



Elevation of the Cross


Study Guide - Level 1 (Grades K-2 / Ages 5-7)

September 14

Lesson Format

- Intro / Summary of the feast
- Review the epistle and gospel readings
- Review the festal hymns
- Read front page of handout together
- Use study guide content for discussion and Q&A on topics related to the feast
- Complete activities on inside pages of handout
- Recap / Review of the feast

Tips & Hints

- Use as few or as many of the questions and explanations found in the study guide based on ages of the youth, helping them discover how the Orthodox Faith can be a part of their daily life.
- Watch for the  in the handout for topics/questions which might spark conversations with participants.
- It's recommended to use open-ended questions, encouraging young people to think, share their experiences or ideas, and strengthen their relationship with Jesus Christ and His holy Orthodox Faith.
- Questions, ideas, feedback, and suggestions can be directed to the publisher at orthodoxjourneys@gmail.com

✦ Overview

Every Orthodox Christian makes the sign of the cross. It's something we'll do the rest of our life, just like brushing our teeth, eating breakfast, and sleeping every night.

Why do we do it?

Because the cross of Jesus Christ is very important for us - it reminds us that God loves us SO much.

We know Christ died on the cross, and it's sad because He needed to do it, but the good news is He was raised from the dead, saving us from the devil and sin.

Thinking about the resurrection makes us remember how happy we are on Pascha, and we can live like that every day - because God is with us every day.

To show our belief in God, we wear a cross.

When we wear a cross, close to our heart, we show our love for God, providing Christ with a place in our lives, letting Him be close to us.

Today we remember a special event from a long time ago, and why it relates to Holy Friday, when Jesus died on the cross.

It's been nearly 5 months since Pascha, and now we have a chance to bow before the cross again, saying "thank you" to God for everything He does for us.

☑ Goal

After completing this handout, youth should be able to articulate the following:

- What we celebrate/commemorate on the feast of the Elevation of the Cross.
- Be familiar with the festal theme songs (apolytikion/troparion and kontakion).
- Understand what is featured in the festal icon.
- Why the feast is important, and celebrated annually in the church.
- Understand what Elevation and Worship mean, and why the Cross is central to our beliefs as Orthodox Christians.
- Know why this feast is relevant to us today.
- How the Church encourages us to live Godly lives regardless of age or situation.

✦ Apostolos / Epistle and Gospel Readings

Open the bible and have someone read the Apostolos/Epistle and another student read the Gospel lesson for the day.

Epistle/Apostol: 1 Corinthians 1:18-24

Talk about the epistle reading:

Today's epistle was written by St. Paul. It is one of the books (or letters) found in the New Testament of our bible.

1) Ask: "What was the author of today's epistle talking about?"

Possible Answers

- God sometimes does things which don't make sense to us.
- That's because He's God, and we're not.
- If we have faith or trust in God, He will help us understand what helps us be closer to Jesus.
- St. Paul tells us that some people will demand facts or have opinions which deny that Christ died on the Cross.
- For us, we learn about God in church school so we can better understand how God cares for us.

2) Ask: "How is the message of this epistle apply to our lives?"

Possible Answers

- Christ is the Word and Son of God - meaning He cares for us and teaches us what to do.
- Jesus leads by example, being kind and loving to other people.
- Until God returns at the Second Coming, we should be loving, forgiving, humble, helpful, and patient, being good examples of Christ's love for others.
- We can learn things in school and also at church, so we have a balanced understanding of the world and being children of God.

Gospel: John 19:6-11, 13-20, 25-28,30-35

Talk about the Gospel reading:

Today's gospel was written by St. John.

It is one of the 4 written accounts of the life of Jesus Christ, found in the New Testament of our bible.

1) Ask: "What took place in today's Gospel reading?"

Possible Answers

- This is a shorter version of the gospel lessons read during Holy Week.
- We remember what God did for us, by having Jesus die on the cross.
- Jesus Christ, the Son of God was turned over to die on a cross.
- We know these things happened, because the author, St. John, was at the cross and crucifixion.

2) Ask: "Why is this important for us living in the 21st century?"

Possible Answers

- This Gospel reading is at the heart of what we believe about God.
- God loves us a lot, and this makes us happy.
- We can be like God by being good and helping other people.
- The devil is going to try and keep us from God, so we have to be careful.
- When we think about God, the devil is going to try to give us other things to do instead. Be strong - God will reward us for staying close to Him.

Hymnography

Have someone read the Troparion/ Apolytikion and Kontakion on the handout.

Explain: Troparion (tro – par – ee – ohn) or Apolytikion (ah – po – lee – tee – key – ee – ohn) and Kontakion (kon – tahk – ee – ohn) are theme songs for each feast, celebration, or saint.

The Troparion/Apolytikion are two names for the same hymn, while the Kontakion expands the idea/thought proclaimed in the Troparion or Apolytikion.

Each describes what we're celebrating today, who is involved in the event, and how this event or saint is important to our lives as Orthodox Christians.

These are celebratory hymns, rejoicing in God's mercy and wonders.

1) Ask: "What do these hymns teach us?"

Possible Answers

- God is our Savior and we rely on Him to be present in our lives.
- We can call this hymn our anthem, since it talks about what we believe as Orthodox Christians.
- Christ chose to die for us to live.
- God defeated the devil for us, because He loves us.
- Satan is bad, and very mean sometimes, we have to be careful and focus on God to stay ready for living the right way.

2) Ask: "How can the message of the hymns apply to our lives?"

Possible Answers

- As Orthodox Christians, we believe God will defeat our enemies (both visible and invisible).
- The cross is a symbol of peace and victory in God, it no longer represents death.
- We hold up the cross, both in church and in our homes, because it's a reminder of God's victory for us.

A Closer Look

After reading the front page of the handout, discuss and explore the themes below. Related questions can be found on the next page "Discussion Questions."

Opening Review:

We remember events which happened a long time ago:

- The finding of the true cross of Jesus Christ by Saint Helen the Empress
- The consecration of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre where Jesus was buried

Why do we celebrate the cross?

The cross is very important for us personally, because it represents what Jesus Christ did for us, and in the life of the Church, because it provides a tangible connection to the time of Jesus Christ here on earth and teaches us about God's love for everyone.

Ask: What does it mean to celebrate the cross?

The cross *was* bad but after Christ died on the cross, it became a symbol of victory for us. This is why we wear the cross around our neck. We've "put it on" our body as a sign of our acceptance of God's plan of salvation and being part of His Church.

Wearing a cross reminds us of what God did for us, and hopefully inspires us to:

- Live in the ways of God's commandments
- Fast and pray
- Help others
- Say "I'm sorry" when we do something wrong
- Accept an apology when someone else says, "I'm sorry"
- Receiving Communion on Sunday at the liturgy

When we wear our cross, or kiss it, or make the sign of it with our hand, we honor God and thank Him for the blessings He gives us.

Ask: How many places can you find the cross in church?

- On top of the iconostasis
- On the dome
- Candle stands
- Banner poles

Ask: Where is the cross in your home?

Wrap Up

The cross is an important symbol for us, it reminds us and helps us believe in Jesus' resurrection from the dead. It is an image of peace and love.

Think of special items you have at home – maybe your parents have something they treasure from their grandparents or parents, or they keep a special drawing you made in Kindergarten. These items hold special meaning for them (and you).

The cross holds special meaning for us. It's not magic but a special gift from Jesus which we bless with and show respect, bowing down in honor of God.

Discussion Questions

Question #1:

Why is this feast important?

Possible Answers:

- Jesus wants us to be united with Him and God the Father in Heaven.
- We are encouraged to keep the cross at the center of our lives as inspiration and a reminder of God's love.

Question #2:

Why do we sing "Lord, have mercy"?

Possible Answers:

- It's a special prayer helping us thank God for the things He gives us
- It reminds us to trust God to take care of us wherever we are in life.

Handout Activities

In the handout for the feast, there are a variety of activities which can be completed:

Front Page: Read the introductory text, ensuring the young people understand the feast, what took place, and how it relates to their lives. Read the festal hymns and scripture readings, using this study guide to understand their meanings.

Page 2: Read through the *Whos' Who in the Icon*, answering questions about the icon, who is portrayed, and what's taking place.

The icon of the Elevation of the Cross represents a historical event, and unlike other Great Feasts, Christ is not present in the icon, because the event took place in 335. But the placement of the cross reminds us of the crucifixion and God's plan of salvation through the cross.

Page 3: Answer the trivia questions about the feast, read the "Big Words" which relate to the feast, and discuss how young people can actively participate in the services of the feast - whether at home or in church.

Page 4: Read through the clues in the *Puzzle within a Puzzle* activity, helping the young people answer the questions. The letters placed within the circles are then used to complete a four-word phrase used in the liturgical hymns sung during Vespers on the eve of the feast.

The phrase celebrates the majesty of the cross, and what it represents for us as Orthodox Christians.

Page 5: Discuss how our parish is part of the universal church. We're not the only Orthodox Christians in the world. Explore the idea of common beliefs and practices, and how prayer and making the sign of the cross unites us to other Orthodox Christians around the world.

Watch the video produced by a small Orthodox church in northern Finland. The music being sung is "Save us, O Son of God, who rose from the dead, and we will sing to you: Alleluia!" and was composed by Elia Piertarinen, a modern choir member and composer of the Finnish Orthodox Church.

Discuss with the young people where they see themselves making the sign of the cross.

At school? Before sports practice? Before meals? When getting up / going to bed?
Before spending time with friends? In difficult situations? Other circumstances?

Helping youth see prayer and the cross as part of their daily lives is crucial for their spiritual maturation as Orthodox Christians.

Review and discuss why we make the sign of the cross, using the examples and outline provided on this page.

Page 6: This drawing of the Exaltation icon can be used for coloring by young and old alike. By creating our own icons, we synthesize our thoughts and knowledge of the feast and what Jesus Christ means to us as our God and Savior.

On The Web

Learn more about the feast on the internet:

Homily on the Feast:

By St. John of Shanghai, 20th century bishop in America
<https://www.oca.org/fs/sermons/the-cross-the-preserver-of-the-universe>

Liturgical Hymns for the Elevation of the Cross:

Sung in a variety of languages and melodies
<https://youtu.be/9e7HuSXuLUI>

Troparion/Apolytikion for the Elevation of the Cross:

In English:
<https://youtu.be/SdiJzHqW6gw>

Liturgical Texts for the Elevation of the Cross:

<https://www.oca.org/liturgics/music-downloads/elevation-of-the-lifegiving-cross>

