

Be it unto me according
to thy word.



The Life of the Theotokos
Camp St. Raphael
2005

Counselor's Activity packet



Day 1 activity: Find the images of the Presentation of the Theotokos in Psalm 45

Have the campers look at the words to psalm 45. Pick out lines or phrases that describe the Theotokos.

Psalms 45

1. My heart is overflowing with a good theme; I recite my composition concerning the King; My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.
2. You are fairer than the sons of men; Grace is poured upon Your lips; Therefore God has blessed You forever.
3. Gird Your sword upon Your thigh, O Mighty One, With Your glory and Your majesty.
4. And in Your majesty ride prosperously because of truth, humility, and righteousness; And Your right hand shall teach You awesome things.
5. Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the King's enemies; The peoples fall under You.
6. Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.
7. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions. 8. All Your garments are scented with myrrh and aloes and cassia, Out of the ivory palaces, by which they have made You glad.



Day 1 activity: Find the images of the Presentation of the Theotokos in Psalm 45

9. Kings' daughters are among Your honorable women; At Your right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir.
10. Listen, O daughter, Consider and incline your ear; Forget your own people also, and your father's house;
11. So the King will greatly desire your beauty; Because He is your Lord, worship Him.
12. And the daughter of Tyre will be there with a gift; The rich among the people will seek your favor.
13. The royal daughter is all glorious within the palace; Her clothing is woven with gold.
14. She shall be brought to the King in robes of many colors; The virgins, her companions who follow her, shall be brought to You.
15. With gladness and rejoicing they shall be brought; They shall enter the King's palace.
16. Instead of Your fathers shall be Your sons, Whom You shall make princes in all the earth.
17. I will make Your name to be remembered in all generations; Therefore the people shall praise You forever and ever.



Day 2 activity: Who is Mary, and why is she important?

Instruction for discussion groups.

Divide the group into two groups and give each group a quote. Have the groups read the quote and write a short explanation of how the quote relates to living out our Orthodox faith. Give the groups 10-15 minutes to complete this task. Have the groups present their answers to the class. If there is time, allow discussion of the explanations written by the groups.

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann describes Mary's place in our faith in this way:

The veneration of the Virgin Mary is a necessary component of our faith: The image of the Virgin Mary, the Virgin Mother, stands [as] the image of infinite humility and purity, filled with beauty and strength; the image of love and the victory of love. The Virgin Mary, the All-Pure Mother demands nothing and receives everything. She pursues nothing and possesses all. In the image of the Virgin Mary, we find compassion, tender-heartedness, care, trust, humility. We call her Our Lady and the Queen of Heaven and Earth, and yet she calls herself "the hand-maid of the Lord." .. Christ said, 'Do not be anxious. Seek first the Kingdom of God' (see Mt 6:33). Beholding this woman - Virgin Mother, Intercessor - we begin to sense, to know not with our mind, but with our heart, what it means to seek the Kingdom, to find it, and to live by it.

THE VIRGIN MARY: THE CELEBRATION OF FAITH
by Alexander Schmemmann, pages 21 - 22.

The main theme of the feast of Mary's entrance to the Temple, repeated many times in the liturgical services, is that she enters the temple to become herself the Living Temple of God, thus inaugurating the New Testament in which are fulfilled the prophecies of old that "the dwelling of God is with man" and that the human person is the sole proper dwelling place of the Divine Presence. (Ezekiel 37:27; John 14:15-23)

Thus, the feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple celebrates the end of the physical temple in Jerusalem as the dwelling place of God. In this feast, we also celebrate that - in the person of the Theotokos - we, too, are the house and tabernacle of the Lord.

Fr. Thomas Hopko



Questions for Discussion groups

1) We think that the quote means:

2) Examples of how this quote describes how we live our Orthodox faith:

3) Ways that we can choose to more closely follow the example of the Theotokos in being a living Temple of God.

4) What we think will happen to the world if we chose to live following her example.



Day 2 activity for discussion groups

What we pray is what we believe!

Instructions:

Divide the class into several small groups. Have them look at the following prayers to the Mother of God. Assign each group one or more prayers. Ask each group to describe what their assigned prayer teaches us about Our Lady and about our Orthodox faith. Allow each group 10-15 minutes to complete their assessment. Have the groups share their findings to the class. As time permits, allow discussion about the findings.

Prayers to the Mother of God

Rejoice Mary, Mother of God, Virgin, full of grace, the Lord is with Thee: blessed art Thou among women and blessed is the Fruit of Thy womb, for thou hast borne the Savior of our souls. Meet it is in truth, to glorify thee, O Birth-giver of God, ever blessed, and all undefiled, the Mother of our God. More honorable than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim, thou who without stain didst bear God the word, true Birth-giver of God, we magnify Thee.

O gracious Mother of the gracious God, O most pure and blessed Mary, the Mother of God, pour the mercy of Thy Son and our God upon my impassionate soul, and with Thine intercessions set me unto good deeds, that I may pass the rest of my life without blemish and, with thine aid, attain heaven. O Virgin mother of God, the only one who art pure and blessed. O Queen of the Heavenly Host, Defender of our souls: being delivered from evil, as thy servants, O Mother of God, we offer unto Thee the hymns of thanks and victory; but as thou hast power invincible, deliver us from all calamity, that we may cry unto thee: Rejoice, O ever-Virgin Bride!

O Virgin, spotless, undefiled, unstained, all-chaste and Pure Lady, Bride of God, who by the glorious birth-giving hast united God the Word with Man and linked our fallen nature with Heavenly Things; who art the hope of the hopeless, the helper of the oppressed, the ready protection of those who haste unto Thee, and the refuge of Christians; despise me not, who am defiled and sinful, who by my wicked thoughts, words and deeds, have become an unworthy servant, and by my slothfulness have turned into a slave to evil affections. O Mother of the God of Love, have mercy and compassion upon me, a sinner and a prodigal. Accept this prayer which is offered to Thee from my impure lips; and putting forward Thy maternal influence with thy Son, my Lord and Master, beseech Him to open unto me the lovingkindness of His grace; beseech Him O most glorious Ever-Virgin Mary, Mother of Christ our God, accept our prayers and present them to Thy Son and our God, that He may, for Thy sake, enlighten and save our souls.



Ye watchers and ye holy ones (a hymn)

**“O higher than the Cherubim,
More glorious than the Seraphim,
Lead their praises, Alleluia!
Thou Bearer of the eternal Word,
Most gracious, magnify the Lord,
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!”**

SUB TUUM PRAESIDIUM

We turn to you for protection, holy Mother of God. Listen to our prayers and help us in our needs.

Save us from every danger, glorious and blessed Virgin.

V/ Pray for us, holy mother of God,

R/ That we may become worthy of the promises of Christ.

Collect:

Eternal Father,

You inspired the Virgin Mary, mother of Your Son,
to visit Elizabeth and assist her in her need.

Keep us open to the working of Your Spirit,
and with Mary may we praise You for ever.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ,
Your Son who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. +Amen.

october1 FEAST OF THE PROTECTION OF THE MOST HOLY MOTHER OF GOD

Troparion of the Protection tone 4

Most holy Mother of God,/ today we Orthodox joyfully celebrate thy coming among us./
As we gaze at thy icon we cry with compunction:/ Shelter us under thy protection,
deliver us from evil,/ and pray thy Son Christ our God to save our souls.

Kontakion of the Protection tone 3

Today the Virgin is standing before us in the Church/ praying for us with the choirs of
Saints./ Angels worship with Hierarchs,/ Apostles rejoice with Prophets,/ for the
Mother of God intercedes with the Eternal God for us.



Kontakion tone 1

O Bethlehem, rejoice: Make ready, Ephrata:/ The ewe is hastening to give birth to the Great Shepherd Whom she carries in her womb./ The Godbearing Fathers rejoice at seeing Him,/ and the Shepherds praise the Virgin who suckles Him.

Troparion of the Forefeast tone 4

Make ready, Bethlehem, Eden has been opened to all./ Prepare, Ephratha, for the Tree of Life has blossomed in the cave from the Virgin./ Her womb was a spiritual paradise whence came the Divine Plant./ If we eat it we shall live and not die like Adam./ Christ is born to raise up the image that of old had fallen.

Kontakion of the Forefeast tone 3

Today the Virgin is coming to the cave/ to give birth to the eternal Word./ Rejoice at the message, O earth;/ with the Angels and Shepherds give glory/ to Him Who was willing to be seen as a Child/ while remaining God throughout all ages.

Kontakion of the Forefeast tone 2

He Who holds the earth in His hands/ is seen in Bethlehem wrapped in swaddling bands./ We sing before the feast to her who bore Him./ She rejoices as a Mother as she nurses the Son of God.

Troparion for the Eve of the Nativity tone 4

When Mary conceived seedlessly/ she was registered in Bethlehem with the elder Joseph as being of the seed of David./ The time for birth came and there was no room in the inn;/ the cave proved a fair palace for the Queen./ Christ is born to raise up the image that of old had fallen.

Kontakion tone 3

The Virgin today gives birth to the Transcendent One,/ and the earth offers a cave to the Unapproachable One,/ Angels and Shepherds glorify Him,/ and wise men journey with a star./ For a young Child is born for us, Who is the eternal God.

Kontakion of the Synaxis tone 6

He that was born before the morning star of Father without mother/ is today incarnate on earth of thee without father./ A star tells the glad tidings to the Magi;/ while Angels and shepherds praise thy seedless childbirth, O thou who art full of grace.



PRAYER TO THE MOST HOLY THEOTOKOS - *St Nikolai of Ochrid and Zhicha*

Waves of passion disturb my spirit, great sadness and anguish have overwhelmed my soul. Embalm my soul with Thy Son's peace, O Most Holy One, and by His Grace drive away every doubt and despair. Calm the storm of my sins that, like a fiery worm, burn me, and quench its flame. Fill my heart with joy, O Most Pure One, and disperse the fog of my iniquities before me, for it confuses me. Illumine me with the light of Thy Son. Helpless is my soul, and everything is cumbersome, even prayer. Here I am, cold as a stone, my lips whispering prayers, while my heart remains immovable, for it is smothered in anguish. Melt the ice which envelops my soul and warm my heart with Thy love.

I rely not on human protection, but fall down before Thee, O Most Pure Sovereign Mother of God; reject me not, but hearken unto the prayer of Thy servant. Sadness has overcome me; I can endure the demonic attack no more. I have no protection; there is no shelter for this poor man, and in this battle I am ever being wounded. I have no consolation, but in Thee, O Holy Sovereign. O Hope and Protection of all who believe, reject not my prayer. Amen.

O Most Holy Mother of Christ, Most Pure, Most Blessed Theotokos, Satan is pounding at me like the waves of the sea against a ship, pursuing me by day and tormenting me at night. I have no peace; turbulent is my soul, my spirit trembles. Hearken, O Most Holy One and help me. Intercede before the dear Lord that He may have mercy on me and forgive the sins I have committed. O Most Holy Mother of Jesus, Thy grace is great, and the mightiest opponent to the powers of hades. Thou art able to save even the greatest of sinners who, having been cast into the depths of hell by unclean powers, should call upon Thee. So too, save me, for lo, Satan will have me stumble and will destroy my faith, but I trust in the Lord. I magnify Thee, Who art more holy than the Cherubim and the Seraphim.



Day 3 activity: Comparing the Magnificat with the Song of Hannah

The prayer of Hannah is taken from the book of 1 Samuel in the Old Testament. The story of Hannah, who was an old woman who desired more than anything else to have a child. She undergoes much ridicule because of her barrenness. None the less, her husband, Elkannah loves her. He tries to cheer her up, but she is still sad. She prays to God to give her a child and she will dedicate the child to the Temple. God answers her prayer with a "yes". And Samuel is born. His parents dedicate him as a young boy to the Temple. He becomes a priest, and it is he who anoints Saul, the first King of Israel.

Look at the Prayer of Hannah and the Magnificat. Compare the two and point out similarities.



Day 3 activity: Comparing the Magnificat with the Song of Hannah

1 Samuel 2:1-8 Prayer of Hannah

1. And Hannah prayed and said: "My heart rejoices in the Lord; my horn is exalted in the Lord. I smile at my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation.
2. "There is none holy like the Lord, for there is none besides You, nor is there any rock like our God.
3. "Talk no more so very proudly; let no arrogance come from your mouth, for the Lord is the God of knowledge; and by His actions are weighed.
4. "The bows of the mighty men are broken, and those who stumbled are girded with strength.
5. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, and those who were hungry have ceased to hunger. Even the barren has borne seven, and she who has many children has become feeble.
6. "The Lord kills and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and brings up.
7. The Lord makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and lifts up.
8. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, To set them among princes and make them inherit the throne of glory. "For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and He has set the world upon them.

The Magnificat Luke 1:46-55

46. And Mary said: "My soul magnifies the Lord,
47. and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.
48. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.
49. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name.
50. And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation.
51. He has shown strength with His arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
52. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly.
53. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty.
54. He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy,
55. As He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever.''



Day 4 activity: Picture yourself as an intercessor!

One of the symbols often associated with the Theotokos is the Star. St. Jerome called her the Star of the Sea. Other "stary" references include the morning star, and star of the dawn, both point to the idea of Mary being higher in honor than the angels. Another notable aspect of the Virgin Mary is her love. She loves everyone! She continually prays for the world in general, and specifically for those who ask her intercession.

Make a picture frame. Using the available decorations, adorn it with the love that you have for those for whom you pray. While you work, ask the Mother of God to pray for those on your prayer list as well.



Day 5 activity: Images of the Mother of God in the Old Testament

The Fathers of the Church have seen types or symbols of the Most-Pure Mother of God in the Old Testament. Many of the stories have deep meanings that are not apparent to the reader. The Old Testament was the Bible for the early Christian Church, as many of the New Testament books were either not yet written, or not available to everyone. Paul's epistles were written to specific Churches, and so those writings were not initially available throughout Christendom.

An example of a type of Mary is the burning bush--it was on fire, but it was not consumed. In like manner, we believe that Mary held the divine fire within her womb, but was not burned. Another example, Jacob's ladder. Jacob saw a ladder that stretched from heaven to earth. He saw angels ascending and descending. Mary is that ladder, she is the connection between heaven and earth and the way through which God became man and descended to earth. There are numerous examples on the following pages.

This activity may be done as a large or small group activity. If it is used as a large group activity, the passages may be used to launch class discussion on one or more of the passages. If it is used as a small group activity, divide the class into several small groups, assign each group a passage to analyze and discuss. Give the groups 10-15 minutes to complete the task. Have each group share their ideas with the class. Allow class discussion as time permits.

Directions for the campers:

Look at the O.T. passage(s). Using what you know about the Theotokos, her manner, her humility, her grace, and her actions tell how each Old Testament passage describes her.



Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" 2. "The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; 3. but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.' " 4. But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; 5. for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, {Or [gods]} knowing good and evil." 6. So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Genesis 3:1-6 NRSV

Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep. Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the Lord stood above it and said: "I am the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. "Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you." Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." Genesis 28:10-16 NKJ

There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." Exodus 3:2-3 New RSV

The Lord went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people. Exodus 13:21-22 NRSV



And have them make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them. Exodus 25:8 NRSV

"They shall make an ark of acacia wood; two cubits and a half shall be its length, a cubit and a half its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. And you shall overlay it with pure gold, within and without shall you overlay it, and you shall make upon it a molding of gold round about. And you shall cast four rings of gold for it and put them on its four feet, two rings on the one side of it, and two rings on the other side of it. You shall make poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. And you shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, to carry the ark by them. The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark; they shall not be taken from it. And you shall put into the ark the testimony which I shall give you. Then you shall make a mercy seat of pure gold; two cubits and a half shall be its length, and a cubit and a half its breadth. And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work shall you make them, on the two ends of the mercy seat. Make one cherub on the one end, and one cherub on the other end; of one piece with the mercy seat shall you make the cherubim on its two ends. The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, their faces one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubim be. And you shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark; and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you of all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel. Exodus 25:10-22 RSV

"You shall also make a table of acacia wood; two cubits shall be its length, a cubit its width, and a cubit and a half its height. And you shall overlay it with pure gold, and make a molding of gold all around. You shall make for it a frame of a handbreadth all around, and you shall make a gold molding for the frame all around. And you shall make for it four rings of gold, and put the rings on the four corners that are at its four legs. The rings shall be close to the frame, as holders for the poles to bear the table. And you shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold, that the table may be carried with them. You shall make its dishes, its pans, its pitchers, and its bowls for pouring. You shall make them of pure gold. And you shall set the showbread on the table before Me always." Exodus 25:23-30



"And you shall make a lampstand of pure gold. The base and the shaft of the lampstand shall be made of hammered work; its cups, its capitals, and its flowers shall be of one piece with it; and there shall be six branches going out of its sides, three branches of the lampstand out of one side of it and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side of it; three cups made like almonds, each with capital and flower, on one branch, and three cups made like almonds, each with capital and flower, on the other branch--so for the six branches going out of the lampstand; and on the lampstand itself four cups made like almonds, with their capitals and flowers, and a capital of one piece with it under each pair of the six branches going out from the lampstand. Their capitals and their branches shall be of one piece with it, the whole of it one piece of hammered work of pure gold. And you shall make the seven lamps for it; and the lamps shall be set up so as to give light upon the space in front of it. Its snuffers and their trays shall be of pure gold. Exodus 25:31-38 RSV

Then Gideon said to God, "If You will save Israel by my hand as You have said "look, I shall put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that You will save Israel by my hand, as You have said.'" And it was so. When he rose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece together, he wrung the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water. Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me, and let me speak just once more: Let me test, I pray, just once more with the fleece; let it now be dry only on the fleece, but on all the ground let there be dew.'" And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, but there was dew on all the ground. Judges 6:36-40 NKJ

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. Isaiah 11:1 NKJ

Then He brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary which faces toward the east, but it was shut. And the Lord said to me, "This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter by it, because the Lord God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut. "As for the prince, because he is the prince, he may sit in it to eat bread before the Lord; he shall enter by way of the vestibule of the gateway, and go out the same way.'" Then He brought me by way of the north gate to the front of the temple; so I looked, and behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord; and I fell on my face. Ezekiel 44:1-4 NKJ



Orthodox Belief Regarding the Immaculate Conception Of Mary

Veneration of the Mother of God

Orthodoxy is the correct veneration of the Most Pure and Most Holy Virgin Mary, the Theotokos, who, with the assembly of the prophets, apostles, martyrs and all the saints, is our unsleeping mediatrix before God. In regard to the veneration of the Mother of God, the Roman Catholic Church likewise diverges greatly from the ancient ecclesiastical Orthodox teaching. We have in mind the Catholic teaching known as the dogma of the "Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God."

In the official enactment of the Roman throne concerning this dogma, it is said: "The Most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first moment of her conception, by a special grace of the omnipotent God and by a special privilege, for the sake of the future merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the human race, was preserved free of all stain of original guilt" (Bull of Pope Pius IX on the new dogma, 1854). In other words, the Mother of God, at her conception, by a special act of Divine Providence, was freed from original sin, which by inheritance from our forefather has spread to all mankind.

The first Christian millennium did not know such a teaching. Beginning with the twelfth century, that is, already after the falling away of the Western church from the Universal Church, the idea of the Immaculate Conception began to spread among the clergy and laity. The new teaching provoked a multitude of disputes. Renowned theologians of the West, such as Thomas Aquinas, Bernard of Clairvaux and others rejected it.

The Orthodox Church acknowledges the birth of the Mother of God as holy, immaculate and blessed in the sense that this birth was from aged parents, that it was announced by an angel of God, that it served for the salvation of mankind, but it occurred within the usual laws of human life, both in a spiritual and physical regard. The Mother of God is also dear to us because she has the same nature as we all have; but she, by the ascetic struggle of her life, beginning from childhood, vanquished in herself her sinful nature and ascended on high as more honorable than the Cherubim and incomparably more glorious than the Seraphim. But if a different spiritual nature were given to her, apart from her will, then she is no longer ours and cannot constitute our glory. We cannot then say to God: "We have given her to Thee," as the Church says concerning this on the feast of Christ's Nativity.



Catholics, ostensibly desiring to magnify the Mother of God, separate her from mankind and ascribe to her different spiritual nature. The Roman Catholic dogma of the Immaculate Conception does not elevate, but demeans the Mother of God, since, if she were born free of sin and holy, then in the attainment of holiness there is no merit of her own. This dogma demeans also the work of men's redemption by Christ's death, since it allows the possibility - even though for only one person - to attain holiness apart from this redemption.

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On the Immaculate Conception of Mary St. John of San Francisco

The teaching of the complete sinlessness of the Mother of God (1) does not correspond to Sacred Scripture, where there is repeatedly mentioned the sinlessness of the *One Mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ* (I Tim. 2:5); and *in Him is no sin* (John 3:5); *Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth* (I Peter 2:22); *One that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin* (Heb. 4:15); *Him Who knew no sin, He made to be sin on our behalf* (II Cor. 5:21). But concerning the rest of men it is said, *Who is pure of defilement? No one who has lived a single day of his life on earth* (Job 14:4). *God commendeth His own love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us* (I Cor. 5:21). *while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by His life* (Rom. 5:8-10).

(2) This teaching contradicts also *Sacred Tradition*, which is contained in numerous Patristic writings, where there is mentioned the exalted sanctity of the Virgin Mary from Her very birth, as well as Her cleansing by the Holy Spirit at Her conception of Christ, but not at Her own conception by Anna. "There is none without stain before Thee, even though his life be but a day, save Thee alone, Jesus Christ our God, Who didst appear on earth without sin, and through Whom we all trust to obtain mercy and the remission of sins" (St. Basil the Great, Third Prayer of Vespers of Pentecost). "But when Christ came through a pure, virginal, unwedded, God-fearing, undefiled Mother without wedlock and without father, and inasmuch as it befitted Him to be born, He purified the female nature, rejected the bitter Eve and overthrew the laws of the flesh" (St. Gregory the Theologian, "In Praise of Virginité"). However, even then, as Sts. Basil the Great and John Chrysostom speak of this, She was not placed in the state of being unable to sin, but continued to take care for Her salvation and overcame all temptations (St. John Chrysostom, *Commentary on John*, Homily 85; St. Basil the Great, Epistle 160).



THE VESPERS PRAYER What do the prayers asking for the Mother of God really mean?

Near the end of Vespers in the Orthodox Church, the officiant says, "O holy Mother of God, save us." What does this mean? The Orthodox Church has taught from the very beginning that Mary is the supreme example, or prototype, of what happens to a person who fully places trust and faith in God. Everything we aspire to become in Christ, she already is. We are all to "receive" Christ (John 1:12). And as we noted previously, Mary was the first human being who did receive Christ. Out of the millions of "decisions" made for Christ, Mary's was the first. Therefore, whatever promises the Holy Scriptures hold for us, Mary already possesses. If the sacred Scriptures declare that we are all kings (Revelation 1:6), is it so strange that the Church refers to Mary as Queen? If the Holy Bible promised that you and I shall judge angels (1 Corinthians 6:3), is it so odd that the Church should sing that Mary is "more honorable than the cherubim and more glorious beyond compare than the seraphim"? If we who are called "holy brethren" (Hebrews 3:1) are commanded to be holy as God is holy (1 Peter 1:15, 16) and are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1), is it so unthinkable that she whose holy body was the recipient of God Incarnate should be called "most holy" by the Church? If Saint Paul instructs us to "[pray] always . . . for all the saints" (Ephesians 6:18), is it so outrageous to confess with the Church that Holy Mary (along with all the saints who have passed from death to life and continually stand in the presence of Christ) intercedes before her Son on behalf of all men? Mary voluntarily relinquished her will to the will of God, thus cooperating fully with the purpose of God. So the original question, "Can Mary save us?" leads to another question: "Can we save others?" Again, the Holy Scriptures speak with resounding clarity. Here are some examples: "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you" (1 Timothy 4:16). "Let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:20). "And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear,



pulling them out of the fire" (Jude 22, 23). Fire saves (1 Corinthians 3:15), prayer saves (James 5:15), angels save (Isaiah 63:9), baptism saves (1 Peter 3:21), preaching saves (1 Corinthians 1:21), the Apostle Paul saved (Romans 11:14). New life in Christ, or salvation, is both personal union with Him and an incorporation into the wholeness of the Body, the Church. Salvation is a Church affair, a Church concern, because we are all affected by it. In another biblical image, salvation is seen as a family matter-God's family ("the whole family in heaven and earth"-Ephesians 3:15). Everybody gets into the act, so to speak. Therefore, under Christ we each have a part to play in the corporateness of His saving act. We do not save alone; Mary does not save alone. Jesus Christ is our wellspring of salvation. And He said, "Without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). But, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you" (John 15:7). Mary has a unique role in our salvation because she provided the physical body of Christ and thereby became the "mother" of all those who would be saved. That is why Jesus, while on the Cross, said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" and then said to Saint John, "Behold your mother!" (John 19:26, 27).



Day 1 Questions with answers

- 1) Who were Mary's parents? *Joachim and Anna*
- 2) How did Joachim make a living? *He was a shepherd*
- 3) How did Joachim choose to spend his money? *He gave 1/3 to the poor, he gave 1/3 to the Temple, and he lived on 1/3.*
- 4) What does the way Joachim spent his money tell you about him? *Answers will vary. In general, he was very frugal, and he cared about the welfare of other people. He used his money to help take care of the Priests and the Temple. He did not hoard his money or spend it foolishly.*
- 5) What Tribe of Israel was Anna from? *Levi, the Tribe whose responsibility was to work in the Temple at the Altar of God.*
- 6) What Tribe of Israel was Joachim from? *Judah, which is the house (or Tribe) of David.*
- 7) Why did God give Joachim and Anna a child in their old age? *God heard their prayers and granted them a child.*
- 8) Why does the Church refer to Joachim and Anna as our Righteous Ancestors? *Because they were pious, they prayed a lot, they lived a righteous life. They are our ancestors because they are the parents of Mary, the Mother of God.*
- 9) How did Mary's parents raise her? *They were very careful that only good and pure things were around her. They kept her from evil.*
- 10) How is this like the way your parents care for you? *Answers will vary. Because we are made in the image and likeness of God, Orthodox parents are supposed to teach their children to know and live their faith. As Orthodox, we must nurture the Holy Spirit that lives inside of us, and this can only be done if we keep our lives turned toward God. This means having and enforcing rules that will help young Orthodox to grow and develop a way of life pleasing to God.*
- 11) What was the purpose that God had for Mary's life? *To be the Mother of God.*
- 12) Does God have a purpose for our life? *YES!*



Day 2 Questions with answers

- 1) How did Mary spend her day while she lived in the Temple? *She read and studied Scripture, prayed, did all sorts of hand work (spinning, sewing, weaving), and she spent time in the Holy of Holies.*
- 2) Who fed her? What was she fed? Where was she fed? *angels. bread from Heaven. In the Holy of Holies.*
- 3) What is the Holy of Holies? *The place of the High Altar in the Temple. It is the place where God Himself is present. The place where the High Priest is allowed to enter to offer a sacrifice once each year for the attonement (forgiveness) of the sins of the people. At all other times no one is allowed to enter, especially women.*
- 4) Why was it hard for the High Priest to decide what to do with Mary once she reached the age of womanhood? *Her parents were dead, so she had no one to support her or help her to arrange a marriage. Also, she had vowed to remain a virgin, and Zacharias wanted to help her keep that vow.*
- 5) How did God choose a guardian for Mary? *He told Zacharias to call for all the widowers to bring their rod to the Temple. Zacharias was to bring the rods into the Holy of Holies and pray over them. Then he was to return them to their owners, God would then produce a sign with the rod of the man chosen to care for Mary.*
- 6) How did Joseph feel when he was asked to bring his rod to the Temple as a possible spouse for one of the virgins? What did he do? *He was embarrassed because he was old. He went as he was told--he obeyed!*
- 7) What was the sign? *The rod budded.*
- 8) What was the important task Mary was asked to do for the Temple? *Spin the true purple thread for the new veil*
- 9) What did the other virgins say to Mary when she was given the true purple to spin? *They mocked her and called her "Queen of the Virgins"*
- 10) What did the angel say to the virgins at their taunting of Mary? *What you say is not a taunt, but the truth.*
- 11) What is significant about the color purple? *It is the color of royalty. It signifies that Mary will be the virgin who bears the King of Kings.*
- 12) Who gives Mary the important message about God's plan for her? *Gabriel*
- 13) What was Mary's answer? *Be it unto me as you say. YES*
- 14) Who is to be the father of Mary's baby? *God*



Day 3 Questions with answers

- 1) How does Elizabeth react to Mary's greeting? *She is filled with the Holy Spirit, and the baby in her womb (John the Baptist) leaps.*
- 2) What does Elizabeth say to Mary? *Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*
- 3) What is unique about these words? *It is the first time that any human has called Mary the "Mother of my Lord".*
- 4) Name some things for which Mary exalts God in her prayer: The Magnificat. "My soul magnifies the Lord..." *Answers will vary. 1) regarded the lowly state of His maidservant, 2) has done great things for me, 3) His mercy is on those who fear Him, 4) shown strength with His arm, 5) scattered the proud..., 6) put down the mighty..., 7) exalted the lowly, 8) filled the hungry, 9) sent the rich away empty, and 10) helped His servant I sreal.*
- 5) Why did Mary and Joseph go to Bethlehem? *To register with the government.*
- 6) What great thing happens while they are in Bethlehem? *Jesus is born.*
- 7) What does the angel announce to the shepherds? *That Jesus is born, and He is the Messiah. They should go Worship Him.*
- 8) When the shepherds came to see and worship Jesus, what did Mary do? *Kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.*
- 9) When Jesus was 40 days old, what did they do? *Took him to the Temple to present Him. We do this still today, when Moms are "Churched" and the babies are presented.*
- 10) Who were Simeon and Anna? *Simeon was a devout man who had been told he would not die until he saw the Messiah. He came to the Temple everyday watching and waiting for this to occur. Anna was a prophetess; an 84 year old widow who lived in the Temple, fasting, and praying night and day.*
- 11) What was the prophecy that Simeon had for Jesus and Mary? *Jesus: He is the Salvation of the world, the Messiah. Mary: Jesus cause a great stir in I sreal, and because of this, she will suffer great pain, as if a sword pierced her soul. (The OSB says: Mary will suffer the sword of pain, which according to Holy tradition, she escaped in childbirth.)*



Day 4 Questions with answers

- 1) For whom was Mary concerned at the Wedding feast? *The family hosting the marriage feast. The Bridegroom, who is thought to have been the future Apostle, Simon the zealot.*

- 2) What did she do to help the family? *She asked her Son to intervene.*

- 3) Why did she want to help, according to St. Romanos? *“When Christ was present at the marriage feast, the crowd of guests were faring sumptuously when the supply of wine failed them, and their joy was turned to distress. The bridegroom was upset and the cupbearers muttered unceasingly....Recognizing it, the all-holy Mary came at once and said to her Son: ‘They have no wine, but I beg thee, my Son, show thou canst do all things, Thou who hast in wisdom created all things.’ ”*

- 4) How is the way Jesus addresses His Mother misinterpreted by modern English speakers? *The term “woman” in the original Greek is not adequately translated into modern English. It carried with it a sense of royalty and high regard for the one addressed. Thus, it bears no resemblance to the familiar slang usage today.*

- 5) Is Jesus speaking disrespectfully to His Mother? Is He reprimanding her? *No, He is not being disrespectful, the tone of voice that we associate with the use of the word “woman” in today’s society is the exact opposite of the way Jesus addresses His Mother. No, He is not reprimanding her when He says His hour has not yet come. St. John Chrysostom explains the verse like this: “Christ was not yet known to those present, nor did all immediately realize that the wine was failing. He wished them to be fully apprised that there was a need, and then they would appreciate more the benefit received.”*

- 6) How do you know that the Theotokos is confident that Jesus will grant her request? *She knows He has a heart and compassion for mankind. She directs her next words to the servants: “Whatsoever He tells you to do...do it!”*



7) What does the Theotokos tell the servants to do? *Whatsoever He tells you to do...do it.*

8) Why does Jesus ask them to fill the waterpots with water, rather than the empty wine pitchers? *So that there will be no doubt that the water was miraculously turned into wine, and not the dregs of wine left in the pitchers diluted with water.*

9) What does the steward have to say about the new wine he is brought by the servants? *He is amazed at the quality of the wine. He is surprised that they have brought out the best wine last. This is the reverse of the normal procedure; usually the best wine is first, when people are the most able to appreciate it, and as the people drink more wine, the lesser quality is brought out.*

10) What does this story tell you about the relationship between Mary and Jesus? *Mary knows her Son, and Jesus loves His Mother. They have a very close relationship. They love each other very much.*

11) Is the Blessed Virgin still one who will intercede with her Son on behalf of men?
YES!

Day 5 Questions with answers

1) Who did Jesus have a conversation with at the foot of the cross just before He died?
Mary and the beloved Apostle, John.

2) What was the conversation about? *He entrusted the care of His Mother to the Apostle John.*

3) Why was this conversation significant? *Because it proved that Jesus was Mary's only biological Son.*



- 4) Where did Mary and John live? *After the ascension, they lived in Jerusalem, at one point, they traveled to and lived in Ephesus, where they evangelized the Ephesians. They came back to Jerusalem, and this is where they lived when Mary died.*
- 5) What did Mary do in Jerusalem nearly everyday? *She went to places that Jesus had been. She went often to the Mount of Olives, and to the garden in Gethsemane.*
- 6) What message did the angel give Mary in the garden of Gethsemane while she was praying? *The angel told her that she would die in three days and go to be with her Son.*
- 7) What was final request to her Son? *That she could see the Apostles one more time before she died.*
- 8) How was this request answered? *Jesus caused all the Apostles except Thomas to caught up in a cloud and transported to John's door.*
- 9) Describe how Mary died. *She fell asleep. It was very peaceful.*
- 10) How did the Apostles react? *They were at peace, because Mary was so peaceful. They were sad because it was like losing their Mother.*
- 11) What miraculous things happened at Mary's funeral? *The Jews tried to disrupt it and God caused a cloud to surround and protect the Christians. The angels caused the Jewish mob to go blind temporarily. A Jewish priest tried to grab the bier, an angel cut off his hands. He was healed through the intercession of the Blessed Theotokos.*
- 12) Why was Thomas not with them? *God had prevented Thomas from being caught up in a cloud and transported with the others. This was so that, just as the Apostles had been more greatly assured of the Resurrection of Jesus, through the doubting of Thomas, they now learn of the bodily assumption into heaven of the Theotokos, through the delay of Thomas.*
- 13) When they opened the tomb for Thomas to see the Theotokos one more time, what did they find? *Her body was gone, and there was a sweet fragrance.*
- 14) When they prayed to God to show them where her body had been taken, what did they see? *They saw a vision of Mary in heaven surrounded by angels.*



**Pray for us Most Holy Theotokos!
Camp St. Raphael 2005**