

2026



# TOPICS, TIPS & RESOURCES



DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (DRE)  
GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA



## ABOUT THE ORATORICAL FESTIVAL

With the blessing of His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America, the Saint John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival continues to be a nationwide ministry of the Department of Religious Education (DRE) and one of the most successful programs of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

The Oratorical Festival provides a platform and experience where Greek Orthodox youth from grades 7-12 present speeches discussing the Faith and the Church. Although they are not part of the National Oratorical Festival, we have included the 2026 Elementary Division topics at the end of this booklet for your convenience, especially for use in local festivals. Participants can explore and deepen their faith while honing their speech writing and public speaking skills.

National finalists earn significant monetary awards, a plaque, and a certificate. All finalists at each competition level are eligible for scholarships.

**The Oratorical Festival goes beyond a nationwide speaking competition. It centers around faith, education, and fellowship for youth.**



## ABOUT THE COMPLETE PACKAGE

# TOPIC TIPS & RESOURCES

This booklet used to be Topic Tips just for participants; then expanded to Topic Tips & Resources. Now, the Department of Religious Education (DRE) is providing, for the second time, a complete package of Topics, Tips & Resources all in one for participants, parents, mentors, GOYA advisors, and religious educators.

1. You will find the 2026 Topics for the Senior Division (grades 10-12) and Junior Division (grades 7-9) participants on pages 4-5. Parishes and religious educators can print these two pages and post them on church bulletin boards and in classrooms or easily include them in the parish's weekly bulletin, whether printed or digital.
2. The Tips section provides participants with suggestions, things to ponder, and thought-provoking questions on each topic to assist youth in brainstorming, developing, and writing their Oratorical Festival speeches. The Tips also empower parents, mentors, and GOYA advisors to assist participants easily and confidently across a wide range of topics. Sunday School teachers can also use these Tips to guide their students through discussions on any topic. They can even turn a class into a writing session to encourage all youth to participate in the church Oratorical Festival.
3. The Resources section includes a bibliography for participants with expansive materials such as books, articles, videos, websites, and liturgical documents. Sunday School teachers can also utilize any of these resources in the classroom at any time, confident that they are DRE-approved.

## HOW IT WORKS

# THE ORATORICAL FESTIVAL

The Oratorical Festival is divided into the Senior Division (grades 10-12), the Junior Division (grades 7-9) and the Elementary Division (grades 4-6). The Junior and Senior Division only are participating in the National Finals, whereas the Elementary Division are taking place primarily in the Parish level. Participants start at the Parish level, which begins in the new year. Then, proceed to the District or Metropolis level. Then, two finalists representing each Metropolis of the Archdiocese advance to the National Finals. If your parish still needs to organize an Oratorical Festival, ask your priest or Sunday School teacher if your community can start one.

## HOSTS

# NATIONAL FINALS

Get ready for the National Finals on the weekend of June 12 to 14, 2026, hosted by the Metropolis of San Francisco and Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church in Northridge, California.



## PARTICIPATION INFORMATION

Everything participants need to know about eligibility, speech requirements, and guidelines can be found in the Oratorical Festival Manual under the Participant Information section: [www.goarch.org/en/oratorical](http://www.goarch.org/en/oratorical)

## AWARDS & SCHOLARSHIPS

Participants at the National Finals receive awards and scholarships ranging from \$2,250 to \$8000

- Oratorical Festival Award Fund of the Department of Religious Education (DRE)
- FAITH: An Endowment for Orthodoxy and Hellenism Scholarships
- Greek Orthodox Ladies Philoptochos Society Finalists at all levels are eligible to receive the Chrysostom Scholarship to Hellenic College ranging from \$2,500 to \$30,000 per year, to receive a credit for the pursuit of one undergraduate degree

## REGISTER

Register for the Oratorical Festival as a parish chairperson or a participant today: [www.goarch.org/-/st-john-chrysostom-oratorical-festival-forms-and-registration](http://www.goarch.org/-/st-john-chrysostom-oratorical-festival-forms-and-registration)

## SUBSCRIBE

Keep up to date on this year's Oratorical Festival by subscribing to the email subscription service: [www.goarch.org/departments/religiousused/lists](http://www.goarch.org/departments/religiousused/lists) Or follow the Oratorical Festival on Instagram and Facebook: [@goarchORATORICAL](https://www.instagram.com/goarchORATORICAL)

## ESTABLISHED/BEGAN

The Saint John Chrysostom Oratorical was established in 1983 under the late Archbishop Iakovos of North & South America of blessed memory, and began in 1984 under the Department of Religious Education (DRE) for the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

## ARCHDIOCESAN NATIONAL CHAIRPERSON

Katherine Orfanakos Demacopoulos serves as the Archdiocesan National Chairperson of the Saint John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival. She has served as the National Chairperson since 2018. Before that, Katherine's parents, Presvytera Margaret Orfanakos and Fr. John Orfanakos of blessed memory, held the role since 1986. May their memories be eternal!

# SENIOR DIVISION

## (GRADES 10-12)

**Select one of the five following topics:**

### **TOPIC 1**

Pick a common icon type that is found in Orthodox churches (for example Christ Pantocrator, Virgin Hodegetria, the Resurrection icon) and explain its meaning and theological significance.

### **TOPIC 2**

Why is the feast of Pentecost important and what does the story of Pentecost teach us about the Holy Spirit?

### **TOPIC 3**

Saint John frequently contrasts light and darkness in his Gospel and letters. Choose one of his teachings about light (such as "God is light" or Christ as "the light of the world") and discuss how this imagery helps us understand our Christian calling and witness.

### **TOPIC 4**

Throughout history, Orthodox Christians have faced persecution for their faith, from ancient martyrs to modern confessors. How does the witness of martyrs, both ancient and contemporary, strengthen and guide the Church today?

### **TOPIC 5**

Orthodox funeral services speak of death as "falling asleep" and emphasize the hope of resurrection. How does Orthodox teaching about death and eternal life influence how we live and how we care for the dying and grieving?

# **JUNIOR DIVISION**

## **(GRADES 7-9)**

**Select one of the five following topics:**

### **TOPIC 1**

Select a hymn that is chanted in the Divine Liturgy and explain its meaning and theological significance.

### **TOPIC 2**

Choose a Saint who was a child or young person. How did their faith influence their life, and what can we learn from them?

### **TOPIC 3**

Who is the Ecumenical Patriarch, and why is he significant in the Orthodox Church today?

### **TOPIC 4**

Choose an Old Testament story (such as David and Goliath, Daniel in the lion's den, or Joseph and his brothers) and explain how it teaches us important lessons that apply to young people today.

### **TOPIC 5**

Select a major Orthodox feast day and explain why we celebrate it and how participating in this celebration deepens our understanding of Christ and our faith.

# SENIOR DIVISION

## (GRADES 10-12)

**Select one of the five following topics:**

### TOPIC 1

Pick a common icon type that is found in Orthodox churches (for example Christ Pantocrator, Virgin Hodegetria, the Resurrection icon) and explain its meaning and theological significance.

**Here are a few suggested ways you could research and develop your speech:**

A. Choose one icon type such as *Christ Pantocrator*, *Virgin Hodegetria*, or the *Resurrection (Anastasis)*, and describe the common features typically found in that icon type. What are the usual poses, colors, or symbols? For example, Christ Pantocrator icons usually show Christ holding the Gospel in His left hand and offering a blessing with His right hand. What do these repeated features tell us about what the Church believes and teaches through this particular icon type?

B. Use Bible passages that connect with the message of the icon type. The *Resurrection* icon type often depicts Christ raising Adam and Eve from the grave, emphasizing that His Resurrection brings life to all humanity—not just His own rising from the dead. Passages like John 11:25 or 1 Corinthians 15:20–22 can help you explain this. How does the icon type help us see what Scripture teaches?

C. Think about where these icons are usually placed in the church and how they are used in prayer. The *Pantocrator* icon is often placed in the dome, symbolizing Christ ruling over all creation. The *Hodegetria* icon usually shows the Virgin Mary pointing to Christ and is often near the altar. Why does the Church place these icons in these specific locations? How do these icon types help people draw closer to Christ and deepen their understanding of faith?

**Here are some other common icon types you might want to consider:**

Jesus Christ:

A. *Christ Pantocrator*: Depicts Christ as the all-powerful ruler of the universe, often with a stern expression.

B. *Christ Emmanuel*: Shows Christ as a child, often with the Virgin Mary.

C. *Christ the Good Shepherd*: A depiction of Jesus as a shepherd, carrying a sheep on his shoulders.

D. *Christ with the Holy Spirit*: A less common but powerful image, often seen with a Nativity context.

Virgin Mary (Theotokos):

A. *Eleousa*: (Tenderness) A depiction of Mary holding the infant Jesus, often with a tender, loving expression.

B. *Theotokos of the Passion*: Features Mary with the implements of Christ's suffering.  
Other Common Types:

A. Deisis: Depicts *Christ Pantocrator* flanked by Mary and John the Baptist.

B. Apostles: Often shown holding books or scrolls.

C. Martyrs: Icons of individuals who died for their faith.

D. Military Saints: Depictions of Christian soldiers who were also martyrs.

E. Saints specific to local traditions: Regional saints or events may be depicted in certain Orthodox communities.

F. Icons depicting events from the Bible: These can include scenes from the life of Christ, like the Nativity or Transfiguration, or scenes from the lives of saints.

### **Here are some resources you can explore as you do your research:**

A. Listen closely to the hymns and prayers during the Divine Liturgy, especially the Cherubic Hymn, the Anaphora, and the dismissal prayers. These parts of the service often reflect the same truths expressed in icon types. For example, Christ as Pantocrator — Ruler of All — is echoed in the way we offer praise and acknowledge His kingship in the Liturgy. Many icon types are also connected to specific feast days and are honored during festal Liturgies.

B. Use the Bible as your foundation. Icon types are visual expressions of Scriptural truths.  
For example:

- Christ Pantocrator: John 1:1–14, Colossians 1:15–20, Revelation 1:12–18
- Virgin Hodegetria: Luke 1:26–38 (Annunciation), Luke 1:39–56 (Theotokos' humility and role), John 2:1–11
- Resurrection (Anastasis): Matthew 28, John 11:25, 1 Corinthians 15

These passages help reveal the deep connection between what we see in the icons and what we hear in Scripture.

C. The Synaxarion is the Church's official calendar of feast days, containing short readings about saints and major feasts. Look up entries for feasts such as Pascha (Resurrection), Annunciation, or Transfiguration, depending on your icon type. These texts often describe the theological meaning behind the feast and mention the icon connected to it. They help us understand how the Church understands these events and how icons visually express that meaning.



## TOPIC 2

Why is the feast of Pentecost important and what does the story of Pentecost teach us about the Holy Spirit?

### **Here are a few suggested ways you could research and develop your speech:**

A. Where is the account of Pentecost found in Scripture? What took place in the Upper Room on the 50th day after Pascha? How were the Apostles transformed by this event?

B. What do the tongues of fire symbolize? How does the descent of the Holy Spirit fulfill Christ's promise to His disciples? What are the titles and roles of the Holy Spirit in Orthodox theology?

C. What is unique about the services of Pentecost, especially the Kneeling Prayers at Vespers? How does the Church express the unity and diversity brought by the Holy Spirit? Why is Pentecost often called the "birthday of the Church"?

D. How does the Holy Spirit continue to guide and sanctify the Church today? What does Pentecost teach us about our own personal spiritual life and our participation in the life of the Church? In what ways are we called to respond to the gift of the Holy Spirit?

### **Here are some resources you can explore as you do your research:**

A. Use these Bible passages to explain what happened at Pentecost and why it matters:

- Acts 2:1–41: This is the central account of Pentecost. It describes the rushing wind, tongues of fire, the Apostles speaking in various languages, and Peter's sermon. This passage is the central narrative of Pentecost.

- Luke 24:49: Jesus promises, "Stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." Connect this verse to Acts 2 to show how Pentecost fulfills Christ's words.

- John 14:26: Jesus promises the Holy Spirit will teach the disciples and remind them of everything he said. Use this to explain the Spirit's ongoing role in the life of the Church.

- Acts 4:13: Peter and John speak with boldness, astonishing the religious leaders. Use this to show the dramatic transformation the Holy Spirit brings to the Apostles.

B. Use these sources to explain who the Holy Spirit is and what the Holy Spirit does:

- Acts 2:3: The tongues of fire symbolize God's presence and purification. Use this to explore the meaning of the imagery.

- Isaiah 6:6–7: The prophet's lips are purified with fire. This parallels the tongues of fire at Pentecost, which prepare the Apostles to proclaim the Gospel.

- John 14:16–17: Jesus calls the Spirit the Comforter and the Spirit of Truth, who abides with us forever. Use this passage to explore the Spirit's titles and personal presence.

- Nicene Creed ("And in the Holy Spirit..."): Use the line: "And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father..." to explain Orthodox theology about the Spirit's divinity and role.

C. In Catechetical Lectures, Lecture 17, "On the Holy Spirit," Saint Cyril of Jerusalem teaches that the Spirit brings people to the Father through the Son and makes the Church one.

### TOPIC 3

Saint John frequently contrasts light and darkness in his Gospel and letters. Choose one of his teachings about light (such as “God is light” or Christ as “the light of the world”) and discuss how this imagery helps us understand our Christian calling and witness.

#### **Here are a few suggested ways you could research and develop your speech:**

A. Reflect on the theological meaning behind the statement “God is light” (1 John 1:5) or “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12). What does light symbolize in Scripture—truth, holiness, revelation, or salvation? How does Saint John use the contrast between light and darkness to emphasize the Christian life of righteousness and communion with God? Consider how this image ties into the idea of God’s presence and moral clarity.

B. Examine how Christ’s identity as “the light of the world” connects to the mission of the Church and the calling of individual Christians. In Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus tells His followers, “You are the light of the world.” How does being enlightened by Christ call us to reflect His light through our words and actions? In what ways does this shape our mission and witness in a world darkened by sin and confusion?

C. Consider how the contrast between light and darkness develops throughout Saint John’s writings. Look at passages like John 1:4–5, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it,” and explore how this imagery reveals the reality of spiritual struggle. How did early Christian communities interpret this contrast in the face of persecution and temptation? What can this teach us about remaining steadfast in our faith and bearing light to others?

#### **Here are some resources you can explore as you do your research:**

A. *The Orthodox Study Bible* contains the full text of the Gospel and Epistles of Saint John with commentary and notes that explain key themes such as “light,” “truth,” and “darkness.” It is a helpful resource for both Scripture study and theological reflection.

B. *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* by Fr. Lawrence Farley, offers an Orthodox pastoral interpretation of Saint John’s Gospel, focusing on Christ as “the light of the world” and how that applies to our lives today.

C. *The Epistles of Saint John* by Saint Augustine (available in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series I, Vol. 7*), is a patristic commentary from a Church Father that explores the deeper meaning behind phrases like “God is light.”

D. *The Orthodox Way* by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware includes a chapter on “God as Light,” explaining the mystical and spiritual significance of divine light in Orthodox theology and how it relates to Christian witness.

## TOPIC 4

Throughout history, Orthodox Christians have faced persecution for their faith, from ancient martyrs to modern confessors. How does the witness of martyrs, both ancient and contemporary, strengthen and guide the Church today?

### Here are a few suggested ways you could research and develop your speech:\

A. Explore the spiritual and theological meaning of martyrdom in the Orthodox Church. Why is martyrdom considered a form of witness (Greek: *martyria*)? What does it mean to “die for Christ”? Look at Christ’s words in John 15:18–20 and Matthew 10:32–33. Using the stories of early martyrs such as Saint Stephen (Acts 6–7) and Saint Polycarp, what was their mindset in the face of persecution?

B. Reflect on how the Church has commemorated and preserved the memory of martyrs in hymns, icons, and the *Synaxarion*. Why is the memory of the martyrs so important to Orthodox life? Consider examples such as the New Martyrs of the Ottoman Empire or Russia under communism (e.g., Saint Elizabeth, the Royal Martyrs, or Fr. Arseny). What role do they play in shaping our understanding of faithfulness, courage, and hope?

C. Connect the past to the present by studying modern-day Orthodox confessors and martyrs, such as those in the Middle East, Africa, or Eastern Europe in the 20th century. How do they give witness in today’s world? How might their faith inspire young Orthodox Christians to live boldly and faithfully even in difficult environments? How do their stories teach us to stand for Christ in our own lives?

### Here are some resources you can explore as you do your research:

A. Read the lives of ancient martyrs in the *Acts of the Apostles* and the writings of early Church Fathers. Focus on the martyrdoms of saints such as Stephen, Ignatius of Antioch, Saint Polycarp of Smyrna, and Saint George the Great Martyr. Consider what these saints teach us about what it means to follow Christ to the end.

B. Explore hymns and services dedicated to the martyrs in the *Menaion*, *Triodion*, and *Pentecostarion*. Pay attention to the language the Church uses to describe the martyrs’ courage, faith, and witness. Review how icons of the martyrs visually communicate their victory in Christ.

C. Study the stories of the New Martyrs of the Orthodox Church, including those who suffered under communism and in other modern contexts. Look into the lives of saints canonized by the Orthodox Church, such as the New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia, and those who were persecuted for their faith in the 20th century. Research their struggles and how their witness has strengthened the Church in our time.

## TOPIC 5

Orthodox funeral services speak of death as “falling asleep” and emphasize the hope of resurrection. How does Orthodox teaching about death and eternal life influence how we live and how we care for the dying and grieving?

### Here are a few suggested ways you could research and develop your speech:

A. Explore the biblical and liturgical foundations for the term “falling asleep” (koimēsis). What does this term teach us about death from an Orthodox perspective? Look at how the Church Fathers and the funeral prayers express both sorrow and hope. Consider how the resurrection of Christ is central to the Christian understanding of death.

B. Reflect on how Orthodox theology of the soul, the body, and the resurrection shapes how we live our daily lives. How does belief in eternal life encourage repentance, love, and preparation for judgment? Consider writings like Saint John Chrysostom’s funeral homilies and how they teach us to live with purpose.

C. Look into how the Church comforts the grieving and prepares the dying. What practices are used—such as the Prayers for the Departed, the Trisagion, and memorial services—and how do these reflect the hope of eternal life? How does the Church provide spiritual and pastoral support to families during times of loss and mourning?

### Here are some resources you can explore as you do your research:

A. Read the *Orthodox Funeral Service* text provided by the GOARCH Department of Religious Education or found in the liturgical books published by Holy Cross Press. Focus on the hymns of the Canon and Kontakia that refer to death as sleep and express the hope of resurrection. <https://www.goarch.org/-/funeral-service>

B. Explore patristic theology through resources available on the GOARCH website or from the Orthodox Christian Education Commission (OCEC). Look for selections from Saint John Chrysostom’s homilies and Saint Gregory of Nyssa, especially in relation to death, the soul, and the resurrection. You can also refer to Greek Orthodox Archdiocese religious education curricula that incorporate these themes. <https://www.goarch.org/en/chapel>

C. Use the *Orthodox Study Bible* to examine key passages: 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 (hope for those “asleep in Christ”), John 11:23–27 (Jesus as the Resurrection and the Life), Philippians 1:21 (“to die is gain”).

D. Read *On the Soul and the Resurrection* by Saint Gregory of Nyssa, a classic patristic dialogue exploring the Christian understanding of the soul’s immortality, the nature of death, and the hope of the resurrection. Written as a conversation with his sister, Saint Macrina, it reflects the early Church’s view of death as a passage—not an end. This work is available from various Orthodox publishers and online through the St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press (SVS Press) or Orthodox Classics collections.

# JUNIOR DIVISION

## (GRADES 7-9)

**Select one of the five following topics:**

### TOPIC 1

Select a hymn that is chanted in the Divine Liturgy and explain its meaning and theological significance.

**Here are a few suggested ways you could research and develop your speech:**

A. Read through the hymn carefully. What are key words or phrases that stick out to you? Does the hymn mention Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Theotokos, or the Trinity? What part of the Liturgy is it chanted in?

B. What is the hymn saying about God or our faith? Is it celebrating something (like Christ's Resurrection)? Is it a prayer, a teaching, or both? How does it connect to what we believe as Orthodox Christians?

C. What does this hymn mean to you? Do you feel something special when you hear or sing it? Why do you think the Church includes it in the Divine Liturgy? Can you think of a time during a service or feast day when this hymn stood out to you?

**Here are some resources you can explore as you do your research:**

A. Philippians 2:5–11, describes how Jesus humbled Himself, became man, and was exalted by God, just as many hymns in the Divine Liturgy proclaim. It reflects the heart of Orthodox worship: reverence for Christ's humility, obedience, and glory.

"Every knee should bow... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."

B. "The Divine Liturgy" overview, this article explains what the Divine Liturgy is and what it means for Orthodox Christians. <https://www.goarch.org/-/introduction-to-the-divine-liturgy>

C. "What Are We Singing?" This short video explains why hymns are important in the Orthodox Church and what they teach us about God. <https://www.goarch.org/-/why-do-we-sing-in-church->

D. The Orthodox Faith, Vol. 2 – Worship by Fr. Thomas Hopko is an easy-to-read book that explains the parts of the Divine Liturgy and the meaning of the hymns. Great for students learning about worship.

## TOPIC 2

Choose a Saint who was a child or young person. How did their faith influence their life, and what can we learn from them?

### **Here are a few suggested ways you could research and develop your speech:**

A. At what age did this saint show signs of strong faith or spiritual maturity? What were the key events in their life that tested or revealed their faith? How did they respond to challenges despite being young?

B. How did their belief in Christ influence their decisions and actions? Were there specific practices (prayer, fasting, martyrdom, etc.) that defined their faith? What stood out in how they lived or died because of their faith?

C. What lessons can young people today draw from this saint's courage or devotion? How can their example inspire us to live more faithfully? In what ways do they show that holiness is possible at any age?

### **Here are some resources you can explore as you do your research:**

A. Verses like 1 Timothy 4:12, "Let no one despise your youth..." and Matthew 19:14, "Let the little children come to Me..." reveal Christ's love for the young and their capacity for holiness.

B. Use the GOARCH Saint of the Day page to search by date or saint's name. Focus on saints under 18 and note how the Church remembers their faith.

C. Akathist or troparia for youthful saints often reveal what the Church admires in them (e.g., purity, boldness, faith under pressure). Look in the *Menaion* (monthly service book) for the saint's feast day for hymns and readings about them.

### TOPIC 3

Who is the Ecumenical Patriarch, and why is he significant in the Orthodox Church today?

#### **Here are a few suggested ways you could research and develop your speech:**

- A. Explore the historical role of the Ecumenical Patriarch. Who was the first to hold this position, and why was the city of Constantinople significant in the early Church? What is the historical origin and meaning of the title “Ecumenical Patriarch”?
- B. Consider the role of the Ecumenical Patriarch in the Orthodox Church today. What are his day-to-day responsibilities? Why is he often referred to as “first among equals”? How does he collaborate with the other Orthodox Churches around the world?
- C. Reflect on the global and spiritual importance of the Ecumenical Patriarch. How does he address major issues such as peace, the environment, and religious freedom? What makes him a significant spiritual leader, even though he holds no political power? Why does his role remain important for Orthodox Christians outside of Constantinople?

#### **Here are some resources you can explore as you do your research:**

- A. Use the following link for a short, clear description of who the Ecumenical Patriarch is and gives insight into his role and the Patriarchate’s history <https://www.goarch.org/-/ecumenical-patriarch-ate-history-and-role-today>
- B. *Orthodox Study Bible* – Acts 15:1–29; Revelation 1–3
  - Acts 15: Shows the importance of leadership and unity in the early Church
  - Revelation 1–3: Christ addresses churches collectively, showing the value of a central spiritual voice
- C. Official Ecumenical Patriarchate Website – Messages and News <https://www.orthodoxcouncil.org/index.html> (English section). Read actual speeches from Patriarch Bartholomew that talk about creation care, religious unity, and Orthodox witness.

## TOPIC 4

Choose an Old Testament story (such as David and Goliath, Daniel in the lion's den, or Joseph and his brothers) and explain how it teaches us important lessons that apply to young people today.

### **Here are a few suggested ways you could research and develop your speech:**

A. Choose a story from Scripture, such as David and Goliath. Summarize it briefly and clearly by identifying the main figures, describing what happened, noting where it took place, and explaining why the story is important.

B. Think about what this story teaches us. Does it talk about trusting God? Standing up for what's right? Forgiving others? Being brave even when you're young?

C. Connect the story to real life. How can a teen today act like David or Daniel? When is it hard to forgive, like Joseph? How can prayer or faith help during hard times?

### **Here are some resources you can explore as you do your research:**

A. The Orthodox Study Bible – Genesis, 1 Samuel, Daniel. This Bible includes the full text of the Old Testament along with introductions and footnotes. The footnotes help explain who the main people are, what's happening in the story, and why it matters from an Orthodox perspective. For example, it shows how Joseph is a "type of Christ," or how David's courage comes from faith, not pride.

B. The Orthodox Study Bible includes commentary beneath the biblical text that explains the spiritual meaning of each story through the lens of the Church Fathers and Orthodox tradition. For example, in the story of Joseph, the notes highlight how his suffering and forgiveness prefigure the life of Christ. In David's story, his victory over Goliath is shown as an example of God's strength working through human weakness. The commentary on Daniel emphasizes his unwavering prayer life and trust in God. These notes illuminate how the virtues found in each story, such as courage, faith, and forgiveness, serve as enduring examples for Christian life.



## TOPIC 5

Select a major Orthodox feast day and explain why we celebrate it and how participating in this celebration deepens our understanding of Christ and our faith.

### **Here are a few suggested ways you could research and develop your speech:**

A. Pick one of the 12 Great Feasts of the Orthodox Church that interests you or your family celebrates strongly. Feasts of the Lord: Nativity of Christ (Christmas): December 25, Theophany (Epiphany): January 6, Presentation of the Lord (Candlemas): February 2, Annunciation: March 25, Palm Sunday: The Sunday before Pascha, Ascension: Forty days after Pascha, Pentecost: Fifty days after Pascha, Transfiguration: August 6, Feasts of the Theotokos: Nativity of the Theotokos: September 8, Presentation of the Theotokos: November 21, Dormition (Falling Asleep) of the Theotokos: August 15, Other Great Feasts: Exaltation of the Holy Cross: September 14.

B. Briefly explain the event being remembered (e.g., Christ's birth, baptism, resurrection, etc.). Include who was present, what took place, and why the event is significant.

C. Reflect on the meaning of what you've learned. Consider questions such as: Why is this event celebrated today? What does it reveal about Jesus? How does it help you grow closer to Him or deepen your understanding of the Church?

### **Here are some resources you can explore as you do your research:**

A. GOARCH Feast Day Calendar [www.goarch.org/chapel/calendar](http://www.goarch.org/chapel/calendar) → Click on the feast day you choose. You'll find: A summary of the event, the Bible reading, icon explanation, hymns of the feast.

B. GOARCH Feasts of the Church <https://www.goarch.org/feasts> contains lesson plans, stories, and reflection questions.

C. Greek Orthodox Church YouTube Channel [www.youtube.com/@GreekOrthodoxChurch](http://www.youtube.com/@GreekOrthodoxChurch) → Watch various videos on different feast days celebrated in the Church calendar. These videos can help you understand the history, meaning, and celebration of each feast.

# ELEMENTARY DIVISION TOPICS

1. Tell us about your favorite story from the Bible. What happens in the story and why do you like it? What does it teach us about God or how we should live?
2. Describe something you love about your Orthodox church. It could be an icon, a special service, the way it looks, or how it makes you feel. Why is this special to you?
3. Choose a saint you've learned about and tell us why you think they were special. What did they do that showed their love for God? How can we be like them?
4. Share an Orthodox tradition that your family celebrates, such as a special holiday, blessing, or custom. How does your family celebrate it and why is it important to you?
5. Choose an icon from your church and describe what you see in it. Who is shown in the icon and what story does it tell? What do you learn from looking at this icon?

# DON'T FORGET!

Everything participants need to know about eligibility, speech requirements, and guidelines can be found in the Oratorical Festival Manual under the Participant Information section: **[www.goarch.org/oratorical](http://www.goarch.org/oratorical)**

## St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival

Department of Religious Education (DRE)

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

Email: [oratorical@goarch.org](mailto:oratorical@goarch.org)

Toll-free: 800.566.1088

[www.religioused.goarch.org](http://www.religioused.goarch.org)

  @goarchORATORICAL

