

THE LIGHT OF CHRIST

4TH - 8TH GRADE LEADER'S GUIDE

Theme: *"I have set you as a light..." (Acts 13:47-49)*

Objectives:

- **Introduce** the idea of *being a light* for the love of Christ.
- **Establish** a connection between *being a light* to all people and the words of Acts 13:47.
- **Understand** how we open our hearts to *be a light* to others and help those who are sharing Christ's love to all people around the world.
- **Challenge** the students -- Christ commands us to share our faith, to *be a light* to all people. Praying each day for our brothers and sisters around our world is also a way of sharing our faith.
- **Identify** the ways that faith has impacted Magdalena's life, and whose actions were a light for her.
- **Act** by making the connection that Christ shared His gifts by helping, healing, and saving people. We can help people by collecting funds during Great Lent. Putting money in the Orthodox Christian Mission Center (OCMC) Coin Boxes supports the work of the Mission Center so that many others are empowered to be a light to all nations.

Lesson Overview:

- Begin with **A Prayer For Missions** prayer.
- Read the Scripture verse in Acts 13:47-49.
- Activity #1 Meet Magdalena - Read Magdalena's story.
- Activity #2 Student Work Sheets - Bridging Connections.
- Activity #3 Assemble & Discuss OCMC Coin Boxes.
- End with a closing prayer.

Lesson Materials:

Bibles, copies of the Prayer for Missions, handouts, writing utensil (pencils, crayons, markers, etc.), paper to write a letter, and OCMC Coin Boxes.

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Opening Prayer: *See the attached prayer*

Scripture Verse: **Read Acts 13:47-49 from your Bible**

For so the Lord has commanded us: "I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth." Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region.

Introduce the idea of *being a light* in this passage. **Emphasize** that:

- We (all of us) are told to *be a light* and to proclaim the Good News all the time.
- The Good News of the "Word of the Lord" is that we are offered salvation through Christ and His Church.
- We are to declare to all the nations the wonderful things that God has done for us.
- Jesus used His gifts to help others, to heal people, to teach people, etc. When we help others, it is a way of sharing the light.

Activity #1: **Read Meet Magdalena**

Magdalena is a young woman in Guatemala. She is an Orthodox Christian who recently became a nurse. She plans to share the light of Christ by being a nurse in her village of Aguacate. Read her story together as a group. Draw attention to the examples of the people in the story. How were they a light to Magdalena and how did their faith impact her? (This is an opportunity to highlight the lesson objectives to **Understand**, **Challenge**, and **Identify** listed in the Objectives section of the previous page).

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Activity #2: Bridging Connections

Pass out the Activity #2 handouts. Review the map of North and Central America and discuss where Guatemala is in relation to the United States of America or the state where they live. Reflect on Magdalena's story and ask the students to jot down some answers to the reflection questions on the Student Worksheet - "*I Have Set you as a Light*". Ask the students to share their answers and encourage a discussion

The following are possible talking points for each question:

Question #1 - Some responses may include:

- Being a good listener, patient, caring, compassionate, seeing all of those around us as a brother or sister in Christ!
- Approaching others like Christ would and keeping them in prayer.
- We should feel comfortable speaking about Christ.
- Whether they are friends or not, whether they live near or far, they are brothers and sisters, and we should pray for them daily.

Question #2 - In Magdalena's story, many people are mentioned who inspired her: Fr. Andrés Girón, Fr. Evangelos Patá, the medical teams, the missionaries, and her sister Juanita.

Question #3 - The responses will be varied but ask that they reflect on how their lives are different or the same as Magdalena's life in Guatemala. What questions they might ask her?

- Consider expanding the opportunity presented in Question 3. Offer your students a chance to write a letter to Magdalena, beginning with "*Dear Magdalena*". Have them return the letters to you when they

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finish writing it or turn it in with their OCMC Coin Boxes after Pascha. Letters can be sent to OCMC.

Question #4 - Ask the students to think about their interactions with their friends, teachers, and parents and how they approach them, including people they do not like. Have them discuss what it would take for them to *be a light* to someone they do not like, or someone that does not like them. Is this easier, or harder, than hanging out with a stranger from Guatemala and *being a light* with them?

Question #5 - Make a connection with the miracle healings of Jesus and the “unmercenary” saint, Panteleimon, and Magdalena’s decision to become a nurse in her village.

Question #6 - They can commit to pray each day for missionaries and the Orthodox Church in mission regions. They can *be a light* to their neighbors here in the USA. They can participate in the coin box program and encourage their community to become involved in missions, maybe even sending a team from the parish to another country!

Activity #3: Assemble & Discuss OCMC Coin Boxes

Have your class assemble the OCMC Coin Boxes and discuss how these funds will be used to support the ministries of the Mission Center to spread the Gospel around the world. Send the coin boxes and parents’ letter home with the students. Ask them to pray for missionaries who are sharing the light of Christ. Give the students an assignment to find ways to *be a light* to others during the weeks of Lent. Fill and return the coin boxes at the appropriate time. Extra coin boxes are available by emailing a request to coinbox@ocmc.org or calling 904-829-5132 or 1-877-GO-FORTH (463-6784).

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Follow-up:

Start collecting the coin boxes on St. Thomas Sunday (the first Sunday after Pascha). Remind your students of their role in spreading the light of Christ around the world. Once collected, return the funds to OCMC by a check with a note identifying the name of your parish.

Closing Prayer:

Lead your students in a closing prayer. Please include Magdalena, the clergy and Orthodox faithful living in Guatemala, and the work of OCMC and missionaries who share Christ's light throughout the world.

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A Note to Teachers:

The Orthodox Church in Guatemala experienced rapid growth when a group of tens of thousands of Guatemalan and Mexican peoples came into the Orthodox Church under the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Mexico. Many of the converts are descendants of the ancient Mayan people who live in Central America. The Mayan people suffered near-genocide when hundreds of villages were destroyed and hundreds of thousands of Mayans were killed during years of civil war. Fr. Andrés Girón, a former Catholic priest, was a charismatic leader in the land reform movements. He unified the diverse Mayan communities and, in 2010, brought tens of thousands of Mayans into the Orthodox Church. This was one of the largest mass conversions in the history of Orthodox Christianity in the Western Hemisphere. According to Fr. John Chakos, OCMC Mission Specialists to Guatemala, *"this massive influx of native people is probably the greatest ministry challenge facing the Orthodox Church today."*

The Fr. Andrés Medical and Dental Clinic in Aguacate, (a-gua-ka-te) means avocado in Spanish, has been open for seven years now. Several times a year, medical mission teams or local healthcare workers arrive with needed medical equipment, supplies, and medicines. Their visits to the clinic are a blessing, but short, sometimes only four days. The Church hoped that one day local people would become the permanent staff of the Clinic. OCMC created a **Medical Education Scholarship** that allowed Magdalena to study nursing and fulfill her dream. Her sister, Juanita, is studying to be a doctor, also with assistance from OCMC. They are both very excited to be able to work together someday soon. They want to share with others the "love of Christ" that so many people shared with their village. In the words of Fr. John Chakos, *"This clinic has already made a difference in the lives of thousands of people. Improving the health of the Mayan people, one village at a time is something to celebrate. We pray for more blessings to come in the name of Christ."*

**For more information about Guatemala, please reference the 9th - 12th grade lesson.*

MEET MAGDALENA

SHARING THE LIGHT OF CHRIST IN GUATEMALA



In the United States, it is normal to see a doctor when you are sick. In Magdalena's village of Aguacate (a-gua-ka-te), which means avocado in Spanish, going to see a doctor is a special event. She lives in the high mountains of northwestern Guatemala. There are few doctors and nurses who come to the village. For many years, people in her village had no one to help them when they were sick.

Magdalena became an Orthodox Christian when she was 10 years old. Her whole family, village, and thousands of Mayan people joined the Orthodox Church. Fr. Andrés Girón loved the Mayan people and helped them become Orthodox Christians. He traveled from village to village performing liturgies, baptisms, and weddings. He always brought a box full of medicine with him. He wanted to care for the whole person, the body and spirit. He healed people with both prayers and medicine.

It was the Church's dream to one day build a hospital so that the Mayan people could have medical care. In 2015, this dream came true. His Eminence Metropolitan ATHENAGORAS, of Mexico and Central America, and Fr. Evangelos, the Vicar (main priest) of Guatemala, came to her village. They blessed a medical clinic and named it after Fr. Andrés. The clinic brought hope and healing to Magdalena's village.



Fr. Andrés Medical and Dental Clinic.

MEET MAGDALENA

SHARING THE LIGHT OF CHRIST IN GUATEMALA



Pharmacy with Archbishop Athenagoras, Fr. Evangelos and some of the staff and clients.

Since then, many people have shared their faith, love, and gifts with the clinic. Fr. Evangelos works hard to care for the needs of the people. OCMC missionaries come to live and help with the work in Guatemala. American doctors and nurses visit as teams, to heal people, and bring medical equipment, medicines, and supplies. Once a team even brought an 800-pound dentist's chair for the clinic. This inspired Magdalena to want to become a nurse. She applied for a scholarship from OCMC and enrolled in a three-year nursing program.

Now, the dream has come true. Magdalena just graduated and is now working at the clinic in her village. Magdalena's older sister, Juanita, is studying to be a doctor with the help of OCMC. She hopes to work at the clinic when she graduates. They will share their faith in Christ and be a light to others.



In the Orthodox Church there are many saints who were also doctors. They healed people by God's grace, prayer, and medicine. They are called "unmercenaries," which means they don't take money. See the icon of Saint Panteleimon (305 AD). His name means "all compassionate one," (which means merciful or caring). An icon of this saint greets people as they enter the reception area of the clinic. It reminds them of Fr. Andrés' compassion, care, and love of Christ which he offered freely to the Mayan people.

Photo: Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

BRIDGING CONNECTIONS

ACTIVITY 2

Look at the map and find the country of Guatemala. Now find the United States of America. Draw a line connecting the two countries. Discuss how far away they are each other. Think about how we are connected by our faith to Magdalena in Guatemala.



Photo: <https://motivasi.my.id/>

I HAVE SET YOU AS A LIGHT

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Jot down some of your thoughts and share them as a class.

1. What does it mean to be a *light* for someone else?
2. After listening to Magdalena's story, who was a *light* in her life and shared Christ with her?
3. If you could write a letter to Magdalena, what would you want to talk about with her?
4. How can you *be a light* in your daily life at school?
5. Panteleimon, the "unmercenary" saint, healed by the Grace of the Holy Spirit, prayer, and medicine. Compare Magdalena's decision to become a nurse and work in a remote, poor Orthodox clinic with the life of this saint. How are they similar?
6. What can you do in your parish and your home to remember Magdalena and your Orthodox brothers and sisters who live in Guatemala?

A PRAYER FOR MISSIONS

God of truth and love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, hear our prayer for those who do not know You, that they may come to a saving knowledge of the truth and that Your Name may be praised among all peoples of the world.

Sustain, inspire, and enlighten Your servants who bring them the Gospel. Bring fresh vigor to wavering faith; sustain our faith when it is still fragile.

Continually renew missionary zeal in ourselves and in the Church; raise up new missionaries who will follow You to the ends of the world.

Make us witnesses to Your goodness, full of love, strength, and faith for Your glory and the salvation of the entire world.

Through the prayers of St. Paul, St. Photini, Ss. Cyril and Methodios, St. Kosmas, St. Innocent, St. Nicholas of Japan, and all the missionary saints, have mercy on us and save us.

Amen.

T O T H E E N D S O F T H E E A R T H