

We Begin to Pray



How do we know a person is a Christian? Not everyone in the world is a Christian. When we see people go to Christian churches we know they are Christians. The Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christians all over the world make the sign of the cross to begin prayers and to show God that they are believers in his Word and his Kingdom. Armenians are Orthodox Christians. You were probably taught to make the sign of the cross when you were a little girl or boy by your parents or grandparents.

Christians weren't always allowed to "show" their beliefs. In the early days of Christianity those who believed in Christ were persecuted. This means they were tortured and sometimes killed for being Christians. These persecuted Christians used to meet in

secret. They held their church services in caves, and in the countryside, and in Christian homes. They were not allowed to hold their services in public.

When Christians met each other on the street they would draw a symbol of a fish. The Greek word for fish is "ICTHIS." In Greek letters it is *IXOYE*. These Greek letters also stand for the first letter in each of the following words: "Jesus Christ, God, Son, Savior." The fish became a word puzzle that symbolized a belief in Jesus Christ.

After the early persecutions stopped, Christians became less afraid and they began to make the sign of the cross on their foreheads. Many years later Christians began to make the sign of the cross as we do today.

Since Armenians became Christians

in the early 4th century, we have often been persecuted. But we have been strong in our faith. We have chosen to die rather than give up our religion. You all know the story of Saint Vartan and the Battle of Avarayr in the year 451 A.D. Before the battle began all of the Armenian soldiers received Holy Communion. The Persian king wanted the Armenians to give up Christianity, but the Armenians chose to fight for it. Many Armenian soldiers were killed during the battle, but our faith was not lost.

Years later in the early 1900's the Armenians were again persecuted; this time by the Turkish government. We were driven from our homes and not allowed to live and worship God freely. Many Armenians were killed. The Armenians left Turkey and fled all over the world. We went wherever we were allowed to worship God in freedom. Some of our people came to America. Others went to Lebanon, England, France, Syria, Egypt, Canada, and even Australia and South America.

Freedom to worship our Lord Jesus Christ is so important to us that we would go anywhere to have that freedom. Today, when we openly and freely make the sign of the cross remember that many Armenians, even some of our own relatives, died so that we can live and pray today as free Armenian Christians.

When you make the sign of the cross you are praying. This is what you say:

In the name of the Father,
the Son,
and the Holy Spirit
Amen.

In Armenian the words to the sign of the cross are:

Hanoon Hor
yev vortvo
yev hokvooyrn srpo
Amen



Write the English and the Armenian words for the sign of the cross.

English

Armenian

The Holy Trinity

The Holy Trinity is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The first time the Holy Trinity appeared to us was at the baptism of Jesus.

We believe in the Holy Trinity.
We believe in God the Father.
We believe in God the Son.
We believe in God the Holy Spirit.
We believe that they are *one God*.

When we make the sign of the cross, we hold our thumb and first two fingers of our right hand together tightly so they are *one*. When we do this, it means we believe in the Holy Trinity.



Next week we will talk about prayer. During the week ask the members of



your family how they pray and why they pray.

Fill in the following questionnaire for each member of your family. Write down what they say on this page and the next.

How do you pray?

Privately _____

Out loud _____

Where do you pray?

In church _____

At home _____

At work _____

What do you pray for?

How do you pray?

Privately _____

Out loud _____

Where do you pray?

In church _____

At home _____

At work _____

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In church _____

At home _____

At work _____

What do you pray for?

Unit III: Prayer

Session 1—We Begin to Pray

Key Concepts

1. The sign of the cross announces our faith.
2. We believe in the Holy Trinity.
3. To begin prayer we give the Trinitarian blessing.
4. The Armenian cross is symbolic of the Holy Trinity.

Objectives

Students will

1. Explain how the symbol for Christianity evolved from the picture of a fish to the sign of the cross.
2. Illustrate how the sign of the cross is symbolic of the Holy Trinity.
3. Recognize an Armenian cross.

Background for Teacher

The purpose of this unit on prayer is to allow students to be firm in their knowledge and understanding of the Holy Trinity and the sign of the cross. It also includes the writing of prayers which overlaps into three of the sessions. By the fourth session a prayer booklet should be compiled and distributed to each student. This prayer booklet should be used weekly in the classroom for the opening and closing prayers. Students may add prayers to the booklet as the year progresses. The unit culminates with individuals from the community giving testimony to personal prayer experiences.

Session 1 will review making the sign of the cross. It will also encompass the freedom and purpose of prayer. The student text is self-explanatory, and may be expanded upon with your own personal experience. Every student should be able to make the sign of the cross accurately by the time he/she has reached this grade. This is an opportunity to check. Both the English and the Armenian words must be memorized.

The latter part of the session (on the Holy Trinity and the Armenian cross) visibly stresses symbolism.

Discuss the baptism of Christ and how the Holy Trinity was visibly present there for the first time. Point out the three tips at the corner of each point of the Armenian cross. The cross itself symbolizes our belief in God the Son, and the three points reinforce the Holy Trinity and our belief in one God.

Procedure

1. Opening prayer. (5 min.)
2. Read aloud "We Begin to Pray," and discuss. (15 min.)

3. Go over step-by-step procedure of making the sign of the cross. (10 min.)

4. Take students to church, and have them note when the sign of the cross is made. Return to class and discuss. (Try to attend between the readings and communion.) (30 min.)

5. *Homework Assignment:* Each student is to interview members of his/her family and report on how each person prays:

- Do they pray privately? Aloud?
- Where do they pray? In church? At home? At work? Another place?
- What do they pray for?
- How do they pray?

Session 2—The Journey of Hovhannes

Key Concepts

1. Prayer is an important part of our daily lives.
2. Concentration is a key to prayer.
3. One can pray any time or any place.
4. We pray for everyone, living and dead.

Objectives

Students will

1. Describe how to concentrate in prayer.
2. Identify who and what to pray for.
3. Write a prayer of their own.

Procedure

1. Opening prayer. (1 min.)
2. Session 2 should reinforce the knowledge of the sign of the cross. Spend a minute to review the making of the sign of the cross with the English and the Armenian words.

Acknowledge students' homework assignment, but leave discussion of it until later in the session. (5 min.)

3. Read "The Journey of Hovhannes" on page 46. Use the following as an introduction to the story and the session.

"In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. This is the way we should begin and end all of our prayers. Whenever we do something good, we are pleasing God; and when we please God, we are praying. When we make the sign of the cross, we are praying. When we love our friends and our

The Easter Cycle

Poon Paregentan (Gen. 2:1-9, 15-17, 21-23). A happy celebration of how God intended life to be when he created Adam and Eve and gave them Paradise.

The Sunday of Expulsion (Gen. 3:1-24). A sad remembrance of the sin of Adam and Eve: disobeying God. People have lost Paradise and realize the consequences of sin, separation from God.

The Sunday of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15:11-32). This is the first step in our process of regaining the lost Paradise. The story of this Sunday is the Parable of the Prodigal Son. He asks his father for his share of his inheritance and sets off for worldly adventures. When everything is gone, he comes home to ask his father if he can be a servant in his father's house. His father sees him as he is coming home and knows this son wants to be back with his family again. The father runs out to greet the son and accept him back, not as a servant, but as his son again. The older son complains, but the father reassures him that there will always be a place for the older son in his home. He wants the older son to know how happy he is that the younger son is home. The lesson this story teaches us is that we have to turn away from sin and back to God. We have to ask God for forgiveness. God is happy when we return to him.

The Sunday of the Steward (Luke 16:1-13). The parable tells us of a man who is in charge of his boss' bills. The

boss finds out the steward has not been doing his job well. He asks the steward to show him all the bills before he will be fired. The steward thinks of a way to make sure he will have a new job when he loses this one. He calls each of the people who owe his boss and tells them they can pay back less than they owe. Each person is happy to pay less and the steward thinks one of them will give him a job. The lesson is that we have lost our original paradise so we must use all our intelligence to gain the new Kingdom that Jesus has promised us.

The Sunday of the Judge (Luke 18:1-8). This story is about a woman who has a case in court that the judge has not settled yet. She keeps after him every day to settle it. The judge doesn't care about the woman, but he wants to be rid of her so he settles her case. Jesus tells us that the judge settled the woman's case even though he didn't care about her because she kept after him to do so. Jesus then tells us that God, who loves us very much, will do for us what we ask him to do if we continually pray for it. (God gives us what is good for us). What we should always ask God for is to be accepted into the Kingdom.

The Sunday of Advent (Mark 13). On this Sunday we are told about what will happen when Jesus comes again. This world as we now know it will end. Christ will come and resurrect the dead. The living and the dead will be judged. Those who have lived their