

Spiritual Lessons on...

MARY: "THE THEOTOKOS AND MOTHER OF LIGHT"

To be presented to campers at the conclusion of morning prayers each of the weekdays of camp.

First Monday of Camp

Nativity of the Mother of God *Celebrated September 21*

OPEN WITH:

Who is the most important saint in the Church?

[Answer: Mary, the Mother of God.]

God wants every one of us to be totally dedicated to Him -- to saying, thinking and doing things that agree with His teachings, and to following His plan for us and our lives. For Christians, Mary, the Mother of God is the best example of a human being who is totally dedicated to God. At every service, we hear a call to follow Mary's example and to "commend ourselves, each other and all our life to Christ our God."

This week, we are going to look at the holy days of the Church year dedicated to Mary, the Mother of God. These holy days, or "feast days", teach us about her life and her place in God's plan for saving the world.

Today, we will begin with the feast of Mary's birth... a holy day that we call the "Nativity of the Mother of God". In Ukrainian we call it "*Rizdvo Bohorodytsi*".

REFLECTION:

Proverbs 9:1-11 (from Vespers)

Wisdom has built her spacious house with seven pillars. She has prepared a great banquet, mixed the wines, and set the table. She has sent her servants to invite everyone to come. She calls out from the heights overlooking the city. "Come home with me," she urges the simple. To those without good judgment, she says, "Come, eat my food, and drink the wine I have mixed. Leave your foolish ways behind, and begin to live; learn how to be wise."

Anyone who rebukes a mocker will get a smart retort. Anyone who rebukes the wicked will get hurt. So don't bother rebuking mockers; they will only hate you. But the wise, when rebuked, will love you all the more. Teach the wise, and they will be wiser. Teach the righteous, and they will learn more.

Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Knowledge of the Holy One results in understanding.

Wisdom will multiply your days and add years to your life.

ABOUT THE DAY:

The Church Year does not begin in January, but in September. The first major feast in the Church year is the Nativity of the Mary, the Mother of God. Besides remembering Mary's birth and her righteous parents, we also celebrate the first preparation of the salvation of the world.

The tradition of this feast teaches that Mary's parents, Joachim and Anna were a godly Jewish couple who were among the small and faithful remnant awaiting the promised Saviour. The couple was old and childless, and had prayed earnestly to the Lord for a child, since among the Jews, not being able to have a child was thought to be a sign of God's disfavor. In answer to their prayer, and as a reward for their strong faith in God, the elderly couple was blessed with the child who was destined, because of her own personal goodness and holiness, to become the Mother of the Messiah - Christ.

The feast of the Nativity of the Mother of God, therefore, is a glorification of the miracle of Mary's birth, of Mary herself, and of her righteous parents. It is the celebration as well of the very first preparation of the salvation of the world.

Tropar of the Feast (Tone 4)

Your nativity, O Virgin, has proclaimed joy to the whole universe! The Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, has shone on you, O Mother of God! By annulling the curse, He bestowed a blessing. By destroying death, He has granted us Eternal Life.

First Tuesday of Camp

The Entrance of the Mother of God into the Temple

Celebrated December 4th

OPEN WITH:

Our Orthodox church buildings are divided into three sections.

In the back is the Narthex. Although now this is usually a smaller area, in ancient times it was as large as the main body of the church building. In those days, anyone who was not a baptised Christian had to stay in the Narthex, and could not go any further into the church.

The main body of the Church is called the "Nave". It is where the faithful gather for the Divine services. The word "Nave" comes from the same word as "Navy"; it reminds us that the Church is like a ship... like Noah's Ark. The Church keeps us safe on the stormy seas of our fallen world.

At the front of the church, we have the Altar or Sanctuary. This is where the priest goes when we celebrate the divine services. The Sanctuary symbolises heaven; it is considered such a holy place, that only ordained clergy or laypeople with the blessing to carry out a specific purpose are allowed there.

In Mary's day, the Jewish house of worship called the Temple also had a special place called the "Holy of Holies", where only one priest (the high priest) could go... and he was allowed in there only once per year! One day, though, an amazing thing happened: Mary was taken into the Holy of Holies. We remember this day with a feast called the "Entrance of the Mother of God into the Temple. In Ukrainian this feast is known as "*Uvedennia v Khram Bohorodytsi*".

REFLECTION:

Hebrews 9:1-7 (from the Divine Liturgy)

Even the first covenant had directions about divine service and the earthly sanctuary. For a tabernacle was prepared: the first part, in which was the lampstand, the table, and the showbread, which is called the sanctuary; and behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance

ABOUT THE DAY:

Before Mary was born, her parents promised God that if He gave them a child, they would dedicated it to serving Him. When Mary was three years old, her parents took her to the Temple in Jerusalem to fulfill their promise. When she is taken into the Temple, the high priest took her into the most sacred part of the Temple, the Holy of Holies, where only he was supposed to go... and just once a year. A temple is a place where God dwells. Mary was taken into the Holy of Holies to show that she is to become the Living Temple of God, since she was to be the mother of the Saviour.

The feast of the Entrance of the Mother of God into the Temple celebrates the end of the physical temple in Jerusalem as the dwelling place of God. In this feast, we also celebrate that, like the Mother of God, we, too, are the house and temple of the Lord.

Tropar of the Feast (Tone 4)

Today is the prelude of the good will of God, of the preaching of the salvation of mankind. The Virgin appears in the Temple of God, In anticipation proclaiming Christ to all. Let us rejoice and sing to her: Rejoice, O Fulfillment of the Creator's dispensation!

First Wednesday of Camp

The Sobor (Synaxis) of the Mother of God

Celebrated January 8, the Day after Christmas

OPEN WITH:

How many people here know the song "The Twelve Days of Christmas"?

In the Orthodox Church, Christmas is not just a one-day celebration. The same as in the ancient times, we celebrated a Christmas season that lasts for 12 days, beginning with the Birth of Christ and ending with the Feast of Jordan, the Baptism of Christ. During this time, there are other holy days that we celebrate, as well. Today, we are going to talk about the "Second Day of Christmas"... a day that we call "The Sobor (or Synaxis) of the Mother of God"... or in Ukrainian "*Sobor Bohorodytsi*".

REFLECTION:

Isaiah 7:10-16 (From Vespers)

The Lord spoke again to King Ahaz, saying, "Ask for yourself a sign of the Lord your God [one that will convince you that God has spoken and will keep His word]; ask it either in the depth below or in the height above.

But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord."

And [Isaiah] said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it a small thing for you to weary and try the patience of men, but will you weary and try the patience of my God also?

Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign: Behold, the young woman who is unmarried and a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel [meaning, 'God with us'].

Butter and curds and wild honey shall he eat when he knows [enough] to refuse the evil and choose the good.

For before the child shall know [enough] to refuse the evil and choose the good."

ABOUT THE DAY:

The day after every great feast day, we celebrate the memory of someone connected to that feast. On January 8, the day after Christmas, we celebrate the memory of His Mother, the Ever-Virgin Mary. We have already seen how Mary had a very special childhood. This was all to prepare her

for her place in God's plan as the mother of the Saviour, for such a woman had to be someone of great dedication and holiness.

We call Mary the "Mother of God" or "Theotokos" (in Ukrainian the word is "*Bohorodytsia*"). This title for Mary has been used in the Church for almost one thousand four hundred years. It is taken from the Gospel of St. Luke in which Mary's cousin, Elizabeth, calls her the "Mother of my Lord". The title Theotokos/Bohorodytsia reminds us that the Child born of Mary was not just another human baby, but was God Himself, who had become man for us and for our salvation.

Kondak of the Nativity of Christ (Tone 3)

Today the Virgin gives birth to the transcendent One, and the earth offers a cave to the Unapproachable God! Angels, with shepherds, glorify Him! The wise men journey with the star! Since for our sake the Eternal God was born as a little child.

The First Thursday of Camp

The Annunciation of the Theotokos

Celebrated April 7th

OPEN WITH:

Everyone likes to get good news. One day, when Mary was a young woman, she received some amazing news... God had called on her to be the mother of the Saviour! This role was not forced on her, she chose to accept it. By freely accepting the place that God had for her in His plan for saving the world, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour came into the world. God kept His promise, and the salvation of the world was coming.

This holy day is called the "Annunciation of the Theotokos" in English and "*Blahovischiennia Bohorodytsi*" in Ukrainian.

REFLECTION:

Luke 1:26-38 (from the Divine Liturgy of the feast)

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, O Lady Full of Grace, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!"

But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since there is no father?"

And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible."

Then Mary said, "Behold, I am the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

ABOUT THE DAY:

On the Feast of the Annunciation, the Orthodox Church commemorates both what God has done for our salvation (sending us His Son), and also the human response to this: Mary freely accepted

the calling set before her to be the Mother of the Saviour. God always respects human free will, so when he chose to become man, He desired to do so with the willing agreement of the woman. He chose to be His mother. Mary was not a passive instrument, but an active participant, with a free and positive part to play in God's scheme of salvation.

In the services of the Church, Mary's doubts are set forth very clearly; we see her not understanding and even being embarrassed. This is done to make it clear that she acted in full freedom.

Tropar of the Feast (Tone 4)

Today is the beginning of our salvation, the revelation of the Eternal Mystery! The Son of God becomes the Son of the Virgin as Gabriel announces the coming of Grace. Together with him, let us cry to the Theotokos: Rejoice! Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you!

First Friday of Camp

The Dormition of the Theotokos

Celebrated on August 28

OPEN WITH:

Mary the Theotokos -- the Mother of God -- was a human being, just like you and me. Like all people, one day, her life came to an end. On the feast day called the "Dormition (or 'Falling Asleep') of the Mother of God" ... "*Uspinnia Bohorodytsi*" in Ukrainian, we remember the day that Mary died. Like her life, the Theotokos' death was unique, showing how Mary was truly highly favoured by God, just as it says in the Bible.

REFLECTION:

Luke 1:39-49,56 (from Matins for the Feast)

Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!"⁴³ But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?⁴⁴ For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.⁴⁵ Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord."

And Mary said:

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant;

For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.

For He who is mighty has done great things for me,

And holy is His name.

And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her house.

ABOUT THE DAY:

The Feast of the Dormition or Falling Asleep of the Mother of God commemorates her death, resurrection, and glorification. To help us in our preparation of the feast, it is preceded by a two week fast.

Following the day of Pentecost, Mary remained in the city of Jerusalem, comforting the new Christian community. At the time of her death (tradition states she was in her early fifties) many of the Apostles were scattered throughout the world preaching the Gospel. All but Thomas were miraculously brought to the Virgin aloft on clouds.

As they stood around her bedside, she commended her spirit to the Lord and Jesus descended from Heaven, taking up her soul in His arms.

The Apostle Thomas arrived on the third day and wished to see the Virgin for the last time. They discovered an empty tomb. Church tradition relates that the Theotokos was resurrected bodily and taken to heaven, the same reward that awaits all the righteous on the Last Day.

It is important to remember that there are no relics of the Theotokos. Their existence has never been mentioned throughout history.

Tropar of the Feast (Tone 1)

In giving birth, you preserved your virginity! In falling asleep you did not forsake the world, O Theotokos! You were translated to life, O Mother of Life, And by your prayers you deliver our souls from death!

Second Monday of Camp

Pokrova ¾ the Protecting Veil of the Mother of God

Celebrated October 14

OPEN WITH:

Last week, we saw how special the Theotokos' life was. We also learned of her important place in our salvation, as she was the Mother of the Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ.

For Christians, though, Mary is not just an important person from ancient times. Throughout the centuries, Mary has been a source of comfort, help and strength for faithful Christians who have called upon her for her help. This week, we are going to look at just a few of the many, many miraculous events connected with Mary, the Theotokos.

Today, we will begin with a feast commemorating the Protecting Veil ("Pokrova") of the Mother of God. In Ukrainian, was call this day "*Pokrova Bohorodytsi*".

Last week, our reflections came from the Bible. This week, they come from a special service honouring the Theotokos, known as the Akathist. "Akathist" means "no sitting"; this whole service is celebrated while standing up.

REFLECTION:

Selection from the Akathist to the Mother of God:

Preamble

As soon as the Angel had received his command, he hastened to Joseph's house and said to the ever-Virgin: "Behold, heaven was brought down to earth when the Word Himself was fully contained in you! Now that I see Him in your womb, taking a servant's form, I cry out to you in wonder:

Rejoice, O Bride and Maiden ever-pure!"

First Chant

An Archangel was sent from heaven to greet the Mother of God, and as he saw You assuming a body at the sound of his bodiless voice, O Lord, he stood rapt in amazement and chanted to her in these words:

Rejoice, O you through whom joy will shine forth;

Rejoice, O you through whom the curse will disappear!

Rejoice, O Restoration of the Fallen Adam;
Rejoice, O Redemption of the Tears of Eve!
Rejoice, O Peak above the reach of human thought;
Rejoice, O Depth even beyond the sight of angels!
Rejoice, O you who have become a kingly Throne;
Rejoice, O you who carries Him Who carries all!
Rejoice, O Star who manifests the Sun;
Rejoice, O Womb of the Divine Incarnation!
Rejoice, O you through whom creation is renewed;
Rejoice, O you through whom the Creator becomes a Babe!
Rejoice, O Bride and Maiden ever-pure!

ABOUT THE DAY:

In 911 in the Church at Blachernae in Constantinople, there was an all night vigil service. The church was full of reverent people. All were deeply absorbed in prayer. St. Andrew the, known as the Fool for Christ, and his disciple Epiphanius stood near the back of the church. At four o'clock in the morning they caught sight of the Most Holy Mother of God above the people with a veil spread out as though to protect the people underneath with it.

The Most Holy Mother of God truly does protect and shield the entire human race. She is our defender: for us as individuals and for whole nations; everyone who appeals to her. In troubled and difficult times Christians have through prayer appealed to the Most Holy Theotokos to deliver them from evil and sickness, to save them from hunger, earthquake, flood, to protect them from enemy invasion... The Most Holy Theotokos has always been quick to help.

We know what these times are like and how much of a necessity protection is to us now, we see and are reassured of it everywhere in every instance.

Tropar of the Day (Tone 4):

Overshadowed by your coming, O Mother of God, we, the right faithful people, celebrate today with splendor, and gazing at your all-precious image, we say with compunction: Cover us with your precious protecting veil, and deliver us from all evil, entreating your Son, Christ our God, that He save our souls.

Second Tuesday of Camp

The "Pochayiv" Mother of God

Celebrated 8/21 September

OPEN WITH:

Ukraine has many monasteries, places where men and women dedicate themselves totally to worshipping and serving God. Many of these monasteries are dedicated to the Mother of God, in honour of her place in the salvation of the world, and of her readiness to pray for those who turn to her for help.

One such monastery is the Dormition Monastery in Pochayiv, in western Ukraine. Not only was this monastery dedicated to the Mother of God, but the Theotokos herself chose where it was to be built.

REFLECTION:

Selection from the Akathist to the Mother of God:

Kontakion

When they saw the star moved by God, the Magi followed its glittering light. Using it as a beacon, they found through it the Mighty King, and reaching the One Beyond All Reach, they rejoiced and cried out to Him: Alleluia!

Fifth Chant

The sons of Chaldea saw in the Virgin's hands the One Whose hands had fashioned men, and acknowledging Him as the Master, although he had taken the form of a servant, they hastened to honor Him with their gifts, and cried out the Blessed One:

Rejoice, O Mother of the Star Without Setting;
Rejoice, O Radiance of the Mystical Day!
Rejoice, O you who quenched the flame of error;
Rejoice, O Light of those who search the + Trinity!
Rejoice, O you who unthrone the enemy of men;
Rejoice, O you who showed forth Christ the Lord, the Lover of Mankind!
Rejoice, O you who cleansed us from the stain of pagan worship;
Rejoice, O you who saved us from the mire of evil deeds!
Rejoice, O you who made cease the cult of fire;
Rejoice, O you who dispelled the flames of passion!

Rejoice, O you who guides the faithful toward wisdom;
Rejoice, O Delight of All the Nations!
Rejoice, O Bride and Maiden ever-pure!

ABOUT THE DAY:

In the year 1340, two monks settled on the hill where the Pochayiv monastery in the Volyn' region of western Ukraine now stands. After prayer, one monk went up to the top of the hill, where suddenly he witnessed the Mother of God standing upon a rock, surrounded by flames. He called his brother to see this miracle. A third witness to the apparition ran up the hill, and together the three glorified God. On the rock upon which the Most Holy Theotokos had stood remained a permanent imprint of her right foot.

In 1559, Metropolitan Neophyte, a bishop of the Church of Constantinople, was traveling through Volyn', where he visited a noblewoman and gave her an icon of the Theotokos which had been brought from Constantinople. People began to note that light was emanating from the icon.

In 1597, after the noblewoman's brother was healed before the icon, she turned the miraculous image over to the monks who had settled on the Pochayiv hill. The holy image was placed in a church erected in honor of the Dormition of the Theotokos. Later, on that site a monastery was established. To this day, the Pochayiv Dormition Monastery is a sight of pilgrimage in Ukraine, where people can venerate the wonder-working Pochayiv Mother of God icon, the "*Pochaivska Bozha Maty*".

Tropar of the Day (Tone 5):

Before your icon, O Virgin Mother of God, they who pray are counted worthy of healings,
they receive knowledge of the True Faith, and repel the assaults of them that attack us.
Wherefore, for us who fall before you, entreat the remission of sins; enlighten our hearts with
thoughts of piety, and offer up supplication before your Son for the salvation of our souls.

Second Wednesday of Camp

Mother of God of "Unexpected Joy"

Celebrated December 22

OPEN WITH:

On Monday, we learned how the Theotokos protects people from harm. She cares for each one of us, just as our own parents care for us. She is always ready to pray to her Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, for us, that he would have mercy on our souls.

The prayers of the Theotokos are very powerful and effective before her Son. Today, we are going to learn about a man whose sins were forgiven thanks to his repentance and to Mary's intercessions (prayers) for him. This was such an amazing event, that an icon was written to commemorate it, which is known as the "Mother of God of Unexpected Joy".

REFLECTION:

Selection from the Akathist to the Mother of God:

Kontakion

Now that we have seen this strange birth, let us estrange ourselves from the world and turn our minds to heaven; indeed, it is for this that the God Most High appeared on earth as a lowly man, desiring to draw up to heaven those who cry out to Him: Alleluia!

Eighth Chant

While fully present amid those below, the Uncontainable Word was in no way absent from those above; for what happened was a divine condescension, and not a moving from one place to another; and it was a birth from a Virgin inspired by God, who heard these words:

Rejoice, O Space of the spaceless God;
Rejoice, O Gate of the Sublime Mystery!
Rejoice, O Message unsure to men without faith;
Rejoice, O Glory most certain to those who believe!
Rejoice, O Sacred Chariot of the One Above the Cherubim;
Rejoice, Perfect Dwelling of the One Above the Seraphim!
Rejoice, O you who reconciled opposites;
Rejoice, O you who combined maidenhood and motherhood!
Rejoice, O you through whom transgression was erased;
Rejoice, O you through whom paradise was opened!

Rejoice, O Key to the Kingdom of Christ;
Rejoice; O Hope for the Ages of Bliss!
Rejoice, O Bride and Maiden ever-pure!

ABOUT THE DAY:

The history of this icon is related by the Holy Ukrainian bishop Dimitri of Rostov. There was a man who despite living his life in sins still had pious love and devotion to the Mother of God. Without fail, he daily prayed before her icon, saying those words once spoken by the Archangel Gabriel: "Rejoice, O Lady full of grace!"

It came to pass that as he was about to go off to engage in some sinful activity, he turned to pray before the icon of the Mother of God. Immediately he began to tremble, as he saw the image of the Mother of God appear to move. The wounds on the hands, feet and side of the Christ Child opened up, and from them burst forth blood. Falling to the ground, the transgressor shouted: "O Lady, who has done this?"

The Mother of God answered: "You and other sinners once again are crucifying my Son. You call me merciful. But then why do you insult me with your lawless acts?" "O my Lady", answered the sinner, "may my sins not overcome your inexpressible goodness! You are the only hope of all sinners. Entreat your Son and our God on my behalf."

The Theotokos twice repeated her prayer to the Infant Christ, but He remained adamant, until finally He responded, saying: "I will fulfill your request. May your wish be granted. Because of you, this person's sins are remitted. Let him, in token of forgiveness, kiss My wounds."

And the forgiven sinner got up from the ground, and joyfully kissed the wounds of his Saviour. From that moment, he lived a clean and pious life. This event provided the faithful with the incentive to write the "Unexpected Joy" icon of the Mother of God.

On this icon is depicted a man, on his knees, praying before the image of the Mother of God. Below the image are usually written the opening words of the story: "There was a certain transgressor".

Tropar (Tone 6)

O protection of Christians that cannot be put to shame, O mediation to the Creator unfailing,
disdain not the suppliant voices of sinners, but be quick, O good one, to help us who in faith
cry unto thee; hasten to intercession and swiftly make supplication, O Theotokos, who ever
protects them that honor you.

Second Thursday of Camp

The Elias-Chernihiv Icon of the Mother of God

Celebrated April 29

OPEN WITH:

Ukraine is a land of great beauty and rich natural resources. For many centuries, foreign powers tried to take over the homeland of our ancestors, so that Ukraine's riches could be theirs.

Sometimes, these invaders did not just want to introduce new rulers in the land, but were out to destroy the Orthodox Christian Faith of the people... a Faith that has been party of who we are for over 1000 years now.

Not wanting to see the Faith of Her Son and God destroyed, Mary the Theotokos has often protected the faithful Ukrainian people from such invasions. One such time has been commemorated in the Church through the Elias-Chernihiv Mother of God icon, named after the monastery in which this miracle happened, and the place in the Ukraine where this monastery is located.

REFLECTION:

Selection from the Akathist to the Mother of God:

Kontakion

Every hymn falls short when it attempts to sing the multitude of Your mercies. We could sing to You as many songs as there are grains of sand, O Holy King, without ever doing anything worthy of what You have given to those who cry out to You: Alleluia!

Eleventh Chant

We see the holy Virgin as a brilliant luminary enlightening those who live in darkness; for having kindled the Immaterial Light, she leads men to the knowledge of God and fills their minds with radiance, so that she is worthily praised in these words:

Rejoice, O Beam of the Mystical Sun;

Rejoice, O Radiance of the Light Without Setting!

Rejoice, Lightning-Flash that brightens the souls;

Rejoice, Thunder-Clap that strikes down the foes!

Rejoice, for you have raised the many-lighted Star;

Rejoice, for you have opened the many-coursed Stream!

Rejoice, O you who traced the Living Model of the Pool;

Rejoice, O you who erased the stain of sin!
Rejoice, Flowing Water that cleanses the conscience;
Rejoice, Holy Vessel overflowing with joy!
Rejoice, O Fragrance of the Sweetness of Christ;
Rejoice, O Life of the Mystical Banquet!
Rejoice, O Bride and Maiden ever-pure!

ABOUT THE DAY:

This Icon was written in 1658, and was found at the St. Elias Monastery. In 1662, for the eight days from April 16 through the 24th, tears flowed from the icon. Almost all of the residents of Chernihiv bore witness to this miracle. Soon afterwards in that same year, the Tartars attacked Chernihiv and devastated all of the surrounding villages. However, the monks of the Elias Monastery knew nothing of the danger. In the night, they received the news. After rushing to the church, and earnestly, tearfully, praying to their Heavenly Intercessor, they hid in the St. Anthony of Kyiv cave.. At midnight, the Tartars burst into the Holy Trinity Monastery, entered the church, toppled all of the icons, took all of the liturgical items, but the miraculous icon and all its decorations remained untouched. An invisible force prevented the impious ones from approaching the holy icon. The same force did not permit the foes to enter the cave of the Venerable Anthony of the Caves, in which the monastery brethren were hiding. Suddenly, as if terrified by some incomprehensible vision, they turned to flight.

Tropar to the Theotokos:

O Victorious Leader of Triumphant Hosts! We, your servants, delivered from evil, sing our grateful thanks to you, O Theotokos! As you possess invincible might, set us from every calamity so that we may sing: Rejoice, O Unwedded Bride!

Second Friday of Camp

The Svena-Caves Icon of the Mother of God

Celebrated May 16

OPEN WITH:

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church has a long tradition of iconography -- writing or painting icons. In this history, there are even some iconographers who have been glorified as saints in the Church. One of these iconographers was St. Alipyi, a monk of the Caves Monastery (*Pecherska Lavra*) in Kyiv. Today, we are going to learn about one of his icons that was blessed by God to be the source of miraculous healing.

REFLECTION:

Selection from the Akathist to the Mother of God:

Kontakion

Because He wished to grant release from all the ancient debts, the One Who pays men's dues came down Himself to those who had spumed His grace. He tore up their obligations, and heard from all of them this cry: Alleluia!

Twelfth Chant

By singing praise to your maternity, we all exalt you as a Spiritual Temple, O Theotokos! For the One Who dwelt within your womb, the Lord Who holds all things in His hands, sanctified you, glorified you and taught all men to sing to You:

Rejoice, O Tabernacle of God the Word;

Rejoice, Holy One, more holy than the Saints!

Rejoice, O Ark that the Spirit has gilded;

Rejoice, Inexhaustible Treasure of Life!

Rejoice, Precious Crown of Rightful Authorities;

Rejoice, Sacred Glory of Reverent Priests!

Rejoice, Unshakable Tower of the Church;

Rejoice, Unbreachable Wall of the Kingdom!

Rejoice, O you through whom the trophies are raised;

Rejoice, O you through whom the enemies are routed!

Rejoice, O Healing of My Body;

Rejoice, O Salvation of My Soul!
Rejoice, O Bride and Maiden ever-pure!

ABOUT THE DAY:

This icon was written by Ukrainian iconographer St. Alipyi of the Kyiv-Caves Monastery (*Pecherska Lavra*). The Mother of God is depicted on this icon, seated on a throne, with her Divine Infant upon her knees. To the right of the throne stands the Venerable Theodosius of the Caves Monastery, and to the left stands the Venerable Anthony of the Caves. Until 1288, the icon remained in the Kyiv-Caves Monastery, where it became renowned for miracles.

In 1288, while in the town of Bryansk a prince became blind. Hearing of the miracles proceeding from the icon he sent a messenger to the monastery, with the request that the icon be sent to him in Bryansk, so that he might be healed. A priest was sent with the icon via the River Desna. Along its way, the boat docked on the right bank of the River Svena. The following morning, the travelers went out to the boat in order to pray before the icon. However, they did not find it there. They beheld it standing amid the branches of an oak tree, on a hill opposite the Svena River.

The prince was brought to the icon, and praying fervently, he promised to build a monastery on this site, and to give to it all of the lands visible from the hill. After these prayers, the prince gradually began to regain his sight. At first, he saw the path, then nearby objects, and finally all of his surroundings. After venerating the icon, the prince had a Moleben served. After the Moleben, all of those present erected there a wooden church dedicated to the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos. They cut down the tree in which the icon had rested, and used its wood to fashion boards upon which to write other icons.

From the Liturgy of St. Basil (Tone 6)

All creation rejoices in you, O Lady full of grace – the assembly of angels and the human race; O sacred temple and spiritual paradise, boast of virgins, from whom God, Who exists from before time, was incarnate and became a child. For He made your body a throne, and your womb He made more spacious than the heavens. All creation rejoices in thee, O Lady full of grace. Glory to you!