



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 9-12

#### 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](http://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:

- Explain how we show that the earth is the Lord's
- Discuss how Adam brought evil into the world, and how Jesus overturned it with the consecration of bread and wine.
- Explain why the Divine Liturgy has cosmic significance.

### **Materials:**

- Orthodox Study Bibles
- Theme Icon
- Pantocrator Icon
- Icons that include animals and landscapes
- Icons of Creation (see St. Isaac of Syria Skete website).
- Calendar pages of majestic scenes from nature
- Prosphora loaf

### **THE LESSON PLAN:**

#### **Opening**

Stand with the students at the icon corner for the opening prayer. Have students find Psalm 23 and read a section.

#### **Introduction**

Make sure they know what psalms are and who wrote them.

#### **Content**

The theme in the Creation icon

- Remind them of the first creation story—that God made creation in an orderly way and show them the icons of creation that depict that.
- Everything that is was created through Christ, who is the Word of God, (the word that God said . . . “and God *said*, let there be light.”
- Have them look at the first verses of John’s Gospel to see that Christ is explained to be the Word through Whom God created all that is.

The concept of ownership

- Are the words of the psalmist true?
- Set up a compare/contrast chart with “I am God’s,” and “I own myself” across the top. Ask, “How does a person act who belongs to God; who belongs to him or herself?”
- Discuss, “If you belong to God, what does that say about the person next to you, or in your math class, or the mean kid down the block?” Does your belief influence your actions?

Living in harmony with nature

- Genesis: 2:19-20: God allowed Adam to name the animals; meaning that mankind is to take care of the earth and the animals. Point out that in the beginning, Adam and Eve ate only of the fruit of the land, and lived peaceably with the animals, but after the Fall the animals feared mankind. When we are in fasting periods, we choose to be free of sin and eat only of the fruit of the land, recalling the harmony of nature that God intended.
- The monks and nuns live this way—ascetically, simply, with God at the center of all they do. There is a saying, “Live simply, so others may simply live.” 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.
- The monks live with their gaze on God at all times. It is easier to do this when not surrounded by a lot of material things.
- 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! What is your eyesight like? Where does your gaze rest most of the time.
- 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. One cannot help but praise God at all times.

Place loaf of prosphora on the table. God’s creation is His, but He has given it to us.

- As a gift to sustain us and as a means for Him to reveal Himself.
- 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.
- What did Jesus do when he took the bread? He 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.*
- To offer back to God the earth, as we do in the Divine Liturgy, is of cosmic significance. Think about these words, “Thine own of thine own.” By offering back, instead of just taking, we are reversing what Adam did that brought evil into the world. Adam **took** the apple he was not supposed to.
- Jesus reversed Adam’s sin when he offered back to God the bread and wine, and later himself. His sacrifice was on behalf of the whole world—that the whole world be saved.
- When we consecrate bread and wine, we do so, “On behalf of all and for all (the world).” We intercede for the whole world, that the world might be saved. Our action in the Divine Liturgy has a cosmic significance.
- We show that the earth is the Lord’s when we saying grace—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.
- We show that the earth is the Lord’s when we tithe.

Tough questions and a headstart on ideas for the projects

- [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.]
- Is the earth the Lord’s?
- Are you the Lord’s?

- What is the incarnational worldview?
- Why should we offer the earth back to God? Look at and read other psalms (Psalm 49; Psalm 104 and 145-150) that glorify God for all He has given to us.
- 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.

### **Activity 1 (Living within our means.)**

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 2**

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 manage and preserve. As an example, talk with the students about living in an environment such as Coruscant from Star Wars. On that planet, everything had been paved over and there was no plant or animal life. Who lived there? (The evil emperor.) But on Naboo, where it was more peaceful, there was a vibrant eco-system. Have them talk about what it would be like to not have any trees or grass, etc. How would that change them?

### **CLOSING**

Have students share at least one verse they have chosen from one of the other psalms.