

Unit 3: GOD'S GREATEST GIFTS

Lesson 3.2: Christmas and St. Stephen the First Deacon

Teacher Preparation and Materials Needed:

Video Lesson: [St. Stephen's Day & Good King Wenceslas](#) (duration 5:39, play up to 4:40)

Carol: [Good King Wenceslas](#) (duration 2:41)

Who is King Wenceslas (optional): [A Moment In History: Good King Wenceslas](#) (duration 3:04)

Memory Verse:

And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

- Matthew 25:40

Lesson

Lesson Opening & Creating Interest:

**Wisdom Prayer, written by St. Nersess the Grace-filled (Shnorhali).*

Open with prayer:

Իմաստութիւն Յօր՝ Յիսուս, տու՛ր ինձ իմաստութիւն, զբարիս խորհել եւ խօսել եւ գործել առաջի
Քո՝ յամենայն ժամ. ի չար խորհրդոց եւ ի բանից եւ ի գործոց փրկեա՛ զիս. եւ ողորմեա՛ Քո
արարածոց եւ ինձ բազմամեղիս: Ամէն

Eemasdootyoon Hor Heesoos, door eents eemasdootyoon uzparees khorel yev khosel yev kordz arachi
ko hamenayn jham. Ee char khorhrtos yev paneets yev kordzots prgya zees yev voghormya ko araradzots
eents pazmameghees. Amen.

Wisdom of the Father, O Jesus, grant to me the wisdom to think, speak, and do that which is good in Your
sight. Save me from all evil and distracting thoughts, words, and deeds. Have mercy upon your creatures
and upon me, a great sinner. Amen.

Lesson Body:

In our last lesson we learned about tradition: cultural, religious, and personal traditions that families might follow. Celebrating Jesus' birth is one of the most important traditions of our church. Christmas is a special day for the Christians around the world when we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, the son of God, our lord and Saviour, who came to restore humanity to its rightful place in creation.

Many years after His birth, followers of Jesus would tell the stories of Jesus' miraculous life and share the good news. Celebrating the birth of Jesus is a remembrance and appreciation for what God has done for us in sending His Begotten Son for our salvation. The story of Jesus' birth, until these days, is a huge inspiration for so many faithful and has been written in the Gospels, shared by storytelling, sung in songs (carols and hymns), and in beautiful artworks like icons, paintings, and sculptures.

Carolling is a beautiful Christmas tradition. Although not quite common in the Armenian culture yet loved and followed by many Armenian families. Christmas carols are Christmas themed songs or hymns which teach and express theology and our faith. There are many Christmas carols which originated in different countries. One of the famous Christmas carols is Good King Wenceslas, originally written in Czech and translated into English in 1853.

This carol tells a story of a kind king, who is a saint, and his page who follow Christ's word in spreading kindness and love. In the first few lines, we hear, "Good King Wenceslas looked out on the feast of Stephen, when the snow lay round about, deep and crisp and even". There is a mention of a saint who wasn't present at the time of Jesus's birth. His name was Saint Stephen, whose name means 'crown'. So, who is this Stephen, why does he have a feast and why is he mentioned in this Christmas carol?

St. Stephen was the first deacon and the first Christian martyr. A deacon is one who serves in the church and a martyr is one who is killed for the Christian faith. So, St. Stephen was the first to serve the Church and the first to receive the crown of martyrdom. The feast of St. Stephen in Armenian church is always celebrated on December 25th, with the exceptions if the 25th falls on a Sunday, Wednesday or Friday. Is it because Sunday is a Dominical day (the day of our Lord) and the other two are fasting days. Western Churches celebrate St. Stephen's Day on December 26th and Eastern Churches on December 27th.

St. Stephen is first mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles 6:5 when the first deacons were appointed: "And what they said pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch."

These seven men were selected and ordained by the apostles to take care of the poorer members and the widows of the community. Of these seven, Stephen, is the first mentioned and the best known.

Traditionally on the feast of St. Stephen, the deacons of the Armenian Church are honored during a special service dedicated to all the deacons, wearing saghavarts (the priestly crowns).

Video Lesson: [St. Stephen's Day & Good King Wenceslas](#) (duration 5:39, play up to 4:40)

Carol: [Good King Wenceslas](#) (duration 2:41)

Message in the Carol: Good King Wenceslas

Good King Wenceslas looked out
On the feast of Stephen,
When the snow lay round about
Deep and crisp and even;
Brightly shone the moon that night
Though the frost was cruel,
When a poor man came in sight,
Gath'ring winter fuel.

'Hither, page, and stand by me,
If thou know'st it, telling
Yonder peasant, who is he?
Where and what his dwelling?'
'Sire, he lives a good league hence,
Underneath the mountain,
Right against the forest fence,
By Saint Agnes' fountain.'

'Bring me flesh and bring me wine,
Bring me pine logs hither,
Thou and I will see him dine
When we bear them thither.'
Page and monarch forth they went,
Forth they went together,
Through the rude wind's wild lament
And the bitter weather.

'Sire, the night is darker now
And the wind blows stronger;
Fails my heart, I know not how,
I can go no longer.'
'Mark my footsteps, good my page,
Tread thou in them boldly:
Thou shalt find the winter's rage
Freeze thy blood less coldly.'

In his master's steps he trod,
Where the snow lay dinted;
Heat was in the very sod
Which the Saint had printed.
Therefore, Christian men, be sure
Wealth or rank possessing,
Ye who now will bless the poor
Shall yourselves find blessing.

On the cold night of the feast of St. Stephen, King Wenceslas looks out and sees a poor man gathering twigs and branches to make fire and get warm. (As it is mentioned in the Bible, St. Stephen was one of the seven appointed deacons who were to help the poor of the community)

The king becomes curious and wants to know who that poor man is and where he lives. His page, the servant, tells the king what he knows about the poor man and his location.

Then king orders his servant to bring meat and wine (Matthew 25:35), and lots of pine logs so they can take it to the poor man. The king wants to make sure the man is fed and warm during that frosty winter. Despite the bad weather and sharp wind, they go out to deliver the goods.

As it gets darker and the wind becomes stronger, the servant complains that he is cold and cannot move forward. The kind king tells him to step in his footsteps, this way he doesn't have to touch the cold snow as much. This also has a different meaning: endurance of difficulties for the greater good and following what Christ has taught us is a blessing.

As soon as the servant starts following his master's footsteps, heat from the indentation warms servant's cold feet and he was able to continue. We Christians find blessings when we bless others with goodness of the Lord, no matter how much wealth or what status we have.

Image from www.orthodoxroad.com



Sometimes we might feel like the king's page, joyfully accepting the invitation of generous giving that comes with Christmas season, but at times meaningful giving, the kind that makes a difference, comes with a sacrifice and that can be difficult. When this happens, we can always turn to another king, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who chose to be a servant, who lived among the poor and gave them comfort and whose life and service we celebrate on Christmas.

We must always remember Christ's words, when He says,

"I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'" (Matthew 25:36-40)

Who is King Wenceslas (optional): [A Moment In History: Good King Wenceslas](#) (duration 3:04)

Christmas Greeting:

When you greet one another, say:

**Քրիստոս ծնաւ եւ յայտնեցաւ:
Kreesdos dznav yev haydnetsav!
Christ is born and revealed!**

The response is:

**Օրհնեալ է յայտնութիւնն Քրիստոսի:
Orhnyal eh haydnootyoonun Kreesdosee!
Blessed is the revelation of Christ!**

Another common greeting is:

**Ձեզ եւ մեզ մեծ աւետիս:
Tsez yev mez medz avepees!
To you and to us is great news!**

Read out loud:

And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

- Matthew 25:40

Review

Memory Verse Review:

And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'
(Matthew 25:4)

Lesson Review:

Questions:

1. What is a martyr?
(One who bears witness and dies for the Christian faith)
2. What is a deacon?
(One who serves in the Church)
3. Who was the first martyr and deacon of the Church?
(St. Stephen)
4. What does Stephen mean?
(Stephen means 'crown')
5. Why should we bless and help others?
(We find blessings when we too bless others)

Christmas Greeting:

When you greet one another, say:
Քրիստոս ծնաւ եւ յայտնեցաւ:
Kreesdos dznnav yev haydnetsav!
Christ is born and revealed!

The response is:
Օրհնեալ է յայտնութիւնն Քրիստոսի:
Orhnyal eh haydnootyoonun Kreesdosee!
Blessed is the revelation of Christ!

Another common greeting is:
Ձեզ եւ մեզ մեծ աւետիս:
Tsez yev mez medz aveedes!
To you and to us is great news!

Life Application:

What are we going to do with what we have learned today?

Like the shepherds, who were told the good news of Christ's birth, we too must go out and tell the same good news to others. We do this not only by telling people about the miracle of Christmas, but also by sharing the blessings that we have. God has blessed each of us with gifts and we are called to share those gifts with people who do not have. In doing so, we spread the the good news, help others and glorify God.

* *Departing Prayer, written by St. Nersess the Grace-filled (Shnorhali).*

Close with prayer:

Պահապան ամենայնի Քրիստոս, աջ Քո հովանի լիցի ի վերայ իմ, ի տուէ եւ ի գիշերի, ի նստիլ ի տան, ի գնալ ի ճանապարհ, ի ննջել եւ ի յառնել, զի մի երբեք սասանեցայց եւ ողորմեա՛ Քո արարածոց եւ ինձ բազմամեղիս: Ամէն

Bahaban amenayn Kreesdos, ach Ko hovanee leetsee ee vera eem; ee dveh yev ee keesher-ee, ee nsdeel ee dan, ee knal ee janabarh, ee nunchel yev ee harnel, zee mee yerpek sa-sanetsayts yev voghormya Ko araradzots yev eents pazmamyghees. Amen.

O Christ, guardian of all, let Your right hand guard and shelter me, by day and by night, at home and abroad, in sleeping and in waking, that I may never stumble. Have mercy upon Your creatures and upon me, a great sinner. Amen.

At Home

No homework at this time.

*Քրիստոս ծնաւ եւ յայտնեցաւ:
Kreesdos dznav yev haydnetsav!
Christ is born and revealed!*

*Օրհնեալ է յայտնութիւնն Քրիստոսի:
Orhnyal eh haydnootyoonun Kreesdosee!
Blessed is the revelation of Christ!*

*Ձեզ եւ մեզ մեծ ատենիս:
Tsez yev mez medz avedees!
To you and to us is great news!*