

St. Vartan Armenian Apostolic Church
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The St. Vartan Voice

newsletter is published once a month by St. Vartan Armenian Church.

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St. Vartan Voice

The Newsletter of St. Vartan Armenian Apostolic Church

Rev. Fr. Krikor Zakaryan, Parish Priest



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Fr. Krikor Zakaryan

September 2021

The Three Cedar Trees

My grandmother told the following story: three cedar trees sprouted in the once beautiful forests of Lebanon. As is known, cedar trees take a long time to grow, and these trees spent whole centuries contemplating life, death, nature and mankind.

They witnessed the arrival of an expedition from Israel, sent by Solomon, and later saw the earth covered with blood, during the wars with Syria. They saw Jezebel and the prophet Elijah, who were mortal enemies. They watched the invention of the alphabet, and enjoyed seeing the caravans passing, laden with colorful textiles.

One fine day, they decided to talk about the future.

– After all I have seen – said the first tree – I wish to be made into the throne of the most powerful king on earth.

– I'd like to be part of something that turns Evil to Good forever – commented the second.

– Myself, I'd like it if every time someone looked at me, they thought of God – replied the third.

More time passed, and some woodcutters came. The cedars were felled, and a ship carried them far away.

Each of those trees had a wish, but reality never asks what to do with dreams; the first was used to build a shelter for animals, and what was left over was used as a prop for bales of hay. The second tree was turned into a very simple table, which was soon sold to a furniture tradesman. Since the timber from the third tree had no buyers as yet, it was cut up and stored in the warehouse of a large town.

They lamented woefully: "Our wood was so good, and no one found anything fine to use it for."

Some time passed and, one starry night, a couple with nowhere to stay, decided to spend the night in the stable which had been built from the first tree. The woman groaned, in the throes of labor, and gave birth, placing her son between the hay and the wood propping it up.

Just then, the first tree understood that his dream had come true: that this was the greatest king on Earth.

Years later, in a modest house, several men sat around the table which had been made from the second tree. Before



Bible Readings

Sept. 5 Mark 7:31-37
Sept. 12 John 3:13-21
Sept. 19 Mark 10:1-12
Sept. 26 Matt. 24:30-36

1 Corinthians 1:18

For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.



they ate, one of them said a few words about the bread and wine before them.

And the second tree understood that, at that moment, it hadn't just been supporting a goblet and a piece of bread, but the union between man and Divinity.

The next day, two pieces of the third tree were taken and assembled to form a cross. It was left to one side, until, hours later, a cruelly beaten man was brought in and nailed to the wood. Horrified, the cedar lamented the barbaric destiny life had left it.

Before three days had passed, however, the third tree understood its destiny: the man nailed there was now the Light which illuminated all around. The cross made from its wood was now no longer a symbol of torture, but became a sign of victory.

As always with dreams, the three cedar trees from Lebanon had fulfilled the destiny they desired – but not in the way they imagined.

By Paulo Coelho

News From Our St. Vartan Family

Condolences

A funeral service was held for **Nurisa (Nadya) Cingoz** at St. Vartan Church on Wednesday, August 4, 2021. Our condolences to Nadya's family—her husband, Iskender (Koko) Cingoz; her sons, Ari Cingoz and Artun (Nicole Cruz) Cingoz; her grandchildren, Armen and Ariana Cingoz; her sisters, Gulizar (Iskender) Narman and Zaruhi (Antranik) Artenoglu; her brother, Krikor Kutnuyan; her sisters-in-law, Nardane Gavar and Aznif Gavar; her brother-in-law, Anto (Hasmig) Cingoz; and nieces and nephews here and all over the world.

A funeral service was held for **Rejan Kalpakjian** at St. Vartan Church on Thursday, August 12. Our condolences to Rejan's two devoted children, Norayr (Elizabeth) and Tanya, as well as her grandchildren Sofia, Elizabeth Rejan and Sevan.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to St. Vartan Armenian Orphanage Fund, 650 Spruce Street, Oakland CA 94610 or the St. John Armenian Apostolic Church Artsakh Refugee Relief Fund, 275 Olympia Way, San Francisco, CA.



Birth Announcement

Congratulations to Christina Henesian and Billy Scarborough on the birth of their son, **Brock Ace Scarborough** on July 20 in Jackson, CA. Congrats also to grandparents Mark and Maida Henesian, Rita Johnson Scarborough, uncles Greg and Stephen Henesian, great-aunt Kim Henesian and great-grandfather Aram "Ace" Henesian.



Fr. Gevorg Abyan led divine liturgy at St. Vartan Armenian Church on July 25, 2021, when Fr. Krikor was on vacation.



On July 25, 2021 St. Vartan Church held the first fellowship hour since the Covid shutdown last year. If you would like to sponsor fellowship hour after a church service on a specific Sunday, please contact the church office at stvartanoakland@aol.com or 510-893-1671.

ST. VARTAN ARMENIAN CHURCH

DRIVE-THROUGH FESTIVAL

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!
Saturday, October 2, 2021

Look for more information on how to order coming soon!

COMMUNITY RUMMAGE SALE

Community Rummage Sale

Clear out those closets! Get into that garage! Donations are now being accepted for our Rummage Sale on Saturday, September 11.

We're looking for sellable items in working order. We will not accept clothing, shoes, broken kids toys (or anything broken), non-functioning electronics, or children's safety items such as car seats, strollers, and cribs. Small furniture accepted, please check ahead if you have anything oversized. Church cannot do pickups.

Bring items to church on Sunday mornings, or Mondays and Fridays from 9:00am - 1:00pm or arrange a time for drop off with the church office at (510) 893-1671.

We're also looking for help sorting and preparing items for sale. If you'd like to help out with this fundraising event, please contact Nicole at nvasger@yahoo.com.

Deadline for dropoff is September 5.

Saturday, September 11
St. Vartan Church, Oakland

SUNDAY
SEPTEMBER

19TH
10:30 AM

PRIMATE'S PASTORAL VISIT

& *St. Vartan's Spirit Award Ceremony*

Please join us as we welcome our Primate,
His Eminence Archbishop Hovnan Derderian,
for his Pastoral Visit.

Surpazan will celebrate the Divine Liturgy and
will recognize individuals with outstanding
dedication to St. Vartan Church.

A welcome reception will follow after services.



Donations

St. Vartan Church Parish Priest and Council gratefully acknowledge the following donations:

For Grape Blessing—Wartkes Hagopian, Zaven Kanneian and Janet Yeghissian

Stewardship—Linda Dardarian, 365 Day Stewardship; Stuart and Caroline Arakelian

St. Vartan Voice Newsletter—Sylvia Arzoian, Harry and Carol Dokouzian, Lou Aronian

In Memory

† Vartanoush Jindoian

Edward and Armineh Jamgotchian, Dana and Seza Dominguez, Hagop and Sonik Hakimian,
Mark and Maida Henesian, Hasmig and Anto Cingoz

† Levon Apelian

Linda Berberian

† Zvart Shahbazian

Aram and Kim Henesian, Evelyn C. Boyd (Ladies Society),
Mark and Maida Henesian, Lucille Dolab, Kathe Scherbe-Nielsen (St. Vartan Voice)

† Gladys K. Peters

Mae Kaljian

† Charles Kezerian

Lucille Dolab

† Nurisa (Nadya) Cingoz

Nataline Jindoian, Evelyn C. Boyd, Vartan and Arlene Hovsepian (Ladies Society),
Arka and Nelly Kargodorian (Ladies Society), Carole Chang (Building Fund), Mark and Maida Henesian,
Karolyn Kutnuyan, Vartan and Ayko Berberian, Vahe and Hilda Mener, Serli Tutunciyan,
Artin Hamamciyan, Pete and Pat Barsamian, Levon and Diruhi Tutunicyan, Hilda Basmajian,
Rose Sagatelyan, Nurhan, Mary and Steven Donikian, Elizabeth and Ron Ojakian, The Straub Family,
Harout and Ollia Yenikomshian, Garbis and Satenik Eldemir, Sylvia Gozurian, Nadya and Arto Yagjian,
Janet Yeghissian and Zaven Kanneian, Sarkis and Hera Kestekyan, Ray and Reyhan Shepherd,
Don and Lisa Manoogian, Marie and Harout Hagopian, Aram and Kim Henesian, David Tateosian,
Ara and Angel Azizian, Zohrab and Elizabeth Markarian, Hasmig and Anto Cingoz, Maral Kismetian,
Sahanik Baharyan, Ani and Jirair Tashjian, Jack and Mary Aslanian, Virginia Madajian, Mari Gamitian,
Linda Berberian, Arman and Marissa Cingoz, Greg and Seta Tcherkoyan, Dorris Kezerian,
Edward and Armineh Jamgotchian, Edward and Kristian Minasian, Rita Takvorian

† Rejan Kalpakjian Orphan Fund

Laureen Carrillo, Mari Suzmeian, Mari Gamitian, Rose Sagatelyan, Debbie Liggett (General Fund)

† Earl Saroyan

Lou Aronian

Ice Cream Is Sometimes Good For The Soul

Last week I took my children to a restaurant. My six-year-old son asked if he could say grace. As we bowed our heads he said, "God is good, God is great. Thank you for the food, and I would thank you even more if Mom gets us ice cream for dessert. And liberty and justice for all! Amen!"

Along with the laughter from the other customers nearby, I heard a woman remark, "That's what's wrong with this country. Kids today don't even know how to pray. Asking God for ice cream! Why, I never!"

Hearing this, my son burst into tears and asked me, "Did I do it wrong? Is God mad at me?"

As I held him and assured him that he had done a terrific job and God was certainly not mad at him, an elderly gentleman approached the table. He winked at my son and said, "I happen to know that God thought that was a great prayer."

"Really?" my son asked.

"Cross my heart." Then in theatrical whisper he added (indicating the woman whose remark had started this whole thing), "too bad she never asks God for ice cream. A little ice cream is good for the soul sometimes."

Naturally, I bought my kids ice cream at the end of the meal. My son stared at his for a moment and then did something I will remember the rest of my life. He picked up his sundae and without a word walked over and placed it in front of the woman. With a big smile he told her, "Here, this is for you. Ice cream is good for the soul sometimes and my soul is good already!"



Assumption of the Holy-Mother-of-God & Grape Blessing—Sunday, August 15, 2021



HYE CAMP IS BACK!



View all camp weekly photos: www.hyecamp.com

Church Humor

Right and Wrong

A Sunday school teacher was teaching her class about the difference between right and wrong. "All right children, let's take another example," she said. "If I were to get into a man's pocket and take his billfold with all his money, what would I be?"

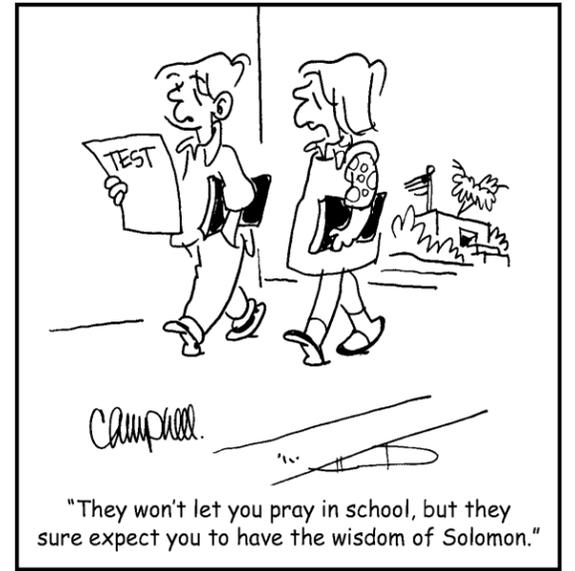
Little Johnny raises his hand, and with a confident smile, he blurts out, "You'd be his wife!"

E-mail from Beyond

A businessman from Wisconsin went on a business trip to Louisiana, and his wife was joining him later for vacation. Upon arrival, he immediately plugged his laptop into the hotel room port and sent a short E-mail back home to his wife, Jennifer Johnson, at her address, JennJohn@world.net.

Unfortunately, in his haste, he mistyped a letter and the E-mail ended up going to JeanJohn@world.net, a Jean Johnson in Duluth, the wife of a preacher who had just passed away and was buried that day.

The preacher's wife took one look at the E-mail and promptly fainted. It read, "Arrived safely. It sure is hot down here! Can't wait for you to join me."



LSCC Roundtable Discussion

A roundtable discussion organized by the Ladies Society Central Council was held at the Western Diocese on Friday, August 13, 2021. The day's keynote speaker was Lisa Manoogian, Vice-Chairlady of the Ladies Society of St. Vartan Armenian Church of Oakland who spoke about outreach to combat loneliness and isolation in these trying times. Lisa joined the Ladies Society Central Council in May 2021.



On Line Bible Study with Fr. Krikor

Wednesday, September 1 Thursday, September 9
 Wednesday, September 15 Wednesday, September 22
 Wednesday, September 29

Bible Study Zoom code: <https://www.stvartanoakland.com/events>.
 If you have already attended Bible Study, you can use the same Zoom code.



Upcoming Events

Rummage Sale
 Archbishop Hovnan Derderian Pastoral Visit
 Drive Through Festival
 St. Vartan Golf Tournament

Saturday, September 11
 Sunday, September 19
 Saturday, October 2
 TBD



On July 24, 2021 Karen Mener, Nicole Vasgerdsian, and Talia Vasgerdsian organized and cleaned the Sunday School classrooms. A big thank you to Karen, Nicole and Talia for a great job!

Sunday School families will be receiving a separate mailing with information about the 2021/2022 Sunday School Year.

Feast of the Holy Cross of Varak

At the end of September Armenian Churches worldwide will celebrate the Feast of the Holy Cross of Varak—an observance unique to the Armenian Church.

In the 7th century, a monk named Totig received a vision of a brilliant cross descending from Mount Varak in historic Armenia, and coming to rest on the monastery at the mountain's foot. Totig raced to where the vision had led him, and there found a miraculous Christian relic: a fragment of the True Cross of Jesus Christ! How had it gotten there? The relic had been brought to Armenia by St. Hripsime, in the late 3rd century, during her flight to find refuge from the persecutions of pagan Rome. When St. Hripsime was martyred by King Drtad, the hiding place of the cross was forgotten—and the holy relic had languished in its secret place for nearly 300 years, before being found again by the monk Totig.

To commemorate this discovery, the catholicos of the time, St. Nersess the Builder, established a feast day. And the Holy Cross became a relic of great power in Armenia, moving from Varak to Sepastia and finally to Van, where it still could be seen by pilgrims—until the time of the Genocide.

Ladies Society Featured Recipe of the Month Bulgur Pilaf or Wheat Pilaf serves 4

1 cup bulghur #3 or #4 cracked wheat	1 can chicken broth plus 3/4 cup water
1/4 cup of vermicelli (crushed)	1 teaspoon salt
1 stick butter	1/2 teaspoon pepper

Melt butter in a 2 quart pan. Break up vermicelli into pieces and brown. Add bulghur to and sauté lightly to coat. Next add broth, water, salt and pepper and bring to a boil. Reduce flame and cover continuing to cook until liquid is evaporated and bulghur is tender. Stir once and then serve.

Paree Aghorjak



Update on the St. Vartan's Ladies Society activities

The executive board is planning for the upcoming visit of Hovnan Surpazan on Sunday, September 19, 2021. We look forward to welcoming him after church with an extended coffee hour. We look forward to seeing you on the 19th.

Khanoot Korner

Ladies Society is busy this month getting ready for our Drive Through Festival planned for October. Make room in your freezer because we're preparing an extensive list of goodies. All our regular favorites, plus a few we haven't seen for a while will be there (simit, bastirma, sujuk, string cheese and more!). See the complete list and order online from our website. See you next month!

In the Shadow of the Cross: The Holy Cross and Armenian History

Every autumn, the Armenian Church celebrates the Exaltation of the Holy Cross—one of the five major feasts of the Church, and the most important of the four feasts of the Holy Cross. The Exaltation refers to the True Cross on which Christ was crucified, which according to Church tradition was ceremoniously elevated for veneration on three occasions. It was first elevated by St. James the Apostle, the first Bishop of Jerusalem, who lifted the cross with the words “We bow before thy cross, O Christ”—a formulation still used in the Armenian liturgy.

The second occasion involved the discovery of the True Cross after a period of some 300 years. In A.D. 326, Queen Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine, traveled to Jerusalem to identify the holy places associated with Christ's life. She authenticated the True Cross by placing upon it the body of a recently deceased youth, who was miraculously raised to life when he came in contact with the formerly discarded cross. According to tradition, the True Cross was overgrown with aromatic basil, which is used in the commemoration of the feast day today.

The third occasion came in the 7th century when the Persians had seized the True Cross of Jesus after conquering the city of Jerusalem. Leading a coalition of forces, including Armenians, the Emperor Heraclius recaptured the cross and, enroute to Jerusalem, passed with it through Armenia, where the cross was repeatedly raised up and venerated. On the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, the Divine Liturgy is marked with an antasdan service (blessing of the fields) during which the processional cross is adorned with basil (a symbol of royalty) and the four corners of the church are blessed as a symbol for all the world.

The cross is a source of great national pride for us as a khachagir—or “cross-bearing”—nation. For over the centuries, Armenians have borne Christ's cross with faith, hope, and love. What was once an instrument of torture and death—comparable to the modern electric chair—became for us Christians the symbol of salvation, and victory over death.

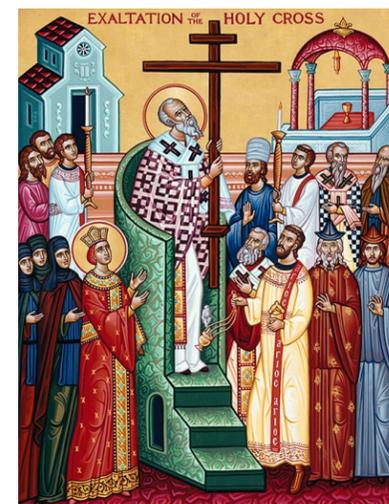
Naturally, to those with no faith, our veneration for the cross makes no sense at all. They cannot understand how so base an instrument could be at the center of our worship, of our churches and altars. But we see in the cross the instrument on which our Lord sacrificed Himself in order to cleanse mankind of its sins. The cross for us is the instrument of life: a divine sign that shows the power of life over death. It is for this reason that Christians throughout the world venerate the Holy Cross.

Throughout our history, we Armenians have lived in the shadow of the cross. Armenians were (and still are) geographically situated on the “leading edge” of the Christian world. Having suffered for our faith in Christ, we have also shared in the passion of His Crucifixion. No wonder, then, that the cross would become pre-eminent among our national emblems, appearing on the domes and walls of our churches, on our altars, in our homes—even erupting out of the Armenian landscape, as stone khachkars.

Imagine the impact this sign must have had on the minds of our ancestors in the Middle Ages! Everywhere they turned, the sign of the cross confronted their eyes—in overt but also rather subtle ways.

Our churches have cruciform plans, and our priests bless their congregations with crosses. We put chaplets with crosses on the heads of those making the marriage vow. Babies—both boys and girls—are given crosses at the time of baptism. We also give those children names like “Khachig” and “Khachador” (in medieval times, our ancestors used feminine forms of these as well). We even trace the lines of the invisible cross etched into the very architecture of the human body when we make the Sign of the Cross.

Why did our ancestors surround themselves with crosses? Perhaps because they understood that human nature being what it is, all of us are prone to making the wrong choices. So, in anticipation of their own moments of fateful decision, they dotted the landscape with crosses, to unavoidably remind themselves of “the power of God.” To view the cross as a sign of God's power is not simply to recall that He is watching us, knows the secrets of our hearts, and will judge us accordingly (although this, of course, is true). But more significantly, the cross is our evidence that God has used—and will use—His power to help us in our times of trial: that through His son, He has stretched forth His hand to mankind as a whole, and to every human individual, to redeem us, guide us, support us—and make us worthy of His kingdom, in spite of our mortal tendency to defy Him.



The Armenians of old took this power very seriously. One of their favorite sayings was: Sourp Khachn yeghitsi eents oknagan—“Let the Holy Cross be my support.” We today could benefit from their wisdom, by keeping our own thoughts focused on the mystery of the Holy Cross.

Such veneration should not be confused with idolatry. We worship the idea or the mystery behind the Holy Cross. Our expectation and hope from the sign of the cross is a reflection of our faith in the Resurrection of Christ. The presence of that sign at every stage and every turn in our lives reminds us that His blood was shed over the original cross, to free us as individuals from our sins. As frequently as we confront a cross, we must be aware of the sacrifice that Christ made on our behalf. More to the point, we must consider why that sacrifice was necessary—and what is required from us in response. During times of adversity and upheaval, the Holy Cross has been the most powerful support for the Armenian flock of Christ. And in times of peace, too, the sign of the Holy Cross has been—and is—our most abundant source of consolation. The cross casts its shadow over our lives—but it also sheds light, healing old wounds, and illuminating before us the way to God's kingdom. It guides us along a path of righteousness, whose ultimate destination is the victory over the ills of the world.

By The Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church

