

Sts. Sahag and Mesrob



A Monk Named Mesrob

About a hundred years after the conversion of Armenia to Christianity the nation was almost completely Christian. Only a few other regions remained primarily pagan. Many other parts of the land needed to be strengthened in the faith. In the early 400s two men

worked together to help the Armenian people develop into stronger Christians. They did this by making the Bible and teachings of the church available to the people in their own spoken language, Armenian.

The story starts with a monk named Mesrob. Trained as a secretary and educated in Greek and Aramaic, he served one of the Armenian princes in the administration of his land. But in all his studies, he learned more and more about Christianity. He finally decided to give up his life as a secretary and become a priest. After becoming a priest, he turned away from life among the people and became a monk.

Life in the monastery was just what Mesrob wanted. He felt closer to God when he lived alone and apart from people. Many other priests wanted to be like Mesrob and soon he had many students. But Mesrob knew there was work to be done among the people. Quite a few regions in Armenia were still mostly pagan and Mesrob knew he must go to those areas and preach the Good News.

Mesrob was successful in getting the people to give up their pagan ways and follow Christian teachings. There was

only one problem in his mission. The people only knew how to speak Armenian and none of the religious books, including the Bible, were written in Armenian. Even religious services were in languages the people could not understand. They went to church but could not understand the service!

Mesrob knew he must find a way to write the Armenian language so that the people could then read the Bible. The Greek and Aramaic services had to be translated and written in Armenian so that the priests who were not able to understand those other languages could better serve their people.

Catholicos Sahag had come to the same conclusion as Mesrob about the need for the Armenian people to worship God in their own language. Sahag was a very educated man himself and was especially good in many languages. He gave Mesrob permission to go to Syria. King Vramshabouh had heard about a Syrian bishop who had Armenian letters and Mesrob went to get them. Mesrob sent his students to two different schools to study until he came back. He needed his students to be ready for the work of translating when he came back from Bishop Daniel.

The Syrian bishop did have an alphabet and gladly gave it to Mesrob. Mesrob came back to Armenia and trained many people to use the letters. Unfortunately, the letters were simply not adequate. Mesrob decided to go to a place where he could be alone so he could find a solution. He prayed and prayed. At last God helped him create letters of an Armenian alphabet that worked.

Working with a scribe named Ropanos, the letters were improved and the book of Proverbs was translated into Armenian — the first book in the Armenian language!

Now Mesrob gathered his students and others who could learn the new alphabet and trained them to read, write, and translate. Many people joined the priesthood to serve the church and teach the Armenian people.

The Bible and many other books were translated. Catholicos Sahag always checked the work to be sure it was all properly done. When it was right the priests took their copies and went throughout Armenia to teach the people in the Armenian language. They could celebrate liturgy and other services in the language the people understood. Before long the nation became even stronger in the faith.

Mesrob knew he must serve God in any way he could. While he and his students were still so busy in Armenia, he received requests from Caucasian Albania and Georgia to come to those countries and help them in the same way. With consent from Catholicos Sahag, Mesrob went to those nations and created alphabets for them. Christianity began to spread throughout those lands with the help of a written language.

Mesrob traveled here and there throughout Armenia helping priests everywhere tell the people about God and the Good News of Jesus Christ. Armenians became stronger and stronger Christians. They understood how wonderful it was to know God. They knew God would share his Kingdom with those who believed.

All this took many years and Mesrob and Catholicos Sahag grew old. Sahag died knowing that the Armenian people were unshakable in their faith. Six years later Mesrob died. These two saints had begun the greatest period of religious growth in the Armenian Church. Little did they know that a few short years after their deaths the Armenian nation and the Armenian Church would be threatened with extinction!

Persia ruled over Armenia. Persians worshipped false gods, especially the god of fire. For many years the Persians had let the Armenians have their own religion, but now things were changing. Soon the Persians would try to force the Armenians to give up Christianity.

But the work of Saint Mesrob and Saint Sahag was not going to be ruined. Their students, including Vartan Mamigonian and Ghevont Yeretz, would resist the Persians' attempts to get the Armenians to convert to paganism. The Armenians fought and eventually won. We remain a people and a church today, but the pagans and their false gods have perished.

As a Church, we honor Saints Sahag and Mesrob. We have a special saint day for them and the students, the Holy Translators. We thank God for these saints for without them the Armenian Church would not have survived!

St. Sahag/St. Mesrob
SOORP SAHAG/SOORP MESROB

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Complete these sentences:

1. The problem St. Mesrob solved was _____ .
2. Catholicos Sahag helped St. Mesrob by _____ .
3. St. Mesrob had many students who helped _____ .
4. Before St. Mesrob, the Armenian people did not have church services in a language they could _____ .
5. King Vramshabouh knew about a Bishop Daniel who _____ .
6. The alphabet Bishop Daniel had was _____ .
7. God helped St. Mesrob to _____ .
8. The first book written in Armenian was _____ .
9. Many books appeared in Armenian, but the most important was _____ .
10. St. Sahag checked all the translations because _____ .
11. St. Mesrob invented alphabets for _____ .
12. Having church services and the Bible in Armenian helped the Armenian people because _____ .



Then and Now

The Armenian people and the Armenian Church face many of the same problems today as they had back in Sahag's and Mesrob's time.

Put a check next to the problems you think we had then and have now, too.

1. ___ The people do not understand what is being said in church.
2. ___ The Bible is not written in a language we understand.
3. ___ Many important religious books other than the Bible are not written in a language we understand.
4. ___ The government wants us to give up our religion.
5. ___ The people do not know enough about Christianity.

3. Reinforce their knowledge of the story of Vartan and Ghevont by planning and presenting (later) a program for assembly.

Materials Needed

- *For extending the lesson:* white shelf paper, a large box (at least bigger than the width of the shelf paper), pencils, crayons, markers
- *For diorama:* shoeboxes, paper, crayons, scissors, markers, pencils, glue

Procedure

1. As the students enter class, greet each one and check homework.

Open class with a prayer such as: "For all the saints of the Church, we thank you, Lord." (5 min.)

2. Have students open their texts; announce: "Today's story is about General Vartan Mamigonian and Ghevont Yeretz, the two main figures in the Battle of Avarayr. It is also about the fight between the Armenians and the Persians. You have heard about Vartanantz many times before. Can anyone tell us the story so it is fresh in our minds?" (Have one or several of the students tell what they know of the Vartanantz story. If necessary, summarize the facts at the end of their contributions to make the story clear.)

"Now think about being there, being one of the soldiers on the field of Avarayr. Our story is about a group of soldiers and their reflections on that day."

Have students read "The Battle of Avarayr: A Conversation" on page 95. They might want to read it as dialogue, each reading the part of a soldier. (15 min.)

3. Have students write the answers to the questions on the story and then go over them together. (10 min.)

4. Go over "Then and Now" and "Questions to Think About." The questions elicit opinions from the students and as opinions there are no right or wrong answers. Try to get students to express their reasons for how they feel. Those with differing feelings might want to challenge the opinions of the others, but encourage all to allow for differences. (10 min.)

5. Do the class activity described in student text, page 98. A five-minute presentation is adequate. They may wish to re-tell (in turns) the story of Vartanantz, present a short skit with puppets, whatever. (20 min.)

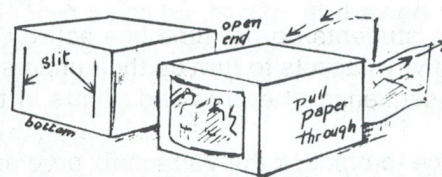
6. *Homework:* Continue to work on the saint's report project.

Close class with a prayer. You may use the same prayer as the opening prayer.

Extending the Lesson

1. Make a crossword puzzle of the facts of the Vartanantz program.
2. Make a diorama of the battle of Avarayr.
3. Make a "movie" of the battle of Avarayr using a box and shelf paper with various scenes of the battle drawn on it. Pull the finished paper through slits

in the box to make it appear like a TV show.



Session 3—Sts. Sahag and Mesrob

Key Concepts

1. Saints Sahag and Mesrob are examples of those who work in the Church to provide for its needs and strengthen it.
2. Through the invention of the Armenian alphabet and the translation of the Bible and other religious works, the Armenian Church was able to reach its people with the Good News.
3. Strengthened by the work of Sts. Sahag and Mesrob, the Armenian Church and nation were able to survive great assaults.

Objectives

Students will

1. Read a story about the work of Sts. Sahag and Mesrob and complete statements about the story.
2. Share their opinions on problems facing the Armenian Church today as well as in St. Sahag's and St. Mesrob's time.
3. Complete a time line.
4. Rehearse their Vartanantz program.

Procedure

1. Ask students how their homework reports are coming along as they enter the room.

Open class with a prayer. (5 min.)

2. Have the students open their books to page 99. Say: "Last week we learned about Vartanantz and the fight for Christianity in Armenia. Our story today takes place about 50 years before Armenians had to fight the Persians. The events of the story help us understand why the Armenians were so steadfast in their faith."

Read or review the story with students. Stop as needed to answer questions or offer further information if the children ask questions or seem puzzled. (10 min.)

3. Have students do the completion exercise. A variety of answers is possible. Accept reasonable ones. Children should be encouraged to look back in the story to find answers. (10 min.)

4. The *Then and Now* activity allows students to offer opinions. Since they are opinions, they are neither wrong nor right; but explanations that are far-fetched might be countered by having the children explore their answers. Encourage students to discuss

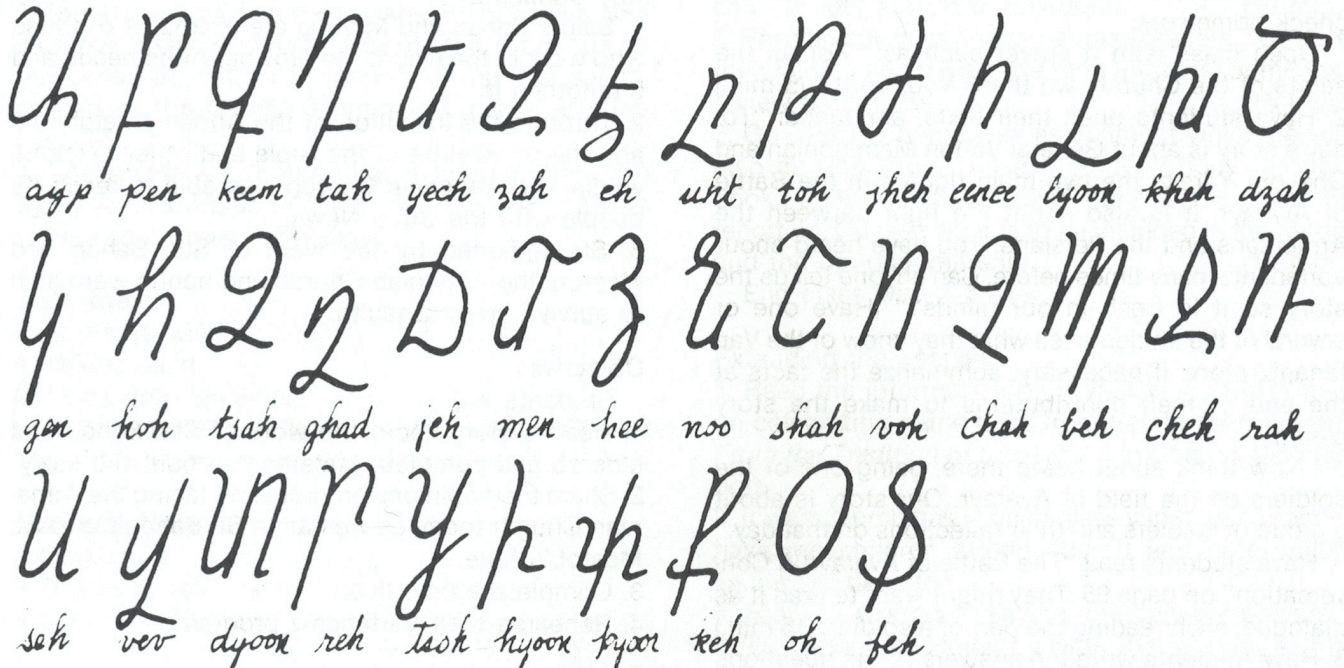
- the ideas freely and have them suggest solutions.
(10 min.)
5. Have the students do the time line activity from student activity packets to firm up their understanding of the sequence of events and points in time.
(15 min.)
 6. Allow time to practice the Vartanantz program for the assembly students created last week if desired.
(10 min.)
 7. *Homework:* Finish work on saint's reports. Remind

children of what the reports should include (see first lesson in this unit).

End class with a prayer.

Extending the Lesson

1. Have the children copy the Armenian alphabet.
2. Meet with each child to go over his/her report and to give suggestions on how it can be improved; offer resource materials as well.



Session 4—Priscilla, Aquilla and Phoebe

Key Concepts

1. Priscilla and Aquilla shared in God's Kingdom by helping teach, and by establishing churches in Corinth, Rome, and Ephesus. (Rom. 16:3; Acts 18:2, 24-26; I Cor. 16:19)
2. Phoebe was entrusted by St. Paul to help minister to the needs of the church at Rome. (Rom. 16:1-2)
3. These people knew and loved Jesus through their association with St. Paul, and were important in spreading the Good News.
4. Priscilla, Aquilla, and Phoebe were ordinary people called to serve God.

Objectives

Students will

1. Recall the events in the lives of Priscilla, Aquilla,

and Phoebe by putting those events in chronological order.

2. Identify from a list those qualities these three early Christians had which enabled them to fulfill their missions.
3. Select from a list of statements those which are true about Christ.

Background for Teacher

After Jesus ascended to heaven, the only way to become a follower of his was through contact with those who knew him. St. Paul met Jesus in a dramatically revealing way (see Unit 1, Session 3 on Paul's conversion, and Acts 9, 22, 26). Then he set off to establish churches, and pockets of Christianity throughout the Middle East. He met and made friends in these areas. Among his friends were Priscilla and Aquilla who were tent makers (as was Paul). Paul supported himself as he traveled by making and repairing tents. Whenever he was in Corinth,