

THE FEAST OF THE HOLY CROSS OF VARAK

On the last Sunday of September, the Armenian Church celebrates the feast of the Holy Cross of Varak. On this day, we observe the discovery of a piece of our Lord's wooden cross, upon which He was crucified, on Mount Varak near Van, in the province of Vasbouragan, in the heartland of historic Armenia. It is a celebration unique only to the Armenian Church and its historical background is a fascinating story!

In the 4th century, a devoted and very beautiful Christian nun named Hripsime was running for her life. The Emperor, Diocletian, had ordered his Roman soldiers to capture all Christians. So Hripsime ran away, and during her escape, she buried a piece of the true cross in the mountains of Varak.

The old Armenian tradition tells us that 300 years later, while praying on Mount Varak, a hermit named Thotig, had a vision. He saw a shining cross with light radiating around it on top of the mountain. The light indicated to him the place where Hripsime had hidden the piece of cross so many years before. It was a miracle that this true piece of the Holy Cross was discovered! It is said that there was an overwhelming smell of incense where the cross was buried and the sweet fragrance could be smelled all over the land. Today we celebrate this discovery as "the Holy Cross of Varak."

It was 650 or 660 A.D. when Catholicos St. Nersess III the Builder declared that each year the Sunday closest to September 28 or the second Sunday of Exaltation be dedicated to the Holy Cross of Varak. It is likely on this day that he wrote the beautiful sharagan, "*Nushanav Amenahaght Khachivut*," (By the sign of Your all powerful Holy Cross), who is one of the most moving and popular sharagans (church hymns) of the Armenian Church.



The Holy Cross of Varak celebrates the discovery of a piece of our Lord's cross on Mount Varak. The story begins with a beautiful nun named Hripsime.



Hripsime was running away from people who were persecuting Christians. While fleeing, she hid a piece of our Lord's cross under some rocks on Mount Varak.



The cross remained hidden among the rocks of Mount Varak for 300 years!



Tradition tells us that in the year 650 A.D. a hermit named Thotig was praying on Mount Varak when he saw a vision of a cross with light radiating around it.



The light indicated to him the place where the piece of the true cross was hidden.



Catholicos St. Nersess III the Builder declared that each year, the Sunday closest to September 28th be dedicated to the Holy Cross of Varak