debrief questions below. After each question, give participants time to write down their answer. At the end, ask participants to share their thoughts with the group to the extent that they feel comfortable doing so.

### **Debrief:**

- What or who was it exactly that frustrated you? Yourself? A situation? Someone else?
- Could you have done something differently? What would that be?
- How could God have been present in this moment?
- How could God have been working in this moment?
- How can sorrow be changed to joy?
- How can you give glory or gratitude to God in difficult moments?
- What are the non “first world problems” that we can be grateful for?

## ACTIVITY 3: SCRIPTURE

*10 minutes*

### **John 11:1-44**

1 “Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) 3 So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.” 4 When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.” 5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, 7 and then he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.” 8 “But Rabbi,” they said, “a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?” 9 Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world’s light. 10 It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light.” 11 After he had said this, he went on to tell them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.” 12 His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.” 13 Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. 14 So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, 15 and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

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16 Then Thomas said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” 17 On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. 18 Now Bethany was less than two miles[b] from Jerusalem, 19 and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. 20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. 21 “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.” 23 Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” 24 Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” 25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; 26 and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?” 27 “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.” 28 After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.” 29 When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31 When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there. 32 When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would

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not have died.” 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. 34 “Where have you laid him?” he asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied. 35 Jesus wept. 36 Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” 37 But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” 38 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. 39 “Take away the stone,” he said. “But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.” 40 **Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?” 41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”** 43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

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### **Debrief:**

- Who are the characters in this passage and what are their roles?
- What is this story about?
- What did Jesus experience in verse 35? Have you ever experienced that?
- What is the importance of verse 41?
- How could it be possible to be grateful at a very sad time like this?
- How can we show gratitude in sorrowful or frustrating times?

## CONCLUSION: WRAP-UP

*5 minutes*

Go around the circle and ask each individual to name one new idea they learned during the session.

## CLOSING PRAYER

*In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*

*“Thank You, Lord, for Your strength and guidance in my work. You are the fulfillment of all good things. Fill also my soul with joy and gladness, that I may praise You always.”*

*Amen.*

## LEARNING SESSION TWO

JANUARY 2020

# Finding Christ Through Gratitude

### MONTH:

January 2020

### GOAL:

To learn about gratitude

### OBJECTIVE:

To identify moments of gratitude in their lives

### ESTIMATED DURATION:

45 minutes

## SUPPLIES NEEDED:

1. Divine Liturgy books
2. blank paper for each participant
3. pen for each participant
4. a few copies of the Saint story below
5. a few copies of the debrief questions

## OPENING PRAYER

*In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*

*Lord, allow us “to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice,” one that is, “holy and acceptable to God for this is Your true and proper worship.” Allow us “not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of our minds.” So that we may be able to “test and prove what is God’s will, His good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

*Amen.*

*(a passage from Romans 12:1-2)*

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## ICEBREAKER:

*10 minutes*

Tell us your name, and a time when you had to be patient.

### **Remember:**

*It's always helpful to start with an activity to help participants relax and allow community to build. Early in the session, focus primarily on getting participants to open their hearts and connect with what's happening in the group. This is an opportunity to encourage participants to share their honest opinions and thoughts, as well as listen to those of others. Take this time to connect with what's important to them, and to understand what they've connected with.*

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## ACTIVITY 1: SAINT STORY

*10 minutes*

Break up the large group into three small groups based on their answer to the icebreaker question. Give each group a copy of the story of Saint Joachim and Anna and the debrief questions.

**<http://www.pravmir.com/sts-joachim-anna-story-great-faithfulness-love/>**

Instruct groups to read the story and work together to answer the questions. After a few minutes, have the groups come back together into one and have each group share their answers.

### **Saint Joachim and Anna**

To be certain, Joachim and Anna were not an extraordinary couple; unlike Joseph and Mary, he was not an aged widower and she was not a consecrated temple virgin. In reality they appear to be everyday people. Their marriage was not the product of a divine matchmaking like Isaac and Rebekah; they did not find each other through a providential meeting like Boaz and Ruth.

Joachim and Anna were an ordinary family, as ordinary as any of ours: which means, of course, that like the rest of us, their family was warm and loving, ... but it wasn't perfect. Upon them was the pain of childlessness. In their culture and in that place and time, this problem was more than a heartache; it was a social stigma, seen by some as a sign of divine disfavor. Unlike today where we consider ourselves to be the sole arbiters of the miracle of human creation, our forebears

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understood family and childbearing to be part of God's divine blessing and plan.

The tradition of the Church tells the story of the great faithfulness and love of Joachim and Anna. In many ways, they were considered blessed: for by God's mercy and providence, they had material abundance; and from their abundance they offered one third of their material blessing to the work of the Temple and its priests; one third to the needs of the poor; and they cared for themselves with the remaining third. One might say that they had everything – except the joy of children.

Thus on that fateful day it was not unusual for Joachim to approach the Temple with generous gifts and offerings – he always gave to the work of God, and he always prayed for the blessing of a child; what was different on that day was that he was turned away. An unthinking person in authority challenged him: How can a childless man be deemed worthy to come before God? In typical male fashion, confused and ashamed, Joachim goes off to be alone (in his “man-cave”) in the wilderness; there to nurse his soul's wounds, but even more, to pour out his heart before God.

His faithful wife Anne fears the worst for her absent husband.

Unaware of what happened, she too goes into mourning as a childless widow. And from her heart, shattered with pain, escapes a prayer that reaches the heavens: “O God of our fathers, bless me.”

Yes, my friends, we know these people, don't we? We know this family: they are us. For, beloved, what family among us is untouched by hurt, by loss, by weakness, by strife, ... by shame? Which of our families is not affected by some condition that breaks our hearts and challenges our hope, whether because of unemployment or underemployment or financial stress or medical issues or legal troubles? What family has not been tested by the presence of moral failure and loss of hope? When we see the family of Joachim and

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Anna, we see people just like ourselves, just like everyone else. We see people who ache for a sense of God's presence, a sense of God's purpose in their life. And just as both were in deep despair, God sent his angel to tell them of His mercy and love, and that after waiting with faith and hope, their prayers would be blessed: they would have a child.

Is it any wonder, then, that in popular piety, the early Church at times could begin the Good News with these two people—at once so obscure and yet so familiar?

That the greatest story of human history starts with such an ordinary family—this brings hope that God can make wonderful things happen even through us—despite our limitations, despite our frailty, despite our basic human nature in all its broken beauty.

And a wonderful thing did happen for Joachim and Anna, a wonderful thing for all humanity. A child was born, a little girl. They gave her a name from the history of God's mercy on His people, the name of the sister of Moses—Miriam. Today, when we call her blessed, we address her as Mary. And we call her blessed, because she gave birth to the Savior, to Jesus Christ – to God in the flesh.

When you see the fruit of the union of Joachim and Anna—when you behold an icon of the Virgin Mary—you see a most profound spiritual statement. Theologians struggle to put into words what every father and mother, every godfather and godmother, every grandparent, every aunt and uncle knows to be true: When human prayers come together with God's grace, miracles happen. We creatures of dust cannot will it to be so. But when we humans do our human things and live our human lives in cooperation with God, miracles happen, even though the eyes of the world see nothing new under the sun. God speaks to His people every day!

The infant Mary was a miracle. But she was not magical. She did not enter the world ready-made for her role as the Virgin Mother. The

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work of Joachim and Anna in God's plan of salvation did not end after a conception and nine months of pregnancy. They were called not merely to be progenitors, but even more, to be parents. The Latin word is so fitting, sharing as it does a root with the word "prepare." A parent is not simply the one who sires a child, but the one who prepares a child to become an adult—through instruction, through patience, by word and example.

This, too, is part of the greatest story ever told. That the mother of our God had parents who were role models of love and self-sacrifice, of perseverance and prayer.

When you hear the story of the Annunciation and you listen to the Virgin Mary singing the Magnificat—can you not hear the voice of Saint Anne, singing psalms of God's praise to the infant at her breast?

When you hear the story of the Crucifixion and see beneath the Cross the Virgin Mary standing watch as her Son departs from this life—do you not recognize the strength of Saint Anne, bidding farewell to her only child at the end of every visit to the Temple, staying strong even while her heart breaks?

Without the motherly example of Saint Anne, day by day and year by year, who would the angel Gabriel have to hail as the one full of grace? This too is part of our shared Gospel, and part of our witness to the world of today: strong adults gave us a strong Mary!

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### **Debrief:**

- What is this story about?
- What can we learn from the lives of Saints Joachim and Anna?
- What is the connection between patience and gratitude?
- How do the Saints show gratitude and thanksgiving to God?
- How can we follow the example of St. Anna and practice faithfulness and gratitude in our lives even when we are not receiving exactly what we want?

## ACTIVITY 2: DIVINE LITURGY

*10 minutes*

Read the following lines from the Divine Liturgy and then ask participants the questions below and facilitate a discussion:

*“We give thanks to You, Master Who loves mankind, benefactor of our souls, that even on this very day You have made us worthy of Your heavenly and immortal Mysteries. Make straight our path, fortify us in Your fear, guard our life, make secure our steps, through the prayers and supplications of the glorious Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary and of all Your saints.”*

### **Debrief:**

- When do we hear this prayer in the Liturgy?
- Why are we giving thanks?
- Have we thought to be thankful after we receive Communion? Why or why not?
- Have we thought to be thankful to the Theotokos for always being near us and listening to our prayers?
- As we leave Church, how are we able to take this moment of gratitude for receiving Communion and transform that into a life of giving thanks in all things?

## ACTIVITY 3: PRACTICE

*10 minutes*

Pray with the group for a few minutes. Pray the Trisagion Prayer, followed by the Lord's Prayer, or any other prayer that you think would be helpful for your group.

Ask participants to sit quietly and practice stillness for two to four minutes.

Next, ask participants to think about their day and create a short list of times when they may not have felt happy or joyful, but times when they could have given thanks to God anyway.

### **Debrief:**

- Can you think of times when you could have given thanks to God?
- What makes it hard to give thanks when you are angry or sad?
- How can we begin to give thanks to God in all things?

## CONCLUSION: WRAP-UP & COMMITMENT

*5 minutes*

Go around the circle and ask each individual to name one new idea they learned during the session.

## CLOSING PRAYER

*In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*

*“O Lord, You who steadied the hand of Peter as he began to sink on the stormy sea, if you are with me, no one is against me. Grant to me the shield of faith and the mighty armor of the Holy Spirit to protect me and guide me to do Your will. The future I put into Your hands, O Lord, and I follow You to a life in Christ.”*

*Amen.*