

Level I, Day 1

Nativity of the Theotokos

Theme: Getting Ready!

CLASSROOM TIME SUMMARY

Aim of This Lesson

We embark on the journey of life on board the Ark of Salvation, which is the Church, with our Lord Jesus Christ as our Captain and the Theotokos as our guide, helper, intercessor, and companion. As we follow the life of the Theotokos, we see how we also travel through our own lives and we can follow her example. As we study how the Theotokos was born, we will think about our own birth, presentation in the Church eight days later, and the prayers and blessing after forty days, and we'll learn how the Church prepares us for our life's journey.

Apply-It Activity: Mary, Mary, What's Her Name?

This activity will familiarize the children with some of the names used for Mary.

Memory Verse: "Do not be afraid, Mary"

We want to help the children take home God's Word in their hearts so that they will have the strength and guidance it can provide when they need it. This verse will help the children remember who the Theotokos is and her relationship to Jesus. Younger children should learn as much as they are able; memorization of the first line is possible for most children.

Crafts

Travel Journal: Children cut out and attach the "Ark of Salvation" to the front of their journals and decorate them. This "Ark" is like the Church: it helps carry us through our lives on earth, giving us shelter and protection, leading us to salvation. Jesus is the "Captain" of the Church.

Theotokos Medallion: Children begin the process of making their Theotokos medallions. When finished, they will remind the children to follow the example of the Theotokos in following God.

Music: "We're Traveling on the Ark of Salvation" (theme song)

This song reinforces the connection between the life of the Mother of God and our own lives, and reminds us that by following her example, and staying "in" the Church (which is called the Ark of Salvation), we will come safely to God.

LESSON.....

Welcome!

1. Introductions & name tags: Introduce yourself to each child and parent as they enter the room. Take attendance and give each child a name tag. Briefly explain how to proceed into church and sit quietly as a class. Have the Music CD playing in the background each morning before class so students can get accustomed to the music. Collect any donations for missions or charity projects.
2. Proceed into church for the Morning Prayer service. Light candles, venerate icons, and encourage the children to sing responses (and help them follow along in the booklet if they can read).
3. Quietly return to classroom. Welcome the students and again introduce the teachers and helpers. Briefly discuss the Classroom Guidelines and any other class rules (e.g., we raise our hands, we listen when other speak, we stay in our chairs).
4. Describe the missions or charity projects for which the Vacation Church School program is taking donations, and remind students to bring something to donate tomorrow in addition to their candle donation (if appropriate).

Introduce the VCS theme

This week we will be going on a journey: we will be “Traveling on the Ark of Salvation.” We are going on a trip to learn about the life of Jesus’s mother.

We are on a ship for this journey (*show the children the ship on the bulletin board*), and each day we will make a new stop to learn about something in the life of the Theotokos (*point out the four icons and the names of the four feasts we will be studying*):

- * The Nativity (Birth) of the Theotokos
- * The Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple
- * The Annunciation of the Theotokos
- * The Dormition of the Theotokos

Let’s listen to the story

Before you tell the story, you might want to do one or more of the following:

1. *Point out the icon of the feast on the bulletin board and in the Student Booklets for them to study as you read.*
2. *Prepare a flannel or felt board with the scene set up.*
3. *Plan ahead to have the children act out the story in your classroom, or, if your priest approves, in the church itself.*

Read aloud pages 1–5 from The Illustrated Life of the Theotokos for Children.



Background note for teachers:

- * *Joachim and Anna, who were too old to have children, had prayed earnestly for a child. In those days, if a married couple did not have children, it was a cause of shame, and others would treat them harshly.*
- * *One day as they were both praying in separate places, an angel appeared to each and promised them a child whose name would be known all through the world. Anna promised to give the child to God, in thanksgiving. Joachim and Anna met one another at the city gate. The angel's promise was fulfilled, and Mary was born in the ordinary way, though her conception was a miracle in itself.*
- * *We see from this story that it was no accidental or random choice of Mary, but that she had been chosen before her birth to be the Mother of our God.*

Let's talk about some words in the story

Who can tell me what these words mean?

Allow the students to explain each word as far as they are able. Explain the words appropriate for the story you used in as much detail as you think necessary for your age group.

- * **Nativity:** *birth*
- * **Angel:** *messenger of God*
- * **Theotokos:** *"Bearer of God," a name we use for Jesus's mother*
- * **Fasting:** *a time when we don't eat certain foods and refrain from entertainments*

Let's talk about the story

Point to the people and places in the icon of the feast as you talk about them. Ask detailed questions about the story, choosing from the following list. Depending on your class, you may ask more detailed and probing questions, or you may stick to the basics—use your judgment to gauge what is most appropriate for the children you are teaching.

1. Can you show me where Mary's mother is? What was her name? *Anna.*
2. Why is she on a bed? *She just gave birth to Mary and is resting.*
3. Can you show me where Mary's father is? What was his name? *Joachim.*
4. How long were Joachim and Anna married before having Mary? *50 years.*
5. Were Joachim and Anna young or old? *Old.*
6. Can you show me where the baby Mary is? *Let children look and point.*
7. Can you point to the other two women in the icon? *Let children look and point.*
8. Do you know why they are there? *They were helping Anna have her baby.*
9. What do you notice about the "baby"? *Mary doesn't look like a baby, but a small woman.*
10. What's happening at the bottom right? *Mary is being rocked in a cradle.*

11. Who is pictured? *A woman, who is rocking the cradle.*
12. Did Mary have any brothers or sisters? *No, Mary was an only child.*
13. How did Joachim and Anna know they would have a child? *An angel appeared to them separately and said her name would be Mary.*
14. What did Joachim and Anna promise to do when Mary turned three years old? *They promised to dedicate her to the Temple to serve God.*
15. When do we celebrate Mary's birthday? *September 8.*
16. Who are the man and woman embracing in the upper left corner? *Joachim and Anna after they got the news they were going to have a baby.*
17. Who is the angel talking to? *Joachim—the angel is telling him that Anna will have a baby.*

Let's talk about our theme for the week

1. We said earlier that we're going on a trip this week. Now, the first step on any journey is to get ready—we must decide where we want to go and how we'll get there. We have to "get ready" to go! *Point to the "Getting Ready" sign on the bulletin board.*
2. Here is an empty suitcase. Let's all pretend we're going on a trip to a far away place. We're going to travel on a big boat. What does your family do to get ready to go on a trip? Do you help get ready? What do you think you'll take with you on your trip? *In a separate bag, have various items that the students are likely to suggest: map, sunglasses, hat, suitcase, sunscreen, guidebook, money, passport, clothes, walking shoes, umbrella, a blank notebook or travel journal, etc. Pull out items as students list them and put them in the suitcase.*
3. What other items might an Orthodox Christian family take along? *Prompt them to suggest Bible, prayer rope, travel icon, candle, prayer book, book about the lives of the saints, etc.*

Let's look at our Travel Journals

Have children look at the icon of the feast on the bulletin board. Then say:

Now take a look at your own Travel Journal and find the same icon.

Sometimes people who take a long trip take their own little book, called a "travel journal," where they can write down what they did each day, where they went, and special memories they have. They may include a photograph or postcard to help them remember.

1. What else is in your Travel Journal along with the icon? *A hymn about the feast.*
2. Listen as I read the hymn. *Read the hymn to the children.*
3. Have you ever heard this hymn? Do you know when we sing it? *On the day of the feast, which is September 8.*
4. When in the Divine Liturgy would you hear this hymn? *Just before the Bible readings.*
5. Next time you come to the Divine Liturgy, listen carefully and you can hear a hymn about a saint or a feast!



Let's apply the lesson to ourselves

If we stop and think about it, our life is a lot like taking a trip. Our parents get ready for us, and then we are born, grow up, get older, maybe have a family, and eventually die. This week in Vacation Church School, we'll be pretending to take a trip, a "journey," to help us understand how the life of the Theotokos helps us on our "journey" of life.

Today we'll take the first step: In the same way that people get ready to take a trip, the Orthodox Church helps us "get ready" to start on the "journey" of our lives.

1. What sort of things do families do to "get ready" when a new baby comes? *Decorate a nursery, buy a crib, get a car seat, etc.*
2. What special things do Orthodox Christian families do to help new babies get started on their Christian journey? *When we are newborn babies, our parents or godparents can bring us to the church for the priest to say special prayers of blessing and to have us baptized and chrismated. This happens after eight days and after forty days.*
3. Tomorrow we'll learn about another step we take as Orthodox Christians: Holy Baptism and Chrismation.
4. Of course, we don't stay babies for long, do we? What happens to babies as they grow up? *They learn to talk, walk, eat regular food, play with toys, etc.*
5. What sorts of things have you learned that have helped you to "grow up" and get to know God? *We are brought to church and Church School, and we learn to pray, to read the Bible and the lives of saints, and to sing hymns.*
6. Many people help prepare us for our journey by teaching us the Holy Traditions of the Church, the story of God's salvation in the Bible, and the prayers and hymns that we will carry with us throughout our lives. Who has helped you learn? *Parents, grandparents, godparents, priests, and Church School teachers help prepare us.*
7. Just like us, Mary, the Theotokos, was born to a real mom and dad, and she started out her life as a newborn baby. What did Joachim and Anna do before Mary was born that helped prepare her to be God's mother? *They prayed to God for a miracle, and they promised to give her back to God in thanksgiving for the miracle. When Mary was three years old, they dedicated her to serve in the Temple.*
8. What is the name of the feast day that the Orthodox Church celebrates that tells us about the birth of the Theotokos? *The Nativity of the Theotokos. Have the children practice saying the name of the feast.*
9. On what date is this feast celebrated? *September 8.*

Use the bulletin board to show the "Ark of Salvation" sailing to the Nativity of the Theotokos feast.



APPLY-IT ACTIVITY: MARY, MARY, WHAT'S HER NAME?

Summary

This activity will familiarize the children with some of the names used for Mary.

Materials

- * Poster board cut into four large square pieces (or cardstock) with one name on each square (attach the preprinted names from the following four pages, or simply write the names on the poster board): Theotokos, Virgin Mary, Mother of God, Unwedded Bride
- * 4 bean bags
- * Chair (optional)
- * Chalkboard and chalk or other scorekeeping method
- * 4 baskets or buckets (optional)

Preparation

Place one name square in each corner of the room, or attach each one to a basket or bucket to make the game more challenging. Write the four names on the chalkboard or on paper in large letters that are clear to see.

Activity

The children line up in a single line next to a chair in the center of the room. The teacher points to one of the names on the chalkboard and says the name. The first child in line stands on the chair with a bean bag and tosses it onto the square with that name written on it. Praise the child for his or her effort. Go through the line until every child has had two or three turns.

Wrap-Up

Say to the children:

- * We have lots of names for Mary, don't we? Who can tell me one of her names that we just used in playing our bean-bag toss game? *Have children raise their hands to offer each of the four names.*
- * What is your favorite name for her? Why? *Give several children the opportunity to answer.*
- * Remember: Mary is always ready to pray for us and to help us when we ask her.



Theotokos

Mother of God

Unwedded Bride

Virgin Mary

Level I, Day 2

Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple Theme: Getting Started!

CLASSROOM TIME SUMMARY

Aim of This Lesson

The children learn how the journey of the Theotokos into the Temple is like their own experience of Holy Baptism and Chrismation and growing up in the Church.

Apply-It Activity: Finding Our Way

This activity will familiarize the children with how much easier a task is if you have instructions or a helper.

Memory Verse: “for you have found favor with God.”

The children learn the second line of the verse, and consider how they, like Mary, can find favor with God.

Craft

Theotokos Medallion: Children paint their medallions on one side.

Luggage Tag: Children write their names on tags and decorate them to reinforce the travel theme

Sailor Hat (alternative to luggage tag): Children decorate sailor hats to wear during the week and for the Closing Program.

Music: “O Champion General”

The children learn a bit of Church history as they read this hymn, and they learn that they can ask the Theotokos for her help and protection in their own lives.

LESSON.....

Welcome!

1. In the classroom before the Morning Prayer service, greet each child by name and take attendance. Remind them about how to proceed into church and sit quietly as a class; have the Music CD playing in the background each morning before class so the students can get accustomed to the music. Collect any donations for missions or charity projects.
2. Proceed into church for the Morning Prayer service. Light candles, venerate icons, and encourage the children to sing responses (and help them follow along in the booklet if they can read).
3. Quietly return to classroom. Greet the students. Briefly review any class rules they may have forgotten.

Let's review what we've learned so far

- * Do you remember why we are here this week? *Briefly review what they learned yesterday: We are taking a trip; yesterday we "got ready"; birth = nativity; Mary's parents' names are Joachim and Anna; Theotokos = Mary.*
- * *Briefly review the birth of Mary.*
- * Today we are going to learn about another event in the life of Mary: when she **entered the Temple**. *Point to the icon on bulletin board.*

Let's listen to the story

Before you tell the story, you might want to do one or more of the following:

1. *Point out the icon of the feast on the bulletin board and in the Student Booklets for them to study as you read.*
2. *Prepare a flannel or felt board with the scene set up.*
3. *Plan ahead to have the children act out the story in your classroom, or, if your priest approves, in the church itself.*

Read aloud pages 6–9 from The Illustrated Life of the Theotokos for Children.

Background notes for teachers:

- * *The Theotokos was raised by righteous Joachim and Anna for three years; she was God's gift to them. At that time they decided to fulfill their promise to God and to offer her to the Lord.*
- * *With the young girls of the neighborhood as her escort, carrying lighted torches and going before her, Mary was taken to the Temple. The light from the torches held her attention and she followed them into the Temple without looking back, and without sadness at leaving her parents. In that way Joachim ensured that she would enter the Temple with joy, not sorrow.*
- * *She grew up to be a righteous and holy young woman, with an understanding of God's promise of a Savior.*



Let's talk about some words we hear in the story

Who can tell me what these words mean?

Allow the students to explain each word as far as they are able. Explain the words appropriate for the story you used in as much detail as you think necessary for your age group.

- ✱ **Temple:** *the holy place where Jews worshipped God*
- ✱ **Zachariah:** *the chief priest of the Temple*
- ✱ **Holy virgins:** *very special girls who were pure of heart and lived in the Temple*

Let's talk about the story

Point to the people and places in the icon of the feast as you talk about them. Ask detailed questions about the story choosing from the following list. Depending on your class, you may ask more detailed and probing questions, or you may stick to the basics—use your judgment to gauge what is most appropriate for the children you are teaching.

1. What happened to Mary when she turned three? *Her parents took her to be raised in the Temple.*
2. Why did Joachim and Anna take Mary to the Temple? *To give thanks to God for the gift of their daughter.*
3. What was the name of the High Priest who led Mary into the Holy of Holies? *Zachariah.*
4. What service did Zachariah perform? *The Sacrament of Consecration.*
5. How long did Mary remain in the Temple? *For twelve years (3 + 12 = 15).*
6. Who took care of Mary while in the Temple? *The priests and virgins who lived in the Temple, and the angels.*
7. What did she do all day? *Prayed and helped with the Temple chores.*
8. Where did Mary go after leaving the Temple? *To live with Joseph of Nazareth.*
9. Whom was she supposed to marry? *Joseph of Nazareth, the carpenter.*

Let's look at our Travel Journals

Have children look at the icon of the feast on the bulletin board. Then say:

Now take a look at your own Travel Journal and find the same icon.

1. What do you notice about this icon? *Let them describe it.*
2. Let's read the hymn the Church sings on this feast day. *Read the hymn aloud to the children.*
3. Today our song talks about how the Theotokos saved the city of Constantinople, which was the capital of the Roman Empire at that time, and how she can help us in our struggles in life. *Read the words to the children, and then play "O Champion General" from the Music CD (track 2).*



4. What will you say about what you have learned today? *Have students dictate a memory of the story, their own baptism, the hymn, or the name of the feast for the teacher to write down in their book.*
5. Remember that just like us, Mary, the Theotokos, was born of a real mom and dad, and started out her life as a newborn baby, and came to the Church as a little child. Tomorrow we'll talk about what happened when she grew up, and how she chose to do God's will and shows us the way to do God's will also.

Let's apply the lesson to ourselves

1. Our life's journey into the Church is like Mary's "journey" into the Temple. Let's compare our lives to Mary's journey:
 - * Mary was dedicated to God in the Temple.
We are baptized and chrismated as Orthodox Christians.
 - * When Mary was a young child, her parents (and other family members and friends) walked with her to the Temple, carrying candles.
Our godparents carry candles at our baptism.
 - * Mary was cared for in the Temple by the holy virgins.
We are cared for in our Orthodox Christian spiritual growth by our godparents.
 - * Mary actually went to live at the Temple.
We come to the Church to receive "life" through Holy Communion.
2. Yesterday we talked about the first step of our journey: making preparations. Let's review some of the things we thought we'd need to take on our journey here in our suitcase. *Remind children of various items on display.*
3. Every journey starts by selecting travel companions, making reservations, and deciding how we'll travel (by boat, plane, or car). In our journey of life, who are our "travel companions"? *Family, godparents, other Orthodox Christians.*
4. How do Orthodox Christians "travel" through their lives? What "carries" us along, sheltering us, protecting us, and keeping us safe? *We travel with the Church, which is also called the Ark of Salvation. Remind children that Noah had an ark to protect him from rain and water. But our Ark is different: it represents the church, and it goes through life, not through water. Show them the "Ark of Salvation" on the cover of the Travel Journal and on the bulletin board.*
5. Sometimes when you're not sure about where you are going and just how to get there, it's good to have a guide—someone who has been there before, who knows what it's like to live in that place, and who knows how to take us where we want to go. Who has God given to us as our special guide? What person has perfectly shown us the way to live the Christian life? *The Theotokos is our "mother," our guide, and our example, because she has already come this way before us and knows the way to reach heaven. We look at her example and ask for her help all along the way.*
6. As on any journey, there comes a time for getting started. In our Christian lives, becoming part of the Church is the first step. How do Orthodox Christian babies become part of

the Church? *First they are introduced to the Church through the services of 8th day and 40 day blessings, which we learned about yesterday. Then through Holy Baptism and Chrismation, they become a part of the Church. The Holy Spirit dwells in their hearts and helps them grow closer to God!*

7. Today we learned about how Mary, the Theotokos, was brought into the Temple. What was the Temple? *The place where the Jewish people went to pray and where the people and High Priest offered animal sacrifices to God to thank Him and to ask for forgiveness for their sins. As we read this story, compare how Mary was brought into the Temple is like the way Orthodox Christians are brought into the Church.*

APPLY-IT ACTIVITY: FINDING OUR WAY

Summary

This activity will familiarize the children with how much easier a task is if you have instructions or a helper.

Materials

- * 2 beach balls (one per team)
- * Various obstacles to place in your playing area, e.g., chairs (numbered 1–4), cones, a laundry basket (taped to the floor)
- * Masking tape or other material to mark arrows or attach signs to the floor
- * Watch with a second hand

Preparation

Create two identical obstacle courses in your playing area, one for each team (if you don't have room for two, make just one course). The courses might require going under a chair, around a cone, over a laundry basket, and so on. Tape arrows to the floor to mark the direction of the course. If you can go outside, a row of trees or shrubs can make a great course.

Demonstrate how each child must roll the ball along the ground to guide it through the course. Show kids the order of obstacles and what must be done at each stop along the way.

Activity

Say to the children:

Today we are going to play a game where you have to move through this obstacle course. There may be some difficult places to get through. In this game you will pretend that the beach ball is your best friend. You must guide the beach ball through all the obstacles.

After getting your ball through the obstacle course, push it back to the starting line and pass it on to the next member of your team.

Have teams line up at the starting point. Give the first person in line a beach ball. Begin the race. If you only have one obstacle course, then time teams as they go through the course. When the first team has finished, encourage them to cheer for the next team. Compare times at the end, and congratulate the team with the fastest time. Collect the balls.

Wrap-Up

- * Was this easy or hard for you? *Allow children to answer.*
- * What was hard?
- * What was easy?



- * What helped you to finish the course?
- * Were the arrows helpful?
- * Was it helpful that the teacher showed you how to do it first?
- * Did it help to watch other children do it before your turn?
- * Today we are learning about someone who helps us: the Theotokos. What did we talk about today that she did? *She entered into the Temple.*
- * Does she show us how to become a part of the Church? *Yes, we must be baptized and chrismated.*
- * What else can she help us with? *Making good choices, loving God, praying.*
- * How do we ask her? *Just pray!*



Annunciation of the Theotokos Theme: Saying Yes!

CLASSROOM TIME SUMMARY

Aim of This Lesson

The children learn to follow the example of the Theotokos by “saying yes!” to God. They will show their willingness to do God’s will through their good behavior toward their family and friends and through their attentiveness and participation at church.

Apply-It Activity: Treasure Hunt

This activity will help the children learn to identify the icons of the Feasts of the Theotokos as they see them in the church and elsewhere.

Memory Verse: “And behold, you will conceive and bear a son.”

In the third line, the angel tells Mary that she will have a baby boy.

Crafts

Theotokos Medallion: Children paint the back side of their medallions.

Postcard: Children prepare a postcard to send to a loved one using a stamp of the Theotokos.

Music: “Saying Yes!”

The children express their desire to follow the Theotokos in their own lives by “saying yes!” to God.

LESSON.....

Welcome!

1. In the classroom before the Morning Prayer service, greet each child by name and take attendance. Remind them about how to proceed into church and sit quietly as a class; have the Music CD playing in the background each morning before class so the students can get accustomed to the music. Collect any donations for missions or charity projects.
2. Proceed into church for the Morning Prayer service. Light candles, venerate icons, and encourage the children to sing responses (and help them follow along in the booklet if they can read).
3. Quietly return to classroom. Greet the students. Briefly review any class rules they may have forgotten.

Let's review what we've learned so far this week

- * Mary was presented to the Temple and greeted by Zachariah.
- * Mary's life was dedicated to God.
- * How are our lives dedicated to God?
- * What are some of the other names we use in the Church for Mary?
- * Today we are going to learn about another event in the life of Mary: when she received some really good news from the Archangel Gabriel. *Point to the icon of the Annunciation on the bulletin board.*

Let's listen to the story

Before you tell the story, you might want to do one or more of the following:

1. *Point out the icon of the feast on the bulletin board and in the Student Booklets for them to study as you read.*
2. *Prepare a flannel or felt board with the scene set up.*
3. *Plan ahead to have the children act out the story in your classroom, or, if your priest approves, in the church itself.*

Read aloud pages 10–14 from The Illustrated Life of the Theotokos for Children and/or Matthew 1:18 and Luke 1:26–38 from a children's story Bible.

Background notes for teachers:

- * *The Archangel Gabriel visits Mary, a young, unmarried teenage girl from Nazareth who is engaged to be married to Joseph, an elderly kinsman who will protect her now that she is of an age to leave the Temple.*
- * *Gabriel **announces** to her that she has been favored by God and tells her that the Lord is with her. He tells her that she will have a baby, by the power of God, and He will be the Messiah, the one who was promised.*



- * *Mary responds, saying, "I am the servant of the Lord. Let it happen the way you have said." She says yes to God.*

Let's talk about some words in the story

Who can tell me what these words mean?

Allow the students to explain each word as far as they are able. Explain the words appropriate for the story you used in as much detail as you think necessary for your age group.

- * **Annunciation:** *announcement*
- * **Archangel:** *a leader of angels; Gabriel's job is to bring messages from God to people*
- * **Nazareth:** *the town where Mary lived*
- * **Blessed:** *having God's favor or approval*
- * **High Priest:** *the leader of the priests in the Jewish Temple*

Let's talk about the story

Point to the people and places in the icon of the feast as you talk about them. Ask detailed questions about the story choosing from the following list. Depending on your class, you may ask more detailed and probing questions, or you may stick to the basics—use your judgment to gauge what is most appropriate for the children you are teaching.

1. *If you read from the Bible: Who were Matthew and Luke? They were followers of Jesus: Matthew was an apostle of Jesus who wrote one of the four Gospels (sometime between 50 and 70 AD); Luke was a Gentile and physician who worked with Paul and wrote both this Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles (70–80 AD).*
2. *Who visited Mary? The Archangel Gabriel.*
3. *What did he say to her? She would have a son named Jesus; Jesus would rule over the house of Jacob; there would be no end to His kingdom; and her cousin Elizabeth would also have a baby.*
4. *What was the name of Elizabeth's baby? St. John the Baptist.*
5. *What did Mary say to the angel? I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you have said.*
6. *What did this answer mean? **Yes**, I'll do whatever God wants.*
7. *Did Mary tell anyone about this visit? No (not that we know about).*
8. *When does the Church remember this event? March 25.*

Let's look at our Travel Journals

Have children look at the icon of the feast on the bulletin board. Then say:

Now take a look at your own Travel Journal and find the same icon.

1. *What do you notice about this icon? Let them describe it.*
2. *Let's read the hymn the Church sings on this feast day. Read the hymn aloud to the class.*



3. Today our song for the day reminds us that when we follow the Theotokos, we'll learn how to say "Yes!" to God. *Read the words on page 7 aloud to the children. Play "Saying Yes!" on the Music CD (track 3).*
4. What will you write about what you have learned today? *In the My Memories section on page 7, have students describe how they will say "Yes!" to God—what they will do.*
5. Remember, just like us, Mary, the Theotokos, faced a choice. She chose to do God's will, and she shows us the way to do God's will. Just remember to ask for her help: Most Holy Theotokos, save us!

Let's apply the lesson to ourselves

1. This week, we've been thinking about how our life is like going on a trip. Who helps you pack your suitcase when you are going on a trip? *Mom, dad, or someone else.*
2. What kinds of things do your parents have to decide while you're on a family trip? *What kinds of things to do, where to go, what to wear every day, who we will visit, etc.*
3. Taking a family vacation or trip is a little like our life. In our life, we are on a journey to see God and get to know Him better. Who has God given you to help you on your journey to get to know God better? *My priest, mom and dad, grandparents, godparents, Church school teachers, aunts and uncles, etc.*
4. Just like we have to decide what to take and where to go when we take a trip, every day in our lives we choose what to do or say, and what not to do or say. What are some things you decide to do? *Obey my mom and dad, be loving to my brother or sister, pick up my toys, etc.*
5. What are some things you decide not to do? *Not to hit someone, not to say bad words, not to leave my toys and clothes lying around.*
6. How do your parents and godparents help you get to know God better? *They take me to church, show me how to make good choices, help me to pray, read the Bible to me, teach me about holy people.*
7. Who is the very best example of a holy person who made a very good choice? *The Theotokos! She chose to do what God wanted her to do, to be the Mother of Jesus. We look at her example, and ask for her help all along the way.*
8. What can you do to get know God better and to show Him that you love Him? *Pray, come to church and Church School, venerate the holy icons, make the sign of the cross, show respect to the priest, receive Holy Communion.*
9. What should you do if we make a mistake and make a bad choice? *We tell our parents, say we're sorry, and ask forgiveness. When we get older, we'll also talk to our priest.*



APPLY-IT ACTIVITY: TREASURE HUNT.....

Summary

This activity will help the children learn to identify the icons of the Feasts of the Theotokos as they see them in the church and elsewhere.

Materials

- * Pencils
- * Church diagrams (see page 113 for an example)

Preparation

Locate the icons for the Feasts of the Theotokos in your church. If you do not have these icons on the iconostasis (icon screen) or elsewhere in your church (narthex, nave, or sanctuary), you may need to check with your parish priest to obtain icons of these feasts. With his approval, you can then place them randomly about the church and let the children “discover” these treasures.

The icons in your church may look somewhat different from those in the Travel Journal booklets and in the classroom. Look for common elements and point those out to the children.

Create a simple diagram of the space where the children will be searching (see page 113 for an example) and make a copy for each child and teacher.

Activity

Lead the children to the church area where you have located the icons. Remind them to show reverence for God whenever they are in His house by speaking quietly and by not running. Have the children work in groups with a teacher or teacher’s helper to assist them. Be prepared to use verbal and visual clues (see below) to help the children identify the people, places, and events shown in each festal icon.

Say to the children:

Today we’re going on a treasure hunt! Let’s pretend that our ship has docked at a famous place where people find special things that are hard to find. You’ve been told that there is treasure somewhere here. . . . It is your job to find it! When you find some “treasure,” put an X on your map to mark the spot. Now put on your thinking caps and pull out your pencils and maps!

The “treasure” we’re looking for today is something very special for us Orthodox Christians. Our treasure is each of the holy icons of the Feasts of the Theotokos that we have been studying this week. What are they again? *The Nativity of the Theotokos, the Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple, the Annunciation of the Theotokos, and the Dormition of the Theotokos.*

Hints

Say to the children:

Look for an icon with _____ (fill in the blank with one of the clues below). When you find it, mark the place on your map with an X.



If necessary, help children by pointing out the area of the church to look for each icon.

- * **Nativity of the Theotokos:** A baby (Theotokos); an old man (Joachim), women helpers (midwives); woman on a couch (Anna),
- * **Entry into the Temple:** Old man with special hat (Zachariah the High Priest); older man and woman (Joachim & Anna); women holding candles (holy virgins); small but grown-up looking woman (Theotokos)
- * **Annunciation of the Theotokos:** An angel (the Archangel Gabriel); a woman (Theotokos); the angel is pointing to the woman
- * **Dormition of the Theotokos:** A woman lying down on a couch (Theotokos on her funeral bier); lots of men standing around her (the Apostles at her funeral); Jesus carrying a small woman (Jesus carries the Mother of God up to heaven); some angels (angels surround Jesus and the Theotokos)

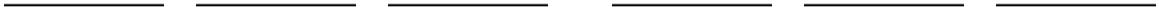
Wrap-Up

Say to the children:

- * Let's see what we've found. Who found the icon of the Feast of _____?
- * *Go through each festal icon, and walk with the group to the vicinity of the icon and ask: How did you know this was the one? Have them point out the important features, as in the hints above.*
- * We truly have a treasure in the icons of our church! Be sure to look at them every time you come to church, show them to your parents and brothers and sisters, and ask the saints and the Theotokos to pray for you every day!



SANCTUARY
(altar area)



SOLEAS
(raised area in front of iconostasis)



NAVE

NARTHEX

ENTRANCE TO CHURCH



Dormition of the Theotokos Theme: Coming Home!

CLASSROOM TIME SUMMARY

Aim of this Lesson

The children learn that although one day our earthly lives will come to an end, they can follow the example of the Theotokos and live a life that honors God, so that they may have the hope of salvation. They can pray to the Theotokos (who never goes to sleep or gets bored) and ask her to pray for them all the time, so that they can love God just as she does.

Apply-It Activity: Cookie Carry

This activity will help the children remember that especially when we face difficult challenges, the Mother of God is with us and prays for us.

Memory Verse: “and you shall call his name Jesus.” Luke 1:30-31

Add the last line, which tells us the child’s name, and the citation, which tells us where in the Bible the verse is found.

Craft

Medallion: Children stain their medallions. When dry, they can string them to make a necklace. Be sure to keep them in the classroom for the Closing Program so that students can wear them at that time.

Music: Dormition Hymn or “Through the Prayers of the Theotokos”

Dormition Hymn: This hymn describes in theological terms the bodily translation into heaven of the Theotokos and her intercessions for us. This song can be learned in another language as well as English, if appropriate in your parish.

“Through the Prayers”: If you have very young students, the VCS director may assign this simple hymn as the Song of the Day for your class. The children learn this liturgical hymn, which they may hear during the Divine Liturgy at the First Antiphon. In the hymn, they learn that the Theotokos intercedes with God for them. This song can be learned in another language, as well as English, and you should use the words and music used in your parish.

LESSON.....

Welcome!

1. In the classroom before the Morning Prayer service (or the Divine Liturgy), greet each child by name and take attendance. Remind them about how to proceed into church and sit quietly as a class; have the Music CD playing in the background each morning before class so the students can get accustomed to the music. Collect any donations for missions or charity projects.
2. Proceed into church for the Morning Prayer service or Divine Liturgy. Light candles, venerate icons, and encourage the children to sing responses (and help them follow along in the booklet if they can read).
3. Quietly return to classroom. Greet the students. Briefly review any class rules they may have forgotten.
4. If you have celebrated a Divine Liturgy, the children may wish to change into their play clothes. Then proceed to lunch.

Let's review what we learned so far this week

- * Mary received good news from the Archangel Gabriel.
- * Mary said "Yes!" to Jesus.
- * What are some of the other names we use in the church for Mary? *Allow children to list the names they remember.*
- * Today we are going to learn about another event in the life of Mary: when she went to heaven to be with Jesus. *Point to the icon of the Dormition of the Theotokos on the bulletin board.*

Let's listen to the story

Before you tell the story, you might want to do one or more of the following:

1. *Point out the icon of the feast on the bulletin board and in the Student Booklets for them to study as you read.*
2. *Prepare a flannel or felt board with the scene set up.*
3. *Plan ahead to have the children act out the story in your classroom, or, if your priest approves, in the church itself.*

Read aloud pages 56–60 from The Illustrated Life of the Theotokos for Children.

There are various beliefs concerning the life of the Theotokos, including the following:

- * When the Theotokos came to the end of her earthly life, she was living in the house of St. John the Apostle and Evangelist, on Mount Zion in Jerusalem.
- * God took special care of her body and her soul. The twelve Apostles (the men who had been the special friends of her Son, Jesus) were preaching the Gospel in different parts



of the world, but God miraculously brought all of them (except Thomas) to her. God also brought the Apostle Paul and three bishops.

- * She gave her spirit into the care of Christ, her Son and God, and He came down from heaven and took her soul in His arms up to heaven. All those present sang funeral hymns to honor her, and they took her body to a special tomb near Gethsemane.

Let's talk about some words in the story

Who can tell me what these words mean?

Allow the students to explain each word as far as they are able. Explain the words appropriate for the story you used in as much detail as you think necessary for your age group.

- * **Dormition:** *to die; sometimes we use the words "falling asleep"; it doesn't mean to sleep like you do at nap time or at night when you go to bed—it is just an expression we use to mean that someone's earthly body has died*
- * **Holy Pascha:** *Easter*
- * **Apostles:** *the twelve followers of Jesus*
- * **Jerusalem:** *a city in Israel where the Jewish people built their Temple long ago*
- * **Mount of Olives:** *a place just outside of Jerusalem; a small mountain that had olive trees growing on it*

Let's talk about the story

Point to the people and places in the icon of the feast as you talk about them. Ask detailed questions about the story choosing from the following list. Depending on your class, you may ask more detailed and probing questions, or you may stick to the basics—use your judgment to gauge what is most appropriate for the children you are teaching.

1. Who was Mary living with at this time? *St. John the Apostle and Evangelist.*
2. Where did she go to pray? *The Mount of Olives.*
3. Who appeared to her when she prayed on the Mount of Olives? *God.*
4. What did God tell her? *That in three days she would be in Paradise with her Son, Jesus.*
5. Was she happy or sad? *She was happy.*
6. What did the angel give her? *A date palm branch from Paradise (a date is a fruit that grows on a certain kind of palm tree).*
7. What was she supposed to do with it? *It was to be carried by someone at the front of her funeral procession.*
8. Where was she to be buried? *Gethsemane.*
9. Later when Mary went back to the Mount of Olives to pray, what did the trees do? *When Mary bowed in prayer, they bowed along with her.*
10. Who was with Mary when she died? *Her family, friends, and all but one of the Apostles.*



11. Who was **not** with her? *St. Thomas.*
12. What was carried in her funeral procession? *The branch of the date palm tree from Paradise, a censer, and the body of Mary.*
13. When does the Church remember this event? *August 15.*
14. What do we do in preparation for this event? *Fast during the first 14 days of August and attend Church services to the Theotokos called Paraklesis.*

Let's look at our Travel Journals

Have children look at the icon of the feast on the bulletin board. Then say:

Now take a look at your own Travel Journal and find the same icon.

1. Did you find the icon that teaches us about the Feast of the Dormition? What do you notice about this icon? *Point to the icon on page 8 and let the children describe it to you.*
2. Let's read the hymn the Church sings on this feast day. *Read the hymn to the children and then play it on the Music CD (track 5). Most of the children will be learning this hymn this week; if the VCS director has assigned "Through the Prayers" to your class as the Song of the Day, say: Today our Song for the Day is one we might hear in church on Sundays. We ask the Theotokos to pray for us and help us to know God. Play the hymn on the Music CD (track 4).*
3. What could you tell about what you have learned today? *Have students dictate a memory of the story, of experiences with death/dying they have had, about the hymn, or about the name of the feast.*
4. Remember, just like we will, Mary, the Theotokos came to the end of her earthly life, and she now lives in heaven with God. She is always ready to help us if we ask her with faith.

Let's apply the lesson to ourselves

You may want to use the following props to discuss the Dormition: tissues (for wiping away tears when saying goodbye); candles (to light as we pray for those we leave behind or who have gone ahead); and old photographs (memories of those we no longer have with us).

1. Do you ever have to say good-bye to someone for a while, such as your grandma or mom or dad? How do you feel? *Sad to be apart.*
2. Have you ever been on a trip away from home and then come back to your house? How did you feel? *Glad to be home again, in your own room and bed, to see your pets, your family*
3. Today we learned about how Mary, the Theotokos, prepared for the end of her earthly life, and how God worked miracles to show us how we should honor her ourselves. The Dormition of the Theotokos is the time when we remember that she died and went to be with Jesus in heaven.
4. Has someone you loved ever died? *Gently allow children to answer; any answer is OK, even pets.*
5. How did you feel? *Sad, crying.*



6. When Orthodox Christians die, we are sad because they have left us, but we are glad because we know they are going to be with God. Have you ever been to a funeral service in an Orthodox church? *Allow children to answer.*
7. *If your church is named for this feast:* Have you ever come to the services of Vespers or Divine Liturgy for the Feast of the Dormition? What was it like? *Lots of people come, and everyone venerates the icon of the Theotokos, which may be decorated with flowers. Sometimes loaves of special bread are offered. We chant lots of hymns about the Theotokos.*
8. Do you know anyone named Maria, Mary, Panagiota (who we might call Penny), or Panagioti (who we might call Pete)? August 15 is their name day. It is a celebration of their relationship with the Theotokos.
9. We Orthodox Christians can follow the example of the Theotokos and live a life that honors God. We can pray to Mary, the Theotokos, who is in heaven with Jesus (and who never goes to sleep or gets bored or forgets), and ask her to pray for us all the time so that we can love God just as she does.

APPLY-IT ACTIVITY COOKIE CARRY

Summary

This activity will help the children remember that especially when we face difficult challenges, the Mother of God is with us and prays for us.

Materials

- * 4 large bowls
- * 1 box of vanilla wafers
- * 3 × 5" index cards (one per child)
- * Dustpan and broom (to clean up crumbs)

Preparation

Place two bowls at one side of the room, and two bowls at the other side. Divide the class into two teams, and line them up on either side of the classroom. Put cookies in each of the bowls on one side of the room, so that there is one cookie for each child on that team. Give each child an index card.

Activity

Say to the children:

Sometimes things are hard for us, things like chores, homework, and pronouncing words. What kinds of things are hard for you? *Skipping, doing a cartwheel, riding a bike, etc.*

Today we are going to play a game by doing something that may be easy for some of you and hard for others. We all just need to try our best. We'll get to eat something good in the end! Each of you will carry a cookie from this bowl to the one over there by holding it on a card you will carry between your lips!

I'll show you how to do it. *Demonstrate how to put the index card between your lips, and then take a cookie from the bowl and place it on the card. Walk to the opposite empty bowl and drop the cookie in it.*

That's not so hard, is it? Each team needs to get all its cookies into the other bowl. Be sure to cheer for your teammates! When all of the cookies are in the other bowls, we'll have a snack and talk about our game.

Wrap-Up

Have the children sit down. Give a fresh cookie to each child from the box (carried cookies have been handled and may have fallen on the floor). Allow the children to respond to each of the following questions:

- * Was it hard to get the cookie all the way across without dropping it?
- * What was hard about this game?
- * What kinds of hard things do you face in real life? At home? At school?



- * Let's sing our song for the day. *Sing the hymn of the day with the children: either the Dormition Hymn or "Through the Prayers" (for very young Level I classes, as designated by the VCS director).*
- * How does the Theotokos help you when you have hard times?
- * Remember that the Theotokos is in heaven with Jesus, and she is always ready to help us when we ask her. When we worry about problems we may face at home or at school or anywhere, she is always there to help us.

