

A man with glasses and a beard, wearing a blue hoodie, is holding a large, ornate wooden icon of a religious figure. A young boy with dark hair is looking at the icon with interest. In the background, there are lit candles on a table.

BYZ#KIDS

May 2025

ICONS

Discover the beauty and richness of Byzantine icons through music, art, engaging activities and inspiring stories!

Glory to Jesus Christ!

Dear ByziParents,

Recently our team was discussing a new opportunity that had each of us taking stock of the quantity and quality of our formal education in the Faith. One of us, with a significant theological degree behind her, told this story. She said,

“I am reminded of something that happened to me when I took an iconography class in school. During the theology portion of the class, the priest teaching us showed us an icon and challenged us to tell him what the icon was about during the next class. Most of us spent a few minutes writing down ideas, but during the next class, one teenage girl gave a gorgeous explanation of the icon that left the rest of us in awe. The priest asked her how she could have known everything about the icon. Did she look it up? Had she seen the icon before? Who told her? Her response was that she had gone into the chapel and sat before the icon for an hour, just looking and meditating on it. As she meditated, the icon itself told her what it meant.

Icons are such powerful tools! Even the simplest and humblest among us can learn such intricacies of the spiritual life by meditating on them and the theological concepts they convey!

For this reason, we believe that icons should be our very first catechism. We are so pleased to explore them with you and your family in this issue!

Enjoy the issue!

Lynne



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INSTRUCTIONS

Red

Suitable for ages
0-3/infant & toddler

We like to start early and include everyone in catechesis! Red activities are provided for little brothers and sisters, the tagalongs, who do not require direct instruction but need something to keep them occupied while the rest of the family participates.

Our objective for these littlest members of the Body of Christ is to introduce them to the theme of the day, making positive connections to each other and to Christ through sensory play.

Orange

Suitable for Pre-Readers;
3-6 years

As pre-readers, these children are best served by hands-on experiences, song, and movement as they learn. Although everything from the red level is still applicable, we can adapt the activities to bring them to the orange level by including more hands-on learning and structured play.

Our objective is to present the theme of the day in an engaging way that involves sufficient movement, creativity, and fun to accommodate the activity level of a child of this age.

Yellow

suitable for early readers;
ages 7-9 years

Children of this age are now able to read functionally, so we can begin to teach them foundational theology points with concrete instruction. They can begin to write about topics as well as create paper projects and use other creative mediums. With a more outward orientation and a new awareness of time, history, and community, at the yellow level, they are more capable of collaborating on projects, although any of the above material may also be of interest to them.

Our objective for this age level is to involve the children in group projects and collaborations so that they can begin to understand and interact as part of a bigger faith community,

Green

suitable for Pre-teens,
ages 10-12 years

This age group is now able to read for comprehension and can apply the teaching they have received to their lives and the lives of those around them. Building on the previous stages, the children in the Green level can delve deeper into the story of salvation and begin to focus on how each is called to participate in this plan and see that Christ is the source of our strength.

Our objective is to use reference tools to explain the topic of the month and encourage the student to feel confident in searching for these tools on his own.

Blue

suitable for young teens,
ages 13-15 years

The young teenage student looks outside his family to the broader community and the world, wanting to understand it and participate in it. We begin to introduce community service ideas and encourage parish participation in various ways so that they can serve both their parish community and the Church at large.

Our objective is to provide ideas that encourage students of this age to remain engaged in developing their own spiritual identity and find support within the Church community.

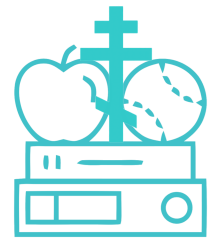
Purple

suitable for teens and adults;
Ages 16+

Learning about the faith isn't just something for childhood, but it is rather a life-long journey that takes us ever closer to God. This group can tackle apologetics, moral life questions, and more challenging concepts and ideas of adult catechesis.

Our Objective: To explore the complex depth of the theme by exploring the writings of the Church Fathers, Scripture, and historical documents. We hope to introduce tools of apologetics, so participants can learn how to defend a position used as a common argument against the theme.

Building the ByziClassroom



Use this outline to turn this issue of Byzikids into a Sunday School, Small Group or Homeschool Lesson!



1

PRAY

Use your voices to pray- open your meeting with a prayer.

Use your ears to hear the Word of God- read the Gospel for the upcoming Sunday together and complete the corresponding puzzle from page 12 or 13 to review the reading. It is fun to copy the puzzle onto a large poster so the group can solve it together.

Present the icon lesson from page 7 which introduces the Eleousa icon.

2

LEARN

Get to know our faith- Review the catechetical lesson on page 18 discussing how sacred icons enhance what we know about the Lord, His Blessed Mother, the Angels and Saints, and the feast days of the church.

Then, turn to page 15 to learn the history of the Pantocrator Icon that adorns the top of our churches.

On page 9, you can learn a new song to remind us to be an icon of Christ to others.

3

PLAY

Icons are visual expressions of our theology- they can teach us without words. To reinforce this point, play a game of charades with the children. To play, write down the names of animals (include a picture of the animal for those children who aren't yet reading independently) and place them in a bowl. One child will choose a slip of paper. Without speaking, have the child act out the animal so that others can guess. Whoever guesses correctly takes the next turn.

SNACK TIME!

Using square rice cakes, create your own "stained glass window" treats this month! Spread your preferred nut butter or cream cheese on top, then add pieces of fruit to make your "glass" decor. A can of fruit cocktail makes putting this snack together even easier!



SENSORY ACTIVITY!

For this month's sensory activity on page 5, help your little ones to make their own "windows to Heaven." You can add as much or as little detail to these creations as your child is able!



Sense-Ability

When God created us, He made us both body and soul, meaning we are both physical and spiritual beings. We are not like angels that are just spirits. For this reason, when we use our bodies to help us learn, our spirits are changed as well! Have you played with a sensory bin before?

A sensory bin is a small tub or table filled with items that you can touch, smell, taste or make noise with. They typically include items that are all about a particular theme. When we use our senses to help us learn something, it helps our brain to recall the information better.

Icons

Icons are often referred to as “windows to heaven.” For this month's sensory activity, we're going to make our own “stained glass” windows! This is a beautiful sensory experience for our little ones. We can help them to notice how our creations look different throughout the changing light of the day and the sticky paper is a delight for their hands. Older children will also enjoy this experience, not only helping their younger siblings, but making their own creations as well.

You will need:

- Clear Contact Paper
- Tissue Paper in various colors
- Masking Tape
- Coloring Pages (optional-see pages provide with QR code)

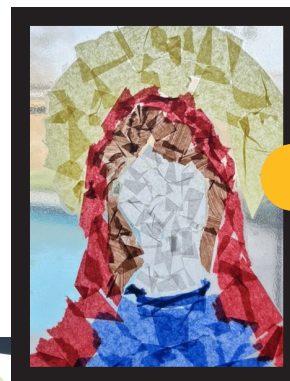
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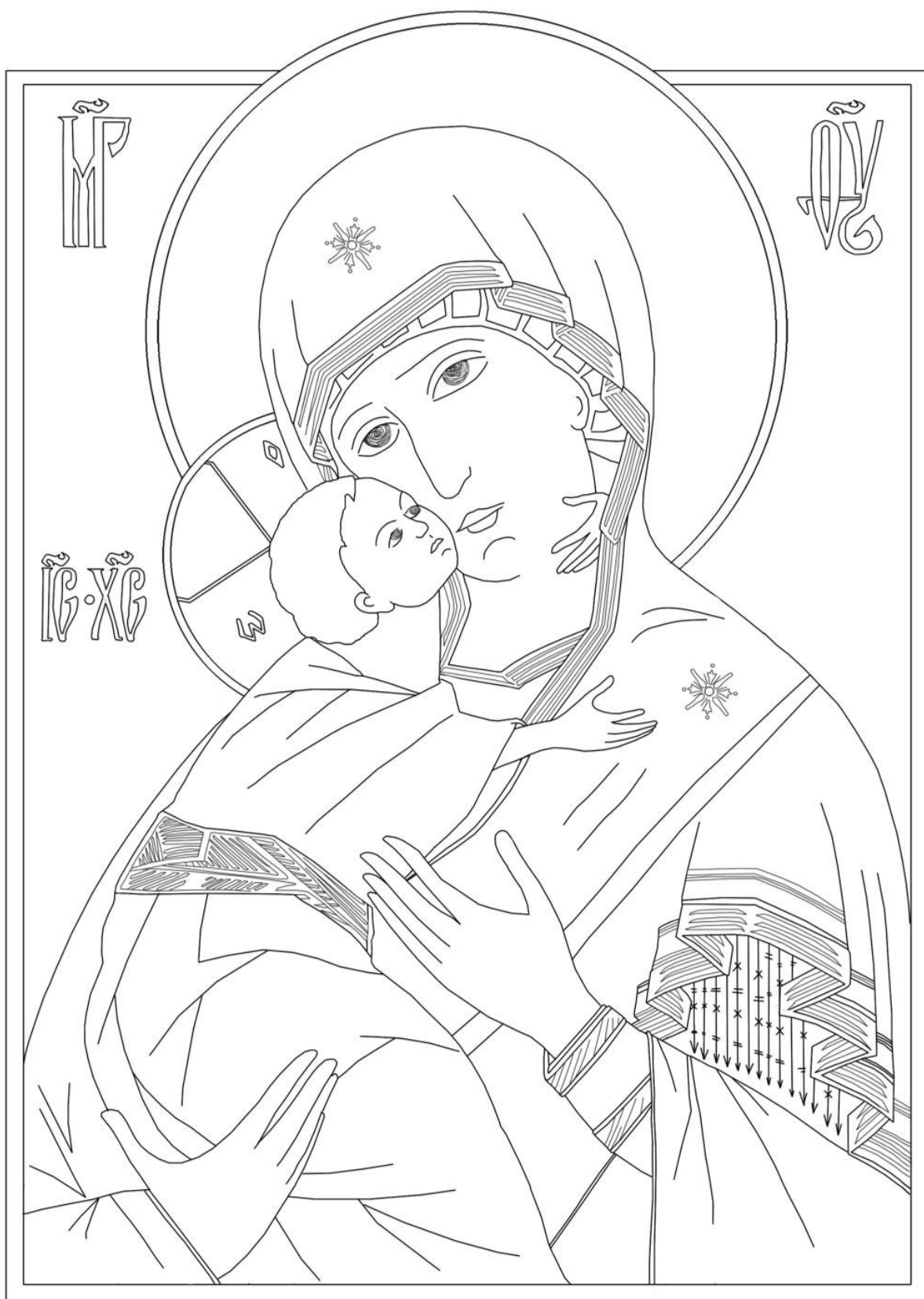
Cut a section of contact paper that you would like to use. Using masking tape, attach the contact paper to a window with the sticky side facing towards you (not on the glass). Cut or have your little one tear your tissue paper into small pieces. The child can now stick the tissue paper to the contact paper in a variety of colors and patterns.

Older children can add a coloring page behind the contact paper to use as an outline for their tissue paper. Once the design has been completed, carefully remove the coloring page from behind the contact paper to see the created effect. If you would like to save your work, consider sealing the tissue paper with another layer of contact paper over it, sealing the image in.



[Link to coloring pages ->](#)





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[Printer-friendly coloring page can be downloaded here->](#)



I SPY IN MY LITTLE ICON



By Kim Fritzges



Do you have a photo of yourself as a small child and your mother? One where she is holding you in her arms and you are snuggled up to her cheek? Our icon for this month is just like that! The love you and your mother are showing is the love that the Christ Child and the Theotokos show in our icon for this month.

This is an Eleousa icon. Eleousa translated means tenderness or showing mercy. In the Eastern Church they are called Panagia Eleousa and the Western Church titles them as Madonna Eleousa, Or Our Lady of Tenderness.

We see the Christ Child being lovingly held by His mother while he has his face cuddled up to her cheek. The tenderness and love that the Christ Child and his mother show each other give icons like this the title Eleousa. Eleousa icons depict the Christ Child draping his left arm around her shoulder. Some show His hand around her neck and some do not show the hand. The Theotokos has her left hand pointing in a gentle way to the Christ Child inviting you to gaze upon her son and approach Him with love and without fear, as she knows how much the Christ Child loves you.

We see on Our Lady's veil a star and also one on her left shoulder. There is a third star on her right shoulder which we don't see as the Christ Child is in front of it. These stars represent her virginity before, during, and after the Nativity of Our Lord. Tradition also states they represent the Holy Trinity.

In the Eastern Church there is an Eleousa icon titled Vladimirskaya, translating to Our Lady of Vladimir, Vladimir Mother of God, or the Virgin of Vladimir, this is a famous Eleousa icon. Tradition has this icon being painted by St. Luke on a board from the table of the Holy Family. The original Virgin of Vladimir is at the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, Russia. It dates to 33? - 1133. If St. Luke painted this icon or not, it is one of the most beloved icons in Russia.

There are many different Eleousa icons. In the Eastern Church some are the Fyodorovskaya, the Tolgskaya, the Donskaya. The Western Church has the Cambrai Madonna, the Tempi Madonna, among others.

Hymn to the Theotokos

It is truly meet to bless you,
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 defilement you gave birth
to God the Word.
True Theotokos we magnify you!

CRAFTING THE PRECIOUS SOUL THAT IS YOU!

Do you remember listening to the Gospel of the Genealogy of Christ when Matthew told us about who became the father of whom and pointed out the 14 generations three times? He was pointing to the fact that, even by His ancestry, Christ was proving that He was the promised Son of David, who would redeem Israel!

God proved to us in the orchestration of Christ's family how He controls our coming and going; God crafts our very being over generations to become the unique individuals we are in the time that was chosen by God just for us! How special we all must be! No two people are alike; each is a priceless and precious creation, crafted by the Master for a specific purpose and place in the Kingdom.



THE MAKING OF A FAMILY ICON

Each member of our family has a specific patron saint. A patron saint is one whose name we were given at our baptism or whom we have chosen as our special heavenly friend. To construct a family icon, collect prints of each of our family patrons and paste them onto a craft board. Your icon can be as elaborate or simple as you desire. The goal is to become acquainted with each of your family's patron saints and understand how your family's structure is critical in making YOU the unique individual you are!

THE TOP ROW of your family icon will be where you will place the icon prints of your grandparent's patron saints.

THE MIDDLE ROW is where your parents' patronal icons are placed: Mom's on the left and Dad's on the right.

THE BOTTOM ROW is where you can place the icon of YOUR patron saint and the patronal icons of each of your brothers and sisters!

This unique icon can be placed in your family's icon corner and become an excellent tool for prayer each day. As you look upon each of the patron saints remember to ask their intercession and God's blessing upon each of your family members, whether they live with you or have departed for eternal life. Recalling the stories of their lives and their struggles can encourage us to become saints, too. We can thank them for their prayers for us before the throne of God so that one day, we may join them in the glory of heaven.

As we pray for each of our earthly family members, we can remember how carefully and particularly each of them was made by God to be exactly who they are!

CHOIR PRACTICE

By Sylvia Dorham

Icons

Do you see all the icons - covering the walls,
Written on their wooden boards with care?
Not - just pretty painted portraits
But windows into heaven made with prayer

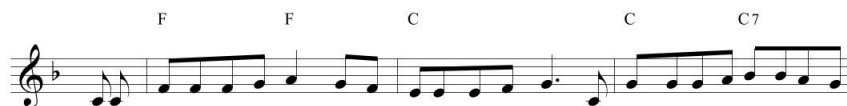
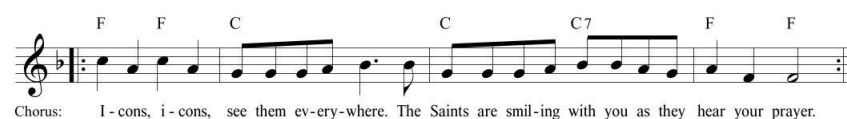
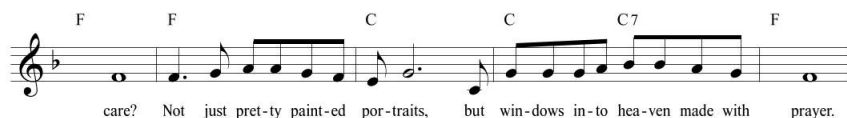
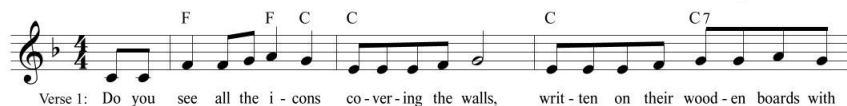
CHORUS:
Icons, Icons
See them everywhere
The Saints are smiling at you
As they hear your prayer.

Jesus became a man - with a body like you
We know he died and rose again - the church says it's true
An icon is a painting of God's human form
A body with hands and a voice that's warm

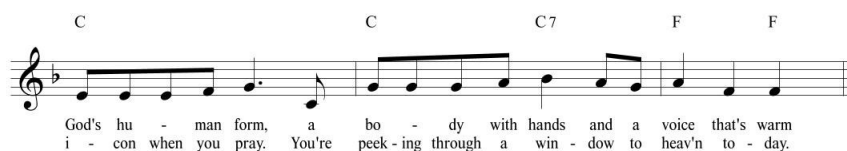
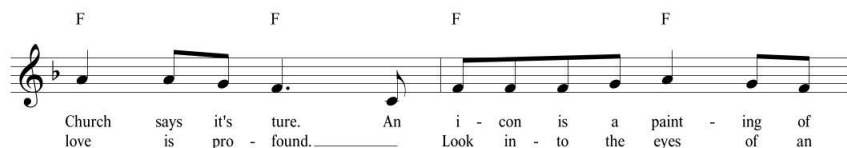
CHORUS

Be an - icon of Jesus to everyone around
Act - like he does, his love is profound
Look into the eyes of an icon as you pray
You're peeking through a window to heaven today.

CHORUS



Verse 3: Be an i - con of Je - sus to ev - ery-one a - round. Act like He does. His



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A Pantomime of The Story of Christ's Ascension

According to St. Luke
A Silent Play by Sylvia Dorham, ©2020

Icons are such powerful teaching tools. Yet they teach by portraying images without the use of words. Here's a powerful teaching tool that you can use to support your family or parish family! It's a play that has no lines but uses pantomime to tell the story of the day that Christ ascended to His Heavenly Father! This year, we will commemorate this event May 29.

A pantomime is a method of telling a story without using words.

Here, we use pantomime to tell the story of the Ascension of Jesus. The story is very dramatic, and if you take the time to develop your character, it can be quite funny. When using humor, please remember that this is a sacred subject, and must be treated with respect by refraining from discourteous gestures or portraying the characters as foolish.

In a pantomime, it is easy to forget that all action must face the audience. Take special care to "block" or arrange the movements so that no player's back is ever toward the audience.

Design the costumes so it is clear who is Jesus and who is an Angel.

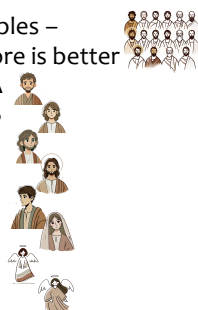
Make sure there are plenty of women among the Apostles and Disciples.

Use exaggerated facial expressions and gestures to convey the story – when you use your whole body, it's also more interesting to watch. Move slowly and deliberately so the audience can follow the story line.

Some directors may want to add a soundtrack played at a very low level behind the action, others will prefer to enjoy the silence that falls over the whole room when the audience becomes engrossed in the story.

Characters:

Apostles and Disciples –
at least eleven, more is better
Emmaus Disciple A
Emmaus Disciple B
Peter
Jesus
John
The Theotokos
Angel A
Angel B



Feel free to make copies of this script for use in school, parish, or home settings.

SCENE I



Two Emmaus Disciples come running, huffing and puffing, into a room where eleven Apostles and others are seated around a table talking excitedly.



Peter greets them with open arms, smiling. He points to each open palm, like pointing to Jesus' wounded hands, and lifts his palms upward to show "arisen" with joyful, excited face. He points to his chest, then to his eyes, then upward to say, "I saw him!"



Two Emmaus Disciples put their palms on their cheeks and open their mouths and eyes wide with surprise. They put up their first fingers to say "wait!"



Two Emmaus Disciples use an exaggerated walk to show what they were doing and turn to look at "Jesus" who is not really there.



Two Emmaus Disciples continue walking and nod their heads as if listening.



Two Emmaus Disciples open a door and gesture invisible Jesus to come in.



Two Emmaus Disciples pour wine and put a loaf of bread on the imaginary table. Their eyes get big in surprise and they jump backward (if they fall over, it will add some humor to the pantomime).



Two Emmaus Disciples look at Apostles and burst open their fists into the air to show "Poof! He was gone!"



Two Emmaus Disciples pantomime turning and running all the way back to Jerusalem and into the room where they are now. They turn all the way around so they can look at everyone there, eyes wide with wonder and surprise.



Jesus suddenly stands among them. He smiles and holds out his hands in greeting to the Apostles and disciples.



Everyone but Jesus falls to the floor (Add some humor by having some "faint" in funny poses).



Jesus helps them up.



Apostles and Disciples bunch up and crowd into a corner, shivering with fear. Some point at Jesus, some cover their eyes, some jump up and down.



Jesus shows them each wound, smiling. He points to the table and then into his open mouth to say, "Give me something to eat."



John gets a plate from the table and brings it to him happily.



Jesus smiles, picks up "fish" from off the plate, puts it in his mouth and munches contentedly. He hiccups and pats his chest with a laugh.



Apostles and Disciples gather around him in a joyful (quiet!) clamor.



Jesus takes both his mother's hands, smiles lovingly, and kisses them.



The Theotokos puts her hands on either side of his face and looks at him with love and joy.

SCENE II



Jesus turns away and beckons them to follow.



Apostles and Disciples hurry after him.

All march around the stage to show him leading them out to Bethany.



Jesus holds up his hand to call for a halt. He turns to face them.



Apostles and Disciples group together in front of him, eager, smiling.



Jesus looks firmly at them, points in a semi-circle at all the Apostles and Disciples, and points to the ground twice to say, "Stay here in Jerusalem."



Jesus raises his arms and simulates rain falling with his fingers as he lowers his arms to show the Holy Spirit descending. He points to them and the ground again to reiterate, "Stay in Jerusalem until he comes."



Apostles and Disciples nod their understanding.



Jesus lifts an arm and makes a big Sign of the Cross over them all in blessing. As he does so, he backs up until he is offstage.



Apostles and Disciples look heavenward as he leaves. They turn in circles with their eyes on the ceiling, some banging into each other. Their joy and excitement turn to bewilderment and disappointment, but they are peaceful. There is no panic.



Angels appear side by side and lift up both hands with a questioning face to say, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?"



Angels with open mouths point at men and with the backs of their hands push up under their own jaws to show the Apostles and Disciples to close their mouths.



Angels point into heaven with their whole hands, show "wait" with index fingers, point to wounds in the palm to show "Jesus" and then sweep arms down from heaven to show Jesus returning.



Peter nods. After a pause, gestures to the Apostles and Disciples to follow him back to Jerusalem.



Apostles and Disciples stumble off stage, rubbing their eyes, looking behind them, talking with heads together.



Byzikids Express



Look what the ECF class at Patronage of the Mother of God parish in Baltimore, MD is doing! They write, "Hi All, if you're looking for a good class I recommend having children make their own icon. It's very easy to do. Just pick up some 7x9 inch pine boards. Then paint the boards. You can even have children do it for a class. Then find digital prints online that are good quality and simply upload them to a local 1-hour photo shop. Then you can use mod-podge on the back of the photo and stick it to the board. It's a very nice quality do it yourself icon! Then for the Sunday of Orthodoxy children can have their own icon blessed!"



A beautiful mosaic of the Theotokos made from colored eggshells by Annelise Wynn, age 13, from Azle TX.

Caught You Listening

MAY 4, 2025

○ **Gospel: Mark 15:43-47, 16:1-8**

Many people believe Jesus' linen burial wrapping is still in existence. It is kept in a church in Italy. Fill in the letters to see what the cloth is called today.

1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8				
9	10	11	12	13	

I = 12 O = 4, 7 U = 5, 10 D = 6 F = 8 H = 2
N = 13 R = 3, 11 S = 1 T = 9



Icon courtesy of Iconographics

MAY 11, 2025

○ **Gospel: John 5:1-15**

Jesus heals a paralyzed man in today's Gospel, but some people were not happy about the miracle.

Why? Circle every third word to find out.

Mary climbed Now she sailed
that seventh week day over time was
when James the older worked Sabbath.

HEALING OF THE PARALYTIC



Icon courtesy of Iconographics

MAY 18, 2025

Gospel: John 4:5-42

Today's Gospel is full of things to discover about Jesus and his mission on earth. Connect the right answers to their questions with a line.

Sychar	Why did the woman come to the well?
The Sixth Hour	How must we worship God?
To Draw Water	What was the name of the Samaritan town?
Photini	What is God?
Living Water	What did the disciples instruct Jesus to do?
In Spirit and Truth	When did Jesus sit down beside the well?
Spirit	Why did Jesus come to earth?
"Rabbi, Eat"	What does Jesus offer the woman?
To do the will of the Father.	How many Samaritans believed Jesus?
Many	According to tradition, what was the woman's name?



MAY 25, 2025

Gospel: John 9:1-38

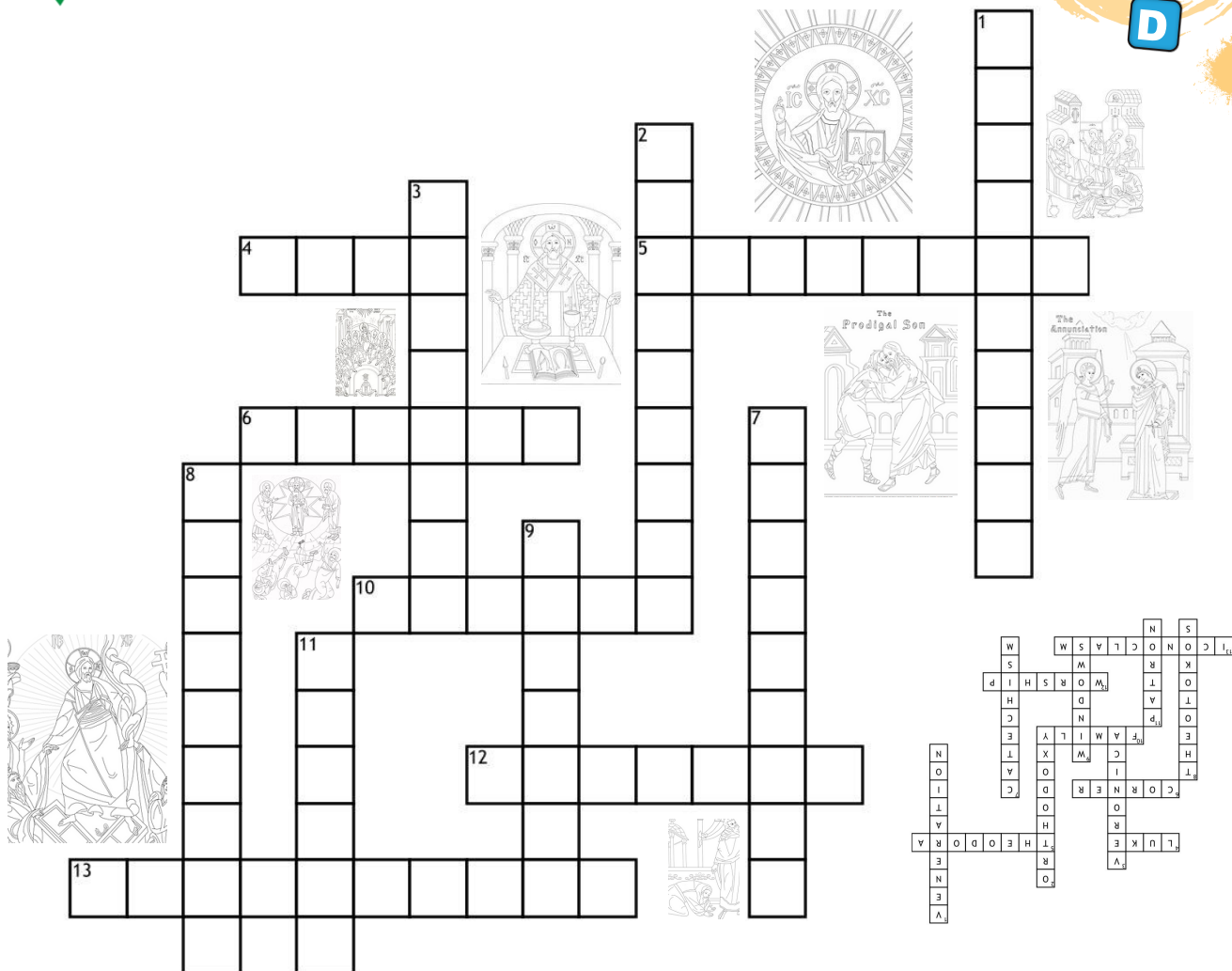
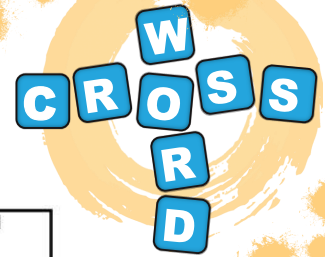
The Pharisees were so busy trying to prove Jesus was NOT the Messiah that they lost sight of the incredible miracle that he did!

Answer each question with true or false

- ☐ The man Jesus healed had been blind since age three. ____
- ☐ Jesus said that both the man and his parents sinned, resulting in his blindness. ____
- ☐ Jesus said we must do the works of God while it is light. ____
- ☐ Jesus made clay from his spittle and dirt. ____
- ☐ Jesus told the man to wash in the pool of Bethesda. ____
- ☐ The Pharisees believed the testimony of the formerly-blind man. ____
- ☐ The man's parents were eager to explain everything to the Pharisees. ____
- ☐ The Pharisees threw the formerly-blind man out of the synagogue. ____
- ☐ The man worshiped Jesus and said to him, "Lord, I believe." ____



Icons



Across

4. Saint ____ is considered the first iconographer
5. Empress _____ carried an icon into the Hagia Sophia on the Sunday of Orthodoxy
6. Many families pray at their icon _____ where most of the icons are hung
10. In this issue, you can make a _____ icon made up of all the icons of the patron saints of your family
12. "Icons are objects of veneration & honor but not of real _____ (latreia), which is reserved for Him Who is the subject of our faith"
13. when icons were not allowed in church because some thought they were not good for prayer

Down

1. "Icons are objects of _____ and honor but not of real worship (latreia), which is reserved for Him Who is the subject of our faith"
2. We remember when icons were restored to worship in our churches on the Sunday of _____
3. an image of Jesus' face was on the cloth _____ gave Jesus to wipe His face before the crucifixion
7. icons are our _____ before we can read!
8. The first painted icon was of the _____
9. icons are _____ to heaven
11. In this issue, you can make a family icon made up of all the icons of the _____ saints of your family

MEANWHILE, BACK IN BYZANTIUM

by Kathryn Reetzke

If you look up inside the dome within a sanctuary of an Eastern Christian Church most likely you will be met with a large icon of Christ, called Christ the Pantocrator. This same image might be in a half dome behind the altar or in the nave when you first enter the church. The name Pantocrator in Ancient Greek means Almighty God and comes from the Jewish tradition in the Torah of the many names for God the Father (the original Hebrew translated into Greek are the names: Lord of Hosts and God Almighty). The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem houses one inside its dome. A mosaic of the same icon has been uncovered in the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul (Constantinople). In Western Churches, this same style of depicting Christ (but in full length) is called "Christ in Majesty."



(From the Dome of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, rebuilt in the 11th Century, Public Access)

The oldest known icon by this name is housed in the monastery at St. Catherine's from the 6th or 7th century in Sinai. As seen in the image, Christ holds the New Testament and makes the sign of blessing (that you have seen your priest or bishop make) towards the viewer. The image was able to survive the iconoclasm that racked the Byzantine Empire twice during 726 AD to 787 AD and 814 AD to 842 AD, since it was located in the Sinai peninsula.

The icon was protected both by the geography of the monastery and the local Islamic Caliph (ruler), who prevented outsiders from coming in to destroy icons. Much later, in the 1960s, an icon restoration to remove the Medieval overpainting around the edges revealed that this icon was most likely made in Constantinople and transported to St. Catherine's. Luckily for Eastern Christians, the iconoclasm ended when Blessed St. Theodora the Empress saved Constantinople from this destruction and with the support of Bishops reinstated the use of icons as "windows into heaven." You can see St. Theodora uplifting icons in the icon "The Triumph of Orthodoxy" that is processed on the first Sunday during Great Lent.



(Christ Pantocrator at St Catherine's Monastery, Sinai 6th/7th Century made with encaustic or hot wax mixed with paint, Public Access)

Christ's expression in this icon is meant to represent God as both merciful and gracious (left) and as the judge of unrepentant sinners in the final judgment (right). May we live so that Christ's mercy covers us with His grace and with the reminder that we will answer in judgment for our faith in Him.

Once Upon a SAINT

by Rebecca O'Loughlin



Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples (1855)

St. Lazarus Zographos

My dear children,

It was November 17, 810AD when Lazarus (Ghazaros) was born. I don't know much about his childhood, but when Lazarus was a teenager, he entered a Studite Monastery in Constantinople.

Brother Lazarus sat under a tree outside. It was a nice warm evening, and there was just enough light to work. He carefully drew a line with a thin piece of charcoal on some bark. The image he sketched was of the Theotokos, a practice for what he would write the next day.

"I'm glad the Monastery is no longer closed and that iconography is allowed again," Brother Lazarus thought to himself. "Iconoclasm is a terrible heresy. Here I can learn from the Masters, and God blesses my hands when I write holy images for His glory. Without icons it would be so much more difficult to teach people the Faith."

The face of the Theotokos appeared under Lazarus' careful hand. The Monastery monks were known as Akoimati, which means "sleepless ones," because they had perpetual adoration in the chapel: there was always at least one monk keeping watch and praying. It was almost time for this young monk to go inside for his own shift. Time just sitting with the Lord provided the perfect environment for Brother Lazarus to meditate and pray, and then he would paint, build or write whatever was on his heart.

Brother Lazarus became known for his peaceful holiness and almsgiving among other things, and he was soon ordained a priest.

One day, Father Lazarus was writing an icon on a wood panel.

A monk was watching him work. “Father,” he asked, “Why is Jesus’ sandal coming off? Why does he seem scared in His body, but His face is so peaceful?”

Father Lazarus replied: “Jesus’ sandal has begun to come off, because He ran very fast to Our Mother after seeing a vision of the archangels holding instruments of His future passion and death. Jesus is fully God, so His face shows His perfect acceptance of the Father’s will. But He is fully human also, and His body fears what is to come, even while He chooses the coming Crucifixion.”

The monk contemplated. “This icon should be called *The All Holy One of the Heart. The Theotokos holds Jesus so close to her heart when He is afraid. I wish she would protect me that way.*”

Father Lazarus locked eyes with his student. “Indeed, she does watch over you this way, my son, just as our Mother holds all her children, helping them in their need whenever they ask her.”

This icon eventually became known as *Our Lady of Perpetual Help*, and is now in St. Alfonso de Liguori Church in Rome. Through the icon, miracles are sometimes given. Father Lazarus also created the Theotokos mosaic in the apse of Hagia Sophia. But most of his work is either destroyed or unknown, because iconographers don’t sign their name. Their goal is to have the icon be as much God’s as possible, and themselves mere instruments through whom He works.

Unfortunately, a new emperor came into power. Basileus (which means ruler) Theophilus was an iconoclast.

“Icons are idols!” Theophilus told Father Lazarus. “You must stop painting and writing and building these unholy images of God and the saints.”

Father Lazarus gently replied, “My Basileus, icons are images, this is true, but we do not honor the paint, but the Holy One that is shown. When I pray before the image of the Theotokos, she stands there, present through the image, listening to her poor child. Because Our Blessed Mother is in heaven, she is not restricted to time and space like you and I are. The icon is similar to me talking to you through a window, and through the icon, we communicate and honor God and the saints in a very real way.”

Theophilus thought for a moment. “Perhaps you will be willing to destroy the icons and stop working if I pay you a lot of money? You can feed a lot of people with the money I can give you.”

“No, I will not stop painting or writing for the glory of God. It would be wicked to feed the bodies of my people in order to starve their souls.” Father Lazarus responded.

Theophilus was angry. “People died for less than this insult in the glory days of iconoclasm!”

“It is against the law to kill a priest, Basileus.”

Theophilus shook his fist. “Nevertheless, stop painting and destroy every last icon, or I promise, YOU WILL SUFFER!”

Father Lazarus returned to the monastery and only worked harder, writing new icons and restoring religious items that had been badly treated by zealous icon haters.

Emperor Theophilus was infuriated by this. He put Father Lazarus in prison, burning him so badly that he nearly died. Not long after, however, the Jailer came to Theophilus.

“Basileus, I am sorry to disturb you, but what should I do with Father Lazarus?”

“Ah! He is finally dead! Hm. Toss his body wherever you please. I don’t care.”

The jailor stiffened. “You misunderstand, Basileus. Father Lazarus is nearly well, and is painting icons on the walls of his cell. He uses rocks to dig images into the walls, and his food to stain them. Beets make a lovely shade of red, and pomegranates, a different shade. He is so resourceful! Why there was even the indigo flowers that he plucked from the grate for blue color. And for green...”

“What?!” Emperor Theophilus stood in fury. “Was his fiery punishment not enough? Burn his hands off then!”

Poor Father Lazarus. His hands were very nearly burned off. But as he lay, near death and in terrible pain, the Lord came and healed him.

When Theophilus saw that Father Lazarus was healed, he wasn’t sure what to do. His wife Theodora came to him. She loved icons and loved to visit Father Lazarus and speak to him in prison.

“Husband,” Theodora said quietly, “why not send Father Lazarus far away where he cannot trouble you? There is a monastery in Tou Phoberou, which is quite secluded.”

Theophilus agreed. Not long after, Theophilus died. Empress Theodora went to Father Lazarus and begged his forgiveness for her husband’s cruelty.

“Is there any hope for his soul, father?” She asked him.

Father Lazarus replied “Take heart. God is just and merciful.”

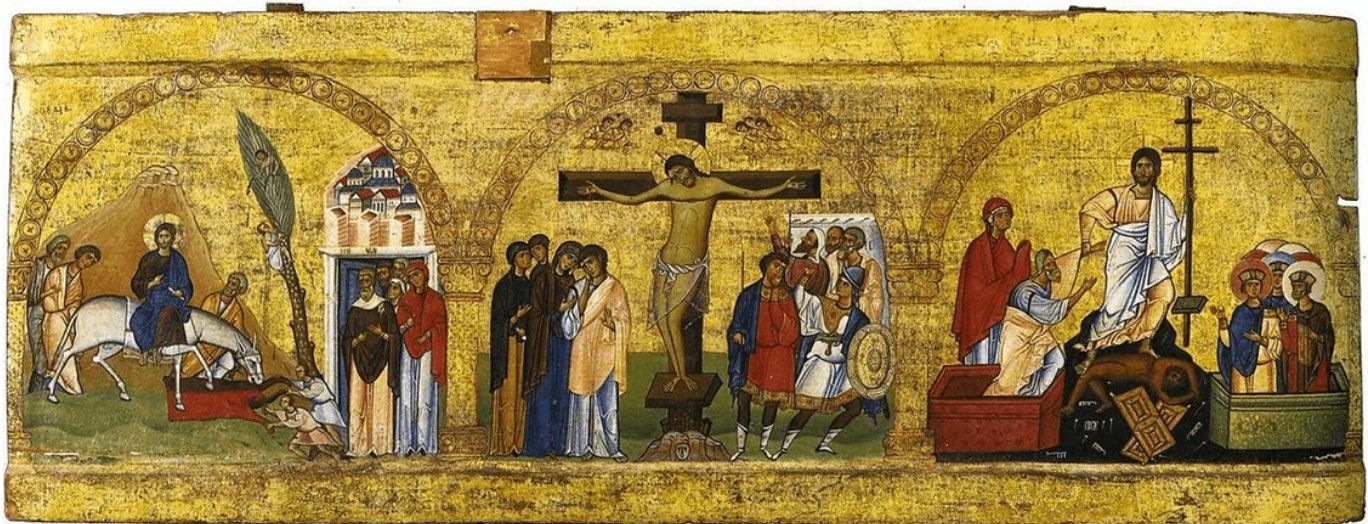
Father Lazarus lived many more years. It is no secret that our Church was meant to be One Church, founded by Christ. Jesus told His Apostles “be one as I and the Father are One” (John 10:30). Unfortunately, there always has been some fighting in our Church, even among the Apostles. It is so sad when brothers and sisters argue. Father Lazarus became an ambassador for Theophilus and Theodora’s son, Emperor Michael III, in 856. He traveled twice to Rome to visit Pope Benedict III to discuss reconciliation between Rome and Constantinople. He died returning from the second visit, and was buried near Constantinople.

Lazarus does not paint You now O Word, But sees You alive without capturing You in the colors of paints.

I think it’s interesting that we don’t call St. Lazarus “the Iconographer,” even though he was a very good one. Instead, our title for him is “Zographos,” which in Greek means “painter,” or more literally, “writer of life.” He was an amazing artist for God’s glory, and worked for unity in the Church. St. Lazarus Zographos’ feast day is celebrated November 17 in the East and February 23 in the West.

KNOW YOUR FAITH

By Lynne Wardach



Toward the end of the seventh century, a controversy arose within the Byzantine Empire due to many miracles that occurred after the faithful prayed before certain icons. Christians who witnessed these miracles began to venerate the miraculous icons, causing many to accuse them of worshipping them. The serious nature of such an accusation was so dangerous that it led many good Christians to fear the use of icons and swing to the other extreme of removing all icons from homes and churches so that no confusion could occur. These were known as iconoclasts.

This movement upset another group of Byzantine Christians known as iconophiles, who argued that icons were merely tools for worship, not worshipped themselves, and that true worship belonged to God alone. The iconophiles treasured the symbolic teaching tools for what they were and could not understand how anyone could confuse them with idol worship.

These two groups of people were completely at odds, and their division caused the church much strife and anxiety. Terasios, the Patriarch of Constantinople, asked Empress Irene to call an Ecumenical Council to discuss and resolve this issue and restore peace to the Church. The Seventh Ecumenical Council then convened in Nicea in 787 and was attended by 367 bishops. Pope Hadrian, who could not attend the council, considered the matter and sent a letter stating that he upheld the position that icons were important and worthy of veneration but not worship, which is due only to God alone. The council agreed and decreed that all icons were to be restored to homes and churches, stating:

"We define that the holy icons, whether in color, mosaic, or some other material, should be exhibited in the holy churches of God, on the sacred vessels and liturgical vestments, on the walls, furnishings, and in houses and along the roads, namely the icons of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, that of our Lady the Theotokos, those of the venerable angels and those of all saintly people. Whenever these representations are contemplated, they will cause those who look at them to commemorate and love their prototype. We define also that they should be kissed and that they are an object of veneration and honor (timitiki proskynisis), but not of real worship (latreia), which is reserved for Him Who is the subject of our faith and is proper for the divine nature. The veneration accorded to an icon is in effect transmitted to the prototype; he who venerates the icon, venerates in it the reality for which it stands".

In 843 AD, a regional Synod was called in Constantinople where Empress Theodora, her son Michael III, Patriarch Methodius and many monks and priests processed into the Hagia Sophia Cathedral, carrying the icons and restoring them to their rightful place in the church. This was done on the first Sunday of the Great Fast and was from that time on, commemorated and known as the Sunday of Orthodoxy. Many churches celebrate this commemoration by processing their own collection of icons around the church on this day.

To this day there are those who challenge this idea, noting various excerpts from scripture like the ones listed below that call attention to the fact that God the Father specifically and emphatically told the early Israelites NOT to make images resembling any living thing.

Exodus 20:4-5 You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me.

Leviticus 26:1-2 "You shall not make idols for yourselves or erect an image or pillar, and you shall not set up a figured stone in your land to bow down to it, for I am the Lord your God. You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord.

If we read those verses as they appear in context we must note that God isn't angry about the making of images so much as He is about His followers actually worshipping those images. The Israelites of the time lived in close proximity to pagan tribes who constantly sought God but, not having had Him reveal Himself to them, they did not know him. They made gods for themselves out of familiar objects and began to offer them worship. God did not want His people to be tempted to do the same. His problem was not with the object, but with the false worship of it.

Psalms 97:7 All worshipers of images are put to shame, who make their boast in worthless idols; worship Him, all you gods!

As Christians, we encounter a new and wonderful idea not yet known to the early Israelites. They were told that whosoever looked upon the Face of God would surely die, so magnificent and unencounterable is our Heavenly Father. No one could ever attempt to fashion an image of Him, or His heavenly angelic escorts, since they had no earthly body to replicate. It was a futile exercise. Then along came Christ!

Colossians 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.

Now, when the second person of the Blessed Trinity became a human being, it became possible for God to be seen and heard; those who encountered Christ did not die. Christ makes the unencounterable God able to be encountered! Not only can we see Him, but we can remember what He looked like in His earthly, physical body and copy the image on canvas to be passed on to

future generations. Legend tells us that St. Luke painted the first icon as a portrait of the Mother of God. Christ Himself left the imprint of His Holy Face upon the veil of St. Veronika and the imprint of His crucified body on the Shroud of Turin. Miraculous cures and healing events have been attributed to the placement of these "images" upon the sick and suffering. Indeed, He is not opposed to the painted image.

Another example of God's tolerance for artistic images of heavenly things is found in the Book of Exodus when He tells the Israelites how to construct the Ark of the Covenant.

Exodus 25:18-20 And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work shall you make them, on the two ends of the mercy seat. Make one cherub on the one end and one cherub on the other end. Of one piece with the mercy seat shall you make the cherubim on its two ends. The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, their faces one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubim be.

Why would God instruct them to build images of Cherubim out of gold to adorn the Ark if He was opposed to graven images altogether? The answer is that He is not. He IS, however, opposed to the worship of those images. This is precisely the distinction that the Council of Nicea sought to solidify in the minds of all Christians. Icons are not dangerous to the faith of the Christian who venerates them so long as the veneration given to the icon is understood to be transferred to the image it represents.

For example, we often carry pictures of those we love in our wallets so that when we are far from home and miss them terribly, may spend time looking upon their image, contemplating our relationship with them, conversing with them in our minds, and even kissing the image of their faces. We may treasure that photograph above all other possessions. Yet, if we were to raise our eyes from the picture and see that our loved ones had come into the room, we would surely toss it to the floor in order to run to them! This is so for the icon as well! Who would forsake the beloved for His picture? It's common sense.

This Sunday, let us contemplate how much these sacred icons have enhanced what we know about the Lord, His Blessed Mother, the Angels and Saints, and the feast days of the church. Before people could read and write, they could consult these icons and remember facts about their catechism. When we feel far away from God due to the state of our souls, the state of the world, or the circumstances in which we find ourselves, we can always turn to these images to find comfort and solace before our Beloved enters!



Scan the QR code to see the links for the activities

May Activities Calendar

This month is filled with so many fun and interesting things to do!

Visit the Activities Index on the ByziKids page at ByziMom.com for all the links!

<https://www.byzimom.com/byzikids-magazine-extras>

May 1

- St. Tamara; Queen of Georgia
- Learn about her icon in I Spy in My Little Icon: St. Tamara, Queen of Georgia, and color your own Queen St. Tamara Coloring Page



May 2

- St. Athanasius;
- Read the story of the Boy Bishop



May 4

- Sunday of the Holy Myrrhbearers
- Make some Myrrhbearers Aromatic Sugar Scrub and read all about the Myrrhbearing Women in the April 2025 issue of ByziKids, from the Archives



May 7

- Apparition of the True Cross Over Jerusalem
- See our Holy Cross Window Craft



May 9

- Feast of the Prophet Isaiah
- Craft our God Is With Us Ornament Set



May 11

- Mothers Day
- Sunday of the Paralytic
- Sts. Cyril & Methodius
- Get our Coloring Page and then read about these brothers in Once Upon A Saint!



May 15

- St. Pachomius the Great
- Learn to make a knotted chotki!



May 18

- Sunday of the Samaritan Woman
- Make Photina's Eggs in a Well for Brunch!



May 21

- Sts. Constantine & Helen, Equal to the Apostles



May 29

- Feast of the Ascension.
- We have LOTS of things to Do for the Feast of the Ascension!
- Make Gatnabour: Armenian Rice Pudding Recipe for Ascension Thursday
- I Spy in My Little Icon of the Ascension
- Ascension Icon Coloring Page
- Ascension Troparion Bookmarks
- A Pantomime of the Story of Christ's Ascension,
- According to St. Luke, A Silent Play by Khouria Sylvia Dorham
- Get the sheet Music from MCI: The Lord Ascends



May is a great time to watch the rebirth of God's Creation!

Check out our May 2019 / Creation Issue Activities:

- Psalm 103
- The Birds of the Sky; Birdfeeder Craft
- Walk on the Wings of the Wind; Kite Craft
- Plants to Serve Man's Needs; Field Journal Activity
- I Spy in My Little Icon: Creation
- Creation Icon Coloring Page
- Listen to the Creation Song by Khouria Sylvia Dorham

