

Fun Facts on the Armenian Church

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- Mount Ararat (which now lies just inside Turkish borders) is traditionally considered a Holy Mountain of Armenia. We've had monasteries on this mountain throughout the Church's history. The Douay Rheims Bible, based on St. Jerome's Latin Vulgate, attests Noah's Ark "rested... on the Mountains of Armenia" (Gen. 8:14).
- Tradition holds that Armenia was evangelized by the Apostles Sts. Thaddaeus and Bartholomew. Thus they are commemorated in our Church's Liturgy as the "First Enlighteners of Armenia."
- As a result of the preaching and sufferings of St. Gregory the Illuminator, Armenia became the first Christian nation (in AD 301).
- Pope John Paul II went to Armenia in AD 2001 to celebrate the 1700th anniversary of our nation's conversion at the invitation of H.H. Patriarch Karekin II (Armenian Orthodox). In a joint prayer, the Pope invoked the intercession of the Apostles St. Peter, St. Thaddaeus and St. Bartholomew, the patrons of our Churches.
- Our most ancient Cathedral, "Holy Echmiadzin," was first built in AD 303 and is believed to be the first Christian temple built in cruciform (the shape of a Cross).
- Our unique Armenian Alphabet (consisting of 38 letters) was created by the Armenian Monk, St. Mesrob Mashdots in AD 405 for the purpose of placing the Holy Bible into our native tongue. From that moment on, as a historian of antiquity noted, "Jesus and the Apostles spoke Armenian." The Divine Liturgy and the writings of the Holy Fathers were also translated at this time known as "the Golden Age" of Armenian Literature (5th century). Besides our Christian faith, the written language proved to be the greatest galvanizing force in the preservation of our people, Church & culture.
- After Syriac, Latin and Gothic, Armenian was the fourth language the Bible was translated into (AD 406) by Sts. Catholicos Sahag the Great and Mesrob Mashdots.
- The Armenian word for the Bible is "Asdvadz-a-shoonch" a compound which means "The Breath of God" (based on a literal translation of 2 Tim 3:16).
- In AD 451 St. Vartan the General and St. Levont the Priest, led a military defense which culminated in the first war ever waged for the religious freedom of Christians. When Armenians were commanded by the Persian "King of Kings" to return to our former religion Zoroastrianism (still the religion of the Persian Empire), St. Vartan's reply was, "Our religion is not like a garment that we might change according to the circumstances; it is part and parcel of our bones and blood and personality..."

Armenians, facing unbelievable odds, lost the battle but eventually won the war for freedom. The Persians, seeing our determination, allowed us to retain our Christian religion. Ironically, eventually the Persians succumbed to Islam.

- The Armenian Church, along with the other Oriental Orthodox Churches (The Coptic, Syrian, Ethiopian, Indian and Eritrean Orthodox Churches), did not accept the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451. Thus we hold to three ancient Ecumenical Church Councils. The Armenian Liturgical Calendar celebrates these three Councils (Nicaea, Constantinople and Ephesus) individually as feasts of our Church.
- The primary reason for not accepting Chalcedon involved the understanding of the word “nature.” To say Christ was “in two natures” was tantamount to saying He was “two persons.” Armenians preferred to say that our Lord’s true humanity was joined to His Divinity to form -after the Hypostatic Union- a single composite nature: without confusion, change, separation or division. This position was misconstrued to be a denial of Christ’s true humanity -something never denied. Modern day joint Christological Statements and Agreements between Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches affirm that we teach the same Orthodox Christology using different terminology.
- During the middle ages, the Armenian and Latin Churches became very close as we joined forces to re-take the Holy Land. The help the Armenians rendered to the Crusaders prompted Pope Gregory XIII to say in AD 1584, “Among the good deeds which the Armenian people has done towards the Church and the Christian world, it should especially be stressed that, in those times when the Christian princes and the warriors went to retake the Holy Land, no people or nation, with the same enthusiasm, joy and faith came to their aid as the Armenians did.” The Armenian and Latin Churches, from the Crusades on, remained close. In AD 1742, a group of Armenians established communion with Rome to form the Armenian Catholic Church.
- Some scholars think that the Europeans got many architectural ideas for their grandiose medieval cathedrals (like Notre Dame) from their contacts with the Armenians during the Crusades.
- The Armenian Divine Liturgy is primarily an ancient form of the Byzantine Liturgy of St. Basil with the Anaphora of St. Athanasius which is said quietly by the priest during the Sanctus (this Anaphora is available on-line, if interested).
- Due to close contact with the Latin Church, the Armenian Liturgy was augmented with “the Preparation” as well as the “Last Gospel.”
- Another result of contacts during the Crusades was that Armenian bishops adopted the vestments of Latin bishops. Armenian priests then adopted the former vestments of our bishops. Thus Armenian bishop vestments look like that of Latin bishops and Armenian priest vestments look like that of Byzantine bishops.

- Unlike the Byzantine tradition, in the Armenian Divine Liturgy the Trisagion is sung not to the Holy Trinity but specifically to the second person of the Holy Trinity, God the Son. Thus Armenians adopted the insertion attributed to Peter the Fuller, “Who was Crucified for us,” in the fifth century. This now has variations based on what liturgical season we are in. Most Sundays we sing “Who has risen from the dead.” Peter the Fuller is also credited for inserting the Creed into the Divine Liturgy.
- The form of the Creed Armenians use is a variation of the Nicene Symbol known as the Nicene-Athanasian Symbol of Faith. Some unique aspects of this Creed include that there is no mention of the procession of the Holy Spirit and more emphatic language regarding our Lord’s Incarnation is used.
- Our Divine Liturgy uses very emphatic language regarding the sacrificial nature of the Divine Liturgy. In fact, the Armenian title for the Divine Liturgy is "Soorp Badarak" which literally means "Holy Sacrifice" (Soorp = Holy, Badarak = Sacrifice).
- Another interesting note is that our version of the Sanctus has an insertion with eschatological significance. Thus we sing “...Blessed is He who ‘came and is to come’ in the name of the Lord ...Hosanna in the highest.”
- Armenians are rather unique among Eastern Churches in that we use unleavened bread for Holy Communion and have done so since at least the 5th century. This is four centuries before scholars think the Latin Church adopted the practice (in the 9th century). We also do not mix water in the wine that will become the Blood of Christ our Lord.

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