

Great Feasts, Part 1

Feasts of the Lord

OPENING PRAYERS:

In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen
Glory to thee, our God, glory to thee!

Prayer to Holy Spirit

O heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of truth, who art everywhere present and fillest all things, Treasury of blessings, and Giver of life: come and abide in us, and cleanse us from every impurity, and save our souls, O Good One.

Trisagion Prayer

Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal: have mercy on us. Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal: have mercy on us. Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal: have mercy on us.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen

O Most Holy Trinity, have mercy on us. Lord, cleanse us from our sins. Master, pardon our transgressions. Holy One, visit and heal our infirmities, for thy Name's sake.

Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

Before Study

Lord Jesus Christ, open the eyes of my heart that I may hear thy word and understand it and so fulfill thy will. Amen.

LESSON / ACTIVITY: See pages below. For each topic, please note Parent roles, notes, and (child responses).

Prayers

Before and after each lesson, please say a short prayer in front of an icon according to your family's prayer rule or the following, taken from the red St Tikhon's Prayer Book:

CLOSING PRAYERS:

"Rejoice, O Virgin Theotokos, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb: for thou hast borne the Savior of our souls.

Pray to God for me, O holy [name of your patron saint], pleasing to God, for with fervor I run to thee, swift helper and intercessor for my soul.

O Lord, save thy people and bless thine inheritance. Grant victories to the Orthodox Christians over their adversaries, and by virtue of thy Cross preserve thy habitation.

It is truly meet to bless thee, O Theotokos: ever-blessed and most pure and the Mother of our God. More honorable than the cherubim and more glorious beyond compare than the seraphim; without corruption thou gavest birth to God the Word: true Theotokos, we magnify thee.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, through the prayers of thy most pure Mother, of my holy guardian angel, of [name of your patron saint], of [saint(s) of the day], and of all the saints: save me, a sinner. Amen."

Introduction: The Church Year and Cycle of Feasts

Parent Asks: “How often do we celebrate days and feasts, eating delicious food and celebrating with people we love, like Christmas or your birthday? Are they on the same day every year? Why do we celebrate those days?” (Something important happened that we want to remember.) “What other days do we celebrate in the Church each year? Are some on a different day, but in the same season?”

Parent Explains: “Each year the Orthodox Church calendar remembers important events that we want to celebrate, like Christ’s nativity, *birthday*, His baptism, or the nativity, *birthday*, of the Theotokos, *mother of God*. These are on specific days. Pascha, or Easter, and the feasts around it, like Palm Sunday, Christ’s Ascension into heaven, and Pentecost, are on different days each year. There are 12 major feast days, plus Pascha, ‘the feast of feasts.’” *If the child has The Great Feasts DIY Banner*, say, “Look at each icon and try to see what event is happening or why this day is special. The 12 feasts in order of the January-December calendar year are: Theophany, Presentation of the Lord in the Temple, Annunciation, Palm Sunday, Pascha, Pentecost, Transfiguration, Dormition, Nativity of the Theotokos, Elevation of the Cross, Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple, and the Nativity of our Lord. This week we will focus on the Feasts of the Lord and sing the Troparia.

Activity: *If you haven’t already, now is a good time to color the Great Feasts Banner and look at the icons. Think about what is happening in the icon while coloring.*

Day 2: Theophany

2) Parent Explains: “On this feast we celebrate Christ’s Baptism in the Jordan. When we look at the icon of Jesus being baptized, we see lines coming down from heaven and a dove above Jesus. Jesus came to show us the way to God. He said we must be baptized; we must wash ourselves clean and live a new and better way. When Jesus is baptized by John in the Jordan, he identifies Himself with sinners as the ‘Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,’ *John 1:29*, God the Father’s ‘Beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased,’ and One of the Holy Trinity, confirmed by the voice of the Father, spoken from heaven, *point to the lines above Jesus*, and by the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove.”

Parent Asks: “What is the dove in this icon?” (The Holy Spirit) “What are the lines coming from the top?” (The voice of God calling Jesus His Beloved Son.)



Let’s listen to and sing the festal Troparion:
(When Thou, O Lord, was baptized in the Jordan the worship of the Trinity was made manifest! For the voice of the Father bore witness to Thee, and called Thee His beloved Son. And the Spirit, in the form of a dove, confirmed the truthfulness of his Word. O Christ our God, who hast revealed Thyself and hast enlightened the world, glory to Thee!)

1) Parent Asks: What do you see? (Jesus, water, Jordan River, angels, St. John, a dove, rocks, lines from above, etc.) What do you think is happening? (St. John is baptizing Jesus)



Day 2: Presentation of the Lord in the Temple (Meeting of the Lord)

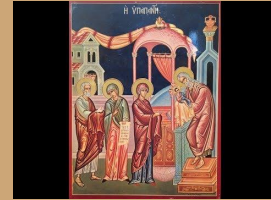
2) Parent Asks: “When a baby is baptized, what else happens that day? What other Holy Mysteries take place?” (Holy Communion, Chrismation, Churching, getting a cross, etc.)

Parent Explains: “On this feast we celebrate the meeting of Christ in the Temple. A lot of special things happen when a baby is baptized, but it can also be seen as one big event. The feasts of Theophany, also called Epiphany, and the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple are similar. In the early Church, they celebrated all of Jesus’ important childhood events on January 6th: His circumcision, presentation in the Temple, and Baptism. Jewish tradition in the temple is celebrated in this feast because Jesus is the fulfilment of Jewish Scripture, *point to scroll in St. Anna’s hand.*

Parent Asks: “What did Jewish people bring into the temple?” (animals like birds, turtle doves, a sacrifice for God)

Parent Explains: “Our epistle reading this day from Hebrews reminds us that the One brought into the Temple this day is the Great High Priest, Who offers Himself on the Cross and destroys the power of sin and death through His resurrection. Jesus does this so we may enter into the Heavenly Temple and participate by grace in the eternal communion of the Holy Trinity.”

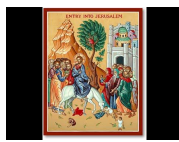
1) Parent Asks: “What do you see in this icon?” (St. Mary and St. Joseph, Jesus, St. Simeon, two turtle doves, St. Anna the prophet, scroll, curtain, candle, steps, table, Holy Scripture on the altar table)



3) Listen to and sing the festal troparion:

(Rejoice, O Virgin Theotokos, Full of Grace! From you shone the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, enlightening those who sat in darkness! Rejoice and be glad, O righteous elder; you accepted in your arms the Redeemer of our souls who grants us the resurrection!)

Day 3: Palm Sunday



1) Listen to the festal troparion and kontakion.

Parent Explains the story and symbols in the icon: “On the Sunday before the Feast of Great and Holy Pascha and at the beginning of Holy Week, the Orthodox Church celebrates one of its most joyous feasts of the year. Palm Sunday celebrates the Entrance of our Lord into Jerusalem, *a fulfillment of the prophecy found in Zechariah 9:9*, after His miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead.

Look at the icon together:

Christ is blessing with His right hand, and in His left hand is a scroll, symbolizing that He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah, the Anointed One who has come to redeem us from our sins and break the power of death.

Behind Him, the disciples accompany Jesus. In front of Him are the Jews who greet Him crying, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!’ The word ‘Hosanna’ means ‘Save, I pray’ or ‘Save now.’

The children greet Christ with palm branches and we often see them laying these and their garments on the ground before Christ, as tokens of honor for one who is a King. The city of Jerusalem is shown as the walled buildings in the background, and the temple is depicted as the building with the dome. On the right in the background we see the Mount of Olives, where many important events happen, including Jesus’s Ascension into heaven.

What is Jesus riding on? Some people say it’s a colt, others say it’s a donkey, also called an ass, but both are important to the story.”

3) **Parent Asks:** “What do you see?” (Jesus, donkey, scroll in His left hand, sign of blessing with His right hand, disciples, mountain, buildings, palm tree, children, palm branches)



2) **Animal symbols:** Jesus said, “ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me,” *Matthew 21:2*. Both animals would have been shocking to the Jews in Jerusalem: the donkey because it is an animal of peace and the Jews expected a conquering, war-like, Messiah; the colt because it was an animal associated with the Gentiles, whilst the Jews expected the Messiah to be only for them.

Day 4: PASCHA!

2) Parent Explains: “On the Great and Holy Feast of Pascha, Orthodox Christians celebrate the life-giving Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This feast of feasts, even more than a ‘Great Feast,’ is the most significant day in the life of the Church. It is a celebration of the defeat of death, as neither death itself nor the power of the grave could hold our Savior captive. In this victory that came through the Cross, Christ broke the bondage of sin, and through faith offers us restoration, transformation, and eternal life.

We know that Jesus Christ was not content with laying in the tomb for three days after His crucifixion. Instead, while His body was entombed, Christ’s soul descended into Hades, or Hell. Christ descended there not to suffer, but to fight, and free the souls trapped there. Just as bringing a light into darkness causes the darkness to disappear, the Source of all Life descending into the abode of the dead resulted in Jesus’ victory over death, and not death’s victory over Jesus. This is the full reality of what Christ’s death and resurrection accomplished.”



1) Parent Asks:
“What do you see?”

- ❖ (Jesus reaching out his hands to Adam and Eve,
- ❖ white robes,
- ❖ lines of gold,
- ❖ rocks,
- ❖ black/darkness,
- ❖ bones)

“What do we celebrate on Pascha?”

3) Parent Asks: “We sing many great hymns on this feast of feasts! Can you guess which one is the Troparion? Let’s sing it together!”
(Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life!)

Day 5: Ascension

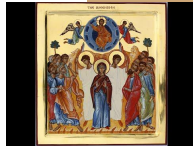
1) Parent Explains: “After eating, drinking, talking and visiting with many people for forty days after His Resurrection, Jesus and His disciples were in Jerusalem again. He then gave his final commandment, to “be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven,’ (Acts 1:8-11). The Lord Jesus Christ had ascended in glory into heaven and sat at the right hand of God the Father. His sacred disciples returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, rejoicing because Jesus had promised to send them the Holy Spirit.”

3) Listen to and sing the Festal Troparion:

“Thou didst ascend in Glory, O Christ our God, granting joy to Thy disciples by the promise of the Holy Spirit. Through the blessing they were assured that Thou art the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world.”

4) Also look at the Festal Kontakion:

“When Thou didst fulfill the dispensation for our sake, and didst unite earth to heaven, Thou didst ascend in glory, O Christ our God, not being parted from those who love Thee, but remaining with them and crying: I am with you and no one will be against you!”



2) Parent Asks: “What do you see?”

(Jesus, bright blue cloud, angels, two angels in white clothes, St. Mary, disciples talking and looking up to heaven, trees)



Day 6: Transfiguration of Christ

1) Parent Explains: “The event of the Transfiguration is recorded in three of the four Gospels: Matthew 17:1-9, Mark 9:2-8, and Luke 9:28-36. Jesus took the Apostles Peter, James, and John with Him up upon a mountain, and while they were on the mountain Jesus was transfigured. His face shone like the sun, and His garments became glistening white.

Moses and Elijah appeared with Christ, talking to Him. Peter declared how good it was for them to be there and expressed the desire to build three booths for Moses, Elijah, and Christ. This reference to the booths could imply that this occurred during the time of the Feast of Tabernacles when the Jews would be camping out in the fields for the grape harvest; for this Feast had acquired other associations in the course of its history, including the memory of the wanderings in the wilderness recorded in the Old Testament book of Exodus.

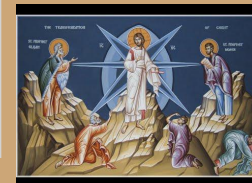
While Peter was speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them. A voice came from the cloud saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him.” When the disciples heard this they fell on their faces filled with awe. Jesus came to them and told them to not be afraid. When the three looked up they saw only Jesus.

As Jesus and His disciples came down the mountain, He told them not to speak of what they had seen until He had risen from the dead.”



2) Parent Asks: “What do you see?”

- ❖ (Jesus,
- ❖ Lines coming out behind him,
- ❖ Voice of God,
- ❖ Moses,
- ❖ Elijah,
- ❖ Peter, James, and John falling,
- ❖ rocks)



3) Listen to and sing the festal troparion: (Thou wast transfigured on the mountain, O Christ God, revealing Thy glory to Thy disciples as far as they could bear it. Let Thine everlasting light also shine upon us sinners. Through the prayers of the Theotokos. O Giver of Light, glory to Thee!)

Day 7: The Nativity of Christ

2) **Parent Explains elements of the icon:** “We know that Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ to a virgin mother, Mary. His life shows the fulfillment of prophecy from Scripture. There are many elements in this icon that tell the **story** of Jesus’s birth and **symbols** that remind us of the bigger picture. *A symbol is an object that also has another meaning.* The **stars** on Mary’s garment denote her virginity before, during and after the Nativity. *Isaiah 1:3*, ‘The **ox** knows his master, and the **donkey** his master’s crib; but Israel does not know me, and the people have not regarded me.’ With great **humility**, God who, invisible in His nature, becomes visible in the flesh for man’s sake, is **born in a cave** and **wrapped in swaddling clothes**. This is foreshadowing His death and burial, the sepulcher, *burial cave*, and the burial clothes. On the bottom corner we see the ‘troubling of Joseph by Satan,’ picturing **Satan** telling Joseph doubts. On the other side, we are reminded of the **water** that Baptizes Jesus as an adult.

A lot is happening in this icon! When we look at the face of the Theotokos, we recall, ‘But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart,’ *Luke 2:19.*”



1) **Parent Asks:** “What do we sing in church on this feast?”
(Thy Nativity of Christ our God has shone to the world the light of wisdom! For by it, those who worship the stars were taught by a star to adore Thee, the Sun of Righteousness, and to know Thee, the Orient from on high. O Lord, glory to Thee)

1) **Parent Asks:** “What do you see?”

- ❖ (Jesus,
- ❖ Mary,
- ❖ Joseph,
- ❖ Animals,
- ❖ wise men,
- ❖ Shepards,
- ❖ drummer boy,
- ❖ Angles,
- ❖ ave or manger,
- ❖ angels,
- ❖ line from above,
- ❖ star,
- ❖ water)

