

St. Vahan of Koghtun (January 26)

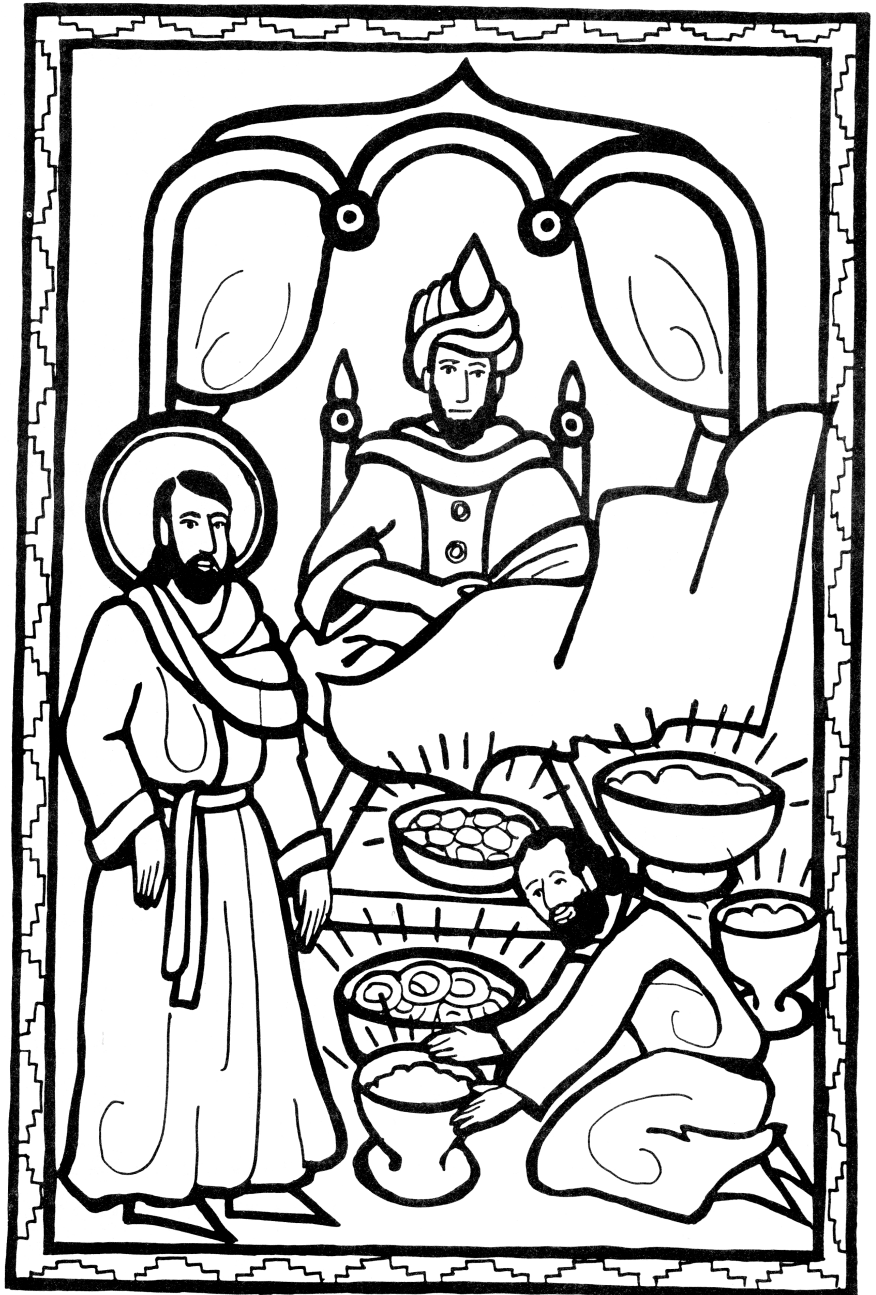
St. Vahan is one of the most fascinating figures among the Armenian saints. Born c. 703 in the Koghtun region of Armenia, the 4-year-old Vahan was abducted by the Arabs during their persecution of Armenians and taken to Damascus, Syria. His father Khosrov, a prince, was martyred during this persecution.

He was raised in Islam, his name changed to Vahab, and, being a bright and accomplished boy, he was eventually given a high post in the Arab court.

In 719, the Armenian Catholicos St. John of Otzoon, came to Damascus. Having earned the Emir Omar's good will and respect, he brought about the release of captive Armenians. When it came to Vahan, however, the Emir insisted he remain at court where he was sorely needed. After many negotiations, Vahan was permitted to return to Armenia with the promise that he would eventually go back to Damascus.

Once home, however, and understandably, Vahan fell in love with his homeland, married an Armenian princess, and lived peacefully for 10 years. Incredibly enough, this was not the end of his connection to the Muslim court. Emir Omar's successor was determined to locate Vahan who, fearing for his life and that of his family, fled into the mountains where he eventually became a monk. Tired of a life of exile, Vahan bravely returned to the Arab court in 736 after four years of wandering and asked to be permanently released and allowed to live as a Christian. The Emir offered him a high position and great wealth. Vahan refused. He was tortured and killed in 737. He died with these words on his lips: "I choose death for the sake of Christ rather than an earthly life."

1. Tell the story of St. Vahan of Koghtun in your own words.
2. Who are the important people of this story? Why?
3. How do you think the 4-year-old Vahan felt?
4. Look at the illustration of St. Vahan faced with worldly riches. What might he have been thinking?
5. What is admirable about Vahan's life? What lessons does his story teach us?



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