

Lesson 5

The Feasts of Mary



Pray Together

Hanoon Hor, yev Vortvo, yev Hokvooyn Surpo, Amen.

Dear Mary, Mother of God, you who are like a miraculous flower bearing the sweet smell of eternal life, fill us with obedience and love of God. Amen.

Adapted from "Oh, Miraculous Flower," the Armenian hymn of Assumption

Quick Quiz

Mark the correct answer.

1. In Jesus' time, crucifixions were public because

- a there were no prisons b the authorities were afraid of being sued
c as a public example d those occasions were feasts days

2. Jesus endured the cross for all the following reasons except

- a the punishment had to be big enough to cover all our sins b he loves us
c God told Adam and Eve this was going to happen
d he voluntarily paid the penalty for our sins

3. When Jesus said "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow me," he meant

- a only those who are killed in his name can be saved
b we are to model his attitude of service and sacrifice
c all believers must make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem
d we have to be suffering and unhappy to be Christians

4. _____ is used to decorate the cross during the Feast of the Exaltation

- a sweet basil b bitter herbs c rosemary d wheat

5. The Holy Cross of Varak appeared during

- a the First World War b World War II
c the Russian Revolution d the wars between Persia and Byzantium

God's Wonderful Choice

God knew he could only entrust his Son to a very special mother. Mary's purity and devotion to him made her the perfect mother for our blessed Savior.

1. What are some of the qualities that make a good mother?
2. How has the role of motherhood changed since the time of Christ?
3. How do you think modern society views motherhood?

Unswerving Faith and Obedience

Mary, the only child of Joachim and Anna, was raised on the teachings of the Old Testament. Her parents were so grateful to God for her birth, that they gave her to service in the Temple of Jerusalem when she was a little girl. As she grew, so did her love for the law of God and the writings of the prophets. As was the custom, at the appropriate age, an engagement was arranged between Mary and Joseph.

All was progressing normally, when one day an angel came to Mary. He told her she was much favored by God, and she would give birth to a son who would be the Savior of the world. Since Mary had not even so much as held a man's hand, she asked the angel how this was possible. He answered that the child would come from the Holy Spirit. Though very confused and afraid, Mary said "I am the Lord's servant. May it be as you have said." (Luke 1:38)

Without a doubt this was to be a very unusual birth. Modern believers, however, might not understand the real danger Mary faced. In those times, if an unmarried woman was found to be pregnant, she was frequently dragged outside the town and stoned to death. Mary understood this perfectly well; nevertheless she was prepared to sacrifice all to carry out the will of the God she loved.

Joseph, the young man pledged to marry Mary, played an important part in the event. Instead of handing Mary over for public ridicule and likely stoning, he decided to quietly end the engagement so no one would know she was having a baby out of wedlock. An angel then appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife (Matthew 1:18-21). He obeyed God's will, remained with Mary, and together they cared for the young Jesus.

Mary's perfect obedience and Joseph's kindness are an example for us, too. Many times we know what is right, but we don't act on it because it might be difficult. Even though Mary and Joseph faced serious consequences because of the miraculous pregnancy, they never hesitated in doing what God asked.



Did You Know?

Armenians love the Virgin Mary very much and many Armenian names for girls such as Mariam, Vartouhi (Rose), Markarit, (Pearl), Azniv, Lusin, Vergin, Sirarpi, Srpouhi, Aroosiag, Takouhi, Lousaper, Diroohi, and Zevart are directly connected to the name Mary or to attributes of Jesus' mother.

Where Do You Stand?

Line up at the back of the room. Look at the following statements. If you agree with them, stand still. If you totally disagree, take a step forward.

If you are babysitting your little cousin, it is okay to have a friend come over to keep you company. Discuss.

You are out shopping and one of your friends takes something without paying for it. It's better not to say anything to the store manager. Discuss.

You aren't sick, but you really don't want to go to school. It's okay to tell your parents you don't feel well so you can stay home. Discuss.

Everyone is talking about someone you know who supposedly did something awful at a party last weekend. It's fine to stay and listen. Discuss.

Your older brother/sister came in last night after drinking. You don't say anything to your parents. Discuss.

You don't like what your mom/dad packed for your lunch today, so you throw it out and buy something else. Discuss.



What's Happening?

Read the following Scripture verses. In the space provided, tell what event in Mary's life is described.

Luke 1:46-55 _____

Luke 2:34-35 _____

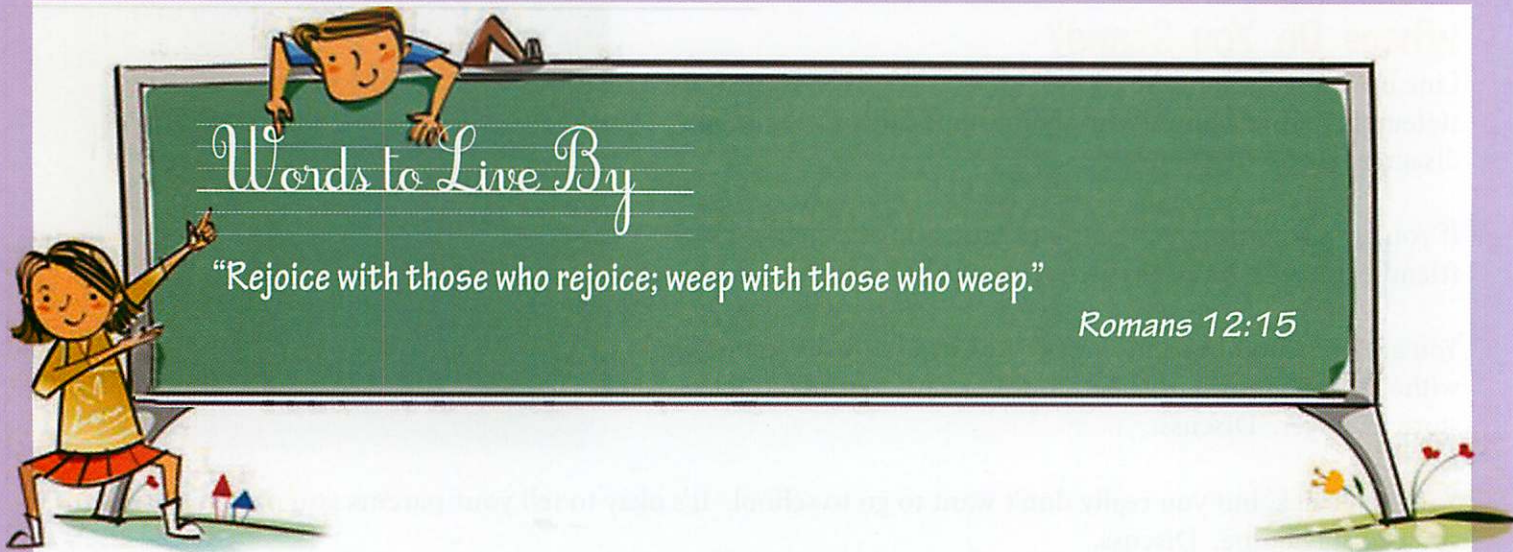
Luke 2:6-7 _____

Luke 2:41-49 _____

Luke 8:19-21 _____

John 2:1-11 _____

John 19:25-27 _____



Our Armenian Way

The founders of our church inspired our love and veneration of the Holy Virgin Mary. Chosen by God, Mary sets the standard for true discipleship which is founded on faith and response in action. Through her, by the Holy Spirit, God became a human being. One of our Tabernacle Feasts, the Assumption, celebrates Mary's welcome into heaven.

After Mary witnessed the Crucifixion of her Son Jesus, she lived in Jerusalem for the remainder of her life. She lived about fifteen years after that tragic and necessary event until she at last left her earthly life. One of the disciples, most likely Bartholomew, was away from Jerusalem at the time of her burial.

When Bartholomew returned, he was informed of Mary's death. Having missed the funeral, Bartholomew insisted that he be allowed to see the Mother of God one last time. He and the other disciples had her grave opened. Mary's body, however, was gone! She had been taken up into heaven to rejoice with her Son. We call the Feast of the Assumption "Verapokhoom," which means "taken up," in recognition of the miraculous way Mary's body was removed to heaven.

We celebrate the Assumption in August with the Blessing of the Grapes. In the Old Testament, grapes are frequently offered to God as the first fruits of the harvest. Jesus, the first fruit of Mary, was offered to God for our sins. Seedless grapes are generally used in this blessing to signify that God became incarnate without a human father.



Note to the Teacher

This lesson is best taught in September, on the Exaltation (or as soon after as possible if your Sunday School opens later). In advance of the session, obtain permission to set up a box to collect non-perishable food for the needy, as well as to put up a few signs in the building about the food collection. It's a *great* way to start the school year!

Procedure

1. Welcome the students and stand to say the opening prayer together. Have them take the **Quick Quiz**.
Answers: F (the Virgin Mary did not accompany the women when they went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body; Mary Magdalene and others went), T, T, F (Daniel was a famous prophet), F (the Vigil Service is not on Palm Sunday. It is the Thursday evening service, a "vigil" recalling the agonizing hours leading to Jesus' crucifixion) 5 min.
2. Read **Our Symbol of Victory** and **Friends of Jesus**. Discuss questions as a class. Guidelines:
1. Answers might include time, possessions, loving company, our talents and skills (which can be further discussed). 2. By granting us strength, patience, understanding, a desire to help and serve. 3. Words of encouragement and support, kindness, etc. are all echoes of Christ's love for us. 4. Many: problems between friends or family members, world issues of poverty, war, human rights. 5. Humbly and quietly – God is the only important witness! 20 min.
3. Review the information in **Exaltation of the Cross**. Tell the students that they are going to collect food as a way of serving Jesus and answering the true call of the cross. Have the class decorate the box with the wrapping paper or other materials. Post a sign on the box: "The Exaltation of the Holy Cross – Khachveratz. Jesus Calls Us to Share Our Abundance!" Have them tape on crosses adorned with basil. Have the students make and put up a few signs telling where the box is and what foods should be deposited (no glass, perishables, etc.). When the box is filled, arrange for its delivery to a homeless shelter or soup kitchen. 30 min.
4. Read or teach **Our Armenian Way**, calling on students to provide two facts from memory before concluding with a prayer: "Lord, thank you for the saving power of your holy cross. Let it be more than an empty symbol for us. Help us serve as you did, Lord, selflessly and with great love." Dismiss the class. 5 min.

Unit Two: Sacred Time – The Church Year

Lesson 5

The Feasts of Mary

Key Concepts

1. Mary and Joseph were wonderful examples of faithfulness and obedience.
2. Mary is revered as the first saint and Mother of God.
3. Mary's body went to heaven through a miracle called the Assumption.
4. We recall Mary's bearing of the first fruit of God, the Lord Jesus, by blessing grapes, which had an important part in the harvest from Old Testament times.

Objectives

During the session the students will

1. Contribute to a class discussion about motherhood.
2. Read about the faith and obedience of Mary and Joseph and retell their story.
3. Participate in a values-defining exercise and discussion.
4. Look up Scripture verses about Mary's life and identify the event they describe.
5. Review the story of the Assumption of Mary and the way our church celebrates it.

Materials Needed

Pencils/pens

Procedure

1. Welcome the students and stand to say the opening prayer together. Have them take the **Quick Quiz**.
Answers: 1. c, 2. c, 3. b, 4. a, 5. d 5 min.
2. Read **God's Wonderful Choice**. Discuss questions. Guidelines: 1. Love, energy, compassion, intelligence, considerateness, emotional and mental vigor, etc. 2. More contribution to parenting by father, easier caretaking via technology, but more isolation as a parent, loss of extended family 3. Societies always seem to value motherhood although there have been shifts, at times less valued. 10 min.
3. Read **Unswerving Faith and Obedience**. Conclude with: "There is a very important and powerful lesson in this story for all of us – about following God no matter what the circumstances. Let's take a moment to remember it well." Have students retell the story by building it sentence by sentence in turns. If anything important has been left out, prompt the next student. 10 min.
4. "We don't have angels or voices prompting us so dramatically anymore - that ended with Jesus' appearance in our history. But we usually *do* know what to do. Let's talk about how Mary and Joseph's decisions pop up in our own daily lives." Have the class line up at the back of the room. Tell them "I will read each of the statements that appear in your book. If you agree with them, stand still. If you disagree, take a step forward." Read from **Where Do You Stand?** and discuss each one and see what happens! This will be an interesting way of having them think about certain situations they may encounter. 15 min.
5. Have the students read the Bible verses in **What's Happening?** and answer the questions. They may work alone, in pairs, or in whatever size groups you choose. The responses are: Mary's song after hearing she would be Jesus' mother, prediction from Simeon, birth of Jesus, Jesus is missing after the Passover, Jesus calls believers his mother and brothers, miracle at Cana, placing Mary in disciple's care at Crucifixion. 15 min.
6. Teach **Our Armenian Way** directing students to important words or phrases in the text. Ask for volunteers to complete the sentence (you can write it on the board): "I learned that....." Conclude with prayer and dismiss class. 5 min.