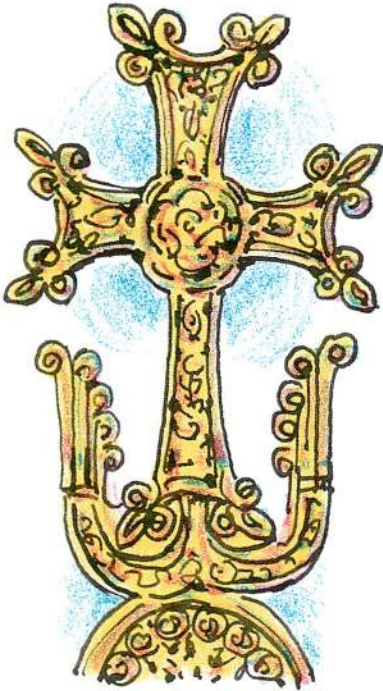


# Feasts of the Cross



The cross is such an important symbol to the church that our early church fathers had special feast days set aside dedicated to the Holy Cross. In the Armenian Church, there are four feasts of the Holy Cross:

Exaltation of the Holy Cross

*Khatchveratz* 628 A.D.

Holy Cross of Varak

*Varaka Khatch* 650 A.D.

Discovery of the Holy Cross

*Kiud Khatch* 327 A.D.

Apparition of the Holy Cross

*Yerevman Khatch* 351 A.D.

The Feast of the *Exaltation of the*

*Holy Cross* is a major feast, or *daghar*. It falls on the Sunday closest to September 14 and may occur between September 11 and 17. This feast day commemorates two distinct historical events. The first event relates to the earliest public act of venerating the cross which is attributed to the apostle James, the first bishop of Jerusalem. He raised a four-armed cross made in the likeness of Christ's cross in full view of the assembly of the faithful, and recited the prayer (now a chant in the Armenian Church): "O Christ, we bow down to your cross."

The second occasion when the cross was made the object of special veneration is the return of the cross from captivity. The city of Jerusalem was captured by the Persians in 610 A.D. and among the articles taken as booty was the cross of Christ. You can imagine how distressed the Christians were to have their precious cross taken away by people who did not worship it as they did. In 627 A.D. the Emperor Heraclius defeated the Persians, returned the cross to Jerusalem and in 628 A.D. with great ceremony and rejoicing, placed it in its original location in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. This is what we remember on the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. On this day, we pray:

"Before your precious and victorious

cross we fall down and worship and ask forgiveness of our sins; for through this you did lift the condemnation of mankind. And now by your holy and divine sign grant your heavenly peace to all the world.”

“*Come let us go out into the field*” (I Kings 20:11): On the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross a special ceremony called *Antasdan* is performed in the church. The word *Antasdan* means “field.” In this processional service, the priest blesses the four corners of the world. Through our prayers and hymns of praise to God, our Father, we ask him to bless the food and fruitfulness of the earth. Also, as caretakers of the field we ask for divine protection for the grounds of the earth, farms, gardens, and the year’s harvest. We also ask God’s blessings upon our church leaders and the people on the earth. During the ceremony, the cross, which is a symbol of our faith, is placed on a tray and adorned with sweet basil and rosewater. It is then carried into the field (which is a symbol of the world), manifesting Christ and his mission in the field of our own lives.

The feast of the *Holy Cross of Varak* is celebrated on the second Sunday after the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. This is usually the last Sunday in September. On this feast day we recall the story of St. Hripsime and a group of young nuns who fled from the pagan king Drtad who ruled Armenia. St. Hripsime had been given a piece of the Holy Cross and she did not want it to fall into the hands of the Roman persecutors. She hid it in Mount Varak which is near the city of

Van. Tradition tells us that a monk named Thodik saw a vision of a church with 12 pillars at the top of Mt. Varak. In the center he saw a cross with radiating lights. This vision descended and stood at the altar of the monastery, and it was there that they found the piece of the cross which St. Hripsime had hidden. Catholicos Nersess “The Builder” came to Varak, proclaimed it the true cross and commemorated this with a yearly feast.

The *Discovery of the Holy Cross*: Empress Helena, mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine, commissioned an army to recover the Holy Cross of Jesus. After the discovery of three crosses on Calvary, tradition tells us that in order to be sure which of the three crosses was our Lord’s, the body of a recently deceased man in a passing funeral procession was taken and placed on the crosses, in turn. When he was placed on the cross of our Lord, a miracle occurred — he was restored to life! We celebrate the Discovery of the Holy Cross on the 7th Sunday of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. It may occur from October 23 to 29.

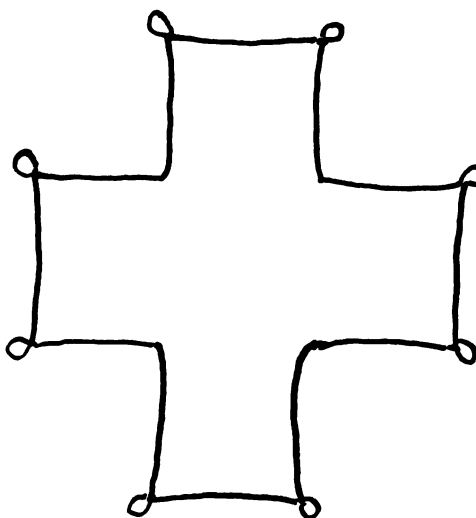
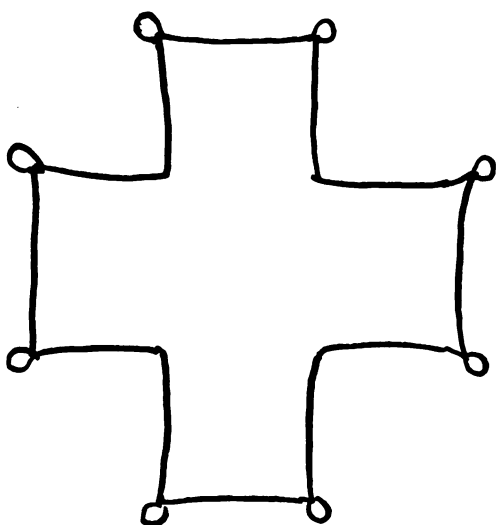
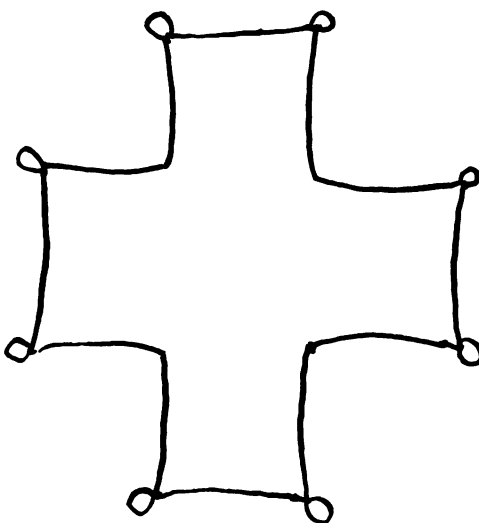
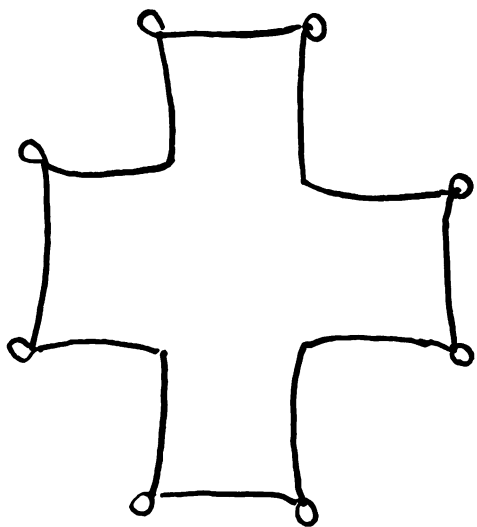
The *Apparition of the Holy Cross* occurred in 351 A.D. on Pentecost Day in Jerusalem. A luminous cross appeared in the sky and extended from Golgotha where Christ was crucified to the Mount of Olives. The vision was seen by many Jerusalemites for several hours. They ran to the churches in penance and with piety. The Armenian Church celebrates the feast of the Apparition of the Holy Cross on the 5th Sunday after Easter, which may occur as early as April 19 and as late as May 23.

a. In each of the blank crosses below, draw an illustration of the four feasts of the Holy Cross, depicting the importance for each.

b. Under each cross, write a "key

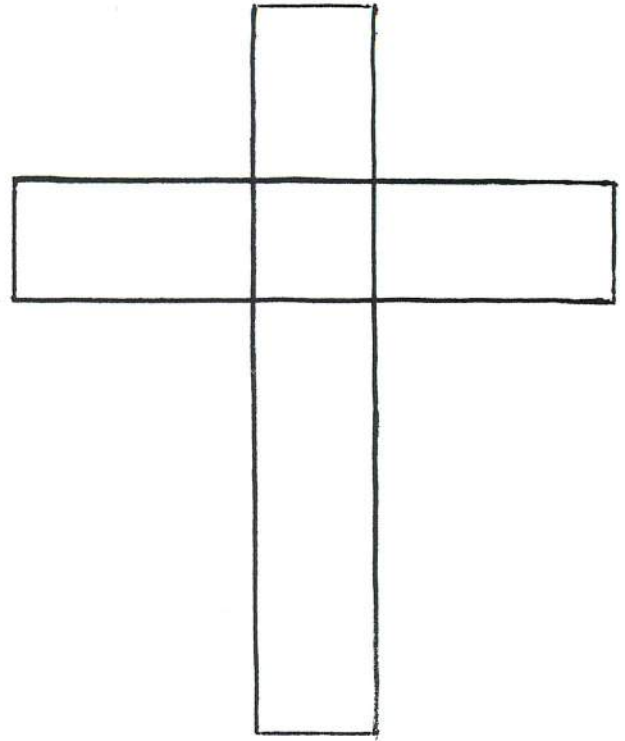
word" that would be a clue to the name of the feast illustrated.

c. Give your book to a friend and have that person guess the name of the feasts you illustrated.



*True or False:*

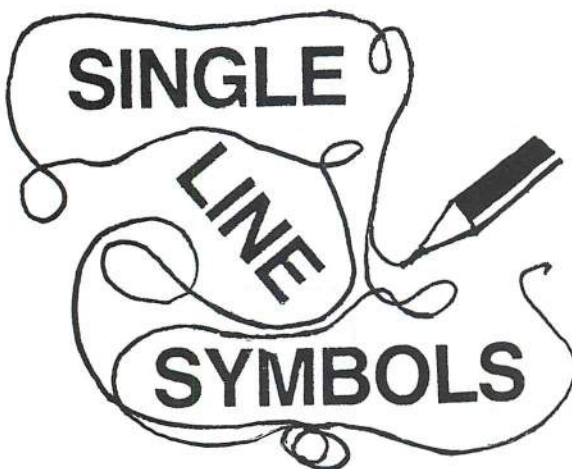
1. The Discovery of the Holy Cross commemorates the finding of a piece of cross which St. Hripsime had hidden from the Romans.
2. The ceremony of Antasdan is performed in church on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.
3. Armenian churches are built in the form of a cross.
4. On the Feast of the Holy Cross of Varak a luminous cross appeared in the sky.
5. On the Apparition of the Holy Cross a dead man rose to life when placed on the true cross of Christ.



*"In the cross of Christ I glory,  
Towering over the wrecks of time.  
All the light of sacred story  
Gathers round its head sublime.  
When the woes of life overtake me,  
Hopes deceive, and fears annoy.  
Never shall the cross forsake me;  
Lo, it glows with peace and joy."*

*Can you draw this symbol without taking your pencil off the paper, without crossing any lines and without tracing over any lines?*

Try your cross here:



The cross is a Christian symbol which reminds us Christ died for us.