

ARMENIAN CHRISTMAS

The feast which we normally refer to as *ARMENIAN CHRISTMAS* is more properly designated as *THEOPHANY* — the revelation of God. The proper Armenian term for this feast is simply *ASDVADZA-HAYDNOOTYOON*. This simply means that this is the feast of God becoming man.

Yes! The God of the universe and all creation became a human being. We call Him *JESUS CHRIST*. The Holy Scripture describes this as: “. . . the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” (John 1:14)

This is the great event which we celebrate on the Feast of the Theophany.

We may ask why this celebration of Armenian Christmas is January 6. After all, everyone else seems to be celebrating on December 25.

To find the answer to this question, we have only to look at history.

Originally, all Christians celebrated Christmas on January 6. However, there was a Roman pagan feast known as the *SATURNALIA*.

This holiday came around December 25. It was a celebration of the winter solstice — the birth of the sun.

This particular Roman feast, as many such Roman feasts, was more an excuse for drunkenness and debauchery than anything else. Unfortunately, some Christians also took part in this pagan observance.

In order to dissuade Christians from taking part in this licentious celebration of the birth of the sun, the Church Fathers in the West designated December 25 as the date of the birth of the SON, our Lord Jesus Christ. This happened in approximately 340 A.D.

Since Armenia was not a part of the Roman Empire, the Roman feast of the Saturnalia, even if known in Armenia, was not observed or celebrated there. Therefore, the Armenian Church saw no need to change the date for the observance of the birth of Jesus. As a result, the Armenian Church has maintained the January 6 date

from the very earliest times.

The Feast of the Theophany in the Armenian Church is really a triple feast. It commemorates:

- 1.) the birth of Jesus Christ
- 2.) His revelation to mankind
- 3.) His Baptism

We find these ideas and truths beautifully expressed in some of the hymns which are sung in the Armenian Church for the Feast of the Theophany.

For example, the Processional Hymn proclaims:

O great and marvelous mystery which was today revealed: the shepherds sing with the angels, and give the glad tidings to the world.

Christ is born and revealed.

Also, the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy on the Feast of the Theophany, there is a service which is called *THE BLESSING OF THE WATER* (Choor-Orhnek). It is also often referred to as *THE SERVICE OF THE BAPTISM OF THE CROSS*. This service, of course, commemorates Jesus's Baptism in the River Jordan.

One of the Hymns which is sung during that service states:

How marvelous is the great mystery which has been revealed: God the Creator comes to the River Jordan. O river, fear not, I am your Creator; I am come to Baptism in order to wash away the sins of the world.

For the Feast of the Theophany the Armenian Church has a special greeting. It proclaims:

Քրիստոս ծնաւ եւ յայտնեցաւ: Krisdos dzunav yev haydnestzav. Christ has been born and revealed.

The proper response to this greeting is:

Օրհնեալ է Յայտնութիւնն Քրիստոսի: Orhnyal eh Haydnootyoonun Krisdosi.

Blessed is the Revelation of Christ.

