

## Using the Theme Throughout the Year



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

Psalm 23 (24):1

The theme this year is definitely about caring for the earth; however, it also brings profound Orthodox spiritual concepts to the table. The first is the *majesty* of God as noted in the sense of ownership the theme imparts. We witness majesty in the grandeur of the land and sea, but also in the view of the earth from space, and of course, the view of space from earth. God's majestic presence underlies our celebration of the Divine Liturgy.

The theme provides an incredible opportunity for the students to understand how Orthodox Christians see creation—our “incarnational” worldview. *We do not see just the material—*

*creation—but see through creation to God* who obviously values order and beauty. (It has been said that Adam's sin was choosing to fix his gaze on the material rather than the spiritual.) The theme gives us a chance to pause and wonder at the complexity and diversity of creation, and how God has provided for the sustenance of life.

*Our use of what God owns, but has given to us, should be preceded by 1) thankfulness, and 2) an offering back to God a portion of what he has provided—“our eucharistic worldview.”* There is no better place to see this than in the offering of the bread and wine at the Divine Liturgy. We also acknowledge God's ownership of the earth when we ask his blessings on our food, home and other items. Finally, the theme is a call to *stewardship—caring for the earth*. For Orthodox Christians, caring for our environment is not a political statement, but a part of our spiritual journey and our duty as stewards of the earth. Here are just a few ideas to get you started on introducing the theme to your students and working on it throughout the year.

### Decorating your Church School rooms:

- Icons of creation can be hard to find, here are two sources:
- St. Isaac of Syria Skete, [www.skete.com](http://www.skete.com), “mounted icons,” “old testament themes” or Come and See Icons [www.comeandseeicons.com](http://www.comeandseeicons.com), “groups,” “Garden of Eden”
- Photos of the world from space;
- Photos of nature;
- Gardening tools and packets of seeds.
- Posters provided (In December additional materials will be available on the website to highlight the blessing of the water at Theophany).

### Activities throughout the year:

1. Create a square foot garden at your church (if possible) or someone's home or some place large enough so that all of the children from your Church School can work in the garden throughout the year. Harvest the vegetables/fruit and donate them to a food bank or make a meal for the parish that includes the harvest.
2. Start a compost pile to use as fertilizer for your square foot garden.
3. Join a group or organize cleaning up a creek, lake or park area in your community.
4. Begin a recycling program at the church for papers and/or cans.
5. Join or organize a community program that plants trees.
6. Make your own paper to use throughout the Church School year.