

THE WORD OF GOD: Christmas Special

Lesson 11. Traditions and Why We Need Them

Bible Study Preparation and Materials Needed:

Video Lesson: [The Nativity Icon](#) (duration 6:00, play until 5:47)

Carol: We [Three Kings of Orient Are](#) (Duration 5:19)

This lesson is inspired by:

ICONS: SACRED ART AND ARMENIAN THEOLOGY by Father Garabed Kochakian (coming soon).

Memory Verse:

Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

- Matthew 2:11

Lesson Body

Open with prayer:

Իմաստութիւն Յօր՝ Յիսուս, տո՛ւր ինձ իմաստութիւն, զբարիս խորհել եւ խօսել եւ գործել առաջի Քո՛ յամենայն ժամ. ի չար խորհրդոց, 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, ee 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.

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.



Image from www.icondiplomastudent.com

What is an Icon?

When hearing the word icon, some might think about celebrities, such as a fashion icon or the entertainment industry icons. In the world of technology, it is a small image that represents an application, a program or a function. In the Orthodox Christian, however, understanding an icon is a form of sacred art that teaches, supports and strengthens one's connection to God by providing the divine presence in churches and homes. In fact, the word icon, means 'image'. When we hear, the in book of Genesis (1:26-27) that God created man in His "image and likeness", the Greek word that is used for 'image' is icon.

Painted icons are called Սրբանկար (Srpangar) or Սրբապատկեր (Srpabadger) in Armenian. Traditionally, icons were produced in workshops by monks and ordained clergy, who were themselves theologically educated and trained in this form of artistry. Since the fourth century, icons in the Armenian Christian tradition have been viewed and referred to as treasured objects. These beautifully painted images are not worshiped but venerated, shown respect, with prayers, offered to them by the faithful to sustain and strengthen piety and spiritual life. They represent the image in the icon, just as each of us represent the image of God.

Along with the Armenian Church, icons can be seen in many orthodox churches, including, but not limited to, the Greek, Ukrainian, Romanian, Russian, Coptic, Indian, Ethiopian, Eritrean, Bulgarian, Georgian, and other churches. Each are unique to the culture of that church and are painted with a unique style.

The Icon of Nativity

The icon of Nativity is one of the most beautiful, complex, and theologically rich compositions. There are many details that symbolize and tell a story of their own. This icon contains the mystery of Jesus's birth and prophesy of His life. It brings us joy at the same time telling the hard truth of His sacrifice yet granting us hope for salvation.

Most of the nativity themed icons are following triangular or a circular format of composition. In the center there is the cave where Mary is laying in a restful position. The cave, in which Christ was born, foreshadows the cave in which He will be buried after the crucifixion. Baby Jesus is by her side in a manger (trough), almost like a coffin, wrapped in swaddling clothes, again, foretelling the burial shroud He will be wrapped in.

Behind the trough is an ox and a donkey eating out of the trough. The ox represents the Gentiles, and the donkey represents the Jewish nation, both coming to the trough to eat the Body and Blood of Christ – Holy Communion. Outside of the cave, on one side, we often see the shepherds, representing the local common folk and the poor, with their sheep and on the other side three wise man, Magi, representing people in foreign lands.

Joseph is usually depicted in the left corner, in a thinking position or his hand by his ear, trying to listen in and understand what's going on. Sometimes another man, Satan, is standing and speaking to Joseph, trying to put doubt in his heart about the birth of Christ. On top of the cave, on both sides, are angels rejoicing and singing glory of God:

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests."

- Luke 2:13-14

Above the cave there is the star of Bethlehem, the sign in the sky which led the Magi to the birthplace of Christ. According to the traditions of the Church, the star often is believed to represent an illuminating angel or the Holy Spirit. Throughout iconography, the star of Bethlehem is depicted in the shape of a cross, a star with six points (representing six days of creation), with seven points (representing the Sabbath of God and the righteous and faithful), and with eight points (representing the Second Coming of Christ).

The gifts the Magi bring play a significant role in the prophecy of Jesus's life, namely gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The gold emphasizes Christ's royal lineage and being King of Kings; the frankincense testifies to the divinity of Christ; and myrrh, an oil used during burial services, prefigures the coming death and sacrifice of Christ.

There are many variations of the Nativity icon, some are more reach and elaborate with symbols, some are not as detailed, yet they all tell the story of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Video Lesson: [The Nativity Icon](#) (duration 6:00, play until 5:47)



Image from www.armenianinstitute.org.uk



Image from www.shnorhali.com



Image from www.shnorhali.com

There is a beautiful Christmas carol that poetically explains the meaning of the gifts presented to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ by the wisemen.

Sing along and Discuss: [We Three Kings](#) (Duration 5:19)

WE THREE KINGS

We three kings of orient are
Bearing gifts we traverse afar
Field and fountain
Moor and mountain
Following yonder star.

O star of wonder, star of night
Star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding
Guide us to thy perfect light.

Born a King on Bethlehem's plain
Gold I bring to crown Him again
King for ever, ceasing never
Over us all to reign.

Frankincense to offer have I
Incense owns a Deity nigh
Prayer and praising
All men raising
Worship Him, God most high.

O star of wonder, star of night
Star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding
Guide us to thy perfect light.

Myrrh is mine
It's bitter perfume breathes
A life of gathering gloom
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying
Sealed in the stone cold tomb.

Glorious now behold Him arise
King and God and Sacrifice
Al-le-lu-ia, al-le-lu-ia
Heaven to earth replies

O star of wonder, star of night
Star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding
Guide us to thy perfect light

Review

Memory Verse Review:

Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. (Matthew 2:11)

Lesson Review:

Questions:

1. What is an icon? (A picture/painting which represents a person or event of our faith)
2. What gifts did the Magi bring to Christ at His birth? (Gold, frankincense, and myrrh)
3. What are the ox and donkey doing in the icon? (They are eating from the trough, eating Jesus, showing that the Gentiles and Jews will eat the Body and Blood of Christ, Holy Communion)
4. What is Jesus born in a cave? (It foreshadows His coming death, burial, and resurrection from a cave)
5. How are we icons? (We are images of God)

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 keesheree, ee nsdeel ee dan, ee knal ee janabarh, ee nunchel yev ee harnel, zee mee yerpek sasanetsayts 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 dznay 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 ատեսիս:
Tsez yev mez medz avedees!
To you and to us is great news!*