



## ST. GREGORY'S COMMITMENT TO THE PIT

### March 31

The story of St. Gregory's conversion of Armenia is remembered and celebrated by the Armenian Church on a number of days, all emphasizing different events or people. In March we recall the incarceration of St. Gregory in the pit (*Khor Virab*). Below is an excerpt from our new publication, *The Light of the World: Lives of Armenian Saints*. It's about a little-known miracle that occurred as the Illuminator was being dragged to his imprisonment. Use it in an assembly or simply to read to the class directly or in simpler language.

At the time of King Drtad's reign, Souren, a court noble of the royal family, was living in the district of Salahunik, in a hamlet called Sourenashen and ruled over that district. His wife, Aghvitos (Agapete), was a very beautiful and pious person, and merciful towards the poor. They had a son named Athenadoros, aged fifteen, who was tormented by the pain of a chronic, incurable disease. Both his father and mother spent a great deal of money on doctors but were unable to cure him. For seven years, day and night, he was greatly distressed by pain from his affliction. His mother had a village built for him on the seashore called Sikiboghon (Grove of Fig Trees). Opposite the village there was a spring of clean, fresh water called Arpenud and there a place was built for the ailing and afflicted and people would give them alms in the form of meals and good wishes. Thirty-five people lived there and Athenadoros joined them. One of them, an old man called Dasios, secretly being a Christian, converted all of them to the Christian faith. He could read the Divine Scriptures in Greek and

taught them according to the Old and the New Testaments, encouraging them to stay firm in their new faith.

It so happened that every year a celebration was held and a sacrifice offered to the gods Hercules and Asclepius. Athenadoros was invited to attend the sacrifice, but he refused to go and as he dreaded his father and was fearful of God, he offered his ailment as an excuse. His father Souren admonished him: "Son, it has been six years now that you have not offered any sacrifice to our gods." Athenadoros again excused himself because of his pain. His mother, meanwhile, had come to know the Creator of heaven and earth and believed in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; secretly, in heart and mind, she worshipped the living God.

As Theodoros was preparing to attend the celebration, everyone was stunned by the sudden arrival of King Drtad's forces. A certain prince Mazentios was taking St. Gregory in fetters to Khor Virab because of his refusal to worship the goddess Anahid. It seems that after tormenting Gregory for three years, they had

informed the king that Gregory was the son of Anag, the murderer of Drtad's father. The king had then ordered him to be taken to the Virab to be food for beasts and poisonous reptiles. It was on this journey that they had reached the district of Salhunik and the hamlet of Sourenashen. People afflicted with ailments, infections and disorders came and fell at the feet of the chained Gregory and were immediately cured of spiritual and physical maladies. Dasios also came with Athenadoros. They knelt before Gregory and were immediately cured. Dasios spoke on behalf of Athenadoros, saying that he did not have the seal of the baptismal font. Gregory advised him: "Go to the spring to the east and baptize Athenadoros; give him the name Theodoros." For Dasios was of priestly rank.

Having heard this from Gregory, he took him to the spring and baptized him. Suddenly a divine light shone upon Theodoros and he was filled with the Holy Spirit, excelling day by day in prayer and the commands of the Lord. By the grace of God he lived in ever stronger faith for six years.