



The Great Feast Icons:
The Life of Our Lord



A program from The Department of Christian Education, Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of North America, funded in part by *The Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch*

Icon of Christ Pantocrator from the Basilica of Hagia Sofia, Constantinople

Dear Teachers,

To be an Orthodox Christian striving to live united to God requires us to walk with one foot in the temporal (calendar) year and the other in the Church's liturgical year—one foot on earth and the other in heaven. The foot that walks the liturgical year keeps us in touch with the eternal events of the life of Jesus and his mother, the Theotokos. Although the term, "liturgical year" includes all the services and readings for the year, it is often used to speak of Pascha and the Twelve Great Feasts. We hold Pascha above all the other Feasts, hence it is called out when we speak of the liturgical year. The feasts are listed in chronological order below; the Church Year begins on September 1.

Pascha!

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| 1. Nativity of the Theotokos September 8 | 7. Annunciation, March 25 |
| 2. Elevation of the Holy Cross, September 14 | 8. Palm Sunday, The Sunday before Pascha |
| 3. Presentation of the Theotokos,
November 21 | 9. Ascension, Forty Days after Pascha |
| 4. Nativity of Christ, December 25 | 10. Pentecost, Fifty Days after Pascha |
| 5. Theophany, January 6 | 11. Transfiguration, August 6 |
| 6. Presentation of Christ, February 2 | 12. Dormition of the Theotokos, August 15 |

Through the Great Feasts we are kept in touch with the reality of Jesus Christ. When we remember any of the events of His life story, we also remember His promise at the end: one day He will come again and we will live eternally in His Kingdom. Only by placing our story in His, can we find peace, joy and meaning in this life.

Please post the Feast Day pages around your classroom, or if you don't have a room, keep them in a notebook so you can show the students the icon as the feast approaches. If you post them, find a way to note that the Feast Day is approaching by placing a colored closepin, or a removable sticker, or arrow on the page. Our goal is for the students to know the icons, and memorize the feasts—our Lord's story—by the end of their years in Church School.

The facing page gives you a few words you can say to the students, or give to a student to read at the outset of each year. This program for grades K-1 intends for you to explain the Feasts by reviewing the colored-in Icon with the students. There is also an icon set in post card size, ideal for playing games (i.e. Memory) or for review. They are included as a separate document for printing on heavier paper or postcard stock for durability. For additional ideas for studying the Feast Days, see our pinterest page: <https://www.pinterest.com/aodce/feast-days> and our teachers blog: <https://orthodoxchurchschoolteachers.wordpress.com> and search for feasts.



Director, Department of Christian Education

Why Celebrate the Feast Days?

Every year there are special days that we celebrate. We call them holidays. Can you name some of these? What are some important days you celebrate?

Our Church also has a calendar and special days we celebrate. These are called Feast Days. On these days we remember certain events in the life of Jesus and the Theotokos. One of them is Pascha. There are 12 others. Can you think of any events in the life of Jesus?

We celebrate these events by having a Vespers Service and Divine Liturgy. The choir sings or chants special hymns that tell us about the event.

Feast Days give us the chance to learn about Jesus' life. Each holy day has its own icon which tells us the story of the special event. Throughout the year, we will look at each icon and learn about the Feast Day it represents.

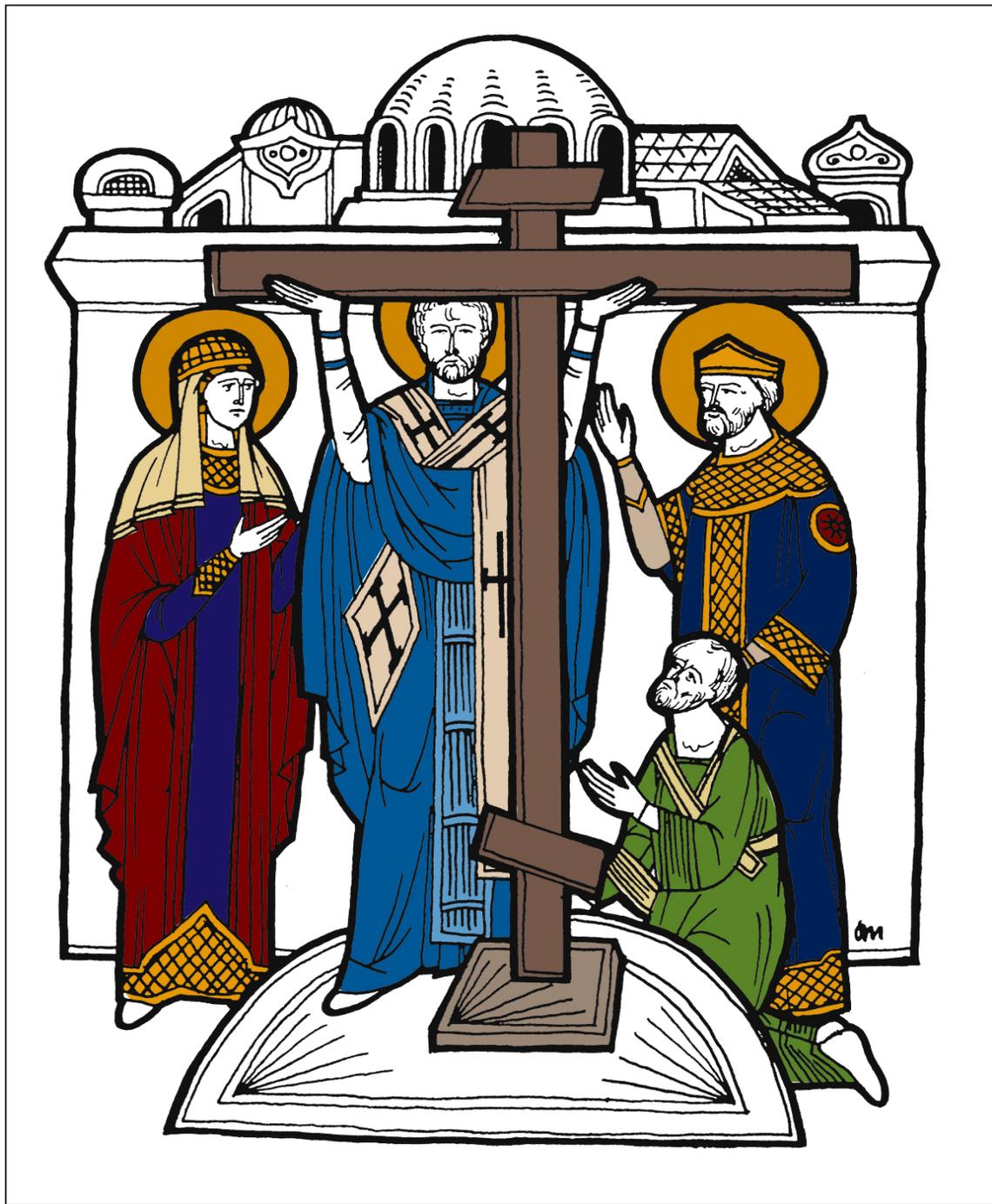
Nativity of the Theotokos



September 8

St. Joachim and St. Anna had lived a long time but had no children. They prayed and prayed, asking God for a child. Finally, their prayers were answered and they had a daughter who they named Mary. This feast celebrates the birth of the Mother of God and reminds us to trust God's plan.

Elevation of the Holy Cross



September 14

St. Helena, the mother of St. Constantine, wanted to find the true cross of Christ. When she found the cross she took it to the Bishop of Jerusalem, St. Macarius, who showed it to all of the people. In this icon, you can see St. Macarius displaying the cross and St. Helena on his right side.

Presentation of the Theotokos



November 21

God chose Mary to be the Mother of God. However, she needed to prepare. Her parents took her to the Temple to live and learn about God. In this icon, you see Mary being greeted at the Temple as a young girl. This feast celebrates this important day in the life of the Theotokos.

Nativity of Christ



December 25

Jesus Christ was born to Mary and Joseph in a cave in the town of Bethlehem. In the icon you can see the star that shone above where He was born. Shepherds heard angels proclaim His birth, and wise men came to honor him. All of creation rejoices in His birth.

Theophany



January 6

Theophany celebrates the baptism of our Lord. Before Jesus started teaching, He first went to John the Baptist to be baptized in the Jordan River. As Jesus was being baptized, the Holy Spirit appeared in the form of a dove and the voice of the Father could be heard saying, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased." (Luke 3: 21-22)

Presentation of Christ



February 2

This feast celebrates Jesus being presented at the Temple in Jerusalem. In the icon Jesus is held by St. Simeon who said, "Now, Master, let thy servant depart in peace; You have fulfilled Your word. For my eyes have witnessed Your saving deed, displayed for all peoples to see; A revealing Light to the Gentiles, the Glory of Your people, Israel."

Annunciation



March 25

Mary was chosen by God to be the Mother of our Lord. God sent the Archangel Gabriel to Mary saying, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" (Luke 1:26-28) This feast celebrates the Virgin Mary's acceptance of God's will.

Palm Sunday



The Sunday before Pascha

After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, Jesus entered Jerusalem fulfilling the prophecy that reads, "Fear not, daughter of Zion; Behold, your King is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt." The people there greeted him with palm branches crying out, "Hosanna in the highest!"

Pascha



Pascha is the day we celebrate Christ's resurrection from the dead. Jesus opened the gates of Hades and won victory over death. In this icon you can see Jesus raising Adam and Eve to be with Him in heaven. This Holy feast reminds us of God's love for us and teaches us that all people have the chance to be with Him in Heaven.

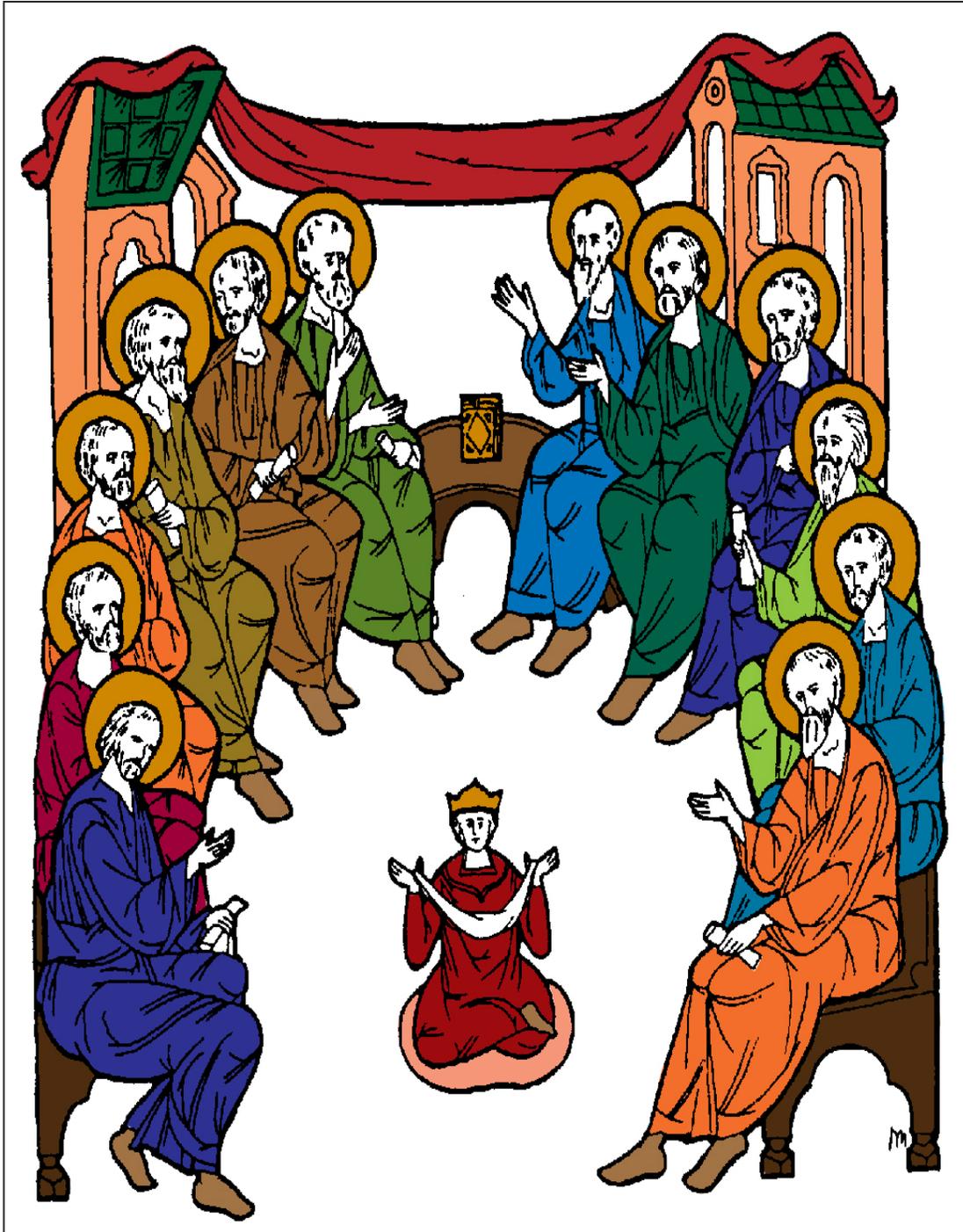
Ascension



40 Days after Pascha

This Feast Day celebrates Christ's ascension, or rising, into Heaven. "He was lifted up before their eyes in a cloud which took Him from their sight." (Acts 1:9) In this icon, you can see Christ going to Heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father. The apostles and the Theotokos are at His feet. Christ promised the apostles that He would not leave them; He would send the Holy Spirit to them.

Pentecost



50 Days after Pascha

While the Apostles were gathered together, the Holy Spirit descended upon them, as Jesus had promised. Tongues of fire came upon them and they were able to speak different languages and teach the world about Jesus Christ. This feast fulfills Christ's promise to the apostles to send the Holy Spirit.

Transfiguration



August 6

Christ took Peter, James and John to the mountain, where He showed them that He was God. "He was transfigured before their eyes. His face became dazzling as the sun, His clothes as radiant as light." (Matthew 17:2) In this icon, Jesus stands with Moses on His left and the Prophet Elias on His right, while the three apostles are at His feet.

Dormition of the Theotokos



August 15

At the feast of the Dormition we remember the death of the Theotokos, the mother of Jesus. In the icon you see the Theotokos surrounded by the Apostles, and Jesus taking her to be with Him in Heaven.