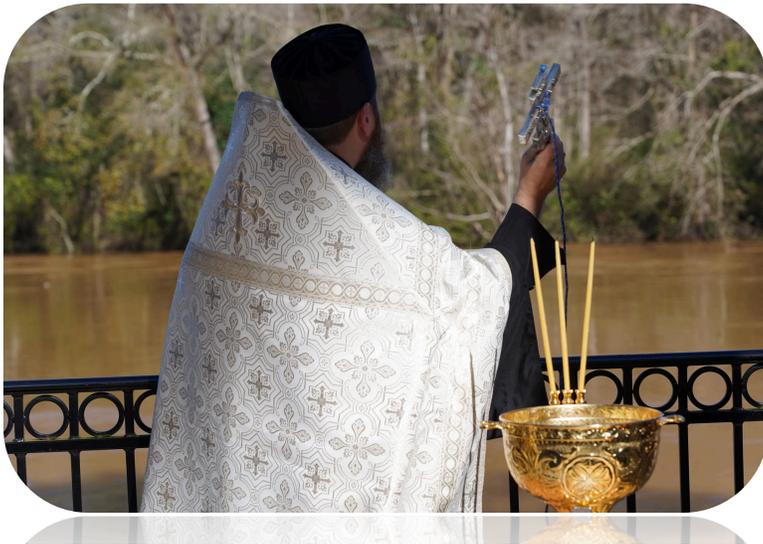


ST. INNOCENT ORTHODOX CHURCH SCHOOL NEWSLETTER

Feast of the Theophany

Of Our Lord And Savior Jesus Christ



Theophany is the Feast which reveals the Most Holy Trinity to the world through the Baptism of the Lord (Mt.3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22). God the Father spoke from Heaven about the Son, the Son was baptized by Saint John the Forerunner, and the Holy Spirit descended upon the Son in the form of a dove. From ancient times this Feast was called the Day of Illumination and the Feast of Lights, since God is Light and has appeared to illumine "those who sat in darkness," and "in the region of the shadow of death" (Mt.4:16), and to save the fallen race of mankind by grace. Source: www.oca.org

Holidays & Saints Days

January 1

CIRCUMCISION OF CHRIST
St. Basil the Great

January 2

Ven. Seraphim of Sarov

January 6

THEOPHANY OF CHRIST

January 7

Synaxis of St. John the Baptist

January 17

God-bearing Father Anthony the Great

January 24

Bl. Xenia of St. Petersburg

January 25

St. Gregory the Theologian

January 30

Synaxis of the 3 Hierarchs: St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian, St. John Chrysostom

From Teachings of St. Anthony The Great

"One who knows oneself, knows God: and one who knows God is worthy to worship Him as is right. Therefore, my beloved in the Lord, know yourselves."

"Except through great humility in your whole heart and mind and spirit and soul and body, you will not be able to inherit the kingdom of God...for he knows his own disgrace, seeks again his elect grace; and whoever

knows his own death, also knows his life eternal." (Letter VI)

"Whoever hammers a lump of iron, first decides what he is going to make of it, a scythe, a sword, or an axe. Even so we ought to make up our minds what kind of virtue we want to forge or we labor in vain."

January, The Month of Orthodox Teachers

January (in Latin, Ianuarius) is named after the Latin word for door (ianua), since January is the door to the year and an opening to new beginnings.

It is considered one of the busiest of the liturgical months, due to it being populated with important feasts and saints. It is also a door for us to the Orthodox tradition. Through the lives of saints and their teachings we learn the importance of humility, kindness, rebirth and reconstitution of human's weak nature for the purpose and benefit of our salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

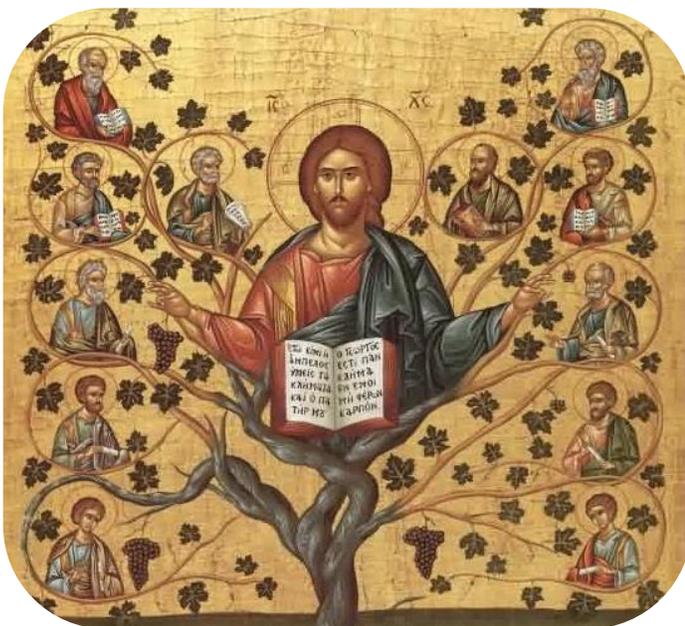
We begin the month of January with a dual feast of great importance within the Church. The first is the Circumcision of Christ, which took place eight days after Christ was born, and therefore falls eight days after Christmas in the liturgical calendar. The importance of this

feast lies in the fact that it proves God indeed came in the flesh. The second is the commemoration of Saint Basil the Great, one of the Three Hierarchs of the Church and among the greatest Fathers of the Church. With January 1st behind us, we now enter the Pre-festal days of Holy Theophany. And like Holy Week, we especially focus on preparing for the Day of Theophany. January 5th is known as the Eve of Lights, for the radiance of the feast of Theophany the next day. This culminates with Holy Theophany itself, or the Feast of Lights, on January 6th, which is considered one of the Twelve Great Feasts of the Church. And just like the day after Christmas we have a special commemoration, or Synaxis, for the principle character of the feast without whom it would not



Continued on page 4

How To Impart Faith To Your Children By Fr. Stavros



On the Sunday before the Nativity, we read the 42 generation genealogy of Christ from the time of Abraham to Joseph, His "earthly" father. It was necessary that Christ came from the lineage of Abraham. This is because God made His first covenant with Abraham, in Genesis 15, that if Abraham worshipped Him as God, He would number Abraham's descendant as the grains of sand on the seashore. Through this covenant, the Jewish faith was established. The Jews were recognized as God's chosen people. And because of this, they could live in expectation that God would one day redeem His chosen people through the "Messiah" who would come to save the people and lead them back to God and to Paradise.

In my work as a priest, I talk to people about a concept I call "the playbook." A football team (and it

Continued on page 5



Celebrating Theophany in Russia

The Christmas season comes to an end with Theophany celebrations in the memory of the baptism of Jesus Christ by John the Forerunner in the waters of the Jordan River. This holiday is also called Epiphany. According to the legend when Jesus Christ was being baptized, the Holy Spirit as a dove came from heaven, and the voice of God said that Jesus Christ was His beloved Son.

Millions of Russians marked the occasion with a traditional bathing ritual - often braving freezing waters. In line with the age-old tradition, thousands upon thousands of people come to special baptismal holes cut out in the ice covering lakes and rivers for brief bathing in the icy water in commemoration of the event of about 2,000 years ago when Jesus took baptism in the waters of the River Jordan from St John the Baptist.

Great blessing of water is taking place in churches, with believers taking the blessed water away to their homes where it is to be kept until next year's Baptism and drunk in small

quantities on very special occasions, like the illnesses of family members or times of unsurpassable problems.

The main bathing sessions take place on the night of January 18 (January 6 O.S.) and continue well into the small hours of January 19 (January 7 O.S.) , as well as after the liturgies on the day of the feast.

In the process of blessing, the water acquires particular property, the force of God's grace, and thus the capability to deliver man from sins, illnesses and numerous everyday routine complications. As the Russian Patriarch Kirill said, "We sprinkle ourselves and one another with that water, sprinkle our houses with it and drink it with piety, we place our faith in the energies and strengths that the Lord imparts to us in our everyday lives so that we could feel them in the most complicated circumstances."

Source:

https://www.rbth.com/arts/lifestyle/2016/01/19/russians-celebrate-epiphany_560579

Month of January (Continued)

have been possible, in that case being the Mother of God herself, so also on the day after Theophany, January 7th, we have a special Synaxis for Saint John the Forerunner. Then the octave of the feast of Theophany culminates on January 14th, with the leavetaking of the feast of Theophany.

Also, it is the day of St. Nina of Georgia, Equal-to-the Apostles. When the Lord opened a path to her, the young Nina indeed went to Georgia, where she quickly gained the love of the people. She baptized Mirian, the Tsar of Georgia, his wife Nana and their son, Bakar, who then aided Nina in her missionary efforts zealously. In the course of her life, St. Nina traveled throughout Georgia and succeeded in bringing all the people to the Christian faith— all during the time when the Emperor Diocletian was fearfully persecuting Christians. Hearing of the power of her prayers, many of the ill began to come to her. The Bishop and priests of Constantinople were summoned, and the first Church was built in Georgia, dedicated to the Apostles. Slowly, almost all of Georgia became Christian. On January 15th we venerate Paul of Thebes who is known as the first Christian hermit, who was claimed to have lived alone in the desert from the age of sixteen to one hundred thirteen years of his age.

Immediately after Jesus was baptized, He was led into the desert by the Holy Spirit in order to be tempted by the devil. The Lord spent forty days of complete abstinence in the desert, where He faced the temptations of the devil, and overcame them all. In imitation of the Lord, Saint Euthymios the Great in the early fifth century would annually leave his Palestinian monastery for the inner desert after the leavetaking of the feast of Holy Theophany in order to face the temptations of the devil, "sundered from all human intercourse and yearning to consort with God in solitude through prayer." He would return to his monastery from his sojourn in the desert on Palm Sunday, in order to celebrate Holy Week and Easter with his fellow monks and disciples. This is most likely the origins of the period of Great Lent, based on the forty day fast of the Lord following His baptism. Saint Euthymios further influenced the month of January for the Church. In the Life of Euthymios written by Cyril of Scythopolis, we read that before his death he was granted to know in advance the day of his repose. He died on January 20th, which is now his feast day.

With all this, we also commemorate in the month of January many high profile Saints and Fathers of the Church. Among these are the following: **St. Sylvester the Pope of Rome** (Jan. 2), **St. Seraphim of Sarov** (Jan. 2), **Synaxis of the Seventy Apostles** (Jan. 4), **St. Polyeuktos** (Jan. 9), **St. Gregory of Nyssa** (Jan. 10), **St. Tatiana** (Jan. 12), **St. Nina** (Jan. 14), **Holy Martyrs of Sinai and Raitho** (Jan. 14), **St. Paul of Thebes** (Jan. 15), **the Chains of St. Peter the Apostle** (Jan. 16), **St. Anthony the Great** (Jan. 17), **St. Athanasius the Great** (Jan. 18), **St. Cyril of Alexandria** (Jan. 18), **St. Makarios of Egypt** (Jan. 19), **St. Makarios of Alexandria** (Jan. 19), **St. Euthymios the Great** (Jan. 20), **St. Maximus the Confessor** (Jan. 21), **St. Timothy the Apostle** (Jan. 22), **St. Dionysios of Olympus** (Jan. 23), **St. Xenia of St. Petersburg** (Jan. 24), **St. Gregory the Theologian** (Jan. 25), **the Holy New Martyrs and Confessors of the Russian land** (Jan. 25), **St. Xenophon** (Jan. 26), **Translation of the Relics of St. John Chrysostom** (Jan. 27), **St. Isaac the Syrian** (Jan. 28), **Sts. Cyrus and John the Unmercenary** (Jan. 31), and many, many more.

The month culminates on January 30th with the **feast of the Holy Three Hierarchs** - Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom. January 30 is selected as appropriate to the celebration, for it would set the seal to the month in which each of the three Hierarchs already had a separate commemoration.

Though the month of January is among the darkest times of the year, the Church has made it one of its most luminous with such a vast array of feasts. From the beginning right through the end of the month, the Church does not cease to celebrate and keep festival. For soon Great Lent will be upon us, and the mood will be changed to one that is more sober and reflective. Therefore, let us take advantage of the opportunities this month offers to us, and celebrate the Light of the world, Who has come to disperse every darkness.

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How To Impart Faith To Your Kids (Continued)

works with other sports as well) has a playbook, a certain book of plays that are unique to that team. Not every team runs exactly the same plays. Each playbook is unique to each team. When the team is playing a game, they can only run the plays in their unique book.

In our lives, we acquire a “playbook” based on our upbringing. Parents have a larger role than they imagine in determining the playbook their children will carry into adult life. If parents understood how much of childhood experiences their children will carry into adulthood, they might parent a little differently. For instance, if parents get divorced, their children are more likely to get a divorce, because somewhere in their “playbook” of life, there is something that says “If the going gets bad enough, I can leave.” Children of parents who are married don’t have that play, which means they are less likely to get a divorce. If a boy sees his father helping around the house, he is more than likely going to help out around the house when he is married. If a boy sees that his father never lifts a finger to help out around the house, he is likely to do the same. I could give dozens of other examples but you get the idea.

The line of the ancestors of Christ has in common that these were men of faith. No, they were not perfect by any means, but they were faithful. And so when Joseph descended from Jacob, who descended from Matthan, and going all the way back to Abraham, Joseph, like his ancestors, was also a man of faith. And so when an angel spoke to him and told him to stay with Mary, his betrothed (but not yet his wife) who was pregnant (but not by him), he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. Why? Because faith was really prominent in his playbook.

It is critically important that faith be the most important play in our playbook. If you are a parent, you are the most determining factor in whether your child will have faith—a priest or a Sunday school teacher will not affect your child’s faith more than you affect it.

If you grew up in a home without faith, do not despair. While growing up with a strong faith at home gives you a head start on a playbook that is filled with faith, you can always add plays to your book. Sports teams are constantly adding things. So work to add faith to your playbook, so that you will have it to pass on to your kids.

If you are partway through raising your kids and you don’t feel like you are imparting a lot of faith to them,

do not despair. Tell your kids that you are going to try something new. We are always trying new things—new foods, new sports, new classes, new books. So, tell your kids with the coming New Year you are going to make faith and church a priority.

And if your faith is strong, then add more plays to it, and make it even stronger. Is your faith so strong that if an angel came to you and asked you to do something really extraordinary, as the angel did with Joseph, that you could do it? I’m not so sure if I could. So, we should work constantly to grow and build upon our faith.

Christ is the most excellent example of faith—He put faith in God and in us, to the degree that He was willing to die for us, and to accept His role in God’s plan for salvation. We, too, are called to play a role in God’s plan for salvation. Whatever our role is, it begins with faith. Every miracle in the Bible involved faith. Every saint lived in faith. Every martyr died with faith. Faith is the common denominator that unites every Christian with the Lord. So, as we prepare to celebrate the Nativity, the church reminds us that our bond with God is made through faith, just like the miracle of the Nativity involved faith—God’s faith in us, and people like Mary and Joseph, and all the ancestors that came before them, embracing their roles in God’s plan for salvation and doing so with faith.

Forty-two generations is a long time to live in expectation. We think a few years is a long time. How about a few centuries? Speaking of playbooks and sports teams, there were probably a lot of people out there who never thought the Cubs would win the World Series. It took them over 100 years to win. Many lifelong fans did not live to see them win the Series. You might say they died with faith in their beloved team, confident the team might one day win. And in 2016, they finally did! And all the fans were so jubilant, many forgot just how long they had been struggling, because they were so happy with winning. Winning made the pain of losing quickly be forgotten. And now, people associate the Cubs as winners, no longer as the “lovable losers” that they were long referred to.

Well, the Cubs didn’t lose for forty-two generations, they lost for just over four. And their die-hard fans kept the faith through all of that. Well, our faith in Christ will be tested throughout our lives. Christ may or may not come back to earth in our lifetimes. We may at times feel like Cubs’ fans used to feel—will it ever end, will we ever reach the glory of God’s Kingdom? And this is where faith comes in. We can get there. And with faith, we will get there, in God’s time, in God’s way.

It all starts with making faith the most important play in your book. Plan to add some new plays of faith to your playbook this coming year! And if you are a parent, help your kids add some as well.

How Do We Pick Godparents *by Phyllis Meshel Onest*

I believe you would agree with me that selecting your child's godparent and agreeing to be a godparent are not casual matters. For some of us, the die has been cast as far as picking godparents. For others of us, the opportunity is still possible. Regardless, we may still be asked to serve as a godparent.

In his book *Your Baby's Baptism in the Orthodox Church* [pp. 43-44], Fr. Anthony Coniaris shares his thoughts on the subject in the section entitled "Sponsors."

"At baptism we have sponsors or godparents who must be of the Orthodox faith since they undertake to assist in the religious nurture of the child. The sponsor should be an active, zealous Orthodox who realizes that he must keep in touch with his godchild and help him grow in the faith especially by his own good example. Although godparents share in the responsibility of helping the newly baptized continue his life in Christ, it is ultimately the person's own choice as to whether he will choose to remain united to Christ. In every liturgy, for example, each person is afforded the opportunity to accept or reject the creed, which is, in effect, the acceptance or rejection of one's baptism, since it is the same confession of faith that is made at baptism.

"There are a great many baptized people who have never formally rejected their baptism, but who are entirely indifferent to it and are not living in accordance with its awesome privileges and responsibilities. Indifference is the same as rejection. 'He who is not with Me, is against Me,' said Jesus. Others who have been baptized in Christ have put off Christ deliberately through the disobedience of sin. They need to repent and return to Christ. We need to accept personally the great gifts God has bestowed upon us in baptism, to claim them, and to begin a daily walk with Jesus.

"Fr. William S. Chiganos writes concerning the faith of the godparent: 'The faith of the godparent is significant. The person who confesses Jesus Christ as his Lord cannot ignore and violate in word and deed this faith. How can he promise God that he will make certain that the child will grow to be a true follower of Christ, when he himself lives a life of unbelief and disobedience!

"It goes without saying that the godparent cannot be a non-Orthodox person. How could someone who is not Orthodox provide the proper religious education, example and inspiration to his godchild? It should be noted that an Orthodox who has not had his marriage blessed in the Orthodox Church is also excluded from exercising the privilege of serving as a sponsor. The Church also cautions us to select a person who has reached the age of reason and moral responsibility (at least 12 years of age)."

Whether you are doing the asking or being asked, I would add, that unlike the situation with Kathryn and Sandy, expectations need to be discussed. Will you be inviting the

godparents to birthdays, holidays? Do you want the godparents to be involved closely, then tell them? If asked, to be a godparent, ask what the parents expect of you and share what you would like to be part of your godchild's life.

What If Godparents Don't Work Out?

It's sad to have your child want to disown their "missing-in-action" godparent, but it can happen. If after repeated efforts the godparent does not respond and since it is so important for our children to have the influence of a "godparent," ask yourself, "Who among my closest Orthodox friends could relate to my child and serve as a spiritual mentor?" Discuss the situation with your spiritual father/parish priest. Ask God to guide your efforts. Ask that person to consider the task and to pray about it. If that person agrees, let your child know that this individual is there for him/her. If the person does not consent, keep on praying and asking. Have faith that God will provide for your child's spiritual needs.

Closing Thoughts

If you are a godparent who has not been as active in the life of your godchild, there's time to make a change. It seems to me that both you and your godchild will benefit. Begin by remembering your godchild in prayer each day. Send a name's day card on his/her patron saint's day and a birthday card. [Patron saints' day cards can be found in card shops. I have found them to be in drawers waiting for someone to ask about them!] Write a letter or make a phone call to ask how he/she is doing, talk about school, hobbies, etc. You will be surprised how much just a card can mean to your godchild.



Why Do We Have Our Homes Blessed? *by Phyllis Meshel Onest, M.Div.*

Begin Everything with Prayer

Since we are reminded in Scripture to begin whatever we do with prayer, it has been the practice of Orthodox Christians for centuries to have new dwellings blessed either before or just after settling in. This has been extended to one's business or office, and even college dorm rooms. "The service performed by the priest to bless the new dwelling is somewhat similar to the consecration of a church [in the Russian practice] in that holy water, holy oil, and incense are used and a lesson from the holy Gospel is read. All the rooms of the house are sprinkled with holy water and each of the four outer walls are anointed with the sign of the Cross with holy oil, a candle placed before them, and after the censuring of the house, the lesson from the Holy Gospel is read [in Greek practice the service of the Small Blessing of Waters is generally done]. At the conclusion of the blessing, the inhabitants are blessed with holy water: the husband first, followed by the wife and then the children - the oldest first. Relatives and friends present are then blessed." (Marriage and the Christian Home, by Rev. Michael B. Henning, p.24.)

Back to "The Fall"

From Scripture we know that whatever God created was good, but with "the Fall", evil entered the world, corrupting the creation. God the Father sent His Son Jesus to save it by effecting a "new creation". This is celebrated at Theophany, specifically with the Great Blessing of Water. "The consecration of the waters on this feast places the entire world - through its 'prime element' of water - in the perspective of the cosmic creation, sanctification, and glorification of the Kingdom of God in Christ and the Spirit." (The Orthodox Faith, Vol. II, Worship, by Fr. Thomas Hopko, p.127.) All the readings, hymns, prayers, and actions of the day speak of God's presence in our entire world and universe, His creation. Through water all of the creation is once again sanctified by God, becoming good again, the way God had intended.

The Feast Of Theophany

The Feast of Theophany (or Epiphany) commemorates the Baptism of our Lord in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. We know from the troparion of the day that "the Trinity was made manifest" to us. But there's more to it than this. "When Jesus descends into the depths of the river, there occurs a profound upheaval. It is not the one baptized who is purified, for he is spotless; but it is the water that is transfigured and illumined. This water, which was believed to be transparent and purifying, is in fact polluted, inhabited by evil spirits, servants of the old gods. ... By purifying the elements, by sanctifying matter, Jesus frees the cosmos from the powers of evil." (The Incarnate God, Vol. I, Catherine Aslanoff, French edition editor, translated by Paul Meyendorff, p.163.)

The Great Blessing of Water and the Home

The Great Blessing of Water takes place at the end of that day's Liturgy. Since our homes cannot be brought to the Church, the Church - through the priest and cantor - go to the homes. There the service of blessing, which began in the church, is finished with the sprinkling of water in the home. Traditionally, in most Orthodox parishes, the priest personally visits all his parishioners each year to pray with them in the place where they live, and to bless their surroundings with the newly sanctified water of Theophany (January 6/13). By sanctifying our living quarters, our private place, we extend the grace of God to our individual dwellings. (In very large parishes a yearly visit may not be possible. In areas of the country where the winter is harsh, I know of at least one parish where houses are blessed at the beginning of the ecclesiastical year in September.)

We also bring the blessed water to our homes to use throughout the year to bless our homes and to drink whether we are ill or as part of our daily prayer life. "There are many occasions in family life when a sip of holy water can help to remind us of the blessing that was given 'to bestow sanctification', 'unto healing of soul and body', 'to be a fountain welling forth unto life eternal', as the priest prayed in the litany of Epiphany day." (Little Falcons: Water, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1998, p.33.)

Weaving Christ into Our Lives

The blessing of homes by these holy waters maintains the spiritual association between the 'family church' and the parish, as well as again providing for the sharing of God's spiritual gifts. ... This annual blessing is not as elaborate as the blessing of the new dwelling, but because of this it should not be overlooked, for it is in this way that the grace of God is extended to individual dwellings." (Marriage and the Christian Home, p.25.)

If the priest comes to bless the home when the children are present, they have the opportunity to see the parish priest in a different and personal situation. If the priest permits, they can lead the way through the house, or hold a candle.

(Continued on p. 8)

Why Do We Have Our Homes Blessed (Continued)

They can show him their rooms or pets or favorite toys. They receive a blessing with water. For children, the house blessing shows the connection of the Church to the home.

In Summary

What does it mean to ask God to bless something? All things in the world have been spoiled right along with us. God must bless His world again in order for it to be the way that He wants it to be. For this reason God sent His Son Jesus and the Holy Spirit to the world: to bless everyone and everything that He made, to make all things good again. When the priest comes to bless our homes, he asks God to have mercy on the house, to rid it of every evil and to fill it with every blessing. What a wonderful way to begin the New Year!

Helping Our Children Grow in Faith What They Can Do, When They Can Do It, and What Parents Can Do to Help!

by Phyllis Meshel Onest, M.Div.

... During my years as our parish's Church School Director I tried to encourage parents of young children. When I would see them after Liturgy, exasperated, I would encourage them to continue bringing them, relating that Jim and I had felt the same way at times. I also took note of those parents who seemed to be "succeeding" in their parenting and would compliment them and pass on the techniques that I had observed to those asking for suggestions. I finally compiled these and distributed them at parent-teacher meetings with the hope of equipping parents in their task, and continue to do so at workshops that I lead. (If you have other suggestions that work, please let me know.) Each section builds on the previous one, so behavior that is begun in the early years should be reinforced as our children get older.

Preschoolers

About Making the Sign of the Cross

By age three the preschooler's little hands can be guided to the correct position for making the Sign of the Cross: thumb & first two fingers together [signifying the three persons of the Trinity], remaining fingers touching palm [signifying the two natures of Christ: human and divine]. If you have puzzles that have pegs on each piece, practice grabbing the pegs. You need the thumb and first two fingers.

When showing your child how to make the sign of the cross, consider looking in a mirror and doing it together. Touch the forehead, the chest, the right shoulder, then the left shoulder while you say, "In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." If you don't have access to a mirror and your child is facing you, you cross from left to right your child will follow and cross from right to left.

About Icons

It doesn't take much for our children to be able to identify their favorite Sesame Street or Disney character, so why shouldn't they learn to point out Jesus, Mary and various saints, especially the patron of the parish. Review this each time you enter church. Make sure that your children have icons in their rooms and in your home to which you can refer.

About Entering Church

Lighting candles (Jesus is the "Light of the World") and venerating icons (kissing Jesus, His mother and His friends) and the Cross come easily to little ones.

Each time you enter, remind the children that the Church is God's House, someplace very special. We behave in a certain way in God's House: we sit & stand quietly; we walk rather than run; we speak softly using what I call our "Church voice".

About Prayers

Pray "Holy God" and begin saying the "Lord's Prayer" together daily. Work on the prayer at meals. Getting children to fold their hands and bow their heads while you recite a prayer is a start. "O Christ our God, bless the food and drink of Your servants, for You are holy, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen." Pray before the icons. Pray at bedtime. (Continued on p. 9)

Reading Books

I suspect that most families have a children's library of secular books. My girls have kept their favorite childhood books and now read them to their godsister Katie Krause and other children who visit our home. We also need to add Bible storybooks and Orthodox books. Today there are many Christian and Orthodox books available. There are even Preschooler and Toddler Bibles! These make great bedtime reading on Saturday evenings as we prepare for Sunday Liturgy. Plus, they are great for our church bags.

Kindergartners

Continue to work on the "Lord's Prayer" and other prayers that the Church School class are learning.

A child this age can begin fasting before Communion. At the least, the Kindergartner should eat just a little [ex. juice & toast]. In our own home, since the adults planned to receive each week, no breakfast was prepared. By the time the girls were three or four, juice and toast was all that was offered. As far as I can remember, we also didn't bring food to church. If we did, it was to be consumed after Communion.

Preschoolers During Liturgy

Sitting close to the front so that the children can see also offers fewer distractions. Our children should be standing at least for "Blessed is the Kingdom," during the Small and Great Entrances, the Gospel reading, the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and whenever the priest/deacon censes the icons and the congregation.

Standing [or Kneeling, if it is the practice of your parish] for the consecration, from the Epiclesis ["Thine own of Thine own..."] until the Hymn to the Theotokos.

Children can be reminded to make the Sign of the Cross whenever the Holy Trinity is named. Some people also make the Sign of the Cross when the Theotokos or a saint is named or when praying for a particular person during one of the Petitions.

During the Sermon is a good time to walk to the Narthex and allow children to stretch their legs. If seated in the Nave, allow children to look at religious books or icon 'photo albums', or draw quietly. Please bring only "quiet" toys to church.

It is unrealistic to expect Preschoolers and Kindergartners to be in the Nave of the Church throughout the Liturgy. Besides going to the bathroom, they need a change of scenery or to stretch their legs. I have found that the Petitions and Sermon give built-in break times.

Begin to teach the children that we do not enter or exit the Nave during an Entrance, the Epistle or Gospel readings, the Creed, the Consecration of the Gifts, or the Lord's Prayer. It is best to enter or exit during the Petitions.

Primary Grade Students

Primary Grade Students should be able to make the Sign of the Cross easily, but need to be reminded when to do it during Liturgy.

Besides identifying the icons of Jesus, Virgin Mary/Theotokos, and their patron saints, primary students can begin learning some of the apostles, saints, and feast days.

Correctly entering the Church should be routine for them if you have kept at it. They will still need to be reminded that the Church is God's House and that we behave in a certain way as listed above.

Continue to add age appropriate books of the saints, storybooks and videos to your home library. There are many fine videos, such as the Hanna-Barbara Greatest Adventure and McGee and Me series, available for rental and purchase from Christian bookstores. Check with your church school director or parish priest for suggestions.

The Church School program should be encouraging the children to work on the "Lord's Prayer" and other prayers that are being worked on in class. Third and Fourth Graders can work on learning the Creed.

In the Slavic tradition, students have their First Confession in first or second grade. If so, they should also be using their Prayer Books to prepare for both confession and communion.

Continue to build on the prayers before icons, at bedtime and at meals, and to work on fasting before Communion. In the Slavic tradition children who have had their first confession now begin to abstain from food and drink before Communion.

The Primary Grade Child During Liturgy

Continue sitting close to the front so that the children can see and are less distracted. The older a child gets, the more he/she should be standing.

Since this age children are reading, it is good to provide them with age-appropriate liturgy books. If your parish does not provide them in the pews for the children, there are several available through the Orthodox Christian Education Commission and the Department of Religious Education of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese. Check with your parish priest or church school director.

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Some younger Primary grade children cannot be in the Nave of the Church throughout the entire Liturgy without a break. Encourage them to go to the bathroom before Liturgy. If they need a change of scenery or to stretch their legs, use the Petitions and Sermon as built-in break times.

By this age students should be exposed to Vespers, Presanctified Liturgy, Akathist, Canon of St. Andrew, Holy Week services, as well as the weekly Liturgy. I encourage parents to make sure that they bring their children to as many of the services of Great Lent and Holy Week as possible. There is a rhythm in the services of the Orthodox Church that will continue throughout one's lifetime. It appears to me that the more we participate in this rhythm from an early age, the more it will become an integral part of our lives. We begin to see what it means to be Orthodox Christians. For their lessons on worship to make sense, it is important for our children to participate in the services as often as possible. This also serves to reinforce our understanding that Orthodox Christianity is a life-style, not just a Sunday religion.

Grades 5 & 6

Continue to add icons of different apostles, saints, and feast days. The "Creed" should be learned during these years, and children can be using their Prayer Books to prepare for both confession and communion.

During Liturgy this age group should be able to listen to the Sermon and be able to talk about it on the way home from church.

By now this age child can have private confession at least four times a year, but it presupposes that parents not only bring their children to confession, but also receive confession themselves. Fr. Peter Gillquist, one of the many former Evangelical Christians to have embraced Orthodoxy, has said that if we want our children to stay in the church, then we should bring them to confession before they need it and they need to see us go to confession!

Jr. & Sr. High Schoolers

Having taught at this level for over twenty years, and being the mother of teenagers, I know they are capable of participating in the liturgical life of the Church. Sometimes peer pressure and our children's struggle to separate themselves from us gets in the way! When they question why they must attend church, respond with, "This is what our family does" and expect them to attend.

Encouraging them to have Church friends and to be part of the parish youth group and church school classes are vital. These situations offer a safe place for our teens, where they know "it's okay to be an Orthodox Christian", and they can talk more freely about their concerns. We can also encourage them to serve in the altar and sing in the choir. Without these ties and friends, they are much more easily pulled away from the church. Given all the distractions of the secular world, we parents need to keep them attached to the Church in as many ways as we can.

Source: <http://www.theologic.com/oflweb/raise-em/grow.htm>

