

## HOW ARMENIA BECAME THE FIRST CHRISTIAN NATION

<b>CHARACTERS:</b>	King Drtad	2nd Minister of State	Guard
	Gregory	Khosrovitoukht (Drtad's sister)	Messenger
	1st Minister of State	Hripsime	Narrator

**Narrator:**

Over 200 years after the birth of Jesus Christ, Khosrov, the King of Armenia, was killed by the father of Gregory, later to be known as St. Gregory the Enlightener. As a result of this deed, all of Gregory's family was killed, except for Gregory himself, who was taken as a baby by his nurse to another country, where he received a Christian education and grew into manhood.

However, Gregory's conscience bothered him, and he returned to Armenia to see what he could do to make up for this father's crime against the king.

The King of Armenia was Drtad, Khosrov's son. Gregory took the job of secretary in Drtad's court and became well-liked by the king.

As our story opens, King Drtad has returned victorious from battle. He is seated on his throne and is talking with his ministers. Outside we can hear the shouts of the rejoicing people.

**CURTAIN OPENS—SCENE I****1st Minister:**

Everyone is worshipping the goddess Anahid as you ordered, Your Majesty, except the one who has become your friend.

**King Drtad:**

And who can that be? Tell me.

**1st Minister:**

It is Gregory, Sire. He refuses to bow down and worship our goddess.

**King Drtad:**

I cannot believe this. *(He shouts)* Guard! *(Guard enters and stands at attention)* Guard, find Gregory the secretary and bring him here at once.

**Guard:**

Yes, Sire. *(Guard exits and comes back promptly with Gregory)* Here he is, Your Majesty.

**King Drtad:**

Gregory, what is this I hear? You won't bow down to worship our goddess Anahid? What is the meaning of this?

**Gregory:**

I cannot, Your Majesty. I am a Christian, and I cannot bow down before your gods.

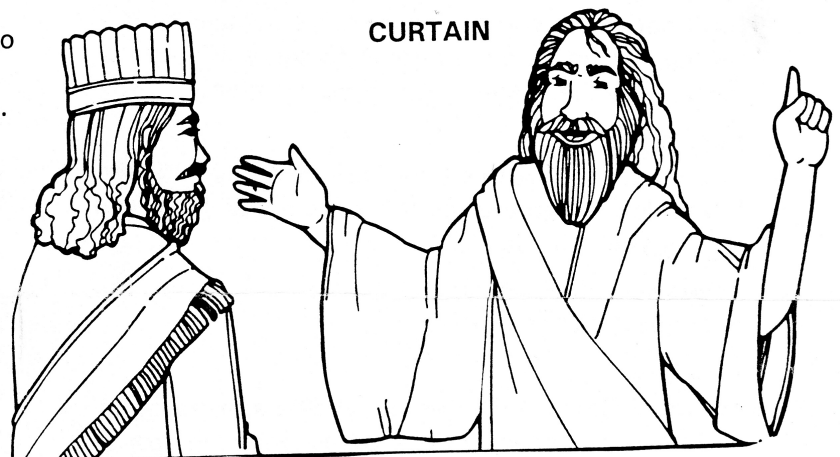
**2nd Minister:**

Your Majesty, *this* is the man whose father killed your own father, King Khosrov, many years ago. Do not let him get away with this.

**King Drtad: (Becoming angry)**

What! Let us hear no more of this nonsense! Away with him! Take him to the pit. If he will not worship our gods, let him join the wild beasts in the pit.

*(Guard drags Gregory away)*

**SCENE II****Narrator:**

Fourteen years have passed since Gregory was thrown into the pit. *(Guard enters)*

**Guard:**

Your Highness, a messenger has arrived from Rome with a message from the Roman Emperor.

**King Drtad:**

Bring him in. Bring him in. *(Guard enters, followed by Messenger)*

**Messenger:**

Your Highness, I bring an important message from your friend, my Emperor. He wishes you to have your countryside searched for a beautiful young Christian woman named Hripsime. She and a band of young women have escaped from Rome to your country. He must have Hripsime back in Rome to be his wife. Please take care of this immediately.

**King Drtad:**

Tell your Emperor I shall do as he asks. *(Messenger departs)* Guard! Have the entire countryside searched

for this band of young women. When you find Hripsime, bring her to me. *(guard exits, then after a pause re-enters with Hripsime)*

**Guard:**

Your Highness. We discovered the women living in caves outside the city. This is the one they call Hripsime. *(Guard exits)*

*(Drtad is awestruck by her beauty and just stares at her. He gets up and walks over for a closer look.)*

**King Drtad:**

You are truly beautiful, Hripsime. There is something about you, you are so pure! . . . I cannot send you back to the Emperor of Rome. You must stay here and be my queen. You must marry me, Hripsime.

**Hripsime:**

I will not marry you or any man, Your Majesty. I belong to God, and I am going to serve him all the days of my life. I only wish to be left alone.

**King Drtad:**

You'd better think this over very carefully, Hripsime. If you do not agree to be my wife, I shall have you and all your friends killed.

**Hripsime:**

I cannot do what you ask.

**King Drtad:**

Die then! Guard, take her away! She and her band must die! *(Guard enters and takes Hripsime out)*

**CURTAIN****SCENE III****Narrator:**

And so the innocent band of young women was put to death on the king's order. But King Drtad is not happy. A sadness settles over him. He cannot throw off a deep feeling of guilt. He sees before him the faces of Gregory whom he had thrown into the pit 14 years ago and of Hripsime whom he had killed. A sickness takes over the king, and he seems to be going mad.

**CURTAIN OPENS**

*(King Drtad is slumped down on the throne. The two ministers are standing near. Every so often the king makes a strange guttural noise. Then, looking up, he thinks he sees someone . . . )*

**King Drtad:**

Hripsime, Hripsime, do not look at me so. . . . Your eyes, Hripsime, your eyes, take them away . . . *(pause)* Gregory, my friend, what have I done to you? *(He lowers his head into his hands)*

**1st Minister:**

There is nothing we can do. We have even brought doctors from India to cure our king, and they cannot. We have had sweet music played for him and dancing, so he would change, but nothing is of any use. What shall we do?

*(Khosrovitoukht enters)*

**2nd Minister:**

Princess, what is it? You seem excited! What have you to tell us?

**Princess:**

For three nights now, I have had the same dream. An angel appeared to me and said, "If you bring Gregory out of the pit, he will cure your brother and save the Armenian people." We must go to the pit.

**2nd Minister:**

But that's impossible. Gregory cannot be alive. It has been fourteen years since Gregory was thrown into the pit. It cannot be!

**Princess:**

We must look. We must be sure. Please! *(She exits.)*

*(The king gives a shout and falls from throne to floor. The ministers become frightened and rush out. After a pause, Gregory enters. He is dirty and has a long beard. He goes slowly toward Drtad, raises his arms, and as he does so, Drtad slowly begins to crawl toward Gregory. Gregory places his hands on Drtad's shoulders and the king rises.)*

**King Drtad:**

But it cannot be you. You are dead . . . in the pit. Who brought you here?

**Gregory:**

God brought me here. *(Outstretching one arm)* And be you baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. You are now a Christian. You are cured.

**King Drtad:**

*(Shouts)* Come, everyone, come. I am cured! I am well! *(Everyone comes in)* Go forth and proclaim throughout the land that our country, Armenia, is now a Christian nation and its people the servants of the King of Heaven and Earth!

**Everyone:**

Alleluia! Alleluia!

**THE END**

Note: Adapt, or use as is, some time during this anniversary year to teach the conversion story.