

The Faith Journey

Lesson 6

Unit Three

The Oldest Church in the New World

Here I Am, Lord

Fill in the blanks with the correct words from the list below.

Kreesdos ee mech mer haydnetzav—Christ is revealed among us!
(from the Divine Liturgy)

_____ in our midst has been revealed! He who is
_____ is seated here.

The voice of _____ has resounded. _____
_____ is commanded. This _____ has now become one
_____. The _____ is given for a full bond. The enmity has
been removed; and _____ is spread over us all. Now, priests, raise
your _____ and give _____ together to the one God,
while _____ sing, “holy, holy, holy!”

holy Christ greeting God peace soul
love voices Church kiss angels blessings



God’s Promise to the Armenian Nation: “I Will Be Your God...And You Shall Be My People!”



It is written on each of our hearts, “*I will be your God and you shall be my people!*” God entered into human history and walked among the people of the world and Armenians continue to acknowledge Jesus’ presence and love wherever they settle. At the center of the Christian story is *God*—what he is doing with the world and his dealings with humankind from the creation to the day yet to come, when history will be fulfilled.

We can actually break that story into six main chapters.

This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

Jeremiah 31:33

1. **Creation**—A relationship which pleased God.
2. **The fall of humankind**—When we fell out of relationship with our creator.
3. **The Covenant with Abraham**—When God chose one man and all his descendants to come...Yes, in faith, that is US!
4. **Jesus**—The Word made Flesh who came to restore the relationship with our creator.
5. **Christ's followers**—Yes, it's us once again.
6. **The end times**—When we will be fully renewed and restored to the relationship that God intended for his creation.

One of the most devoted of Jesus' first followers was St. Paul. During three different missionary journeys, he was instrumental in founding new Christian communities in what is now the Middle East and Western Europe. His letters to these churches - most of the Epistles of the New Testament - are the earliest and among the greatest works of theology.

And from the beginning of *Armenia's* faith story in 301 AD, our faith has proven stronger than any enemy's persecution; that the Armenian Church is thriving across the globe is living proof!





One Step Back

True or False

- | | | |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. According to Romans 1:16-17 it is through faith that we are put right with God. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. St. Santookht first persecuted Christians, then became a convert. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. St. Nersess established the first Armenian Church in America. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. We are all called to become saints. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. The Armenian word “ <i>Shmorhali</i> ” means “ <i>holy</i> ” in English. | T <input type="checkbox"/> | F <input type="checkbox"/> |

Charting a Spiritual Journey

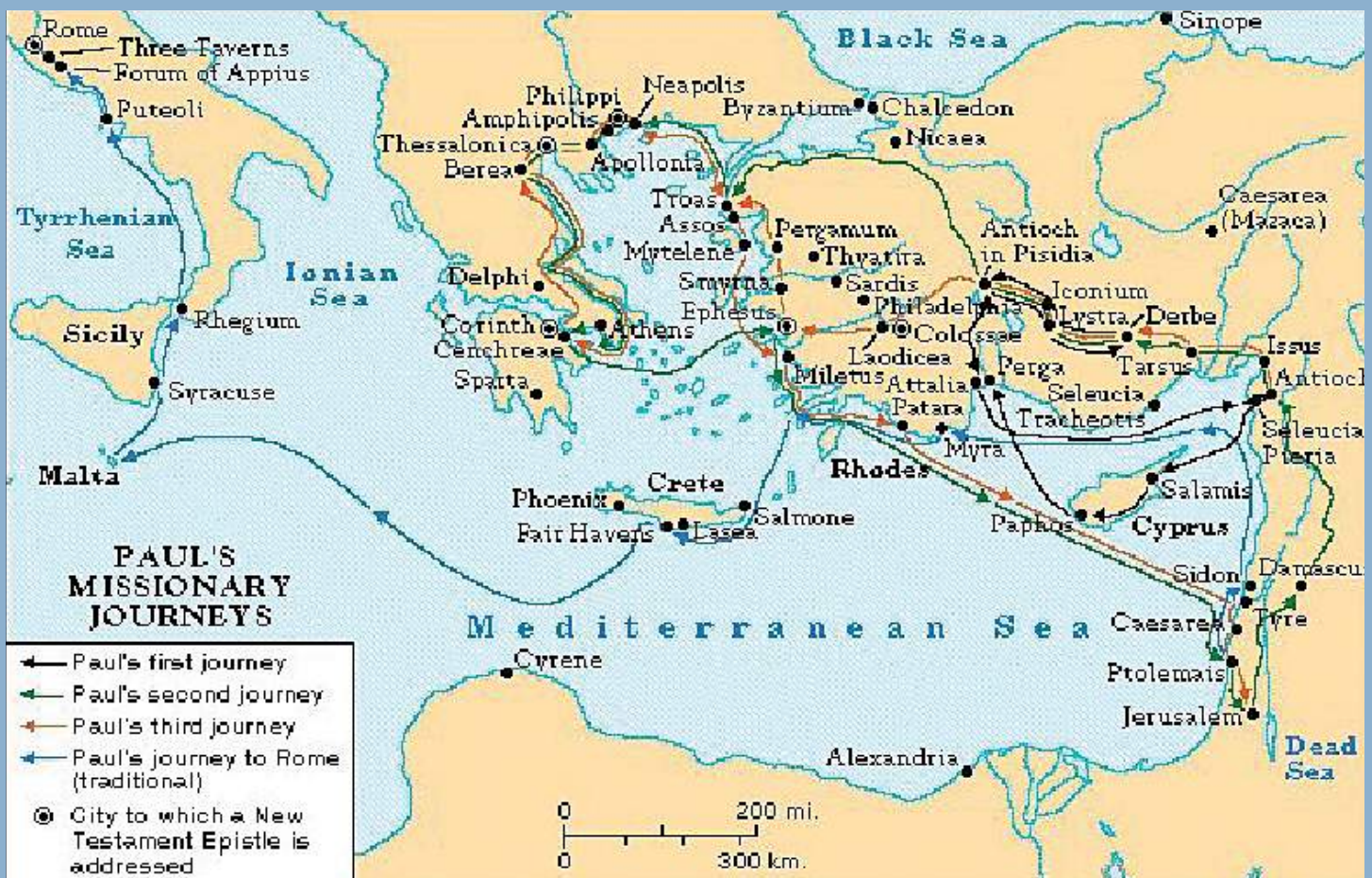
The Bible is an unending story of hope that inspires all Christian life. St. Paul wrote the oldest book of the New Testament to the people of Thessalonica (50-51 A.D.) who were mostly non-Jewish Christians. Apparently due to Paul’s powerful personal witness, they had formed a Christian community in this Greek city. This letter and all the others serve as personal invitations not only for the people of St. Paul’s time, but for the new Armenian communities that sprung up throughout the world, and for each of us today, to live Christ’s message and share it with others.

Before we read about how the oldest Church faced the challenges of the New World, let’s remember where it all began: in the instructions that Jesus gave to the 12 disciples called the Great Commission. It must be an important instruction, as it will be repeated in all the Gospels and the Book of Acts.

“Go make disciples of all nations...and I will be with you always, to the end of time!” Matthew 28:19-20
And there’s more! Read on....

Read your assigned Bible verses and then answer the four questions.

Matthew 28:16-20	Mark 16:14-18	Luke 24:33-49	John 20:19-23	Acts 1:3-9
Where were the apostles and what were they doing?	Where were the apostles and what were they doing?	Where were the apostles and what were they doing?	Where were the apostles and what were they doing?	Where were the apostles and what were they doing?
What reaction did they have to Jesus’ appearance?	What reaction did they have to Jesus’ appearance?	What reaction did they have to Jesus’ appearance?	What reaction did they have to Jesus’ appearance?	What reaction did they have to Jesus’ appearance?
What did Jesus tell them to do?	What did Jesus tell them to do?	What did Jesus tell them to do?	What did Jesus tell them to do?	What did Jesus tell them to do?
Who would help them?	Who would help them?	Who would help them?	Who would help them?	Who would help them?



St. Paul Rocks His World

You remember reading about St. Paul's amazing conversion in the Book of Acts. From a fierce persecutor of Christians, the man called Saul became St. Paul, devoted believer and energetic missionary. St. Paul traveled widely throughout the region, establishing church communities wherever he went. It was never easy. He was often met with hostility and sometimes even threatened and imprisoned. But as people opened their hearts and minds to his message (and you can be sure that the Holy Spirit had a role in this!), it was too good to ignore. More and more people became followers of Jesus Christ, followers of what came to be called "the Way."

Most of the letters in the New Testament are letters from St. Paul to the Christian communities he had founded around the Mediterranean. Above is a map of his three famous missionary journeys.

The first journey, described in Acts 13-14, took Paul from Antioch to Cyprus then southern Asia Minor and back to Antioch. The second journey, described in Acts 15-18, took him from Jerusalem to, among other places, Philippi and Corinth and then finally to Antioch. On

his third and final missionary journey, described in Acts 18-21, Paul went to Galatia, Ephesus and other places, returning finally to Jerusalem. A bit later he sailed to Rome, where he was imprisoned and eventually executed.

St. Paul's epistles or letters contained answers to questions and strong advice about what the communities needed to change and how they could follow Christ more closely. So, for example, the book known as I Corinthians is simply his first letter to the Christians in Corinth. Philippians is his letter to the Christians in Philippi... and so on.

If you were writing to your parish today, what would you want to tell them?

Dear parishioners....

1. One thing we might *stop* doing to follow Christ more closely:
2. Something we might *start* doing to follow Christ more closely:

Our Armenian Way

Some interesting facts: The first real surge of immigration from Armenia to the United States was in the 1890's. From 1890-1914 about 64,000 Turkish Armenians came to the United States before WWI. From 1920 -1924 a second wave of about 30,000 Armenian refugees fled to the United States. A third wave of immigration came following WWII, when 700,000 Armenians immigrated to Europe or the United States. From the 1920's and on, Armenians came to the United States (among other destinations) from Egypt, Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Russia, and Armenia.

Upon arriving in their new country, those earliest immigrants to the United States knew nothing of America except for what they had heard from fellow countrymen. Few had any guarantee of employment, mainly because they could not speak English. As a result, they made initial contacts with friends and relatives, creating new Armenian communities; they needed each other in this strange land.

One of the first things the new communities did was to establish a church, a place to gather for worship and fellowship. The Armenian Church served as a beacon for every new wave of immigrants, bringing newcomers together in faith and culture.

The first Armenian Church, the Armenian Church of Our Saviour (Soorp Purgitch), was built in Worcester, Massachusetts in 1890 and consecrated on January 18, in 1891 and the first Armenian clergyman arrived, in response to a petition by 300 Armenian residents of the city. By 1897, as the number of Armenian immigrants grew, there were six clergymen serving the Armenian Church in America.

The Armenian Church of North America was established officially by Catholicos Mgrdich Khrimian in 1898, and grew to embrace three Dioceses and thousands of faithful. Today there are Armenian churches all over the world in Western Europe, South America, the Middle East, Asia, Australia, and, of course, Armenia.



Closing Reflection

The Armenian Church

The Armenian Church is the birthplace of my spirit,
shadowed and illuminated like a cavern;
but vast and vaulted, its entrance welcomes guests
to the wide sanctuary where the altar floats
in silence in the distance like a mighty ship.

Even with my eyes closed I can see it,
its Christ's face bright as a child's.
When I breathe in, I breathe its holy incense
smoking on its altar; its sturdy walls quaking
with old and stormy prayers.

The Armenian Church is the unyielding fortress
of our fathers' faith. They raised it
stone by stone out of the earth.
They lowered it dewfall by dew from the heavens.
And they were buried in hushed stillness there.

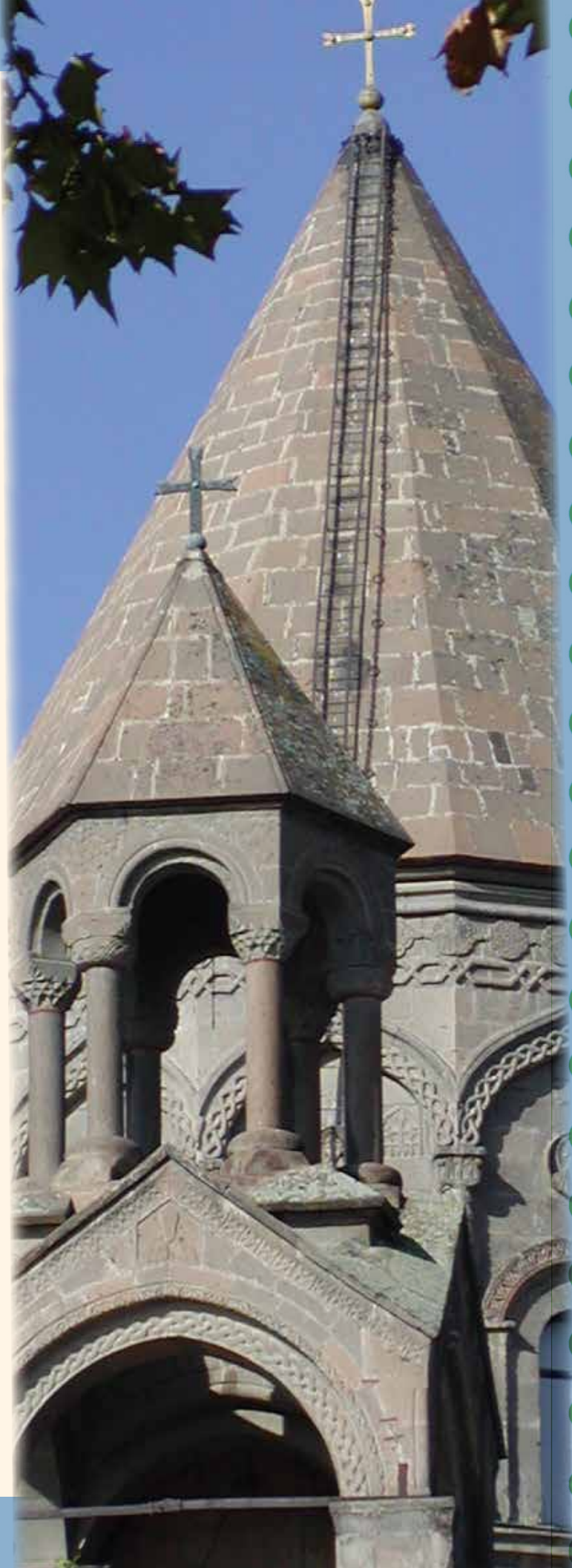
The Armenian Church is the tapestry curtain
behind which God himself descends
into the chalice. And before which my nation
bows its head for communion with the past
with life-giving bread and wine.

Against storms our church is haven and harbor.
Against the cold night it is fire and flame.
It is the shaded forest in the heat of day
Where lilies flower, watered by our hymns, our psalms.

The Armenian Church knows the secret road to heaven
Hidden under every stone. For the Armenian spirit
And body it is the shining armor, its crosses swords;
Its bells reverberate with the victory we know is ours.

Vahan Tekeyan 1924

*Translated by Diana Der Hovanessian and
Marzbed Margossian*



Unit Three: The Faith Journey

Session 6: The Oldest Church in the New World

Key Concepts

1. God will remain faithful to his promise “to be our God and accept us as his people.” (Jeremiah 31:33)
2. The Armenian Church in America established its first church in Worcester, MA in 1898 and grew to embrace three Dioceses and thousands of faithful.
3. The Armenian Church always served as a beacon for Armenians wherever they lived.

Objectives

During this session students will

1. Explore the meaning of the word “community.”
2. Analyze the hymn *Kreesdos Ee Mech Mer* (Christ in Our Midst).
3. Complete a brief review quiz.
4. Identify the six main chapters of our faith story.
5. Participate in a Bible study focusing on Jesus’ call to the apostles and to us today.
6. Read about St. Paul’s missionary journeys.
7. Review the facts of the first immigration of Armenians to the United States and the founding of the first church in Worcester, MA.

Materials Needed

Large cross

Divine Liturgy pew books (one for each pair of students)

Procedure

1. Begin class by asking students what word or words come to mind when they hear the word ‘community.’ Give them time to respond and write answers on the board. Then turn to **Here I Am, Lord**. Distribute Divine Liturgy books. Have students turn to page 27 and tell them: “This is the hymn that we sing while we share the “Kiss of Peace” during *Badarak*. It is a way of expressing our love and togetherness in Christ, since it is during the Divine Liturgy that Christ brings all of us together in him through Holy Communion. For that reason, we need to be in complete peace with *one another* so that our hearts are pure and open and ready to receive God.” Hold up the cross and note that our communion with one another and with God is symbolized in Christ’s holy cross. “The vertical leg of the cross represents our relationship with God; the horizontal arm represents our relationship with one another.” Give them five minutes to complete the assignment, using the pew books. When they are done, pray the prayer together. Answers (students will answer in English, but review some of the more important Armenian terms by pointing to them in pew book; the words may vary slightly because of grammatical prefixes or suffixes but they will be recognizable): *Christ/Kreesdos, God/Asdvadz, peace/khaghaghootyoon, Holy/Soorp, greeting/voghchooyrn, church/yegeghetsee, soul/hokee, kiss/hampooyr, love/ser, voices, blessings, angels.* 10 min.
2. Read or teach **God’s Promise to the Armenian Nation**.
3. Tell students: “Let’s look at **One Step Back** for our little review quiz and see what we remember from last week’s lesson.” Answers: T, F (she never persecuted Christians), F (Catholicos Khrimian accomplished this), T, F (it means “filled with Grace;” holy is “soorp” in Armenian). 10 min.
4. Ask for a volunteer to read **Charting A Spiritual Journey**. On the board make five columns, one for each passage below. Divide students into five groups (this can be done in pairs or singly or as one group if the class is small) and assign each one of the Scripture passages. Direct them to read their passage and respond to the questions. (Timing will depend on whether you work as one group or five.) If working in groups, allow ten minutes for the reading and the answers, and ten minutes for a quick review together. As you discuss, record (or ask for volunteers to do so) their answers in the appropriate column on the board. Have them copy answers into their books.

5.

Matthew 28:16-20	Mark 16:14-18	Luke 24:33-49	John 20:19-23	Acts 1:3-9
Together on a mountain in Galilee where Jesus had told them to go.	They were together eating	Together in Jerusalem	Behind locked doors together	Together in Jerusalem
They worshiped but some doubted.	Disbelief-doubt	They were terrified; they thought he was a ghost. But eventually they were filled with joy & wonder.	Doubtful, but filled with joy when Jesus revealed himself as the Lord, showing his wounds.	They no longer doubted that Jesus was still alive (v.3).
Make disciples of all nations and baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and teach them to obey the commandments.	Go out throughout the world, preach the Good News, and baptize believers.	They would be his witnesses throughout the world.	Gave them the power to forgive people's sins.	Wait for the Holy Spirit, the gift the Father promised; then they would tell people everywhere about Jesus.
That they would not be alone, Jesus would always be with them.	The Lord worked with them.	He would send them the Holy Spirit as the Father promised.	He breathed the power of the Holy Spirit upon them.	The Holy Spirit

In conclusion, make the connection that our Christian journey is the same today as it was for the apostles and summarize all the findings quickly:

Where the apostles were or what they were doing? They were together-Christians journey together in community.

What reaction did they have to Jesus's appearance? Mixed reaction, fear, doubt and finally joy. Our faith journey very often is a mixed reaction. But once we truly believe, we are filled with joy –which is a sure sign of the Holy Spirit.

What did Jesus tell them to do? To be his witnesses throughout the world, with the power to baptize, perform miracles & forgive sins: The Church's mission has not changed – our mission is still the same.

What should they expect? The gift that the Father promised, Jesus' authority, power and the grace of God's Holy Spirit. As the body of Christ we are can count on the Holy Spirit to guide us in the Church's mission.

6. Teach or read **St. Paul Rocks His World!** Give students a few minutes to address their parish. Share answers. If students can't think of anything, prompt them to think of what Christ asks us to do in following him: give to the poor, pray, love one another, serve one another, etc. 10 min.

7. Read **Our Armenian Way** and recite Vahan Tekeyan's poem as a closing reflection. 10 min.

Unit Three: The Faith Journey Session 7: We Are The Church

Key Concepts

1. The church is the Body of Christ on earth, a community of gifts, a redeemed family of believers.
2. Christ lives in us through the Holy Spirit.
3. The Holy Spirit guides and strengthens all the faithful, who are Christ's Body, through his gifts & through the spiritual fruit we bear when we live in him.