

FALL FEASTS: HONORING THE CROSS

Every fall, Sunday School opens near or on one of the five major feasts, the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (celebrated on the Sunday closest to September 14, anywhere from September 11 to 17). Traditionally, 'Antasdan'--the blessing of the field, also known as the blessing of the four corners--is held at the end of Liturgy. Other feasts of the cross follow quickly.

Exaltation of the Holy Cross--Khachveratz

This feast recalls the exaltation or "lifting up" of the cross for adoration as it was brought back from Persia. In the 7th century, Jerusalem had been attacked by the Persians who stole the True Cross. The Emperor Heracles led troops to retrieve the cross and upon their triumphant return, passed through Armenia where the cross was venerated all across the land.



Holy Cross of Varak--Varakakhach

A cross commemoration unique to the Armenian Church, this one recalls the discovery of the piece of the cross hidden by the nun Hripsime (of King Drtad fame). The tradition is that a monk, Todig, had a dream of a 12-pillared church descending over the Monastery of Varak. There, the relic of the cross was discovered. An annual commemoration was established later by St. Nersess the Builder (7th Century).

Discovery of the Holy Cross--Kiud Khach

In the 4th Century, Helena, the mother of the Emperor Constantine (under whose reign Christianity became a sanctioned religion of the state). Searched for the three crosses of Golgotha--the Cross of Christ and the two on which the thieves hung. They were found in a ruin in Jerusalem. There is a story that in order to verify the identity of the True Cross, a passing funeral procession was stopped and the deceased placed on the crosses. When he was miraculously revived on one, it was immediately identified as the Lord's.

Why this special veneration of the cross, an instrument of torture and execution? Even St. Paul said "we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling lock to Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles. (*1 Corinthians 1:23*)

The Cross of Salvation

With Jesus' death, the cross was transformed into a vehicle of salvation. On it, the Son of God died; and by means of His death, rose again, making it possible for all to join Him in eternal life. This miraculous event is why the Armenian Cross often features rays shooting out from it's center (agn in Armenian, for "eye" or with leaves, or wheat and grapes flaring from it's base, and other ornamentation meant to emphasize its life-giving character.

**E
X
A
L
T
A
T
I
O
N** **O
F
T
H
E** **H
O
L
Y
C
R
O
S
S**

