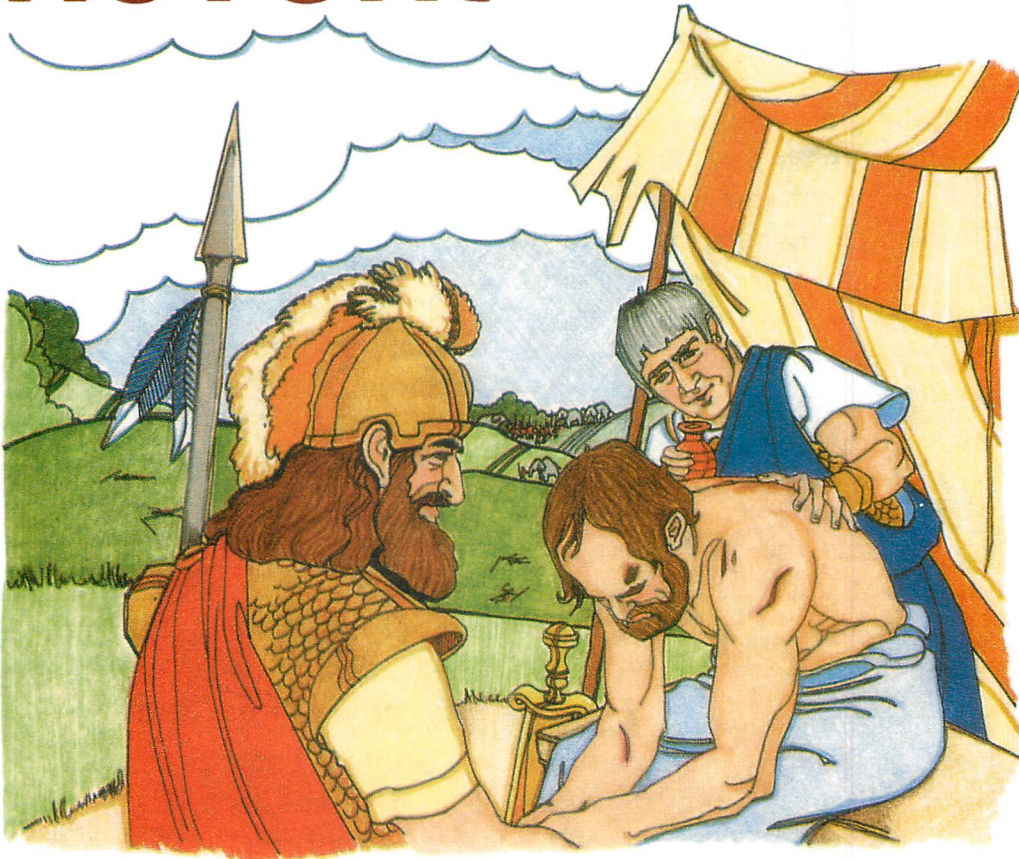


# Sts. Vartan and Ghevont



## The Battle of Avarayr: A Conversation

“I just want to give up and go back home!” sighed Aram. “There’s just no way we can win.”

“They’re really beating us,” Harootiun said, looking around at all the Armenians who lay dead or wounded on the field.

“But if we do give up, we lose everything!” Hovhannes cried.

“If we give up there will be no more Armenia and our children will be forced to worship fire and other false gods. We will lose our land, our country, our property, our language, our rights; but

most of all we will lose our souls. We will lose our share of the Kingdom of God. God will not let us inherit the Kingdom if we lose our faith in the Lord."

"You've been listening to that priest, Der Ghevont!" Simon sneered. "He's afraid he'll be out of a job. That's why he wants us to fight. Why should we risk our lives for him?"

"We're risking our lives for ourselves and our families and each other, Simon," said Michael. "And besides, didn't you hear? Yesterday the Persians captured most of the priests including Catholicos Hovsep and Der Ghevont. Reports say they were taken far away and cruelly murdered by the Persians. They gave their lives for us. They stayed with our troops on the battlefield since the fight began. I myself saw Der Ghevont caring for our wounded and praying over the dying. He looked all worn out and could hardly stand on his feet, but he kept on moving from one soldier to another helping as much as he could."

"So we have lost our church leaders. We have lost our military leaders including Vartan. What chance do we have now of winning? Maybe we should just give up." Aram looked ready to collapse from exhaustion.

"If we give up, all their deaths and the deaths of our friends who fought with us will be for nothing!" Minas was gathering what little strength he had left to speak again. "My wife has been in the camp all day helping where she could. She even fought alongside me for a while. She is afraid of what will happen to our family if the Persians win this war. She doesn't want us to live if we can't be free Armenians who

worship the one true God. She would rather throw herself into the fire and gain eternal life than kneel before it and worship it and lose her soul. We are Christians and we don't want to stop being Christians!"

"Why couldn't the Persian King Hasgerd let us alone? We paid our taxes to him. We helped him fight his wars. Why does he do this to us now? We Armenians could live under Persian rule if we were allowed to keep our religion. Why does he insist we change it?" Armen was puzzled over why the Persians forced their religion on Armenia.

"Hasgerd is afraid of his gods. He doesn't understand that there is only one true God and that the Son of God, Jesus Christ, has given us something no one can take from us. Our Lord has given us a share in his Kingdom, a life after this life which will be new and better. Hasgerd only cares about this life here and now." Sevan put down his spear and prayed, "Lord, help us to stay strong in our faith."

"Strong? Look at us. Only a few left. The Persians scared off many of us when they brought their elephants into the battle. Did you see how they drove the beasts into the fight and surrounded Vartan? Each elephant had spearmen on its back and the spearmen threw so many spears at us it was as if it were raining spears! When I saw Vartan get hit, my heart broke. I knew he was dead. The news of Vartan's death spread among our troops like a sickness and many were disheartened." Haig wiped tears from his eyes as he spoke and remembered the death of Vartan.

“Should we give up?” Aram asked.

“No,” they all said.

“Vartan’s nephew, Vahan Mamigonian, is taking our army into the mountains. There we will regroup and plan what to do next. We will not give up. We will fight until the Persians give up and let us worship the God of our forefathers, or we will die trying!” Sevan said, as he picked up his spear again.

“Let’s go,” Michael said as he helped the others gather their things together.

“Today we have lost a battle, but we will not lose this war. We will fight until we can live freely as Christians or we will die as Christians.”

“You know,” said Aram, “I’m tired and hungry and dirty and wounded, but somehow I feel good and happy now. I have seen my father and brothers die, but I feel happy. It doesn’t make sense.”

“Yes, it does,” said Minas. “The happiness you feel comes from the Lord because you have not given up your love for him.”

“Today I have killed many men,” said Aram. “I prayed that God would forgive me for taking lives. Perhaps this feeling of hope and joy is his answer to my prayers.”

“You did not kill out of hate or desire to gain something for yourself. You killed out of love of God and the desire to save your fellow Christians from being forced to give up their faith. God who judges all men will judge you fairly. He knows our fight was forced on us. Don’t despair.”

“Let’s go. Let’s find Vahan’s camp in the mountains.”

## Review Questions

1. Who was Vartan Mamigonian?
2. Who was Der Ghevont?
3. What did the Persians want the Armenians to do?
4. Why did the Armenians have to fight the Persians?
5. Who finally won the fight?



## Then and Now

In Vartan’s and Ghevont’s time another country that did not believe in God tried to impose its beliefs on the Armenian people and turn them away from the Armenian Church.

Today there are forces trying to turn us away from our faith.

Preachers from other religions try to get us to think about God the way they do, and not the way we have been taught throughout the centuries by our Armenian Church.

Advertisers try to convince us that their products will give us great happiness and that we *really* need them.

People try to tell us that anything is okay if you can get away with it.

There is a feeling of “Me First” rather than “Let’s Share.”

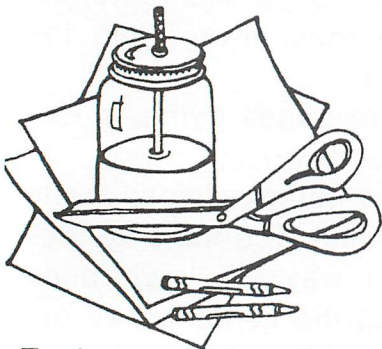


## Questions to Think About

Choose one and tell your classmates what you think about:

1. Having to fight and kill does not seem like a Christian thing to do. Was it right or wrong for Vartan to fight the Persians?
2. Should a person pretend to change her religion to save her life (and practice in secret?)
3. Should a person change his religion to save his life?
4. Should you move to another place to have religious freedom, or stay and fight for your right to practice your religion in your own home?
5. Should Armenians try to continue their church in this country or should they just join another church?

## Class Activity



Each year before Great Lent begins we celebrate Vartanantz Day. We remember the sacrifices of Vartan Mamigonian, Ghevont Yeretz, and all the Armenian people who kept the Armenian Church alive.

Plan a Vartanantz program for your Sunday School assembly.

# Unit V: Special People of the Church

## Session 1—Role Models

### Key Concepts

1. The saints serve as examples of Christian life.
2. The Armenian Church celebrates the lives of the saints through saint day celebrations.
3. The Armenian Church decorates its buildings with pictures of saints to remind us of their sacrifices on our behalf as well as to remind us that the saints, as part of the Church Triumphant, serve as intercessors for us.
4. The Armenian Church shares many saints with the general Christian Church and has many saints unique to its own experience.

### Objectives

Students will

1. Define saint.
2. List saintly qualities.
3. Identify the terms, Church Triumphant and Church Militant, and give examples of each.

### Materials Needed

- Oratzooytz
- Diocesan calendar
- Books on saints

### Vocabulary

Militant, Triumphant, Intercessor (Զինուորեալ, Յաղթական, Միջնորդ)

### Procedure

1. Welcome students and briefly check homework. Start class with a prayer. (5 min.)
2. Announce that today we start a new unit about saints and other special people of the Armenian Church. Ask for a definition of a saint and/or qualities of a person which would make him saintly. Have students give the names of any saints they know and tell about them briefly. (5 min.)
3. Look at page 91 of the student text and identify the people shown. Have the children read through the first section, "Whom Do We Want to Be Like?", and fill in the spaces as directed. Discuss answers. Do the same with "How do You Think God wants us to live?" (10 min.)
4. Read together "Celebrating the Lives of Saints—Saint Days." (You may have to explain how the church has many services throughout the day. This is only done in monasteries, and the priests pray on behalf of us all. Some of the services are done in our

churches on special occasions. Many churches precede Divine Liturgy with Morning Service. Services of the church can be found in the Book of Hours.) You may want to have students look up the name of the saint they were named for on the calendar or an *Oratzooytz* and make note of when they can celebrate their name day. Students without saints' names can "adopt" a saint to celebrate. (15 min.)

5. Read and discuss "Saints as Intercessors." Be sure the children know what the term intercessor means; review definitions. (15 min.)
6. Go over the homework assignment which serves also as Unit Project. Have students look through books about saints and pick the one they wish to report on. Go over what is to be included in the report and the optional material. (10 min.)

End class with a prayer.

### Extending the Lesson

1. Read the information on "What Is a Saint?" and on celebrating name days from *Saints for Children: From the Tradition of the Armenian Church*. Discuss both.
2. If your church has stained glass windows of saints, have the children attend church and note which saints are depicted.
3. Practice writing or saying intercessory prayers.
4. Talk about well-known saints that are not saints in the Armenian Church, such as Francis of Assisi, Joan of Arc, etc.
5. Compare the way the Roman Catholic Church canonizes a saint to the Armenian Church's practice. This will need researching on your part ahead of time.

## Session 2—Sts. Vartan and Ghevont

### Key Concepts

1. St. Vartan Mamigonian and St. Ghevont Yeretz and their comrades kept the Armenian Church from extinction by their sacrifice on the battlefield.
2. The Armenian Church still faces the same challenge to perpetuate the faith of the Armenian people today.

### Objectives

Students will

1. Review the story of Vartanantz through storytelling.
2. Discuss the concerns and actions of the Vartanank to today.

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.)

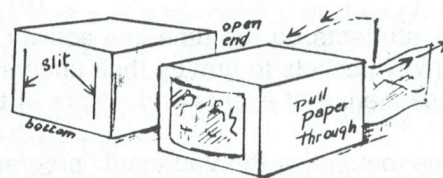
6. *Homework:* Continue to work on the saint's report project.

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