

Christ Speaks from the Cross

A Great & Holy Friday Retreat

Objective:

- We come to know Christ not by our witness alone, but by the combined witness of the Evangelists, the Apostles, the Saints, the Fathers, and of our priests and our families and our friends.
- We come to know God not just as individuals, but as a community.
- The four gospel narratives tell Christ's story in different ways.
 - As Christ was hanging on the Cross, He said seven things -- but you can only know all of them if you read more than one of the gospel accounts.
- We can learn important lessons from each of the seven things Jesus said as He was on the Cross -- many of which also point to understanding the Body of Christ (the Church) as community (communion).

Supplies:

- At least one Bible per group
- One posterboard or foam board per group
- Markers for each group
- Vinegar and small cups (for elementary group)
- Print up a sheet for each instructor
- Print up copies of Psalm 21 for adult group

Set Up:

- Divide students into appropriate age groups
- Create a maximum of 7 groups
- Assign each group leader 1-3 of the statements of Jesus on the cross (with 7 groups, each group gets 1, etc.) and give them the related pages
- Provide Bibles for each group
- Provide a posterboard or foamboard and markers for each group

Basic Structure:

1. Tell the elephant story to the group
2. Discuss the way that multiple sources give us fullness of understanding
3. Divide into Groups:
 - a. Discuss your group's assigned statement(s) of Christ
 - b. Ask questions, and give time for students to answer. Ideally, more information comes from them than from the leader
 - c. Create a poster for display for each statement
4. Gather again in the big group, and ask one person from each group to present their statement(s) and what they discussed.
5. Wrap it up, pointing out how community/communion shows itself throughout -- from the various perspectives of the gospel writers to the diverse input of today's groups.

Introduction:

(Inspired by Joel Miller's post, 'The Trouble with Me-and-Jesus Christianity', on his Ancient Faith blog, *Theology that Sticks*)

There's a very old story about a group of blind men talking about an elephant.

- The blind men all walk up to the elephant, and begin to touch it, to understand what it is.
- Because the elephant is very large, each of the blind men touches only a small part of the animal, and describes what he has learned from that specific part.
 - The man feeling the leg might say the elephant is like a tree.
 - The one tugging the tail says it's like a snake, and so on.
 - Each man comes to a different, incomplete conclusion based on his limited experience.

(For younger groups, you may want to tell each kid what part they have and ask them to describe it.)

God is infinite -- much much bigger than any elephant.

How could us talking about God be like those blind men?

- We cannot comprehend Him, so we each describe part of Him
- It will take a lot of us to put together the whole picture
- Every once in a while, someone with better vision can offer a really helpful description to add to the picture.

- The Church = many people with experience of God, working together and guiding one another, contributing their understanding (and being corrected when it's wrong).

Even the Apostles had to rely on each other for information.

- Jesus sometimes had experiences that involved only a few of them
 - For example: Christ revealed His glory at the Transfiguration, but only to Peter, James and John.
 - The other apostles and disciples had to rely on those three to tell them about it -- and of course, we only know about it because they told us too.

The Church did not and does not limit itself to one view of Jesus' life and ministry. It recognizes four gospels and countless more interpretations:

“Each person [reads] in accordance with his capacity, and it is interpreted in accordance with what has been given to him,” says Ephraim the Syrian. “If there were [only] one meaning in the words, the first interpreter would find it, and all other [readers] would have neither the toil of seeking nor the pleasure of finding.”

We grasp what we can, and we gain the rest from the witness and memory of the larger community. It's the cumulative insight of the Church that gives us the best picture of God and of Jesus Christ, a picture that reflects not only a diversity of contemporary opinion but those of centuries upon centuries.

That's how God designed it.

- He wants us to draw close to one another, to live in communion as He does (Holy Trinity) so He designs it this way.

- He gives each of us a piece of the puzzle, so that we have to come together to work out the solution.

We live and worship God in community because we can't see enough of Him on our own. Christians who isolate themselves from the body, whatever its defects and deficiencies, are consigning themselves to a peculiarly distorted and limited view of God: their own.

THE LESSON: *The Seven Statements Christ Made on the Cross*

- There is one sheet for each of Christ's seven statements.
- They are numbered in the order He made the statements.
- Assign one or more to each group.

Guidelines for assigning:

Youngest Group:

#3, *'Woman, behold your Son'* Plan to teach hymn, *More honorable than...*

Early Elementary Group:

#5, *I thirst.* Bring vinegar and dixie cups

#6, *It is finished.*

Upper Elementary Group:

#7, *Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit.*

Middle School Group:

#2, *Today you will be with me in Paradise*

High School Group:

#1, *Father, forgive them, for they know not...*

Adult Group:

#4, *Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me?* Bring copies of Psalm 21 or Bibles/Psalms

If you don't have seven groups, 'I thirst' and 'It is finished' are related to each other and could easily be combined.

1: Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do. (Luke 23:34)

Jesus' first words on the Cross are of forgiveness.

Ask the group: What is He forgiving? What had they done?

- The people chanted 'Crucify Him!'
- Christ was mocked, scourged, tortured, and nailed to the Cross.
- Take this opportunity to look through the gospel and have participants identify the various indignities and tortures he suffered. You might begin with the betrayal by Judas, and continue through his arrest and beating and crucifixion. See Matthew 27.

Why did he forgive them?

- He loves us. Love is forgiving and full of mercy.
- He knows that humans lack understanding. We don't always see the whole picture, don't know that He is God, etc.
- Jesus is humble, and is realistic about our fallen world: He did not expect that people would always recognize or respect Him.
- Jesus is our Healer – He wants to heal us of our sins, so that we can live eternally with Him. Does a doctor get angry at the patient's symptoms?

In the Lord's prayer, we pray, "*Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.*" After giving us that prayer, He continues, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matthew 6: 14-15)

Why do we have to forgive others in order to be forgiven ourselves?

- An unforgiving heart cannot receive forgiveness
- Think of how the human heart works:
 - It pumps blood in, and in the same motion, the heart pumps blood back out. Can the heart stop pumping out blood but still pump it in? No, it's all one motion! The heart is either pumping or it isn't.
 - Perhaps it's just like that: if you stop pumping out forgiveness, you have also stopped pumping it in...
- Think of the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee:
 - The Dead Sea does not have a place where water flows out; it only comes in. Over time, the water evaporates, leaving salt and minerals behind. The salt has built up so much that it's terribly salty, and everything dies in the salt.
 - The Sea of Galilee, however, is lively and filled with fish. Water flows in, and it also flows out, so everything stays in balance and the salt does not build up.
- If you have time and especially if this is a difficult concept for participants, consider Matthew 18: 21-36, *The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant*

How can we learn to forgive, using Christ as our example?

- He forgives because He knows we are limited and we don't understand things clearly: we can try to remember how limited we all are.
- He wants us to be healed of sin: we must remember that our sins are symptoms of illness, and try to remember that we all struggle with sin. Praying for each other helps with this.

- He is humble, and therefore does not react to our sins as we might react to one another: we can try to be humble too, and spend some time focusing on our own sins, asking forgiveness for our own sins, which will help us to react humbly when someone sins against us.

In your experience, how hard is it to forgive? Talk about your experience.

What can we do when it's hard to forgive someone?

- If we search our own hearts, and come to God to ask to be forgiven for what we have done wrong, that can help us see all of us as sharing this human condition
- “Pray for your enemies” – why would that help?

Be sure to determine who will present, and to have the group write or draw what you've discussed on the poster.

2. *Assuredly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise. (Luke 23:43)*

Ask the group: to whom did Jesus say this?

- He's not speaking to a disciple or to one of His faithful followers
- He's speaking to a "bad guy", to the thief on the cross.

On the cross, Jesus is tormented by the Roman soldiers, by various passers-by who mock Him, and then by one of the two robbers who were crucified together beside the Son of God.

Ask the group: What is it that they are saying? How do they mock Him?

- "And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, 'He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God.'
The soldiers also mocked Him, coming and offering Him sour wine, and saying, 'If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself.'" (Luke 23:35-7)
- "He saved others" – they acknowledge that He has done many good things, miraculous healings, etc.

Are they right? Could Jesus save Himself? Why doesn't He?

How do they feel when they mock Him?

- They feel powerful.
- They are exerting their control over Him – *if you are so great, you should be able to fight me off...*

He is mostly silent through their mockery. He does not respond.

Now let's read the passage in which Christ does speak:

“Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying,
“If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.”

But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.”

Then he said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.”

And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.” (Luke 23: 39-43)

Through all of this, Christ speaks only once.

- What doesn't He say?
 - He never returns their spite
 - He never responds to defend Himself
- What does He say?
 - Only good things – a promise of eternal life

The good thief argues back at the bad thief, and then does more: he acknowledges that Jesus is truly the Son of God and asks Him to save Him: **“Lord, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom”**. (Luke 23:42).

This thief is the first person to declare Jesus "Lord" over life and death.

What does he see that the others don't see?

- The people who mock Him are thinking that Christ is weak and they are powerful. They think Christ has been defeated.
- Even many of the apostles walk away broken-hearted, thinking that Christ was defeated (that He failed to become the new King of Israel, and now He's just dead).
 - Think of Luke and Cleopas on the road to Emmaus, Luke 24.
- The thief sees that Christ is not defeated – *remember me when You come into Your Kingdom.*
- Even there on the Cross, he knows that Jesus still has His victory ahead of Him, and that His Kingdom is coming after His death.

Who is this thief?

- Tradition holds that this thief is named Dismas, and was a robber.
- Many years before, when he and his band of robbers were terrorizing travelers in Egypt, they came upon the Holy Family, as they fled from Herod's slaughter of the innocents.
- According to tradition, this thief stopped the other men, sensing that there was something special and holy about this infant child. He protected the Holy Family, and let them pass safely by.
- Now, years later, He encounters Christ again, and once again knows who He is.

I have pasted the full story from St. Nikolai Velimirovich's Prologue of Ohrid, below, if you would like to read it.

What must it say about Dismas that he keeps recognizing Christ?

Because the thief on the cross recognizes that Christ's Kingdom is greater than this world, and that death really cannot end Christ, the thief becomes **the first person to enter Paradise**, as Jesus says: "Assuredly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise".

The thief is first to enter the Kingdom.

He is in that sense, the first Saint.

Of course, Christ Himself foretold this: "Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you" (Matt: 21:31) -- and indeed, a guilty thief would be the first to enter.

Christ generously opens the door to heaven for those who repent of their sins -- even at the last moment of life.

Christ will soon enter into Hades and invite even those evil souls from the days of Noah to join Him in Paradise. There is no sinner He does not wish to save, and His mercy is always boundless.

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St. Dismas, from the Prologue:

When the holy family fled before Herod's sword to Egypt, robbers leapt out on the road with the intention of stealing something. The righteous Joseph was leading the donkey, on which were some belongings and on which the Most-holy Theotokos was riding with her Son at her breast. The robbers seized the donkey to lead it away. At that moment, one of the robbers approached the Mother of God to see what she was holding next to her breast.

The robber, seeing the Christ-child, was astonished at His unusual beauty and said in his astonishment: "If God were to take upon Himself the flesh of man, He would not be more beautiful than this Child!" This robber then ordered his companions to take nothing from these travelers. Filled with gratitude toward this generous robber, the Most-holy Virgin said to him: "Know that this Child will repay you with a good reward because you protected Him today."

Thirty-three years later, this same thief hung on the Cross for his crimes, crucified on the right side of Christ's Cross. His name was Dismas, and the name of the thief on the left side was Gestas. Beholding Christ the Lord innocently crucified, Dismas repented for all the evil of his life. While Gestas reviled the Lord, Dismas defended Him, saying: "This man hath done nothing amiss" (Luke 23:41). Dismas, therefore, was the wise thief to whom our Lord said: "Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). Thus the Lord granted Paradise to him who spared Him in childhood.

3. When Jesus therefore saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother: “Woman, behold your son!” Then He said to the disciple: “Behold your mother!” (John 19:26-27)

When Jesus was arrested, most of His followers scattered.

Why would they leave?

- They were afraid! They didn't want to be arrested for following Jesus.
- Maybe it was too sad. They couldn't watch Jesus be crucified!
 - They have followed Him, believing He is the one who will restore Israel, who will defeat their enemies... and now, He is humiliated.

Some stayed close: the women (myrrhbearers) and especially the Holy Theotokos and St. John the Theologian stayed close even as He was crucified.

Why would they stay close? Was that hard to do?

- They loved Him with their whole hearts.
- They were brave, and willing to sacrifice themselves if necessary.
- They could not bear to leave Him.

John is Jesus' friend (they are not related) and Mary is His mother.

From the cross, Jesus speaks to John and Mary: **He said to His mother: “Woman, behold your son!” Then He said to the disciple: “Behold your mother!”**

Jesus asks Mary to think of John as her son, and He asks John to take Mary as his mother. Why?

- Jesus wants them to take care of each other.
- Jesus wants all of us to take care of each other.
- Christians are always asked to take care of the widows (as the Theotokos is, with Joseph now dead and her Son gone) and the poor, the orphans and those who need our help.

This is more than just Jesus looking for someone to take care of His mother.

- Jesus loves us.
- He calls us His brothers and sisters.
- He told us to call God, 'Our Father' (in the Lord's prayer, etc.)
- Now He tells us to think of His Mother as our Mother
- He invites us to be in His family!

The Holy Theotokos, Panagia, loves all of us so much. She is like a mother to all of us! She prays for us (not just John, but all of us)!

Be sure to determine who will present, and to have the group write or draw what you've discussed on the poster. You might want to have everyone present, by singing a hymn to the Theotokos!

More honorable than the Cherubim, and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim, without corruption you gave birth to God the Word. Truly Theotokos we magnify you!

4. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying: "Eli, Eli, lama sabacthani?" Which means, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34, Matthew 27:46)

Do you know what this quote references?

- This is the first line of Psalm 21.

Why would Christ quote a Psalm?

- Jesus is praying a Psalm.
 - They prayed the Psalms in the synagogues and in the Temple, as we pray them in church.
- When we pray the Psalms, we are using our Lord's prayer book!

If you don't realize it's part of a Psalm, you might misunderstand.

- He says, "Why have You forsaken me?"
 - People wonder why God would forsake Jesus, and how that is even possible if Jesus actually is God.
 - Is the cost of salvation separating the Father and the Son?
 - Is it possible to separate the Father and the Son?
 - No! The Father and the Son cannot be separated; the godhead (or the Trinity) is indivisible.
- Fr. Patrick Reardon: "The message of Jesus' cry, therefore, in no way suggests God's actual abandonment of him. This prayer conveys [...] his human experience of distance from God. The abandonment was psychological, not ontological. God never abandons His friends and loyal

servants—much less His Son. Nonetheless, it often happens that they feel abandoned..”

- In other words, since He took on our nature, Jesus does experience our human sensation of being far from God (and He does not despair), but of course God is always there – for Jesus, and for us.

The complete Psalm is pasted at the end of this lesson. Ask participants to look it over. It opens with this feeling of forsakenness – how does it end?

The Psalm foretells many details of His crucifixion. How many can you find?

- Humiliation and the mocking of the crowd: “A reproach of man and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; They speak with their lips and shake their head, saying, “He hoped in the Lord, let Him rescue him; Let Him save him since He delights in him.””
- People really do walk right by Jesus and say those very things!
- The Psalm says, “They pierced my hands and my feet” as they did
- “They divided my garments among themselves, And for my clothing they cast lots.”
 - The evangelists specifically emphasize when they cast lots for His clothing, noting that the Scriptures (this very Psalm) foretold this.
 - They recognized the Psalm that Jesus is praying here, and they know that the Psalm does not end in despair but in victory:

“All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord;
And all families of the Gentiles shall worship before You, For the kingdom is the Lord's; And He is the Master of the Gentiles. All the prosperous of the earth ate and worshiped; All going down into the earth shall bow down before Him, **And my soul lives with Him.**”

And my seed shall serve Him; The coming generation shall be told of the Lord, And they will declare His righteousness To a people who will be born, because the Lord made them.”

When Jesus cries out this Psalm on the Cross, He reminds us that we are in community and in continuity with the whole Old Testament.

This climax of the New Testament calls back to the Old Testament. Why?

- He confirms that His crucifixion is no accident or defeat – it is the fulfillment of the Scriptures.

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Psalm 21

1 *For the End; concerning help in the morning; a psalm by David. †*

2 O God, my God, hear me; why have You forsaken me?

The words of my transgressions are far from my salvation.

3 O my God, I will cry out by day, but You will not hear me;

And by night, but not for a lack of understanding in me.

4 But You dwell among the saints, O praise of Israel.

5 Our fathers hoped in You; They hoped in You, and You delivered them.

6 They cried out to You and were saved; They hoped in You and were not ashamed.

7 But I am a worm, and not a man; A reproach of man and despised by the people.

8 All who see me mock me; They speak with their lips and shake their head,

9 Saying, "He hoped in the Lord, let Him rescue him; Let Him save him since He delights in him."

10 For You are He who drew me from the womb, My hope from my mother's breasts;

11 I was cast upon You from the womb, From my mother's womb You are my God.

12 Do not stand off from me, for affliction is near; There is no one to help.

13 Many young bulls surrounded me; Fat bulls encircled me.

14 They opened their mouths against me Like a raging and roaring lion.

15 I am poured out like water, And all my bones are shattered; My heart is like wax, melting into my stomach.

16 My strength is dried up like an earthen vessel; My tongue cleaves to my throat; And You led me into the dust of death.

17 For many dogs surrounded me; An assembly of evildoers enclosed me; They pierced my hands and my feet.

18 I numbered all my bones, And they look and stare at me.

19 They divided my garments among themselves, And for my clothing they cast lots.

20 But You, O Lord, do not remove Your help from me; Attend to my aid.

21 Deliver my soul from the sword And my only-begotten from the hand of the dog;

22 Save me from the lion's mouth, My humiliation from the horns of the unicorns.

23 I will declare Your name to my brethren; In the midst of the church I will sing to You.

24 You who fear the Lord, praise Him. All you seed of Jacob, glorify Him; Fear Him, all you seed of Israel.

25 For He has not despised nor scorned the beggar's supplication, Nor has He turned away His face from me; And when I cried out to Him, He heard me.

26 My praise is from You in the great church; I will pay my vows before those who fear Him.

27 The poor shall eat and be well-filled, And those who seek Him will praise the Lord; Their hearts will live unto ages of ages.

28 All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord; And all families of the Gentiles shall worship before You,

29 For the kingdom is the Lord's; And He is the Master of the Gentiles.

30 All the prosperous of the earth ate and worshiped; All going down into the earth shall bow down before Him, And my soul lives with Him.

31 And my seed shall serve Him; The coming generation shall be told of the Lord,

32 And they will declare His righteousness To a people who will be born, because the Lord made them.

5. After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said: “I thirst.” (John 19:28)

This is the only time Jesus says anything about His suffering.

Crucifixion is incredibly painful, and He was very very thirsty as He was dying.

Do you like feeling thirsty? What is that like?

How does it feel when you finally get a drink?

Thousands of years before Christ came to the earth, King David wrote the Psalms, which were prayerful songs, and He predicted a lot of this!

- Psalm 21 explained:
 - How He would be mocked
 - How they would divide up His clothes
 - How He would be nailed to a cross
 - How He would be thirsty: “my tongue cleaves to my throat”
(Psalm 21:16) *Can you think what that feels like?*
My tongue sticks to my throat?
- Psalm 70 says, “They gave me gall for my food, and they gave me vinegar for my drink.” (70:22)
 - When Jesus says, “I thirst”, He is thinking about this prophecy.
 - He says, “I thirst” and then the soldiers give Him vinegar to drink.

What does vinegar taste like?

Let’s taste it! This is what the soldiers gave Jesus when He was thirsty.

How do you like drinking vinegar? What if you were thirsty and took a big gulp?

Why would the soldiers do this?

Optional (depending on students' age):

We might think about the Israelites in the desert, with Moses. Very often, the Israelites would get thirsty, and that would make them feel like God was not taking care of them.

Exodus 17: 3-6

And the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses, and said, "Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?"

So Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me!"

And the Lord said to Moses, "Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink."

God always provided water for them, even though He was frustrated that they never seemed to trust that the water was coming.

Is it possible to be "spiritually thirsty"? Is there a way that we might be thirsty for God – even thirsty for trusting God?

When we think about water, we might remember the story of the Samaritan Woman. Do you remember her story?

- Jesus met her at a well, and asked her for a drink of water.
- She gave Him a drink, and He said:

“Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.” The woman said to Him, “Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw.” (John 4: 12-15)

There’s regular water (which helps bodily thirst), but then Jesus talks about living water – a water that helps us with our spiritual thirst, forever.

Be sure to determine who will present, and to have the group write or draw what you’ve discussed on the poster.

6. *So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said: “It is finished.”*
(John 19:30)

What does He mean – what is finished?

- Jesus’ life on earth is “finished” and He has died.

What did He accomplish on earth? What did He come to do?

- To live as a human.
- To do what we do: be baptized, have friends, struggle, etc.
- To teach us.
- To do miracles and show God’s power and glory.
- To save us from death.
- The prophecies are fulfilled.
- The sour wine in particular fulfilled the last prophecy He needed to fill:
 - Psalm 21:16 refers to His thirst (“my tongue cleaves to my throat”)
 - Psalm 70:22 tells us about the sour wine, also known as vinegar (“They gave me gall for my food, and they gave me vinegar for my drink.”)

He is God, and He has always been in control, and it is He who declares, “It is finished”, assuring us that He has completed all that He was meant to complete.

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7. *And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said: “Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit.” Having said this, He breathed His last. (Luke 23:46)*

What does this mean?

- Jesus willingly gives up His soul to His Father in Heaven

When Jesus was arrested and tried, Pontius Pilate asked, “Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?” Jesus answered, “You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above.” (John 19:10-11).

- What does this mean?
- Could God stop the crucifixion from happening?
- Who is responsible for crucifying Jesus?
 - Some people wanted to see Jesus destroyed and defeated
 - They worked together to crucify Him

This crucifixion is the work of human beings who wished to see Jesus destroyed and vanquished, but that is ultimately only possible because it was part of the divine plan for our salvation.

What is this plan?

1. God created us and He saw that we were good, and He created the whole world and saw that it was good.

2. God placed us in the Garden of Eden, where there is no suffering or sorrow, and where we were able to walk and talk with Him, and to live in peace and harmony. There was no death in the Garden.
3. Adam and Eve preferred to find their own way, to do what they wanted to do, instead of doing what God told them to do. So they ate the fruit they weren't supposed to eat.
4. God is life, and being in communion with God is having life forever – but they turned away, turning toward death, so they had to leave the garden.
5. Out in the world, people get sick and die, and we don't live in peace or harmony. We are out of balance, and we struggle. When people died, they would go to a place called Hades, where they were far from God, and just kind of waiting there.
6. God sent His Son: Jesus was born (at Nativity or Christmas), and was truly God in the flesh! He came to earth and taught us all about God and His plans for us.
7. Jesus is God and man – God cannot die, but man can die. So when Jesus dies, He enters into Hades like everyone else, but Hades cannot hold Him! God is Life, and that's just too much for Hades, so the gates of Hades break open. Hades can no longer hold people hostage, because it's all blown up! Now the people are free to go with Jesus, to live forever with God in heaven.
8. This was God's plan all along, and it "is finished" when Jesus dies and destroys Hades.

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Gather Back Together:

- Each group takes a turn to present the saying(s) they discussed.
- Have the participants follow the order of the timeline:

1. *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” (Luke 23:34)*
2. *“Assuredly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43)*
3. *When Jesus therefore saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother: “Woman, behold your son!” Then He said to the disciple: “Behold your mother!” (John 19:26-27)*
4. *And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying:”Eli, Eli, lama sabacthani?” Which means, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34, Matthew 27:46)*
5. *After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said: “I thirst.” (John 19:28)*
6. *So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said: “It is finished.” (John 19:30)*
7. *And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said: “Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit.” Having said this, He breathed His last. (Luke 23:46)*

Conclusion:

These seven statements speak of:

- Forgiveness
 - God forgives us, allowing us to enter into the Kingdom
 - And we learn to forgive others, which allows us to remain in communion with each other even though we are weak and can offend and harm one another
- Our common mother, the Holy Theotokos
- The call to take care of one another when we are weak and need help
- The continuity of the Scriptures and on the fulfillment of the Scriptures, and thereby of our communion with the Old Testament Prophets and the Old Testament faithful
- Healing: Christ joined us in our physical suffering so that He could heal us. We are His Bride, and we are called to be in communion with Him
- Christ willingly enters Hades to free all of humanity from death; His victory belongs to all of us, together -- and we come to understand it together.

Healing