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# ORTHODOX RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: FEASTS OF JOY

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Grade Level/Age 8-10 / 14-15 y



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## **Orthodox Religious Education: Feasts of Joy**

### **Competences/Learning Outcomes**

- To recognize the religious origin of the festivals.
- To understand and interpret festival of joy in its own particular way.
- To identify and analyze different customs related to the feast and explain their meaning.
- To describe rituals of the festivals.
- To be able to share traditions and origins of a particular feast with people from different culture
- To understand the concept of time and the distribution of holidays throughout the year, in order to establish a connection between time, the liturgical calendar, and the church festivals.
- To comprehend that the Orthodox Church's celebrations provide time with an unbroken unity of the past, present, and future, making the Church timeless and eternal.
- To recognize the responsibility of Christians for preserving the festivals and the benefits they offer to people.

### **Grade Level / Age**

8-10 / 14-15

### **Duration**

90 min



## Preparation

- Acquire a box filled with materials related to the feast and bring it to class; pictures, magazines, flyers etc.
- Bring materials for designing a poster; papers, scissors, glue etc.

## Step-by-step description

- Inform students about the task to introduce a feast from their own religion/worldview at the Encounter Day.
- Arrange students to sit in a circle.
- Read the text (M1) about the selected feast and ask students to share their personal experiences on this feast.
- Explain that with this lesson they will explore the different aspects on the feast and write down the categories *music, food, customs, facts about the feast* on the blackboard.
- Divide the participants into 4 groups of 4-5 students to research and work together about the category that they will choose.
- Ask each group to choose one of the categories.
- Distribute the info & task cards (M2) and checklist (M3) to each group.
- Ask students to work on their task in the card by using the materials. Provide sources (such as books, glossaries, online sources, etc.) for the students to search for information, pictures, songs, etc.
- Ask students to illustrate the poster with suitable pictures. (M4)
- Remind each group to use the checklist to help them with the presentation of their results.
- Ask students to hang up their posters and make a presentation about their results.

## Tips for teachers

- This lesson structure can be used for other religious festivals. So feel free to convert this lesson plan to any other content.
- If the „Feast of Joy“ topic will be designed as lesson series it would be useful to create a calendar of religious holidays (M5) for the classroom that show all the important religious festivals at a glance, so that the students will remember them. Feel free to update this calendar by adding other religious festival.
- The texts in the lesson plan aims to work as a starting point for students to think about the subject. They also work as a base for students presentation for Encounter Day.
- Remember to guide students throughout the process.





Learning in Encounter for Common Values in Diversity

- Please note that some customs, songs and explanations represent Greek way of celebration. If you are from other Orthodox traditions feel free to add your own songs, customs etc.



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## Materials

### [M1] General Info Text

#### General Info Text about Christmas

One of the most important feasts in Christianity: On the 25th December, the nativity of Jesus Christ by Virgin Mary in a stable in Bethlehem is celebrated. At that time, 2000 years ago, the king of Judea was Herod, and, the emperor of Rome was Octavian Augustus, who had ordered a population census of the citizens of the Roman empire. Therefore, Joseph took Mary who expecting a child and they went from Nazareth, where they lived, to Bethlehem for the census. There Mary gave birth to Jesus, in a stable. After the birth of Jesus, an angel appeared to the shepherds of the region, announcing the joyous event, while other angels sang "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace and glory to the people". While this was going on, a bright star in the sky, led three Magi (Melchior, Gaspar, Belshazzar) from the East to Bethlehem to worship the newborn Jesus Christ, offering him gold, incense, and smyrna (myrrh).

Christmas means the time starting on 24th December and lasting for 15 days till the celebration of St John the Baptist on 7th January, which follows the Epiphany of Jesus Christ.

The Christmas Lent (fasting time) lasts for forty days, beginning on 14th November.

### [M2] Infotexts about facts, customs, food, and music with recipes and songs

#### Facts about Christmas

- *Read the info text and underline the most important information.*
- *Use this information and any other information from books, glossaries and online sources.*
- *Design your poster.*

Christmas is the whole festive fortnight which begins from Christmas Eve, on 24th December to the feast of St. John the Baptist on 7th January. On the 25th December, the Nativity of Jesus Christ is celebrated.

What is important for the Christians is the value of the Nativity as a "sign" of the arrival of the Messiah who came on Earth to save the people from their sins, fulfilling the prophecies of the Old Testament. The story is described in the Gospels in Luke 2,1-20 and Mathew 2,1-12.

Jesus Christ was born by Virgin Mary in Bethlehem in Judea. At that time, the king of Judea was Herod, and, the emperor of Rome was Octavian Augustus, who had ordered a population census of the citizens of the Roman empire. Therefore, Joseph took the Mary who expecting a child and they went from Nazareth, where they lived, to Bethlehem for the census. There Mary gave birth to Jesus, in a stable. After the birth of Jesus, an angel appeared to the shepherds of the region, announcing the joyous event, and the shepherds went to the stable to worship the newborn Jesus. In heaven,



other angels sang "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace and joy to the people". While this was going on, a bright star in the sky led three Magi (Melchior, Gaspar, Belshazzar) from the East to Bethlehem. There, they worshipped the newborn Jesus Christ, offering him gold, incense and myrra (myrrh).

The Christmas liturgy is sung in churches early in the morning, at dawn and all the songs sang in it glorify his Nativity and incarnation. Christ is the Light that comes from the East, that's why during Christmas we have lights in the streets and in our homes.

Christmas is also called „The Metropolis of all the feasts“, „Feast of the Recreation“, „Epiphany“, „Birthday of Humanity“.

### How do Christian families celebrate Christmas?

- *Read the info text and underline the most important information.*
- *Use this information and any other information from books, glossaries and online sources.*
- *Design your poster.*

Christmas is the most celebrated feast of the year and is a holiday in many countries.

#### Customs - Folklore

In general, the customs of the "Christmas holidays" come from a combination of religious (Christian and early Christian) and folk traditions that are celebrated mainly by Orthodox Christians. Each country has its own particular Christmas customs. The most common is the gathering of all the members of the family in one house to celebrate Christmas Eve together.

An important custom at Christmas is the exchange of presents on Christmas Eve. The presents are placed, the day before, under the Christmas Tree and given to everybody (children, parents, relatives, and other guests) on the morning of Christmas Day on 25th December.

In the villages, the Christmas feast was characterised by the constant lighting of the fire (for the whole period from 24 Dec to 7 Jan) which had a deterrent character against goblins and evil spirits.

#### Christmas decoration

The main customs in the decorations are the adornment of the Christmas tree (the power of the tree's growth symbolizes hope). Under the Christmas tree, usually a miniature replica depiction of the Nativity Scene with Jesus, Mary, Josef, the shepherds, the Magi and the animals (cow, donkey, sheep) is placed. Other decorations are the representations of the Nativity scene in Churches, streets or squares, shops, the Christmas boat (a Greek custom related to the Greeks' preoccupation with the sea, but also an ecclesiastical reference, as the Church is often symbolized by a ship), the Alexandrian garden plant with the red leaves and lights or known as the Star of Bethlehem (symbolizing the Light which is Jesus).



## Food at Christmas

- *Read the info text and underline the most important information.*
- *Use this information and visuals for your poster design. Create a recipe book using the recipes.*

Before Christmas, in the Orthodox Church there is a 40-day fasting period, the Lent of Christmas or Little Lent.

During the Christmas period, special foods and sweets are prepared (and consumed).

**Christ bread (Christopsomo)** is called the bread (loaf) or kouloura which is prepared 2-3 days before Christmas especially for this great religious feast. The only difference with the other common breads is its rich decoration.

Melomakarono is a dessert made from flour, semolina, oil, orange juice, and honey. It is one of the traditional national sweets that are considered essential, especially during the Christmas period. The typical ingredients of melomakaron are flour and semolina, sugar, sugar, orange zest or orange juice, cinnamon and other flavourings, oil, honey, and water. The English name for the melomakarono is 'small honey cake'.

Kurabies is a typical dessert widely spread throughout Greece and Cyprus, which is classified among the traditional sweets, such as melomakarono, and is usually prepared at Christmas. Its name comes from the Persian Qurabiye, which means biscuit, a sweet made of flour, butter, and icing sugar.

A prominent place at the festive table is occupied by pork (alternatively by goat or lamb). In many countries, today the festive table is occupied by a stuffed turkey.

## Music at Christmas Festival

- *Read the info text and underline the most important information.*
- *Use this information and visuals for your poster design. Create song booklet with the help of the song lyrics.*

### Christmas music and songs

Music is part of the Christmas celebration. So there is a lot of singing.

Children sing Christmas carols which are considered important customs during the Christmas holidays and are very popular to every country. The carols are popular blessing and laudatory songs sung every year, mainly on the morning of the Christmas Eve. The carols begin mainly with a greeting, then they announce the great Christian feast that arrives and end with blessings. Their language is a combination of modern and old one with local idioms and their origin comes from the Byzantine times.

During the Christmas Liturgy (Mass), Christmas ecclesiastic songs are sung by the church choir and the congregation.





Links:

### **Apolytikio**

Your Birth Christ our Lord

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sDnXb2R2BiU>

### **Kontakio**

Today Virgin Mary

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=irU7fzu3bSA>

The morning of the day of the Christmas Eve, the children sing the Christmas carols from house to house and are treated. These carols convey the message of the birth of Jesus to every home as their verses say details of the Nativity and the breeding of the baby Jesus.

### **Traditional Christmas carols**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nSnhvgsTa04> (in Greece)

The best-known songs include the Christmas carols and some other children songs from other countries songs translated into the language of another country. Such songs are : "Silent Night", "O Christmas tree", „The little drummer boy“, „Jingle Bells“, etc.

Link to the songs:

### **Silent Night**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TuyroRHlcBE>

### **Oh Christmas tree**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IS4wTuvR7Ik>

### **The little drummer boy**




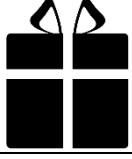
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R6vGGKchcdQ>

### **Jingle bells**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hvMUEHHhHE4>



[M3] Checklist

Checklist Music		
<input type="checkbox"/>	What is the significance of music?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	What are the songs?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	When to sing these songs?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	What are the songs about?	
Checklist Facts		
<input type="checkbox"/>	When will the feast be celebrated?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	How long will the feast be celebrated?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	What does the name of the feast mean?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Why is the feast celebrated?	
Checklist Food		
<input type="checkbox"/>	What is eaten at the feast?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Why is this food eaten?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	How is the food prepared?	
Checklist Traditions		
<input type="checkbox"/>	What are the traditions?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Why do these traditions exist?	
<input type="checkbox"/>	How does the feast day work?	



[M4] Image Materials

1



2



3



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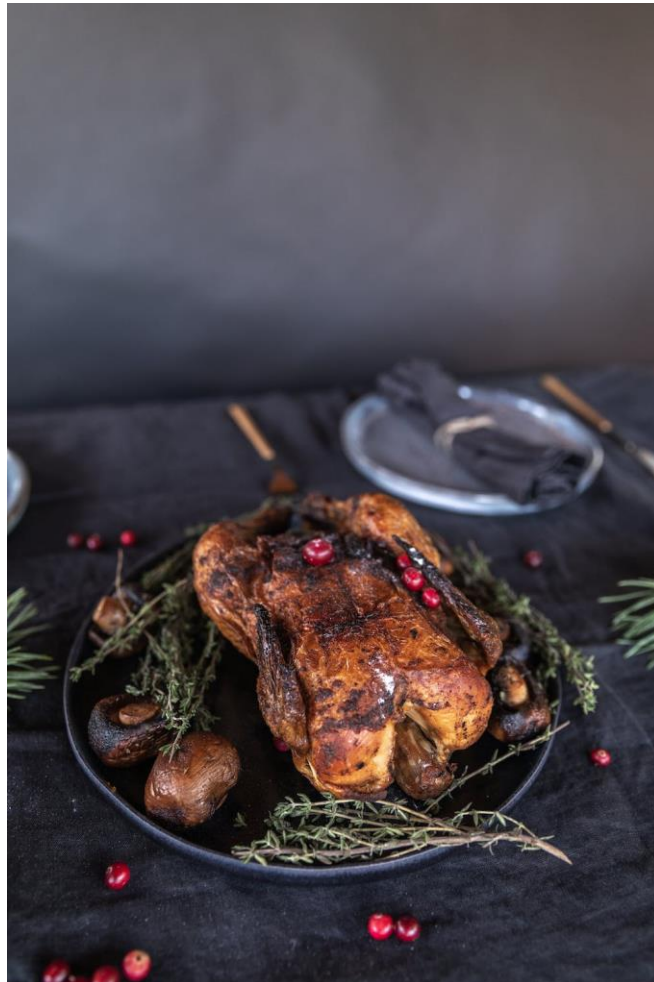
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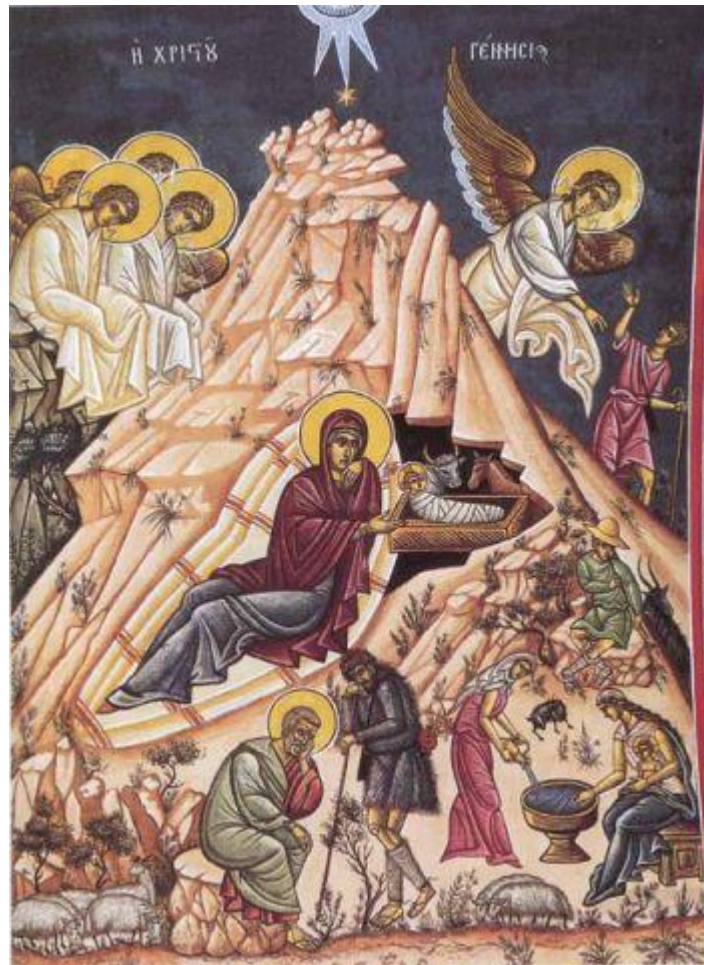


6



7







## [M5] Festival Calendar

Name of the Feast	Description	Date
Nativity / Christmas	<p>One of the most important feasts in Christianity. On the 25th December, is celebrated the nativity of Jesus Christ by Virgin Mary in a stable in Bethlehem.</p> <p>With the word Christmas is meant the time starting on 24th December and lasts for 15 days till the celebration of St John the Baptist on 7th January, which follows the Epiphany of Jesus Christ.</p> <p>The Christmas Lent (fasting time) lasts for forty days, beginning on 14th November.</p>	25 <sup>th</sup> December
Epiphany (Theofania)	<p>Epiphany is a great Christian feast celebrated on the 6th January. The Feast commemorates the Baptism of Christ by St John the Baptist and the revelation of the Holy Trinity, because that moment, all three Persons of the Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—were made manifest. Thus, the name of the Feast is Epiphany, meaning manifestation or Theophany of God.</p> <p>The Biblical story of the Baptism of Christ is recorded in all four of the Gospels: Matthew 3, Mark 1:1-9, Luke 3:21-22, and John 1:31-34.</p>	6 <sup>th</sup> January
Annunciation (Evangelismos)	<p>The word Annunciation refers to the joyful message that the archangel Gabriel gave to Mary, that she would give birth to the Son of God, Jesus Christ. The Annunciation as a feast is celebrated on March 25 in commemoration of this event.</p> <p>According to Luke the Evangelist, the event of the Annunciation took place in Nazareth, The Biblical story of the Annunciation is recorded in the Gospels of: Luke 1,26-38 and Mathew 1,19-24</p>	25 <sup>th</sup> March





<p>Clear Monday (Kathari Deftera)</p>	<p>Clean Monday, for the Orthodox Church, begins the fasting of Great Lent. It is celebrated 48 days before the Sunday of Christ's Resurrection, the Christian Easter. It is called Clean Monday because Christians are "cleansed" (purified) spiritually and physically. It is a day of fasting but also a holiday for the Orthodox Christians. The fasting lasts for 40 days, the same number of days that Christ fasted in the desert. On Clean Monday, according to tradition, Orthodox Christians eat lagana (unleavened bread made only on this day), and other fasting foods such as taramas, vegetables, halvah, seafood, olives and bean shoup without oil.</p>	<p>30 March</p>
<p>Transfiguration (Metamofrosis)</p>	<p>The Feast of the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ is celebrated each year on August 6th. The feast commemorates the transfiguration or metamorphosis of Christ on Mount Tabor, when he appeared in glory before his Disciples: Peter, Jacob and John. His face glowed like the sun and his clothes became as white as snow. The disciples were for a moment able to see the divine glory pouring out from within Christ. With his transfiguration Jesus Christ wanted to give His disciples, and the whole world a message. The Biblical story of the Transfiguration of Christ is recorded in the Gospels of: Matthew 17:1-9, Mark 9:2-8, and Luke 9:28-36.</p>	<p>1 and 2 April</p>



<p>Easter (Pascha)</p>	<p>Easter or Pascha is the most important feast in the Church. On Easter the Orthodox Christians celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ after three days in the tomb. Thus, in Pascha is celebrated the defeat of the death. Christ with His Resurrection, demolished the kingdom of Death (Hades) and offers to the Christins the eternal life. Easter is a movable feast (and the core of all movable feasts), i.e. it is not celebrated on the same date every year; an astronomical calculation is required in order to determine the exact date of the feast. Easter is celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the spring equinox (as it was established by the First Ecumenical Council of Nicea in 325 AD, with a special rule, the <i>Paschalis Canon</i>).</p>	<p>40 days after Clear Monday</p>
<p>Ascension (Analipsi)</p>	<p>The Ascension of Jesus in heaven is the Christian teaching that Jesus departed from Earth and ascended into heaven in the presence of his eleven apostles. According to the New Testament narrative, the Ascension took place forty days after the resurrection. Jesus led the eleven remaining disciples to Bethany, a village on the Mount of Olives, and told them to remain in Jerusalem and wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit. He then walked away from the disciples in front of them, a cloud hid him, and two men in white appeared to tell them that he would return "in the same way you saw him depart to heaven." The Biblical story of the Ascension of Christ is recorded in the Acts 1,3-11</p>	<p>May</p>



<p>Pentecost (Pentikosti)</p>	<p>The Feast of Holy Pentecost is celebrated each year on the fiftieth day after Easter Sunday (Pascha) and ten days after the Feast of the Ascension of Christ. The Feast is always celebrated on a Sunday. The Feast commemorates the descending of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, as flames, on the day of Pentecost, which was a feast of the Jewish tradition. It also celebrates the establishment of the Church through the preaching of the Apostles and the baptism of the thousands who on that day believed in the Gospel message of salvation through Jesus Christ. The story is described in Acts 2:1-4</p>	<p>7 October</p>
<p>All Saint's Day (Agion Panton)</p>	<p>The Church dedicates every day of the year to the memory of a saint or a few saints together. But to the memory of all the saints (unknown and anonymous), the Church dedicates the first Sunday after Pentecost, called all Saint's Day.</p>	<p>1 November</p>
<p>Holy Spirit (Agion Pnevma)</p>	<p>It is celebrated on the next day of Pentecost, Monday. The Church celebrates the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity. According to the New Testament, 10 days after the Ascension and 50 days after Easter, the 12 disciples were gathered in a house located in Jerusalem. A loud thunder suddenly sounded in the sky and 12 tongues that looked like fire descended into the house and stood over the heads of the disciples. The epiphany of the Holy Spirit fulfilled the promise Jesus had made to his disciples before his Ascension. The story is described in Acts 1:13-15; 2:1-41</p>	<p>50 days after Easter</p>



<p>Dormition of Virgin Mary (Kimisi Theotokou)</p>	<p>The Feast of the Dormition of Virgin Mary (Theotokos) is celebrated on August 15th every by all the Christians. The Feast commemorates the repose (dormition and in the Greek <i>kimisis</i>) of the Mother of Jesus Christ. She was buried in the village of Gethimani. The Feast also commemorates her Metastasis to heaven after three days in the tomb.</p>	<p>15<sup>th</sup> August</p>
<p>Nativity of Virgin Mary</p>	<p>The Nativity of the Virgin Mary is a Christian feast that refers to the birth of the Virgin Mary. It is celebrated on 8<sup>th</sup> September. According to Luke the Evangelist, the event of the Annunciation took place in Nazareth. The first known reference to her birth is found in the first chapter of the Gospel of James (known as Protevangelio), an apocryphal text from the late second century. From this text we know the names of her parents: Joachim and Anna.</p>	<p>21<sup>st</sup> September</p>



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