



DISCOVERY OF THE HOLY CROSS

Discovery of the Holy Cross is the fourth and last feast of the Armenian Apostolic Church which reminds us about the importance of discovering the Lord's Cross in our own lives.

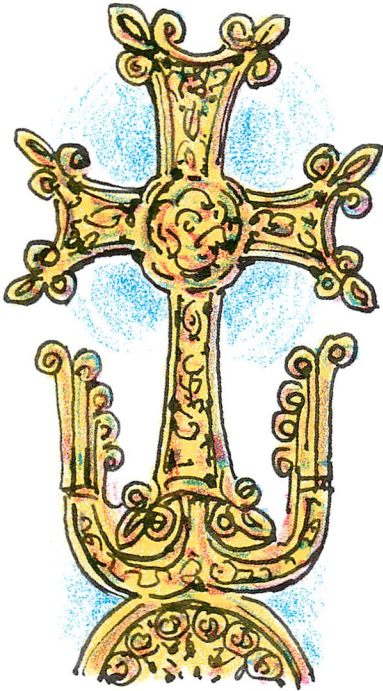
The Holy cross is called the Tree of Life and symbolizes our salvation by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The Cross provides protection for the believers and reminds us about Lord's victory over death.

In the 4th Century Roman Empress Helena, the mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine has decided to find the True Cross of Jesus Christ, the Cross of the Crucifixion which was lost. After many years of searching, they found three crosses under the rubble heap in Jerusalem.

Following the discovery of the Crosses, tradition tells us that in order to be sure which of the three crosses was our Lord's, the body of a newly-deceased man placed on the crosses, one by one. When he was placed on the Cross of our Lord, a miracle occurred – he came alive.

Throughout the centuries Holy Cross has helped us to overcome difficulties and there are many witnesses who tell us that even today, after 1700 years of discovery of the Holy Cross it still helps many Christians.

Feasts of the Cross



The cross is such an important symbol to the church that our early church fathers had special feast days set aside dedicated to the Holy Cross. In the Armenian Church, there are four feasts of the Holy Cross:

Exaltation of the Holy Cross

Khatchveratz 628 A.D.

Holy Cross of Varak

Varaka Khatch 650 A.D.

Discovery of the Holy Cross

Kiud Khatch 327 A.D.

Apparition of the Holy Cross

Yerevman Khatch 351 A.D.

The Feast of the *Exaltation of the*

Holy Cross is a major feast, or *daghavar*. It falls on the Sunday closest to September 14 and may occur between September 11 and 17. This feast day commemorates two distinct historical events. The first event relates to the earliest public act of venerating the cross which is attributed to the apostle James, the first bishop of Jerusalem. He raised a four-armed cross made in the likeness of Christ's cross in full view of the assembly of the faithful, and recited the prayer (now a chant in the Armenian Church): "O Christ, we bow down to your cross."

The second occasion when the cross was made the object of special veneration is the return of the cross from captivity. The city of Jerusalem was captured by the Persians in 610 A.D. and among the articles taken as booty was the cross of Christ. You can imagine how distressed the Christians were to have their precious cross taken away by people who did not worship it as they did. In 627 A.D. the Emperor Heraclius defeated the Persians, returned the cross to Jerusalem and in 628 A.D. with great ceremony and rejoicing, placed it in its original location in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. This is what we remember on the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. On this day, we pray:

"Before your precious and victorious

cross we fall down and worship and ask forgiveness of our sins; for through this you did lift the condemnation of mankind. And now by your holy and divine sign grant your heavenly peace to all the world.”

“*Come let us go out into the field*” (I Kings 20:11): On the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross a special ceremony called *Antasdan* is performed in the church. The word *Antasdan* means “field.” In this processional service, the priest blesses the four corners of the world. Through our prayers and hymns of praise to God, our Father, we ask him to bless the food and fruitfulness of the earth. Also, as caretakers of the field we ask for divine protection for the grounds of the earth, farms, gardens, and the year’s harvest. We also ask God’s blessings upon our church leaders and the people on the earth. During the ceremony, the cross, which is a symbol of our faith, is placed on a tray and adorned with sweet basil and rosewater. It is then carried into the field (which is a symbol of the world), manifesting Christ and his mission in the field of our own lives.

The feast of the *Holy Cross of Varak* is celebrated on the second Sunday after the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. This is usually the last Sunday in September. On this feast day we recall the story of St. Hripsime and a group of young nuns who fled from the pagan king Drtad who ruled Armenia. St. Hripsime had been given a piece of the Holy Cross and she did not want it to fall into the hands of the Roman persecutors. She hid it in Mount Varak which is near the city of

Van. Tradition tells us that a monk named Thodik saw a vision of a church with 12 pillars at the top of Mt. Varak. In the center he saw a cross with radiating lights. This vision descended and stood at the altar of the monastery, and it was there that they found the piece of the cross which St. Hripsime had hidden. Catholicos Nersess “The Builder” came to Varak, proclaimed it the true cross and commemorated this with a yearly feast.

The *Discovery of the Holy Cross*: Empress Helena, mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine, commissioned an army to recover the Holy Cross of Jesus. After the discovery of three crosses on Calvary, tradition tells us that in order to be sure which of the three crosses was our Lord’s, the body of a recently deceased man in a passing funeral procession was taken and placed on the crosses, in turn. When he was placed on the cross of our Lord, a miracle occurred — he was restored to life! We celebrate the Discovery of the Holy Cross on the 7th Sunday of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. It may occur from October 23 to 29.

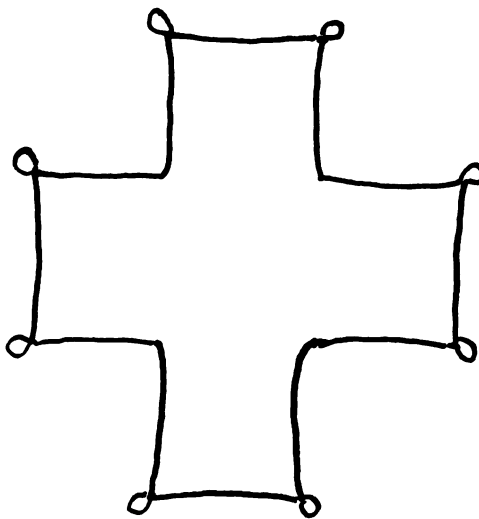
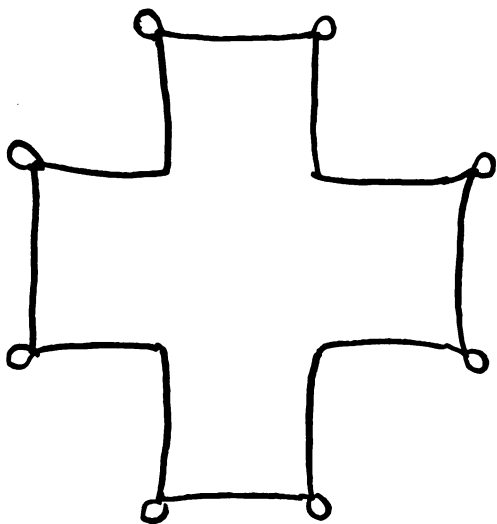
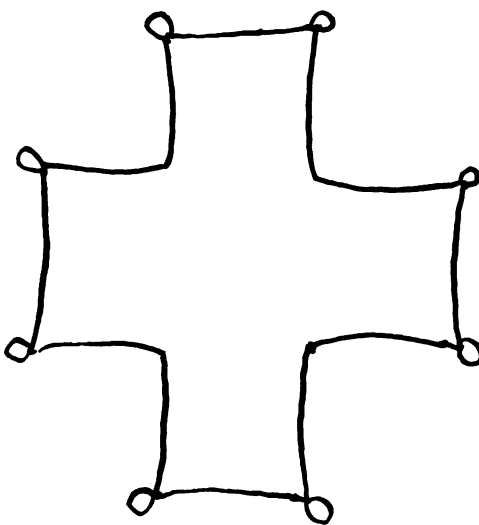
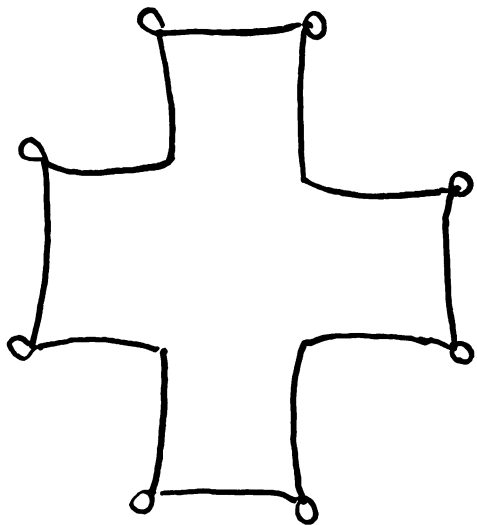
The *Apparition of the Holy Cross* occurred in 351 A.D. on Pentecost Day in Jerusalem. A luminous cross appeared in the sky and extended from Golgotha where Christ was crucified to the Mount of Olives. The vision was seen by many Jerusalemites for several hours. They ran to the churches in penance and with piety. The Armenian Church celebrates the feast of the Apparition of the Holy Cross on the 5th Sunday after Easter, which may occur as early as April 19 and as late as May 23.

a. In each of the blank crosses below, draw an illustration of the four feasts of the Holy Cross, depicting the importance for each.

b. Under each cross, write a "key

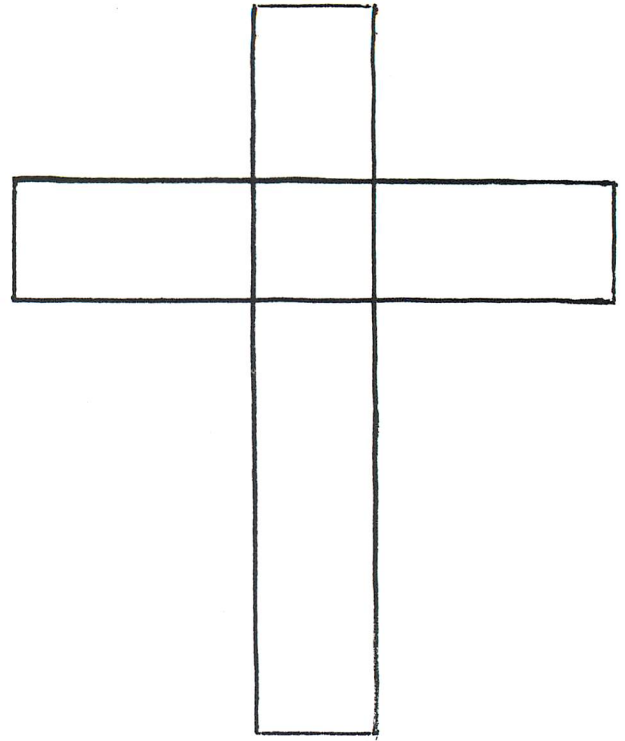
word" that would be a clue to the name of the feast illustrated.

c. Give your book to a friend and have that person guess the name of the feasts you illustrated.



True or False:

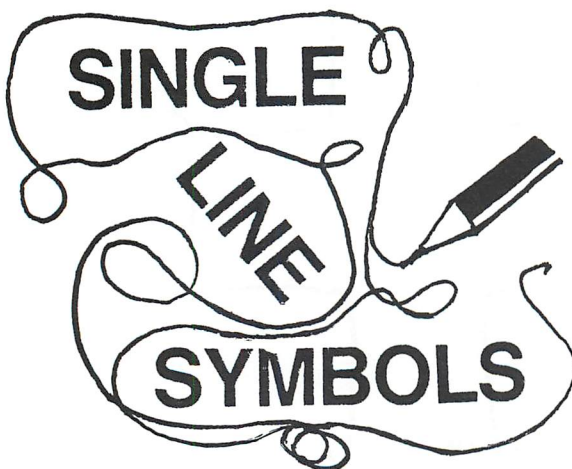
1. The Discovery of the Holy Cross commemorates the finding of a piece of cross which St. Hripsime had hidden from the Romans.
2. The ceremony of Antasdan is performed in church on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.
3. Armenian churches are built in the form of a cross.
4. On the Feast of the Holy Cross of Varak a luminous cross appeared in the sky.
5. On the Apparition of the Holy Cross a dead man rose to life when placed on the true cross of Christ.



*“In the cross of Christ I glory,
Towering over the wrecks of time.
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime.
When the woes of life overtake me,
Hopes deceive, and fears annoy.
Never shall the cross forsake me;
Lo, it glows with peace and joy.”*

Can you draw this symbol without taking your pencil off the paper, without crossing any lines and without tracing over any lines?

Try your cross here:



The cross is a Christian symbol which reminds us Christ died for us.

- 64 Add the number of days Jesus appeared to the apostles after the Resurrection. (40)
- 320 Multiply by the number of major feast days. (5)
- 160 Divide by the number of references in the Divine Liturgy to the Ascension. (2)
- 172 Add the number of Jesus' disciples. (12)
- 122 Subtract the number of days between Easter and Pentecost. (50)
- 366 Multiply by the number of persons in the Holy Trinity. (3)
- 377 Add the number of letters in the Armenian word for Ascension Day. (11)

Session 4—Feasts of the Cross

Key Concepts

1. The cross is the oldest and most sacred symbol of Christianity.
2. The Armenian Church celebrates four feasts of the Holy Cross.
3. The cross is a symbol of a life of sacrifice, endurance, and courage.

Objectives

Students will

1. List the four feasts of the Holy Cross.
2. Describe the events surrounding the four feasts of the Holy Cross.
3. Relate the cross of Christ to our own lives and tell how we can better bear our crosses in life in a positive way.
4. Make their own match stick crosses.

Background for Teacher

The Armenian Church is built in the form of a cross. This means that the foundation of the church is the cross. The strength of buildings derives from their foundation. A building with a good, strong foundation will stand up even under great stress. A building with a weak foundation will crumble and fall.

The cross is the most sacred symbol of Christianity. It is a symbol of joy and thanksgiving and victory over death. Christians venerate the cross because Christ gave his life for our salvation on the cross. From that day on, it became a reminder of the great sacrifice that the Son of God made for mankind. The cross had assumed the meaning of a life of endurance, courage, and sacrifice. Our Lord once said, "He that taketh not his cross and followeth after me is not worthy of me." (Matthew 10:38) What does this mean? Those who cannot endure moral hardships, those who cannot sacrifice their own selfish and bodily interests for the sake of a higher life of sanc-

tity and honesty, cannot worthily be called Christians.

We must fight against evil with courage and endurance and at the same time with gentleness and charity; this is the moral significance of the cross.

Materials Needed

- Burnt wooden kitchen matches
- Heavy cardboard
- Scissors
- Glue
- Clear Shellac
- Bible
- Candles
- Paint brushes
- Felt
- Hangers
- String

Procedure

1. Review "New Eyes," from previous lesson. Remind students to try the experiment in last week's parent/pupil worksheet. The students are to go to church and during the elevation of the host, use the host as a focal point. Check on this in subsequent weeks.

Try to get across to the students that the priest elevates the host for all to see. Jesus is present in the sacrifice of the Holy Eucharist to reach out to us and touch us so our souls might be healed from sin. We, in turn, see Jesus and receive him into our hearts, souls, and minds. When we receive the Holy Eucharist the bond is complete and we are one in the Lord. When the priest elevates the host we should begin preparing ourselves spiritually to receive Jesus in communion. (10 min.)

2. Worship Service: Bible reading 1 Cor. 1:1-18. Sing the hymn "Zorootyoon Soorp Khachi." Perhaps you can arrange with the choir director to help teach it to the class. (10 min.)

3. *Meditation on the meaning of the cross:*

a. Make certain that there will be no distractions or interruptions during the meditation. Ask students to remove all books, papers, etc., from their desks and to get as comfortable as possible.

b. Begin by mentioning that the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross occurs in September and that it would be a good time to meditate or reflect upon the meaning of the cross in our lives. (The Feast of the Exaltation is a major feast day or *daghavar* and, in many Armenian churches, coincides with the opening day of Sunday School. What a beautiful way to begin our spiritual training.)

c. Speak in a soft reflective tone: Sometimes things go wrong in our lives which we are able to fix. For example, you have an argument with a friend; you can discuss it and resolve it together. If something goes wrong with your bike, you can have it repaired. If

you're overweight, you can go on a diet. Can anyone think of some more examples? These are upsets or little sufferings that are in our power to change or mend. And we should always try to do that. But there are times when we can't do a thing about the suffering in our lives.

What are some examples of sufferings or "crosses" that we just can't get rid of? (Students will probably be general: sickness, death, frustrations, heartaches, wants, hurts, etc.) If possible, give an example from your own life when you were your students' age.

d. The cross is the oldest and most important symbol of our Church. It reminds us of Christ. Let's try a little experiment with that: Try to picture in your mind—close your eyes if it helps—Jesus carrying the cross up the hilly streets of Jerusalem. Fill in the details of the scene as you imagine them—the hot sun, people along the way, etc. Try to see how Jesus handled the situation. Remember how tired and discouraged he was and imagine how he behaved under all the pressure.

e. Now let's change the picture a little. The scene is the same, a man carrying a cross up the streets of Jerusalem. This time, however, imagine a different kind of man—one who is feeling sorry for himself and trying to do things to get out of the situation, even though he knows it's hopeless. Picture in your mind how he's acting. (Ask students: What was Jesus like in your picture? How did the second man act? Discuss these two questions briefly, comparing the two men.)

f. Now let's bring the scene up to the present and to our own lives. Think for a moment of the heaviest cross you are carrying right now. (Students may have trouble understanding what you mean. If so, give some examples—not getting along with parents or siblings, some physical defect they see in themselves, problems with school, etc.) First try to picture in your mind someone else your age with the same suffering or cross. Imagine that person as a very strong and brave young person. Picture him or her in the situation you've chosen, handling the problem with as much dignity as anyone possibly could.

g. Now change the picture and imagine the weakest possible person handling the same problem in the worst possible way.

h. Finally, try to think whether your usual way of handling this suffering is closer to the way of the first person or the second person.

i. At this point, ask if someone would like to share his/her problem and the mental pictures that went with it. (Volunteers only.)

j. Summary: What have we found out so far? All of us have things that go wrong in our lives from time to time, and it's good to try to get rid of these things if and when we can. Sometimes, however, it's not that

easy and we can't fix things. And we also saw that there's a good way and a bad way to live with the crosses we can't get rid of. (Ask if anyone has anything to add.)

k. Ask students to reflect back to Jesus and his cross. In your mental picture of him, you said he was strong and brave. But was he just being brave because he couldn't get away from his cross or was there some other element in his courage? (We hope students will say that he knew it would benefit others.)

l. If Jesus knew that his suffering could be used to help others, and if he tells us to imitate him, then it follows that our suffering can have meaning and value too. What do you think? (Make sure that students don't conclude that all suffering is good or that they should seek out opportunities to suffer.) How can a person's sickness, for instance, be used positively rather than just be endured? How could it not be wasted?

m. Think about the example from your own life. How could you live with it in a way that could help it have value? (Ask if anyone would like to share his/her thoughts.) The better we get to know what Jesus was like and how he handled the crosses in his life, the better we can learn how to live with our crosses. We know he understands our pain because he went through it too.

n. Ask students to meditate on the following thoughts over the next week: By making the most of the crosses we can't get rid of, we become closer to Christ and grow as persons. Our cross enables us to be more sensitive to others who suffer. Close by reading Matthew 16:24, "Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'"

o. We have reflected on the meaning of the cross in our own personal lives. Now let's take a look at the meaning of the Holy Cross of Jesus. The cross is the oldest and most sacred symbol of Christianity. It is such an important symbol to our church that our early church fathers had special feast days set aside dedicated to the Holy Cross. In the Armenian Church there are four feasts of the Holy Cross: Exaltation of the Holy Cross, Holy Cross of Varak, Discovery of the Holy Cross, and the Apparition of the Holy Cross. (15 min.)

4. Read student text: "Feasts of the Cross" and complete activities which follow it.

True or false exercise answers:

1.F, 2.T, 3.T, 4.F, 5.F.

The cross is a very important part of our church. Its symbol can be seen everywhere. It is always on the altar and it is also on the curtain which goes across the altar at certain times during the Badarak.

If you were in church, where are some of the places you would see a cross? Discuss. (10 min.)

5. Activity: Match Stick Crosses.

Instructions

- a. Students first draw a cross on heavy cardboard and cut it out.
 - b. The number of matches needed will depend on how large the cardboard base is.
 - c. You should burn the matches *before* distributing them. Burn the matches down below the tip and brush off excess residue before using.
 - d. Glue the matches to the cardboard. Matches toward the edges will need to be glued together since there will not be enough exposed cardboard to glue matches securely.
 - e. The finished piece is covered with one or two coats of clear shellac.
 - f. A hanger can be placed in the back for display purposes, or students might wish to glue entire piece onto cardboard covered with black or brown felt. (15 min.)
6. **Homework:** "Single Line Symbols" (page 56); parent/pupil worksheet: "Time Is on My Side."

Notes

