



The earth
is the Lord's,
and its fullness,
the world and all
who dwell therein.

Psalms 23 (24):1

Lesson Plans for 2009-2010 Creative Festivals

Grades 1-3

GOAL:

To teach the theme to the children so that they will be able to express their understanding of it through drawings, poetry, essays, and photography.

BACKGROUND

This year's theme comes from the Psalms, and is reiterated throughout the Bible, both Old and New Testament. The wonder of creation is seen in the Old Testament Psalms, and in the miracle accounts, such as the calming of the sea, in the New Testament. The theme has at least two dimensions, one dealing with the majesty of God, and the second with our response to God the Creator.

Majesty. The grandeur of creation attests to the majesty of God, as does the theme itself, "The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness . . ." It is different than saying, "all things were made by God."

Within the theme is hidden some theology, namely, that God stands apart from, and above creation. We take this for granted. The Israelites who accepted the Ten Commandments may not have. The cultures that surrounded them at the time held traditional stories of creation in which battles between the gods resulted in creation. Or that an aspect of creation, such as the waters, was the consequence of the death of a god who then fell to earth. Creation had no hold on God. Rather, God was the master of all, the possessor of all, because He was the Creator of all. When Jesus calmed the storm, the disciples were given a major clue as to His identity—only God has power over nature.

It is our faith as well, stated in the Nicene Creed, "I believe in one God, the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible." The Pantocrator, or "Ruler of All," is a good icon for teaching this

concept as it evokes the majesty of God especially if placed, as it traditionally is, in the center dome of the church.

Our Response to Creation. The second dimension involves our response to God's majesty, and God's creation. If you take a look at Genesis, the first book in the Bible, you will see that there are two creation accounts, in chapters one and two. (Those who compiled the written Bible knew of at least two oral traditions of the story of creation. They both hold truth. We are most familiar with the first, "creation in seven days.") In the first account we read that the human person is made in the image and likeness of God, and in the second God made man from the clay of the earth and breathed in his nostrils. The human person was thus made both matter and spirit—connected to the created order, and connected to God through being made in His image. It is the role of the human person to care for (steward) creation and all that lives within creation; and also, to intercede for creation before God.

Stewardship. We were given dominion over all things; we are the crown jewel of God's creation. All of creation is meant for man to use, not abuse, to tend to and to keep. God's creation is His, but He has given it to us as a gift to sustain us and especially for us to sustain. If we eat only what we need and replenish what we have used, all people will have food to eat; if we keep our water clean and don't waste it, everyone will have water to drink. This is also a reminder to us that we are meant to serve others and not ourselves, just as Christ came to ". . .

serve and not be served . . .” Mark 10:45. Christ is our example; stewardship is the task.

When we celebrate Divine Liturgy, we offer bread and wine, that it might become the Body and Blood of Christ. We do this in imitation of Jesus at the Last Supper, who took bread and offered it, blessed and broke it; and likewise took wine, offered, blessed and shared it. In this way, Jesus gave back to God from the produce of the land. *To offer back to God is to acknowledge that the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.* When we say grace we are to remember this, and we thank God for letting us use what He has provided. Actually, when we bless anything, we are offering back to God and acknowledging that nothing is truly ours—all belongs to Him. This is also the basis for tithing.

One explanation of Adam’s sin is that the material world blocked his vision of God—he failed to look through the material to the spiritual. How much moreso is our vision of God blocked today! The saints all got it right. They knew to see through the material world to God. They knew that if one did so, the whole world *revealed* God. This is called the “incarnational” worldview, and following from the worldview is praying at all times.

With the incarnational worldview, it becomes easy to see the earth as the Lord’s. It becomes easy to offer it back to God before partaking of it. When we offer it back to God in thanksgiving, He blesses it, and makes it a vehicle of grace—a way of drawing us into closer union with Him. This is the basic pattern of the Eucharist (Greek for “thanksgiving”) we celebrate in the Divine Liturgy. This offering-

thanksgiving pattern can be ours each day, and every day can draw us closer into union with the Creator.

Recommended Reading/Listening/Projects:

- Ecology & God’s Creation, Parts 1 & 2, Fr. John Chryssavgis, Orthodox Christian Network podcasts, <http://www.myocn.net/>
- The Earth is the Lord’s: Caring for God’s Creation; a 5- part Study Unit from Education & Community Life Ministries; OCA, 1995 (www.orthodoxed.org)
- *Animals & Man: A State of Blessedness*, Joanne Stefanatos, DVM, Light-n-Life
- *Celebrate the Earth*; Dorrie Papademetriou; SVS Press
- *Keeping the Garden* by Fr. John Oliver, <http://www.antiochian.org/node/19202>
- *Christian Ecology: An Orthodox Christian View* by Fr. Gregory Lazarus Murphy, The Word Magazine, March 2004, pgs. 5-9, <http://www.antiochian.org/node/19464>
- <http://www.enchantedlearning.com/crafts/earthday/>
- *The Goodness of God’s Creation*, by Fr. Philip LeMasters, Regina Press; podcast on Come Receive the Light, <http://www.myocn.net/>
- <http://Orth-Transfiguration.org/>



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Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- State that God created all things, and that He is the Ruler of All.
- Explain what it means to be stewards of creation.
- List the ways they can care for the environment.
- Thank God for all things.

Time: 45 minutes

Materials:

- Orthodox Study Bible
- Divine Liturgy Service Book (Nicene Creed)
- Theme icon (provided)
- Pantocrator icon (provided)
- Magazine or calendar photos showing the grandeur of creation
- Gift box with ribbon and wrapping paper and small globe inside
- Food items
- Paper and pencils

For Activities

- *Miraculous Friendships between Saints & the Wild Beasts* (Light and Life Publishers)
- *Celebrate the Earth* by Dorrie Papademetriou (Light and Life Publishers)
- Icons with animals and landscapes (Palm Sunday, St. Elias and the Raven)
- Books and/or stories of saints and animals

THE LESSON PLAN:

Opening

Gather children around the icon corner for the opening prayer. Using the Bible, read Psalm 23: 1-3 and the first sentence of the Symbol of Faith (Nicene Creed).

Introduction

Explain the Creative Festival program

- Tell them the theme again and have them recite it.
- Explain to them that the Psalms are a part of the Bible written by St. David the Psalmist. Many of these songs praise God for His creation of the world.
- We express our belief in God as Creator of All in the Nicene Creed.

Then go over the verse

- “Who is the Lord?”
- “Why does the earth belong to Him?”

- Explain that the word ‘fullness’ means all of creation. Ask them to list all the things that God has created (the earth, the animals, the moon, sun, and stars).
- Explain that the word ‘dwell’ means to live in a given place, like their homes and their neighborhoods, etc.

Content

Ask them to tell you what they know from the Creation Story.

- Using either the OSB or a children’s Bible (or in your own words) fill-in and complete the story of Creation.
- Emphasize how God took care to create the earth slowly over time, i.e. first there was light; then heaven and earth, etc. and that God saw that each thing He made was good and said so.
- You can have them close their eyes to imagine what it was like before the world existed. Point out how God made everything in a specific order. Have the children imagine a king on a throne who can say give an order and have it done; and then have them imagine God on a throne as Creator and Ruler of all, calling aspects of creation into existence.
- Take them into the church to show them an icon of the Pantocrator if you have one, or use the icon provided.

Have a gift box tied with a wrapping paper and ribbon. Inside the box have a small globe of the earth.

- Talk to the children about how much love and care went into the gift and how loving it is to have someone give us a gift.
- How do they feel at Christmas time or your birthday when you receive a gift? How do they feel about the person who gives them a gift? What do they say to that person? Open the gift. God wants us to do two things with this gift . . . say thank you, and help care for it.

Read Genesis 1:26.

- Explain the word “dominion” as “rule and responsibility.” Ask if they have any animals. What are ways we care for pets? We also have rule (control) over our pets and are to take good care of them.

Place food items in front of you.

- Let’s talk about something we do everyday. Before we eat, what do we stop and say? (Grace)
- Why? (Because we want to say thank you to God.) “Why should we thank God?” (The earth . . . is His.)
- If you forget to say thank you to a friend for something he or she gave you, how do you feel afterwards?

Ask the children to share what they are thankful for, and how they they would write that in a letter to God. (Record and save their responses to help when it is time to draw, or compose poems and creative writing.)

Choice of Activities

Activity 1

Taken from “The Earth is the Lord’s: Caring for God’s Creation,” OCEC Publications

Read Psalm 104 from *Celebrate the Earth* by Dorrie Papademetriou. Emphasize that all of creation sings praises of thanksgiving to God for all He does for us.

Divide the children into groups and have them learn the parts of Psalm 104: 1-4, 5-9, 10-13, 14-15, 16-18 19-23, 24-26, 27-30, 31-35. Have them develop skits for their respective verses. Provide a variety of props and materials (recycled items) that can be used in the skits.

Activity 2

Read some of the stories from the book *“Miraculous Friendships between Saints & the Wild Beasts”* (available from Light & Life Publishing). (You might find stories about these saints –Sts. Sergius, Seraphim, Gerasimos, Simeon the Stylite, Anthony the Great, Blasius, Neophyte, Acacius the Bishop of Miletus, Herman of Alaska - in other publications.) Ask about the relationship between the saint and the animals in their story. Have them explain the reasons these saints had such good relationships with wild animals. Ensure that they can point to the fact that all of these saints had a close/special relationship with God by the way they lived their lives. This relationship with God affected how they interacted with the world around them and how the animals respected them.

Activity 3

Using icons with animals and landscape in them, talk to the children about how our icons show the world transfigured (changed) in the icons; that the world in the icons is renewed and glorifies God. Use the icons of St. George riding the horse and slaying the dragon; the Palm Sunday icon of Christ riding on the donkey; etc. In the icons we see the animals subdued and working in harmony with Christ or the saint. In the icon of St. Elias being fed by the raven, we see a bird that is normally a scavenger, bringing food to the saint. Icons show us the world to come where there is peace and harmony amongst all of God’s creation. Walk with them through your church temple and point out all of the flowers, vines, animals they see used in the decoration of the temple. This is because all God created glorifies Him and praises Him.

Closing

List ways they and their families can work to care for the earth.

Help children to recite Psalm 23: 1-3 and the first sentence of the Symbol of Faith.