

“...and you shall be witnesses to Me..” (Acts 1:8) *Teacher’s Page - Lesson Summary*

Grade Level: 9th - 12th Grade

Theme: “...and you shall be witnesses to Me...” (Acts 1:8)

Objectives:

- **Introduce** the idea of being sent as a “*witness*” for Christ.
- **Understand** what it means to be a witness from the lives of Sts. Cosmas, Nina, and Raphael and why it is important to witness both in our own community and around the world.
- **Challenge** the students to understand some of the barriers that might be faced as we, as Christians, witness throughout the world as well as within our own communities.
- **Identify** the ways that we can be witnesses today here at home.
- **Act** by collecting funds throughout Great Lent with the Mission Coin Boxes to support the work of the Mission Center so that many more are empowered to ‘witness.’

Overview:

- Begin the lesson with the Missions Prayer.
- Read the scripture verse Acts 1:8.
- Activity #1 - Reflection on Acts 1:8.
- Activity #2 - Lives of Missionary Saints
- Activity #3 - Assemble the Coin Boxes and send them home with students with the instructions that the donations that they return will support the work of the Mission Center and help many “witness” around the world.
- Close with a prayer.

Materials:

- A copy of the Missions Prayer for each student
- Lives of Saints Handouts / Reflection Questions
- Paper/Pencils
- Coin boxes
- Copies of various missionary prayer cards (must download and print). Available on each missionary page under “Resources” from www.ocmc.org.

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Teacher’s Page - Activities

Pray: *Attached Mission Prayer*

Verse: *Acts 1:8 “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

Introduce the idea of “witness” in this passage.

- **Emphasize** that:
 - we (all of us) are told to “witness” 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.
 - it is our responsibility, as Christians, to see that this witness not only takes place in our own community (i.e. Jerusalem), but also across our country (i.e. all Judea and Samaria) as well as to the end of the earth to all of our brothers and sisters who have yet to hear of Christ and his life-giving message.

Activity #1: **Reflection on Acts 1:8** (This is an opportunity to highlight the lesson objective to **Introduce** listed in the Objectives section of the previous page.)

- Ask the students to write on a piece of paper those things that they regularly tell, or “witness,” to their friends at school. Items will likely include weekend activities, highlights from recent sporting events, news about a new version of a video game or mobile phone application being released, details from a recent date, etc.
- Ask the students to share with the class these important news events that they must regularly share with their friends and family and why they feel that these are important.
- Establish a boundary between what is witnessing through sharing and what is just gossip.
- Share that this scripture is read at Holy Pascha and reflect on why this is an important time to read this verse.
- Conclude with the fact that the most amazing news that any of us have to tell, or “witness,” is that of our life in Christ and the hope that each of us can find when we open our hearts to Him and hand over our lives and plans to His will.

Activity #2: **Lives of the Saints - Saint Raphael, Saint Nina, and Saint Cosmas** (This is an opportunity to highlight the lesson objectives to **Understand, Challenge, and Identify** listed in the Objectives section of the previous page.)

- Break the class up into 3 groups and give each group one of the Saints’ Lives handouts provided.
- Have each group read the life of their respective saint and respond to the reflection questions provided.
- After sharing the groups’ responses with the entire class, reflect on the Concluding Questions as a class.

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Teacher’s Page - Activities

Activity #3: 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 boxes home with the students and ask them to fill them and then return the boxes at the appropriate time. Extra Coin Boxes can be obtained by emailing a request to coinbox@ocmc.org or calling 904-829-5132 or 1-877-GO-FORTH (463-6784).

Follow-up: Collect Coin Box money on the predetermined date. Remind class of their role in spreading the fullness of Orthodoxy and the Gospel of Christ around the world. Assign the students the task of finding ways that they can “witness for Jesus Christ” throughout the week in both their talk and their actions.

A Note to Teachers:

While the focus of the ministries of the Orthodox Christian Mission Center is outside of the United States and Canada, it is important for the students to have this foundation for how the faith was first planted on this continent. The elements of Orthodox missions presented in the lives of St. Nina, St. Cosmas, and St. Raphael are the same employed by dedicated clergy and laity serving Christ’s growing Church around the world today. Having this appreciation for missions, and how it is relevant in our daily lives here in North America, lays a strong foundation for understanding how Christ’s message of salvation for all mankind is our responsibility to take throughout the world.

By learning from the example of St. Nina, St. Raphael, and St. Cosmas and seeing others transformed by their ministries, we see an example of how we are to spread our faith among all people, including those people in the halls of any American middle or high school. Today many individuals and families follow in the footsteps of Orthodox Saints like St. Nina, St. Raphael, and St. Cosmas, whose response to the Gospel passages direct them to leave home and family to spread Christ’s good news. Michael Pagedas and Katie Wilcoxson are two young professionals who are preparing to leave for Tanzania. More information about their ministries, and all of those Orthodox ministries supported through the Orthodox Christian Mission Center, can be found at www.ocmc.org.

*The Life of St. Raphael of Brooklyn**Activity 2*

Portions taken from the OCA website, www.oca.org

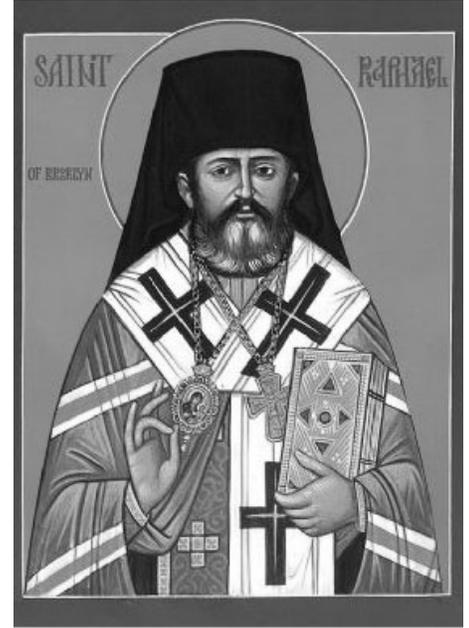
St. Raphael was born in Syria in 1860 and, being a wonderful student, went on to study at the School of Theology at Halki. Following his ordination to the Diaconate in 1885, he studied at the Theological Academy of Kiev and was ordained to the priesthood in 1889. For many years he taught at the theological academy in Kazan until being invited by the Syrian Orthodox Benevolent Society of New York to come to the United States and pastor of the Arab Orthodox community there. St. Raphael arrived in New York on November 2, 1895, and less than two weeks after his arrival, he found a suitable place in lower Manhattan to set up a chapel, and furnished it with ecclesiastical items that he had brought with him from Russia. Bishop NICHOLAS blessed the new chapel which was dedicated to St Nicholas of Myra. At this time in America the Church united those of diverse backgrounds under the Russian Orthodox Church. St. Raphael told his flock that he had “been sent here to tend the flock of Christ - Russians, Slavs, Syro-Arabs, and Greeks - which is scattered across the entire North American continent.” The Church structure would remain this way until the Russian Revolution disrupted the Church in Moscow, and as a result, across the world.

A strong pastor, St. Raphael remained in New York teaching, preaching, and celebrating the divine services for his parishioners. It was not long, however, before he heard of smaller communities of Orthodox Christians scattered throughout the length and breadth of North America. Since these immigrant communities had no pastor to care for them, it was not surprising that some turned to other denominations or even completely fell away from the Church. This was an ongoing concern for Saint Raphael throughout the course of his ministry.

In the summer of 1896, Saint Raphael undertook the first of several pastoral journeys across the continent. He visited thirty cities between New York and San Francisco, seeking out the Master's lost sheep in cities, towns, and on isolated farms. He fed the spiritually hungry people with the Word of God in each place where he stopped. He performed marriages, baptisms, heard confessions, and celebrated the Divine Liturgy in the homes of the faithful where there was no church building.

In 1899 he embarked on a second trip, during which he visited 43 cities throughout the northeastern, southern, and midwestern regions of the United States, and though he was traveling to reach out to Orthodox Christians who had settled in the USA from the Middle East, he continued to reach out to all nationalities. In 1901, Metropolitan GABRIEL of Beirut, Lebanon, wrote to St. Raphael asking if he would be willing to return home to the Middle East and serve as an auxiliary bishop. St. Raphael declined, stating that he could not step away from his important work in America. As the Church continued to grow in the United States, it became too large for Bishop TIKHON of the Russian Orthodox Church to make all the visits from the See (or seat of the Church) in San Francisco. During Lent in 1904, St. Raphael became the first Orthodox Bishop to be consecrated on American soil as Bishop Raphael of Brooklyn under the Russian Orthodox Church. As Bishop, however, he retained a position as head of a Syro-Arab Orthodox mission in America and continued in his advocacy for Arabic speaking clergy and Arabic texts to serve native Arabs across America.

From his youth, St. Raphael's greatest joy was to serve the Church. When he came to America, he found his people scattered abroad, and he called them to unity. He never neglected his flock, but traveled throughout America, Canada, and Mexico in search of them so that he might care for them. He kept them from straying into strange pastures, and he protected them from spiritual harm. During twenty years of faithful ministry he nurtured them and helped them to grow. At the time of his death in February 1915, St. Raphael had under his spiritual guidance 30 parishes and 25,000 faithful. He zealously fulfilled his ministry as a preacher of the Gospel, enduring many hardships and afflictions, and he was watchful in all things concerning the care of his flock (2 Tim 4:5).



*The Life of St. Cosmas of Aitolia**Activity 2*

Portions taken from the OCA website: www.oca.org.

The New Hieromartyr Cosmas, Equal of the Apostles, was a native of Aitolia. He studied at first under the guidance of the archdeacon Ananias Dervisanos, and afterwards he continued his education on Mount Athos. Remaining on Athos at the Philotheou monastery to devote himself to spiritual labors, he was tonsured a monk with the name Cosmas, and was later ordained hieromonk. The desire to benefit his fellow Christians, to guide them upon the way of salvation and strengthen their faith, impelled St. Cosmas to seek the blessing of his spiritual fathers and go to Constantinople. There he mastered the art of rhetoric and, having received a written permit from Patriarch Seraphim II (and later from his successor Sophronius), he began to preach the Holy Gospel.

So the saint began to proclaim the Gospel at first in the churches of Constantinople and the surrounding villages, then in the Danube regions, in Thessalonica, in Verroia, in Macedonia, Chimaera, Akarnania, Aitolia, on the islands of Saint Maura, Kephalaria, and other places.



His preaching, filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit, was simple, calm, and gentle. It brought Christians great spiritual benefit. The Lord Himself assisted him and confirmed his words with signs and miracles, just as He had confirmed the preaching of the Apostles. Preaching in the remote areas of Albania, where Christian piety had almost disappeared among the rough and coarse people entrenched in sin, St. Cosmas led them to sincere repentance and improvement with the Word of God.

Under his guidance, church schools were opened in the towns and villages. The rich offered their money for the betterment of the churches, for the purchase of Holy Books (which the saint distributed to the literate), veils (which he gave women, admonishing them to come to church with covered heads), for prayer ropes and crosses (which he distributed to the common folk), and for baptismal fonts so that children could be baptized in the proper manner.

Since the churches could not accommodate everyone wanting to hear the wise preacher, St. Cosmas and forty or fifty priests served the Vigil in the fields and in city squares, where thousands of people prayed for the living and for the dead and were edified by his preaching. Everywhere that St. Cosmas halted and preached, the grateful listeners set up a large wooden cross, which remained thereafter in memory of this.

The apostolic service of St. Cosmas was brought to a close by his martyric death in the year 1779. At 65 years of age, he was seized by the Turks and strangled. His body was thrown into a river, and after three days was found by the priest Mark and buried near the village of Kolikontasi at the monastery of the Entrance into the Temple of the Most Holy Theotokos. Afterward, part of his relics were transferred to various places as a blessing.

The Life of St. Nina, Enlightener of Georgia

Activity 2

Portions taken from the OCA website: www.oca.org

The virgin Nina (Nino) of Cappadocia was a relative of Great-martyr George. When Nina reached the age of twelve, her parents sold all their possessions and moved to Jerusalem. Soon after, Nina's father was tonsured a monk. He bid farewell to his family and went to labor in the wilderness of the Jordan. Nina was left in the care of an old woman, Sara Niaphor, who raised her in the Christian Faith and related to her the stories of Christ's life and His suffering on earth. It was from Sara that Nina learned how Christ's Robe had arrived in Georgia, a country of pagans.

Soon Nina began to pray fervently to the Theotokos, asking for her blessing to travel to Georgia and be made worthy to venerate the Sacred Robe that she had woven for her beloved Son. The Most Holy Virgin heard her prayers and appeared to Nina in a dream, saying, "Go to the country that was assigned to me by lot and preach the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will send down His grace upon you and I will be your protector."

But the blessed Nina was overwhelmed at the thought of such a great responsibility and answered, "How can I, a fragile woman, perform such a momentous task, and how can I believe that this vision is real?" In response, the Most Holy Theotokos presented her with a cross of grapevines and proclaimed, "Receive this cross as a shield against visible and invisible enemies!" When she awoke, Nina was holding the cross in her hands. She dampened it with tears of rejoicing and tied it securely with strands of her own hair. (According to another source, the Theotokos bound the grapevine cross with strands of her own hair.)



Nina related the vision to her uncle, Patriarch Juvenal, and revealed to him her desire to preach the Gospel in Georgia. Juvenal led her in front of the Royal Doors, laid his hands on her, and prayed, "O Lord, God of Eternity, I beseech Thee on behalf of my orphaned niece: Grant that, according to Thy will, she may go to preach and proclaim Thy Holy Resurrection. O Christ God, be Thou to her a guide, a refuge, and a spiritual father. And as Thou didst enlighten the Apostles and all those who feared Thy name, do Thou also enlighten her with the wisdom to proclaim Thy glad tidings." When she finally arrived in Georgia, St. Nina was greeted by a group of Mtskheta shepherds near Lake Paravani, and she received a blessing from God to preach to the pagans of this region. With the help of her acquaintances, St. Nina soon reached the city of Urbnisi. She remained there a month, then traveled to Mtskheta with a group of Georgians who were making a pilgrimage to venerate the pagan idol Armazi. There she watched with great sadness as the Georgian people trembled before the idols. She was exceedingly sorrowful and prayed to the Lord, "O Lord, send down Thy mercy upon this nation ... that all nations may glorify Thee alone, the One True God, through Thy Son, Jesus Christ." Suddenly a violent wind began to blow and hail fell from the sky, shattering the pagan statues. The terrified worshippers fled, scattering across the city.

St. Nina made her home beneath a bramble bush in the garden of the king, with the family of the royal gardener. The gardener and his wife were childless, but through St. Nina's prayers God granted them a child. The couple rejoiced exceedingly, declared Christ to be the True God, and became disciples of St. Nina. Wherever St. Nina went, those who heard her preach converted to the Christian Faith in great numbers. St. Nina even healed the terminally ill Queen Nana after she declared Christ to be the True God. King Mirian, a pagan, was not at all pleased with the great impression St. Nina's preaching had made on the Georgian nation. One day, while he was out hunting, he resolved to kill all those who followed Christ.

According to his wicked scheme, even his wife, Queen Nana, would face death for failing to renounce the Christian Faith. But in the midst of the hunt, it suddenly became very dark. All alone, King Mirian became greatly afraid and prayed in vain for the help of the pagan gods. When his prayers went unanswered, he finally lost hope and, miraculously, he turned to Christ: "God of Nina, illumine this night for me and guide my footsteps, and I will declare Thy Holy Name. I will erect a cross and venerate it and I will construct for Thee a temple. I vow to be obedient to Nina and to the Faith of the Roman people!" Suddenly the night was transfigured, the sun shone radiantly, and King Mirian gave great thanks to the Creator. When he returned to the city, he immediately informed St. Nina of his decision. As a result of the unceasing labors of Equal-to-the-Apostles Nina, Georgia was established as a nation solidly rooted in the Christian Faith.

St. Nina reposed in the village of Bodbe in eastern Georgia and, according to her will, she was buried in the place where she took her last breath. King Mirian later erected a church in honor of St. George over her grave.

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Activity 2

Reflection Questions for your respective Saint (St. Nina, St. Raphael, St. Cosmas):

1. Where did this Saint serve as a witness and what called them to that place/country?

2. What barriers did this Saint face as part of his/her ministry there?

3. How did this Saint overcome those barriers (language, humanitarian aid, prayer)?

Concluding Questions - for entire class to consider as a whole

4. What are the barriers keeping us from being a witness here at home - at school, in church, and in our community?

5. Determine 3 things that we, as high school students, can do right now to be better witnesses in this community.

Quote to leave with.....

“If it were possible for me to climb up into the sky and to shout with a great voice, to preach to the entire world that only our Christ is the Son and the Word of God, true God and the life of all, I would have done it. But because I can’t do such a big thing, I do this small thing. I walk from place to place and teach my brothers as I can, not as a teacher, but as a brother.” St. Cosmas Aitolos

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. Fotini,
Sts. Cyril and Methodios, St. Cosmas, St. Innocent,
St. Nina, St. Raphael, St. Nicholas of Japan
St. Herman, and all the missionary saints,
have mercy on us and save us.*

Amen.