

Lesson Plan: The Nativity of the Holy Theotokos

Grade Level: 5th-8th

Lesson Duration: 45-60 minutes

Topic: The Birth of the Most Holy Theotokos: The Nativity of the Theotokos

Objective:

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Understand the story of the Nativity of the Theotokos.
- Recognize the significance of the Virgin Mary in God's plan for salvation.
- Explore how the faith and patience of Saints Joachim and Anna demonstrate trust in God's timing.

Materials:

- Bible (Luke 1:26-33 to introduce the role of the Virgin Mary)
- Icons of the Nativity of the Theotokos
- Whiteboard/Markers
- Handouts with key points (optional)

Opening Prayer (5 minutes):

Begin with the prayer:

"O Most Holy Theotokos, intercede for us with your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and help us learn more about your holy life today. Amen."

Introduction (10 minutes):

Ask the students:

- "What do you know about the Virgin Mary?"
- "Why do you think her birth is important?"

Introduce the Nativity of the Theotokos:

- Explain that this feast marks the birth of the woman chosen to be the Mother of God, the Virgin Mary.
- Mention the parents of the Theotokos: Saints Joachim and Anna, who were faithful and trusted in God's plan even when they were childless for many years.

Scripture Reading and Story (15-20 minutes):

1. Read Luke 1:26-33

This passage introduces Mary as the one chosen to be the Mother of Jesus, setting the stage for why her birth is significant.

2. Tell the Story of the Nativity of the Theotokos:

- Saint Joachim and Saint Anna were righteous people but had no children. In their old age, they continued to pray for a child and vowed to dedicate this child to God.

- The Archangel Gabriel appeared to them, telling them that they would have a daughter who would be the Mother of God.
- The birth of the Theotokos was a joyful event, showing that God's promise to send the Savior was being fulfilled.

Discussion (10-15 minutes):

Ask the students:

1. How do you think Joachim and Anna felt when they were childless for so long?
2. What can we learn from their patience and faith?
3. Why is Mary's birth such an important event in the life of the Church?

Highlight key points:

- God's plan unfolds in His perfect timing.
- The faith of Joachim and Anna serves as an example of trusting in God, even when it seems impossible.
- The birth of the Virgin Mary brings joy to the world because it marks the beginning of God's plan for our salvation.

Activity: Reflection and Writing (10-15 minutes):

1. **Reflection Time:** Ask the students to take a few moments to think about when they had to wait for something important. How did they feel? How can they trust God during times of waiting?
2. **Writing Exercise:** Have students write a short paragraph about what they admire most about Saints Joachim and Anna's faith or how they can trust God in their own lives.

Closing Prayer (5 minutes):

Conclude with a prayer asking for the intercessions of the Theotokos:

"O Holy Theotokos, thank you for your example of purity, humility, and obedience to God's will. Help us to follow your example and trust in God always. Amen."

Optional Homework/Follow-Up:

- Encourage students to read more about the Virgin Mary's life and her role in the Church.
- Have students share their reflections with their families and ask their parents or guardians about times when they've had to trust God's plan.

Feast Day Connection:

Discuss with students the celebration of the Nativity of the Theotokos on September 21/8, and encourage them to attend church services or reflect on the feast with their family.

The Birth of the Most Holy Theotokos

The Blessed Virgin Mary was born when people reached such limits of moral decline. The best minds of that era realized and often openly said that God must descend into the world to correct the faith and prevent the destruction of humanity. The Son of God wanted to take human nature for the salvation of people. The only one worthy to contain in Himself and incarnate the Source of purity and holiness was the Virgin Mary, and he chose her as His Mother.

The Church celebrates the Nativity of Our Most Holy Lady Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary as a day of universal joy. On this bright day, the Most Blessed Virgin Mary was born at the turn of the Old and New Testaments. Through Divine Providence, she was chosen to serve the mystery of the incarnation of God the Word - to appear as the Mother of the Savior of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Blessed Virgin Mary was born in the small Galilean city of Nazareth. Her parents were the righteous Joachim from the prophet's family and King David and Anna from the family of the high priest Aaron. The spouses were childless since Saint Anna was barren. Having reached old age, Joachim and Anna did not lose hope in God's mercy. They firmly believed that everything is possible for God and that He can resolve Anna's infertility even in her old age, as He once resolved the infertility of Sarah, the wife of Patriarch Abraham. Saints Joachim and Anna vowed to consecrate to God for service in the temple a child that the Lord would send them. The Jewish people considered childlessness as God's punishment for sins. Therefore, the holy and righteous Joachim and Anna endured unjust reproach from their neighbors.

On one of the holidays, the elder Joachim brought his sacrifice to the Jerusalem temple as a gift to God, but the high priest did not accept it, calling Joachim unworthy because of his childlessness. Saint Joachim, in deep grief, went into the desert, and there, with tears, he prayed to the Lord for the gift of a child. Saint Anna, having learned what had happened in the Jerusalem temple, wept bitterly but did not grumble at the Lord but prayed, calling on her family the mercy of God. The Lord fulfilled their petition when the holy spouses reached an advanced age and prepared themselves with a virtuous life for a high title - to be the parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the future Mother of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Archangel Gabriel brought joyful news to Joachim and Anna: their prayers were heard by God, and the Blessed Daughter Mary would be born to them, through whom salvation would be given to the whole world. The Blessed Virgin Mary, with her purity and virtue, surpassed all people and the angels. She was the living temple of God, and, as the Church sings in joyful hymns, "the Heavenly Door, introducing Christ into the Universe for the salvation of our souls" (2nd sticheron on "Lord, I have cried," tone 6).

The Nativity of the Mother of God marked the onset of the time when God's great and comforting promises about the salvation of the human race from the slavery of the devil began to be fulfilled. This event brought closer to earth the grace-filled Kingdom of God, the kingdom of truth, righteousness, virtue, and immortal life.