

Exaltation of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem

Grade Level: 2nd-4th Grade

Duration: 45 minutes

Objective: By the end of this lesson, students should be able to tell the story of the Finding and Exaltation of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem and understand its significance in the Orthodox Christian tradition.

Materials:

- Please see the attached story for reference
- Visual aids (pictures illustrating critical parts of the story).
- Whiteboard and markers.

Introduction (10 minutes):

1. Begin the lesson by welcoming the students and creating an engaging and respectful atmosphere.
2. Ask the students if they have heard of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross or know anything about it. Please encourage them to share their thoughts.
3. Explain that today's lesson is about learning the story of the Finding and Exaltation of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem and understanding its significance in the Orthodox Christian faith.

Main Activities (30 minutes):

Activity 1: Storytelling (15 minutes)

1. Read the story of the Finding and Exaltation of the Holy Cross from the Lives of Saints Book or storybook, using age-appropriate language and explanations.
2. Use visual aids or pictures to illustrate essential parts of the story, such as the discovery of the Cross by St. Helena and its Exaltation.

Activity 2: Interactive Discussion (10 minutes)

1. Engage the students in a discussion about the story. Ask questions like:
 - Why was the Holy Cross important?
 - What did St. Helena do when she found the Cross?
1. Guide the students in understanding the significance of the Holy Cross and its role in the Christian faith.

Activity 3: Moral Lesson (5 minutes)

1. Discuss the moral lesson of the story, emphasizing the importance of treasuring and honoring the Holy Cross as a symbol of Jesus' sacrifice and love.
2. Highlight how the Exaltation of the Holy Cross is celebrated in the Orthodox Church.

Conclusion (5 minutes):

1. Gather the students and ask them to retell the Finding and Exaltation of the Holy Cross story in their own words.
2. Summarize the lesson by highlighting the significance of the Holy Cross and the importance of treasuring and honoring it in the Orthodox Christian tradition.
3. Conclude the lesson with a short prayer, thanking God for the Holy Cross and the opportunity to learn about its history.

Homework:

Encourage students to reflect on the meaning of the Holy Cross in their faith and how they can show reverence for it. Ask them to share their thoughts in the next lesson.

The Story of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross

A long, long time ago, in a place called Jerusalem, there was a very special hill where Jesus was crucified. But after many years, some Roman emperors who didn't believe in Jesus tried to erase the memory of this holy place. They built a temple for their gods and put up statues, trying to hide the story of Jesus' sacrifice.

Then, something amazing happened! A Christian emperor named Constantine, who loved Jesus, decided to find the real Cross where Jesus had been crucified. His mother, Empress Helen, helped him in this important mission. Even though she was quite old, she was very determined and brave.

Empress Helen went to Jerusalem and started searching for the Cross. She had to remove the old temples and statues that were in the way. She asked many people, and finally, an old man named Judas told her he knew where to find it. He said it was buried under the old temple.

So, Helen and her helpers began to dig. They found the old Cross and three other crosses. To find out which one was Jesus' Cross, they placed the crosses on a man who had passed away. When the True Cross touched him, he came back to life! This miracle showed everyone that they had found the right Cross.

Everyone was overjoyed. They lifted the Holy Cross high for everyone to see, and many people came to honor it. This happened in the year 326. That day was filled with happiness and wonder because the Cross showed God's love for us.

Another amazing thing happened after a sick woman was healed by being near the Cross. Judas, the old man, and many others believed in Jesus and were baptized. Judas became a bishop, helping people to learn about Jesus.

Empress Helen also marked important places where Jesus lived and did many good things. She built over 80 churches in places where Jesus had been, including where He was born and where He went up to heaven. She brought parts of the True Cross back to her city. Later, during a difficult time, the Cross was taken away by the Persians and held captive for 14 years. But with God's help, Emperor Heraclius defeated the Persians and brought the Cross back to Jerusalem. He carried it with great respect, and when he reached the holy gate, he realized he should enter humbly, just as Jesus had done when He carried the Cross.

On September 14, we celebrate the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, remembering these incredible events and the joy of finding the True Cross again. The Cross reminds us of Jesus' love and sacrifice and symbolizes hope and victory.