

Exaltation of the Cross-Khach-ve-ratz

Holy Cross of Varak (Varaka Khach)

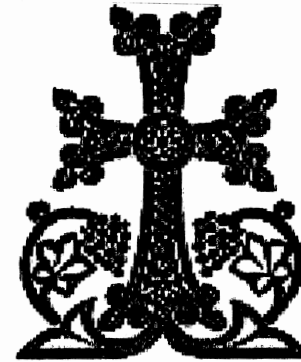
Discovery of the Cross (Kyood Khach)

The Celebrations of the Cross

## Season of the HOLY CROSS



2008, September



## The Season of the Cross

September and October feature special commemorations of the holy cross. Understandably, the feasts of the cross are important to Christians. The cross is the place where God, who became human to share in and ultimately redeem human suffering and

death, was crucified and died.

It is also the place where He vanquished death through His resurrection, thereby rendering the cross a powerful symbol of eternal life. The Armenian cross is symbolic of life in these ways:

- the crossbars intersect at a midpoint that signifies the four corners of the world meeting at life's center
  - the "empty" Armenian cross (as opposed to the Catholic crucifix bearing the body of Jesus) emphasizes Jesus' victory over death
  - the appearance of vines, grapes, and wheat as decorative motifs in the Armenian cross symbolizes the life generated from the cross which was otherwise an instrument of death
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- **EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS-KHACH-VE-RATZ** Sunday, September 14
  - **HOLY CROSS OF VARAK (VARAKA KHACH)** Sunday, September 28
  - **DISCOVERY OF THE HOLY CROSS (KYOOD KHACH)** Sunday, October 26

## Did You Know?

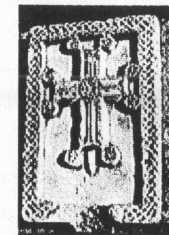
- Any Cross used in the church must be blessed and anointed at five points, the center and the four “wings”
- In Armenian, the center of the cross is called the “ag-un” or “eye”. The meaning of the eye in this case has to do with it being the center of focus, but interestingly, the “eye” of a hurricane is the calm center of the storm—as is the cross the calm center of the storms of life.
- The Armenian cross often portraits rays radiating from it’s center, like spokes of a wheel. This type of cross is called “se-rag-na-tzev. The hymn sung on the feast of the Cross of Varak refers to these spokes or rays...”the radiant four-winged holy cross which illumined the world with sun-like rays...”
- The cross perched on top of a pole & carried at the head of a procession is called “ta-po-rec-khach.”
- Armenian crosses do not depict the crucified body of Christ, emphasizing His resurrection and saving power of the cross.
- Crosses are placed on the altar, church walls, and the deacons and priests vestments. How many crosses can you find in the church sanctuary?

**T**he Cross which originated in Persia was a gruesome tool of punishment. It was used by the Romans as a deterrent used to discipline mutinous troops, conquered people and to wear down a city under siege. The victims condemned to this inhumane punishment would first be flogged, then forced to carry the cross or one of its beams. Once they had arrived at their destination they were either nailed or tied to it. It would take hours, sometimes days to succumb to a very painful death.

Crosses as a deterrent were mounted in public places or along busy roadways to serve as a warning for passersby. During the Christian persecutions by the Emperor Nero, those who were crucified were burned along the road as human torches.



**T**he cross was transformed into a vehicle of salvation with Jesus' death. For as the Son of God died; and by means of His death, rose again, making it possible for all to join Him in eternal life. This miraculous event is why the Armenian Cross often features rays radiating out from its center (agn-eye) with decorative ornamentation meant to symbolize the live giving character of the cross.



The cross also symbolizes our relationship to our Lord as we are asked to take up His cross and follow Him, so that in this symbolic death, we truly become alive (Mark 8:34-35)

In early centuries, the cross became a visual symbol in Christian piety. People signed their foreheads (as early as the end of the 2nd century) Pictures of crosses are found in the catacombs. When Christianity was established as a state-sanctified religion, early in the 4th century, the cross began appearing on buildings, altars and on clerical vestments.

It was late in the 11th century that the crucifix appeared, however the Armenian Church who continues to emphasize the spirit of the early church—the cross as a symbol of redemption, never adopted this form of cross.

# HOLY CROSS

## Important Facts:

- Armenians were a part of the rescue & adoration of the Holy Cross.
- Exaltation is the most important feast of the Cross
- It is one of the 5 major feasts of the church

Story: When the Persians conquered the city of Jerusalem in the 7th Century (629 AD) they seized the Cross. The Emperor Heraclius lead the coalition of forces, which included Armenians, to recapture the cross. He traveled with the cross through Armenian repeatedly raising it up for veneration.

**T**his major feast is celebrated annually on the Sunday nearest September 14; The liturgy is marked with an "Antasdan" service which is the blessing of the fields during which the processional cross is adorned with basil which is considered a symbol of royalty. The 4 corners of the church are blessed as a symbol for the whole world.

## Exaltation of the Holy Cross

### Important Facts

**A**n authentic relic of the cross can be found in Armenian soil, making his feast unique to the Armenian Church.

**Story:** in the 3rd century, (650AD) a nun named Hripsime buried a piece of the cross on Mt. Varak in historic Armenia as a way of protecting it from the soldiers of Emperor Constantine, who were pursuing her. Centuries later, a monk named Todik had a vision of a church on Mt. Varak with 12 pillars in the center of which was a radiant cross. The cross then came to rest over the altar of the monastery of Varak, where Todik discovered the relic of the cross. When Todik relayed this dream to Catholicos Nersess he verified the relic's authenticity and established a feast in honor of the discovery.

The Armenian Church celebrates this feast two weeks after the Exaltation or the closest Sunday to September 28th.

### Important Facts

**T**his feast commemorates the rediscovery of all three of the crosses at Golgotha—our Lord's and the two others on which the thieves were hung.

**Story:** The Empress Helena, the mother of Constantine, commissioned an army to find the true cross. After many years of searching they found three in Jerusalem in a garbage dump. At the same time a funeral was passing by...the body of the deceased man was taken from the funeral procession and placed before each cross. The many miraculously came to life on what was thereafter considered the one True Cross.

This feast is celebrated in the Armenian Church on the closest Sunday to October 26th.

*Booklet prepared by Debbie Derderian—July 2008.*

*Resources: Armenian Church Eastern Diocese Website  
<http://www.armenianchurch.net>*