**Tips of the Week**

**FIRST WEEK OF THE NATIVITY FAST**

**FOR MULTIPLE AGES & ADULTS...**

*The Nativity Season*
Click [here](#) for a five-session unit with lessons and activities for four different age levels as well as adults from the OCA Department of Christian Education

*The Jesse Tree Project*
Click [here](#) for daily Jesse Tree readings from WordPress.com

**FOR YOUNG CHILDREN & ELEMENTARY...**

Click [here](#) for *A Different Jesse Tree* from OrthodoxPeebles.com

**FOR TEENS...**

*God’s Mother, Our Mother*
Click [here](#) for video lesson on the Theotokos from Be the Bee/Y2AM

**FOR ADULTS...**

*The Nativity Fast*
Click [here](#) for indepth study of the Nativity Fast from Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk Orthodox Monastery

**FOR MULTIPLE LEVELS**

*Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos*
Attached Sample .PDF of Printable Activities From OrthodoxJourneys.com

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www.facebook.com/nynjocaeducation
The Virgin Mary is the mother of Jesus, which is why we call her the Theotokos (the Mother of God). An only child, she was born when her parents were very old, bringing joy into their lives.

**Our Temple**

While still a very young child, she was led to the Temple in Jerusalem, where she would be cared for after Joachim and Anna died. Mary grew and matured, choosing to live a life of holiness, in purity and faithfulness to God. This is why we call her the sinless one.

Today's feast celebrates her entrance into the physical Temple in Jerusalem. Yet today's feast is more than remembering a historical event, it's an opportunity for us to understand that Mary's life prepared her to become the spiritual Temple of Christ, who is born of her on Christmas.

**Our Example**

The hymns of this feast celebrate Mary’s life and encourage us to be like her. We too can choose a life of holiness and purity. The Theotokos is our best example of how to live our lives if we too want to become a dwelling place for Jesus Christ.

Mary dedicated herself to learning God's teachings, which she then exhibited through caring and loving others. In this way, Mary shows how we can be examples of Christ’s love in the world.

**Our Intercessor**

Mary is rarely quoted in scripture, but when she does speak, it's always to lead us back to her Son. At the marriage in Cana, her intercessions before Jesus result in the best wine being served. Mary watches over each of us, ready to respond to our prayers, transforming our cries for help into songs of gratitude for God's blessings.

As Orthodox Christians, we are blessed to have the Theotokos with us every day of our life. Her icon is prominent in our homes, as encouragement for how we should live our lives, holding Christ close to our hearts.

**Our Spiritual Mother**

As we draw closer to Christ’s birth, we can prepare to receive Him into our hearts by reflecting on the life of the Theotokos. Her time in the temple guides (and reminds) us that staying focused on the Source of our Salvation: her son, Jesus Christ should always be our first priority.

Praying to Mary, and thinking about her life means we have the most important and powerful intercessor praying to God for us. Most Holy Theotokos, pray to God for us!
Icons are often called windows to Heaven, because they show and teach us how historic events and the saints are to be understood in the saving message of Jesus Christ.

Icons do not portray people like we see them in person or in photos, but instead transfiguring them with the light of Christ, emanating from within, by their encounter with God. Likewise, each element of an icon has a purpose or meaning.

Let’s take a closer look at the icon for the feast of The Entrance of the Mother of God into the Temple.

Can you use the word list below to identify who’s who, and what’s what?

Who’s Who in the Icon

Buildings and Draping
Icons portray events in the lives of the ____________ whether indoors or ____________. For events taking place inside, draping between ____________ is used in icons. In this icon, ____________ canopies and roofs represent the ____________ in Jerusalem. The High ____________ stands before two closed ____________ , while the Theotokos is ____________ in the Holy of Holies. The image teaches us that ____________ herself becomes the Holy of Holies, when Jesus Christ was born of her. Icons therefore show historical ____________ and theological ____________ which help us better understand our own relationship to God.

Virgins
In ____________ temple rites, young ____________ looked after the robes, vestments, and liturgical cloths used in the Temple.

Their service to ____________ was most likely guided by widows like the ____________ Anna who would oversee the proper care of the liturgical items, and education of the young ____________ who resided in the temple, including the young Virgin Mary.

The women carry ____________ in procession as atonement for Eve’s sin, but God’s ____________ for humanity is revealed through the Virgin Mary’s Son: Jesus Christ.

Joachim
As Mary’s ____________, he is portrayed holding a candle, standing next to Anna, her mother.

His devotion, along with Anna, is an example of their ____________ to God. In gratitude for the blessing of Mary’s ____________, they fulfilled their promise, presenting her to Zachariah the High Priest, to live a life dedicated to God through service in the Temple until she would be betrothed (to ____________ ).

Anna
The ____________ of Mary looks back lovingly at Joachim, in humble ____________, thankful that God has blessed them with this beautiful daughter, who they now offer to God for service in His ____________ Temple.

Joachim and Anna’s godly lives prepared Mary for a ____________.

Angel
According to ____________ Tradition, angels ministered to Mary while she lived in the Temple, since the High Priest would only enter the Holy of Holies ____________ a year.

As God’s ____________, angels care for His faithful believers, guiding and interceding for their ____________, as they did for the young child Mary.

The Virgin Mary
Mary was presented to the Temple as a three year old ____________. In icons, she is shown as a smaller version of her ____________ self, wearing the same red and blue robes (__________ symbolic of her humanity, and ____________ symbolic of taking on the divine role as Mother of God).

Mary is shown being greeted by ____________ the high priest, and also seated in the Holy of ____________ - the sacred altar of the temple - which the high priest only entered once a year.

This affirms Mary’s holiness, being ministered to by ____________ in the most sacred place of God’s temple, prefiguring her becoming the God-bearer.

Zachariah
The High Priest is shown in his temple ____________, welcoming the Virgin Mary. He stands before the doors which are ____________, signifying that Mary would be ever-virgin before, during, and ____________ the birth of Jesus Christ.

Who’s Who, and what’s what?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adult</th>
<th>Blue</th>
<th>Closed</th>
<th>God</th>
<th>Joy</th>
<th>Miracle</th>
<th>Outdoors</th>
<th>Saints</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>After</td>
<td>Buildings</td>
<td>Doors</td>
<td>Holies</td>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Priest</td>
<td>Seated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angels</td>
<td>Candles</td>
<td>Events</td>
<td>Holy</td>
<td>Maidens</td>
<td>Needs</td>
<td>Prophetess</td>
<td>Temple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Faithfulness</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth</td>
<td>Church</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>Messengers</td>
<td>Ornate</td>
<td>Robes</td>
<td>Zachariah</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
#1. We often call the Virgin Mary by a special name which is Theotokos, a word the Church treats as very important. What does the word mean in English?

- a. Mother of God
- b. One who gave birth to God
- c. Holy One of Israel
- d. Birth-giver of God

#2. How can we interact with the Virgin Mary in our daily lives?

- a. Pray to her
- b. Have an icon of her in our home or in our room
- c. Sing hymns to her
- d. Light a candle when we pray at her icon in church

#3. True or False: Everything we believe as Orthodox Christians is based on scripture and the Holy Bible.

TRUE  FALSE

#4. Circle the words we use to describe the Virgin Mary:

Special  Ever-Virgin  Lady  Queen of Heaven  Diamond
Joy of All Who Sorrow  Precious  Full of Grace  Angelic  Savior
Intercessor  God  Mother  Protectress  Mediator
Counselor  Pure  Ruler  Holy  Mother of God  Disciple  Saint

#5. What are the names of the Virgin Mary’s parents:

_________________________ and __________________________

#6. After the Entry of the Theotokos in the Temple, this is the next feast of the Virgin we will celebrate honoring her holy and pure life:

- a. The Annunciation
- b. Presentation in the Temple
- c. Nativity of Christ
- d. Dormition

#7. We know Zachariah is the High Priest, and he is also:

- a. The cousin of Jesus Christ
- b. The father of St. John the Baptist
- c. The father of the Apostles James and John
- d. The cousin of St. John the Baptist

Why is the Virgin Mary’s ever-virginity so important?

1. If she had other ____________, she would’ve lost her virginity and people could ________, whether she had been a virgin when she gave birth to ______________.

2. If Mary had other ______________, they’d have a claim to Christ’s _______________ (as certain slanderous fictional books/films have tried to assert).

3. ______________, like His symbolic prototype, the Great High Priest ________________, (see Hebrews 7), had no biological successors or ____________; we are His spiritual ________________! (Romans 8:15-17)

4. The Theotokos shows ________, we can lead a “__________” life, and Mary proves _______________ and earth are no longer at odds with each other as they were after ________ and ________ sinned.

Use these words to complete the sentences above!

- Adam  Heirs
- Authority  Heaven
- Children  Heavenly
- Children  Jesus
- Children  Melchizedek
- Christ  Question
- Eve  Us
Understanding the Feast

Today's feast is a celebration of the Mother of God. While we don't worship the Virgin Mary, we honor her because she gave birth to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Therefore, she holds a special place in the heart of every Christian, watching over and praying for us.

In icons, Mary is directing us to look at her Son, reminding us to focus on Him, as our Savior. The same occurs in the liturgical texts and hymns of our services for the feast, directing us to worship God.

Even if we are unable to be in church for the festal services, we can sing/read these prayers at home to honor the birth of the Virgin Mary, sharing in the joy of the feast!

Descriptor what each liturgical text is saying:

From Vespers (the evening service) before the Feast: At "Lord, I have Called..." Tone/Mode 1

Today the Living Temple of the holy glory of Christ our God:
She, who alone among women is pure and blessed
is offered in the temple of the law,
That she may make her dwelling in the Sanctuary.
Joachim and Anna rejoice with her in spirit,
and choirs of virgins sing to the Lord,
chanting psalms and honoring His Mother.

From Vespers: At the Litiya, Tone/Mode 4

Today the God-Bearing Temple, the Theotokos,
is offered in the temple of the Lord,
And Zachariah receives her!

Today the Holy of Holies exults
And the choir of angels mystically celebrates!

Today we celebrate with them and cry out with Gabriel:
"Rejoice, Full of Grace, the Lord of great mercy is with you!"

From Matins (the morning service) of the Feast:
Second Canon, Ode 5, Tone/Mode 1

Let us, the Orthodox faithful,
 hasten to gather with our lamps!
Let us glorify the Mother of God,
 for today she is offered to the Lord as an acceptable sacrifice.

From Matins: The Hymn of Light, Tone/Mode 3

Virgin Theotokos,
intercede for those who seek refuge with faith beneath your compassion,
and who piously worship your Son as God and Lord of the world.
That they may be delivered from corruption and danger
and from manifold temptations.

From the festal Divine Liturgy:
The festal Hymn to the Theotokos
The angels beheld the Entrance of the Pure One and were amazed!
How has the Virgin entered into the Holy of Holies!

As you are a Living Temple of God,
Let no impure hand touch you, Theotokos!
But let the lips of all believers sing,
Constantly magnifying you in joy with the angelic salutation:
"Truly you are above all creatures, O Pure One!"
The feast celebrating the Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple is rich with meaning for our life as Orthodox Christians. When the Virgin Mary enters the Temple, it was to prepare her to become the living Temple, the Mother of God.

We are called to follow Mary’s example, living a godly life of compassion, prayer, forgiveness, and service to others. In the boxes below, use markers, crayons, or colored pencils to draw three of your descriptions from page 4, showing in images, what the liturgical texts mean to you.

When you’re finished, take a photo of each drawing and email it to orthodoxjourneys@gmail.com to be featured in our youth art gallery, where we celebrate your talents!
Color the Icon of the Entry

- Can you add color to the icon below? Use your favorite markers, colored pencils, or paints to bring the icon to life!
- When you’re finished, take a photo of your drawing and email it to orthodoxjourneys@gmail.com to be featured in our youth art gallery, where we celebrate your talents!
- Trim the page to the shape of the icon, and place it in your icon corner to celebrate the feast!
- On the last day of the feast, November 25, the icon can be removed from your icon corner and placed in a safe place with your other festal icons for use next year.

Most Holy Theotokos, save us!