

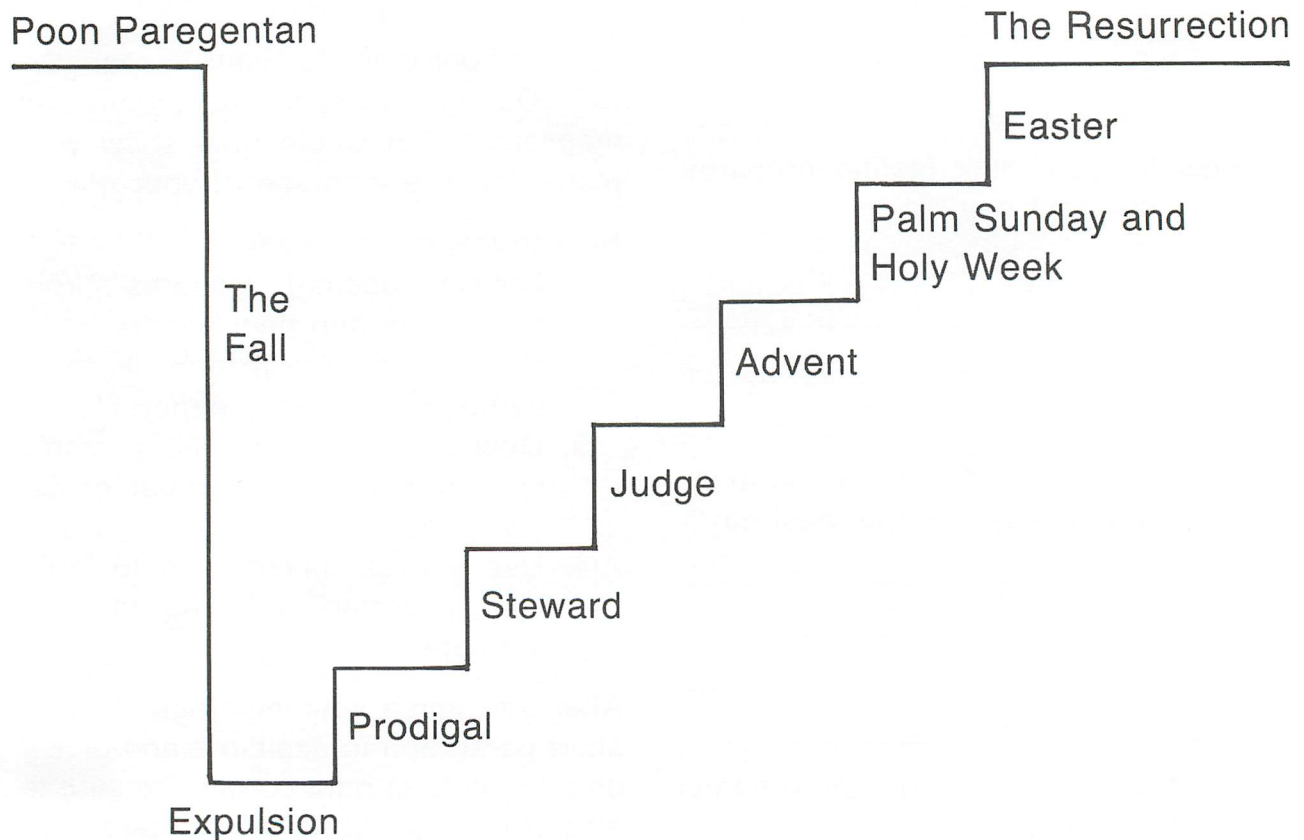
# Great Lent

Great Lent (Medz Bahk) commemorates the time when Jesus went into the wilderness. While he was there, he did not eat or drink. He was tempted by the devil to turn away from his mission. But Jesus did not. After 40 days, the angels came to Jesus and cared for him.

Just as Jesus used his time in the wilderness to prepare for his mission, we use Lent to prepare ourselves for Jesus. The church helps us do this

through Bible readings, practices, and services that help us think about our relationship with God and how we can improve it.

Here is a chart of the Easter Cycle from Poon Paregentan through Easter. Great Lent starts the Monday after Poon Paregentan and ends the Saturday before Palm Sunday. Study the chart to see how we progress and prepare ourselves for Jesus.



# The Easter Cycle

**Poon Paregentan** (Gen. 2:1-9, 15-17, 21-23). A happy celebration of how God intended life to be when he created Adam and Eve and gave them Paradise.

**The Sunday of Expulsion** (Gen. 3:1-24). A sad remembrance of the sin of Adam and Eve: disobeying God. People have lost Paradise and realize the consequences of sin, separation from God.

**The Sunday of the Prodigal Son** (Lk. 15:11-32). This is the first step in our process of regaining the lost Paradise. The story of this Sunday is the Parable of the Prodigal Son. He asks his father for his share of his inheritance and sets off for worldly adventures. When everything is gone, he comes home to ask his father if he can be a servant in his father's house. His father sees him as he is coming home and knows this son wants to be back with his family again. The father runs out to greet the son and accept him back, not as a servant, but as his son again. The older son complains, but the father reassures him that there will always be a place for the older son in his home. He wants the older son to know how happy he is that the younger son is home. The lesson this story teaches us is that we have to turn away from sin and back to God. We have to ask God for forgiveness. God is happy when we return to him.

**The Sunday of the Steward** (Luke 16:1-13). The parable tells us of a man who is in charge of his boss' bills. The

boss finds out the steward has not been doing his job well. He asks the steward to show him all the bills before he will be fired. The steward thinks of a way to make sure he will have a new job when he loses this one. He calls each of the people who owe his boss and tells them they can pay back less than they owe. Each person is happy to pay less and the steward thinks one of them will give him a job. The lesson is that we have lost our original paradise so we must use all our intelligence to gain the new Kingdom that Jesus has promised us.

**The Sunday of the Judge** (Luke 18:1-8). This story is about a woman who has a case in court that the judge has not settled yet. She keeps after him every day to settle it. The judge doesn't care about the woman, but he wants to be rid of her so he settles her case. Jesus tells us that the judge settled the woman's case even though he didn't care about her because she kept after him to do so. Jesus then tells us that God, who loves us very much, will do for us what we ask him to do if we continually pray for it. (God gives us what is good for us). What we should always ask God for is to be accepted into the Kingdom.

**The Sunday of Advent** (Mark 13). On this Sunday we are told about what will happen when Jesus comes again. This world as we now know it will end. Christ will come and resurrect the dead. The living and the dead will be judged. Those who have lived their



lives as God wants them to will be accepted into the Kingdom.

**Palm Sunday.** Jesus enters Jerusalem welcomed as the Son of God. He teaches and heals people. He warns those who are not living according to God's will to change their ways.

**Holy Week.** On Friday Jesus is arrested and tried before the Roman Governor and the Hebrew leaders. He is condemned to death on the cross even though he is innocent of the charges.

On Great Saturday Jesus talks to those who have died before he came. He gives them a chance to choose the Kingdom.

**Easter.** Jesus ascends to Heaven to prove to all the Kingdom is real and ready for us, when he will come again. Now all know Jesus is really God and that what he taught us about how God wants us to live is true. God has given us a new chance to be with him. The Old Covenant is ended. The New Covenant is begun. Now anyone who believes in Jesus and follows his teachings can come to the Kingdom.

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## Great Lent Then and Now



Hi. My name is Hripsime. I lived in Armenia long ago. In those days this is how we commemorated Great Lent.

On Poon Paregentan our whole village would go to church and receive communion. Then we would hurry home and change into costumes so no one could see who we were. We would meet each other in the village square and soon there would be singing and dancing. Music would fill the air and we would form a parade trying to guess who everyone was. There would be fruit to eat and cheese and bread and sweets. Then, after enough party time had gone by, our priest would remind us to hurry home and be ready for Medz Bahk. This would be the last party for a long, long time. This would be the last time we would eat pilaf made with butter. Now it would be made with olive oil and it wouldn't taste the same. Tonight we would enjoy fish, chicken, lamb, and beef, but tomorrow there would be none.

On Monday and every day for forty days, we would go to service at our village church. We would eat only enough food to keep us well. We'd gather



Great Lent  
MEDZ BAHK  
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the things we did not need anymore and give them to people who did. Every Sunday we would go to church. A black curtain covered the usual red one. A small altar was placed in the chancel of the church; and on it was a picture of Jesus crucified. The priest would tell us the Lenten stories about Adam and Eve, the Prodigal Son, the Steward, the Judge, and Advent.

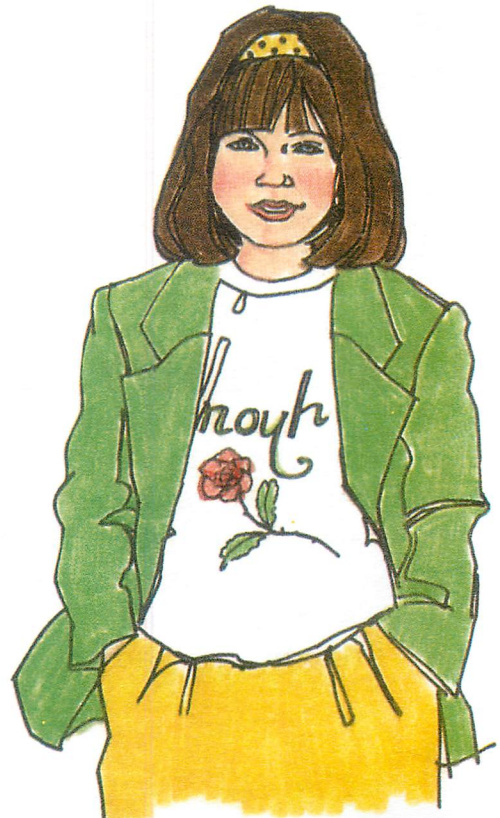
Each week was hard to get through. We longed for butter on our bread. We dreamt about the taste of eggs. We wondered if we had forgotten how baked chicken tasted! But we knew each day brought us closer to Palm Sunday and the good feast that would go with it.

With every extra prayer we knew more and more that God was listening to us. We knew God was glad to hear us tell him we love him. We knew God was happy we told him we appreciated all the nice things he provided for us.

During the week after Advent Sunday, everyone in the house started cleaning for Easter. Everything was dusted and washed and straightened and checked. We wanted to be ready for the King of Glory, Jesus Christ's arrival on Palm Sunday and his Resurrection on Easter. We knew he would not walk in our door, but we knew he would come into our hearts.

Hi. My name's Rosie. (My grandmother calls me Vartoohy.) Today we celebrate Lent in many of the same ways it was commemorated long ago. Even though Armenians do not live all together in villages with a church of our own at the center, we do come together in church to hear the stories of Lent. We don't all dress up and have a party, but some of our Sunday Schools have a costume party on the Saturday before Poon Paregentan.

My mom won't let me give up milk for Lent because she says I need it to grow strong. But we do eat meatless meals on Wednesdays and Fridays and mom doesn't cook enough for us to have extra





helpings. We don't have desserts. We go to the fish and chips dinner at church even though I don't like fish!

Our church has services on Wednesday nights. My cousin's church has them on Friday nights. These are special Lenten services. They consist of the Rest and Peace Hours, plus the 24 Prayers of St. Nersess and a prayer of St. Gregory of Narek. The church is dim and quiet and sad.

The black curtain has replaced the colorful one we usually have. The special Lenten altar is set up in front of the curtain. This altar is draped in black and has a picture of Christ on the cross at the top of it. I like going to church because these services are so unlike the Sunday service. As I sit with my family, I think about how sorry and sad I feel when I know I have done something wrong. But I also remember that God will forgive me for my sins if I ask him to.

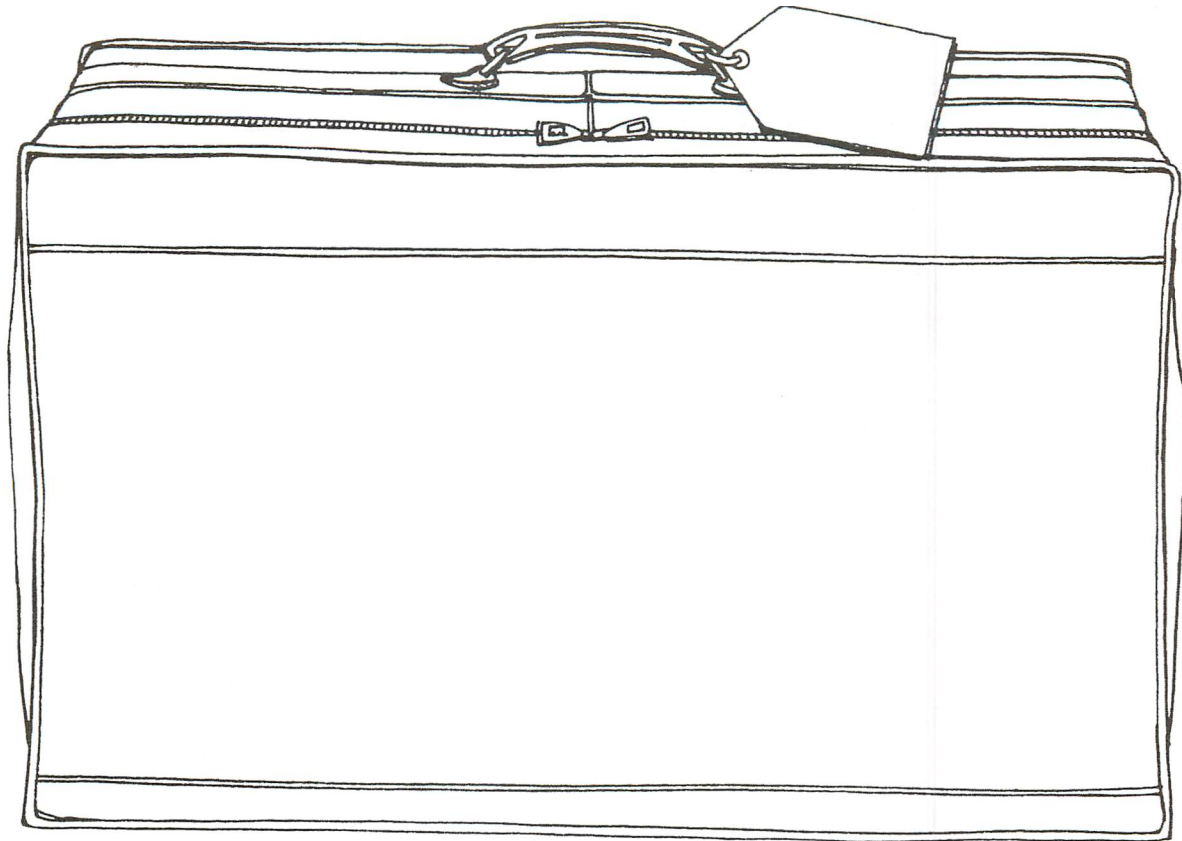
Our Sunday School teacher told us to give up something for Lent. I gave up watching my favorite TV show, but I hope I will see the episodes I miss when they are rerun. The teacher also told us to choose to do something that would be especially pleasing to God. I chose not fighting with my brother when he does things that annoy me. It is really hard not to get angry with him when he messes up my collection of stuffed animals.



## I AM READY, LORD.

The last Sunday of Lent is the Sunday of Advent. We are reminded to be ready always for Jesus' Second Coming. No one knows when that will be, but let's imagine that it will be tomorrow. Pretend you had to pack a suit-

case to be ready to go with our Lord to the Kingdom. The items in your suitcase would be examples of how you have followed the teachings of Jesus. What have you done that you could put in your suitcase?



HOMEWORK: Memorize one of these prayers.

## PRAYERS OF ST. NERSESS

1. O Jesus, wisdom of the Father, grant me wisdom, that I may always think, speak, and do that which is good in your sight; save me from evil thoughts, words, and deeds. Have mercy upon your creatures and upon me, a manifold sinner.
2. Heavenly King, grant me your kingdom which you promised to your beloved; strengthen my heart to hate sin and to love you alone, and to do your will. Have mercy upon



your creatures and upon me, a manifold sinner.

3. O Christ, the guardian of all, let your right hand guard and shelter me by day and by night, at home and abroad, in sleeping and waking, that I may never fall. Have mercy upon your creatures and upon me, a manifold sinner.