

The Faith Journey

Lesson 2

Unit Three

The Holy Spirit: An Eye-Opener!

Here I Am, Lord

Lord, I don't always know what's next in my life and sometimes the unknown is scary. But I will wait for your gifts. Holy Spirit, help me understand what I need to do and when I need to do it. Give me whatever I need to accomplish it. Amen.

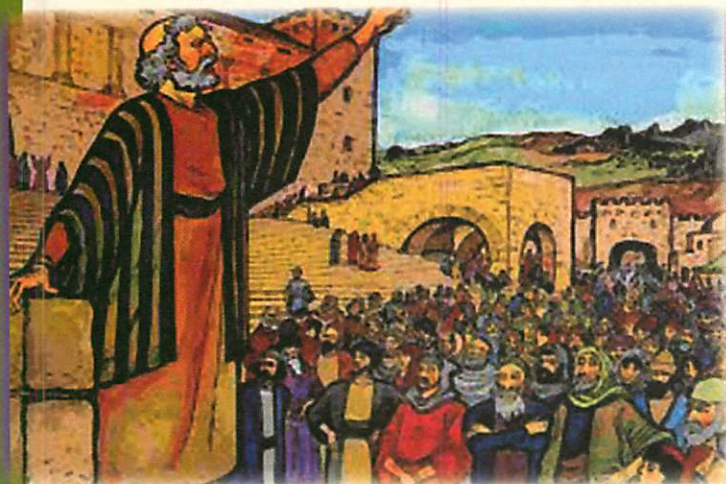


One Step Back

1. Just as Jesus predicted, Paul denied Jesus three times even after he said he would never do that. T F
2. Jesus knew that the apostles would need a “Counselor” to help them build up his Church; that is why he sent us the Holy Spirit. T F
3. The Armenian Church commemorates the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Feast of the Transfiguration. T F
4. Through the sacrament of chrismation, the gifts of the Holy Spirit equip us to live as disciples and share our faith with others. T F
5. Peter’s denial of Jesus appears in all four gospels. How are we best to interpret this?
 - a. Peter’s great weakness is revealed.
 - b. Jesus’ predictions always come true.
 - c. God calls and forgives believers even after repeated acts of weakness.
 - d. The gospel writers didn’t like Peter.

Holy Spirit Soorp Hokee Մուրբ Հոգի

The Church Takes Root and Grows Strong



The Book of Acts covers a period of almost thirty years. It begins with the Ascension of Jesus and then the birth of the Church on the day of Pentecost to Paul's imprisonment in Rome. It describes the spread of Christianity around the northern Mediterranean—through present-day Syria, Turkey and Greece, to the heart of the Roman Empire.

The acts or activities that we read about are mainly those of St. Peter and St. Paul. But the book could also be entitled the Acts of the Spirit of God, for truly, it is under the direction of the Holy Spirit that the newborn church bursts through the national frontiers of Palestine to become an international, worldwide movement. In his own words, the last words to his followers, Jesus told them what their mission would be and who would guide them (Acts 1:8): “When the *Holy Spirit* comes upon you, you will be filled with power, and you will be witnesses for me in Jerusalem in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.”

It Takes Conversion...Saul Meets Jesus

Saul's confrontation with Jesus, on the road to the old Syrian capital, Damascus, marks a turning-point in the history of the Early Church. It is safe for us to say that never has any conversion brought a more radical change.

Reader's Theater: Acts 9:1-31

Now let's review it step by step...

The blinding light left Saul sightless in the dark for three days, with nothing to do but think. For three days, Paul was practically lifeless—not seeing, not eating, and not drinking. This period reminds us of Jesus' three days in the tomb. In many ways, going through a conversion is like dying—dying to old ways of thinking and acting.



Also, three days gave Ananias the time he needed to reach him...yes after all the years of persecuting Christ's people, Saul would need someone to bring him the next step of the way. When he finally arrived in Jerusalem it would be Barnabas who would testify for him within the community of believers. Now Saul the persecutor becomes Saul the brother—someone who will suffer greatly for the cause that he once tried to stamp out. His conversion even brought forth a new name...Saul becomes Paul. His immense energy is given at once to preaching Jesus as Son of God!

Paul's conversion literally changed his heart about Christ...once blinded by the truth, his experience with Jesus offered him the gift of seeing the world in a new way. I guess we can call this a “wow moment.” However, this conversion can happen to anyone.

Have you ever had an experience that helped you see something in your life in a new way? How did this happen?

Our Armenian Way

Today we explored how the Good News spread and the new Church began to grow, as it sent disciples like Paul to witness to the communities of the world.

Prior to the time of Christ, our Armenian nation, like many others, followed pagan polytheism (belief in many gods). Remember that it was Sts. Thaddeus and Bartholomew who first preached Christianity in Armenia in the 1st century. The number of believers continued to grow and they were often in grave danger for their Christian belief. Historians have cited persecutions against Christians in 110, 230, and 287. Thaddeus and Bartholomew were both martyred, and the great Illuminator, St. Gregory, was imprisoned for thirteen years for proclaiming the Christian faith. Finally, it was King Drtad, persuaded by the power of the teachings and miraculous cure of St. Gregory, who declared Christianity the official state religion and appointed Gregory as Catholicos of the Armenian Apostolic Church.



The conversion from a pagan religion to Christianity was not an easy one. St. Gregory, King Drtad, his wife Queen Ashkhen, and his sister Princess Khosrovitookht all worked tirelessly to strengthen the new Church of Armenia. St. Gregory and the king spent much of the rest of their lives trying to eliminate all pagan superstitions and destroyed countless statues and temples, erecting churches and chapels in their place.



Over the centuries, the Armenian people have given their very lives for their faith. From St. Vartan's Battle of Avarayr in the 5th century to the Armenian Genocide of the 20th century, our holy Armenian martyrs have woven a golden tapestry of faith that is our gift today. They paid the ultimate price so that today we could enjoy fellowship and worship in the Armenian Church throughout the world.

Before Christ, Armenians believed in many gods. Here are some of the most important in the old Armenian pantheon.

Aramazd	Creator, father of gods
Astghig	Goddess of love, beauty
Anahid	Goddess of motherhood, fertility
Vahagn	God of war, thunder, lightning
Mihr	God of the sun, light
Tir	God of wisdom, science



The Birth of Vahagn

*In travail were heaven and earth,
In travail, too, the purple sea!
The travail held in the sea the small red reed.
Through the hollow of the stalk came forth smoke,
Through the hollow of the stalk came forth flame,
And out of the flame a youth ran!
Fiery hair had he,
Ay, too, he had a flaming beard,
And his eyes, they were as suns!*

Ancient Armenian poem

Երկնէր երկին, երկնէր երկիր,
Երկնէր եւ ծովս ծիրանի .
Երկն ի ծովուն ունէր եւ զկարմրիկն եղեգնկ.
Ընդ եղեգան փող ծուխ ելանէր,
Ընդ եղեգան փող բոց ելանէր.
Եվ ի բացոյն վազէր խարտեաշ պատանեկիկ.
Նա հուր հէր ունէր,
Բոց ունէր մօրուս,
Եվ աչկունքն էին արեգակունք:

The First Church

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common.⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

Acts 2:42-47

This is the first church community ever described!



What is it like – describe it in the space above using words and pictures (even stick figures are fine).

How does it compare with your own parish?

1. It sounds the same because...
2. It seems different because...

Closing Prayer

Thank you God, for this wonderful world and for all the special people we love. Thank you too, for all the different ways there are to work close to you. Make us strong and wise so that we can see those ways. Help us feel how exciting it is to be a priest, or a teacher, or any of the other kinds of people who serve you and work for our people. Bless us with open hearts and open minds, God, so we can see what really matters in life: love for you and for the people and the world you created. We know you will lead our heads and hands to serve you. Amen.