



# Sunday of the Holy Ancestors

Study Guide - Level 4 (Grades 9–12 / Ages 14–18)

Today is the Sunday  
of the Holy Ancestors

## Lesson Order

- Opening Prayer
- Intro / Recap last week's lesson
- Review the scripture readings
- Review the hymns of the day
- Read front page of handout together
- Use study guide lesson and Q&A
- Complete handout activities
- Preview next week's lesson
- Closing Prayer

## Tips & Hints

- Use as much or as little of the content in this study guide helping the students discover how the Byzantine Catholic Faith can be a part of their daily life.
- Use open-ended questions, encouraging young people to share their experiences or ideas, drawing connections to the topics of the day, strengthening their relationship with Jesus Christ and His holy Byzantine Catholic Faith.
- Questions, ideas, feedback, and suggestions can be directed to the publisher at [orthodoxjourneys@gmail.com](mailto:orthodoxjourneys@gmail.com)

## ✓ Goal

After completing this week's lesson, students should be able to articulate the following:

- How today's scripture readings and liturgical hymns apply to their life
- Understanding what God is expecting us to live as His followers and members of the Byzantine Catholic Faith
- How being part of the Byzantine Catholic Church gives us the tools and skills to live godly lives regardless of our circumstances
- Why they believe and follow Jesus Christ as Byzantine Catholic Christians

## ✂ Overview

We hear a list of many names, people who were the earthly ancestors of Jesus Christ. While He is the Son of God, having always existed, Christ's earthly life is woven into the history of humanity as recorded in the bible.

We are reminded in this reading that Christ is the descendant of Abraham, David, and many other people - good and bad, and at the fullness of time - born of the Virgin Mary, all of it, according to God's plan.

God's wisdom and love for us is not some random act, but is part of His plan,

designed for us to participate in the glory and majesty of His Kingdom for all eternity.

When we have moments of doubt or confusion regarding of what to do in life, prayer is an ideal way to ask for the strength and faith to be like Saint Joseph the Betrothed.

He was obedient to God, caring for Mary's needs, showing her love and kindness in circumstances he didn't completely understand. His faith in God, like ours, leads back to God, knowing the Father will provide for our needs through His Son: Jesus Christ.

## 📖 Apostolos / Epistle and Gospel Readings

Have one student read today's Apostolos/Epistle and another read the Gospel lesson.

**Epistle/Apostol:** Hebrews 11:9-10, 17-23, 32-40

**Gospel:** Matthew 1:1-25

1. What is the author of today's epistle/apostol talking about?
2. How does the message of this epistle apply to our lives?

### Possible Answers

- St. Paul recaps the history of Christ's ancestors in the Old Testament
- He explains that their faith in God resulted in becoming part of the history leading to Christ's birth
- God's promise of Salvation for all of humanity is fulfilled in the birth of Jesus Christ
- We are recipients of God's blessings as members of the Church
- Born centuries after Christ, we are still recipients of God's plan
- Like figures in the Old Testament, we need to remain faithful to God when faced with attacks and sufferings
- God provides for our needs and what is necessary for salvation

1. What took place in today's lesson?
2. Why is this important for us living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

### Possible Answers

- The gospel tells of the genealogy of Jesus Christ
- There were 42 generations from the first Patriarch, Abraham to Christ's birth of Mary
- Christ's birth fulfilled a prophecy spoken long before His birth
- Obedience to God can help us live godly lives, potentially helping God bring the world to salvation
- As Byzantine Catholic Christians, we are united through the Church to the generations of people in the Old Testament
- Each person plays an important role in God's plan, we can pray to God that He will guide us to our role

## 🎵 Hymnography

Have a student read the hymn(s) on the front page of the handout.

1. What do the hymns teach us about today's commemoration?
2. How can the message of these hymns apply to our lives?

### Possible Answers

- The Old Testament ancestors of Jesus Christ were faithful to God's promise
- With God's mercy, they were able to withstand horrible circumstances, even unto death
- The major figures of the Old Testament provide a glimpse or foreshadowing of Christ's earthly life
- We don't need to be famous or well known to play a valuable role in the church
- The struggles and trials faced by Christ's earthly ancestors can be examples for us of obedience and faithfulness to God
- We glorify God in our hymns and prayers for being born of Mary

## **A Closer Look**

*Let's take a closer look at today's primary topic.*

### **Opening Review**

Today's gospel reading provides for us the annual reading of the genealogy of Jesus Christ. It usually sounds like a list of weird and hard to pronounce names of people who don't really have any impact on our daily lives.

So why is this gospel reading proclaimed in Church every year? The gospel of St. Matthew begins with these very important words about our Lord, calling Him: "the Son of David, the Son of Abraham." (Matt. 1:1)

While the Evangelist and Apostle Matthew is writing for a predominantly Jewish audience in the early years after Christ's Ascension, he's informing all readers the Messiah has come, and the Messiah is Christ!

At that time, the readers and hearers of the gospel were people living in and around Jerusalem, possibly hearing about or being present for the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Matthew begins his gospel by presenting Jesus' earthly ancestry showing that his lineage leads back to the Patriarch Abraham.

In this reading, we see the connections between many of the major figures of the Old Testament: Abraham, Issac, Jacob, Judah, Jesse, David, Solomon, and Joseph, but *all* of the names included in the genealogy of Jesus Christ are important. That's why we don't read a summary or just highlight a few of the people.

It is no accident all of these figures were related, as it was said in the Old Testament that Judah, the son of Jacob, would be the one of the Prophet Joseph's brothers to carry on the lineage of kings. Matthew's gospel affirms that Christ fulfills the promise given to Abraham, connecting people across generations, leading to His being born of Mary.

### **What Does This Mean For Us?**

The genealogy of Christ reminds us that *each of us* plays an important part in the life of the church today. In the same way, the **Great Commission** given by Christ to His disciples at the end of Matthew's gospel (28:18-20), is given to each of us as part of our responsibility as Byzantine Catholic Christians:

"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'"

This message defines our lives as Byzantine Catholic Christians. Even if we won't become missionaries working with the Byzantine Catholic Christian Mission Center, we can still take Christ's words from the end of Matthew's gospel, remembering how each of Jesus' earthly ancestors were also faithful to God in their lives.

Their lives and experiences made it possible for Christ to be born in the world. We have the same responsibility as His followers to be faithful to His command to proclaim the Good News through our words and deeds.

Christ isn't just the Messiah because He has the right lineage or ancestry. The prophets spoke of Christ across many generations.

One in particular, Isaiah, proclaims a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, "and they shall call his name Immanuel" and Matthew (1:23) quotes directing from Isaiah (7:14).

We can tell from today's reading that Christ's birth was not ordinary. God's plan took not one, two, or five generations, but forty-two generations! This means many generations lived, knowing of the promise, but never able to witness the prophecy being fulfilled. There were probably some who were unaware of their role in it!

In our own lives, God is working wonders. We might not always see them, but God is present and with us. Each of us has a responsibility to be faithful to God, learning all we can through the Church that we can pass our Byzantine Catholic Faith on to the next generation, helping them possess the tools necessary to attain Eternal Life.

### **Wrap Up**

From the start of the book of Genesis and the founding of the world, God's relationship with His creation (the plants, animals, and us) is an expression of His love.

While the human image was distorted through the sin of Adam and Eve, God's plan of Salvation was set in motion immediately, to restore that image. As we draw closer to the Nativity of Our Lord this week, let us remember that Christ's birth was a miraculous event in our world, and it should also be the same in our own lives.

Christ's birth can only be explained through the love and grace of God. While we cannot explain why and how God works wonders in our lives, we can remember the faithfulness of the earthly ancestors of Christ, especially the Virgin Mary and be encouraged to follow her example.

Being faithful to God's commandments and teachings doesn't mean everything will make sense or give us a sense of calm. Even Jacob, the son of Abraham wrestled with an "angel" (Genesis 32:22-32), struggling in His encounter with God. So we can 'wrestle' with God as long as we accept that He is God (and we're not).

Our struggles to understand and accept God's plan for us is healthy and can ultimately lead us to a deeper relationship with God. As we trust God, putting our faith in His plan for our lives, we are being like Mary.

By gathering in church on Christmas, we show our faith in God. Sure the presents, gifts, and time with family and friends are enjoyable - but if they become the focus of our Christmas, at the expense of coming to liturgy, then what does that say about our relationship with God?

Today's reading of Christ's genealogy is about honoring those who came before us, leading to Christ's Incarnation as a little child. Our response is to approach and kneel before the icon of the Nativity, glorifying God for His great mercy and love.

It's time for us to add our voice of gratitude and worship, living a life centered on God Who loves us by sending His Son to us. Let us glorify Him!

## Discussion Questions

Choose from these possible questions to explore today's topic.

**Question #1:** Why is it important to know Christ is the descendant of all of these people?

**Possible Answers:**

- It's about making connections between the Old Testament figures and Jesus Christ
- Showing that Christ isn't some random guy claiming to be the Son of God
- There's a connection between Jesus and all of the major figures of the Promise of a Messiah, meaning He IS the Messiah

**Question #2:** What would it be like to hear of something great happening some day in the future, yet never being able to see it take place in your own life? What do you think that would be like?

**Possible Answers:**

- It might be really hard to accept or believe
- Might be disappointed to never see that great thing
- Sad to never witness it
- Hope that it will be a better future for others
- Create a reason to do things better here to help prepare for that future event
- Might create some excitement for what is to come

**Question #3:** Knowing that the birth of Christ was the result of God's plan over forty-two generations, how should we react when something doesn't happen for us in the amount of time we expect?

**Possible Answers:**

- We're not God, and don't have the perspective He does
- Our frame of reference is pretty small compared to God
- We might have to make some effort and have faith in God
- God will provide for our needs when He knows it's right for us and our salvation
- We have to be patient and focused on God, trusting that He will provide for our needs

**Question #4:** How can we respond when we experience God's grace in our life?

**Possible Answers:**

- Give thanks
- Pray for ourselves and others
- Keep doing God's commandments
- See the joy in life
- Love others in a godly way
- Repent before God, forgive others
- Go to church, offer a candle in thanks, receive the Eucharist

**Question #5:** How would you describe the nature of God?

**Possible Answers:**

- Love
- Freedom
- Creativity (the Holy Spirit)
- Rational thinking
- Express compassion for others
- Be in communion with God

**Question #6:** How can we faithfully trust God when things do not make sense?

**Possible Answers:**

- There might be a deeper meaning - pray to God for discernment
- We might experience things with resistance, as if we're not supposed to do something - pray to God for understanding and guidance
- Talk with our parents or priest for guidance when things are confusing or facing spiritual struggles

**Question #7:** How can the Nativity of Christ remind us of the power of inexplicable wonder?

**Possible Answers:**

- If we get focused on our lives, we forget God is present
- Our participation in the life of the Church is vital for us to be part of something bigger - God's plan
- We can see the miracle of Christ's birth in a new light
- It's more than a coincidence that 42 generations, wise men from Persia, shepherds, and a Roman census all took place in exactly the right way for Christ to be born in Bethlehem

## Preview

### Next Week

We continue the celebration of the Nativity by honoring St. Joseph the Betrothed, St. James, the Lord's brother, and St. David, the prophet and ancestor of Christ.

St. Joseph was faithful in very unusual circumstances, St. James was the son of St. Joseph and a devoted follower of Jesus, and St. David wrote the book of Psalms.

We have the choice to follow God with faith, knowing from the lives of these three saints, God has a very specific plan of salvation for each of us living in the 21st century.

## On The Web

Learn more about this week's topics on the web:

### Homily on the Genealogy of Christ

(9:23 min)

<https://youtu.be/HpuHotcl1hc>

### About the Sunday of the Holy Ancestors

<http://ww1.antiochian.org/node/18658>

### What Does the Name Jesus Mean?

<https://antiochpatriarchate.org/en/page/jesus-what-does-this-name-mean/2326/>

### Christ's Family - Our Family

<https://www.goarch.org/-/christ-s-family-our-family>

