

Level: High School

Bible Verse: Matthew 14:28-33, *Christ Walking on Water*

Overview:

- Opening Prayer for Missions
- Icebreaker - Drawasaurus
- Activity #1 - Read Matthew 14:28-33
- Activity #2 - Story from the Mission Field
- Activity #3 - Read and discuss the life of St. Photini
- Activity #4 - Assemble OCMC coin boxes and offer the prayer to St. Photini

Objective: This lesson seeks to help the youth understand that when we seek Christ and form a connection or relationship with Him, we connect with our neighbor.

Materials: OCMC Coin Boxes

Note to Teachers: This past year, we have faced many challenges and seen our world become divided. We've suffered the loss of friends, family, and felt disconnected from our communities. At times when we feel that we are alone, it is easy to lose sight of what is truly important. Yet, it is through our connection and love for Christ that we find healing, strength, and unity.

This is because we are ALL called to unite ourselves with Him. Christ is everything. He is the source of hope. The beacon of light. The reason for joy. He is simply love.

Have your students think about what it means to have a connection with Christ. To connect with someone, we open ourselves to them. We find time for them. We listen to what they have to teach us. And for Christ, we connect best when we find time to pray and go to church, when we fast, and when we offer ourselves to serve and love our neighbor - because we cannot love Christ if we cannot love our neighbor.

The Orthodox Christian Mission Center sends out living witnesses to help connect the world to Christ. These witnesses are OCMC missionaries and volunteers who offer their lives as examples for others to follow. They go out to different countries and connect with others to teach the Good News, to share Christ's love, and help lead them to salvation. Their stories are examples of how a fixed gaze towards Christ, draws us closer to one another.

Opening Prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, we pray for all people from all nations that they may come to know You. Help us to care for the spiritual and physical needs of others around us and around the world. Teach us how to show Your love and peace to others. Grant us the courage to answer Your call. Amen.*

Icebreaker: Drawasaurus!

This icebreaker is a free online multiplayer drawing game that is like Pictionary. It is a great way to help the students feel connected to one another while having fun. Gather the students together either in-person or online and have them join from their phone, tablet, or computer.

- Go to www.drawasaurus.org and enter a nickname.
- Next click the purple button, Create Room to set up your group's game.
- Then Customize your settings: (Make it simple)
 - Enter a Room Name, name it after your church.
 - Choose Room Type, Private
 - Create a password, something short to enter.
 - Select your max number of players.
 - Click Show Custom Settings to adjust the number of rounds, time, and word choice.
 - Finally click the green button, Start Playing! When you are ready to begin.

Copy and share the link along with the password to your game with the students. They will enter the password, a nickname, and join the game. Once everyone has signed in and clicked ready you may begin your game. Each player will get a chance to draw. Use your mouse to make your picture. For those guessing, a chat box is available on the right hand-side of the screen to guess your word. At the center of the screen, you will see empty spaces for how many letters are in the word. Points will be distributed based on how quickly you answer, so guess as fast as you can.

Modification: For those not wishing to play online, the in-person game of Pictionary is a great substitute. Ask the students to submit one word that will be drawn for everyone to guess. Each player will get a chance to draw and guess.

Activity #1: Read Matthew 14:28-33

And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus; but when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "O man of little faith, why did you doubt?" And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Discussion:

- Why did Peter get out of the boat? How does Peter react?
- What do you think of his reaction? What can we learn from him?
- Why did Peter begin to sink?

- What might the stormy waters and winds represent in our life? What kind of “storms” do teenagers endure?
- How would you feel if you heard Jesus say, “O man of little faith, why did you doubt?” Is there be anything that you would change in your life?
- How did the disciples react after witnessing these events? What did they say when Peter and Jesus got to the boat? How would you have reacted?

Activity #2: Story From the Mission Field – Connecting Uganda and the US

Read the article about OCMC’s newest ministry, Virtual Teams, to your students. Discuss how Anna’s journey demonstrates one of the many unique ways we can forge connections that transcend distance.

Discussion:

- What part of the reading made the biggest impact on you? Why?
- Just as Anna felt she was called to minister to the youth in Uganda, how are you called to serve your neighbor?
- Why is it important for people like Anna to share their faith?
- Can you think of anyone you know that helped you connect with a new friend, get to know a new church community, or helped you face a new situation? How did it feel?
- What are some challenges we face in sharing Christ with others? How do we overcome those challenges?

Activity #3: Read the life of St. Photini

Read the life of St. Photini. Reflect on how her life is an example we can follow here at home.

Discussion:

- Where did St. Photini first connect with Christ? What was she called to do after that encounter?
- Did St. Photini come across any barriers during her ministry?
- What difficulties did St. Photini face while in Rome? Did she ever lose sight of Christ?
- What do you think of Emperor Nero?
- How did you react when St. Photini wanted to bring Nero to Christ? If he was persecuting Christians, why did she do that? Have you ever encountered someone who hurt you?
- Why do you think she was honored with the title “Equal to the Apostles”?
- What can we learn from St. Photini that we can bring into our own lives?

Ask the students to compare their patron saint with St. Photini. See if they have anything in common with their connection to Christ. As a group discussion, talk about what lessons we can learn to grow our relationships with Christ and each other.

Closing: Assemble the OCMC Coin Boxes & Prayer to St. Photini

Discuss how these funds will be used to support the ministries of the Mission Center to send people who have answered God's call to help connect the world to Christ. Send the boxes home with the students and ask them to fill them and return the boxes at a time you decide upon. Encourage the class to pray for OCMC missionaries and mission priests regularly.

A Prayer to St. Photini

Illuminated by the Holy Spirit, All-Glorious One,
from Christ the Savior you drank the water of salvation.
With open hand you give it to those who thirst.
Great-Martyr Photini, Equal-to-the-Apostles,
pray to Christ for the salvation of our souls.

*Connecting Uganda and the US*Story From the Mission Field

Anna, a lady living in Jacksonville, FL, was overcome with emotion and tears of joy when she learned of the impact her presentation had on youth in northern Uganda. She felt called to connect with the youth in Uganda after hearing a sermon given by OCMC Executive Director, Fr. Martin Ritsi, at her home parish last September, and prayed that God would open a door to answer that calling.

Although in-person teams had been suspended due to the pandemic, Anna joined six other team members from Florida and New York as part of an OCMC virtual mission team for youth and youth leaders in Gulu, Uganda, the first week of December 2020. This area of Uganda has been beset by violence in the recent past and is home to many displaced people, including youth who were child soldiers.

The connection that Anna and her fellow presenters forged with the youth not only spanned continents and miles, but it also formed a bridge of mutual support and love in Jesus Christ. For many of the youth, it was a connection that led to continued healing and hope.

As Anna began preparing for her three presentations, she listened to a podcast by Hank Hanegraaff, the “Bible Answer Man”, who came into the Orthodox faith in 2017. Her decision to include Hank’s story in her teaching was reinforced when James Ssengunda, the coordinator of the team in Uganda, shared his personal connection with Mr. Hanegraaff.

In 2018, James had traveled to Greece for a Conference on Digital Media and met Hank there. Hank and James had the opportunity to share their common ministry of sharing Christ through digital means.

During a debrief session following the presentations, the OCMC virtual team members and coordinators on the ground in Gulu were powerfully impacted to see how these connections bound them together as members of the Body of Christ.

The sharing of the Good News strengthened every participant, both in Uganda and here in the US.

*The Life of St. Photini, Equal to the Apostles***Commemorated: February 26, March 20, & the fifth Sunday after Pascha**

St. Photini lived during the 1st century first in Palestine, and later North Africa in what is modern-day Tunisia. According to Church tradition, she was the Samaritan woman that Jesus Christ met at Jacob's well, as recorded in the Gospel of John (4:5-42).

Shortly after Pentecost, the Samaritan woman was among the first to be baptized by the Holy Apostles. She was given the Christian name Photini meaning "the enlightened one." Along with her five sisters and two sons, St. Photini traveled across Samaria preaching the Good News of Christ and settled in Carthage (modern-day Tunisia). Their missionary journey took place when Nero, Emperor of Rome, began persecuting Christians. He made it a crime to preach about Jesus. So, when this and future events were revealed to St. Photini in a dream, she along with her followers sailed for Rome.

Upon her arrival, curiosity grew throughout the capital city. Everyone wondered, "Who is this woman?" "She came here with a crowd of followers and she preaches Christ with great boldness." Soldiers brought her and her companions before Emperor Nero who demanded that they stop believing in Jesus. Unafraid of the maddened ruler, Photini tried to convert even him to the Christian faith. Nero ordered them to be tortured, but they felt no pain. He even tried to use his own daughter to get them to deny Jesus. St. Photini, after connecting with Nero's daughter, converted and saw her baptized along with her slaves.

For three years, St. Photini and her followers were held in a Roman prison where she preached and converted many. After many efforts to force her to worship idols, the emperor had her thrown into a deep, dry well and then into prison again. One night, Jesus appeared to her and made the sign of the cross over her three times. Filled with joy from this vision, she sang and praised the Lord for many days. In the year 66 A.D., St. Photini fell asleep in the Lord.

She was a living example of how our connection with Christ can connect us to each other. She holds a place of honor with the title "Equal to the Apostles" for her great work in sharing the Good News and building up the Church through missionary work.

O, Holy Saint Photini, Equal to the Apostles, pray unto God for us!

