

Shelley Finkler oversees Saint John's Children Education program which we call "Atrium." She has very kindly put together some ideas for Holy Week that would be very helpful for younger children and inspirational for all of us. Below is the material she has assembled for families to use as they wish. – Fr. Marc

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Holy Week with Orthodox Catechesis of the Good Shepherd – 2020

Dear St. John's parents.

We are soon going to be in Holy Week and Pascha in the most unprecedented of circumstances. I want to share some ideas for ways to lift up this time with our children. It is wonderful that St John's has the services available for us online. And online services are very hard for children, especially young children, to focus on.

Your children have had a form of Christian Education that is entirely experiential thanks to Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. They already know God and are in relationship with God. They already know how to pray, listen to God's word in a thoughtful way, and participate in the life of the church.

I want to share some ideas with you for helping your children continue in their faith life at home.

Shelley Finkler

FAMILY PRAYER TABLE

The first thing I want to share with you is that your children *already know how to lead prayer*. Atrium begins teaching this when they are 3 years old. We do this through the Prayer Table. This is something you can provide to your children in your home. They will know what to do and they can show you! In fact, they will be excited to show you how to do prayer table and it will provide continuity for them to their life in the Church. Here's how:



1. Gather the following items in a box or basket.
 - a. Purple cloth for Holy Week and White cloth for Pascha and Bright Week (can be a scarf, table cloth, scrap of fabric, etc), candle holder and candle, Bible, Icon and icon stand, Prayer book, prayer cards (see note below) any other prayer items you have like Holy Water bottle, prayer rope, incense burner, holy oil, etc.
2. Ask your children to show you how they set up prayer table at Atrium. For the table you can use anything, an upside-down laundry basket, a small coffee table, a chair, a box. It should be low for your child and so that the family can gather around it. Let your child/children set the table up.
3. Ask them to lead you in prayer each day at a particular time. Ask them how they usually lead prayer in atrium and to do the same thing for your family each day. If your children are all in level 1, you can serve as their assistant in leading prayer. In level 2 and 3 the children choose 4 or 5 categories and organize them in a particular order and sequence. Here are the categories they choose from:
 - a. *Song, *Prayer (written on a prayer card for all to see), *Bible reading, *Psalm, *Silence, *The Lord's Prayer, *Kontakion/Troparion of the day, *Saint of the day, **You can write each of these out on a strip of paper and your child can choose which 4 or 5 they want to do and in what order. If you only have young children, you might choose only 3 or 4 categories and make suggestions to you little one.*
 - i. Intercessions: In Level 2 and 3 intercessions is done this way: We have a cross or other prayer item. Each person holds it and asks for prayer for their intercession and everyone else responds "Lord Have Mercy". Then they pass the item to the next person. This is the favorite part of prayer table time in our Atriums. You could certainly do this with your little ones as well.

4. Prayer Cards. Prayer cards are part of every table. These are handwritten, illustrated cards of scriptures and common prayers of the church and troparions. For the youngest children, the prayer cards are just one word like Alleluia, Amen, Hosanna, Peace, Joy. You can make this a Holy Week project for your family. Gather paper and crayons and let the children make the prayer cards for the family prayer table.



SCRIPTURE STUDIES

Each day of Holy Week, gather with your children around the prayer table and read one of the following scriptures with them (see list below). Older children can do the reading. In Atrium we read scripture by verse, with each person reading one verse. Follow up the reading with this question:

“What did you hear?”

This next part is important

The way we do scripture study in Atrium is always to LISTEN TOGETHER with the children and then ask them what they hear and ask them meditative questions designed to get them thinking about the message. Your Level 2 and 3 age children already know how to enter into scripture in this way. It is fascinating to listen to them and hear their perspectives and thoughts on particular aspects of scripture. We don't tell them what the scripture means or inform them. We lead by question. Here is a sample of typical Lesson Plan questions

1. What did you hear? What did Jesus say? *Content questions, what happened? Who went where? What did the person do/say? Where did this story happen?*
2. I wonder what Jesus meant when he said that? What do you think? *Meaning questions. These have NO right or wrong answers. Try to avoid the temptation to state your opinion or define. Wait until after your children have discussed and then you add your thoughts just like they have. All answers are correct for that child unless they are being intentionally silly.*
3. What do you think Jesus wants us to understand? How do we live this story in our own lives? *Application questions. If your child is under 6 years old do not ask these questions. They are not developmentally capable for application questions until they reach the second plane of development: 6-12 years old.*

Note to parents of children under the age of 6. You might want to ask your children to use their toys or other found objects in the house to create the story they have just heard. Have them gather what they want, bring it back to the prayer table and set it up. Then read the story a second time and encourage your child to use the things they've gathered while they listen to the story. Then ask no more than 3 meditative questions, keeping it simple. Encourage them to continue to “work” with the items they have chosen. This is how non-reading children “enter in” to the word of God.

This is something we do often in level 2. We invite the children to gather items from around the room that make them think about a particular theme or scripture verse. Once they have what they want, we ask them to tell us about the item they chose, why they chose it and what they think the scripture means. They love this!

Here are the scripture readings for each day of Holy Week. The second list is for parents who only have Level 1 age children, ages 2-6. Some of the scriptures of this week are too much for the youngest child so it is important that parents offer only what will nourish their little ones. “Rich food but not too much of it.” ~Sofia Cavalletti, foundress of CGS

1. Palm Sunday: John 12: 1-18.
 - a. For Level 1: John 12:12-15
 - b. Activity: make a prayer card of the proclamation in verse 12
2. Monday: Matthew 21:18-43
 - a. For Level 1: Matthew 21:28-31. Some of the stories in the whole scripture listed above are beyond the child under 6 as they are not aware of sin in the same way. Stick to the parable of the two sons and who obeyed.
 - b. Activity: Age 7+ Write out all or part of the Hymn of the Bridegroom on a prayer card.
3. Tuesday: Matthew 21:1-13.
 - a. This is a parable with a materials that all your children ages 6-12 have experienced and thought about. Ask them what they remember and what they think Jesus wants us to understand. The main question kids have is, "Why wouldn't the bridesmaids share?" Focus on what kinds of things we cannot force another person to receive, like love, prayer, faith. You may have faith and you desperately wish to share your faith with another, but you can't. So ask, "if I have faith or I love to pray and I want to share that with another person, but they don't want it, can I force them?" "I wonder if the oil in the parable is something like that, something we can't force on someone else? What do you think?"
 - b. For level 1 keep it to the JOY! Only focus on the JOY of the bridesmaids and the bridegroom.
4. Wednesday: John 12:17-50
 - a. For Level 1 only read John 12: 44-46. Have the child draw what they think Jesus means or draw in response to the reading.
 - b. The normal event on Holy Wednesday is the Holy Mystery of Holy Unction. The basis of this sacrament in scripture is James 5:14-15. You may wish to read and discuss with your older children.
5. Thursday: Matthew 26:21-39 (ONLY FOR LEVEL 2 AND 3 AGES)
 - a. LEVEL 1: Matthew 26:26-30
 - i. This is the core, the most important scripture your child hears in Atrium, every year from age 3 to age 12. We say that this is the "way that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, remains with us always and forever. "
 - b. Level 2 and 3: Your children have received the Mystical Supper every year of their lives and always with the focus on Jesus, the Good Shepherd remaining with us in the Holy Eucharist. We NEVER leave a child at the death of Christ. We ALWAYS connect it to Christ's Resurrection. They are one whole. So, we always end the presentation of the Mystical Supper with this statement:

Imagine how sad Jesus' disciples felt. They didn't know what we know. They didn't know that Jesus is going to be resurrected on the third day. (Then light a candle to signify the Light of Christ and say "Jesus is the Light of the World always and forever unto ages of ages")

6. Holy Friday: Choose any of the 12 Gospel Readings, but only one. Consider covering a crucifix with a white cross. Sing the 15th Antiphon.
 - a. Level 1: if you only have Level 1 age children, don't read the account of the crucifixion. The lesson for this even is a map of the City of Jerusalem in which the events of that day are narrated in order. You can do this with the map in the back of most bibles. Simply narrate what happened at each place: this is where Jesus ate his last meal with his disciples. This is where Jesus prayed in the Garden of Olives. This is where Jesus met with the high priest of the Temple: Caiaphus. This is where they took Jesus to be tried by Pontius Pilate. Pontius Pilate decided Jesus should die. This is where Jesus died. End the narration this way:
 - i. "Jesus died (Place a cross. Cover it with a cloth) After he died, his friends placed in him a new tomb. He died on a holy day so his friends couldn't bury him the way they wanted to. After the holy day was over, his friends went to the tomb, but when they got there, an angel told them that Jesus wasn't there. The angel said: He is alive! He is Risen from the dead. (Light a candle) (Pause and remain in silence)
7. Holy Saturday: Most of the readings on this day are prophetic readings from the Old Testament. Also read are Romans 6:3-11 and Matthew 28:1-20 which is Matthew's account of the Resurrection.

PASCHA

I am attaching the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Pascha Celebration that we do each year. You can pick and choose elements from it for your own family celebration at home.

Celebration of Pascha

Prior to beginning choose one or two children who are good readers to read portions of the Homily of St John Chrysostom

Gather children in a darkened area outside the atrium where a single tall candle is set on a tall stand. Explain that we are going to celebrate the Feast of Feasts: Pascha in our atrium today. Have a brief candle management talk. Pass out candles to each child and explain that we will be making a procession into the atrium to celebrate. Candles can be either votives in glass or leftover candles from Pascha or beeswax tapers to stick in sand)

Catechist lights single tall candle in silence. Then he/she sings:

Come take light from the Light, That is never overtaken by night, come glorify Christ, who is Risen from the dead.

Pass the light to all children and catechists. When all have a lit candle, process with the children into the atrium singing:

Thy resurrection O Christ our savior, the Angels in heaven sing, enable us on earth, to glorify thee with purity of heart.

When you arrive into the atrium, gather around the prayer table and set the tall candle upon it. Invite the children to set their votives on the prayer table around the tall candle or if using beeswax tapers, place the candle in the sand. Sing the Paschal Troparion:

*Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life.
(Troparion)*

Invite the children to be seated.

Catechist: “Let’s listen to what happened on that glorious morning.” (solemn reading) (OPTIONAL: YOU MAY WISH TO HAVE THE EMPTY TOMB ON DISPLAY ON OR NEAR THE PRAYER TABLE AND INVITE TWO CHILDREN TO MOVE THE FIGURES AS YOU READ THE SCRIPTURE)

Matthew 28:1-10

Jesus Has Risen

28 After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

² There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

⁵ The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”

⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

Catechist: Christ is truly Risen! Can you imagine how joyful his friends felt when they heard this news? Can you imagine how full of joy and happiness Jesus' mother felt when she learned that her son was ALIVE? We sing a song about Mary, the Theotokos expresses this joy so beautifully. Let's sing it now!

Paschal Hymn to the Theotokos

The angel cried to the Lady full of grace

Rejoice, O pure virgin

Again I say: Rejoice!

Your Son is Risen from His three days in the tomb!

With Himself He has raised all the dead!

Rejoice, rejoice all you people!

Shine! Shine! Shine O New Jerusalem!

The Glory of the Lord has shone on you!

Exalt now exalt and be glad O Zion!

Be Radiant! O Pure Theotokos

In the Resurrection

The Resurrection of your Son!

Catechists introduces the Homily of St John Chrysostom by saying:

“This is perhaps the greatest homily ever written. It was written by St John Chrysostom about 350 years after Jesus rose from the dead. Hi homily is read in EVERY Orthodox Church ALL OVER THE WORLD during the Paschal Divine Liturgy. Today we hear some of it. There are two part where well will have a response to say. When you hear: “Hell was embittered”, you reply: “Hell was embittered”. When you hear “Christ is Risen”, you reply “Christ is Risen!”



Let's listen.

Child 1: If any man be devout and love God, let him enjoy this fair and radiant triumphal feast. ...

Let no one fear death, for the Savior's death has set us free. He that was held prisoner of it has annihilated it. By descending into Hell, He made Hell captive.

He embittered Hell when it tasted of His flesh. And Isaiah, foretelling this, did cry:

Hell, said he, was embittered, when it encountered Thee in the lower regions.

Have one child read this portion of the Homily

Child 2: Hell was embittered.

All: Hell was embittered

For it was abolished.

Child 2: Hell was embittered

All: Hell was embittered

For it was mocked.

Child 2: Hell was embittered

All: Hell was embittered

For it was slain.

Child 2: Hell was embittered

All: Hell was embittered

For it was overthrown.

Child 2: Hell was embittered

All: Hell was embittered

For it was fettered in chains.

Child 2: It took a body, **and met God face to face**. It took earth, and encountered Heaven. It took that which was seen, and fell upon the unseen.

Child 2:



O Death, where is your sting? O Hell, where is your victory?

Child 3: Christ is risen.....All: "*Christ is Risen*"

and you are overthrown.

Child 3: Christ is risen, All: "*Christ is Risen*"

and the demons are fallen.

Child 3: Christ is risen, All: "*Christ is Risen*"

and the angels rejoice.

Child 3: Christ is risen, All: "*Christ is Risen*"

and life reigns.

Child 3: Christ is risen, All: "*Christ is Risen*"

and not one dead remains in the grave.

Child 3: For Christ, being risen from the dead, is become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. To Him be glory and dominion unto ages of ages. Amen.

Let's sing the Paschal troparion in as many ways as we know!

Paschal Troparion

Christ is Risen from the Dead

Trampling down death by death

And upon those in the tomb

Bestowing Life!

CHRIST IS RISEN

INDEED HE IS RISEN!

SAY CHRIST IS RISEN IN AS MANY LANGUAGES AS THE CHILDREN KNOW. LET THE CHILDREN SUGGEST.

How to make a Pascha candle

Supplies:

White Pillar Candle
White tissue paper
Permanent Colored Markers
Printed images to trace
Blow Dryer and hot mits

Instructions

Lay one layer of tissue paper over printed image and trace.
Color in with colored permanent markers
Trim to fit the white pillar candle
Blow Dry the tissue paper on the pillar candle using hot it's to avoid burning your hands. The wax will melt and soak through the tissue paper. Smooth paper as you blow dry
Allow to cool completely











