

Kids in Church: 4th Sunday of Great Lent: St Mary of Egypt – Study Guide

This study guide is intended to accompany the Sunday of St. Mary of Egypt handout from the Kids in Church series of handouts.

These resources are designed for youth ages 6-13. Within each handout, ↪ indicates topics/questions which can be used to inspire conversations with youth.

The questions and discussion topics included here intend to build on the content found in the Sunday of St. Mary of Egypt handout, engaging youth with questions and discussions related to the 5th Sunday of Great Lent commemoration our mother, Saint Mary of Egypt, our relationship with Jesus Christ and the Orthodox Faith.

Feel free to use as few or as many of the questions and explanations to engage children, sharing with them the meaning of this feast.

Questions, feedback, and suggestions can be directed to the publisher at dluca@verizon.net

Overview

The fifth Sunday of Great Lent celebrates the memory of Saint Mary of Egypt, a 6th century lay person who was born in the city of Alexandria, on the north African coast of Egypt. We remember Saint Mary for her radical change of lifestyle after traveling to Jerusalem.

We know of St. Mary because of her two encounters with St. Zosimas, a monastic whom she encountered in the Palestinian desert during Great Lent in the year 521 AD.

During the first meeting with St. Zosimas, she shared her life story, recounting how from the age of 12, when she left her parents, she lived a disgraceful life seducing men. She wasn't a prostitute, and often refused payment for her deeds. At the age of 29, she joined pilgrims on a ship en route to Jerusalem for the feast of the Elevation of the Cross.

It was in Jerusalem, that an invisible force prevented her from entering the church multiple times. She sat outside, thinking about what happened, when she noticed the icon of the Theotokos above the doorway. Mary prayed to the Theotokos, recognizing her sinful ways, and promised to immediately change her way of life if she was allowed to enter and venerate the Cross of Christ (the true Cross was brought out annually and the Patriarch of Jerusalem would hold it for veneration by the faithful.)

This time, when Mary attempted to enter the church, she was able to, and rejoicing, venerated the cross and bowed to the ground in gratitude for the opportunity to enter the church.

She then returned to the icon, and prayed again to the Virgin Mary, asking for guidance on what to do. Mary heard a voice instructing her to go into the desert. It was there that she lived for the next 47 years, living off herbs and whatever she could find. She endured the cold and heat, and frequently struggled with temptation and attacks from the devil. During her spiritual growth, Mary spent countless years in prayer, asking forgiveness of God.

When Mary encountered the monk Zosimas the first time, she spoke with him by name, even though he had not told it to her. This was a sign of her great humility and holiness. At the end of their encounter, Mary asked St. Zosimas to come back one year later, on Holy Thursday and meet her on the banks of the River Jordan, and to bring the Eucharist, so she might receive the holy gifts.

A year later, he did so, and Mary walked across the River as Christ walked on the Sea of Galilee. Mary received the Eucharist from St. Zosimas, and asked him to return again one year later, to the same place

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they had met before. St. Zosimas agreed, and Mary then cross back to the other side of the river, and returned to the desert.

The following year, St. Zosimas went into the desert, walking some 20 days before he reached the same place where he met St. Mary. There, he found her body, with a message carved into the sand, asking him to “bury the body of the sinful Mary.” (He didn’t know her name prior to this.)

St. Zosimas was old, and did not have a shovel or tools to dig the desert soil, but a lion appeared, and dug the burial place for St. Mary. St. Zosimas then returned to his monastery and recounted the life of St. Mary to all of the monastics, and her life has been shared to this day, in honor of her great repentance and humility.

St. Mary’s life is recounted every year during the Great Fast, as an example of what is possible of anyone who seeks to live in the presence of God in Paradise. All of us, whether monastics or lay people, are called to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Christ.

This comes in a unique form for each of us, depending on our spiritual strength and sinful lives. During Great Lent, we can increase our prayer, fasting, and almsgiving and give up those actions and habits which prevent us from living godly lives.

For youth, this may seem overwhelming or not applicable, however it’s important to share the life of St. Mary because we can establish even small habits now which will help us in high school, college, or in life when temptations or accepted societal norms go against the teachings of Christ and His holy church.

Like the other saints remembered during Great Lent, their lives can inspire each of us, because they lived with Faith that God would help them in their struggles. Lent is not a time to beat one’s self up over our sins, but instead to have compassion, remembering that God will have mercy on us if we allow Him into our life.

Objective

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

- What we celebrate/commemorate on the 5th Sunday of Great Lent
- Why we celebrate the memory of St. Mary of Egypt
- Be familiar with the festal theme songs (troparion/kontakion) of St. Mary
- Things to do at home during the Great Fast
- Know the life of St. Mary (based on the summary account above, or by reading the life of St. Mary of Egypt here: <https://bit.ly/stmary-egypt>)
- How the Church encourages us to live godly lives regardless of age or situation

Page 1: Sunday of St. Mary of Egypt

- 1) Read the front page together.
- 2) Ask: “Why do we celebrate St. Mary of Egypt on the fifth Sunday of the Great Fast?”
(Possible answers: she recognized that she needed to make a change to her life, that Mary encountered the Theotokos and with her help lived differently, going to church isn’t a right, it’s a blessing from God, going to church can help us be good Orthodox Christians, repentance is a way we can draw closer to God, being Orthodox Christians can be difficult, because the devil tempts us and wants us to stay away from God, we have free will to choose what we do, doing

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the good things God wants us to do requires us to be humble, peaceful, loving, and merciful to others, we don't need to go into the desert to be like St. Mary, we can live godly lives wherever we may be, as long as we avoid sin, and live as God commanded us.)

- 3) Ask: "What can we do during the remaining days of Great Lent to prepare for Pascha?" (Possible answers: reflect on the life of St. Mary, go to confession, prepare for communion by praying more, fasting from food and bad behaviors, looking seriously at our actions and how they may not be the right ways to live, being kind and forgiving of ourselves and others, making a change in our life, being more kind, loving, merciful, humble, forgive others, apologize, ask for forgiveness, be more Christ-like, help those in need, checking-in on friends or family, providing a good example of Christian behavior.)
- 4) Open the bible and have someone read Hebrews 9:11-14 and Mark 10:32-45
- 5) Talk about the readings:

Epistle:

a) In the Old Testament, the Jewish High Priest would once a year sacrifice a lamb for the sins of the people. What type of sacrifice did Christ make for all people?

(Possible answers: He died on the cross for us and for our sins, that the Old Testament worship involved a lamb, but Christ replaces the old covenant with His own death, so there is no longer any need for animal sacrifices, Christ died that we may someday be with Him and God the Father in heaven, that Christ was born to fulfill the prophecies that salvation was promised by God for the sins of the people, that God sent His only Son to die for our sake, that Jesus is our Great High Priest, that God does only He can do for us, we can't save ourselves.)

b) What does it mean that Christ is our High Priest?

(Possible answers: that He offers a sacrifice for us to reconcile us to God, that He died for our sins, that He is the eternal leader of His people, that He fulfills the Old Testament and establishes the Church as our path to heaven, that He is our Savior, that God loves us so much, that He gives us an example of how to live – with compassion towards others.)

Gospel:

a) What did James and John want Jesus to do for them?

(Possible answers: Promise them a place in Heaven with God the Father, and a place of prominence – closest to Jesus, security and happiness)

b) Why did Jesus reply as He did?

(Possible answers: Only God the Father can say who will receive what reward at the Last Judgment, that being a follower and disciple of Christ means we need to be humble and servants of each other, that Christ is our example of how to live – humbly, willing to die for each other – and not here to be in control or in a position of power, that being Christians means we have to die to our desires and wishes – like St. Mary of Egypt – and pick up the cross of our own life which requires sacrifice, patience, and humility)

c) Why did Jesus ask His disciples if they could "drink the cup that I drink"?

(Possible answers: Because he was talking about his betrayal, crucifixion and death, that He was telling them they would each be martyred for their belief in Jesus Christ as God, that as disciples of Christ, we are all called to martyrdom, giving up our own interests and lives to be servants to those in need and around us.)

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d) How did Jesus respond when the other disciples began to pick on James and John?
(Possible answers: He told them they all need to be humble, and compassionate to everyone they encounter in life, that being a servant is the right way to live a godly life, helping others and being merciful to those in need, that Christ is the example we should follow, and God will provide for us what we need, helping us live as good Orthodox Christians.)

Page 1: Sunday of St. Mary of Egypt

- 6) Explain: A troparion is a festal theme song which we sing (or read), remembering and celebrating the saint or feast of the day. A kontakion is another type of theme song. Both of these hymns are meant to teach us, explaining why we celebrate the saint or feast.
- 7) Ask: What do the troparion and kontakion tell about St. Mary's life?
(Possible answers: She took up her personal cross, changed her way of life, she followed Christ instead of her personal desires, she denied her desires to sleep around by focusing on her salvation, she struggled against the devil and physical temptations, she gained eternal life by her life here on earth, she turned from a sinful way of life, Mary is known as a bride of Christ – who is the Bridegroom, she defeated demons by her spiritual struggles, she fasted, prayed, and received a crown (shown in icons as a halo) for her saintly life.)

Page 1: 15 Things to Do

- 8) Use the link above to read the life of St. Mary and ask: "How can we be like St. Mary of Egypt?"
(Possible answers: Deny ourselves bad habits and desires which keep us from God, be more like St Mary living a saintly life, do things we can do which are blessed by God.)
- 9) Ask: How do we greet each other between Pascha (Easter) and Ascension?
(Answer: Christ is risen! Indeed, He is risen! (or Truly, He is risen!)
- 10) Ask: Do you know how to say the Paschal greeting in Aleut?
(Answer: Kristusaq Aglagikuk! Angangulakan Aglagikuk!)
Pronunciation: Khree-STU sak Ahg-lah-gee-KOOK! Ahn-gahn-goo-lah-kahn Ahg-lah-gee-KOOK!
Note: the accent goes on the syllables in all caps
- 11) Will it still be Pascha if we are quarantined and unable to be "in church" on Pascha? (Possible answers: Yes, because Christ rose from the dead once for all, It will be different, it won't feel the same, we can still celebrate the Resurrection.)
- 12) Ask: "Who knows the prayer to St. Ephraim?"
- + O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, despair, lust of power, and idle talk. (prostration.)
- + But give, rather, the spirit of chastity, humility, patience and love to Thy servant. (prostration.)
- + Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own transgressions and not to judge my brother, for blessed are Thou unto ages of ages. Amen. (prostration.)
- 13) Explore: What are some prayers we can say in the Morning? (Possible answers: Trisagion, Lord's Prayer, It is Truly Meet, Psalm 50)

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<https://www.oca.org/orthodoxy/prayers/morning-prayers>

- 14) Explore: What are some evening prayers? (Possible answers: Trisagion, Lord's Prayer, Rejoice, O Virgin, Psalm 50, St. Ephraim's Prayer)

<https://www.oca.org/orthodoxy/prayers/evening-prayers>

- 15) Explore: What are some prayers for at meals? (Possible answers: Lord's Prayer, The Poor Shall Eat and Be Satisfied)

<https://www.oca.org/orthodoxy/prayers/before-and-after-meals>

- 16) Explore: How can we stay connected with friends and family? (Possible answers: call, email, text, facetime, zoom, facebook messenger.)

- 17) Explore: What type of new skills can we learn? (Possible answers: cook, clean, practice an instrument, scrapbook, draw or sketch an icon, practice singing church hymns, read from the bible, research a topic of interest online, ask a relative or grandparent about their childhood, see how many birds you can see and name outside, plant a garden, discover new Lenten or Paschal recipes to try this year.)

Pages 2: Reassemble the Icon of St. Mary

- 1) Print out the jumbled icon and cut into the 54 individual pieces
- 2) Print out the blank grid page
- 3) Have glue available to affix each piece to the grid
- 4) Once the icon is assembled, look at the image and ask What is being portrayed in the icon? (Possible answers: St. Zosimas is bringing the Eucharist to St. Mary, Mary is standing on one side of the Jordan River, Mary is crossing her arms like we do when we receive the Eucharist, St. Zosimas is a priest (and a monastic – identified by his headgear/hat), St Mary is wearing barely any clothes (because she lived in the desert and her clothes wore out), both Father Zosimas and Mary have halos because they are called saints (holy) because of the godly lives they lived, the background has mountains and lots of rocks because they lived in an area of the Middle East where there was little vegetation or food to eat, Mary is very skinny because she ate hardly anything for 47 years, the River Jordan flows between them because that's where St. Mary asked St Zosimas to meet her on Holy Friday in the year 522 AD.)
- 5) When the activity is complete, place the icon near your family's icon corner or in your child's room, using the troparion and kontakion to pray to St. Mary of Egypt each year during the 5th week of Great Lent and on her feast day, April 1.
- 6) Discuss why we celebrate St. Mary of Egypt on the Fifth Sunday of Great Lent (Possible answers: she recognized that she needed to make a change to her life, that Mary encountered the Theotokos and with her help lived differently, going to church isn't a right, it's a blessing from God, going to church can help us be good Orthodox Christians, repentance is a

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way we can draw closer to God, being Orthodox Christians can be difficult, because the devil tempts us and wants us to stay away from God, we have free will to choose what we do, doing the good things God wants us to do requires us to be humble, peaceful, loving, and merciful to others, we don't need to go into the desert to be like St. Mary, we can live godly lives wherever we may be, as long as we avoid sin, and live as God commanded us.)

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For More Information About the 4th Sunday of Great Lent:

<https://www.oca.org/saints/lives/2020/03/29/16-4th-sunday-of-great-lent-st-john-climacus-of-the-ladder>

About St. John Climacus (of the Ladder)

<https://www.oca.org/saints/lives/2020/03/30/100943-venerable-john-climacus-of-sinai-author-of-the-ladder>

For More Information About the Sundays of Great Lent:

<https://www.oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/worship/the-church-year/sundays-of-lent>

For the complete Ladder of Divine Ascent:

<http://www.prudencetrue.com/images/TheLadderofDivineAscent.pdf>

Music resources:

<https://www.oca.org/liturgics/music-downloads/lenten-tridion>

Common Prayers:

<https://www.oca.org/orthodoxy/prayers>

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