

WORSHIP LESSONS.....

Nativity of the Theotokos: 8th Day and 40th Day Blessing Services

The Theotokos was born of a human mother and father, just like all of us. When Orthodox families have a new baby, they go to the church for two special prayer services.

Briefly demonstrate each service (using a baby doll) and ask the following questions.

8th Day Blessing

- * Have you ever seen this service?
- * What is this service about? *The priest blesses the newborn child and gives him or her a Christian name.*
- * Who participates? *The parents, child, and priest.*
- * Why do we do this? *Because we love God and give every part of our lives to Him and ask for His blessing, we pray that God will help the newborn child grow up to be strong, to make good choices, and to love God.*
- * How does this “prepare” us for our journey in life? *The child’s Christian name is a step toward being part of God’s holy Church through Holy Baptism and Chrismation.*

40th Day Blessing

- * Have you ever seen this service?
- * What is this service about? *The child and parents come to the church for prayers of blessing after childbirth, and the infant is brought to the church and offered to God.*
- * Who participates? *The parents, child, priest, and family members and parishioners.*
- * Why do we do this? *We remember that baby Jesus was brought to the Temple by His parents, as was the Jewish custom.*
- * How does this “prepare” us for our journey in life? *Parents give thanks to God first for the blessing of this child (a new family member) and begin the child’s life in the Church.*

Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple: Sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation

When the Theotokos was three years old, her parents “presented” her at the Temple. Orthodox families bring their new babies to the church to receive the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Chrismation.

Briefly demonstrate each service (using a baby doll) and ask the following questions:

- * Have you ever been to a baptism and chrismation service in the Orthodox Christian Church?
- * What is this service about? *The priest baptizes (dips into the baptismal font) the child, declaring that the child belongs to God and that his or her sins have been cleansed. The priest anoints the child with holy chrism (blessed oil) on the head, face, chest, hands, and feet, showing that the Holy Spirit lives in the child and that he or she is now a baptized and chrismated member of the Church and may receive Holy Communion.*
- * Who participates? *The priest, child, parents, godparents, and other witnesses.*
- * Why do we do this? *In this way, children are brought into the Orthodox Christian Church and receive God’s love and blessing to live a Christian life.*
- * How do these sacraments “get us started” on our journey through life? *We begin our lives by thanking God for His blessings, asking His forgiveness of our sins, and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit to make good choices and to follow Jesus throughout our lives.*

Annunciation of the Theotokos: All About Angels

When the Archangel Gabriel came to Mary, she agreed to do whatever God wanted her to do, which meant she would become the *Theotokos* or Mother of God. Today. Let's talk about angels:

- * What angels have you heard about? *Students may mention Gabriel, Michael, and guardian angels.*
- * Do you see any icons of angels in our church? *Let children point them out and help them describe the events depicted.*
- * What do angels do? *Angels protect, announce, fight against demons, glorify God, and act as God's messengers.*
- * What do we call the special angel that watches out for each of us? *He is our guardian angel.*
- * What does that angel do? *He is our guardian, protector, and companion.*
- * How do we honor angels? *The same way we honor the saints: we venerate them in icons, ask for their help, and thank God for them.*

Divine Liturgy: Gospel Lesson or Church Behaviors

Have your priest give a brief sermon based on the day's Gospel lesson (which was read during the Divine Liturgy), on proper church behavior, or on another topic related to the VCS theme.

Dormition of the Theotokos: The Funeral Service and the “Falling Asleep” of Orthodox Christians

When the time came for the Theotokos to leave this earthly life, God brought together many of those who loved her to honor her as her soul went to be with her Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, in heaven. When Orthodox Christians come to the end of their earthly life’s journey, their loved ones gather together to say prayers, to sing funeral hymns, to honor the one who has “fallen asleep,” and to comfort one another.

Discuss the funeral service briefly and ask the following questions:

- * Have you ever been to a funeral service at the church? In the funeral home?
- * What is this service about? *We say prayers for the person who died and for ourselves and others.*
- * Who participates? *The priest and the family and friends of the person who died.*
- * Why do we do this? *We are saying goodbye to and praying for someone we knew and loved. We also need to be reassured of God’s comfort and peace, and because sometimes we need to cry.*
- * How does this service bring the earthly life’s journey to a close? *We pray that just like we began our earthly lives with prayers at our birth, at eight days, and forty days, and with Holy Baptism and Chrismation, we may continue to trust in God at the end of our earthly lives, and ask His love and peace.*
- * How can we remember our loved ones who have fallen asleep? *We pray for them, asking God to give rest to their souls. We can pray for them and ask the Church to offer special prayers to remember them forty days later, and each year on that day. We can make and eat koliva (sweetened boiled wheat) to help us remember our hope in eternal life.*