

All of Creation Rejoices: Welcome to the Zoo!



6-12th Grade Youth Connection

Day 1: The Serpent—20 min

Show a picture of the bishop's staff as in the icon of St. Sophronius, Bishop of Irkutsk.

Icon of St. Sophronius

Ask if anyone knows why there are serpents on the bishop's staff. Read Numbers 21:4-9. Compare the bishop's staff to the copper serpent Moses put on the signal pole. Ask "What happened when anyone looked at Moses's copper serpent?" (They lived.)

Read John 3:14-15. Compare this to the Numbers reading. Explain that just like looking at the copper serpent, anyone who believes in Christ will have eternal life. Read John 3:16.

Explain "In Numbers 21, the serpent is the disease and becomes the cure. The serpents caused death, but looking at the copper serpent caused life." Ask "What else in the Bible signifies both death and life?" (The cross) Say, "A cross is a way to die, but through Christ the cross becomes a source of life as He trampled down death."

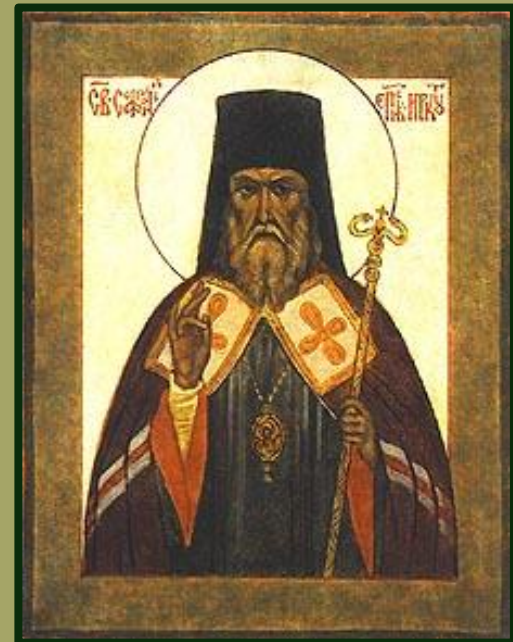
Hold up an icon of Christ on the cross and an icon of Moses with the copper serpent for students to compare.

Icon of the Crucifixion Icon of Moses with copper serpent

Finally, share an icon of Adam and Eve with the serpent in the Garden of Eden.

Icon of Adam and Eve with serpent

Explain that the serpent coils around the tree of Good and Evil. Moses's copper serpent foreshadows Christ being put on a tree/cross. The Garden of Eden had the tree of Eternal Life; Christ through his death offers us eternal life. Finally, look back at the icon of St. Sophronius with the bishop's staff. Ask students to explain how the meaning of the two snakes on his staff has changed for them.



Game Break

Serpent Catch Challenge

Supplies needed: pencils (roughly 10 per student)

Students balance two pencils ("snakes") on the back of the hand, then flip them up into the air, and catch both of them in their hand. See video below if needed.

If they drop a pencil they are out. If they catch both, then they try it with four, then six, then eight, continuing up until they are the only student left able to catch that amount of pencils.

Winner gets a bag of gummy worms (mini snakes).

<https://youtu.be/4EHsIqSvDFk>



Additional Activity Suggestions

The purpose of the youth VCS lessons are to have a brief lesson themed along with the younger student's activities, but then to give students the opportunity to do a bigger fellowship activity as a group. Some suggestions are: kickball, swimming, ice skating, capture the flag, board games, and bowling. Ask your youth what would be interesting and motivating to them.

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Day 2: Doves in the Bible—20 min

Ask students where doves appear in the Bible. Take answers, but it is okay if they can't remember all the locations.

Separate students into groups, and hand out a Bible to each group. Give each group a Bible segment below that involves a dove. Instruct them to review the Bible passage and then discuss the story with their group, including how the dove was involved in the story.

Noah's Ark: Genesis 8:6-13

Theophany: Matthew 3:13-17

Share the following quote from St. Gregory of Nazianzus from his Oration on the Holy Lights in 381 A.D.

"And the Spirit comes as a dove, for he honors the body being seen 'corporeally', since He is also God by divinization. And since long ago the dove has been accustomed to announcing the good news of the flood's end."

Discuss how the flood prefigured Christians being baptized or saved through water. Finally, share St. John of Damascus's quote from An Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, Book IV.

"Olive oil is employed in baptism as a significant of our anointing, and as making us anointed, and as announcing to us through the Holy Spirit God's pity: for it was the fruit of the olive that the dove brought to those who were saved from the flood." Discuss the connection between the flood and Christ's baptism both with the presence of a dove and the olive branch/oil.



Game Break

Bird Beak Relay

Supplies needed: Lucky Charms, big paper plates, small paper plates, spoons

Spread Lucky Charms onto big paper plates on a table. On a separate table set up a small paper plate, one per student. Give each student a spoon, which they hold in their mouth like a bird beak. On go, each student must transfer 10 Lucky Charm marshmallows from the big plates to their small plate only using the spoon in their mouth. First to 10 wins!

Additional Activity Suggestions

The purpose of the youth VCS lessons are to have a brief lesson themed along with the younger student's activities, but then to give students the opportunity to do a bigger fellowship activity as a group. A fitting activity for this lesson could be swimming at a local pool, capture the flag with squirt guns or water balloons, or a slip n slide.



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Day 3: St. Gerasimos—20 min

Read the story of St. Gerasimos from OrthodoxWiki.

https://orthodoxwiki.org/Gerasimos_of_the_Jordan

Divide students into small groups. Give each group drawing supplies, such as colored pencils or markers. Also, provide them with a comic strip template such as the following:

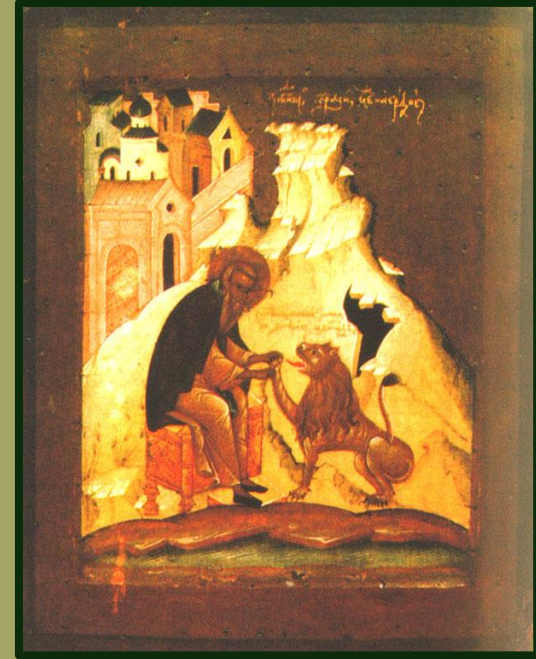
<https://www.papertraildesign.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Comic-Book-Template-1.jpg>

<https://www.papertraildesign.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Comic-Book-Template-3.jpg>

Each group is then given a portion of the life of St. Gerasimos to be drawn onto their comic strip.

Examples of portions of his life could be: Gerasimos's life in the desert community, meeting Jordanes the lion and fixing his paw, the lion's task of guarding the donkeys, the donkey being stolen, finding the donkey and returning it, Gerasimos's death and Jordanes' grief.

When put together these pages should tell the story of St. Gerasimos's life. At the End of Unit Celebration these pages can be laid out for the younger classes to read.



Game Break

Protect the Donkey

Supplies needed: plastic cup or Tupperware large enough to fit over an egg, raw eggs, tablecloth, ponchos

Cover a table with a tablecloth, and have two students wearing ponchos sit across from each other. Place an egg ("Donkey") under a plastic cup or Tupperware container on the center of the table. Each student (Jordanes) raises one hand above their head and takes turns quickly bringing it down onto the cup. They tap the cup, then quickly raise their hand. They do this in rapid succession. Randomly one of the students decides to grab and lift the cup with their hand keeping the same momentum. The goal is to trick the other student into not realizing the cup is gone, and thus breaking the egg.

Additional Activity Suggestions

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Day 4: St. Seraphim—20 min

Watch a video about St. Seraphim of Sarov's life, such as the following:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLvtG-pggUU>

Show the icon of St. Seraphim of Sarov's life such as the one below or an icon you have at your parish. Ask the students to tell you what they see happening in each of the frames.

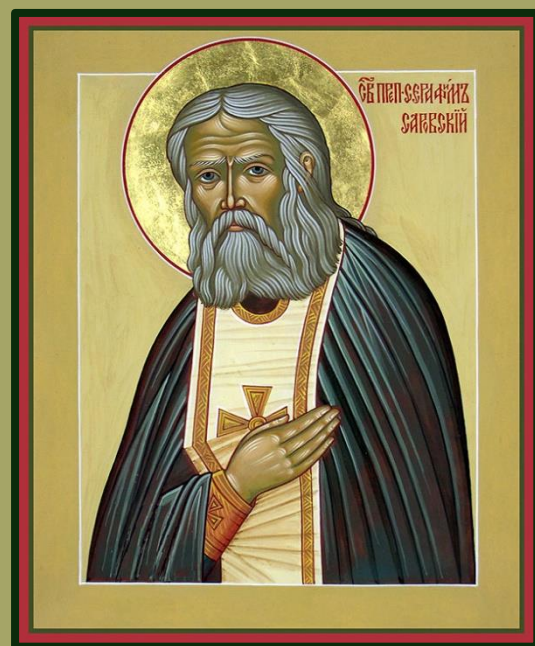
<http://full-of-grace-and-truth.blogspot.com/2012/01/st-seraphim-of-sarov-righteous.html>

If students have cell phones, iPads, or computers, ask them to search for famous quotes from St. Seraphim of Sarov to share. If they don't have these available, print out some of the famous quotes such as the following:

<https://www.orthodoxchurchquotes.com/category/sayings-from-saints-elders-and-fathers/st-seraphim-of-sarov/>

<https://orthodoxfiles.wordpress.com/2013/04/08/quotes-of-st-seraphim-of-sarov/>

Split students into groups to read them and discuss their reactions to the quotes. Have each group share their favorite piece of advice from St. Seraphim with the whole class.



Game Break

Feed the Animals Marshmallow Toss

Supplies needed: mini marshmallows, flat bottom ice cream cones

Students form pairs. One student in the pair sits in a chair with an ice cream cone in their mouth with the opening facing upwards. The other student (acting as St. Seraphim feeding the animals) grabs a handful of mini marshmallows and stands across from their partner. On go, they attempt to throw as many mini marshmallows into the ice cream cone as possible within a set time limit. The team with the most wins that round. Team mates then switch places and try again.

Additional Activity Suggestions

The purpose of the youth VCS lessons are to have a brief lesson themed along with the younger student's activities, but then to give students the opportunity to do a bigger fellowship activity as a group. A perfect connection to St. Seraphim's life would be a hike or outdoor activity to enjoy some solitude and nature.

