

## Lesson 1

# What Is Holy Tradition?



### Pray Together

Hanoon Hor, yev Vortvo, yev Hokvooy'n Surpo, Amen.

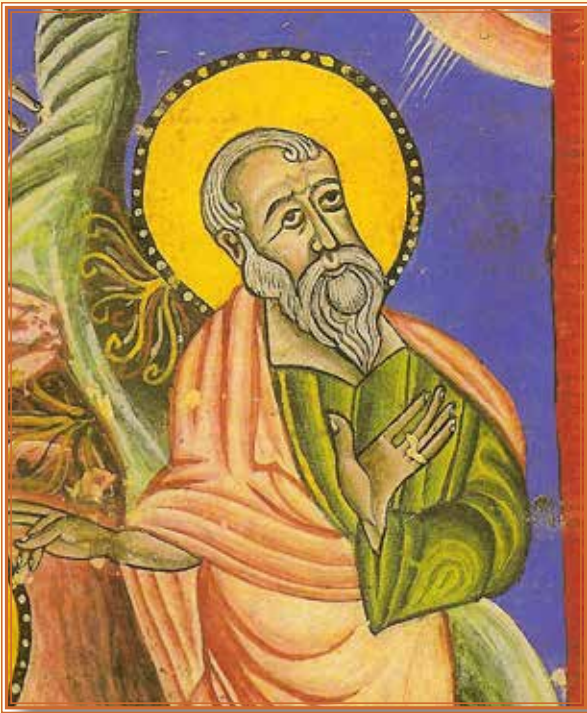
Dear Lord, I pray that I might  
be honored with clothing of light, from which I have been stripped  
touch the hand of Him, from whom I am separated  
receive my daily bread, for which I have not worked  
be showered with rewards which I have not earned  
remember all my blessings which I always forget.

*Prayer 24, St. Gregory of Narek*

## Identify Yourself!

On the paper provided, note some of the things that make you who you are. Do not write your name on the paper, as you will be using it in a guessing game. Some of the things that go into your identity may be what school you go to, your brothers and sisters, sports you like, where you were born, your nationality, what languages you speak, favorite activities, and your friends.



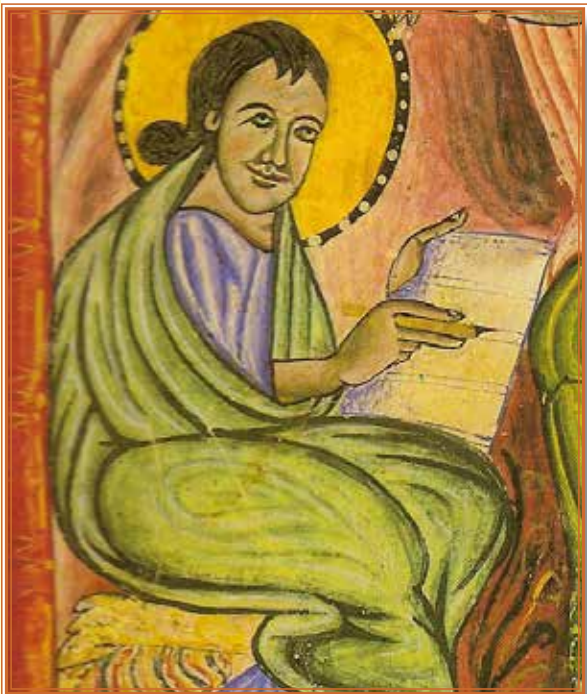


## Identity and the Armenian Church

What if you woke up tomorrow with amnesia? Imagine you can't remember what your name is, where you live, where you are supposed to go to school, or who is in your family. Your day would be a disaster! You would not know what to think or do. The Armenian Church is like a person in that it has to understand its true identity in order to function correctly. As you develop your sense of who you are from the things that you know to be true, our Church also possesses a body of truth about itself. Every believing community, in fact, interprets the life and teachings of Jesus Christ in a very specific way.

This knowledge base, known as Holy Tradition, is founded on the teachings of God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures and in the evolving life of the community through the Holy Spirit. Many years ago, the apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew traveled to Armenia to tell the people there about Jesus Christ. Since they were among the twelve original disciples chosen by Jesus, they heard the actual words he spoke. They were taught directly by him. Thaddeus and Bartholomew were able to give the people of Armenia a very fresh and accurate understanding of God's Kingdom. The Armenian Church is truly blessed to have this foundation, followed only a few centuries later by the great Illuminator, St. Gregory.

As the centuries passed, Armenia produced many saints and teachers. Our church has used the thoughts and prayers of these holy men and women to develop our beautiful worship services and our church tradition. This tradition keeps us focused on Jesus' message so that we can follow God's word even though many years and many ideas have come and gone. We believe the Holy Spirit continues to guide the Church, as Jesus promised (John 16:13); wise men and women still seek his guidance as Nicodemus sought Jesus.



### *Did You Know?*

The St. Thaddeus Armenian monastery [14th c] at Artaz, in present-day Iran, is recognized as a UNESCO historical site.

## Nicodemus – A Reminder from God

Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews (John 3:1) who lived at the time of Jesus' ministry. He was a member of the Pharisees. The Pharisees were a group of Jews who considered themselves very religious. They strictly followed the Law of Moses from the Old Testament, as well as their own traditions. Most of the Pharisees did not want to listen to Jesus. They had more faith in their own ways and often tried to trick Jesus into saying something wrong.

Nicodemus was very curious about Jesus, so he went to see him under cover of night; he didn't want the other Pharisees to know about the visit. During those precious hours, Jesus explained to Nicodemus the way to enter God's Kingdom (John 3:3-21).

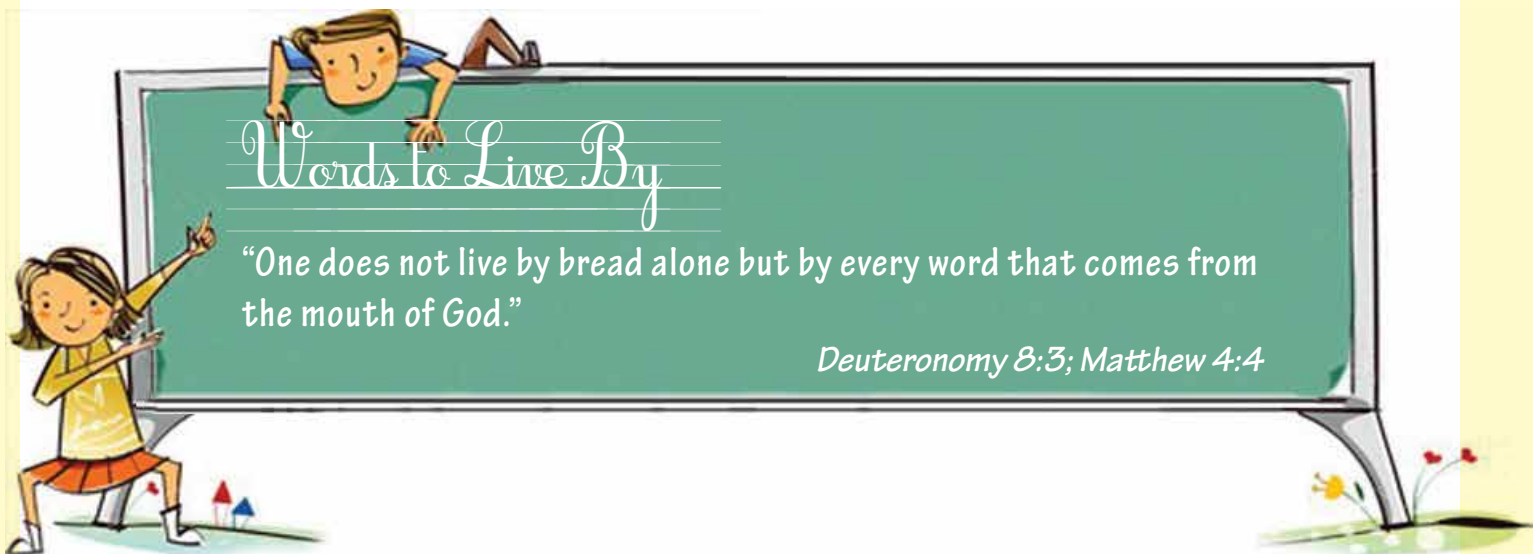
Jesus' words were very different from anything Nicodemus had ever heard. They did not sound the same as the traditions followed by the Jews. He was impressed by what Jesus said, for after the Crucifixion he brought a large quantity of expensive spices to prepare Jesus' body for burial (John 19:39). Nicodemus is a wonderful example of how we *all* might make the effort to learn from Jesus. Let's look at this story together.



### John 3:3-21

Discuss these questions as a class:

1. How would you explain being “born again” (verses 5-8)?
2. John 3:16 is a very famous verse. Put it in your own simple words as if you were explaining it to a younger sister or brother.
3. What does verse 19 mean to you? Why is it that people prefer “darkness” to light?





### Lesson 1

# What Is Holy Tradition?

#### Key Concepts

1. Holy Tradition is the sum of all the teachings of the Church over time including first and foremost Scripture, the lives of the saints, worship services, canon law, sacraments, the teachings of the Church Fathers, and the evolving life and history of the believing community.
2. This Holy Tradition, guided by the Holy Spirit over time, can help us navigate safely through a confusing world.

#### Objectives

During the session the students will:

1. Participate in a values continuum.
2. Play an identity game.
3. Read about Holy Tradition and the apostolic basis for the Armenian Church.
4. Read and discuss the story of Nicodemus (John 3:21).
5. Explore Bible verses that stress the importance of God's tradition vs. human traditions.
6. Read about two characteristics of Armenian Church architecture.

#### Materials Needed

Pencils/pens  
Lined paper

#### Procedure

1. Welcome the students and stand to say the opening prayer together.
2. Ask the students to line up in front of the class. Explain that they must imagine a line going across where they are standing. They will stand on it according to how they would answer the following questions (this activity is called a "Values Continuum"):
  - a. Your room is (left end point of line) clean enough to eat off the floor OR (right end point of line) as messy as if an earthquake had just taken place. (*Students will stand somewhere on the line that describes their room.*) Discuss.
  - b. You never open the Bible except at Sunday School (left end point of line) OR you read from it every day (right end point of line). Discuss.

Now have students choose *either* one end or another, no standing in between (this is called "Either/Or"):

- a. If I had to pick something to eat at a hungry moment, it would be a dessert (one end) OR a meal, i.e. meat and potatoes, etc. (other end). Discuss.
- b. If I could travel anywhere, I would travel around the U.S. (one end) OR somewhere overseas (other end). Discuss.

Conclude by saying that "this was just a fun way of getting ourselves to think about the choices we make that say something about who we are."

15 min.

3. Read the instructions in **Identify Yourself!** to the students. Distribute paper and pencils and tell them this exercise will be part of a guessing game. Making sure they do not write their names on their papers, have them list some of the things that make them who they are. Encourage each child to identify at least five items. When they have finished, collect the papers. Mix them up, then redistribute one paper to each child. Be careful to not give a student his or her own sheet. Tell the class to read the page they have received. In turn, call on each student and have them guess whose paper they hold. Some of them will know each other already and this will be easy, but it should be a fun ice-breaker. 15 min.
4. Teach or have the students read **Identity and the Armenian Church** and **Nicodemus: A Reminder from God**. Read the Scripture verses and discuss questions. (Note: “Born again” simply refers to one’s spiritual as opposed to physical birth; it is also a popular Evangelical Christian term for someone who has suddenly found Christ.) You can read or work together as a class, or give the students quiet time to work alone, in pairs, or in small groups, depending on the size of your class. Review questions as an entire class. 15 min.
5. Read **The Right Road**. Have them complete the exercise. Review the answers with them. The first and third passages are the ones that emphasize the importance of Scripture; the 2nd simply describes a man who has broken the rules of hospitality; the 4<sup>th</sup> describes the early church living its faith out in beautiful practices of prayer and fellowship; and the 5th shows the Biblical inspiration of liturgical vestments (it comes from a much longer passage that details all the temple vestments). 10 min.
6. Read **Our Armenian Way** and conclude class with a prayer: “Dear Lord, open our hearts to your Holy Tradition and the new ways of living in Christ it can help us discover. Fill us with strength and wisdom and patience this week so that whatever we say and do honors your name. Amen.” 5 min.

## Unit One: A Community Over Time

### Lesson 2

# *The Bible*

#### Key Concepts

1. The books of the Bible were inspired by God and collected and canonized by the Spirit-led Church.
2. The Bible is useful in daily life.

#### Objectives

During the session students will

1. Recall a book that has helped or guided them in their lives.
2. Read a selection about how the Bible is like an owner’s manual for humankind.
3. Write a short skit about handling real-life situations and perform it with their classmates.
4. Explore how God’s Word can help them deal with and avoid problems.
5. Learn about the Gideons’ placement of Bibles in hotel rooms.
6. Make and decorate a bookmark that features Proverbs 1:2.