

## STS. VARTANANTZ

Every year, on the Thursday preceding Great Lent (this year that's February 11), Armenians throughout the world celebrate the anniversary of an important event in their history—the religious war waged between pagan Persia and Christian Armenia in the year 451 A.D. The hero of this war was St. Vartan the Brave. All those who gave their lives in this war are called collectively, the Vartanians.



The cause of the battle was religious. Armenia, which proclaimed Christianity as its state religion in 301 A.D. lived peacefully, first under its own kings, and then under Persian rule. She developed her culture with great zeal during the first half of the fifth century. During this period, the Bible was translated into Armenian and Christianity flourished in the country.

After becoming Christians, Armenians began to show signs of alienation from the Persians. In order to force the Armenians to revert back to the Persian religion, the king of Persia decreed that all Christians under his rule should abandon their new religion and accept Mazdeism, which was the worship of the sun and fire. The Armenians, in a mass meeting of the clergy and ruling princes, gave a bold answer to this royal decree insisting that they had not the slightest intention of denying their Christian faith. The Persians countered this boldness with a heavy hand. They sent a huge army of some 220,000 strong to Armenia to crush the resistance and to convert the country to paganism by force.

In 451 A.D. on the field of Avarayr, near Mount Ararat, a band of 66,000 semi-trained, poorly-equipped Armenian fighters, under the leadership of Vartan Mamigonian, their Commander-in-Chief, stood waiting for the invading army of Persians. In this battle, Vartan and his comrades suffered a military defeat but in reality the victory was theirs. They lost the battle but in the end attained the aim for which they were fighting. The Persians eventually stopped the scheme of converting the country to their religion when they realized how steadfast the Armenians were in their faith and convictions. Their defeat became a moral victory. As a result of such battles in our history and the fine spirit which the Vartanians displayed, Christianity has survived in Armenia throughout centuries. We are the proud heirs of this unconquerable spirit.

## ST. SARKIS THE WARRIOR

According to our church calendar, January 30 will be the Feast of St. Sarkis the Warrior together with his son Mardiros and fourteen soldiers.

Sarkis was from Caesarea of Cappadocia. He rose in the military ranks because of his valiant campaigns and became a trustworthy and faithful general in Emperor Constantine's army.

When Julian the Apostate became ruler of the Byzantine Empire after the fall of Constantine's dynasty, Sarkis, who was a Christian, took refuge with his son Mardiros in Armenia and was put under the protection of King Tiran.

Later when Julian fought against the Persians with the self-illusion of rebuilding Alexander the Great's vast empire, Sarkis and his son went to Persia to join the Persian army in the service of King Shabouh. Sarkis and his son fought with great bravery against Julian's army. Sarkis was also able to convert many of the Persian soldiers to Christianity.



Eventually, King Shabouh discovered that Sarkis was a Christian. He asked Sarkis to abandon his faith and to accept the Zoroastrian religion instead. The king gave him this option because he did not want to lose the faithful and courageous service of his top general. For Sarkis, that meant, of course, the worship of pagan idols.

But both Sarkis and his son steadfastly refused to do so. The king's promises of higher position and great wealth did not alter their firm stand; they'd rather die than deny Christ.

Finally, both Mardiros and Sarkis were executed by the king. After Sarkis' death, fourteen of his soldiers came to bury him and for that, they too were slain.

St. Sarkis' fame as a brave soldier of Christ spread among the Armenian people, and many miracles were attributed to his remains.



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