



THEOTOKOS JUNIOR ACADEMY



TJA FAMILY NEWSLETTER

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THIS MONTH'S REFLECTION

Meeting Christ in the Gospel of St. Luke

*"For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior,
who is Christ the Lord."*

LUKE 2:11

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THIS MONTH'S REFLECTION • FOR PARENTS AND STUDENTS

Meeting Christ in the Gospel of St. Luke

*The Savior who came looking for us**"For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."*

LUKE 2:11

Before he ever wrote a line, St. Luke was a doctor. St. Paul calls him "the beloved physician" (Colossians 4:14). You can hear the doctor in the way he writes: he asks questions, he listens to eyewitnesses, and he goes back over "all things from the very first" and sets them down in order, one careful line after another, so that we who never walked the roads of Galilee, who never heard His voice or saw His face, may still "know the certainty" of what we were taught (Luke 1:3-4). That is his gift to us. This year our students have been meeting, chapter by chapter, the One who "has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Here is Christ as St. Luke paints Him.

FOUR PORTRAITS OF CHRIST IN ST. LUKE

I The Savior of Every Nation*Luke 2:25-32; 3:23-38*

St. Matthew begins the Lord's family tree with Abraham. St. Luke runs it backward, all the way to Adam (3:38), so that every reader finds a place in that line. Simeon calls the Child "a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles" (2:32). St. Luke was one of those Gentiles. So are most of us.

II The Physician of Souls*Luke 5:27-32; 15:1-32*

When the Pharisees complained that He ate with sinners, He answered like a doctor: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick" (5:31). Read chapter 15 with your children. A shepherd leaves ninety-nine for one sheep. A woman sweeps for one coin. A father runs for one son.

III The Teacher of Prayer*Luke 3:21; 6:12; 11:1-4; 23:34*

No Evangelist shows the Lord at prayer as often as St. Luke does: at His baptism, all night before choosing the Twelve, and on the Cross, "Father, forgive them" (23:34). The disciples watched and asked, "Lord, teach us to pray" (11:1). The Church still prays in his words: Simeon's song, which only St. Luke records, is the Gospel of the Twelfth Hour in the Agpeya.

IV The Friend of the Overlooked*Luke 2:19; 7:11-17; 18:15-17*

St. Luke has a physician's eye for the patient in the corner: the widow of Nain behind her only son's coffin, the little children the Lord calls to Himself, and the Theotokos, who "kept all these things and pondered them in her heart" (2:19). She teaches us to listen.

Bringing St. Luke Home

- ◆ Read a chapter together each week, then ask: *What did Christ do here?*
- ◆ At bedtime, pray Simeon's words: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace" (Luke 2:29).
- ◆ Notice the child who sits alone, and be the one who sees him.
- ◆ Go to Confession this month; the Physician is waiting for you.

A PRAYER FOR OUR FAMILIES

O Lord Jesus Christ, Physician of our souls, walk with our families as You walked with Your disciples on the road to Emmaus, open our eyes as You opened theirs, and make our homes places of prayer. Amen.

At Emmaus, two tired disciples finally recognize the risen Lord, for "He was known to them in the breaking of bread" (24:35), and He waits for us at that same Table in every Divine Liturgy. Bring the children with you, and come early. He is there.



A NOTE FOR PARENTS

What Is Christian Apologetics?

Why we are teaching our middle and high school students to give an answer, and why it matters more now than it did when we were their age.

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear."

1 Peter 3:15

The Word Behind the Work

APOLOGETICS COMES from the Greek word ἀπολογία (*apologia*). It is the word St. Peter uses in the verse above, and it has nothing to do with apologizing. It means an answer: a reasoned account of what we believe and why we believe it, given to whoever asks.

That is all it is; not arguing, and not winning. When a child learns to explain his or her faith clearly and kindly, that child is doing what the Church has asked of every believer since the first century.

Why We Are Teaching It Now

Because the questions have already arrived.

Our children are asked things we were never asked at their age, and they are asked far younger, often by classmates who mean no harm at all and simply want to know why anyone still believes. Is there a God? Why do you believe a book that old? Why do you fast? Why does your church have icons? Who is the Theotokos, and why do you honor her? In most classrooms our student is the only Coptic Orthodox child in the room, and those questions do not politely wait until he or she feels ready to take them.

Your son or daughter will answer something. The only question is whether anyone taught them first.

Here is what worries us more than any argument. Young people rarely leave the faith because someone defeated them in a debate. They leave quietly, over years, because a question sat inside them and no one ever showed them that the Church had an answer. A question that is welcomed becomes conviction. A question that is brushed aside becomes distance.

Silence is never neutral.

None of this is new. St. Paul stood in the middle of the Areopagus and reasoned with the philosophers of Athens on their own ground (Acts 17:22-23); the believers at Berea were praised for the opposite of blind acceptance, because they searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so (Acts 17:11); and St. Justin Martyr thought the faith reasonable enough to address his defense of it to the emperor himself. Apologetics is not a modern reaction to a hostile culture. It is one of the oldest habits of Christian life.

And most of what our students learn this year they will end up using on themselves, because doubt does not always arrive in an argument with a classmate. Sometimes it arrives at midnight, quietly, in their own thoughts. A young person who knows why the Church confesses the Resurrection has something to hold on to when the night is hard. That is the real aim of this program: not clever answers, but a steadier faith.

One last thing, and we consider it part of the lesson rather than a footnote to it. St. Peter did not stop with the words *give a defense*. He added *with meekness and fear*. A student who wins the argument and loses the friend has misunderstood the assignment. We are asking our children to be right and kind in the same breath, which is harder than being either one alone.

But Does This Not Invite Doubt?

Some of you will read this and feel uneasy. If we teach a child to examine what he or she believes, are we not handing over the tools to walk away from it? That is a fair worry, and we have thought about it carefully rather than waving it off.



The examination is going to happen either way. The only question is whether it happens with us or without us. A faith that has never been tested is not stronger for it, only untested, and untested things tend to break at the worst possible moment. What we are trying to build is not a son or daughter who can win a debate at fifteen.

It is an adult at thirty who has already been through the hard questions and stayed.

Faith is a gift from God, and no argument has ever produced it. We know that well. But God has always taught His people, and He gave us minds along with hearts. Reason does not replace prayer, confession, the Eucharist, or the life of the Church. It clears the road.

Voices of the Church Fathers

Two lines our High School students will meet this year.

"You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in You."

St. Augustine, Confessions 1.1

"Whatever things were rightly said among all men are the property of us Christians."

St. Justin Martyr, Second Apology 13

What Your Child Will Be Doing This Year

- One honest question at a time: what Christianity is, how we know it is true, and who the Lord Jesus Christ is. Every section begins in Scripture.
- *Middle School*: clear lessons, a memory verse for each section, a student workbook, and two things to practice during the week.
- *High School*: the same ground in greater depth, with the Church Fathers, key terms in the original Greek, and an honest account of what each argument proves and what it does not.

How You Can Help at Home

- Ask what question the class answered this week, and let your son or daughter teach it back to you (Deuteronomy 6:7).
- Let the hard questions be asked at your own table. A question asked at home is one fewer question answered by a stranger.
- Say "I do not know; let us find out together" when you do not know. Children trust a parent who looks things up more than one who never hesitates.
- Pray together before the study, and let them see you reading the Scriptures.

What Apologetics Is Not

- *It is not winning.* The goal is a person, not a scoreboard. An argument won at the cost of a friendship costs more than it gains.
- *It is not a replacement for prayer and the sacraments.* Reason clears the road. Grace does the work.
- *It is not certainty on demand.* "I do not know yet" is an honest answer, and we teach our students to say it without embarrassment.

Our children do not need to have every answer. They need to know that the answers exist, that the Church has been giving them for two thousand years, and that no one here is afraid of the question.

**FROM OUR PARENTS AND SERVANTS**

What Parents and Servants Are Saying

Our families are scattered across countries and time zones, yet something real has grown around the weekly lessons, the live classes, and the priests and servants who serve them. Here is what three of our parents and servants told us.

A Parent in Queensland, Australia

"My three school-aged children are in the Bible Study and Apologetics programs. We have found the TJA presenters knowledgeable, Spirit-led, and clearly experienced in engaging both middle and high school students. My kids find the Google Classroom format familiar and easy to use, so the lessons feel like a real extension of their learning. The recordings are uploaded promptly, so even with the time difference my kids aren't missing out.

We received a very warm welcome to the Academy, and our questions are answered with great courtesy and speed. Most importantly, these programs give my children a meaningful way to deepen their faith and stay connected to the Church despite our current isolation."

Megan • Mother of three students • St. Mary & St. Moses, Bundaberg, Queensland, Australia

A Servant and Mother in Virginia

"I started serving with Theotokos Junior Academy last semester, which was the Academy's very first semester. We studied the Gospel of St. Luke, chapters 1 to 12, and now we are back to continue it. There are a lot of study materials on Google Classroom, along with our weekly live online class where each chapter is explained. We are blessed to have priests and servants who serve the live classes every week.

As a servant, I have learned so much myself from studying the Bible. I have also been encouraging parents to enroll their children in Theotokos Junior Academy. I am very grateful to be part of it."

Nancy • Servant and mother • St. Mary Coptic Orthodox Church, Virginia, USA

A Servant in Syracuse, New York

"As a servant with Theotokos Junior Academy, I am blessed to see the impact this ministry has on both the students and the servants. The students get engaged in the material and develop a deeper understanding of what they are reading, and they are able to apply it to their daily lives. As servants, we have grown through this experience too. Serving the elementary class has strengthened my own understanding of the Bible and has taught me that ministry can take many different forms.

Theotokos Junior Academy is a phenomenal resource for children with busy schedules. It gives them the flexibility to learn more about the faith at their own pace, while receiving support and guidance from multiple servants along the way. We invite families to take advantage of this wonderful opportunity to grow in their faith and become part of a supportive, Christ-centered community!"

Maria • Servant, elementary class, and pharmacy student • St. Mary & St. Mina Coptic Orthodox Church, Syracuse, New York, USA

Thank you to every parent who has trusted us with your children, and to every priest and servant who serves the live classes each week. If the Academy has been a blessing to your family, we would love to hear from you at TheotokosJunior@gmail.com.