



*Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese
of North America, Metropolitan PHILIP, Primate*
DEPARTMENT OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION
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**2008 Creative Festivals Lesson Plan:
Grades 1-3**

THEME:

At the beginning He made them male and female. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh."

Matthew 19:5

GOALS:

To help students understand the theme well enough to express it in art, poetry, creative writing, or photography.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Students will be able to say that marriage is the way God intended for us to have families with a father, mother, and children.
2. Students will explore actual objects used in the Orthodox Christian wedding service.
3. Students will predict, discuss, and explain the symbolic meanings of objects used in the Orthodox Christian marriage service through the use of a K-W-L (Know, Want to Know, Learn) chart.

TIME: 40-45 minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Icon of the Wedding at Cana
- Photos of families: father, mother, children
- 3-6 Large pieces of butcher block paper for K-W-L Chart
- Markers
- Smaller sheets of paper for each student

- Actual objects used in the Service of Holy Matrimony (Ask permission from the parish priest to allow children to see and touch these objects during the lesson.)
 - Two large white candles
 - Rings (Photos can be used here.)
 - Wedding Crowns: Wreaths (Greek style) or Gold/Metal Crowns (Russian style)
 - Gospel book
 - Hand Cross

OPTIONAL MATERIALS:

Video or photos of an actual wedding service.

FOR THE CATECHIST:

Suggested Readings:

John 2:1-11. The Wedding at Cana, with notes, *Orthodox Study Bible*, pp. 214-215.

Ephesians 5:22-33.

Marriage, *Orthodox Study Bible*, p. 449.

Sr. Magdalen. Children in the Church Today. Chapters 1-3, pp. 7-32.

Service of the Holy Matrimony, *Service Book*, Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocesan, pp. 166-182.

Ford, David and Mary. Introduction, *Marriage as a Path to Holiness. Lives of Married Saints*, pp. xxi-iv.

With this age group, you will need to be as concrete as possible in your comments and explanations, especially since first-graders do not have the reading skills of older students. For this reason, it is recommended that you receive the permission of your parish

priest to present actual objects for the children to examine, both by touching as well as looking at them in detail. Students may come to the lesson with preconceived ideas about what a wedding service is all about based on experience with weddings from the Western Christian traditions. You will need to show respect for those traditions, of course, but do impress upon your students the unique quality of the Orthodox marriage service, especially with the Crowning that has so much rich symbolism. If the children do not understand the meaning of words “symbol” or “symbolize” you may say, “The candles mean this...the crowns show us thatthe Gospel book reminds us...” etc.

The lesson suggests use of a **K-W-L** chart: What We **Know**, What We **Want** to Know, and what we have **Learned**. You can also have smaller sheets of paper for students to write on.

Also important in any discussion you have with students about marriage and family life is to recognize that not all families are intact. You will want to approach any discussion in a non-judgmental way and with counsel by your parish priest and in an attitude of compassion and in prayer.

THE LESSON PLAN

OPENING:

Gather children around the icon corner to say, “Our Father.”

INTRODUCTION:

Introduce the purpose of the Creative Festivals and read the theme. Explain that you will help students to understand its meaning. Tell students that basically the theme is about marriage—about a man and a woman getting married. In this lesson, you will be talking about people getting married in the Orthodox Church.

Focus first on the beginning sentence of the theme to remind students that God has created human beings to be either male or female. (Some students may also want to give examples from the animal world—that animals are also male and female. You could also reference Noah’s ark.) Read from *Genesis* 1:27-28:

(v. 27) So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

(v. 28:) And God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

You might point out that God says this to *both* men and women. He uses the word them.

Remind students of terminology: a boy grows up to be a man; a girl grows up to be a woman. The man and the woman (emphasize male and female here) want to get married because they love each other and want to spend their whole lives together and live as husband and wife. (You can show photos of families here.) The husband and wife start their own family. They add to their family by having children. You can emphasize that this was part of God’s plan—for a man and a woman to get married and to start a family. (You might want to avoid saying “...get married and have children” because not all married couples can have children; and procreation is not the only reason for marriage in the Orthodox Church.)

Ask whether anyone has ever seen an Orthodox wedding service or been a participant in one. Spend a few minutes with children sharing their experiences.

Use of a K-W-L Chart.

What We Know About the Orthodox Christian Wedding Service

Ask students to tell what they know about the marriage service in the Orthodox Church. Record responses on one of the large butcher block sheets:

Know

Be sure all information is in keeping with an Orthodox Christian approach to marriage and marriage service.

What We Want to Know About the Orthodox Christian Marriage Service.

Ask for questions students may have about marriage or the marriage service. Record student questions on the chart:

Want to Know

Tell students you will try to answer all these questions.

CONTENT:

Refer students to the pre-arranged display of the actual objects (or photos, if the objects are not available) used in an Orthodox wedding service. Invite students to examine them. Encourage students to use great care in handling the objects. If your group has mixed ages, organize the groups to include children from each age group. The actual objects recommended for this part of the lesson include:

Two white candles

Rings (A picture of two rings will suffice.)

The crowns: either wreaths, (Greek tradition) or gold crowns (Slavic tradition)

The Gospel book

Hand cross used by the priest.

Brainstorm with the students what they think these objects are used for or what they mean in the wedding service.

Provide information regarding what each of the items mean.

Large white candles. At the beginning of the service, the priest gives a candle to the bride and a candle to the groom. Candles are a symbol (or sign) of the Light of Christ. We often say, "Christ is the Light of the World."

Rings. The wedding ring is a sign that a person is married. In the Orthodox tradition, each person wears the ring on the fourth finger (ring finger) of the *right* hand. (However today, because of the influence of the Western churches, many

people wear their wedding rings on their left hand.) The ring is a circle that never ends. It symbolizes marriage.

Crowns.

Explain to students that the Crowning is unique to Orthodox weddings.

Protestant or Catholic services do not have this crowning as part of their marriage services.

Whether gold crowns or the laurel/flower wreaths, the crowns show that the husband and wife are now king and queen of their new household. In the marriage service, after the priest places the crowns over the heads of the bride and groom, he will exchange the crowns three times, each time saying, "O Lord our God, crown them with glory and honor." (You might demonstrate this action by the priest with the actual crowns.)

This is a good time for you to mention that in the marriage service there is sung a special prokeimenon just before the Epistle reading:

*"Thou has set upon their heads crowns of precious stones.
They asked life of Thee and Thou gavest it them."*

Rephrase this for students: God has set upon their heads crowns of precious stones. The bride and groom ask life from God and He gives it to them.

The Epistle reading itself tells about how the husband and wife should respect each other and how they each are responsible for the well being of the other. They should also remember how Christ loved His Church so much that He died on the cross to save Her.

The Gospel book. The Word of God. The priest reads from the Gospel, just as he would read from the Gospel at Divine Liturgy. The reading is the account of how Christ was present at the wedding in Cana of Galilee and changed water into wine, his first miracle. This Gospel reading teaches us that God blesses marriage and makes it holy in the Church.

Show students an icon of the Wedding at Cana of Galilee and ask them to point out the various figures of bride and groom, Christ, The Theotokos, the servants filling the stone jars with water. Take note that in this icon Christ is not at the center of the scene but in the corner, where the “action” of the miracle takes place. You might also mention that it is by Christ’s word alone that this miracle takes place. As the Son of God, He can make a miracle happen simply by speaking His Word.

The Gospel book is placed on the table in front of the altar. Later in the service, when the couple walks around the table three times (Isaiah’s Dance), they walk with the Word of God at the center of their lives.

Impress upon students that the Church reads the Gospel about the Wedding in Cana because it shows us *Christ* blesses marriage and performed His first miracle there. Marriage is no longer just something that happened to people in the Old Testament. Christ brings something new to marriage, because He gives us eternal life.

Exchange of rings
Crowns being placed on the heads of the bride and groom

The Cross represents Christ’s sacrifice for our salvation, since Jesus died on the cross.

Both the Gospel and the cross remind the bride and groom to always keep Christ at the center of their lives.

The crowns are removed. (In most churches, the couple comes back a week later and there is a special service for “Removal of the Crowns.” In the Early Church, the bride and groom wore their crowns for eight days.)

RESPONSE:

What We Have Learned

After discussing what the objects mean, or represent, you can record what students have learned on the chart. Be sure that each child contributes.

Name each of the objects discussed, record them, and write a phrase given by students for their meanings. Read all the responses aloud.

With either photographs of key points in the wedding service or a video that you can stop at key points, show the following and ask students in turn to explain what is happening or what the objects mean:

Candles being given to the bride and groom

Exchange of crowns three times: “O Lord, crown them with glory and honor.”

Reading of the Gospel about the Wedding at Cana of Galilee

As a final point, you may want to emphasize that while it is God's desire that a man and a woman marry for the rest of their lives, all families are different and God loves *everyone*. We want to present what the Orthodox Church teaches about marriage, but we must be sensitive to the conditions of our society where divorce and separation abound – even in our own parishes. We must not judge, nor make any child feel inferior because his family is not intact. Here is where your teaching skills and Christian love come together.

CLOSING:

Gather students around the icon corner. Say a closing prayer or sing an “Alleluia” or other hymn customary for your parish.