

Get to the Root of It!

Tutorial 10

Church Calendar

Year of Church and Home 2007

Why A Church Calendar?

- Commemorate Key Events
 - Life of Christ
 - History of the Church
 - Examples of Faith - Lives of the Saints
 - New and Old Testament Models and Teachers
 - Rhythm of a Christian's life

Why a church calendar? As we live our lives, it helps to periodically pause and reflect on what's important. For this reason, we have family celebrations like birthdays or anniversaries. In a similar way as a church family, we pause from time to time to reflect on who we are and where we are going.

The Church Calendar endows time with rhythm and significance as a Christian makes the spiritual journey through life. The Calendar annually commemorates the key events in the Life of Christ and the history of the Church. At appropriate times during the year, it also draws our attention to examples of our faith and beliefs through the Lives of the Saints and New and Old Testament lessons.

Feast Days, Saints, Fast Days

- **Sunday** of each week is the Day of the Lord (*Giragi*, as in Gk. Kyrie eleison, 'Lord, have mercy').
- **Feasts** - Fixed or Moveable
- **Saints' days** *Srpots*- Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays
- **Fast Days** *Bahots*- Wednesday and Fridays

The Church Calendar consists of **Feast Days**, **Saints' Days** and **Fast Days**, which are grouped into larger Seasons or tides, e.g., Eastertide.

The Sunday of each week is the Day of the Lord (*Giragi*, cf. Greek - Kyrie eleison - Lord, have mercy), during which we celebrate Holy Communion and the Resurrection.

Some feast days are fixed on a particular day, such as Christmas, which is always on January 6, while some are moveable, such as Easter, which depends upon the lunar calendar.

Saints' days in the Armenian Church are celebrated on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. Saints' days are called *Srpots* from the word *Surp* meaning Saint.

Wednesdays and Fridays are days of abstinence and fasting. Fast days are called *Bahots*, from the word *Bahk* meaning 'fast' or 'keep'.

Saints' Days

- over 100 Saints' days
- 89 Biblical Saints
- Saints from first 5 centuries of Christianity
- Armenian Church saints - through 15th century

The Armenian Church celebrates over 100 saints' days each year. Saints' days are observed on weekdays: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. Sundays are the Lord's days and are dedicated to the Resurrection. Wednesdays and Fridays are fast days. 89 saints are known as Biblical Saints. Then come saints from the first five centuries of Christianity, representing the Apostolic Fathers of the second century and the church Fathers of the three ecumenical councils up to the end of the fifth century. The Armenian Church added more saints from the fifth through the fifteenth centuries, mainly from leaders of the Armenian Church.

Saints As Inspirational Examples

Saints are inspirational examples for our lives:

Why were the saints, saints?

Because they were cheerful when it was difficult to be cheerful,

Patient when it was difficult to be patient;

And because they pushed on when they wanted to stand still

And kept silent when they wanted to talk;

That was all. It was quite simple and always will be.

Author Unknown.

(quoted from *Saints for Children: from the Tradition of the Armenian Church*, by Louise Kalemkerian and Barbara Hovsepian, Diocese of the Armenian Church of America, New York, 1983).

Saints are inspirational examples for our lives:

Some of the Major Saints

St. Mary, Mother of God

St. John the Baptist

St. Stephen

Sts. Thaddeus and
Bartholomew

St. Santukht

St. Apkar

St. Sarkis

St. Hripsimé

St. Gayané

Sts. Nuné and Mané

St. Gregory the
Illuminator

Sts. Sahak and Mesrob
Holy Translators

Sts. Vartan and
Ghevond

St. Nersess the Great

St. John of Odzun

St. Nersess Shnorhali

St. Gregory of Nareg

St. Gregory of Datev

These are some of the major saints remembered in the Armenian Church Calendar.

Fast Days

- 160 Fast Days per year
- All Wednesdays and Fridays
- Lent 48 days before Easter
- Fasts often preparatory, the week before major feast days

The Armenian Church observes 160 fast days each year. All Wednesdays and Fridays are fasting days, except for those during the fifty days following Easter, which are days of celebration of Christ's resurrection. Certain weekdays preceding major feasts are also fasting days.

While dietary practices vary, traditionally fast days were days without animal products. More important than dietary practices, however, fast days are intended to be times of reflection and self-restraint, when we focus and re-calibrate our lives. In the Armenian Church fast days are primarily a time for purification of our souls through individual and communal prayer and critical moral self-reflection. The purification is supported by a discipline of our bodies through abstaining from the consumption of meat, fats, milk products, eggs, and alcoholic drinks. By fasting we participate in a universal law of God's creation, that in order to continue growing we must engage in self-discipline and self-sacrifice, for only the cup which is emptied may be filled again.

Major Fast Days

Nativity (6 days)
Easter (Holy Week, 6 days)
Transfiguration (5 days)
Assumption (5 days)
Exaltation (5 days)
Great Lent (48 days)
Fast of Catechumens (5 days)
Fast of Elijah (5 days, Summer, ending on Feast of Holy Etchmiadzin)
Fast of St. Gregory (5 days)
Fast of the Cross of Varak (5 days, beginning of Fall)
Fast of Advent (5 days)
Fast of St. James of Nisibis (5 days, beginning of Winter)

This chart shows the main fast days, including the longest period, Lent, before Easter.

5 Seasons

The Armenian Church Calendar is divided into 5 seasons, each marked by a key holiday, which is the highpoint of the season:

- **Christmastide** (50 days starting on the Sunday nearest November 25 through the Saturday following January 6 through beginning of Eastertide)
- **Eastertide** (9 weeks before Easter Day and 15 weeks after Easter, a moveable feast between March 22 and April 25)
- **Transfigurationtide** (starts 100 days after Easter)
- **Assumptiontide** (4 weeks, starts Sunday closest to August 14)
- **Exaltationtide** (starts the Sunday closest to Sept. 14 at the Exaltation of the Cross through beginning of Advent)

The Seasons of the Armenian Liturgical Year

The Armenian Church divides the year into seasons based upon the great or **tabernacle feasts**. The five seasons of the liturgical year are:

- **Christmastide** (50 days starting on the Sunday nearest the 25th of November through the Saturday following January 6 until beginning of Eastertide)
- **Eastertide** (9 weeks before Easter Day and 15 weeks after Easter, a moveable feast between March 22 and April 25)
- **Transfigurationtide** (starts 100 days after Easter)
- **Assumptiontide** (4 weeks, starts Sunday closest to August 14)
- **Exaltationtide** (starts the Sunday closest to Sept. 14 at the Exaltation of the Cross through beginning of Advent,)

The five greatest feasts of the Armenian Church are the tabernacle feasts. These feasts are called tabernacle feast because special tents called tabernacles were set up in the fields for their observance. Each feast is preceded by a period of fasting and followed by a day of remembrance of the dead.

Some feast days are fixed on a particular day, such as Christmas, which is always on January 6; others are moveable, such as Easter, which depends upon the lunar calendar.

Tabernacle Feasts

- **Christmas** (*Surp Dznunt, Asdvadzahaydnutyun*, Theophany) **January 6**.
- **Easter** (*Surp Zadig, Surp Harutyun*) (**movable**) (**March 22-April 25**) First Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox (March 21)), commemoration Christ's Resurrection.
- **Transfiguration** (*Vartavar, Baydzaragerbutyun*) **100 days after Easter**, Christ's divinity is revealed on Mt. Tabor
- **Assumption** (*Asdvadzadzin, Verapokhum*) Sunday closest to **August 15**. St. Mary is transported to heaven at her death (assume = take up) or sleep (hence this holy day is also called the Dormition)
- **Exaltation of the Holy Cross** (*Khachverats*) Sunday closest to **September 15**. (Խաչվերաց *khach*=cross, *verats*=raising). commemorates 3 events (1) 1st-century raising of the Cross by the brother of our Lord St. James, (2) the Discovery of the Cross in 326 by Emperor Constantine's wife St. Helen at Golgotha where Jesus was crucified, and (3) the recovery of the Cross from Persian captivity in 629.

Christmas (*Surp Dznunt*), Easter (*Surp Zadig*), Transfiguration (*Vartavar*), Assumption (*Verapokhum*) and Exaltation of the Cross (*Surp Khach* or *Khachverats*) are the 5 main holidays of the Armenian Church Calendar. They are called Tabernacle Feasts, that is, a feast held under a tent, or tabernacle.

Christmas (*Surp Dznunt, Asdvadzahaydnutyun*, Theophany) is a fixed feast day celebrated on January 6. Christmas commemorates the birth and Baptism of Christ. The Armenian Church, along with other ancient Eastern Churches, celebrates Christmas on January 6. The Roman Catholic church later established Dec. 25 as Christmas to supplant the Saturnalia. The Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches also celebrate Christmas on Dec. 25, but since they follow the Julian calendar, which is 14 days behind the Gregorian Calendar (the calendar in ordinary use), their holiday celebration falls on January 7.

Easter (*Surp Zadig, Surp Harutyun*) (between March 22 and April 25, First Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox (March 21)). Easter commemorates the Resurrection of Christ and includes all the feasts related to Easter, including Palm Sunday, the Last Supper on Holy Thursday, the Crucifixion on Good Friday.

Transfiguration (*Vartavar, Baydzaragerbutyun*, 100 days after Easter). The Transfiguration commemorates the revelation of Jesus' divinity, when he was visibly glorified in the presence of his three disciples, Peter, James and John. According to the Gospels (Matt. 17:1-8, Mark 9:1-10, Luke 9:28-36), while Jesus was on Mount Tabor, Moses and the prophet Elijah appeared beside Jesus and all three were engulfed in heavenly light. This transfiguration was witnessed by the disciples Simon-Peter, James and John Zebedee, who erected tabernacles and were surrounded by a cloud as a voice told them, "This is my Son and I have chosen him. Listen to Him."

Assumption (*Asdvadzadzin, Verapokhum*, Sunday closest to August 15, August 12-18). The Assumption commemorates the taking of Mary, the Holy Mother of God, to heaven after her death, 15 years after Jesus' death. The Blessing of the Grapes (*Khaghghorhnek*) also takes place at this time.

Exaltation of the Holy Cross (*Khachverats*) (Sunday closest to September 14). This feast commemorates 3 events (1) raising of the Cross by the brother of our Lord St. James in 1st-century, (2) the Discovery of the Cross in 326 by Emperor Constantine's wife St. Helen at Golgotha where Jesus was crucified, and (3) the recovery of the Cross from Persian captivity in 629 by the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius, whose father, according to tradition, was Armenian.

Christmastide

- **Christmas** – January 6 – Christ's Birth, Baptism and Adoration of the Wise Men
- **Presentation of the Lord** – Feb. 14, 40 days after Christ's birth (Տեառնընդառաջ *Dyarn*=Lord, *ēnt*=to, *arach*=forward) (Luke 2:29-32)
- **St. Sarkis** – at the end of the Fast of Salt and Bread, traditionally believed to have been established by St. Gregory as a national fast for Armenia's conversion
- **Sts. Vartanants** – Thursday before Lent. AD 451 – St. Vartan defends Christian Armenia against the Persians at Avarayr

Now let's review the calendar from the beginning of the Church Year, which not surprisingly begins with Christ's birth on January 6. Christmas is a fixed holiday, always celebrated on January 6. In Armenian this holiday is called *Asdvadzahaydnutyun* from *Asdvadz*='God' and *haydnutyun* revelation. Theophany, The Revelation of God, Theo='God' phany='revelation'.

Forty days later, according to Jewish tradition, Sts. Mary and Joseph presented Jesus in the Temple as an expression of thanks to God for the blessing of a new life. In Armenian, this holiday is called *Dyarnētarach*. There is a folk tradition of lighting a bon fire at this time and leaping over it for good luck, the bonfire representing the light of the world, unextinguished despite the darkness of winter. At this time, Sts. Simeon and Anna prophesied Christ's divinity and divine mission. People often light candles and take the light home, representing the spread of the Light of Christ through the world. You can read more about the Presentation in the Gospel of Luke 2:29-32.

Before Lent begins, we pause to remember the Christian soldiers who fought and died defending our right to freely practice Christianity. St. Sarkis, Sts. Vartanants, and Sts. Ghevondyants are three key feasts in the month of February.

St. Sarkis was a great defender of the faith who was persecuted by the Roman emperor Julian the Apostate (4th cent.), took refuge in Armenia, then with his son converted many soldiers to Christianity, before being martyred by the Persians along with 14 of his soldiers. His feast is at the end of the Fast of Salt and Bread, traditionally believed to have been established by St. Gregory the Illuminator as a national fast for Armenia's conversion.

Sts. Ghevontyants is always celebrated the Tuesday before Lent begins and Sts. Vartanants the Thursday before Lent. St. Ghevont was a priest who rallied the troops during the Battle of Avarayr in 451, during which St. Vartan led the Armenian forces in defying the odds against a far larger Persian army to defend Armenians' right to practice Christianity.

Together these people and events are examples of active faith. They remind us that life poses perils to those who try to do good. In our life there are values and ideals we will be called on to defend if we are to be free and if people are to have the opportunity to do good. We must have the courage to do so, understanding that we may not always win and that the struggle may not always be cost-free. That should not discourage us, and we should not lose heart in the face of hardships and failure. We should remember that Sts. Sarkis, Vartan and Ghevont faced the same choice, and it is due to their courage and faith that we are free to live and practice Christianity today.

Since Easter is a moveable feast, sometimes Lent starts early in the month of February and sometimes as late as March 7.

Pre-Easter

- **Lent** – 40 days ending on the Friday before Palm Sunday
- **Annunciation** – April 7, Archangel Gabriel announces to St. Mary that she will bear a son, Jesus (Luke 1:26-38)
- **Palm Sunday** – Christ's entry into Jerusalem
- **Holy Thursday** – The Last Supper, when Christ established communion
- **Good Friday** – Crucifixion
- **Easter** – Christ's Resurrection (Յարութիւն *Harutyun*) on the 3rd day after his crucifixion—Մբ. Ջատիկ *Surp Zadig*, the first Sunday after the first full moon after the Spring Equinox (March 21)

Eastertide begins with *Pun Paregentan*, a Mardi-Gras like celebration that precedes Lent, and reminds us of how good the world is that God created. Lent is the 40-day great fast ending on the Friday before Palm Sunday, which is immediately followed by the Holy Week fast. In February we reflected on the external obstacles to our faith and the courageous spirit of Sts. Sarkis, Vartan and Ghevont. During Great Lent, we look into ourselves to overcome the obstacles within us that prevent us from making the most of the freedom Christ and our heroic saints won for us.

Lent is a time to recalibrate our lives, sorting out what's important, and getting back on track, to make the most of this "second chance" at maximizing our God-given talents and resources for living a good life and creating a good world for ourselves and others. Each of the six Sundays during Lent has a special theme and three are based on the central teachings of Christ about how we should relate to one other and to God: the Prodigal Son (about being willing to forgive and set aside grudges to receive people back into the fold), the Unjust Steward (about how we need to correct our mistakes and forgive others as we are forgiven), the Widow and the Judge (about not becoming discouraged when faced with indifference or evil).

The other holidays are directly related to the last week of Christ's ministry before his crucifixion, from his triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday for Passover, to the Last Supper on Holy Thursday, when he instituted communion, to Holy Friday (also called Good Friday) the day Christ was crucified, and Easter, the most joyous holiday celebrating Christ's Resurrection and his triumph over death.

Easter is a movable feast based on the date of Passover, which was celebrated after the first full moon after the Spring Equinox (March 21). For this reason pre-Easter can start as early as February 1 or as late as March 7.

One feast which almost always falls during Pre-Easter, but is not tied to Easter, is the Annunciation, a fixed feast set for April 7, exactly nine months before Christmas, Jan. 6. On Annunciation Day, the Archangel Gabriel announced to St. Mary that she will bear a son, Jesus (which means 'savior' in Hebrew). At this time, St. Mary's heart was filled with humble joy and she sang the *Medzatsustse* the Magnificat, which is a core part of Armenian Morning Service, emphasizing her willingness to serve as an instrument of God's work on earth. You can read more about the Annunciation in Luke 1:26-38.

Post-Easter

- **Ascension** – 40 days after Easter – when Christ ascended into heaven. Համբարձում *Hampartsum* (Mark 16: 19, Luke 24: 50-51, Acts 1: 9-11)
- **Pentecost** – 50 days after Easter (*Pentecost* is Greek for 50) Arm. Հոգեգալուստ *hoke*=spirit, *kalusd*=coming, when the Holy Spirit filled the disciples gathered in Jerusalem (Acts 2)
- **Holy Etchmiadzin Day** after St. Gregory's emergence from his captivity, when the Only (*mi* =one) Begotten (*dzin* =born) i.e., Christ + descended (*etch*), founding the mother cathedral and churches honoring Sts. Hripsimé and Gayané)

Easter tide continues for another 100 days after Easter, until Transfiguration, sometime between June 28 and August 1. Having fasted before Easter, the Church is in a celebrative mood after Easter. The two main feasts are Ascension, 40 days after Easter, when Christ ascended into heaven, and Pentecost, 50 days or the seventh Sunday after Easter. During this period the church reads all 4 gospels and the Acts of the Apostles as a reminder of Christ's teachings and the good news of His resurrection. After the Resurrection, Christ instructed his disciples to baptize people and spread his teaching throughout the world.

Having prepared ourselves throughout the pre-Easter period, refreshed through the reading of the gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, we are now presented with a mission, to follow their example. Having been cleansed through Lent has made us ready to be refueled and carried by the celebratory spirit of the post-Easter period to continue to improve ourselves and the world around us. We have no cause for despair or apathy, for there is hope of ultimate justice as demonstrated by Christ's triumph over the false accusations, humiliation, and cruel death to which he was unjustly subjected by some misguided, powerful people in this world.

Ascension Day always falls on a Thursday and in Armenian is called *Hampartsum*, a common first and last name in Armenian. (Note the root - *parts* = which means 'high' and is related to the *berg* in Eng. *iceberg*, literally, 'ice high point, ice mountain', as we have seen in *park i partsuns* ('glory in the highest')).

Pentecost 50 days after Easter (*pentecost* means 50 in Greek) is called *Hokekalusd* in Armenian (*hoki* ='spirit' ⇌ 'heave' and *kalusd* 'coming' ⇌ invade). On this day the disciples were gathered in the upper room, believed to be located on Mt. Zion, just outside the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit filled them and energized them for the mission they were to carry out over the next 50 years: spreading Christianity far and wide from India to Spain. This is traditionally viewed as the founding of the Church universal.

During this season, the Armenian Church also remembers its own founding by St. Gregory the Illuminator, in the feast of Holy Etchmiadzin, when Christ came down upon the Armenian homeland at the foot of the Biblical Mount Ararat, where Noah's ark rested after the flood. This initiated a new era in the life of the Armenian nation. During the weeks before and after the Feast of Holy Etchmiadzin, we remember the central figures in Armenia's second conversion, including Sts. Hripsimé and Gayané, who came as missionaries to Armenia, fleeing Roman persecution, and Sts. Trdat, Ashkhen and Khosrovidukht, the Armenian royal family who along with St. Gregory the Illuminator proclaimed Christianity Armenia's state religion, and St. Nersess the Great, St. Gregory's great grandson, who significantly consolidated the Church and expanded its charitable and educational work late in the 4th century.

In short, the Post-Easter period, coming in the late spring, is about renewal and reengagement in our mission as children of God and brothers and sisters in Christ. We are inspired by the experience of our forbears in founding the church and their missionary work, and encouraged by the promise of comfort and help as we build the church.

Transfiguration

- **Transfiguration** – 100 days after Easter, Christ's divinity is revealed on Mt. Tabor (Arm. Պայծառակերպութիւն (*baydzara*= 'bright', *gerbutyun*= 'appearance') or Վարդավառ (*varta*= 'rose', *var*= 'blaze') on this day people sprinkle each other with water (Matthew 17:1-6, Mark 9:1-8, Luke 9:28-36, John 1:14)

Transfiguration is an early summer feast day, falling 100 days after Easter, as early as June 28 and as late as August 1, depending on when Easter falls. As the year progresses, so too does our understanding and appreciation of Christ's divine mission. If during pre- and post-Easter periods, we prepared to find meaning and purpose in our lives and became engaged in the pursuit of that purpose, the Transfiguration reminds us that we, like the disciples, are human, but that Jesus is divine. The Transfiguration underscores Jesus' central place in God's plan for the salvation of humanity, lest we in our enthusiasm forget that our efforts alone are insufficient to set the world aright, but with God's grace anything is possible. Neither should we be discouraged if we are unequal to this task alone. We should take heart that divine grace will intervene for the fulfillment of God's plan.

This feast recalls a miraculous event in the life of Jesus witnessed by Peter, James, and John and documented by all of the evangelists: Matthew (17:1-6), Mark (9:1-8), Luke (9:28-36), and John (1:14). After a long night of prayer on top of Mount Tabor, blinding light radiated from Christ's body and face, as the Old Testament prophets Moses and Elijah flanked him and were speaking with him.

The central importance of the transfiguration becomes clearer in the context of Jesus' entire life and mission. Just before going to Mount Tabor, Jesus revealed to the disciples his Father's plan for the salvation of humanity, which would necessitate his torturous death but end in his glorious victory. The transfiguration was Christ's inspiration and glory in anticipation of fulfilling his Father's plan.

According to Bishop Gregory Arsharuni (ca. 690), *Aylagerbum-Vartavar*, as the feast is known in the Armenian Church, was established by St. Gregory the Illuminator, who substituted it for the pagan feast of Aphrodite called *Vartavar* (roseflame), because Christ's glory opened like a rose on Mount Tabor. Just as Christianity in general built on the foundation of the Jewish religion represented by the prophets Moses and Elijah, so too the Armenian celebration of transfiguration was placed upon the foundation of earlier worship. For Christ did not come to abolish the previous relationships man had with his Creator, but rather to strengthen relationships that had been forming ever since God made the world and left hints of his image within it.

One of the 5 Tabernacle (*Daghavar*) feasts of the Armenian Church, *Vartavar* is celebrated in mid-July and accompanied by the folk custom of sprinkling each other with water.

Assumption

- **Assumption** – Sunday closest to August 14. St. Mary is transported to heaven at her death (assume = take up) or sleep (hence this holy day is also called the Dormition) (Arm. Վերափոխում *verapokhum* 'up, over' + 'change') (Blessing of the Grapes Խաղողօրհնէք *khaghghorhnek*=grape + blessing)

The Assumption (Dormition) is the greatest of the three major holidays of the Armenian Church devoted to the Virgin Mary, and is one of the five major feast days (also called Tabernacle or *Daghavar* feasts) of the Armenian Church . According to different sources, St. Mary lived in Jerusalem from three to fifteen years after watching her son die on the cross and witnessing the miracle of his empty tomb. Eastern tradition tells us that at her death an elaborate funeral took place. All the apostles except St. Bartholomew were present at her funeral, burying her with great reverence in the Garden of Gethsemane. When Bartholomew arrived, he wanted to see Mary for the last time. The apostles took him to the tomb, and to their amazement, found it empty. They were convinced that her body was taken up to heaven by the Lord.

This belief was sanctioned by the church between the 9th and 12th centuries. The earliest and most reliable written formulation of the tradition of the Assumption comes from St. John of Damascus, who wrote that at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, the Emperor Marcian wished to possess the body of the Mother of God. The Emperor was told, however, by the Bishop of Jerusalem that St. Mary died in the presence of all the Apostles, but that her tomb, when opened at the request of St. Thomas, was found empty; wherefrom the Apostles concluded that the body was taken up to heaven. The raising up of St. Mary's body to heaven, following the ascension of her Son Jesus Christ, is perhaps the best testimony of her importance, second only to Jesus, in the Christian tradition. In this way the image of St. Mary and Jesus side by side, familiar to every Armenian churchgoer.

St. Mary, chosen by God for her humility and purity to be the mother of Jesus, the promised savior, is venerated by the church as the Holy Mother of God or *Asdvadzadzin*. Her name is invoked first in the prayers of the church, because she quite literally became the connection between God and man. St. Mary also plays a central liturgical role in the Armenian Church. Her picture with the Christ child on her knees adorns the main altar of Armenian churches, and daily worship services include the chanting of one or more hymns in her honor. There are three major feast days of St. Mary in the Armenian Church: the Birth of the Virgin Mary, the Annunciation, and the Assumption .

Exaltation of the Cross

- **Exaltation of the Cross** – Sunday closest to September 15. (Խաչվերաց *khachverats* = 'cross'+ 'raising'). The feasts of the Cross celebrate the 1st-century raising of the Cross by the brother of our Lord St. James, the Discovery of the Cross in 326 by Emperor Constantine's wife St. Helen at Golgotha where Jesus was crucified, and the recovery of the Cross from Persian captivity in 629.
- **Holy Translators** – mid-October. (Թարգմանչաց *Tarkmanchats*='translators') commemorates the translation of the Bible into Armenian using the Armenian Alphabet invented by Sts. Sahag & Mesrob in 405, as well as other Armenian Church Fathers and scholars, such as St. Gregory of Nareg and St. Nerses Shnorhali

In the Fall, we turn to the symbols and great works inspired by faith, including the Cross and the Bible.

In the time of Christ, the cross was a symbol of the grotesque, calling to mind a punishment so excruciatingly painful and inhumane that it was banned by the government. Perhaps the closest analogue to the cross today would be the electric chair or gallows. Yet as with everything else which comes into contact with the Lord, even an instrument of death can miraculously be given new life and meaning. Christians began to use the cross, once a sign of death, as a symbol of their faith and the new life given them through Jesus Christ.

It would be impossible to participate in the Divine Liturgy of the Armenian Church without noticing the importance of the cross; perhaps most obviously in the dozens of times each believer makes the sign of the cross.

Blessings by the priest are often made with cross in hand. The power of the cross is invoked with these words of prayer, intoned by the deacon before the ceremony of blessing: *Surp khachivs aghachestsuk z-Der, zi sovav prgestse z-mez i meghats, yev getsustse shnorhiv voghormutyan yuro. Amenegal Der Asdvadz mer, getso yev voghormya.* 'Let us pray to the Lord through the holy cross by which he saves us from sin and gives life by his merciful grace. Our Lord God almighty, save us and have mercy.'

The church fathers also recognized this importance of the cross by designating special feast days to it. In the Armenian Church there are four major holidays devoted to the Holy Cross: Exaltation of the Cross, Apparition of the Cross, Discovery of the Cross, and Holy Cross of Varak (located in Van).

In mid-October, we commemorate the translation of the Bible into Armenian using the Armenian Alphabet invented by Sts. Sahag and Mesrob in 405. Just as the cross is a symbolic expression of Christianity, through which we raise awareness of the faith, so too by making the Bible available to the Armenian people in their native language, Sts. Sahag and Mesrob inaugurated a new era in which Armenians could articulate their faith in their own language, thus infusing this medium of social interaction and intellectual discourse with the light and idiom of Christianity. During their time and for centuries thereafter Armenian Church Fathers, such as St. Gregory of Narek and St. Nerses Shnorhali, used this tool, invented with divine inspiration, to continue the mission of enlightening and liberating the Armenian people. Like the cross, the Bible is both a tool and symbol of liberation from the darkness of ignorance and destruction.

Advent

- **Advent** – Late November through Christmas. Յիսնակ *Hisnak* (from յիսուն *hisun*= 'fifty') 50-day preparation for the celebration of Christ's Birth on January 6

Exaltationtide continues until the beginning of Advent, the 50-day (7 week) pre-Christmas period observed in preparation for the celebration of Christ's birth on January 6. We started the year with the tidings of great joy that God is among us. Despite our many failings, he continues to work with us to create a better world. We now return to this starting point, cleansed during the Pre-Easter Lent, re-energized by Easter and post-Easter mission, reassured by the divinity of Christ in the Transfiguration, inspired by the humility of St. Mary in the Assumption. Armed with the tools of liberation and enlightenment, the Cross and Bible in Exaltationtide, we are on the threshold of the celebration of reconciliation with each other and God in Christmas. The miracle of new life causes even the powerful and rude of this world to pause and become more gentle, if only for a moment, reaffirming their better nature. Thus, the year comes full cycle. Like the seasons of nature and the passing years of our lives, each repetition is reminiscent of the past; yet each holds the potential for something new and better, if only we have the courage and commitment to work for the good as God gives us to understand it.

The Year in Review

- **Christmastide** – The Light in our midst, spread of Christianity, “Christian soldiers” Sts. Sarkis, Vardan and Ghevond.
- **Eastertide** – The Light within us. Lent, the period of “Spring cleaning” when we clean and prepare the soil of our soul, reassured by the triumph of Easter, Ascension, and the comfort of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the founding of the Church universal and planting of the Armenian Church.
- **Transfigurationtide** – comes in early summer when the sun is in full blaze, near the longest day of the year. Christ’s Transfiguration at *Vartavar* reminds us of his divinity, lest we in our enthusiasm believe we can go it alone.
- **Assumptiontide** – comes as the fall harvest is ripe and ready to be reaped. At Assumption we remember the example of Mary, the humble servant, Mother of God, who was reaped and transported to heaven. At this time, we also celebrate the Blessing of the Grapes (*Khaghoghohrhnek*), from which we make wine.
- **Exaltationtide** – the days grow shorter, but our work has just begun. Exaltation of the Cross and the Holy Translators remind us to take up our cross and to assist our Creator with our works with the powerful symbolic tools – the Cross and Bible.
- **Advent into Christmastide Again**. Days grow shorter, but propelled by efforts of passing year and drawn forward by faith that the light will come again, as it does every Christmas.

There are many ways to view the year as a coherent cycle.

Christmastide – comes in mid-winter, after the shortest day of the year (Dec. 23) when we most want the light. In the darkness we are reassured by the light of Christ entering the world. Then we remember the spread of the light by St. Gregory (National Fast of Armenia’s conversion) and through courage of “Christian soldiers” Sts. Sarkis, Vartan and Ghevont.

Eastertide –Spring is a time of growth and renewal, rebirth, coinciding with Lent and Easter. It is the period of “Spring cleaning” when we clean and prepare the soil of our soul, for resurrection, reassured by the triumph of Easter, Ascension, and the comfort of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, when the Church was founded and when we remember St. Gregory and those who planted and cultivated the Armenian Church.

Transfigurationtide – comes in early summer when the sun is in full blaze, near the longest day of the year. Christ’s Transfiguration reminds us of his divinity, lest we in our enthusiasm believe we can go it alone.

Assumptiontide – comes as the fall harvest is ripe and ready to be reaped. At Assumption we remember the example of Mary, the humble servant, Mother of God, who as the best fruit was reaped and transported to heaven. At this time, we also celebrate the Blessing of the Grapes, from which we make wine.

Exaltationtide – the days grow shorter, but our work is not done. Having grown to fruition during the four preceding seasons, it is our turn to work, to take up our cross and to assist our creator with our works. As we celebrate the Exaltation of the Cross and the Holy Translators, we remember how the tool of death and darkness turned into a symbol of life. We also remember the Bible, in Armenian the *Asdvadzashunch*, the “Breath of God” translated in the 5th century by the Holy Translators is a tool to battle ignorance. The cross and the Bible are two of the most powerful symbolic tools of our faith.

So the year winds down and the days grow shorter with Advent and Christmastide, when we are propelled by the efforts of the year that passed and drawn forward by the faith that the light will come again, as it always does, every at Christmas, giving us another chance to do better with the insight and experience gained in the passing year.

Hours

- 9 services per day, *Zhamakirk* ժամագիրք (Book of Hours).
- monastic tradition.
- most common in parish life:
 - **Morning Service** (*Aravodyan Zhamerkutyun*) առաւօտեան ժամերգութիւն
 - **Evening Service** (*Yeregoyan Zhamerkutyun*) երեկոյեան ժամերգութիւն

Just as the year is broken down into a sequence of holidays that give a rhythm to our lives as the years pass, so each day has its own course and rhythm, which the Church has marked with times for prayer and reflection. The Armenian Church has 9 services per day, which you can find in the *Zhamakirk* (Book of Hours). These have roots in monastic tradition. The most commonly celebrated in parishes are the following:

Morning Service (*Aravodyan Zhamerkutyun*)

Evening Service (*Yeregoyan Zhamerkutyun*)

Daily Hours

- Night (*Kisherayin*) Գիշերային Vigils
- Sunrise (*Arevakal*) Արեւագալ
- Morning (*Aravodyan*) Առաւօտեան
- Terce (*Jashu*) Ճաշու
- Sexte (*Jashu*) Ճաշու
- None (*Jashu*) Ճաշու
- Evening (*Yeregoyan*) Երեկոյեան
- Peace (*Khaghaghayin*) Խաղաղային
- Compline (*Hanksdyan*) Հանգստեան

During Lent, Sunrise and Peace Services are often observed in addition to or instead of Morning and Evening Services. Otherwise, as already noted, Morning and Evening Services are the most commonly observed in non-monastic settings. The Sunday Service with Holy Communion is based on the *Jashu* service (which is the Midday Service), said around the main meal (*jash*) of the day.

Readings

- Based on the Calendar, the Armenian Church prescribes specific readings appropriate to the day. You can find these in the Lectionary (*Jashots*) or on-line at www.armenianchurch.net

The Armenian Church, following the practice of the Church in Jerusalem, has selected one or more Old and New Testament readings for each day of the year. The readings usually relate to the specific holiday or season. These are found in the *Jashots* Lectionary (lecture - lesson read aloud), which are meant to be read during the mid-day meal service according to the Book of Hours of the Armenian Church; hence, the name *Jashots*, from *Jash* = 'meal'.

Time

- Time is one of our most precious resources.
- It is important that we use our lifetime, the time given to us, well.
- The Church Calendar helps us to see time in a new perspective.
- Most importantly, it teaches us to set aside some time for contemplating our lives in light of our Creator's design, by remembering the life of Christ, the saints, prophets, and founders of our church and faith.

As the priest says at the beginning of each Sunday Service, "give us time to do good" with the guidance and grace of the Holy Spirit. The past is past. But because life is repetitive and cyclical, we get a "second chance" by the grace of God. It is important to learn from our own and others' experience how they steered clear of perils when possible and met and overcame those perils with the grace of God. Experience has two components *ex*='out of' *per*='peril', Arm. *portsutyun*, so experience is a guide to learning from other's mistakes and avoiding perils.

Models and Paths

- Why repeat this every day of every year? Because we grow and change, and what may seem irrelevant at one stage in our lives, becomes relevant at another. If we have regularly observed the Calendar, we may see patterns and models that will help us through life's predicaments.
- Although our lives are unique, the Calendar reminds us they are not totally different from the lives of those who have passed this way before.