

The Faith Journey

Lesson 3

Unit Three

Hearts of Stone to Hearts of Flesh: The Conversion of Armenia

Here I Am, Lord

*This prayer is for you, God.
You teach me, and I trust in you.
Sometimes I mess up.
I did when I was younger, and I still do.
You loved me through it all.
Because you are awesome,*

*you show me what to do, and
I try to do what is good.
I turn to you for help, and
you help me not to worry.
I trust in you.
You protect me and keep me safe.
I trust in you.*

Inspired by Psalm 25



One Step Back

Put a check mark next to the correct answer.

- 1. The Book of Acts reviews a period of 30 years which covers what time period?**
 - a. The Ascension of Christ to Paul's imprisonment in Rome
 - b. Pentecost to the Ascension of Christ
 - c. The Resurrection of Christ to Pentecost
 - d. The Crucifixion of Christ to his Ascension
- 2. After Saul's confrontation with Jesus on the road to Damascus, the blinding light leaves him sightless for**
 - a. 7 Days
 - b. 40 days
 - c. 3 days
- 3. This man from Damascus, who was a follower of Jesus, was sent by God to bless & baptize Saul.**
 - a. Barnabus
 - b. Ananias
 - c. Cornelius
- 4. Historical writers indicate that Christians were persecuted in Armenia as early as**
 - a. 110 A.D.
 - b. 287 A.D.
 - c. 301 A.D.
- 5. To aid in the spread of Christianity in Armenia, St. Gregory and King Drtad**
 - a. built churches and chapels
 - b. destroyed pagan statues and temples
 - c. worked very hard for the rest of their lives to spread the faith
 - d. all of the above

A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. *Ezekiel 36:26*

Faithful Witnesses Continue to Share the Good News

Acts 8:26-40

This is the story of an Ethiopian eunuch who looked for and found Christ. (A eunuch is a man who has been castrated, either by accident or by design. Eunuchs often served as guards of the harems of kings.) This eunuch was reading a text from Isaiah while returning from a visit to Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit moved the apostle Philip to explain to him how Isaiah's prophecies pointed to Jesus. And the man believed and was baptized. So why is his baptism significant? It's because his baptism signals the beginning acceptance of Gentile (non-Jewish) believers.



The eunuch's faith was dependent on the interaction of three characters; the Ethiopian who was searching; Philip, bearing the Good News; and the Holy Spirit, who brought them together.

Acts 16:11-15

Women were a crucial part of Christianity from its beginning. Lydia was Paul's first convert in Philippi, which is part of modern-day Europe. She was a textile merchant and was wealthy enough to support a household and open her home to Paul and Silas to stay for an extended time.

Why is it important for us to know about the inclusion of women? In the ancient world, many people considered women to be inferior to men. However, in the life of the new Church, women were not only supporting the missionary work of the Church but also leading and teaching.

Seeds of Faith Spread to Armenia

As Philip baptized the eunuch, geographical, ethnic, and legal barriers were washed away. In baptizing Lydia, Paul addressed the equality in gender. Both of these facts were important to the story of how Armenia became the first Christian nation.



The first seeds of Christianity were planted in Armenia by the apostle Thaddeus. Like Philip, Thaddeus had moved beyond the cultural, geographical and ethnic boundaries to boldly proclaim the Christian faith in Armenia, baptizing King Sanadroog's daughter, Santookht. The king bitterly opposed the threatening new faith, going so far as to imprison his own daughter. In prison, Santookht not only refused to renounce Christianity, but, instead converted the other prisoners. She became the first Armenian martyr. After Santookht was executed, Thaddeus continued preaching and was himself martyred in 66 A.D.



Bartholomew followed Thaddeus' mission to Armenia around the time of Santookht's imprisonment and martyrdom. He converted King Sanadroog's sister Volouhi. The king in anger ordered the execution of both his sister and Bartholomew. We know from the study of our Armenian history that a long line of women were faithful witnesses of the Christian faith.

The Next on the Scene: St. Gregory the Illuminator

Soorp Krikor Loosavorich Սուրբ Գրիգոր Լուսավորիչ

Sometime between 274 and 276 Gregory entered the service of King Drtad as court secretary. (This was particularly ironic, since years ago Gregory's father had killed Drtad's father during a rebellion.) He pursued his duties faithfully over a period of several years. However, the relationship between the two soon began to deteriorate. After refusing to worship at the altar of the goddess Anahid, Gregory was incarcerated in a pit for a period of 13 years. Enduring brutal physical punishments at the hands of Drtad, Gregory remained firm in his faith in Christ. However, after the king fell victim to a mental illness, his sister Khosrovitookht (who had secretly become a Christian) encouraged him to seek the help of Gregory. Gregory was immediately released from the pit. It was through his healing prayers that the king experienced a physical and spiritual conversion which led to the Christianization of Armenia. Gregory became the first Catholicos of the Armenian Church, baptized the royal family, and began to evangelize Armenia which was the first nation in the world to officially proclaim Christianity as the state religion in 301 AD.

Our Armenian Way

Feast Days of St. Gregory the Illuminator

Commitment to the Pit (March)

St. Gregory's imprisonment in the pit launches many miracles: his own survival despite thirteen years in "solitary confinement," the healing of King Drtad, the conversion of a nation. At the site of the deep pit there is now a monastery, called *Khor Virabi Vank* in the Republic of Armenia. The Feast of St. Gregory's commitment to the pit is at present a day of pilgrimage to Khor Virab.



Deliverance from the Pit (June)

St. Gregory's deliverance from the pit was the catalyst that began the "Great Conversion" of Armenia from the darkness of paganism to the light of Christianity. Pagan temples and statues were destroyed in Armenia and replaced with crosses and chapels.

Discovery of His Holy Relics (June)

The relics of St. Gregory the Illuminator are among our most revered within the Armenian Church, as well as all Christian Churches. Today, they may be found at Holy Etchmiadzin, Jerusalem and Antelias. The relic at Holy Etchmiadzin, encased in an arm-shaped reliquary, is used to bless the Holy Chrism (Muron) once every seven years. It is on display in the treasury of the Holy See.



Essay Assignment

**How the Conversion of Armenia in 301 A.D. Affects
How I Live Today in the 21st Century**

Closing Prayer

*I kneel before the Creator of heaven and earth.
I ask to receive the power of the Holy Spirit to
strengthen my inner self.*

I pray that Jesus Christ lives in my heart.

I pray that my life is built on love.

*I pray that I can know how huge God's love is for me
and for all the world,*

*I pray that God's power will work in me to do more
than I can ever imagine.*

Glory to God forever! Amen.

inspired by Ephesians 3:14-21

