



Sunday School Lessons

Level IV

Grades 7 & 8

**Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo
Debre Meheret St Michael Church**

Garland, TX

The Holy Bible

Objective: Learn the general contents of the Holy Bible

Memory Verse: "... *Prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*" 2 Peter 1:21

References: *The Scripture*

Introduction

The Bible is a book that is written by the inspiration of God. For this reason, and because it talks about God, His creation, and His love for us, it is called Holy. It is important that we read and know about the Bible, because we know God through reading it, it offers solutions for our problems, gives us comfort when we are sad, and hope when we are desperate. Our faith in God, and our worship is Biblical. Therefore we will have an introductory lesson on the Holy Bible.

The Lesson

The Bible is a collection of many books, which are all written by different men at different times by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. That is why St. Peter, one of Jesus' 12 apostles said, "... *Prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke it as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*" (2 Peter 1:21) So we see that not only the Bible is holy, but also the men who wrote the books of the Bible are holy. The Holy Bible has two major sub sections:

1. **The Old Testament**
2. **The New Testament**

- ❖ The Old Testament is written before the Birth of Jesus Christ. It has different books which talk about:
 1. God's creation of the universe and mankind (Book of Genesis)
 2. The Fall of mankind from the grace of God (Book of Genesis)
 3. The Promise of God to return mankind to the former grace (Book of Genesis, Psalm ...)
 4. History of the Israelites (Exodus, Chronicles, Book of Samuel ...)
 5. Prophecy (Isaiah, Jeremiah ...)
 6. Books of Literature (Job, Proverb, Song of Solomon ...)
- ❖ The New Testament books are written after the Birth of Jesus Christ. In the New Testament, we find the following books:
 1. Four Gospels, which talk about Jesus Christ from His birth to His ascension into heaven.
 2. Book of Acts, which talks about the work of Jesus' disciples after the ascension of Jesus Christ.
 3. Epistles (Messages) by different disciples of Christ
 4. Book of Revelation, which talks about Biblical events of the past, prophecy, about the future.
- ❖ Through all these different writings of the Bible we get the following essential lessons:
 - The love of God for mankind
 - God's commandment
 - How we should live according to the commandment of God
 - It teaches us the benefits of loving one another, praying, fasting, and doing other virtues.
 - In general it teaches us about where we came from, where we are going, and how we can inherit the kingdom of God for an everlasting happiness.

Conclusion:

The Holy Bible is written by different men through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is important that we learn about the contents of the Bible, and also read it often because it teaches us about God, His love, His commandments, and How we should lead our life to inherit the kingdom of God.

Questions

1. *What is the Holy Bible?*

2. *What are the two major sections of the Holy Bible?*

1. _____ 2. _____

3. *What categories of books do we find in the New Testament?*

Manifestation of God's Love in Creation

Objective: Learn about God's the unconditional love of God for us

Memory Verse: *"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." John 15:13*

References: *Genesis 2-3*

Introduction

Throughout the Bible we learn the love of God for mankind in many ways. God's love for us is apparent from the beginning of creation. God created us out of love. On today's lesson, we are going to see how God's love was manifested by the events of creation.

The Lesson

- ❖ God made all creation in six days. Man was created on the sixth day, and was also the last creature God made in the universe. Why do you think God created man last? ... He made man on the last day to show His love by preparing everything we need beforehand. A good example of this is *Baby Shower*. Expecting mothers prepare for the coming of a new child, and friends host a *Baby Shower* to bring gifts of necessity for the child to be born. This is an act of love for the unborn child, to make sure that everything the baby needs is ready when he/she comes. The child is loved even before birth. God also loved us before we He created us. So, he prepared everything for Adam and Eve before He created them.
- ❖ God's love is also apparent in the way he created us, because we are the only ones he created in His image. After He made everything, He said, *"Let us make man in our own image."*
- ❖ When God made Adam, He didn't want him to be lonely. So, He created Eve from His own bone to help Him. He made Eve from Adam's bone so that Adam can also learn to love Eve as himself, because she was taken out of him. So, not only was God showing love, but He was also teaching man about love.
- ❖ After God made Adam and Eve, He made them king and queen on earth: He said to them, *"Have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."*

Conclusion:

God created us out of love, and He has shown His love for us from the beginning of creation. He created man in His own image. He prepared everything for Adam and Eve before He created them, and He made them king and queen over every creation on earth. He has shown us a great deal of love from the beginning of creation.

Questions

1. Write three examples of God's love for mankind at the time of creation.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

2. Which category of the two major section of the Bible do we find the story of creation in?

3. Who wrote the story of creation? (Clue: He is a prophet born in Egypt.)

Manifestation of God's Love After the Fall

Objective: Learn about the unconditional love of God

Memory Verse: *"I will put enmity between you and the woman; between your seed and her Seed." Genesis 3:15*

References: Genesis 3

Introduction

After God created Adam and Eve, He showed them His love in many ways as we have seen in the last lesson. But there was nothing that Adam and Eve could do to show their love, gratitude, and worship to God. But God gave them a simple commandment to keep so that they can worship Him and show their love through this commandment. In this lesson we are going to learn about the result of sin, and God's unconditional love even after the fall of man due to sin.

The Lesson

After God created Adam and Eve on the six and last day of creation, he made them king and queen on earth, and told them to feed from everything that grows on earth, except one thing: **The Tree of Knowledge**. He told them not to eat of this tree, for if they do they would die.

Adam and Eve lived for seven years in paradise keeping God's commandment. But one day a serpent, the most cunning animal of all, came to Eve and told her that if they eat from the tree God forbade them not to eat, their eyes would be open and they would be like God. When Eve looked at the tree, she saw that:

1. The tree was good for food.
2. It was pleasant to the eye.
3. It was desirable to make one wise

So, she ignored God's commandment, and took a fruit from the tree and ate it. She also gave it to Adam, and he also ate. Immediately their eyes were opened, and the first thing they realized was that they were naked. When they heard God in the garden, they hid themselves. But God, being a loving father, came to them and said, *"Where are you?"* Adam replied *"I heard your voice in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked."* God asked Adam if he ate of the forbidden tree, and Adam replied that the woman God gave him to be his helper gave him the fruit and he ate. When God asked Eve why she did this, she in turn blamed the serpent.

Because of this, God told Adam and Eve that they shall return to dust and the earth would be condemned because of them. He said to the serpent, *"Because you have done this, you are cursed ... I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed."* God condemned Adam and Eve to death, but he also gave them hope to be saved again, when he said to the serpent, *"I will put enmity between you and the woman"* It was the devil, disguised in the serpent that fooled Adam and Eve into sin. So, enmity between the serpent and the woman means, enmity between Satan and the Virgin Mary. This he said to indicate that he would be born of the Virgin Mary to save Adam and all his ancestors.

God's love was constant even after Adam and Eve disobeyed the only commandment he gave them.

Conclusion:

Fear and death are the results of sin. God told **Adam and Eve** that they would die if they broke His commandment; but they sinned and brought death upon themselves. They were also afraid to be in the presence of God after they sinned. They were happy to be in His presence before they ate of the forbidden tree, but after sinning, they became afraid. Remember that **everything that looks good, pleasant to the eye and desirable is not always good**. Eve saw that the fruit was good, pleasant & desirable; but because she didn't think about the result of breaking God's commandment, she ate of the fruit, and brought death upon herself & Adam.

Questions

1. *What is the commandment God gave Adam and Eve? Why did He give them that commandment?*

2. *What did the serpent tell Eve about the Tree of Knowledge?*

3. *Why did Eve eat of the forbidden tree?*

4. *What are the results of sin?*

5. *How did God show his love to Adam and Eve after they sinned?*

The Holy Cross

Objective: Learn the story and the message of the Cross

Memory Verse: *"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." 1 Corinthians 1:18*

References: *Abune Yesehaq*

Introduction

This is a lesson on the story of the founding of the Holy Cross, on which Jesus Christ paid the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of Adam and Eve, so that they and their children could earn the birthright to enter the kingdom of God. In the lesson, we will learn how His Cross was lost for centuries, and how, and by whom it was found again.

The Lesson

The historical event (of the founding of the holy cross) is of great interest not only for the Ethiopian Church but also for all Christians throughout the world. **Constantine** the great (A.D. 306-37) and his mother Eleni were very sad during the persecution of all Christians under Neron Dioclitianos And Maksimianos. Upon the death of Calrios, King Constantine marched to Rome to bring it under his jurisdiction, carrying with him all kinds of idols and images that he considered helpful for victory.

On his way to Rome, king Constantine stopped in France at the Seine River. There he saw a vision of a shape like a burning cross and heard a voice saying, *"You will defeat your enemy with this cross."* After that Constantine took all the images and burned them. He ordered his soldiers to put the sign of the cross on their uniforms as a badge and continued on his way to Rome, where he defeated Maximianos. Then Constantine decreed freedom to all Christians. He ordered that holy objects that had been taken away from the holy place be returned. All were returned except the cross of Christ...

The true cross of our Lord Jesus Christ had disappeared for several years. It was buried in an unknown place, but **Queen Eleni** (Helen), the mother of Emperor Constantine, as a Christian woman, desired to find the Cross. She inquired of the people concerning its location. She discovered that the Jews had buried it in an unknown place. However, continuing her investigation, She found an elder of the Jewish Community, named Kyriakos, who knew where the cross was buried. ... He pointed out to the queen the area where the cross was buried. She then instructed the people of all nearby communities to gather wood in huge pile. The pile was then burned together with incense after special prayers had been said. This she did in accordance with a vision she had. The flames and smoke from the incense ascended and returned to point on the place where the Cross-was buried. This place was a hill that the Jews utilized for waste disposal for over two hundred years by the order of the governor of the province. Eleni further instructed the people to dig up the hill. The project began on the **seventeenth of September by the Ethiopian calendar (September 27, European calendar)** and was completed on **the tenth of March by the Ethiopian Calendar (March 19, European Calendar)**.

After the hill was completely cleared, three crosses were found. In order to distinguish which was the True Cross, they placed each cross on the sick, the blind and the dead. The cross of Christ healed the sick, gave sight to the blind and caused the dead to be raised up from the grave.

Several years later the right arm of the True Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ was given to Ethiopia. It was brought from Jerusalem during the reign of King Dawit I (David) of Ethiopia (A.D. 1382-1411). It is found at **Geshan Mariam** in Wollo province today.

... Also sent together with the cross (were) the icon of the Virgin Mary painted by saint Luke, the icon of the Lord Jesus Christ painted by Saint John the Evangelist, other holy relics and the Tabot (Ark) of Saint Michael the archangel. King Dawit received the cross and kept it temporarily in Tegulet, his capital city at that time. ... King Dawit saw a vision and a message came through the vision that said, **preserve my cross on a place shaped like a cross**. King Dawit then went forth throughout Ethiopia in search of this place. But he died before he found it.

King Dawit's son, Emperor Yeshaq, saw a similar vision but he also died before he found the place. His brother, **Emperor Zara Yacob**, also called Constantine II saw a similar vision and went throughout the country searching for the location. He finally found it in Wollo province and placed the cross in the church of Geshan Mariam. Ethiopian tradition asserts that when the cross was placed there, a light was shining from heaven and several miracles were performed as evidence that it was the proper place for the cross to be preserved This was done on the twenty-first day of September by Ethiopian calendar (October 2, European calendar). Today thousands of the faithful from every province in Ethiopia go to this place for blessings.

Commemoration of the True Cross is observed throughout the country, on the seventeenth of September by the Ethiopian calendar (September 28, European calendar) annually. It is called Yemasqal Baal (Holly day of the Cross). On the

sixteenth of September (September 27, European calendar) the **Demera** (gathered wood) is celebrated in the whole country. At 3:00 p.m. on that day, the clergy, dressed in their vestments, come to the place of Demera. The patriarch, archbishops, bishops and government officials attend the festival, which begins with chants and drums by the debteras selected for the day, followed by liturgical services.

Special hymns and songs for the occasion are performed by hundreds Of thousands of people who may be in attendance. The Demera is blessed at its four corners in Addis Ababa by the church leader and in provinces by the diocesan archbishops, after the clergy and people go around the demera three times. The Demera is lit with burning twigs (Chibo), by the mayor of the city, if not by the leader of the country. The ceremony concludes with benediction.

Masqual (Holly Cross) is the instrument of our salvation, our defender and protection.

Conclusion:

The Message of the Cross:

- Love: Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ said there is no greater love than giving once life to another. He also set an example for us, by giving His life for Us on the Cross. *How do you show your love to your friends? parents? brothers and sisters? teachers ...? and more importantly to God?*
- Perseverance: As Christ suffered on the cross, we may also suffer a little or a lot when we live as Christians. But we should be patient, and remain faithful. We should also pray for everyone, as Christ did even for those who put him on the cross by saying, "**Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.**"

Questions

1. *Who buried the Holy Cross?*

2. *Who found the Holy Cross, and where?*

3. *What is the Cross so precious to Christians?*

4. *How do you prostrate yourself with the Holy Cross when you pray, and what is the meaning of each step of the prostration?*

4. *What is the message of the Cross?*

The Bronze Snake

Objective: Learn about the result of sin, and the sign of salvation from the story of the Bronze Snake.

Memory Verse: *"For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." 1 Corinthians 1:18*

References: Numbers 21:4-9

Introduction

God has performed 10 great miracles before Pharaoh let the Israelites go free. Through their exodus, the Lord has been with them, protecting them from the scorching sun with clouds during the day, guiding them with pillars of light in the night, and feeding them manna from heaven. But the Israelites tend to forget the might of the Lord, and His care for them. Despite all His goodness and the miracles He had performed, they always complained when faced with difficulties. In this lesson, we are going to learn about the result of such a rebellion and how God saved them when they repented.

The Lesson

When the Israelites came out of Egypt, God was feeding them manna from heaven. But instead of being grateful for all the wonders God has done for them, they grew impatient on their journey. They complained, *"Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! And we detest this miserable food."* Just a few months before they set out on this journey, they had complained about not having water, but the Lord had given them water from a rock in the desert of Zin. But, they kept revolting against the Lord, rousing His anger.

Because of their ungratefulness and murmur, He sent venomous snakes among them. The people then realized their sin and came to Moses to ask the Lord God to take away the snakes from them. The Lord God commanded Moses to make a snake from a bronze and put it on a pole, and that anyone who was bitten by the snake, and looked at **the bronze snake** would live. Moses did as God commanded him, and anyone who was bitten by the snake was saved when He/She looked at the bronze snake on the pole.

Conclusion: Lesson from the Story

1. **Trusting God in our journey:** The journey of the Israelites from Egypt to Jerusalem is a symbol of our journey from a land of exile - **the earth** - into an everlasting land or promise - **the kingdom of God**. We should learn to thank the Lord for all his kindness and trust in his might and love to get us out of any hardships we may be faced with during our journey.
2. **Patience:** Sometimes, the road to holiness seems longer than we can bear. But we only make it longer if we grow impatient with God and lose our trust in Him. It took the Israelites 40 years to get to the Land the Lord had promised them, because they did not fully trust him. It would have taken them only 40 days. Most of the people that came out of Egypt, and who had witnessed the miracles of the Lord, yet doubted Him, did not enter the promise land. **Lack of patience may cost us the kingdom of God too.**
3. **Repentance:** The Israelites realized their sin, repented and asked Moses to ask the Lord to take away the snakes from among them. They asked Moses to ask the Lord, instead of asking Him themselves, because they knew that they were unworthy to speak to the Lord because of their sin, and that the Lord was with Moses. Repentance softens the wrath of the Lord, and brings forgiveness from God.

Questions

1. *Which part of the two major sections of the Bible do we find this story in, the New Testament or the Old Testament?*

2. *Why did God send venomous snakes against the Israelites?*

3. *Where were the Israelites traveling to, & from where?*

4. *What is the symbolism of the journey?*

5. *What do you learn from the story?*

Abraham Intercession for Sodom

Objective: Learn about Intercession, and God's love for the holy

Memory Verse: *"Shall I hide from Abraham" Genesis 18:17*

References: *Genesis 18*

Introduction

In previous lessons, we have seen God's love in creation, and after the Fall of Adam. Today we are going to see God's love for the holy. This is a story of how Abraham interceded for Sodom and Gomorrah, and how much God hearkened to Abraham's request. Today's story shows a conversation between God and Abraham about the city, that God later destroyed with fire due to the people's sin.

The Lesson

Abraham was very faithful and obedient to God. He was also very kind to the needy, and used to host strangers in his house. God has blessed him home as result, and he was very close to him.

Once upon a time, there was something important that God wanted to share with Abraham. So, He came to Abraham and told him that because the people of **Sodom and Gomorrah** were committing grievous sins, he would send his angels and destroy the city. Then Abraham stood before the Lord and had the following interesting conversation with God:

Abraham said, *"Will You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? If there are fifty righteous within the city, will You also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein?"* And the Lord said, *"If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes."*

And Abraham answered and said, *"Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, while I am but dust and ashes: If there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: will You destroy all the city for lack of five?"* And God said, *"If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it."*

And Abraham spoke again saying, *"If there shall be forty found there."* And the Lord said, *"I will not do it for forty's sake."* And Abraham said, *"Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: If there shall be thirty found there."* And the Lord said, *"I will not do it, if I find thirty there."*

And Abraham said, *"Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord: If there shall be twenty found there."* And God said, *"I will not destroy it for twenty's sake."* And Abraham continued, *"Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: If ten shall be found there."* And the Lord replied, *"I will not destroy it for ten's sake."*

And the Lord went His way, as soon as he had finished speaking with Abraham, and Abraham returned to his home. Now, there weren't even five holy people in Sodom and Gomorrah, and the people never showed any sign of repentance. So, Sodom & Gomorrah was destroyed with fire, and only **Lot, and his daughters were saved from the fire.**

Conclusion: Lesson from the Story

1. **God's Love for the Holy:** What we see in the story of Abraham is God's abundant love for holy people. Because Abraham walked in His way, God not only hearkened His heart to Abraham's request, but He also didn't want to hide what He was about to do from Abraham. And for Abraham's sake, and because Lot was also found to be holy, He saved Lot and his daughters.
2. **God saves the righteous from among the sinful:** The angels, God sent to destroy the city, first went to Lot's house to instruct Him to go out of the city, and the angels waited until he was out of the city before they burned it down. All this destruction happened because of the evil deeds of the people.
3. **God Sends His Angels for mercy to the righteous, and for destruction to the sinful as we can see from the story.**

Questions

1. *Why did God want to reveal to Abraham about the destruction of Sodom & Gomorrah?*

2. *For the sake of how many holy did Abraham first ask God to save Sodom & Gomorrah?*

3. *How far did Abraham go with his request?*

4. *What was God's response to Abraham's question?*

5. *Who was saved from the destruction of Sodom? Why and how were they saved?*

6. *Do You remember what happened to Lot's wife when the city was destroyed?*

Joseph's Faithfulness

Objective: Learn that God allows all things for a reason.

Memory Verse: *"All things work together for good for those who love God." Romans 8:28*

References: Genesis 37, 39-50

Introduction

Do you remember the story of **Joseph**? He was one of **Jacob's 12 sons**. But because Jacob loved him more than the others, they were envious of him. Moreover, he had a dream that showed Joseph ruling his brothers. Because of these they dug a hole and threw him, in a pit; but merchants found him and sold him as a slave in Egypt.

But God was with Him in Egypt, and an official of Pharaoh appointed him as the head of his household. The wife of the official desired Joseph to sin with her, but Joseph refused to sin. Because of this, the wife of the official falsely accused Joseph, and he was put in prison. But the Lord was with him in prison too, and gave him favor in front of the prison keeper.

While in prison, he had two companions who were troubled about their strange dreams. When they told Joseph their dreams, he interpreted each dream, and it happened to both according to his interpretation. After two years in prison, Pharaoh had a dream, which no one could interpret for him. But the prisoner who became a servant of Pharaoh as Joseph told him remembered Joseph, and told Pharaoh of how Joseph interpreted his dream, and it happened according to his interpretation. So, Pharaoh had Joseph called and told him his dreams. Joseph interpreted each for him, and warned him of the coming period of great harvest, followed by great drought. So, Pharaoh said that there was no man better suited to prepare for the drought than Joseph, and he gave him charge of everything in Egypt, making him 2nd only to him.

So, Joseph became a lord in Egypt, and God had blessed everything that he did. After the first seven years of harvest, people from different parts of the world were coming to Egypt to buy crops during the following time of drought. It was at this time, Joseph's brothers came to Egypt and learned that their brother was alive, and a master in Egypt. But Joseph did not take revenge against his brothers for what they had done to him. Instead he forgave them all, and had them all settle in Egypt with his father, Jacob.

In today's lesson, we are going to learn about the virtues in the life of Joseph.

The Lesson

Joseph was open to his brothers: Joseph dreamed of the sun, the moon and eleven stars bowing to him. But he was open to his brothers and told them of his dream. They hated him and envied him more for this. But, because of his innocence, he told them of his dreams openly. Because of his innocence and openness, God was always with Him.

Joseph was a faithful servant wherever he went: Joseph was obedient in his father's house. It is one of the reasons Jacob liked him more than the others. His brothers conspired to get rid of him, when Joseph went to his brothers to take them food, obeying his father. When he went to Egypt, he was also a good and faithful servant. Because of this his master made him head of his property. When he went into prison, he remained faithful. Thus the prison keeper gave him charge of all the prisoners. He was so faithful that the prison keeper left him in charge, without looking into how he conducts his work. He was also faithful, and wise once appointed by Pharaoh. Thus God blessed everything he did.

Joseph was faithful in sight of Men & God: Joseph not only was faithful in the sight of men, but in sight of God too. When his Egyptian master's wife desired to sin with him, he refused saying that even if no one could see them, God would see them. So he refused to sin, even if he knew she could falsely get him in trouble. He refused to sin against his master, and against God.

Joseph was forgiving: At the time of the drought, when his brothers came to Egypt to buy food, they did not know him. But he knew them. But instead of taking revenge for what they had done to him, he welcomed all, and had Jacob - his father - brought to Egypt. His brothers were afraid that he would take revenge against them, but he said to them, *"God sent me before you to preserve life ... and to save your lives by a great deliverance ... It was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and the lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout the land of Egypt."* (Genesis 45:5-8) So instead of looking at their evil work, Joseph instead looked at how God allowed all things in his life, so that he would be in a position to save the lives of many, including that of his brothers and father.

Conclusion

It was only the 2nd year of the drought when Joseph's father and brothers came to Egypt. There were five more years of drought. So, all the children of Jacob, who was later named Israel settled in Egypt, and stayed 400 years before they were led out of Egypt under Moses. God, through His faithful servant Joseph, delivered Israel from famine. After 400 years, he would deliver them again from slavery through His faithful servant, Moses. If we are faithful to God, He will guard us all the days of our lives, and even if we get in hardship, He always brings us out of it.

Questions

1. What were the dreams of the two prisoners', which Joseph interpreted?

2. Write one of Pharaoh's dreams, which Joseph interpreted, with the interpretation.

3. Explain how Joseph was faithful to his master & to God?

4. Is there any bad deed you can hide from God? Can you give examples of some things that you may do just because your parents' or anyone else cannot see you? Is that a good thing to do in the sight of God?

Wrestling with God

Objective: Learn about the importance of persistence in prayer

Memory Verse: *“And I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will, knock and it will be opened to you” (Luke 11:9)*

References: *Genesis 32:22-32; Luke 18:1-8, 11:9-13*

Introduction

When you really want something from your parents, and they say no at first, do you quit asking? *No ...* If you really want it, you keep asking again and again until you get it. You make a persistent request. Chances are, you may get what you want by asking again and again. It is also important that we become persistent in our prayers, so that God may answer them quickly. God always gives us what we ask for unless it is harmful or inappropriate for us. But, He answers our prayers if we don't give up praying. Today we are going to see how Jacob, the son of Isaac, the grandson of Abraham received blessing by being persistent in.

The Lesson

Jacob is the son of Isaac, the grandson of Jacob. He was obedient to his parents. His mother Rebecca loved him more than his twin brother Esau. Jacob knew the value of **God's blessing**. In the Old Testament, the first born of every household had the birth right of a special blessing. *Do you remember who had the birth-right to receive his father's blessing from Jacob & Esau?*

From his youth, Jacob wanted to get his father's blessing, because he knew that God's blessing was passed on through his father's blessing. Thus Esau, who did not value his **birth-right**, sold it to Jacob, and Jacob received the blessing of the first born from Isaac.

Later in his life, when Jacob was coming back to Canaan, from his uncle's house, with his family, he wrestled with a man during the night. */Review where he was coming from/* The man asked him to let him go, but Jacob said, ***"I will not let you go unless you bless me."*** (**Genesis 32:26**). So the man blessed him there, and changed his name from Jacob to Israel. Then in the morning, he knew that he was struggling with God to get a blessing.

So, Jacob received the promise and the blessing Abraham and Isaac received, and God's covenant to Abraham was fulfilled through him. He became the father of a great nation, Israel.

Conclusion: Lesson from the Story

- ***The importance of being blessed from God*** - It is important to seek God's blessing. As we see from the story of Jacob, he received God's blessing through his father Isaac. Therefore whenever we get blessing from our parents', it is God's blessing that we receive from them. God has given us different means of blessings in the New Testament. We receive blessings when we attend the Divine Liturgy. We receive blessings when we partake of the Holy Communion. We receive blessing from the Gospel, the holy books, the Cross, the priests, the bishops, and from elders in the church. God has given us all these, that we may receive His blessing.
- ***The importance of persistence in our prayers to God*** - Persistent prayer is important to get answers for our prayers.
- The importance of persistent prayer is also captured in the parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18:1-8 (*Read the story from the Bible*). In this case, the widow was pleading in front of an unjust judge, and through persistence, the unjust judge avenged her of her enemies. If the unjust judge listens through persistence, then what would our merciful God do when we continue to pray to him with our requests. Our Lord Jesus Christ said in Luke 11:11-13, that parents give their children the best; thus God, the most wonderful to us, gives us even more.
- Jacob was not focused on material things. Instead he kept his focus on God's blessing. If we seek God's blessing, we get all that we need in life with the blessing. Do you remember what Solomon asked from God? ... He asked for wisdom to rule God's people. Because he did not ask for money or other material things, God blessed him with the gift of wisdom, and also wealth, which he didn't ask for.

Questions & Exercise

1. *In which book of the Bible do you find the story of Jacob?*

2. *How did Essau lose his birth right, and the blessing of his father?*

3. *When you come to church, do you think of the blessings you receive? What do you do to partake of the blessings from coming to church?*

4. *What was the promise God gave Abraham & Isaac?*

5. *Do you get blessings from your parent's or grandparent's? Write words of blessing you received from anyone.*

6. *If God asks you of what you want, what would you ask for?*

The Plight to Egypt

Objective: Learn about the exile of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary and Joseph.

Memory Verse: *"I called My Son out of Egypt" (Hosea 11:1)*

References: *Hosea 11; Revelation 12; Synaxarium*

Introduction

In this lesson we are going to learn about the plight of the Virgin Mary with her Son Jesus Christ, and Joseph to Egypt. We are going to see the reason for their plight, the hardship they faced on their journey, and how long they stayed in Egypt.

The Lesson

Herod was the king of Jerusalem when Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem. When he learned of the birth of Jesus Christ, a King, he was threatened and wanted to kill Him. Because of this the **angel Gabriel** told Joseph to take the Virgin Mary and her Son to **Egypt**. So, Joseph traveled south towards Egypt with the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ.

Herod killed 14 000 children under the age of two years old, thinking that one of them would be Jesus Christ. But when he learned that Jesus Christ was not among the 14 000 children, he sent his soldiers after them. The archangel Gabriel was with them all the way through their journey, protecting and helping them. John the apostle describes the plight of the Virgin Mary to Egypt in the book of Revelation as follows:

And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars. And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered. And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man- child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days. (Revelation 12:1-6)

The woman the apostle describes here is the Virgin Mary; the Child is Jesus Christ. The dragon chasing her is Herod, and the place God prepared for the woman is Egypt. Three thousand two hundred and three days are 3 and half years. That is how long they stayed in Egypt, until the death of Herod.

The Virgin Mary, with her Son and Joseph arrived in Egypt on the Ethiopian day of **Hedar 6**, at a place called **Kuskuam**. The archangel Gabriel told Joseph to take the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ back to Jerusalem after Herod died. One of the Old Testament prophets, Hosea wrote the words of God about Jesus Christ's return to Jerusalem with the Virgin Mary and Joseph: *"Out of Egypt I called My Son."* (Hosea 11:1)

Conclusion: Lesson from the Story

- **Christians may be afflicted for the sake of God** - The Virgin Mary is the mother of God, the heavenly king. But because she gave birth to a King, she was exiled to Egypt for three and half years. But she never complained. Because of the exile, many who accepted them were blessed on their way, and she and her Son also blessed Egypt, and also Ethiopia during their exile. We should also learn to do the best we can in time of hardship, because God can bring us out of it. There may be times when one suffers for being truthful. But the ultimate reward of truth is always good. That is why Jesus Christ taught us to *"love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven."* (Matthew 5:44-45)
- **Desire for power is dangerous** - Herod could not think of doing good, because all he was concerned about was his power as a king. Thus, when he heard of the birth of another King, he killed 14000 children hoping that one of them would be the new- born King. Any material or worldly desire is just as dangerous as a desire for power. People who have a desire to live in a state of vanity get in bad habits such as drinking and drugs. People who have an unchecked desire for material things may develop dishonest habits to get what they want. Some crimes are a result of a strong desire for materialism, drugs and alcohol. Some go to the extent of hurting others due to a strong desire to be famous. For instance, there was a US ice skater, who hired people to hurt her competitor so that she could easily be a champion.

Questions & Exercise

1. *On which book of the Bible do we find a reference of the Virgin Mary's plight to Egypt?*

2. *Why was she exiled to Egypt?*

3. *Who told Joseph to take the Virgin Mary and her Son to Egypt?*

4. *Give an example of a material or worldly desire that may lead one to be dishonest, or to hurt others.*

5. *Do you think strong desire is always bad? Explain.*

St. Michael

Objective: Learn about the role of St. Michael as protector and defender of God's people

Memory Verse: *"The Angel of the Lord encamps all around who fear him, and delivers them." (Psalm 34:7)*

References: *Exodus, Miracles of St. Michael*

Introduction

There are nine hierarchies of angels, and seven Archangels among the heavenly hosts. We will learn the names of the hosts of angels and the archangels in the future, but today, we are going to learn about St. Michael, who is one of the seven archangels, and the highest ranking of the heavenly hosts.

The Lesson

Michael means, "Who is Like God". He is the archangel who defeated Satan and cast him out of heaven when he claimed to be the creator. The apostle John describes the battle in heaven as follows:

"And war broke out in heave. Michael and his angels fought with the dragon and the dragon and his angles fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon, was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world, he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him." Rev. 12:7-9

St. Michael has helped Israel on their journey from Egypt to Jerusalem. He is the archangel of whom God said to Moses, *"Behold, I send an Angel before you, to keep you in the way, and to bring you into the place which I have prepared" (Exodus 23:20)*. The Ethiopian Orthodox church celebrates the archangel's protection and guidance of the children of Israel out of Egypt, on the 12th day of the Ethiopian month, *Hedar*. St. Michael helped the Israelites cross the Red Sea River. He also helped them in other battles in their journey. He once appeared to Joshua, the successor of Moses and said, *"... as commander of the Army of God, I have now come."* to let him know that he was always there to help them. *(Joshua 5:13)*

Once upon a time, the Israelites were exiled in Persia, and a prophet called Daniel was also exiled. St. Michael came to help him when he was in Persia praying for the return of the Jews to Jerusalem. Daniel describes the event as follows:

"... And behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me for I had been left alone there with the Kings of Persia." Dan 10:13

St. Michael is the great protector of the people of God. On the book of the prophet Daniel, it is written, *"At that time shall Michael rise up, the great prince, who stands for the children of your people". (Daniel 12:1)*

Conclusion: Lesson from the Story

- **Angels are messengers of God:** God sends his angels to help us, guide us and protect us. That is what we learn from the story of the journey of the Israelites from Egypt, the land of bondage, to Jerusalem - the land of freedom.
- **Angels care for the people of God:** Angels accompany us in times of loneliness, and pray on our behalf. It was in his time of loneliness the Archangel Michael came to help Daniel. But it is important to remember that the archangel came when Daniel was praying.
- **Lying may cost us what we have:** Satan was the highest - ranking angel when created, but he lied to the hosts of angels and said that he created them all. Thus he brought condemnation upon himself and the angels who followed him, and they were all cast out of heaven. We should be grateful to God's gifts, and should not seek vain glorification in front of men. Lying and deceit may cost us the good that we have. Therefore we should always be grateful for what we have, and be honest in our daily life to improve ourselves, and our spiritual life.

Questions & Exercise

1. *On which book of the New Testament do you find the story of the "war in heaven"?*

2. *What was the cause of the war?*

3. *Who is the prophet whom the Archangel Michael helped during his moments of loneliness?*

4. *God's are messengers of God. Can you write two instances that show this from the Bible?*

5. *There are two icons of the Archangel St. Michael inside the church that represent two events described in this lesson. Identify these icons and write which event each icon represents.*

Moses on the Mountain of God

Objective: Learn the benefits of spiritual curiosity, humbleness, and obedience to God.

Memory Verse: *"I will now turn aside and see this great sight." (Genesis 3:3)*

References: Exodus 3

Introduction

Do you remember how the Israelites settled in Egypt, and how Moses led them out of Egypt with the mighty hand of the Almighty God? ... Today, we are going to learn how God called Moses and sent him back to Egypt to free His people, and the circumstances around the time of his calling.

The Lesson

Moses used to tend the flock of his father in law, **Jethro**, after he fled from Pharaoh in Egypt. Once upon a time, while keeping the flocks near a mountain called **Mountain of God**, Moses saw something amazing. At the top of the mountain, he saw **a flame of fire in the midst of a bush**, but the fire was not consuming the bush. So, Moses was curious to find out what was happening, and he said, *"I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn."*

When Moses came near, God called Him from the midst of the bush and said, *"Moses, Moses!"* And Moses replied, *"Here I am"*. The God said, *"Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet for the place where you stand is holy ground ... I am the God of your father - the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob ... I have seen the oppression of My people, who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry ... So I have come down to deliver them ... I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring, My people, the children of Israel out of Egypt."*

When Moses heard this, he said, *"Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?"* God told him that he would be with him, and would give him a sign. He told him that he would give him the words that he should speak, and plague Egypt with His mighty hands until Pharaoh lets the children of Israel go free. So, Moses went back to Pharaoh, and led the Israelites out of Egypt with the mighty hand of God.

Conclusion: Lesson from the Story

- **Spiritual curiosity draws us closer to God:** The curiosity of an amazing sight was what led Moses to go to the top of the mountain, and talk to God for the first time. We need this kind of curiosity in our church to know God, and come near him. God may not speak to us in the way that He talked to Moses, but He speaks to us through the holy icons, the saints, the worship, the incense ... If we develop the spiritual curiosity to find out about these, we come to know more about God, and get closer to him, as we come to know him.
- **God fulfills the desire of the humble** - Moses was very humble in front of God. When God told him that He would send him to Pharaoh to free the children of Israel, Moses humbly said, *"Who am I that I should go?"* But God said to him, He would be with him. Moses humbly tended the flock of his father in law. He was doing the same when he saw the burning bush. When Moses was growing in the house of Pharaoh, he had a burning desire for the freedom of the children of Israel. Because of his humbleness, God fulfilled his desire through Moses himself. That is why King David in his Psalm said, *"Lord, You have heard the desire of the humble." (Psalm 10:17)*
- **God is proud of the righteous:** God is proud of the holy. That is why he mentioned the holy forefathers of the children of Israel when he introduced himself to Moses: He said, *"I am the God of your father - the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."* It is because of this that we call upon the saints, that God may forgive us for their sake. During the Israelites journey to Egypt, God's wrath burned against the Israelites because of their constant sin, and wanted to destroy them, but Moses pleaded with God, to remember the covenant he had made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. So, God forgave the people for the sake of His saints.

Questions & Exercise

1. *On which book do we find the story of today's lesson, in the Old or the New Testament?*

2. *Why did Moses leave the house of Pharaoh? Do you remember how he came to grow up in Pharaoh's house?*

3. *What was Moses response when God told him that He would send him to Egypt to free the children of Israel?*

4. *Why were the people called "the children of Israel"?*

5. *What do you learn about how we should stand in a holy place from this story?*

6. *Is there anything that you are curious about in the church, any icon or the different ceremonies in our worship?*

Angels

Objective: Learn the nature and roles of angels

Memory Verse: *"The angel of the Lord encamps all around who fear him, and delivers them." (Ps 34:7)*

References: *Old Testament, New Testament*

Introduction

Angels are spirits created in heaven on the first day of creation. They are countless in number. In this lesson, we are going to learn about the story of the angels on creation day, and the role of angels in our lives.

The Lesson

The word angels came from the Greek word "angelos" which means messengers. They are created on the first day of creation on a Sunday.

After God created the angels in heaven, they started asking themselves who created them. Seeing no one above him, Satnael, the highest-ranking angel of all the celestial hosts (angels) told all the angels that he had created them. This created a division among the angels. The Archangel Gabriel calmed the other angels by saying, *"Let us stay where we stand till we find our Creator"*. But some angels followed Satnael as their creator. This resulted in a battle among the angels in heaven. The apostle John describes this in the book of Revelation as follows:

*"And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which **deceives** the whole **world**: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him." Rev. 12:7-9*

There are nine celestial hierarchies of the holy angels. These are:

- | | | |
|-------------|-------------------|---------------|
| 1. Cherubim | 4. Powers | 7. Dominions |
| 2. Seraphim | 5. Authorities | 8. Archangels |
| 3. Thrones | 6. Principalities | 9. Angels |

These celestial hierarchies of the heavenly hosts are commonly called angels. Angels have different responsibilities and roles.

1. **Angels worship God in heaven:** The primary role of angels is worshipping God. They worship him without rest. We can learn this from the following passages of the Holy Bible:

*"And the four beasts had each of them **six wings** about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, LORD God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come."*

*"And when those beasts give glory and honor and thanks to Him that sat on the throne, who lives forever and ever, The four and twenty elders fall down before Him that sat on the throne, and worship him that lives for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, You art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast **created** all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." Rev. 4:8-11*

2. **Angels help human beings:** Angels are also our helpers. The apostle Paul wrote; *"Are they not all ministering spirits for those who will inherit salvation?"* The angel of the Lord helped the Apostle Peter to get out of prison. (Acts 12:6-17). Angels helped Lot get out of Sodom and Gomorrah before God burned down the cities due to the grave sins of the people. (Genesis 19:12-22).

3. **Angels deliver us from hardships in our spiritual life:** Angels keep us safe from hardships in our spiritual life. That is why King David said:

"The angel of the Lord encamps all around who fear him, and delivers them. (Ps 34:7)

4. **Angels protect us and keep us safe:** The Lord God said to Moses, *"I will send an angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared."* An angel of the Lord thus protected them on their way from Egypt to Jerusalem, the land that God promised them to inherit. Each of us also has guardian angels, who pray for us. Jesus Christ said, *"Take heed (be careful) that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in the heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven."* Mathew 18:10

5. **Angels also punish those who do not obey God's commandments:** God said to Moses, *"Beware of him (an angel of the Lord) and obey his voice. Do not provoke him, for he will not pardon (forgive) your transgressions (disobedience)."* Exodus 23:21. God sent angels to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because of the people's sin. The archangel Gabriel made Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist, dumb because he would not believe his word, which he brought from God about the birth of John the Baptist.
6. **Angels bring good news to us from God:** The Archangel Gabriel announced to the Virgin Mary that she would conceive and give birth to Jesus Christ. It was also angels who told the shepherds that Christ was born. They sang *"Glory to God in the highest, and peace to His people on earth."* at the time of Christ's birth. When Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, angels of the Lord told the apostles that He would come in the same way as they saw Him go up to heaven.
7. **Angels present our prayers to God:** The following verse from the Book of Revelations shows that angels present our prayer's to God.
"Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar, which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand." Rev 8:4-5

Conclusion: Lesson from the Story

- Angels are spirits created on the first day of creation. Some of the angels fell from grace due to Satnael's false claim that he had created them. War broke out in heaven because of this, and Satnael and his angels were cast out of heaven.
- There are nine hierarchies of the holy angels. These angels worship God, help and protect us in our lives, and bring messages and good news to us from God, and also take our prayers to God.

Questions & Exercise

1. *On which book of the Bible do we find the story of creation?*

2. *When were the angels created?*

3. *Why was there a division among the angels in heaven after they were created?*

4. *What happened to Satnael and the angels that followed him?*

5. *Write three roles of angels:*

Virgin Mary

Objective: Learn about the Virgin Mary and why we venerate her.

Memory Verse: *"All generations will call me blessed."* (Luke 1:48)

References: Ezekiel 44, Luke 1

Introduction

The Virgin Mary is the mother of Jesus Christ. She is also the mother of God, because Jesus Christ is God. She was a Virgin before she gave birth to Jesus Christ, and she remained a Virgin after giving birth to Him the rest of her life. God revealed this mystery to the prophet Ezekiel: *"Then He brought me 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.'"* (Ezekiel 44:1-2) Next we are going to learn more about the Virgin Mary and why we venerate and praise her.

The Lesson

The Virgin Mary was born of righteous husband and wife, **Hanna (Anna) and Eyakem (Eliakem)**. Her parent's promised to dedicate her to God's service if God gave them a child. When she was three years old, they brought her to the Temple of God according to their promise. The prophet David spoke of this by saying, *"O daughter, consider and incline your ear; Forget your own people also, and your father's house; for the King desires your beauty."* (Psalm 45:10). David calls her "daughter" because she is his descendant. "The King desires your beauty" means, He loves the beauty of your holiness in body and in thought. She was fed by angels in the temple, and she lived in the temple serving God and praying.

When she was 15 years old, she was engaged to a man named Joseph; but she was not engaged to him for marriage. Joseph was an old man, and he was related to her. She was engaged to him so that he could keep her and protect her. As we have seen in the words of God to Ezekiel, she would remain a virgin all the days of her life. It is the archangel Gabriel, who announced to her that she would conceive and give birth to Jesus Christ. He greeted her by saying: *"Rejoice full of grace, for the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women."* (Luke 1:28)

After the **Annunciation**, the Virgin Mary went to visit her relative, Elizabeth. **Elizabeth** was the mother of John the Baptist. When the Virgin Mary visited her, Elizabeth was pregnant. When she heard the voice of the Virgin Mary, she was filled with the Holy Spirit and the child (John the Baptist) in her womb leaped with joy. Elizabeth said to Mary, *"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the Fruit of your womb, why is it granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"* (Luke 1:41-42)

The Virgin Mary was very humble, God chose her to be His mother because of her absolute purity. She knew that God has chosen her to be a cause of salvation, and that the faithful would praise her for this. She said, *"Behold, from now on, all generations shall call me blessed, for He, who is mighty has done great things for me."* (Luke 1:48-49)

Jesus performed the first miracle recorded in the New Testament at the request of the Virgin Mary. Jesus, the Virgin Mary and the disciples were called to a wedding in a place called **Cana of Galilee**. The host of the wedding ran out of wine, and seeing their problem, the Virgin Mary told Jesus Christ that they were out of wine. Then she told the servants to do whatever He told them. Jesus told the servants to fill the pots they have with water, and they did. Then he told them to serve the guests from the pot, and when they did, fresh wine came out of each pot.

When Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross, the Virgin Mary was under the cross with John the disciple. Our Lord Jesus told her not to cry, and said to her, *"Behold your child"*, and He said to John, *"Behold your mother."* John received the Virgin Mary as his mother on our behalf, and he became her child on our behalf.

Conclusion: Lesson from the Story

- **We learned praising the Virgin Mary from angels and saints:** In the lesson above, we see that the Archangel Gabriel praised her saying, *"Rejoice, O full of grace; the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women."* Elizabeth also praised her saying, *"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the Fruit of your womb"* So, we learn that it is angelic to praise the Virgin Mary. When we praise her like the Archangel Gabriel, and Elizabeth - the mother of John the Baptist, we are joining them in praising her. The Archangel Gabriel praised her, when God sent him to for the Annunciation, and Elizabeth praised her when she was filled with the Holy Spirit.
- **The Virgin Mary is the mother of God:** - The Virgin Mary is the mother of God, because Jesus Christ is God. That is why Elizabeth called her *"Mother of my Lord."*

Questions & Exercise

1. *On which book of the Bible do we find the passage about the ever-virginity of the Virgin Mary?*

2. *On which book of the Bible do we find the Annunciation of the Archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary?*

3. *Who did we learn from, to praise the Virgin Mary?*

4. *Why do we call the Virgin Mary "Mother of God"?*

5. *What was the first Miracle Jesus did in the New Testament, at the request of the Virgin Mary? Where?*

6. *For the next period, write a description of one of the icons of the Virgin Mary inside the church.*

Intercession

Objective: Learn about the intercession of saints

Memory Verse: *"God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them." (Hebrews 11:16)*

References: Matthew 10:43; Revelation 5:8; 8:3-4, John 2:1-10

Introduction

Intercession is the prayer angels and saints offer to God on our behalf. Our prayers to God become stronger, when we ask for angels and saints to pray for us. We have seen in the lesson on "Angels", that angels present our prayers to God (**Rev. 8:3-4**). We have also seen how the Virgin Mary interceded for the wedding hosts at Cana of Galilee. In this lesson, we are going to see how God favors the prayers of the righteous, and how they intercede for us.

The Lesson

- Angels pray for us in front of God. St. Paul wrote *"Are they not ministering spirits for those who will inherit Salvation" (Hebrews 1:14)*. Do you remember how St. Michael helped the Israelites in their exodus from Egypt to Jerusalem?
- Righteous people intercede on earth, and also in paradise. Once upon a time, **Abraham** went to a place called Gerar with his wife **Sarah**. The king of Gerar, not knowing that Sarah was Abraham's wife, wanted to have her. But God warned him in a dream and told him to return Sarah to her Abraham. Moreover, He told the king that Abraham would pray for him, so that He would live. And as God said, Abraham prayed for the king, Abimelech, and God forgave him through Abraham's prayer (intercession). (**Genesis 20**)
- Saints like Abraham and Moses also intercede for us in paradise after they pass away, because a person doesn't stop to exist when he dies.
- When a person dies the soul leaves the body and goes to paradise if they are holy. Jesus Christ said to the robber who was crucified on His right side, *"Today you will be with me in paradise."* when the robber asked Him to remember him when He comes in His kingdom (**Luke 23:43**). This passage indicates that the righteous go to paradise when they die, and they become closer to God than when they were on earth.
- God says, *"I have made a covenant with My chosen."*(**Psalms 89:3**) This is a covenant of mercy He has made with the righteous. He made a covenant with Abraham to give Canaan for His descendants. Likewise, He makes a covenant of mercy with other saints, to forgive our sins when we ask for their intercession in our prayers, and also when we help the needy in their name. Jesus Christ said, *"Whoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no way lose his reward."* (**Matthew 10:42**)

Conclusion:

- Angels and saints pray and intercede for us. Saints who passed away, are alive in their soul in paradise, and they are closer to God, than to us. They hear our prayers, and present our prayers to God. They also receive covenants of mercy from God. God made a covenant with Abraham to let his descendants inherit Canaan. Before Abraham, He made a covenant with Noah never to destroy the earth with water because of people's sin again. He made a covenant with David, to preserve His throne during the reign of his son, Solomon. Even though Solomon turned away from God and made a worship place of idols for his Egyptian wife, God did not destroy his throne, because of the covenant He made with David. Likewise, God makes covenants of mercy with His saints, and we benefit from the covenants they received through our prayer, asking them to intercede for us - in addition to praying to God.

Questions & Exercise

1. *What is intercession?*

2. *Who can intercede on our behalf?*

3. *When a person dies, does he/she stop to exist?*

4. *What did Jesus Christ say to the robber crucified on His right, when the robber asked Him to remember him in His kingdom?*

5. *What kind of covenant does God make with His saints to forgive us of our sins?*

6. *Do you have a favorite angel or saint? Who?*

7. *What do we have to do to benefit from the intercession of saints for us, and the covenant of mercy God made with them?*

Annunciation

Objective: Learn about the fulfillment of God's promise.

Memory Verse: *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head." Genesis 3:15*

References: Genesis 3; Luke 1

Introduction

Do you remember what God promised Adam and Eve, after their fall? He promised to be born of a woman, bruise the serpent's (the devil's) head, and save them from death. Today, we are going to learn about the annunciation of His coming to "the woman", the Virgin Mary, from whom He would be born.

The Lesson

- The woman God mentioned in the memory verse above is the Virgin Mary, and the woman's Seed is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
- *Do you remember who came to the Virgin Mary to announce that she would conceive and give birth to a Son? ... The Archangel Gabriel is the one chosen for the annunciation. St. Gabriel received this honor because of his role in calming the heavenly hosts when Lucifer (Satan), the fallen angel, declared that he created all the angels. The Archangel Gabriel calmed the heavenly hosts by telling the angels to stay still until they found their Creator. When God revealed Himself to the angels, He gave St. Gabriel the responsibility of the annunciation.*
- Before St. Gabriel came to the Virgin Mary for the annunciation, he went to a priest called Zachariah. Zachariah was married to a woman named Elizabeth. They lived a long time without a child, and Elizabeth was passed the age of child bearing. St. Gabriel came to Zachariah in the temple and he told him that Elizabeth would bear a son, whose name would be called John. Zachariah replied, *"But how shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced."* Then Gabriel said, *"I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. But behold you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place because you did not believe my words."*(Luke 1:18-20)
- Six months after the angel's annunciation to Zachariah, God sent him to the Virgin Mary to announce the coming of the promise He made to Adam and Eve on the day they sinned. The archangel came in and greeted her with words never before accorded to anyone: *"Rejoice, full of grace; the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women."* (Luke 1:28). The Virgin Mary was surprised at this manner of greeting.
- The archangel Gabriel told her that she would conceive and give birth to a Son, who would be called Son of the Highest. But the Virgin Mary dedicated her life to God, and did not understand how she would conceive. But the archangel Gabriel said to her, *"the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also the Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God."*(Luke 1:35) He also told her that Elizabeth, who was considered barren, conceived at an old age, for nothing is impossible with God. The Virgin Mary humbly replied, *"Let it be to me according to your word."*
- A few days after this, the Virgin Mary went to visit her relative Elizabeth, and Elizabeth praised her for her belief of what the angel Gabriel told her, for she believed what was impossible, knowing that nothing is impossible with God. Elizabeth said, *"Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told to her from the Lord."* (Luke 1:45). The Virgin Mary praised God for the great mystery He fulfilled through her. (*Read the prayer of the Virgin Mary on Luke 1:46-55*)

Conclusion:

- God bestows great responsibilities on us when we stand still in the faith of our fathers. The Archangel Gabriel received the honor of announcing the Lord's birth to the Virgin Mary because of his leading role, declaring to the angels to remain where they were until they found their Creator.
- The Virgin Mary humbly and faithfully believed the words of the archangel Gabriel. In our prayer, we salute the Virgin Mary in the words of the archangel, words never before, and after could be said to any creature: *"Rejoice full of grace, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women."* She was chosen to be the mother of God, but she humbled herself to visit Elizabeth. We can also see her humble and faithful nature in her prayer at Elizabeth's. Because of her humbleness, and spiritual and physical purity, God fulfilled His promise to Adam and Eve through her.

Questions & Exercise

1. *What was the promise God gave Adam and Eve, which was fulfilled through the Virgin Mary?*

2. *Why did God choose the Archangel Gabriel to announce His birth from the Virgin Mary?*

3. *Whose birth did the archangel Gabriel announce, before he was sent to the Virgin Mary for the Annunciation?*

4. *What was Zachariah's response to the Archangel's announcement that his wife, Elizabeth, would bear a child at an old age?*

5. *What happened to Zachariah because of his doubt?*

6. *How did the archangel Gabriel greet the Virgin Mary?*

The Everlasting Gift on Christmas

Objective: Learn about the fulfillment of God's promise.

Memory Verse: *"Behold a Virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His name Emmanuel." Isaiah 7:14*

References: Matthew 1 & 2

Introduction

About 2000 years ago, on January 7th (Tahsas 29 of the Ethiopian month), a King the world has never seen before was born in a manger, in a small village called **Bethlehem** in the land of Judea. Several hundreds of years before this day, a prophet called Micah said, *"But you Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler Who will Shepherd My people Israel."* (Micah 5:2)

Nine months before this day, as we have seen in the previous lesson, the Archangel Gabriel appeared to St. Mary, and said to her *"Rejoice full of grace, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among all women ... Do not be afraid for you have found favor with God. And behold you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Highest."*

In today's lesson, we are going to see the events of the fulfillment of the prophecy, and the Annunciation.

The Lesson

After the Virgin Mary conceived a Child in her womb, there was a decree from **Caesar Augustus** (the Roman Emperor) to register the people in their city of origin. So all went to their own city to register. Joseph, to whom Mary was betrothed for protection, also went from Galilee to Bethlehem - the city of David in Judea - with the Virgin Mary, because he was of the House of David. While they were in Bethlehem, Mary was ready to deliver the Child. But they could not find a place. So, she delivered a Son in a manger, and wrapped Him in cloths.

At the same time, an angel of the Lord stood before shepherds keeping watch over their flock. They were greatly afraid, for a great light shined over them. Then the angel said to them,

"Do not be afraid for I will bring you good news of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you. You will find a Baby wrapped in cloths, lying in a manger."

And suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts praising God and saying: *"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and goodwill toward His people!"* And when the angels had gone away, the shepherds went to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the Baby lying in the manger as the angel had told them. And they returned glorifying and praising God for what they had heard and seen.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem, in the days of Herod the king, three wise men came from the East following a star to worship Him. Herod told them to come back when they find him so that he might worship him.

The star, which they had been following, stopped over where Mary and Joseph were with the Child. When they came inside and saw the Child with Mary his mother, they worshiped Him, and presented gifts to Him. They gave him gold, frankincense and myrrh. Then an angel of the Lord warned them not to return to Herod for he wanted to kill the Child, and they departed to their country another way.

The Child was called Jesus for he was the Savior, and Emanuel, which meant God is with us, for He truly was with us for everyone to see Him and receive Him, and believe in Him.

Conclusion:

The three wise men presented gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to Jesus Christ when He was born. But we have received far greater gifts than we can ever give Him:

1. We received the grace of **childhood**.

"For all those who received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name." John 1:12

2. Freedom

"Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage." Gal 5:1

3. Love

"And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in Him" 1John 4:16

4. Peace

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and goodwill toward His people!" Luke 2:14

5. Everlasting Life

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live" John 11:25

Questions & Exercise

1. *On What day was Jesus Christ born and in what city?*

2. *In what location specifically was Jesus Christ born? Why?*

3. *Whose birth did the archangel Gabriel announce, before he was sent to the Virgin Mary for the Annunciation?*

4. *Who announced the birth of Jesus Christ to angels?*

5. *What did the angels hear after they heard of Christ's birth from the angel?*

6. *Write three gifts we received upon the birth of Jesus Christ.*

The Three wise men & Their Gifts

Objective: Learn about the spirituality of the Gift the wise men

Memory Verse: *"When they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts, gold and frankincense, and myrrh." Matthew 2:11*

References: Matthew 2:1-12

Introduction

After the Nativity of Jesus Christ, we have seen that three kings visited Him, and gave Him presents. We are going to learn about the gifts, the symbolic meaning of each gift, and the gift we can give our Lord Jesus Christ today.

The Lesson

Three wise men from the East learned of the birth of Jesus Christ from a star. They learned from their forefathers that they would see a star with an image of the Nativity when the Savior comes. When they came to Jerusalem, following this star, they went to King Herod and asked, *"Where is He, that is born King of the Jews, for we have seen His star in the East, and came to worship Him."* Herod was troubled at the news, because He thought that Jesus Christ was an earthly king who came to take his throne. So, he gathered the chief priests and asked them of any prophecy about the Nativity. They told him that according to the prophecy, He would be born in Bethlehem.

Herod told the three wise men that He was born in Bethlehem, and told them to come and tell him when they found Him, so that He could worship the new born King too. But his intention was to kill the Child.

The three kings went to Bethlehem, and found Jesus Christ with the Virgin Mary and Joseph. They each had gifts with them, and opened their treasures and presented Him their gifts: **gold, frankincense, and myrrh.**

- Gold was a precious gift presented to kings as gifts. Because Jesus Christ is King of heaven and earth, they brought Him a gift of Gold.
- Frankincense is a material made of different natural extracts, and produces a pleasant aroma when smoked. It is used in angelic worship. (*Revelation 5:18*). They brought Him this gift because He is truly God the Son, Who is worshipped by the angels, and revealed Himself to us - partaking our nature for our salvation.
- Myrrh is made of a plant found in Ethiopia. It is very sour. This is one of the sour materials Jesus was given on the cross to drink when He said that He was thirsty. Because of this, and because He would die a bitter death for our sake, they gave him myrrh as a symbolic gift.

After they presented their gifts to Jesus Christ, an angel told them not to return to Herod, he told them to go another way. So, they went back another way. When Herod learned of this, he gathered all the children who were two years old and younger, and killed fourteen thousand children. Joseph and the Virgin Mary went to Egypt with Jesus Christ, and stayed there for three years, until the death of Herod.

Conclusion:

- The three kings brought Jesus Christ precious and symbolic gifts. Today, we exchange gifts on Christmas with each other, but often forget about the gift we received, and also the gift we need to give Jesus Christ.
- The gift Jesus Christ wants from us is:
 - A pure heart like the pure gold of the wise men's gift.
 - A pleasant prayer of thanksgiving, and supplication like the wise men's frankincense, which had a pleasant aroma.
 - We may taste bitter experiences, as Christ tasted bitter mixtures of myrrh with the drink the Jews gave Him. But he wants us to offer Him ourselves, despite the bitter struggle and experience, for if we persevere for a while, He will give us an everlasting rest in His kingdom.
 - We also should remember to give gifts to the needy, not just on Christmas, but always, for a gift to the poor, is like a gift to Jesus Christ. *Matthew 25:34-40*

Questions & Exercise

1. *From Where did the three wise men (kings) came to Jerusalem?*

2. *How did they learn about the birth of a King, Jesus Christ?*

3. *What did Herod tell the three wise men, before they headed to Bethlehem? Why?*

4. *What gifts did the wise men bring to Jesus Christ?*

5. *Write the reasons they brought the gifts they offered to Jesus Christ.*

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

6. *Did the three kings return to Herod after they presented their gifts and worshipped Jesus Christ? Why?*

7. *Can we give Jesus Christ gifts today? How?*

Epiphany

Objective: Learn about the Baptism of Jesus Christ, and the purpose of His Baptism

Memory Verse: *"I indeed baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry, He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." Matthew 3:11*

References: Matthew 3; Mark 1; Luke 3:21-23; John 1:29-34

Introduction

Jesus Christ returned to Jerusalem from Egypt with the Virgin Mary and Joseph after the death of Herod. Before He started His ministry, there was a man by the name of John who preached of repentance. He was the son of the priest Zachariah and Elizabeth. He told the people, *"I indeed baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry, He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."* When the Jews scholars asked John who he was, he told them that he was *"the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord."* He was preparing the people to repent and receive Jesus Christ. We are going to learn today about the Baptism of Jesus Christ by, John the Baptist, before He begin His ministry.

The Lesson

When Jesus was 30 years old, He went to the Jordan River from Galilee to be baptized by John. But John tried to prevent Him saying he is the one who needed to be baptized by Jesus. But Jesus said, *"Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."* Thus John baptized Jesus Christ.

When Jesus came from the water, the heavens were opened:

1. The Spirit of God descended upon Him like a dove.
2. And a voice came from heaven saying, *"This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased."*

On the day Jesus Christ was baptized, God was manifested in His three persons. God the Father was manifested in heaven testifying about His Son, Jesus Christ. The Son was manifested in the Jordan River being baptized, and receiving the testimony of the Father, and the Holy Spirit was manifested as a dove coming upon the Son. Thus Jesus Christ started His ministry with manifestation of His Divinity. This was one of the reasons He was baptized: to reveal Himself, the Father and the Holy Spirit to the world. The other reason for His baptism is to set an example for us to be baptized, and to fulfill the prophecies.

We celebrate the baptism of Jesus Christ on the 11th of the Ethiopian month *Tir* (January 19). It is called Timket, which means Baptism. In the west this holiday is known as Epiphany, which means manifestation or Revelation for His baptism was followed by the manifestation of the Holy Trinity.

Conclusion: Lessons from the Baptism of Jesus Christ

- **Repentance:** John the Baptist was telling the people, *"Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand"*. Repentance is a sincere regret for the sins we have made and a determination to turn away from sin and turn to a life of righteousness in Jesus Christ.
- **Humbleness:** Jesus Christ is greater than John as John himself testified. He is creator of heaven and earth. But He went to John to be baptized instead of having John come to Him, to teach us humbleness. That is what Jesus Christ meant when He said, *"... it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."* We learn humbleness from Jesus Christ, and obedience from John, for John obeyed His Lord. Obedience and Humbleness are virtues that lead to righteousness.
- **Teaching by example:** Jesus Christ did not teach us just by words. But He taught us in words and in deeds to teach us by example. Thus He is teaching us to teach others also by being good examples in our daily life.
- **Epiphany:** means manifestation or revelation. It refers to the manifestation of the Holy Trinity. Jesus said to John, *"... it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness"* also about the fulfillment of this manifestation of the Holy Trinity: The father speaking from Heaven, the Son (Jesus Christ) coming out of the water, and the Holy Spirit descending upon the Son in the form of a dove.

Questions & Exercise

1. *Who are the father and mother of John the Baptist?*

2. *Why was John baptizing?*

3. *How old was Jesus Christ when He was baptized?*

4. *Where was He baptized?*

5. *Was John willing to baptize Jesus Christ at first? Why?*

6. *What happened when Jesus Christ came out of the water after being baptized?*

7. *Why was Jesus Christ baptized?*

8. *When do we celebrate Epiphany? Why is this celebration called Epiphany?*

Jesus' Temptation by Satan

Objective: Learn how to overcome temptations, from the Temptation of Jesus Christ by Satan

Memory Verse: *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God"*
Matthew 4:4

References: Matthew 4

Introduction

After Jesus Christ was baptized, he went into the wilderness for fasting and was tempted by the Devil. The Devil is a master of deception. *Do you remember how he deceived Adam and Eve?* ... In this lesson, we are going to learn about how the Devil tempted Jesus Christ in the wilderness, and How Jesus Christ overcame the temptations.

The Lesson

Jesus fasted for 40 days and 40 nights in a wilderness right after His baptism.

- When He was hungry, Satan came and said, *"If you are the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread."* But Jesus Christ replied, *"It is written man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God."*
- The devil came a second time and said, *"If you are the Son of God, cast Yourself down for it is written: He shall give his angels charge concerning You, and in their hands they shall bear you up, lest at any time You dash Your food against a stone."* But Jesus Christ replied, *"It is written again, You shall not tempt the Lord Your God."*
- A third time, the Devil took Him to a high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and said, *"All these things I will give You, if You will fall down and worship me."* Then Jesus said, *"Get thee hence, Satan; for it is written you shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve."*
- The devil was defeated in all his temptations, and he left Him.

Conclusion: Lessons from the story

- **The devil tempted Adam and Eve with food**, and they couldn't overcome the temptation. But **Jesus Christ overcame the temptation of hunger and defeated the devil.**
- **Adam and Eve tempted God** by eating from the forbidden fruit, but Jesus Christ defeated Satan by pointing out that **it is not proper to tempt the Lord.**
- **Adam and Eve could not overcome the temptation** of the beauty and attractiveness of the forbidden fruit. But **Jesus Christ overcame the temptation of the glory of the world's Kingdom, and cast Satan away from Him.** Thus Jesus made restitutions for the transgressions of Adam and Eve.
- We can learn from the story that **Satan is a relentless tempter.** That is why he kept coming with different temptations. But, Jesus Christ showed us that he can be defeated if we live according to the word of God. Since he never stops to tempt and deceive us, we should always be steadfast and alert in our spiritual life.
- The devil tempts and tries to deceive us when we are most vulnerable. It was when Jesus Christ was hungry that he came and tempted Him with food. Likewise, he tries to get us when we are in difficulty. He tries to deceive us when we have a difficulty by drawing away our attention away from concentrating on going to church, fasting, praying, humbling our selves, helping others ... Therefore we always need to turn to God, and seek His guidance in all our lives.
- Sometimes, the devil may twist the meaning of the scriptures so that we may not have proper understanding. When he tempted Jesus Christ the second time, he quoted a verse from the book of Psalm 90. The reason that we have so much division among Christians in the world is because of this work of the Devil. We need to learn the Scripture and the meaning of the Scriptures according to the traditions and interpretations of our forefathers who wrote and interpreted them by the light of the Holy Spirit.

Questions & Exercise

1. *What did Jesus Christ do right after His baptism?*

2. *How did the devil tempt Jesus Christ three times?*

3. *Why did the devil tempt Jesus with food first?*

4. *How did the devil deceive Adam and Eve?*

5. *When does the devil usually try to tempt and deceive us?*

6. *What happened when Jesus Christ came out of the water after being baptized?*

7. *How many days and nights did Jesus Christ fast in the wilderness? Do you remember anyone who fasted the same days and nights from the Old Testament?*

Jonah

Objective: Learn to obey God, and to repent in prayer and fasting for our sins.

Memory Verse: *“I cried out to the Lord because of my affliction, and He answered me” (Jonah 2:1)*

References: Book of Jonah

Introduction

A long time elapsed during which men kept away from God and people committed so many sins that they forgot God their Lord, but God did not forget them at all. He was always near them because He desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. It was not possible for God to come closer to men in a direct way as men invented gods for themselves and their idea about God was deformed. So the Lord sent prophets to the children of Israel whom He had chosen to send to the other nations to let them know His holy name.

The Lesson

Jonah was a prophet sent by God to tell the people of **Nineveh** the looming disaster God was about to bring on the city for their wickedness. But Jonah went on a ship to go away from Nineveh to flee from God. God sent a great wind on the sea, and the people on the ship were afraid for their life. Jonah was asleep when all this was happening in the lowest part of the ship. The captain of the ship woke him up and told him to pray to his God, so that they may not perish. The sailors believed that this was happening to them because of someone's sin, and they agreed to cast a lot to find out for whose cause this trouble has come upon them. The lot fell on Jonah. They asked him what he did, and he told them how he tried to flee from the presence of God, and told them that the sea would be calm if they throw him into the sea. They tried to get to dry land, but the wind became stronger. So, they prayed to God not to charge them with innocent blood, and threw Jonah into the sea. The wind stopped as soon as they did this.

God prepared a big fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the fish's belly for three days and three nights. Jonah then prayed to the Lord from the belly of the fish, and God answered him. He ordered the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land. The Lord God told Jonah again to go to Nineveh and tell the people that in 40 days, Nineveh shall be destroyed for their sins.

When the people heard this, they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth. The king of Nineveh arose from his throne, covered himself with sack cloth and sat in ashes, and made a decree for all men and women, including children, and even all animals to fast for three days, and for everybody to turn from their evil ways, and cry out to the Lord. When God saw their supplication and their return from their evil ways, He forgave them, and did not bring upon them the disaster He warned to bring upon the city.

But Jonah was angry because God did not do according to what He told him to proclaim to the people of Nineveh. So, Jonah went out of the city, and sat under a shelter. God prepared a plant to shade for Jonah, and Jonah was very grateful for the plant. But, as morning came up, a worm damaged the plant, and it withered. Jonah was upset the plant withered and wished for his death. Then God said to him, "You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. And should I not pity Nineveh, a great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons.

Conclusion:

- God is merciful. He doesn't want people to perish. So, he sends His messages through prophets and teachers to warn us of the looming dangers of sin. Even when we sin, he gives us time to repent. He sent Jonah to the people of Nineveh about the punishment He was about to bring upon them. But because they repented, and returned from their sinful ways, He forgave their sins.
- When the people of Nineveh repented, their repentance was accompanied by prayer and fasting. The king proclaimed for everyone to fast, even children and animals. From this we learn that fasting hearkens God's heart, and brings his mercy.
- We cannot hide anywhere from God. We have to listen to His call and respond. Jonah tried to get away from God, but He couldn't. What God wants us to do, we have to do.

Questions & Exercise

1. *Why did Jonah try to get away from Nineveh?*

2. *What happened on the sea when Jonah tried to get away on a ship?*

3. *How many days did Jonah spend in the belly of the fish?*

4. *What did the people of Nineveh do when Jonah told them of what God commanded him to tell the people?*

5. *How did Jonah feel when God hearkened His heart and forgave the people of Nineveh?*

6. *What happened to the tree under which Jonah rested?*

7. *What did God tell Jonah, when Jonah felt angry because of the withering of the tree?*

8. *In which book of the Bible is the Book of Jonah? The New or the Old Testament?*

The Prodigal Son

Objective: Learn about God's love

Memory Verse: *"He was lost and is found" Luke 15:24*

References: Luke 15

Introduction

In this country young boys and girls usually can't wait to get out of their parent's house. But they may face unforeseen hardships when they get out. In this lesson, we are going to learn about what happened to a son, who left his father's house for the love of freedom and fun.

The Lesson

There was a rich man who had two sons. One day the youngest son said, *"Father, Give me my share."* The father agreed, and the young son took what was given to him and traveled to a far away country. He started wasting his money lavishly, because he had lots of money to spend. He entertained his new friends with the money he had. But gradually, all the money was gone and with his money also went away his friends.

With no money in his hands, the son was left to beg for his food; but he could not find food or work. Eventually, a pig farmer hired him to watch over his pigs. The son was so hungry that even the pig food looked good to him. As the son sat and watched the pigs eat, he thought, *"Why am I here, starving, with no money, when my father has servants who are better clothed and fed than I? I am going to go back to my father and beg him to forgive me. I will ask him if he will allow me to be one of his servants."*

So the son began the long journey back home. Soon he came into sight of his father's land. The father had been waiting for his son to come back home since the day he left. He saw his son coming back home from afar and he said, *"He's here, my son who was lost is now found"*. He ran to meet his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said, *"Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."* But the father was not angry. With a heart overflowing with forgiveness and love, he said to his servants, *"Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."* And they all celebrated the coming back of the son.

Conclusion:

- Prodigal means wasteful. The son, who took his share of inheritance and went to a far away place from his father, was left destitute and hungry because he was wasteful. That is why he is known as the prodigal son. Not only was he not wise in seeking to leave his father's house, but also was he wrong in being wasteful and extravagant.
- We all make mistakes in our life, but God is always ready to accept us if we return, as the father had been waiting for the return of his son. But we have to admit our mistakes, and confess our sins like the prodigal son: *"Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you."* If we confess our sins and return, God's hands are always stretched out to receive us. That is why Jesus Christ said: *"there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."* Luke 15:10

Questions & Exercise

1. *Why did the young son want to leave his father's house?*

2. *Did the son have many friends when he left his father's house? Did they stay with him till he returned to his father?*

3. *What kind of job did the prodigal son have, after he finished all the money he had?*

4. *Why did the prodigal son finally want to return to his father's house?*

5. *What did he say to his father when he returned?*

6. *How did his father accept him when his son repented and returned?*

7. *Does God hate sinners? What does he want us to do when we sin?*

8. *In which book of the bible is the story of the prodigal Son? Who wrote the book? Who told the story of the prodigal son?*

The Great Supper

Objective: Learn about the consequence of making excuses

Memory Verse: *"Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" Luke 14:15*

References: Luke 14

Introduction

Today's lesson is based on a parable Jesus Christ told the people, about the Kingdom of God. Before he told them this parable, he taught them to invite the poor and the needy when they make a feast. For the poor cannot pay them back. He told them that they would be paid back for such deeds on Judgment Day. Then, a person sitting next to Him said, *"Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God."* It was at this time, that Jesus spoke of the following parable.

The Lesson

Once upon a time, a man prepared a great supper, and invited many people to come. He sent his servants to call those invited, but they all gave different excuses not to come to the great supper:

- One of them said that he bought a new land, and must go to see it.
- Another one said that he bought five oxen, and he was going to test them.
- One said that he married a new wife, and therefore he could not come.
- Others made different kinds of excuses not to come to the great supper

The servants came and told their master of the excuses that the invited made. The master was upset, and told his servants to go out in the street and bring in the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind. He told them to bring as many as they could from the streets of the city to fill his house, and he said: *"None of those men who were invited shall taste my supper."*

Conclusion:

- In this parable, the Master is a symbol of Jesus Christ, and the great supper is a symbol of the Holy Communion. The invitation is a symbol of the calling of everyone to inherit the kingdom of God. The servants are symbols of the prophets, messengers, and servants of God.
- Jesus Christ has given us His body and blood for the forgiveness of sin and for our salvation. But people make different excuses not to receive the Holy Communion. But others, who are called later come and partake of what the Lord has prepared. Likewise, those who make excuses miss the chance to inherit the Kingdom of God. It is the everlasting happiness in the kingdom of God that the master spoke of when he said: *"None of those men who were invited shall taste my supper."*
- People make different excuses not to come to church, or fulfill their responsibility. But making excuses is not going to relieve us of our responsibility. Therefore we should always seek to fulfill our responsibility, instead of looking for excuses.
- Do you make excuses not to come to church, or not to come early? Children often stay late watching TV, and therefore do not wake up early to come to church. Sometimes, children make excuses on their parents', and parents' on their children, for not coming to church. Can you think of all other excuses you make not to come to church? For not doing your homework? ...

Questions

1. *Why do we need to invite the poor and the needy when we make a feast?*

2. *What kind of excuses did the men invited make when the master sent his servants to call them?*

3. *Who partook of the great supper the master prepared?*

4. *Who symbolizes Jesus Christ in the story of the great supper?*

5. *What is the great supper a symbol of?*

6. *Do you make excuses when you fail to fulfill your responsibility? Can you mention some?*

The Great Lent

Objective: Learn about the importance and spirituality of Fasting.

Memory Verse: “Give yourselves to fasting and prayer” (1 Corinthians 7:5)

References: Matthew 4; Daniel; Coptic Sunday School Curriculum

Introduction

Fasting in simple terms is abstaining from food for a certain period of time, and from meat and any dairy product. The Great Lent is one of the seven fasting periods we have during the year. It is a fast, Jesus Christ practiced first, by fasting for forty days and nights in the wilderness. In the lesson today, we are going to learn about the spirituality and the importance of fasting in our life.

The Lesson

Fasting has an important position in our spiritual life and there are many examples in the Old Testament men of God who fasted and did great works.

- Moses fasted forty days before he received the Ten Commandments from God.
- Daniel was fasting when the Angel Gabriel appeared to him.
- Nehemiah fasted when he heard of the sad news about Jerusalem.
- David was a man of fasting. He said, “*I afflicted myself with fasting*”.
- Isaiah practiced and also taught about fasting (*Isaiah 58:3-12*)
- The prophet Elijah also fasted for forty days.
- The people of Nineveh fasted, with prayer and supplication for the mercy of God when faced with a looming destruction because of their faith.

Our Lord Jesus Himself fasted till He felt hungry in the wilderness. The Lord spoke about fasting in His Sermon on the Mountain (*Mathew 6:16-18*). He also spoke about the importance of fasting when He said about the Devil, “*This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer and fasting*” (*Mark 9:29*). In Book of Acts we read about fasting in the church of the apostles (Acts 13:3,4 and 1 Corinthians 7:5). The church fathers also wrote about fasting in their writings and rules, which reached us. The history of the Orthodox Church bears witness to the fact that the believers respected public fasting that have been established since the times of the early church such as Lent, and fasting on Wednesday and Friday.

Fasting and Spiritual Growth: Fasting is an exercise to humiliate the desires of the flesh. Our life is a struggle between our body and our spirit. St. Paul expressed this by saying; “*For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other; so that you cannot do the things that you would*” (*Galatians 5; 17*). St. Isaac the Syrian says: “*Every struggle against sin and its lusts must begin with fasting* especially when the struggle is because of an internal sin. Abstaining from food should go side by side with internal spiritual growth. This means that physical fasting is connected with the goodness of the heart, the soul’s fasting and the purity of the flesh. In this, one of the saints said, “If we are fasting only in the sense of abstaining from food while we are still bound to sin and iniquities, submission of the body will not benefit us so long as the most precious part of us is defiled. So as the outer man fasts, the inner man must also be controlled and be kept away from harmful food as acceptable fasting should be genuine, without evil, insincerity, grudge, hatred or defilement of body and soul”.

Inseparableness of fasting and prayer: The saints likened fasting to a stronghold and prayer to a weapon with which man fights inside the stronghold. Throughout the bible, we see that prayer is accompanied by fasting. The fasting of the people of Nineveh, and the fasting of Esther and the Jews to escape from destruction, are examples of coupling prayer with fasting. The outcome of their prayer and fasting is a good example of the benefit of coupling prayer with fasting.

Inseparableness of fasting and contemplation: It is necessary for spiritual life to feed on contemplations during fasting. The church sets fasting on important occasions so we must connect fasting with contemplation and remember the occasions of fasting. During the holy Lent we the fasting, the suffering and the agony of our Lord, Jesus Christ. On Wednesday we remember the plot of the chief priests to kill Him. So during each fasting, raise your heart to God in the

spirit of contemplation to attain spiritual power during fasting. You can get benefit also through reading the Holy Bible and the spiritual books with the spirit of discipleship, prayer and obedience of the commandments.

Inseparableness of fasting and almsgiving: Fasting is usually accompanied by works of love and mercy. So in his hunger, the fasting man shares with the poor and the needy and spends what he has saved of the expenses of his food and other things on his needy brethren. The prophet Isaiah emphasizes this fact by writing God's words: *"Is not this the fast that I choose... Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house? When you see the naked, to cover him and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?" (Isaiah 58:6,7).* Note the Lent hymn: *Blessed are those who are kind to the poor....*

Conclusion:

Fasting and prayer are inseparable acts of worship and instruments of righteousness, that are essential for us to develop self-control and to spiritual growth. Jesus Christ Himself fasted to set an example for us, so that we might follow His example and arm ourselves with essential spiritual weapons.

Questions & Exercise

1. *What is fasting?*

2. *Who are the prophets that fasted for forty days and forty nights?*

3. *Give two examples of the saving of a nation from danger of God's punishment through fasting.*

4. *Discuss the challenges of fasting and how you can overcome them.*

Esther

Objective: Learn about the importance and spirituality of Fasting from the life of Esther

Memory Verse: *“Give yourselves to fasting and prayer” (1 Corinthians 7:5)*

References: Book of Esther

Introduction

Today's lesson is a story of a woman called Esther, who was faithful to God and her people, and risked her own life to save the lives of God's people. In the story, we are going to see the importance of fasting and prayer.

The Lesson

There used to be a king named **Xerxes**, who ruled India and Persia. Once upon a time, the king gave a banquet for all his officials. For 180 days he made a show of the riches of the imperial court with all its splendor and majesty. The king sent for his wife, as he wanted to show off her beauty to all the officials and all his guests. But the queen refused to come. This made the king furious. He issued a royal proclamation that Queen Vashti may never again appear before the king. The king made a search to find some beautiful young virgins to choose one of them to be his queen, instead of Vashti.

A Jewish man, named **Mordecai**, who once revealed a plot by two servants of the palace to kill the king, brought **Esther, his cousin**, to the king for his choice. Mordecai raised Esther from her childhood because her parents died when she was just a small girl. The king admired her beauty and chose her to be his queen from among many others. Mordecai's deed of revealing the plot against the king was written down in the official records of the empire.

King Xerxes had a minister called **Haman**. He ordered all his officials in his service to show their respect for Haman by kneeling and bowing to him. All in the king's service did accordingly, except Mordecai, who refused to bow to him. So Haman was furious and decided to kill all the Jews to avenge Mordecai, who was also a Jew. Haman told the king that the Jews had their own laws and would not respect the laws of the king. Thus the king gave him permission to destroy all the Jews throughout his land.

A **proclamation** was sent to all rulers, governors and officials. It contained the instructions that on a single day all Jews were to be killed. When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes in anguish. Then he dressed in sackcloth, covered his head with ashes... wailed loudly and bitterly. There was loud mourning among the Jews. They fasted, wept and wailed. Mordecai explained the situation to Esther and asked her to go and plead with the king and beg him to have mercy on her people. Esther advised Mordecai and the Jews **to fast and pray** for her, and not to eat or drink anything for three days and nights.

On the third day of the fast, Esther entered the King's room and invited the king and Haman to a banquet. The king and Haman accepted the invitation.

Haman had gallows built to have Mordecai hanged on it. The same night the king could not go to sleep, so he ordered the official records of the empire to be brought and read to him. The part they read included the account of how Mordecai had uncovered a plot to assassinate the king. The king ordered Haman to get the royal robes, a horse, and the royal crown and provide these honors to Mordecai. So Haman got the robes and the horse, and he put the robes on Mordecai. Mordecai got on the horse, and Haman led him through the City Square, announcing to the people as they went, “See how the king rewards a man he wishes to honor”.

Esther invited the king and Haman to another banquet. The king said to Esther, “Tell me what you wish and you shall have it. I'll even give you half the empire”. Esther told the king about what Haman wanted to do with her and her people.

The king was furious and ordered that Haman to be hanged on the gallows which he prepared for Mordecai. The king gave his ring with the seal on it to Mordecai who quickly wrote letters and sent them to all towns ordering rulers and governors to protect the Jews and not to destroy them.

Conclusion:

- The main characters in the story are Esther, the king, Haman and Mordecai. Haman was a greedy and ruthless minister who plotted to kill the people of God. But through the prayer of Esther, Mordecai and the people, God delivered them. But Haman received death on gallows he prepared for Mordecai.
- Esther did not pride in her beauty and her position. Instead, she was worried about the well being of God's people. So, she risked her life to go and talk to the king. But, before she did that, she ordered the people to fast for three days, and she herself also fasted so that God would give her the courage to stand in the presence of the king, and also that the king would accept her request.

Questions & Exercise

1. *In which book of the Bible is the Book of Esther found?*

2. *Why did Mordecai raise Esther?*

3. *Describe What Esther did before going to talk to the king.*

4. *Are there any hardships in the world today that we need to pray and fast for? Describe them.*

5. *What kind of person was Mordecai, and what do you learn from him?*

The Purpose of Coming to Church

Objective: Learn that the church is a house of prayer, and how we should present ourselves in front of God.

Memory Verse: *"My house shall be called the house of prayer" Matthew 21:13*

References: Matthew 21, Mark 11, John 2

Introduction

Why do you come to church? ... People may come to church for different reasons. But it is important to know the purpose of a church, so that we accomplish what we come for. Many people used to follow Jesus Christ, but all had different reasons for following Him. Some wanted to see His miracles, others followed him just so that he could feed them as he fed the multitude with few bread and fish, but some followed Him to learn from Him and serve Him. In this lesson, we are going to what defiles a holy place, and how we should present ourselves in church.

The Lesson

A church is a special place for prayer and worshipping God. After King Solomon built the temple of God, God said to him, *"My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to prayer made in this place. 16 For now I have chosen and sanctified this house, that My name may be there forever; and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually."* (2 Chronicle 7:15)

Once, when Jesus came to Jerusalem with the Virgin Mary and His disciples, He went into the temple of God and found the people inside selling oxen, sheep, doves and exchanging money. Jesus was angry because the temple was a holy place, and it was not a place for selling anything or exchanging money. So, He made a bundle of small cords and drove those that abused the house of God, and their belongings out of the temple.

He said to them, *Take these out, do not make my Father's house a house of merchandize. My house shall be called a house of prayer. But you have made it a den of thieves.*

The people were astonished at His teaching, because He spoke of the truth with authority. But the scribes and the chief priests were jealous and they sought to find a false cause to accuse Him. Jesus stayed in Jerusalem, teaching in the temple everyday.

Conclusion: Lessons from the story

When we come to church we should ask ourselves, *"What would our Lord Jesus Christ say to us, if he came today? Do we come to church and pray, or just hang around with our friends?"*

A church is a house of God, and therefore a house of prayer. When we come to church, we should prepare ourselves to pray, and also hear the word of God. We always have to remember the words of Jesus Christ: *My house shall be called a house of prayer."*

When we come to church,

1. We should be clean.
2. We should wear clean clothes. If we can, it is good to have separate church clothes. Jesus Christ once told the apostles a story of a king who made a feast for his Son's wedding. When the king came to see the guests, he saw a man who didn't have wedding clothes. He asked the guest why he didn't have wedding clothes, but the guest was speechless. So, the king told his servants to take the guest out of the wedding. (Mathew 22:1-14) Jesus told this story to teach us by example that we should wear appropriate clothes when we present ourselves in the Sanctuary of His praise.
3. Once we come to church, we should take our shoes off when we go inside, because the church is a holy place. When Moses went up on a mountain where God revealed Himself to him, God said to him, *"Put off your shoes from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground."* (Exodus 3:4).

Inside the church, men sit on the left, and women on the right. When Noah went inside the ark with his family, and the two of each kind of animals on the earth, he set the males on the left, the females on the right, and set up an altar in the middle. Noah's ark is a symbol of the church. As everyone who was in the Ark was saved from the great flood, so is everyone who is in the church saved from everlasting condemnation and death. We sit in such a manner inside the church to remember the salvation our Lord has given us through the institution of the church with His Precious blood.

Questions & Exercise

1. *What is the category of the books (Matthew, Mark & John) in which we find the story of the cleansing of the temple?*

2. *What were the people doing in the temple when Jesus Christ came to Jerusalem? What did He say to them, and what did He do?*

3. *How should we prepare ourselves when we come to church?*

4. *What did God say to Moses first, when He spoke to Him on the Mountain of God? In which book of the Bible do we find this?*

The Cry of Bartimaeus

Objective: Learn the importance of persistence in our prayer

Memory Verse: *"Your faith has made you whole" Mark 10:52*

References: Mark 10:46 - 52

Introduction

- This is the story of a blind man who used to beg for money on the streets of a city called Jericho in Israel. It is not common in the West, but in third world countries it is common to see such people begging for money, food, and other basic needs. Some of these are children who are not as fortunate as you are. Some of these people are handicapped. Such was the case of the man in the story.

The Lesson

Once upon a time, Jesus Christ was passing by the main road in a city called Jericho with his disciples, where a blind man, named Bartimaeus was sitting. A large crowd was following Him as He was passing by. Bartimaeus heard the crowd, and asked what was happening. He was told that Jesus was passing by. When Bartimaeus heard this, he was very happy because he heard about the miracles of Jesus and believed that He could also give him his sight. So he cried out with a loud voice, *"Jesus the Son of David, have mercy on me."*

Many people told him to be quite. But Bartimaeus cried out more, *"Son of David, have mercy on me."* Even though the crowd was loud, Jesus heard the cry of Bartimaeus. So, He stood still, and commanded for Bartimaeus to be called. When Bartimaeus heard Jesus wanted to see him, he was overjoyed, and went to Jesus, throwing away his garment.

Jesus asked Bartimaeus, *"What would you want Me to do for you?"* Before this day, the blind man, Bartimaeus used to beg for food and money. But on this day, he asked for something that he never asked before. He answered Jesus Christ, *"Lord, that I might have my sight."* So Jesus said to him: *"Go your way, your faith has made you whole."* The blind man immediately received his sight, and followed Jesus.

Conclusion: Lessons from the story

Persistence in prayer: When we are in need of something, we should pray again and again, until Jesus answers our prayer. Jesus answered the blind man because he screamed out to Him until he was heard.

What do you do when you want something from your parents? You ask for what you need again and again? You should do the same when praying to God.

How to follow Our Lord Jesus Christ: The garment Bartimaeus threw away is a symbol of his old life, a symbol of sin. Once cured, he left his past life, and followed Jesus Christ. Likewise we should follow Jesus Christ in our life. We have a lot to be grateful for. God has given us food, shelter, clothing, and a lot of other things that we need. So, let us always remember to follow him in our life.

Importance of faith: We have to have absolute faith in our Lord, Jesus Christ. It is according to our faith that He answers to our prayers and wishes. Christ testified to the faith of Bartimaeus when he said to him, *"Go your way, your faith has made you whole."* So, with persistent prayer in faith, what is lacking in our life becomes whole.

Knowing what to Ask: Bartimaeus did not ask for money or other material things from Jesus Christ. He asked that he may see. This was the most important thing that he was lacking in his life. When he heard of the coming of the the Lord, he knew exactly what to ask for. Before this day, he used to beg for money and gold. But on this day, he knew that the the person he cried out to could give him, what nobody else could. So, he asked in faith, *"Lord, that I might have my sight."*

Questions & Exercise

1. *In which book of the gospels do we find the story of Bartimaeus?*

2. *How did people treat Bartimaeus when he cried out calling to Jesus Christ?*

3. *What did Bartimaeus used to beg for sitting on the main road of Jericho?*

4. *Did he ask for money and gold from Jesus Christ? What did he ask for?*

5. *What good did Bartimaeus' faith and persistence prayer do for him?*

The Parable on the Mount of Olives

Objective: Learn the importance of spiritual preparedness, faith and virtues

Memory Verse: *"Whatever you have done to the least of these, that you done unto me" Matthew 25:40*

References: Matthew 25

Introduction

A **parable** is a simple story that has a moral message. Jesus Christ told the disciples two parables on the **Mount of Olives**. Today's lesson is on one of these two parables. The story is written just as Jesus Christ told it. After these parables, Jesus Christ tells them about judgment day – when He comes back in glory to judge the living and the dead according to their deeds.

The Lesson

The kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

"At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.'

'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us, and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!' But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.' Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

Conclusion: Lessons from the story

Preparedness: We learn from the five wise virgins that it is important to be prepared so that we do not miss a chance at the last moment. The foolish virgins missed the chance to enter with the bridegroom, because they were not ready with extra oil. This parable is about the kingdom of heaven, as Jesus said when he began telling the story. The bridegroom is Jesus Christ. The wise virgins are those who lived a life of holiness, keeping God's commandments, worshipping Him, and helping the needy. The foolish virgins are those who do not lead a holy life, preparing themselves for the kingdom of God. The coming of the bridegroom is the coming of Jesus Christ for judgment.

After the above parable and another parable, Jesus Christ told the disciples about what happens when He comes for judgment. When He comes for judgment, He comes in glory with his holy angels, and all the sinners, who are like the foolish virgins, stand on His left. The righteous, who are like the ten virgins, stand on His right. To them He says, *"Come you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink. I was a stranger, and you took me in. I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick, and you visited me. I was in prison, and you came to me ... Whatever you have done to one of the least of these, you have done it unto me."* The lamp is a symbol of their faith, and the oil, a symbol of their deeds.

But to the ones on His left He says, *"Depart from me you cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food. I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink. I was a stranger, and you took me not in. I was naked and you did not clothe me. I was sick, and you did not visit me. I was in prison, and you did not come to me ... Whatever you have done to one of the least of these, you have done it unto me."* Just like the bridegroom told the foolish virgins, He will say, he does not know them. so Jesus Christ will deny such as these when He comes for judgment.

Therefore, we should live in faith, with works of virtue so that we will be prepared to inherit His kingdom when He calls us. Note that He says, *"The kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world."* He created us with the intention to give us His kingdom as an inheritance. If we don't live up to it, we will go into a place that wasn't intended for us - *"into an everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."*

Questions & Exercise

1. *Who told the parable of the Ten Virgins?*

2. *Where did He tell the story?*

3. *What is the other parable He told the disciples on the same day? Find out for next week.*

4. *What are the symbolisms of the bridegroom, the ten virgins, the lamps and the oil?*

5. *How do you prepare for your exams in school? Does the result of your exam depend on how you prepare for it? How does the same principle apply in spiritual life?*

Nicodemus

Objective: Learn the benefit of searching for spiritual knowledge, and the benefit of Baptism

Memory Verse: *"Unless a man is born of water and of the Spirit, he can not enter into the Kingdom of God."* John 3:5

References: John 3

Introduction

The Pharisees were Jewish scholars, who advocated the strict observance of the Law. **Nicodemus** was one of the Pharisees, who was a scholar of the Jews. In today's lesson, we are going to see how such a scholar goes in search of more knowledge and as a result learns about the first mystery of the sacraments of the church, **the Sacrament of Baptism**.

The Lesson

There was a man called **Nicodemus**, who used to come to Jesus Christ to learn from Him. He was a very educated himself, but he knew that he could learn a lot from Jesus Christ. So, he used to come in the night to learn from Him. He was coming in the night, because he was a Jewish scholar himself, and was afraid to be seen by the others. During one of those nights, Jesus Christ taught Nicodemus about Baptism.

Jesus said, *"Unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"* Nicodemus was surprised because, how can that happen? So he asked Jesus, *"How? ... Can a man enter his mother's womb and be born again?"*

So Jesus explained to him what *"born again"* means. He said, *"Unless a man is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."*

According to this teaching of Jesus Christ, children are baptized in the church with water and the Holy Spirit. The mother sits with the child in front of the Baptismal, and the priest and deacons stand around the baptismal and pray.

When the priest prays over the water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the water becomes the very same **water that came out of the body of Jesus Christ**. When Jesus died on the cross, a man came and stabbed him on his side. Water and blood flowed separately from his side that was stabbed. This is the water with which we are baptized. That is why our baptism is a birth from water and the Holy Spirit.

After the priest prays over the water, they choose a godfather for a boy, or a godmother for a girl. Then they give the child a new name, which is called a baptismal name. *Do you know your baptismal names?*

Then the godfather or the godmother testifies his or her faith by reciting the creed, or repeating after the priest the words, *"I believe in Jesus Christ, and deny Satan"*, and promises to teach the child about God. Then the child will be baptized. The priest anoints the child with a holy oil called Myron, after the Baptism. This is called **Confirmation**. After the Baptism and confirmation, the child fasts until the end of the Divine Liturgy, and received the Holy Communion.

Conclusion: Lessons from the story

Baptism is important to enter the kingdom of God, as we can learn from what Jesus Christ taught Nicodemus. The importance of baptism is also evident in the words of Jesus Christ, which He spoke to His disciples when he commissioned them after His resurrection: *"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in^{al} the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."* (Matthew 28:19)

We learn from Nicodemus that it is important to seek the knowledge of God, because He reveals to us mysteries of salvation, like He did to Nicodemus. Even though Nicodemus was educated himself, he did not pride in his knowledge. Instead he went to Jesus to know more about God, and for this, Jesus revealed to Him the Mystery of Baptism.

Three sacraments are administered when a person is baptized: the Sacrament of **Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Communion**.

Questions & Exercise

1. *What social group of the Jews was Nicodemus from?*

2. *What did he learn about from Jesus Christ?*

3. *What does “born again” mean?*

4. *Did Nicodemus understand at first when Jesus told him that no one enters the kingdom of God unless he is born again?*

5. *Why is baptism important?*

6. *What did Jesus say to the disciples when He commissioned them to spread the gospel to all nations?*

7. *Why is it important to always seek to know more about God?*

Hosanna

Objective: Learn about the glorious entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem

Memory Verse: *"Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings, you have perfected praise." Matthew 21:16*

References: Matthew 21:1 – 11

Introduction

Today's lesson is about **the glorious entry** of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem, on the last Sunday before His crucifixion. His coming to Jerusalem is called a glorious entry, because He was going to destroy death by His own death and resurrection, and proclaim salvation to all the living and the dead. The Palm leaves that people had in their hands when receiving Jesus Christ, are symbols of this glory. Palm leaves were a symbol of glory and honor in the Old Testament. On *Leviticus 23:40*, God told the Israelites to take branches of palm trees and rejoice before Him. Children and adults rejoiced with palm trees when Jesus Christ came to Jerusalem, according to this custom.

The Lesson

When Jesus came to Jerusalem just before a Jews holiday, called "Passover", many people came out to receive Him. The people who were in Jerusalem heard about how Jesus Christ raised a man called Lazarus from the dead. Because of this, many people came to see Him.

Before He came into Jerusalem, he sent two disciples saying, *"Go to the village... and you shall find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them, and bring them unto me. And if any man asks you ... you shall say to them the Lord has need of them."* The two disciples went and got the donkey and the Colt, and when the owner asked them where they were taking them, they told him that the Lord needs them. The man let them take both when he heard this.

He entered Jerusalem sitting on the colt, a young donkey. When He came, the people met Him with branches of palm trees, and laid down their clothes and the branches they had for him on the ground.

There were also many children among the people. The children sang, *"Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that comes in the name of the Lord."*

The disciples, the men Jesus chose, did not understand all these things at first. But later, they understood that the prophets wrote all these about Him long time ago.

The prophets Isaiah and Zachariah wrote about the glorious entry of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem as follows:

"Rejoice greatly O daughter of Zion (Israel); Shout O daughter of Jerusalem; behold your King comes to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding upon a donkey, and upon a colt, the foal of a donkey."

King David wrote about the children's song when they received Jesus Christ long before this day. He wrote, *"Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings, You have ordained strength (praise)."* *Psalms 8:2.*

But the chief priests of the Jews were jealous, and they said to Jesus, *"Do you hear what they say?"* And Jesus answered, *"Have you never read: Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings, you have perfected praise?"* He was reminding them of King David's prophecy.

Conclusion:

The glorious entry of Jesus into Jerusalem was on the last Sunday before His crucifixion. When the chief priests of the Jews saw that many people were going after Him, they became jealous. It was this jealousy that led them to crucify the Lord Jesus Christ, who came to save them. Even though the chief priests were scholars of the books, which talk about Jesus Christ, their pride and their jealousy covered their eyes, and their understanding from knowing and accepting Jesus Christ. Their jealousy finally led them to plot false accusations against Him, and crucify Him on the Cross the Friday after this glorious entry into Jerusalem. But, Jesus Christ knew of their plot, and yet came to accept death, and destroyed death by His own death and resurrection.

The week after this Sunday is known as Passion Week, in remembrance of the sufferings of Jesus Christ.

Questions & Exercise

1. *Why is the coming of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem known as the glorious entry?*

2. *How did people receive Him, when he came into Jerusalem?*

3. *What is the symbolism of Palm leaves?*

4. *How did Jesus Christ come into Jerusalem?*

5. *Why were the chief priests jealous of Jesus Christ? What did they do as a result of their jealousy?*

6. *What is the week after Hosanna called?*

7. *In which book of the Bible do we find prophecies about the glorious entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem?*

The Seven Words on the Cross

Objective: Learn the meaning of the words Jesus spoke on the cross.

Memory Verse: *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son" John 3:16*

References: Matthew 27, Luke 23, John 19

Introduction

The chief priests condemned Jesus Christ to death because of jealousy and a zeal for their own social status. Jesus Christ accepted humility and death for our sake - to make amends for our sins. One of His own twelve disciples betrayed Him and gave Him up to the chief priests in exchange for 30 pieces of silver. The chief priests condemned Him to death. When they brought Him to **Pontius Pilate**, the Roman governor of Jerusalem, they demanded to crucify Him, even though he could not find any fault with Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ rarely spoke in His defense to the chief priest or **Pontius Pilate** when they questioned Him. But, he spoke what are known as the **Seven Words on the Cross**, which have deep spiritual meanings. In today's lesson, we are going to learn these phrases of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross.

The Lesson

1. ***"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do "* (Luke 23:34).**

These are words of forgiveness and love. Jesus spoke these words to teach us to forgive those who sin against us. That is why in the prayer of "Our Father", He taught us to pray, *"forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us."*

2. ***"Assuredly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43).***

Jesus Christ spoke these words to one of the two criminals who were condemned to death with Him. The criminal on His left mocked Jesus Christ saying, *"If you are the Christ, save Yourself and us."* But the one on His right rebuked him saying, *"Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong."* Then he said to Jesus, *"Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."* And Jesus said to him, *"Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."* The man believed in Jesus Christ, after seeing many miracles that took place at the time of the crucifixion, repented for His sins, and asked Jesus Christ for forgiveness. As a result, Jesus spoke these words to him, and he became the first person to enter paradise since Adam and Eve were expelled after the Fall.

3. ***"Woman, behold your son... Behold your mother" (John 19:26 & 27)***

These are the words He spoke to the Virgin Mary and John. She was given to us through John to be our mother, and John took her to be his mother on our behalf, that we may all take her to be our mother.

4. ***"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46)***

Jesus spoke these words on the cross, not because the Father forsook him, but to teach us to seek God at all times, even in moments of despair. As we have seen above, the criminal on the right of Jesus Christ became the first person to enter paradise because he repented and sought forgiveness in his moment of despair.

5. ***"I thirst " (John 19:28).***

Jesus Christ said, *"If anyone thirst, let him come to Me, and drink" (John 7:37)"* He, who gives the water of life, became thirsty and cried, *"I thirst."* This was a symbolic call for us to come close to Him. He thirst for a fountain of good deeds in our lives. They gave Him a mixture of vinegar and goal. If we don't try to live by His words, our life will be like that mixture of vinegar and goal to Him.

6. ***"It is finished." (John 19:30).***

Jesus spoke this word to indicate the completion of His mission of atonement. He paid for every transgression of Adam's sin on the cross, and reconciled us with Himself, the Father and the Holy Spirit.

7. ***"Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit" (Luke 23:46).***

Jesus Christ, who accepted death and suffering according to the will of His Father, Himself and the Holy Spirit, spoke these words, after completing His redemptive mission on the cross. He said this just before He gave up His

life, because there was one more thing he was going to do - go and free the spirits in Hell: ***"being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison."*** (1 Peter 3:18-19)

He also spoke these words to show us that no matter what one does to our body, our soul is out of reach. That is why the apostle Peter said, ***"Let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator."*** (1 Peter 4:19) We are called to commit our souls to God, living according to His will.

Conclusion:

Jesus Christ came down from heaven, became man from the Virgin Mary, and suffered and died for our sake. He paid for our sins by his suffering and paid the ultimate price for us, by giving up his life. We also see the love and the example He gave us in the Seven Words on the Cross. These words speak of forgiveness, His thirst for a fountain of faith and righteousness in our life, the importance of seeking Him in time of despair, perseverance, faith, and Redemption.

Questions & Exercise

1. *Why did the chief priests condemn Jesus Christ to death?*

2. *Who was the disciple, who betrayed Jesus Christ for 30 pieces of silver?*

3. *Who was the person who received the promise of forgiveness from Jesus Christ on the day of crucifixion?*

4. *What was Jesus Christ talking about when He said, "It is finished"?*

5. *On what day of the week was Jesus Christ crucified?*

6. *Where was Jesus Christ crucified?*

7. *Who received the Virgin Mary as His mother, representing all of us?*

Christ Is Risen

Objective: Learn about the ultimate sacrifice of Christ's love for us in His crucifixion, and the Resurrection.

Memory Verse: *"Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen." Luke 24:5-6*

References: *Mathew 28:1 - 8; Mark 16:1 - 8; Luke 24:1-12*

Introduction

Jesus Christ was betrayed by one of the disciples, Judas of Iscariot, and the Jews made false accusations against Him, and forced Pontius Pilate to deliver Him to their wish. Jesus Christ knew that they had hardened their heart to crucify Him, but He allowed them to do to Him as they wished for our sake. But He was risen on the third day as He had said, and proclaimed resurrection and life for all those who believed in Him. In today's lesson, we are going to learn about the love of Jesus Christ through the events before and after His crucifixion.

The Lesson

After the glorious entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem for the Passover, the chief priests wanted to crucify Jesus Christ. So, they gathered on Wednesday before the Passover and plotted how to capture Him and accuse Him. Judas of Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples plotted with the Jews to deliver Jesus to them.

On Thursday evening, after the Last Supper, Judas came with the chief priests, the Pharisees and a great multitude with swords. Judas gave them a sign saying whomever I kiss is Jesus, hold Him fast. When they came to Jesus and the apostles, Judas went over to Jesus and kissed Him, and they laid their hands on Him and took Him. Peter was angry and drew His sword and struck a servant of the high priests cutting of his ear. But Jesus told him to put his sword back in its place, and he put the ears back on the servant.

They brought Jesus early next morning on Friday to Pontius Pilate, their governor and made accusations against him, saying that He claims to be the Son of God, and broke the Sabbath law. Pontius Pilate told the multitude that he had examined Jesus Christ and found no fault with Him. But the chief priests and the multitude screamed saying, crucify Him. After repeated attempts to set Him free, Pontius Pilate delivered Jesus Christ to their wish. So they took Him from Pontius Pilate's court to Golgotha to crucify Him. They made Him carry the cross on which he would be crucified, and tortured Him all the way to Golgotha. But He had not spoken a word all this time. At Golgotha, they nailed his feet and hands on the cross, and crucified Him between two robbers.

After He died, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took His body off the cross, and buried Him. The chief priests told Pontius Pilate to keep guards at the tomb, because Jesus said that He would rise after three days. They said that His disciples might steal His body and claim that He was risen.

On the early hours of the third day, Sunday, there was a great earthquake because an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and rolled the stone from the door of the tomb. The guards fell down and became as dead men with fear. When Mary Magdalene and other women came to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus Christ, they found the tomb empty and saw the angel in a long white garment. The angel said to them, ***"Fear not for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for He is risen, as He said. ... Go quickly and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead."***

The women quickly departed from the tomb with great joy at what they heard, and ran to bring the good news to the disciples. On their way, Jesus Christ Himself appeared to them, and they worshipped Him with greater joy. He also said to them, ***"Go, tell My brothers that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me."***

Then the disciples went into Galilee as the women told them, and there, Jesus Christ appeared to them. He commanded them, ***"Go and teach all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and behold I am with you even unto the end of the world."***

Conclusion:

- The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was the result of His love for us. Before His crucifixion, He commanded, ***"Love one another as I have loved you."*** (*John 15:12*) So we should practice the kind of love Jesus Christ showed us, a love to death, for He said, ***"There is no greater love than that a man lay down his life for his friends."*** (*John 15:13*)
- When Peter struck the servant of the high priest with His sword, Jesus said to Him, ***"Put up again your sword into its place, for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword."*** Likewise we should not take irrational action out of anger, for it may also have undesirable spiritual, emotional and physical effects on us. We should make greater effort to respond positively to all situations out of love, as Jesus Christ taught us.

Questions & Exercise

1. *Which of the Disciples betrayed Jesus Christ?*

2. *Why do we not greet each other with a kiss during the passion (holy) week?*

3. *What is the name of the governor who gave away Jesus to the Jews?*

4. *Why did they put guards at the tomb of Jesus Christ?*

5. *Who came to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus Christ on the early morning hours of Sunday after the Crucifixion?*

6. *Who announced to the women the Resurrection of Jesus Christ?*

7. *What did the women do after they heard the joyful news of the Resurrection?*

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

Objective: Learn about the Significance of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ

Memory Verse: *"The Lord awakened as one out of sleep." Ps. 78:65*

References: *Mathew 28:1 - 8; Mark 16:1 - 8; Luke 24:1-12*

Introduction

Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the third day after His crucifixion, and appeared to certain women and the disciples at different times for the following forty days. Today we are going to learn why Jesus Christ came down from heaven, about His appearance at different times after His Resurrection, and about the significance of His Resurrection.

The Lesson

Jesus Christ came down from heaven, and became man through the Virgin Mary for the following reasons:

1. To return Adam and his children from exile into paradise, by making an atonement for Adam's transgression
2. To give us the hope of resurrection for everlasting life and happiness for all those who believe in Him.
3. To teach us, and set an example for us.

The prophets have spoken about the coming of Jesus Christ, His suffering for our sake, and His resurrection; but the chief priests and even those who followed Him until His crucifixion did not understand the scriptures. Jesus Christ appeared to His disciples and those who had believed in Him after his resurrection, and performed different miracles:

- He appeared to **women who came to His tomb** to anoint His body with perfume.
- He appeared to **two men who were traveling to a village called Emmaus** from Jerusalem, and told them all that was said about Him by the prophets starting with Moses, and opened their mind so that they could understand the scriptures.
- He appeared to **the disciples** twice, while they were sitting in a room with the doors locked, and showed them his hands that were pierced by nails.
- He appeared to them on a shore where they were fishing. They had been fishing all night, but could not catch anything until Jesus appeared to them in the morning and told them to cast their net on the right side of their ship. They reluctantly cast their net as he had told them; but this time, they caught so many fish in the net, they could not pull it.

Jesus Christ's resurrection is:

1. **Powerful** - The keepers of the tomb fell down with fear at the time of His resurrection for there was a great thunder and lightening as an angel of the Lord descended down from heaven. It is also a power of hope for those who believe in His resurrection, but a power of defeat for His enemies.
2. **Good News** - It is a glorious news that angles announced to women, as they announced His birth to shepherds.
3. **Comfort and Joy** - It was a comfort for those who followed Him, and were saddened by his crucifixion, for their sorrow was turned into Joy by His resurrection.
4. **Hope** - He was the first to defeat death by His own power, and also gave us the hope of the Resurrection and everlasting life through His glorious Resurrection. (*John 5:28-29*)

Conclusion:

Death could not hold Jesus Christ captive. He defeated death, and proclaimed life for us, who believe in Him and do His commandments. His resurrection is a powerful, glorious, comforting, and joyful news for us. By His crucifixion and death, he redeemed Adam and his ancestors, and by His resurrection He defeated death and gave us the hope of resurrection and everlasting life.

Questions & Exercise

1. *Why did Jesus Christ come down from heaven?*

2. *What is the hope that Jesus Christ gave us through His Resurrection?*

3. *What miracle did Jesus do, when He appeared to the disciples at a shore, while they were fishing?*

4. *How many times did Jesus Christ appear to the disciples in a closed room?*

5. *On which day of the week was Jesus Christ crucified? What about His Resurrection?*

6. *Who brought the good news of Jesus' Resurrection to the women who came to Jesus' Tomb?*

7. *Why did the women come to the Tomb of Jesus Christ?*

St. George

IV

Objective: Learn Patience, perseverance and the power of the cross from the life of St. George

Memory Verse: *"Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms." James 5:13*

References: *Miracles of St. George*

Introduction

Saints are persons, who elevated the physical temptations of this world, and transcended into a life of righteousness through faith and love in Jesus Christ. God says, *"God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. (Hebrews 11:16)* Today, we are going to learn about the life of a saint, St. George the martyr.

The Lesson

St. George was born in a region called Leda from a Christian, God fearing family. His father was governor of the region. His parents raised him with Christian values and morals.

When he was twenty years old he went to a place called **Beirut**, where the people worshipped a huge snake, dragon. The people of Beirut used to offer their daughters to this dragon every year. After each resident of Beirut offered their daughter, they came to the governor and said that they had to leave Beirut because all had offered their daughters and had nothing to offer the dragon anymore. And they said they would leave Beirut for fear of the dragon. But the governor told the people not to fear for he would offer his own daughter.

They took governor's daughter and tied her on a tree outside of the city for the dragon. St. George saw the girl tied on a tree on his way to Beirut, and asked her why she was there. She told him that she was being offered to their god, the dragon, and told him all the customs of Beirut in worshipping this evil. She told him to go before the dragon came so that he would not kill him too. But St. George was not afraid.

While St. George was speaking to the governor's daughter, the dragon came and when he saw St. George, he raised his head to kill him. But He became weak and fell down when St. George made a sign of the cross in front of him. He then got off his horse, untied the governor's daughter and had her drag the dragon to the city with a rope. When the people of Beirut saw St. George and the governor's daughter coming to the city dragging the dragon, they were terrified and told St. George not to bring their god into the city. But he told them that this was not a god at all, he had no power over them, and told them to believe in Jesus Christ. He killed the snake, they feared and worshipped all their life, and sacrificed their daughters for, with a spear.

After witnessing what St. George did in the name of Jesus Christ, they all became Christians. The people of Beirut later built a church in his name in the city and at the place where he killed the dragon.

St. George gave up all his wealth and the chance to be a governor later for the sake of Jesus Christ. He stood up against kings and governors to worship Jesus Christ instead of the idols they forced the people to worship. He received many cruel punishments as a result, but he was able to convert many people into Christianity and strengthen the believers despite being persecuted.

St. George became a martyr on the Ethiopian month of *Miyazya 23 (March 01)*, and Jesus Christ - with a many angels and saints - received his soul into an everlasting happiness.

May the prayers of Saint George help and protect us from evil.

Lessons from the story:

- Making the sign of the cross weakens evil power. The dragon was weakened when St. George made the sign of the cross in front of him. The power of God against evil is manifested by the sign of the Cross. St. Paul testified to this by saying, *"The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God."* 1Corinthians 1:18
- *"Be patient until the coming of the Lord"* James 5:7. These are the words of one of the apostles of Jesus Christ. St. George was patient when being persecuted to the end, until Jesus Christ came with the holy angels and saints to receive him.
- *"Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms."* James 5:13. These are also the words the same apostle. St. George was able to bear his suffering because he always prayed to Jesus Christ when suffering. The apostle Paul said, *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* Phil 4:13.
 - I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.
 - I can be patient through Christ who strengthens me.
 - I can love everybody through Christ who strengthens me.
 - I can change my bad habits in Christ who strengthens me?
 - What else can you do in Christ who strengthens you?

Questions & Exercise

1. *How old was St. George when He went to Beirut?*

2. *What did the people of Beirut used to worship?*

3. *Why did the people of Beirut want to leave Beirut? How did the governor makee them stay?*

4. *What did St. George do when the dragon was about to attack him?*

5. *What is the meaning of prostrating oneself with the sign of the cross?*

6. *What is a martyr? How did St. George become a martyr?*

Jesus' Disciples

Objective: Knowing the 12 disciples and their calling by Jesus Christ.

Memory Verse: *"You shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Acts 1:8*

References: *The Gospel*

Introduction

Jesus Christ chose 12 disciples to follow Him and learn from Him, so that they could preach the gospel to the whole world. Out of the 12, one of them, Judas Iscariot, betrayed Jesus, and passed Him over to the chief priests who wanted to accuse Him falsely and crucify Him on the cross. Next we are going to see the names of the other 11 disciples, how they were chosen, and the 12th disciple, who took the place of Judas of Iscariot

The Lesson

1. **Peter:** Peter was fishing with his brother when Jesus Christ called him to follow Him. His name was Simon. But Jesus named him Peter, which means stone or rock. And He said to him, *"On this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* **Mathew 16:18**
2. **Andrew:** He is the brother of Peter. He was fishing with Peter when Jesus saw them. He called them both and said to them, *"Follow me and I will make you fishers of men."* **Mathew 4:19**
3. **James:** There are two disciples named James among the 11. One is **son of Zebedee**, a fisherman.
4. **John:** He is the brother of James, the **Son of Zebedee**
5. **James:** This is the other James, **the son of Alpheus**.
6. **Philip:** Jesus saw Philip in Galilee, and said to Him *"Follow me"*. He followed Him without asking questions. **John 1:43**. Philip in turn told another person that he found the Messiah of whom Moses and the prophets wrote.
7. **Simon (Nathanael):** He is the one Philip told about Jesus Christ. When Philip told him that he had found the Messiah, he was doubtful; but Philip told him to come see for himself. So, he came to Jesus. When Jesus saw Nathanael, he said, *"Behold an Israelite in whom is no guile."* When Nathanael heard this, he asked, *"Where do you know me?"* Jesus replied, *"Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw (knew) you."* Then Nathanael said, *"You are the Son of God, You are the King of Israel,"* and he followed Jesus from that day on. He is known as **Simon the Canaanite** to distinguish him from Peter.
8. **Thaddeus (Judas):** He is the brother of James, the **son of Alpheus**. He is also known as **Judas the brother of James**.
9. **Bartholomew:** He was sold as a slave, where he spread the gospel through miracles and a testimony until the day of his martyrdom in Armenia.
10. **Matthew:** He was a tax collector. When Jesus saw him, He just said to Him, *Follow me*, immediately he got up and followed Him. Jesus dined in His house that night, and people accused him of dinning with sinners. But he told them that he did not come to call the righteous, but the sinners.
11. **Thomas:** He is the one who would not believe that Jesus Christ was risen from the dead, until he saw Him himself.
12. **Matthias:** Matthias was chosen by disciples with prayer in place of Judas of Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus Christ.

Lessons from the story:

- As we can see, Jesus Christ chose his disciples from different walks of life. He did not choose them from the elite, the wealthy, or the highly regarded of the society. Instead he chose the humble, the hardworking and those regarded low by the society. They followed Him faithfully, learning from Him. He not only chose them, but also opened their minds for them so that they can understand the scriptures, and preach the gospel.
- They preached the gospel, even in the face of imprisonment and persecution, and they were glad to receive all these in His name. The faithfully, and courageously bear testimony of the His life, death, resurrection and ascension, as He had commanded them. That is why our faith is built on their foundation: *"You are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets..." (Ephesians 2:19-20)*

Questions & Exercise

1. *Write the names of the twelve disciples.*

2. *What did Jesus say to Peter, after He gave him his new name?*

3. *Name the pair of disciples that are brothers.*

4. *How many disciples are named James?*

5. *Who is the disciple whom Philip told to come and see the Messiah?*

6. *What was the profession of Mathew before Jesus Christ made him a disciple?*

7. *Who was the disciple who betrayed Jesus Christ? Who was chosen in his place?*

The Bread of Life

Objective: Learn about the Importance of receiving the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

Memory Verse: *"unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.."*
(John 6:53)

References: *John 6*

Introduction

Jesus Christ taught a multitude of people in a place called Capernaum about the Bread of Life. In this lesson, you are going to learn about what this Bread of Life is, what the it's benefit is, and the consequence of living without it.

The Lesson

Many people used to follow Jesus Christ because of the great wonders and miracles He does. Once upon a time, He went to a place called the Sea of Galilee, and many people followed Him as usual. On this night, Jesus Christ blessed only 2 fish and five loaves of bread, and fed 5000 people. After these, He and the disciples went to Capernaum on a boat. But the people did not see Jesus leaving. So, on the next morning, when they could not find Him, they also sailed on a boat to Capernaum.

When they found Jesus Christ, they asked Him when He came. He said to them that they seek Him because he fed them, and they were filled. He told them not to labor for food that perishes, but for the food that gives an everlasting life, which He gives them. Then they asked Him what they should do to do the work of God. So, Jesus taught them saying:

- This is the work of God that you believe in Him whom He sent.
- My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

When they heard this, they said to our Lord Jesus: *"Lord, give us this bread always."* So, Jesus said to them:

- I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.
- He who believes in Me has everlasting life. **I am the bread of life.** Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread, which comes down from heaven that one may eat of it and not die. **I am the living bread, which came down from heaven.** If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and **the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.**
- Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. **Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life,** and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. **He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.** As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread, which came down from heaven - not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. **He who eats this bread will live forever."**

The people who followed him complained about how Christ could give them His flesh and His body. The disciples also said that this was a hard teaching to understand, and they started to draw back from Him. So, Jesus Christ asked His disciples: *"Do you also want to go away?"* But Simon Peter answered Him, *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* Thus the disciples followed him, and they became the first to receive of the body and blood of Jesus Christ on the night of the Last supper, when he blessed the bread, and the cup of wine, and changed both into his body and blood, and gave it to them.

Conclusion:

- According to the teaching of Jesus Christ, we do not have a life without receiving His body and His blood: *"unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you."* (John 6:53) We need to oblige ourselves to receive His holy body and His holy blood so that:
 - We can have life in us,
 - We can have eternal life and
 - We can abide in Him, and Him in us,
- Sometimes, we may not understand all the meanings and the messages of the Scripture, but if we have the kind of faith that Peter expressed by saying: *Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life* - we will eventually come to understand. Because the disciples returned and followed Him, they became the first to receive from this Divine Mystery.

Questions & Exercise

1. What is the miracle Jesus Christ did on the mountain near the Sea of Galilee?

2. Why were the people, who saw the miracle, seeking Jesus Christ?

3. When Jesus told the people that His Father gives them the true bread from heaven, what did they ask Him?

4. What is the true bread of life?

5. What did the disciples think about Jesus' teaching in Capernaum?

6. Who were the first to receive the body and blood of Jesus Christ? When did they receive it?

7. Why do we need to receive the Holy Communion?

8. What is the consequence of living without the Holy Communion?

9. Find our from the Bible where this story is written, how Jesus Chist went to Capernaum after feeding 5000 people.

The Ascension

Objective: Learn about the Ascension of Christ and His commandment to His disciples

Memory Verse: *"You shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Acts 1:8*

References: Mark 16:19-20; Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:3-11

Introduction

Jesus Christ lived 33 years on earth. He was baptized at the age of 30, and for three years, until He ultimately paid for our sins by His crucifixion on the Cross. But He was risen from the dead on the third day, and appeared to the disciples and other believers. Today, we are going to learn about his teaching and commandment to the disciples after His Resurrection, and before His Ascension into heaven.

The Lesson

After His resurrection, Jesus Christ appeared to the disciples at different times in the next 40 days, teaching them about all the things that were written about Him in the Scripture. He opened their minds so that they can understand the Scripture. He strengthened their faith, and removed any doubt they had about His resurrection. He gave them the following commandments and responsibilities:

1. *"Go into the world and preach the gospel to every creature." Mark 16:15*
2. *"John Truly Baptized with water; but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit" Acts 1:5*
3. *"Teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Matthew 28:19-20*
4. *"You shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" Acts 1:8*

He told them that, when they go around the world preaching the gospel, and baptizing in His name, they would be persecuted, and forced to stand trial in front of kings and queens. But whoever endures to the end will be saved. He promised them that, even though He would be gone, He would also be with them till the end of the world, and that He would send them the Holy Spirit so that they may receive power.

On the 40th day after His resurrection, He took all His disciples to Mount Olive, and He blessed them. While they all gathered listening to Him, He went up to heaven and disappeared into the clouds. They remained looking up towards heaven. Immediately, two angels in white appeared to them, and said, *"You men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen Him go into heaven." Acts 1:11*

The disciples then returned to Jerusalem from Mount of Olives, for Jesus Christ commanded them to stay in Jerusalem until they received the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion:

After His resurrection, Jesus Christ taught the disciples for 40 days, and commanded them to preach the gospel to the entire world, baptize all nations in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. He told them that they would be persecuted for being His witnesses, but whoever endures to the end shall be rewarded with everlasting and glorious happiness with Him. Then, He gathered them at **Mount Olives**, where He taught them about Judgment day, and He blessed them and ascended into heaven.

As Christians, we are also called to be His witnesses. Becoming a witness though is not just talking about Jesus Christ, but also keeping His commandments. One of the things He told the disciples to do is to teach all nations and *"to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Matthew 28:20*

Questions & Exercise

1. *How many days did Jesus Stay on earth after His Resurrection?*

2. *What did Jesus command the disciples to do?*

3. *In whose name did Jesus command the disciples to baptize?*

4. *Where were the disciples gathered when Jesus Christ ascended into heaven?*

5. *What did the angels tell the disciples, as they stood staring up as Jesus Christ ascended into heaven?*

6. *Where did Jesus Christ teach the disciples about on the Mount of Olives before His crucifixion?*

7. *According to what Jesus told them, what would happen to the disciples as they go throughout the world witnessing about Jesus Christ?*

Pentecost

Objective: Learn about the gift of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and the importance of assembling with one accord in faith.

Memory Verse: *"They were all with one accord in one place" (Acts 2:1)*

References: Acts 2

Introduction

Pentecost means the 50th day. The day the apostles received the gift of the Holy Spirit is known as Pentecost, because they received the Holy Spirit on the 50th day of Jesus Christ's Resurrection. Today, we are going to see the events of Pentecost, and the beginning of the apostles' ministry.

The Lesson

On the 50th day after the Resurrection and the 10th day of the Ascension of Jesus Christ, the disciples were all gathered at the house of St. Mark. The Virgin Mary and other believers were also with them. There were a total of 120 people gathered with one accord in prayer and supplication.

Suddenly, a sound came from heaven like a wind and filled the house the disciples were gathered in. The Holy Spirit came upon each disciple in the form of a fire, and they all began to speak with other languages. There were many people who came from different parts of the world to celebrate the Jews Passover, and they were amazed to hear the disciples speak in their language. But some of them mocked them saying they were drunk.

Peter, among the disciples stood and gave a sermon to the gathering. He told them that what they see, and have seen in the days before this, were fulfilled according to the words of the prophets. He told them what David had prophesied about the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ. Then he said, *"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*

Three thousand people believed and were baptized on this day. They all continued a life of fellowship, communion and prayer with one accord. This was just the beginning of what Jesus had told them would happen. He promised them *"All these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they speak with new tongues (language)..." Mark 16:17-18*

After the disciples received the gift of the Holy Spirit, they preached the gospel, witnessing about Jesus Christ. They were persecuted, mocked, imprisoned - but they were happy to receive all these afflictions in His name, and became His witnesses unto death.

Important Messages from the story

- Jesus Christ gave the disciples important commandments just before His Ascension:
 1. *Stay in the city of Jerusalem, until you are given power from above. (Luke 24:49)*
 2. *Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:21-22)*
- The disciples stayed in Jerusalem as Jesus Christ had commanded them.
- They were also gathered in one house, with one accord praying & waiting for the fulfillment of Jesus' promise.
- Because they obeyed his commandment and stayed with one accord, the Holy Spirit descended on the 10th day of His resurrection while they were gathered in a room, and they received the gift of many languages.
- Jesus told them that they would be witnesses to Him throughout the world starting from Jerusalem. After they received the promised power and gift of the Holy Spirit, they started their ministry in Jerusalem, and baptized 3000 people just on the first day. Great signs and wonders followed them as Jesus Christ has told them.

Conclusion:

God always fulfils what He promises. But as we can learn from the events of the story above, to receive the promise, we have to be

1. Obedient
2. We need to be with one accord, that is: be in agreement in all things that are good, and pray in harmony.

Questions & Exercise

1. *What does Pentecost mean? What happened on the day of Pentecost?*

2. *Where were the disciples gathered after the Ascension of Jesus Christ? How many people were gathered in one house?*

3. *How many days after the Ascension of Jesus Christ did the disciples receive the Holy Spirit?*

4. *What kind of sign would follow those who believed?*

5. *In what state of harmony were the disciples assembled when they received the Holy Spirit?*

6. *Do you assemble in one accord with your family at home, your friends at school?*

The Temple that became a Church

Objective: Learn about the spiritual reasons for the celebration of St. Michael's day on *Senne 12*, and the forms of modern forms of idolization

Memory Verse: "You shall have no other gods before Me." (Exodus 20:3)

References: Synaxarium

Introduction

The celebration of St. Michael on *Senne 12* of the Ethiopian Calendar started in Egypt in the 4th century. It was first celebrated in a temple built by the legendary Egyptian queen, Cleopatra centuries earlier. We are going to learn in the following lesson how this temple, built for idol worship, was converted into a church, and how the celebration of St. Michael started.

The Lesson

There were pagans in Alexandria, Egypt, who worshipped an idol called Zuhal in a temple built by Cleopatra. They used to offer animal sacrifices to their idol every year on the 12 of the Ethiopian month *Senne*. In the 4th century, the pope of Alexandria, named Alexandros preached the gospel to the people. He taught them that the idol can't hear, reason, speak, or do anything else, because it was made by their own hands. He thought them of the prophecies about Jesus Christ, and the fulfillment of the prophecies in the life of Jesus Christ on earth.

Pope Alxandros became Pope of Alexandria, Egypt during the reign of Emperor Constantine of the Roman Empire. The period before Constantine was marked by a great deal of persecution against Christians. *Do you remember from the previous lessons what Jesus Christ told the disciples of what would happen to them while witnessing about Him? ...* But Constantine declared freedom for all Christians, and the closure of all Pagan worship temples. It was in the same year of this decree that Pope Alexandros became the Pope of Alexandria.

After becoming a Pope, Alexandros consecrated the temple of Zuhal into a church of St. Michael, and destroyed all the statues of their idol. He converted the pagans into Christians and since that time, instead of offering sacrifices to Zuhal, they started worshipping God and distributing their offerings to the poor. The day was also declared St. Michael's day, and ever since that time, St. Michael is celebrated by worshipping God and feeding the poor.

Important Messages from the story

- Pagan worship was wide spread before of Emperor Constantine's decree to close all pagan temples. It may seem that there isn't a great deal of Pagan worship today, but if we examine the world, it is still prevalent. Materialism and individualism are forms of idol worship. Idolization of music stars, movie stars, or sports stars is much more prevalent than idolization of saints, and angels, or anything with divine relevance. When Pope Alexanderos destroyed the statue of Zuhal, he also destroyed the spirit of material idolization, and changed the people to worshipping God, and idolizing saints and holy angels.

Conclusion:

The reign of Emperor Constantine marks the end of the wide spread persecution and martyrdom of Christians, and the closure of the temples of idol worships. The celebration of St. Michael's day on the 12 of the Ethiopian month *Senne* also started by ending the worship of the idol Zuhal, and converting the pagan temple into a church of St. Michael, and the pagans into Christians by Pope Alexanderos during the reign of Constantine.

Do you remember the mother of Emperor Constantine? Hint: She is the one who found the Cross of Jesus after it disappeared for almost three centuries.

Questions & Exercise

1. *Who built the temple of Zuhal? Why was it built?*

2. *Who converted the temple of Zuhal into a church, and the pagans, who worshiped in it, into Christians?*

3. *Who is the Roman emperor that ended the persecution of Christians?*

4. *What is the decree the Roman Emperor made to end the persecution of Christians?*

5. *What is the prevalent kind of idolization in the world today? Do you idolize anything or anyone?*

6. *Who is your favorite saint? Why?*

7. *What is the relationship between the woman who found the Cross, and the Emperor who ended the persecution of Christians by closing pagan temples, and opening churches? What are their names?*

Being an Example to Others

Objective: Learn the responsibility of setting good examples to others.

Memory Verse: *"I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you." John 13:15*

References: *Look at the Verses in the Lesson.*

Introduction

Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary to teach us how to live according to the word of God, and also set an example for us by fulfilling what he was doing. In this lesson, we are going to see how he taught not just in words but also in deeds.

The Lesson

1. Our Lord and savior Jesus Christ said, *"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." (Matt. 5:44).* He set an example for us by praying for those who mocked Him and crucified Him: *"Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." Luke 23:34.*
2. He thought that there is no greater love than laying one's life for another. (John 15:13) He set an example for us by giving His life for us on the Cross.
3. He said, *"Unless a man is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." (John 3:5)* He was baptized in the Jordan River, by John the Baptis, to set an example for us.
4. Finally, before the day of His crucifixion, He washed the disciples feet, and said to them, *"If I then your Master, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you." John 13:14-15*

The disciples did as Christ had commanded them. They preached the gospel with love, setting examples for others, and teaching others to set examples in their lives. The following are such words of St. Paul to his student, Timothy, *"Be an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." (1Tim. 4:12)*

Important Messages from the story

- It is important that we set good examples to others in our lives. Younger brothers and sisters, and children look up to older brothers and sisters, and learn from, not just what they tell them, but also from what elders do. We ought to set examples for others, as Jesus Christ set examples for us.

Conclusion:

The examples that Jesus Christ set for us are that of love, humbleness, and all other kinds of virtues. As St. Paul told his student Timothy, we should set examples to others,

1. **In our word and conversation:** Speak nicely to others, without using bad words in our conversation.
2. **In Charity:** Help the needy, and teach others to do the same.
3. **In Spirit:** Do the works of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness...
4. **In faith:** Keep your faith in Jesus Christ, and live according to His commandments. Active participation and presence in church worship services, and a life of prayer and fasting, are expressions and practices of faith.
5. **In Purity:** Be pure in body and in spirit. Being pure in body means making the necessary physical preparations, i.e. cleanliness, proper dressing ... when coming to church for worship; and abstaining from improper relations with others until marriage. Spiritual preparation means praying, and preparing - thinking and contemplating about spiritual things instead of thinking about material and immoral things.

Questions & Exercise

1. *Give examples of how our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ set examples for us.*

2. *What was St. Paul's advice to his disciple, Timothy?*

3. *Why is it important to teach in words and in deeds?*

4. *Explain some virtues you learned from others through their deeds.*

5. *Do you have younger brothers and sisters? Do they try to imitate your actions? Explain how.*

The Martyrdom of St. Stephen

Objective: Learn about how St. Stephen followed the examples of Jesus Christ, and the importance of following Christ's teachings and examples.

Memory Verse *"Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Acts 7:60*

References: Book of Acts: Ch. 7

Introduction

Martyrdom is giving one's own life for a cause. Many people were killed because of their faith in Jesus Christ, because they would not stop believing and witnessing about Him, and they would not worship or sacrifice to any other idols. St. Stephen is the first to be martyred of the first century Christians, after Christ's ascension. Today we are going to learn about the courage of St. Stephen, and how he followed the examples of Jesus Christ until His death.

The Lesson

St. Stephen was one of seven deacons chosen by the disciples and early church believers to serve the faithful. He was **honest, full of wisdom, and filled with the Holy Spirit**. He did great wonders and miracles among the people. Jews from the Jewish synagogue argued with him, but they could not resist him. So, they accused him of speaking against the holy place, the law and Moses, and they set up false witnesses against him.

He was brought to trial, and the high priest asked him if the charges were true. St. Stephen told the gathering about:

1. The History of the Jews from the time of Abraham.
2. The Prophecy the prophets about the coming of Jesus Christ.
3. The fulfillment of the prophecies about the birth, suffering, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

Then he said to them, *"You stiff necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you do always resist the Holy Spirit."* When they heard this, they were upset, and they took him out of the city, and stoned him. But he was not afraid, and only looked up to heaven while they were stoning him. As he looked up, he saw God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. While being stoned, Stephen prayed: *"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit ... lay not this sin to their charge."* And after he had said this, he passed away - a martyr of Jesus Christ.

Important Messages from the story

- When St. Stephen stood trial, accused, he was not afraid to tell the truth, even though he knew the truth might cost him his life. God wants us to be truthful, no matter what the consequences may be. Those who became martyrs of Jesus Christ received crowns of glory from Jesus Christ because they died for the Truth. But they remain alive in Spirit, and live with God in everlasting happiness.
- When Jesus Christ was on the cross, He prayed for those who crucified Him. Our Lord did this to set an example for us to pray for those who persecute us, or do bad things against us. St. Stephen learned from this, and he also prayed for the people who were stoning him to death. He in turn set an example of love for others. This is an example we should also follow, and aspire to set an example for others.

Conclusion:

As we have seen above, St. Stephen gave up his life for witnessing about Jesus Christ, and spreading the gospel. He became a martyr because he died for the Truth. He was the first to be martyred for Jesus Christ after Christ's ascension. He is referred to as the First Martyr in our church.

Questions & Exercise

1. *Why is St. Stephen known as the first martyr?*

2. *What was St. Stephen accused of?*

3. *What did he tell the Jewish leaders when they put him on trial?*

4. *What did St. Stephen do when the Jews were stoning him to death? What did he see when he looked up?*

5. *How did St. Stephen follow the example Jesus Christ set for us?*

6. *Do you always tell the truth no matter what, like St. Stephen?*

7. *What is martyrdom?*

The Martyrdom of St. Peter

Objective: Learn about life and martyrdom of St. Peter, the Apostle

Memory Verse *"when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish." John 21:18*

References: Gospels, St. Peter's Epistles, Synaxarium

Introduction

Do you remember what martyrdom is? Today we are going to learn about the martyrdom of St. Peter, who was one of the twelve disciples. In the lesson, we are going to learn about what St. Peter used to do before he became a disciple, also what kind of a disciple he was.

The Lesson

St. Peter was a fisherman before he became a disciple of Jesus Christ. Jesus called him and **his brother Andrew** to be his disciples. Once Jesus Christ asked the disciples, *"Who do men say that I am?"* They answered, *"Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."* Then Jesus asked them who they say He is, and Peter answered, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* Because of his faith, Jesus said to him that He was a rock (Peter), upon which he would build His church.

When Jesus Christ was crucified, St. Peter was following to see what they would do to Him. But he denied knowing Him three times, when someone claimed that they saw him with Jesus Christ. St. Peter repented and cried bitterly for his denial.

After Jesus Christ's resurrection, he entrusted the faithful to Peter by saying, *"Feed my lambs ... feed my sheep ... feed my sheep."* After receiving the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, St. Peter spent the rest of his life preaching the gospel. Three thousand people believed and were baptized on the day of Pentecost after Peter gave a long speech witnessing about Jesus Christ. He also did great wonders and miracles. People were being healed just by being in the presence of his shadow. He later went to Rome and spread the word of the gospel.

Nero, the emperor of Rome, arrested Peter and condemned him to die on the cross. Peter was willing to die for Jesus Christ, but he asked them to hang him upside down on the cross, saying he is not equal to his Lord Jesus Christ to be crucified upright like Him. He received the crown of martyrdom on July 12 (Hamle 5 of the Ethiopian Calendar).

St. Peter wrote two epistles (messages) to the believers.

Important Messages from the story

- **St. Peter** used to catch fish for living, but once a disciple, he caught only men for Jesus Christ, being His witness even unto death, sacrificing his life. God wants small sacrifices from us too. Coming to church, sitting quietly in a classroom, and participating in the Divine Liturgy are few of the personal sacrifices we can give to God.
- We should repent when we sin, as St. Peter repented after denying Jesus Christ. If we repent for our sins, God is ready to forgive our sins. It was after Peter repented that Jesus gave him a greater responsibility by saying, feed my lambs, feed my sheep.
- The epistles St. Peter wrote are for us, so that we can learn how to lead a righteous life. So, we should read and learn from his epistles, as we learned from his life.

Conclusion:

St. Peter was one of the 12 disciples of Jesus Christ. He is known as the chief disciple, because Jesus Christ said to him he is a rock upon which He builds His church. Peter means rock. Even though he denied knowing Jesus three times on the day of Jesus' crucifixion, he repented and received greater responsibility to keep and feed the flock of God. He spent the rest of his life preaching the gospel, and became a martyr in Rome, on July 12 (Hamle 5 of the Ethiopian Calendar)

Questions & Exercise

1. *What did St. Peter used to do before He became a disciple?*

2. *What did he answer when Jesus Christ asked the disciples about who they thought He was?*

3. *Why is Peter considered the chief disciple?*

4. *When did Peter deny Jesus Christ? What did he do afterwards?*

5. *What was the responsibility Jesus gave Peter?*

6. *How many people believed and were baptized on the day of Pentecost after Peter's preaching?*

7. *Where was St. Peter Martyred? How was he martyred?*

The Martyrdom of St. Paul

Objective: Learn about spiritual battle from the life and martyrdom of St. Paul

Memory Verse: *"We must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God."* Acts 14:22

References: Synaxarium and Book of Acts

Introduction

St. Paul, who was also known as **Saul**, was not a disciple of Jesus Christ until after His Ascension. He was a zealous Jew, and also a scholar of the Jewish Law. He was among the people who crucified Jesus Christ, and later, after Christ's Resurrection and Ascension, persecuted Christians, because of his zeal to maintain the Jewish faith. He was also present at the stoning of St. Stephen. Today, we are going to learn how he came to accept Christ, and became one of the greatest apostles of the His time.

The Lesson

After the death of St. Stephen, the Christians in Jerusalem were scattered out to different cities. Paul received a letter of permission to go to Damascus, one of the cities where Christians were exiled, to bring back Christians as prisoners. But on his way to Damascus, a great light shined around Him, and he heard a voice that said, "**Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?**" Then Saul asked, who are you Lord? And the Lord replied, "**I am Jesus whom you persecute.**"

He asked Jesus what He wanted him to do. Our Lord, Jesus Christ told him to go to Damascus, where he would find a person named **Ananias**, who would tell him what he needed to do. So, Paul was led into Damascus by his company because he was blinded from the light. After fasting for three days, Ananias came and healed him so that he could see, and baptized him. Ever since this time, St. Paul dedicated his life to preaching the gospel to Jews and non-Jews around the world.

When he returned to Jerusalem, the Jews were angry with him because of his faith in Jesus Christ, and the Christians did not believe him at first, because he used to persecute them. But they accepted him after a disciple named **Barnabas** came and testified about his conversion. St. Paul traveled around the world spreading the gospel, and also multiplying believers and disciples.

He had been put to prison, stoned and left to die, and beaten up because of his devotion to spreading the gospel. But he said, "**I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.**" (Phil. 4:13) and continued to teach the gospel. He was later imprisoned and taken to Rome, where he had converted many to Christianity, to stand trial in front of a king, named Nero. The king condemned him to die by cutting his head off. But he was never afraid to die, for a death for the faithful is a bridge to a glorious union with God. That is why he said, "**I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing.**" (II Tim. 4:6-8)

Just before he was beheaded, a woman gave him her veil to wipe his face with it. St. Paul put it over his face when he was beheaded. The woman later met the soldier who carried out the king's judgment, and asked him what happened to Paul. He told her that he was beheaded, and that her veil was over his face. But the woman told him that he was lying because she just saw St. Paul and St. Peter passing by with crowns on their heads, and that St. Paul gave her the veil back; and she showed him the veil.

St. Paul wrote 14 epistles (messages) that are part of the New Testament. His first epistle is to the Romans, where he was martyred.

Important Messages from the Lesson

- Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is ready to receive us if we return to Him, as he received St. Paul when he returned to Him.
- When St. Paul suffered a lot due to his faith in Jesus Christ, he knew that he could bear the suffering, trusting God to help him overcome. That is why he said, "**I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.**"
- There is a crown of glory to all who believe in Jesus Christ, and keep his commandments, and keep their faith. St Paul testified to this by saying: "**There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge will give to me on that Day, and to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.**" /2 Timothy 4:8/

Conclusion:

St. Paul was called by Jesus Christ while traveling to persecute Christians, but became a devout disciple after he was called. He preached the gospel the rest of his life to the Jews, and non-Jews around the world, and was martyred in Rome in the name of Jesus Christ.

Questions & Exercise

1. *Why did Saul persecute Christians?*

2. *Where was he traveling to when Jesus spoke to him? Why was he traveling there?*

3. *What did Jesus Christ say to Saul when He first spoke to him?*

4. *Who testified about St. Paul when the believers doubted him after his conversion?*

5. *Where was St. Paul Martyred?*

6. *What happened to the veil a woman gave St. Paul just before he was beheaded? Who did the woman say that she saw after St. Paul was martyred?*

7. *What is the reward of those who "loved His appearing" according to St. Paul?*

Qirkos & Iyalota

Objective: Learn about spiritual battle from the life of Qirkos & Iyalota.

Memory Verse: *"We must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God." Acts 14:22*

References: Synaxarium

Introduction

Today we are going to continue to learn about the lives of saints, a mother and her child, who had been persecuted a great deal, and bear all the sufferings and hardships until they received the crown of Martyrdom.

The Lesson

On the 15th day of the Ethiopian month, *Hamle*, we celebrate the martyrdom of a child and his mother, **Qirkos and Iyalota**. The governor of a place called Tarsus ordered Iyalota to worship idols, but she told him that even her three-year-old child knows not to worship idols. So, the governor told the three year old to worship his idols. But Qirkos replied, *"your gods are made of stone and wood by the hands of men. There is no other god except my Lord Jesus Christ."*

Qirkos also said, *"The Lord who saved Ananiah, Azariah, and Mishael from a fiery fire can save us."* Indeed, when they were thrown into a fiery fire, God sent the archangel who saved the three young men Qirkos mentioned, to protect them from the fire, and save them. Many people believed in Jesus Christ because of their perseverance in their faith. Even though Qirkos was only a child, he learned the story of the three young men, and inherited their faith.

The governor subjected them to different kinds of torture, but God delivered them many times. He finally called them to His eternal peace, and they received the crown of martyrdom on the 15th of the Ethiopian month, *Hamle*.

Important Messages from the Lesson

- Qirkos and Iyalota lived during a time known by the church as the Era of Martyrdom. There was a great deal of persecution against Christians. Some gave up their faith for fear of death, or for the riches of this world; but others like Qirkos and Iyalota persevered. By sacrificing themselves, not only did they receive an eternal crown of martyrdom, but also preserved for us the faith which they received from the apostles, and by which we also enter into eternal life with God. That is why we praise saints, and also ask for their prayers to intercede upon us.
- The death of a martyr is a glory for the person, because he/she would not die in vain. Through martyrdom,
 1. They gained a glorious entry into eternal happiness with God and the saints.
 2. They became causes of salvation for many, because, through their sacrifice many people quit their bad habits or worshiping of idols to become Christian.
 3. They preserved and passed on the faith for others to carry on. St. Jude reminds us the importance of preserving and passing on our faith by saying, *"It was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that you should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."* Jude 3.
- Qirkos learned to be faithful and courageous from the three young men before him. We also should learn from our fore fathers, and repeat their history today.

Conclusion:

In the last couple of weeks we learned about the martyrdom of four saints, St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Qirkos, and St. Iyalota. St. Peter was one of the first 12 disciples. St. Paul converted, and became a disciple of Jesus Christ after he had a fateful encounter with Jesus Christ on his way to persecute Christians. St. Qirkos and St. Iyalota lived many years after the martyrdom of both disciples. They all died for confessing their faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and they received a crown of glory for they conquered this world by their death.

Questions & Exercise

1. *What is martyrdom?*

2. *Why did Qirkos and Iyalota leave their native land?*

3. *Did Qirkos and Iyalota escape persecution after they left their native land?*

4. *What did Qirkos say to the governor who threatened to throw them in a fire if they would not worship his idols?*

5. *Who is the angels who saved Qirkos and Iyalota from the fiery fire?*

6. *What are the fruits of Martyrdom?*

7. *Who did Qirkos learn from to have courage in faith?*

8. *What is the era called, during which Qirkos and Iyalota lived?*

Abuna Aregawi

Objective: Learn the life of Abuna Aregawi, one of the 9 early Ethiopian saints.

Memory Verse: "Stand fast in Faith." *1 Corinthians 16:13*

References: Acts of Abuna Aregawi

Introduction

Abuna Aregawi is one of nine saints, who came to Ethiopia in the early 4th century and built monasteries. He disappeared in a cave on mount Debre Damo, after many years of monastic life, and teaching. We are going to learn about the life of this saint, and also how the 9 saints came to Ethiopia.

The Lesson

Abuna Aregawi was born of devoted Christian parents. He was raised by his parents to love and respect God. His parents named him **Zemichael**, which means - of Michael. He went to Greece to devote his life to God under a monk named Aba Pakumis. Aba Pakumis told him of the hardships of monastic life, but Zemichael was determined to dedicate his life to God. He had already given up his parent's house and his inheritance.

Zemichael became a monk when he was only 14. Aba Pakumis admired his devotion, love and piety. Seven of His friends came to the monastery and became monks following his footsteps. They always looked unto him and called him **Abuna Aregawi (the elder)** because of his deep wisdom and knowledge despite his young age. Abuna Aregawi's mother also left her house and her belongings and joined him in the monastery and became a nun.

Abuna Aregawi had a vision of Ethiopia as a land, which had accepted Christianity before preaching by the apostles. He shared his vision to his friends and they decided to continue their monastic life in Ethiopia. His mother also left with him to Ethiopia. Once in Ethiopia, Abuna Aregawi and his friends sent for their friend **Isaac (Yisehaq)** in Rome. Isaac left Rome and his family to join his friends in Ethiopian. He is one of the 9 saints, who was later named Abuna Gerima.

The nine friends decided that they shouldn't live together in luxury and each decided to find a place where God has prepared for them. They all went their separate ways and each established monasteries and ascetic life. The monasteries these nine saints established are still great sites of pilgrimage, monastic life, and theological teachings. Even though they came from Rome, they embraced the culture, the language and became synonymous with Ethiopia.

Abuna Aregawi went North of Axum in search of a place of solitude to lead a life of prayer and worship. He ate a loaf of bread at night when he came to rest. He did this three times, but finished the loaf without getting full. Therefore he wouldn't stay in these places because he knew that the God's blessing was not there. He finally saw Debre Damo, a mountaintop surrounded by a cliff. He loved the place when he saw it and wished to go to the top, but there was no access. The Archangel Michael appeared to him and told him that a huge snake would be sent to him from God to put him to the mountaintop. After 2 weeks of prayer, a 60-foot snake came and put him on top of the mountain.

He worshipped God on the mountain and took out his loaf of bread to feed himself as usual. But this time, he was full with only half of the loaf. He therefore knew that God's blessing was in this place and glorified him for all the good things he did for him. His mother and his followers stayed at the bottom of the mountain.

Many people from all over the country heard of the miracles and wonders being done by Abuna Aregawi and came to visit him. They built a rope to climb the mountain, and that is the only means of access to the mountaintop to this day. Atse Gebre Meskel, one of the Ethiopian Kings during the life of Abuna Aregawi built stairs to climb the mountain to build a church. But he destroyed it after the completion of a magnificent church on Debre Damo. St. Yared visited this place and praised it as a place that would always be visited by angels and where God would be glorified.

King Caleb, the father of King Gebre Meskel came to Abuna Aregawi to get his blessing before he went to war in Yemen to repel the persecution of Christians upon the request of the Pope of Constantinople. Abuna Aregawi blessed him and told him that God would grant him victory over his enemies. King Caleb returned victorious from the war as Abuna Aregawi told him. Because God has given him glory over his enemies, King Caleb gave up his throne and went into a monastery to lead a monastic life.

Abuna Aregawi disappeared like Enoch of Genesis in the cave of Debre Damo when he was 99 years old.

May the blessing of our Abuna Aregawi be with us all.

Conclusion:

- Ethiopia used to be a haven for Christians who were oppressed because of their faith. That was not accidental. It was the faith that attracted so many like Abune Aregawi. Our faith is still a haven from many hardships in life, because it offers solutions for all kinds of problems, and guides us in the right direction in our faith.

Questions & Exercise

1. *What is the name his parents gave Abuna Aregawi? How did he come to be called Abuna Aregawi?*

2. *What is the vision Abuna Aregawi had about Ethiopia?*

3. *How many saints came to Ethiopian with Abuna Aregawi?*

4. *Why did the nine saints decide to part with each other?*

5. *Where is the monastery of Abuna Aregawi founded?*

6. *How did Abuna Aregawi get to the top of the mountain, where he founded the monastery?*

7. *Who built a church on Debre Damo? What happened to the stairs the king built to climb up the mountain?*

8. *Who is the king who came to get a blessing from Abuna Aregawi before going to war?*

9. *What did St. Yared say of Debre Damo?*

10. *Did Abuna Aregawi die? What happened to him?*

11. *Do you remember of anyone in the Holy Bible who was taken alive by God?*

Ascension of the Virgin Mary

Objective: Learn about the resurrection and the ascension of the Virgin Mary.

Memory Verse: *"Upon Thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir." Psalm 45:9*

References: Miracles of Mary and Synaxarium

Introduction

Felseta literally means going from one place to another. We use the term during the fast of the Ethiopian month Nehasse in remembrance of the Ascension of the Virgin Mary.

The Lesson

After the Virgin Mary died, angels took her body and placed it under **the Tree of Life**. Because the apostles did not know about the where about of her body, they were sad for a long time. They fasted for two weeks for God to reveal the fate of her body. On the 14th day of the Ethiopian month Nehasse, the Lord gave them her body and they buried her that same day. Thomas the apostle was not present at the time, but he saw the Virgin Mary ascending into heaven on the 16th of Nehasse, three days after the apostles buried her body. She gave Thomas a piece of her burial linen as she ascended into heaven.

When Thomas met the other apostles, he asked them about the Virgin Mary. They told him that they buried her body three days ago. But Thomas said he would not believe unless he saw her body himself. So, they went to her grave to show him, but found no body inside. Thomas then told them that he saw her ascending into heaven, and showed them the linen she gave him.

In remembrance of this, we fast for two weeks like the apostles from the first of the Ethiopian month Nehasse, until the day of her resurrection, the 16th of Nehase. Priests and bishops put a piece of cloth on the hand held cross they bless us with, as a symbol of the linen the apostle Thomas received from the Virgin Mary.

The apostles were sad again because they didn't see her ascension, and they fasted again for two weeks. A year after her resurrection, on the day of her ascension, the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to all the apostles with the Virgin Mary.

May the blessing of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Virgin Mary be upon us. Amen.

Important Messages from the Lesson

- The Virgin Mary's resurrection reminds us of our own resurrection on judgment day. Because she is the mother of God, holier than all creation, God would not leave her body on earth until judgment day. King David prophesied, *"Upon Your right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir."* The queen King David spoke of is the Virgin Mary.
- As we can see from the story, prayer accompanied by fasting is essential. The disciples fasted and prayed to see the Virgin Mary, and God heard their supplications. That is why we have seven fasting periods during the year. *Find out and write the seven fasting periods of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.*

Conclusion:

The Virgin Mary died at age 64, on the Ethiopian month of **Tir 21**. Angels took her body, but returned her back to the apostles on the 14th day of the Ethiopian month *Nehasse*, after they prayed and fasted for two weeks. She was resurrected and ascended into heaven on the third day of her burial, on the 16th of *Nehase*. Only Thomas saw her ascension into heaven, but she appeared to all the disciples with Jesus Christ, a year from the date of her Ascension.

Questions & Exercise

1. *Where did angels take the Virgin Mary's body after she died?*

2. *Who is the disciple who was not present when the other disciples buried her body?*

3. *Who is the disciple who saw the Virgin Mary ascending into heaven?*

4. *Why did the disciples fast twice after the falling asleep of the Virgin Mary??*

5. *What does Felseta mean? Why do we use this term for the fasting period in remembrance of the Virgin Mary's ascension?*

6. *How is the linen Thomas received from the Virgin Mary, when she ascended into heaven, represented (symbolized) in our church?*

7. *Can you write some symbolisms and representations of Biblical or religious events and figures in the church?*

8. *Can you think of wrong symbolisms and representations in the world that may influence the youth into materialism and wrong actions?*

Ezra

Objective: Learn about a prophet named Ezra, his wisdom, his faith, and his conversation with an angel.

Memory Verse: *"The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him'." Ezra 8:21-22*

References: Book of Ezra

Introduction

Today, we are going to learn about one of the prophets of God, who lived during a time when the Israelites were under captivity by Babylonians, and who had a great deal of zeal for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and his faith.

The Lesson

There was a prophet named **Ezra** during the 70 years captivity of Israel. The king of Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and their children were taken prisoners. Ezra was one of the prophets who were taken to Persia during this captivity. He always sought the word of God, and was a scholar of the laws of Moses.

While in Persia, Ezra saw more sinful deeds by the people than he had ever seen in Israel. He started asking God why He had given the children of Israel into the hands of more sinful people. God sent the angel **Urael**, one of the seven archangels, to answer his questions. The angel Urael explained to Ezra the great wisdom of God, which is beyond human understanding.

During this time Ezra had seven visions about different events including the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and also the coming of Jesus Christ. The angel Urael interpreted his visions for him, and told him that God revealed these visions to him because of his love for God, and for Jerusalem.

God revealed these visions for Ezra after he had fasted and prayed for several days. He was also humble in front of God. He was so humble that the angel Urael said to him, *"You are blessed in the sight of God for you made yourself like a sinner, when you are not; and you have humbled yourself, and did not pride yourself as righteous."*

The archangel Urael gave Ezra a cup of drink, which was **a drink of great wisdom** and understanding. He also revealed many secrets to five people Ezra had chosen, and they wrote 24 books in 40 days. The archangel Urael is known as **the Angel of Wisdom** in our church because he revealed many secrets and gave wisdom to Ezra.

Ezra went back to Jerusalem from captivity during the reign of the Persian king called Artaxxes, with the king's approval. He knew that they would need protection on their way to Jerusalem from their enemies. But Ezra didn't ask for any escort of soldiers from the king. He told the king, *"The hand of God is upon all those for good who seek Him."* and he declared a fast before they started going to Jerusalem.

They took with them different articles, gold and silver for the house of God, and God has delivered them from the hands of their enemies.

Important Messages from the Lesson

1. God's wisdom is beyond our understanding to question.
2. We should be zealous for the worship place of God.
3. Ezra had always wanted to rebuild Jerusalem and build a temple for God. God revealed to him many mysteries through the angel Urael as a result.
4. We should humble ourselves in front of God like Ezra.
Ezra always humbled himself, and because of this the angle Urael told him that he is blessed in the sight of God.
5. We should always have faith in the might of God, instead of our own might.

Ezra said *"I proclaimed a fast at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, 'The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him'." Ezra 8:21-22*

Conclusion:

Ezra was a righteous man, as the angel Urael himself testified. He was also humble, and considered himself a sinner. He led a life of fasting and prayer. He wanted to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and when he was given permission by the king of Persia, he didn't ask for soldiers. Instead, he proclaimed a fast, for he knew that the protection of God was greater than the protection of armies.

Questions & Exercise

1. *What did Ezra ask God after the Israelites were made captive?*

2. *Who is the angel whom God sent to Ezra? Why did God send him this angel?*

3. *How many visions did Ezra had during his captivity? Who revealed these visions to him, and why?*

4. *What is one of the visions he had about Jerusalem?*

5. *Who testified about the righteousness of Ezra in the story?*

6. *What did Ezra consider of himself, even though he was righteous?*

7. *Why didn't Ezra ask for soldiers from the King when he was returning to Jerusalem?*

8. *What did the Israelites take with them when returning to Jerusalem?*

9. *How many books did the men Ezra chose write? How many days it take them?*

10. *How were they able to write so many books in just few days?*

Tobiah

Objective: Learn about the benefit of different spiritual virtues from the story of Tobiah

Memory Verse: *"The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek Him'." Ezra 8:21-22*

References: Book of Tobiah

Introduction

This is a story of how God turns the despair of two faithful persons, who wished for their death out of distress, through an angel. It is a story of strong faith, character and perseverance.

The Lesson

There was a man named **Tobit** who lived during the reign of a cruel king in Persia. Tobit used to give to the poor, and help the needy. He used to bury the body of the people who were killed by this cruel king. Once upon a time, he was very tired from helping the needy all day, and lay down in open air outside his house with his eyes open. A bird threw its water on his eyes and he became blind. One day, out of despair Tobit prayed, *"Lord, do what is pleasing to you ... send me Your angel to receive my soul"*

There was a man named **Raguel** in the land of Midian during the same period, who had a daughter called **Sarah**. She was married 7 times, but all the men she married died the night they married her. People were saying bad things about her as a result. At the same time Tobit was praying for his death, **Sarah** also out of distress prayed, *"My Lord and my Creator, blessed be Your name and blessed is Your work ... Take me away so that I do not live in despair."*

The Lord God heard the prayers of both Tobit, and Sarah in His throne, and sent the **Archangel Rafael** to save them from their distress.

Tobit had a son named **Tobiah**. He wanted to send him to Median to bring him some money he had given to a man to keep for him. Tobiah met a young man and asked him if he knew the way to Median, and the young man said he did. So Tobiah took him to his father, Tobit, and Tobit promised the young man to pay him for his service when he comes back with his son. **Tobiah's mother Rahel** cried because her son was traveling far away, but Tobit told her not to worry for *an Angel of the Lord would go before him*, and would bring him back safe.

On their way to Median, a whale came out of the sea to swallow Tobiah, but the young man saved him and they killed the whale and fed themselves. The young man led Tobiah to the house of Raguel, and helped him marry his daughter Sarah and survive. Raguel thought that Tobiah was going to die like the other seven men she married, who died on the first night of the wedding. Tobiah stayed at Raguel's house because of the wedding, and the young man went to Median with Tobit's letter to bring his money.

When the young man came back, Tobiah, Sarah and the young man were set to go back to his father's house with an inheritance of half of Raguel's wealth. Tobit and Sarah were worried when Tobiah did not come back on time. Tobiah was also worried about them, but the young man comforted him. He told Tobiah to rub the his father's eye with a piece of the whale's liver when he gets to his father's house.

When they finally came back to his father's house, Tobit came out to receive him. Tobiah hugged his father and rubbed his eye with a piece of the whale's liver. His father then rubbed his eye and he was able to see Tobiah and his wife, Sarah.

Tobit told Tobiah to pay his young friend his wage. Tobiah said he would be glad to pay him half of what he inherited from his father in law, "for he has returned me back safely, cured my wife and also my father." But the young man said to them, *"I presented your prayer, and your daughter in law's prayer to God when you prayed to Him. I was with you when you buried the dead, and when you were helping the poor and the needy. The Lord God sent me to save you and your daughter in law, Sarah. I am Rafael, one of the seven Archangels who present the prayers of the holy to the presence of the Lord's glory."* They believed in the angel sent by God, and in the miraculous work of God.

Tobit and Raguel and their wives lived long enough to see their grandchildren, the children of Tobiah and Sarah.

Important Messages from the Lesson

- God answers our prayers and eases our despair and distress in his own ways. Tobit and Sarah prayed for their death in distress, but God relieved them of their distress in a different way.
- God sends his angels to help us. Tobit told his wife Rahel, "An angel of the Lord would go before him". And an angel of the Lord indeed went before him.
- We should help the needy, and the poor. If we give to the needy, we will be rewarded by God in our life just as Tobit was rewarded with a blessing through his son, and was also cured from his blindness.
- Angels present our prayers to God. They always stay with us, when we occupy ourselves with deeds of righteousness, as the Archangel Rafael had been with Tobit during his deeds of righteousness.

Questions & Exercise

1. Describe the good deeds of Tobit.

2. Why was Tobit distressed?

3. Why was Sara distressed?

4. Who did God send to Tobit and Sarah to save them from their distress?

5. How many Archangels are there?

6. What did Tobit told Rahel when she was worried about Tobiah?

7. Can you name the angles from the previous classes?

St. Ignatius

Objective: Learn about St. Ignatius and the importance of perseverance

Memory Verse: *"Whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame." Romans 10:11*

References: Synaxarium (Tahsas 24)

Introduction

The first century was marked by extreme persecution of Christians. Many were tortured and killed for preaching about Jesus Christ and worshiping Him. The disciples were martyred in this century. Today's lesson is about the life, the faith and the courage of one of the saints of the first century - **St. Ignatius**.

The Lesson

St Ignatius is an apostle who lived in the first century. He is said to be the child Jesus Christ had on his side, when He said: *"Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of God."* (Matt 18:3)

He later became a **disciple of John the apostle**. He was the third patriarch of the Church of Antioch. He converted many people to Christianity, teaching them and revealing to them the knowledge of God, and baptized them.

Some pagans were alarmed and accused Ignatius of destroying the worship of idols and bringing many people into the Christian faith. The emperor told him to stop his teaching and sacrifice to his idols. But Ignatius said to him that not only would he not sacrifice for his worship, but also would convert the emperor himself to worship Jesus Christ if he could.

The emperor, whose name was Trajan, was upset and ordered his soldiers to torture him. When he saw that Ignatius would not sacrifice for the emperor's idols despite all the tortures, he ordered his soldiers to throw him alive to lions.

When they threw him in the midst of the lions, St. Ignatius raised his voice, and said, *"Hear my voice, O ye men of the city of Rome, who are gathered together here, know ye that I do not suffer this torture for the sake of pride and arrogant boasting, but I suffer it patiently for the sake of Jesus Christ, my Lord God. And behold, my soul desires that these lions shall chew me up like grain, for my soul desires to depart to my Lord Jesus Christ."*

The lions came near him, and stood in fear. He delivered his life in the hand of Christ, and died on this day, **Tahsas 24** of the Ethiopian month. The lions never touched his body, and the Christians of Antioch buried his body in glory.

Praised be the Lord who is glorified in His saints.

May the prayers of St. Ignatius be with us.

Important Messages from the Lesson

- Children are pure in their heart, and do not have ill intentions towards others. What Jesus meant by becoming like little children is having a pure and loving heart.
- St. Ignatius preached tirelessly to convert pagans to Christianity. He witnessed about Jesus Christ to anyone he met. He even told the emperor who imprisoned him that he would try to convert him. He had no fear, for he was courageous in Jesus Christ. It is also important that we talk about Jesus Christ as much as we can to others. We usually talk about TV shows, sports and many other things. But, we often do not talk about the love, and the miracles of God in our lives. Remember Jesus sent the disciples to be His witnesses.
- Do you remember a prophet who was thrown into a Lion's den in the Old Testament? ... We learn from this and today's story the power of faith.

The Parable of the Sower

Objective: Learn the importance of remembering the word of God in our lives

Memory Verse: "*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*" James 1:22

References: Matthew 13

Introduction

Our Lord Jesus Christ used to teach often in parables. *Do you know what a parable is?* ... A parable is a short story used as an example to teach a moral lesson. In this lesson we are going to learn one of such parables Jesus Christ taught.

The Lesson

Once upon a time Jesus taught many people who were standing on a shore following parable:

1. Behold, **a sower went out to sow**. And as he sowed, **some seed fell on the street**; and the birds came and devoured them.
2. **Some fell on stony places**, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away.
3. And **some fell among thorns**, and the thorns sprang up and choked them.
4. But **others fell on good ground** and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Jesus explained the parables to the disciples as follows:

1. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand *it*, then the wicked *one* comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the street.
2. But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.
3. Now he who received seed among the thorns, is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.
4. But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands *it*, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

Important Messages from the Lesson

- According to the teaching the seed is the word of God. If we do not understand the word of God, the wicked one - Satan, takes away what was sown in our heart. So it is important that we ask questions to understand the word of God we hear and learn everyday.
- Not having a foundation and the riches of this world are other obstacles of bearing fruit from the word of God. The purpose of spiritual learning at an early age is to lay a strong spiritual foundation. But even after having the spiritual foundation, we have to be careful not to be deceived by the riches, attractiveness and materialism of this world.
- Our heart is like the good ground that bears fruit only if we are doers, and not just hearers of the word of God. It is a struggle to overcome the temptations of this world, but hearing the word of God as often as we can, praying and fasting are important spiritual tools to overcome temptations.

How would you describe your heart according to the parable? Do you have a heart like the street, the stony place, a ground with thorns, or a good ground that bears fruit?