



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 6-8

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:

The students will be able to

1. Explain how we take responsibility for the earth
2. State that when we bless food and other items we acknowledge that the earth is the Lord's; and we thank the Lord.
3. Explain why we offer prosthora and wine during the Divine Liturgy.

TIME: 45 minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Orthodox Study Bible
- Theme Icon (provided)
- Pantocrator Icon (provided)
- Something you own that the students might want to have, hidden in a bag or box
- Icons that include animals and landscapes (Palm Sunday, Nativity)
- Icons of Creation (see St. Isaac of Syria Skete website).
- Calendar pages or magazine photos of majestic scenes from nature, and of food
- Loaf of prosthora

For Activities

- Supplies for making prosthora.

THE LESSON PLAN:

Opening

Stand with the students at the icon corner for the opening prayer. Ask the students to find Psalm 23, and have them take turns reading parts of it.

Introduction

Make sure the children know what psalms are and who wrote many of them.

- Go over the theme words to make sure all are understood

Content

Place item of yours in its bag or box in front of you.

- There is something in here. Any guesses? It is something you might want to have.
- How do you get things you want?
- Can you ever get something, legally, without spending money?
- If I gave it to you as a gift, what would you say? Why?
- If I gave it to you as a gift, would you be free to . . . sell it? Trash it? Give it to someone else?

Place magazine photos in front of you.

- Any ideas on how what is in the bag is connected with these photos?
- Think about the One who created the earth.
- Help children imagine a king on a throne speaking the first few verses of Genesis, chapter one. He gives the order, and it happens . . . You can watch as he speaks the word and a majestic scene appears before you. That king is our Lord and God, the Creator and Ruler of All.
- Show the icon of the Pantocrator, or take them into the church to show them an icon of the Pantocrator if you have one.

Place loaf of prosphora in front of you.

- Because the earth is the Lord's we respond in a certain way when we partake of what God has provided.
- "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.)
- Any ideas why the prosphora is now on the table?

Each Sunday at Divine Liturgy we offer the bread and wine for Holy Communion.

- We offer these to God, as a way of saying thanks ("eucharist") for all He has done for us—his life, death, resurrection, ascension and glorious second coming.
- Yet, if the earth is the Lord's, how can we give anything to God, that isn't God's already?" (We are actually "returning" a portion to God from what He has given us, with our thanks. This is our way of showing that we know the earth is the Lord's.)
- God gave us wheat, we turn the wheat into flour and we make bread and bring it to church as our thanks offering. The prosphora is then blessed and becomes the body of Christ and is given to us so that we may be joined to Him.

What else do we bless—think about feasts and what your family brings to church.

- The feast of Theophany, the Blessing of the Water; at the feast of the Transfiguration we bless grapes; at Paska we bring baskets of food to be blessed; the hard-boiled eggs which have been dyed red are blessed.
- How many of you have had Father bless your home; what does that say to God?
- It is important to see God behind all that we see on earth. He is the Creator and the Ruler of All.

God wants us to say "thank you," and he wants us to help Him.

- What does He want us to do?
- Read aloud Genesis 1:26. Ask, "What does "dominion," mean ("rule over, and responsibility for").
- How can we take responsibility for the earth?

Let's review

[Give pencils and paper to the students to take notes on review session. Keep these papers to help them when it comes time to draw or write for the festivals.]

Mention key words from the paragraphs above, have students write a word that comes to mind. Hold up the pages of majestic scenes, one at a time, have the students say words that remind them of that picture. Finally, hold up the icon of the Pantocrator, and have students write words that come to mind.

Choice of Activities

Activity 1

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.

Activity 2 (“... Thine own of Thine own”)

Gather ingredients for prosphora.

Talk about how we use many things from the world around us in our worship, i.e. water (for Holy Communion, blessings); grapes for wine for Holy Communion; elements from the earth to make incense; elements from the earth for pigment for the paint used in icons; wheat for the Prosfhora and Koliva; flowers to decorate the tomb for Holy Friday. Emphasize that we use those things from the world and offer them back to God to bless and sanctify. Discuss Theophany and the Blessing of the Water; Blessing our homes; Blessing of the grapes at the feast of the Transfiguration.

Make the Prosfhora.

Activity 3 (Living within our means.)

Discuss: How does fasting, almsgiving and prayer help us to live in harmony with nature? We eat only what we need, so that we have more to give those who have less than we do. We are more thankful for what we have. Have the children list the items in their lives that they need to live and those things that are not necessary but that they want. Help them to differentiate between what is necessary and what is not. How would giving up some of the things that they don't need to live help the environment?

Activity 4

Look at and read other psalms (Psalm 49; Psalm 104 and 145-150) that glorify God for all He has given to us. Have students make a list of phrases that can be possible titles for their projects, or inspiration for writing.

Closing

Recite the Psalm 24: 1-3 and all of the Symbol of Faith.