

# O Holy Birth-Giver of God, Save Us!

## Youth Group Session One – Session Leader

Consistory Office of Youth & Young Adult Ministry – Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA  
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Objective: To provide a beginning knowledge about Mary the Mother of God

Items in **blue** are notes for the Session Leader. For younger children read for them – you may want to paraphrase and ask questions often to keep their interest. For older children, allow them to read aloud or to themselves.

This curriculum is written to be used in conjunction with the book *The Illustrated Life of the Theotokos for Children* by Georgia and Helen Hronas. This book is published by Light and Life and can be obtained from them at [www.light-n-life.com](http://www.light-n-life.com) or by calling 952-925-3888.

### **Related books for Session Leader's Reference:**

*The Illustrated Life of the Theotokos for Children* by Georgia and Helen Hronas – Light and Life Publishing.  
*The Incarnate God: The Feasts of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary* editor Catherine Aslanoff translated by Paul Meyendorff. St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 2002.

### **Pre-session Preparation**

Make needed copies of Lesson One Handouts.

Purchase needed number of books for *The Illustrated Life of the Theotokos for Children*

Purchase a large piece of poster board for each age level with which you will be working.

Tape or tack the poster board onto the wall near where you will be having your session.

Purchase ½” three-ring binders with pockets.

Additional Needed Items:

Markers

Paper Icon of the Theotokos at least 5X7 in size

Glue Stick or Craft Glue

### **Craft – Mosaic Icon of the Theotokos and Child**

This craft will be worked on at each session. It is labor intensive but is extremely beautiful and will stay with the youth for their entire lives. See the attached explanation for the craft.

### **Session**

Begin the session in prayer (The Lord's Prayer and Prayer to the Virgin Mary). Ask the youth to glue the icon of the Theotokos anywhere on the poster board. Go around the room and ask them to tell you something about the Theotokos or provide a word to describe her. Write their contribution onto the poster board. Continue going around the room until they have no more suggestions. At this point begin reading from the lesson.

### **Who is Mary – the Theotokos, the Birth-Giver of God?**

You have probably heard a lot about the Virgin Mary. We use her name often during the Divine Liturgy. Can you think of a time when you hear her name during the liturgy? **At the end of each litany prior to the**

Creed (commemorating our most holy and blessed virgin Mary), It is Right in Truth to Glorify you the Birth-giver of God.

We also use many other names that you may have heard such as “Theotokos” and “Birth-giver of God”. Theotokos means “god bearer” in Greek and in Ukrainian we say “Bohorodichen”. Here is how you would say “Birth-giver of God” in other languages:

Arabic – Walidatu-le-elaah

Romanian – Sfanta Nascatorare de Dumnezeu

Luganda (Uganda) – Nnyina Katonda

Georgian - Ghmrtisnshobeli

You have probably heard many other names used to describe Mary. But who is she? Let us read pages 2-5 in our textbook “The Illustrated Life of the Theotokos for Children” to learn more about Mary’s life and how she prepared to become the Mother of God.

Who are Mary’s parents? \_\_\_\_\_ **Joachim and Anna** \_\_\_\_\_

As we read, Joachim and Anna were very sad about not having any children. The people in their town did not treat them nicely. How do you think that they felt?

**Sad, hurt, angry**

Did their unhappiness stop them from worshipping God and being thankful for what they had? No, it did not. They continued to look to God and His mercy.

We would consider the birth of Mary a miracle. Why? Her parents were very old and were told they could not have children. The angel coming to Joachim and telling him of the birth of his daughter gives us a vision of the future that she will be special.

Why do you think St. Andrew of Crete said that the Nativity of Mary “is for us the beginning of all holy days”? **Allow them time to come up with some answers.**

The birth of Mary, the Theotokos, is also the beginning of the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. With the intervention of God to answer the prayers of Joachim and Anna, we see how Mary will begin to intercede for those in need...beginning with her parents!

Our textbook tells us that the Nativity of Mary is celebrated on September 8<sup>th</sup> each year. This is on what is called the New Calendar or the Gregorian Calendar. This is the calendar that we use everyday at school and at home. Pope Gregory created the Gregorian Calendar in 1582. He created this calendar because the old calendar that was created in 46 BC by Julius Caesar was not quite perfect. **If they question why it was not perfect explain that they did not know enough about the stars and the motions of the planets that we use to calculate time today. Point out the difference between what people knew about space when their grandparents were little and what we know now.**

Our daily calendar in life today follows the Gregorian Calendar. However, many Orthodox Churches (for many reasons) have chosen to still use the Julian Calendar. Our Holy Ukrainian Orthodox Church is one of those churches. You may have friends who are from Greek, Antiochian or other Orthodox churches who celebrate feast days and holy days on different days than you do. This does not mean that we don’t all belong to the same Orthodox Church – we just use different calendars!

There is one time during the year when all Orthodox churches follow the same calendar (Julian Calendar) and that is from the beginning of Great Lent until Pentecost.

The Nativity of Mary is celebrated on September 21<sup>st</sup> for those who follow the Julian or “Old Calendar”.

Your textbook shows an icon of the Nativity of the Theotokos on page 4. You will notice that Mary is held in the arms of a nurse who is taking care of St. Anna. What do you notice about Mary? **She does not look like a baby.**

Iconography does not always just show us the exact story. Sometimes they also teach us special things about the church. For example, Mary does not look like a baby in this icon because we are taught that Mary was already full of wisdom when she was born. God gave her this knowledge. So instead of being shown as a baby, she is shown like a small woman. Not all icons of the Nativity are written in this way.

**Review some of the major points of the lesson. At this point you may want to give a short break, have a meal or some snacks. Resume with beginning the icon project. Conclude your session at the prescribed time.**

**Give the participants time to decorate a three-ring binder. In this binder you will add each new worksheet and keep their text book. The binders may be kept with you and passed out at each session. At the end of the programming, they will have a nice reference book of what they learned.**

