

GROUPING OF THE FEASTS IN THE ARMENIAN CHURCH (DATES SHOWN ARE FOR THE YEAR 2014)

Introduction

The Armenian Church yearly calendar has its special setting for the groupings of the religious feasts, cycled around the date of Easter Sunday. Some of the observances have fixed dates. They are independent from the cycle of the dominical feasts, given the fact that their dates are compatible with the data found in the Holy Scriptures. Others, specified as national or cultural feasts, emerge from the religious aspect of the life of the Armenian Church and people. Fasting days are predominant. The following study will show at a glance the variety of the observances, their groupings, and their duration through the year. Dates shown correspond to the calendar year 2014. The main source of this study is the *Tonatssooyts*, the *Church Calendar* of the Armenian Church.

Groupings

By virtue of their nature, the feasts and their observance in the Armenian Church comprise three categories:

Dominical Feasts, to commemorate the life and the ordinances of Jesus Christ, and to venerate the memory of the Mother-of-God St. Mary.

Saints Days, designated to commemorate the lives of the Biblical and historical Saints. The latter have reached the level of sainthood by canonization. Inter-church saints are included in the Armenian Church calendar in addition to the native Saints.

Fasting Days, designated for repentance and prayer for our own souls and for those departed in Christ. The main part of the fasting is the *Great Lent*. Also, major feasts are preceded by weekly fasting days, all for the main purpose to prepare the faithful spiritually to worthily welcome the respective feasts.

Dominical Feasts

1. Pertaining to Jesus Christ

- a. Epiphany:** Nativity, January 6 (fixed date)
Baptism, January 6 (fixed date)
Naming, January 13 (fixed date)
Presentation, February 14 (fixed date)
- b. Transfiguration (Vartavar) Sunday, July 27**
(14 weeks after Easter)
- c. All Sundays of the Year**
Raising of Lazarus (Saturday April 12)
Palm Sunday (Sunday April 13)
- d. Resurrection**
Holy Week (April 13-19)
EASTER SUNDAY (Sunday April 20)
Ascension (Thursday May 29) 40 days
after Easter
Second Palm Sunday (Sunday June 1)
Pentecost (Sunday June 8) 50 days
after Easter

2. Dedicated to St. Mary Mother-of-God

- Birth, September 8 (fixed date)
- Annunciation, April 7 (fixed date)
- Discovery of jewelry box (July 6)
- Assumption Sunday (August 17)
- Discovery of belt (August 31)
- Presentation Nov. 21 (fixed date)

3. Dominical Commemorations

Feasts of the Cross

- Apparition of the Cross (Sun. May 18)
 - Exaltation of the Cross (Sun. Sept. 14)
 - Holy Cross of Varak (Sun. Sept. 28)
 - Discovery of the Cross (Sun. Oct. 26)
- Feasts dedicated to the Church**

The six days following the Exaltation
(September 15-20)
New Sunday (Sunday April 27)
World Church Sunday (Sun. May 4)
Holy Etchmiadzin (Sunday June 22)
Shoghagat (Saturday August 16), day
before Assumption Sunday

Saints Days

In the Armenian Church, Saints are observed on four weekdays: Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. Sundays are dominical days dedicated to the resurrection of Christ. Wednesdays and Fridays are fasting days.

89 Saints are derived from the Holy Bible and are known as Biblical Saints, both from the Old and New Testaments. The rest are from the first five centuries of Christianity. They represent the Apostolic Fathers of the 2nd century, and the Church fathers of the First Three Ecumenical Councils to the end of the 5th century. The Armenian Church later added more Saints through the 5th and the 14th centuries, mainly from the Fathers of the Armenian Church.

Fasting Days

According to the *Tonatssooyts* the fasting days are specified as follows:

1. All Wednesdays and Fridays of the year, except for those during the 50 days following Easter.
2. Weekdays preceding major feasts as follows. Major feasts require fasting periods for spiritual preparation. They are:
 - a) Holy Nativity of Jesus (6 days)
 - b) Great Lent (48 days including Palm Sunday and Holy Week)
 - c) Easter (Holy Week). Days included above.
 - d) Transfiguration of the Lord (5 days)
 - e) Assumption of St. Mary (5 days)
 - f) Exaltation of the Cross (5 days)
 - g) Fast of Catechumen (5 days)

- h) Fast of Prophet Elijah (5 days. Seasonal, before summer)
- i) Fast of St. Gregory the Illuminator (5 days)
- j) Fast of Holy Cross of Varak (5 days. Seasonal, before fall)
- k) Fast of Advent (5 days)
- l) Fast of St. James of Nisibis (5 days. Seasonal, before winter)

The total of the above fasting days is 99 days. Grand total of fasting shown in the Church Calendar is 139.

Summary

Given the above distribution of the three groups (*Dominical, Saints, and fasting*), the respective figures of the days through the year stand as follows:

Fasting Days	139
Non-Fasting Days	57
Saints Days	114
Sundays	44 (excluding Lent)
Others (fixed dates)	11
TOTAL	365 days

Note: "Others" include 11 special days and they are:

Christmas Eve	January 5
Nativity of Jesus	January 6
6 days of Nativity	January 7-12
Naming of Jesus	January 13
Presentation of Jesus	February 14
Birth of St. Mary	September 8

Even though the present study indicates dates for the year 2014, it is applicable for other years as well, having as a necessary guide the 2-volume *Tonatsoyts* of the Armenian Church. The first volume governs the feasts, and the second calculates the dates accordingly.