

We Believe: History / 2

Etchmiadzin

St. Gregory Builds a Church

St. Gregory and Drtad were friends now. Drtad was thankful St. Gregory had healed him. Drtad had been baptized by St. Gregory, and now was a Christian. They both wanted to serve Jesus in Armenia.

King Drtad wanted Armenia to be a Christian country. He wanted to help Gregory in any way he could. St. Gregory wanted to build a church in Armenia. He wanted God's people to have a home.

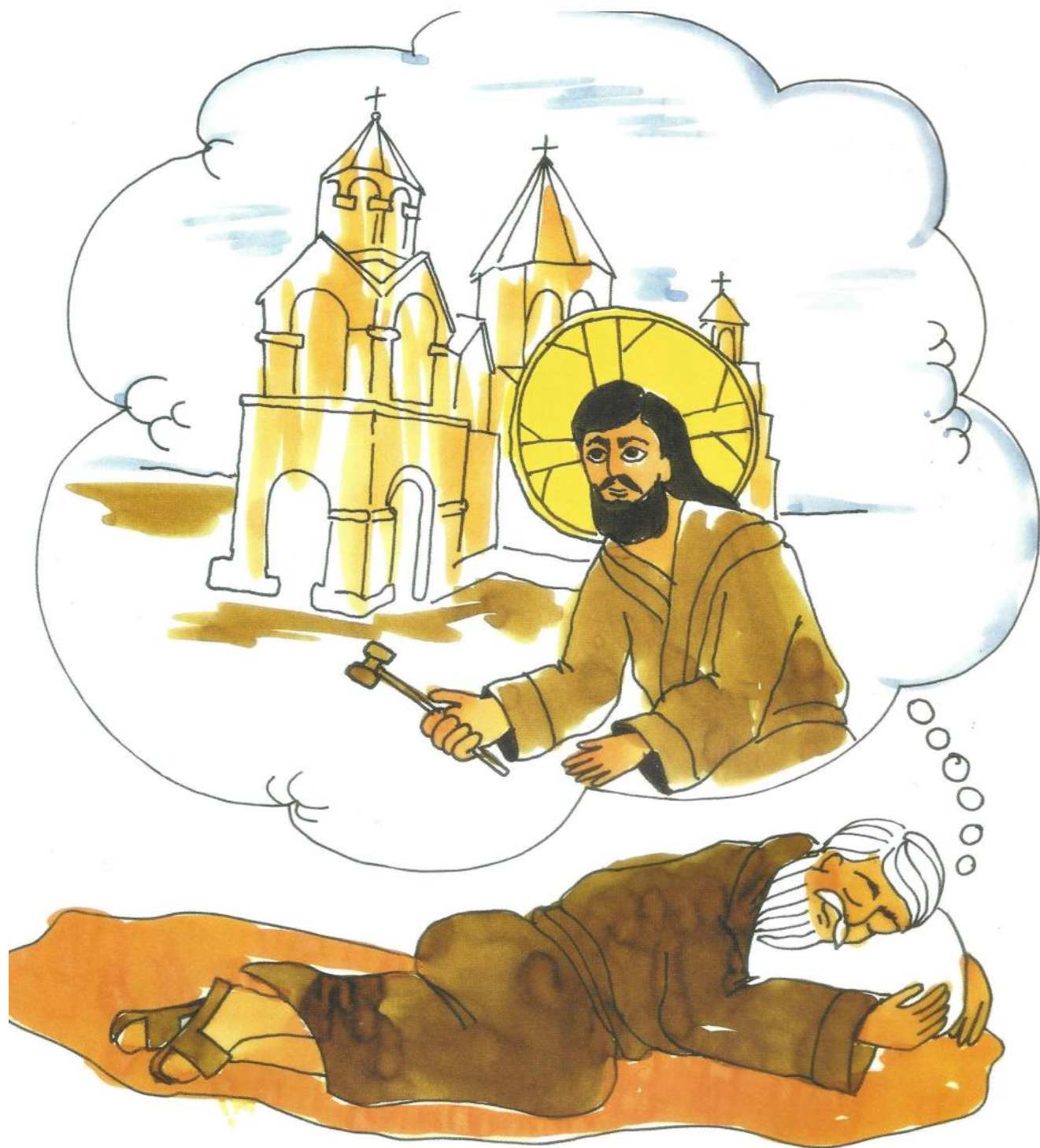
St. Gregory prayed about the church he wanted to build. God answered St. Gregory's prayer. St. Gregory had a dream. In the dream St. Gregory saw Jesus come down from heaven. Jesus had a hammer in his hand and he struck the ground with the hammer.

Gregory woke up. He knew that Jesus wanted him to build the church in that place. King Drtad helped Gregory build the church. Many people helped. They built it just where Jesus showed Gregory.

King Drtad asked Gregory, "What shall we name this church?" Gregory said, "Let's call it 'The Place Where Jesus Descended,' Etchmiadzin."

The church was a good church, strong and big and beautiful. Gregory was the priest of Etchmiadzin. After he grew old and died, another priest took care of the church. Year after year, the church was filled with Armenians.

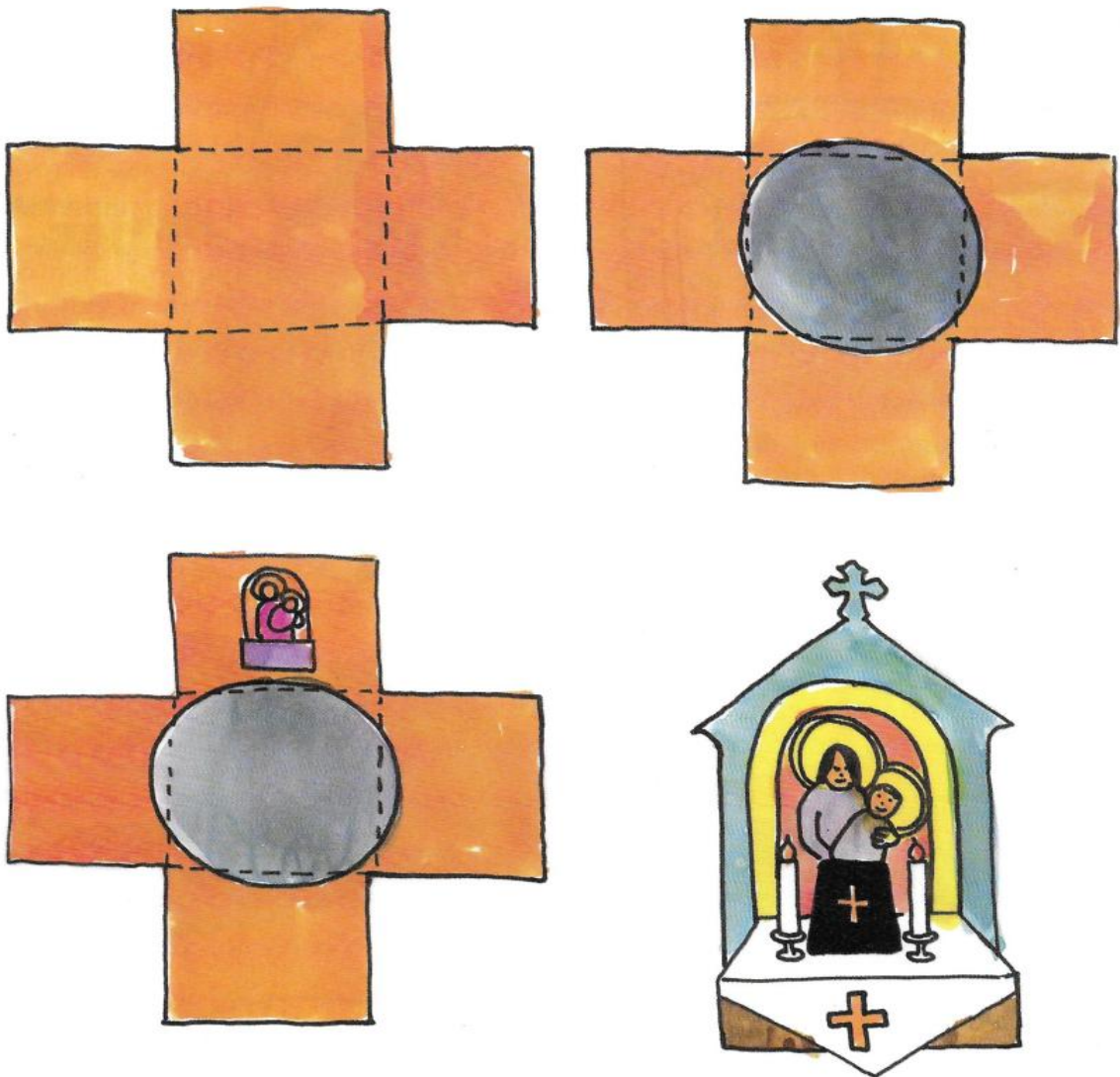
Many other churches were built in many other towns in Armenia. But Etchmiadzin was the first church. We call it the Mother Church.



Etchmiadzin is an Armenian church. It is built the way Armenians build churches. The shape of it helps people know it is an Armenian church.

Armenian churches are built like a cross. In the center of the cross is a square. Above the square is a circle roof. In one of the four ends of the cross is the altar. The altar has a little house around it.

Here is the way Etchmiadzin is built:





SOORP ETCHMIADZIN

The Boyajians' New Home

Mark and Leon went with their dad to the builder's office. Today dad was going to tell the builder all about the new house the Boyajian family was building.

"Hello, Mr. Boyajian," said Mr. Hall. "I see you brought the boys with you."

"Yes. This is Mark and this is Leon." They all shook hands.

Dad and Mr. Hall got right to work on the plans for the new house.

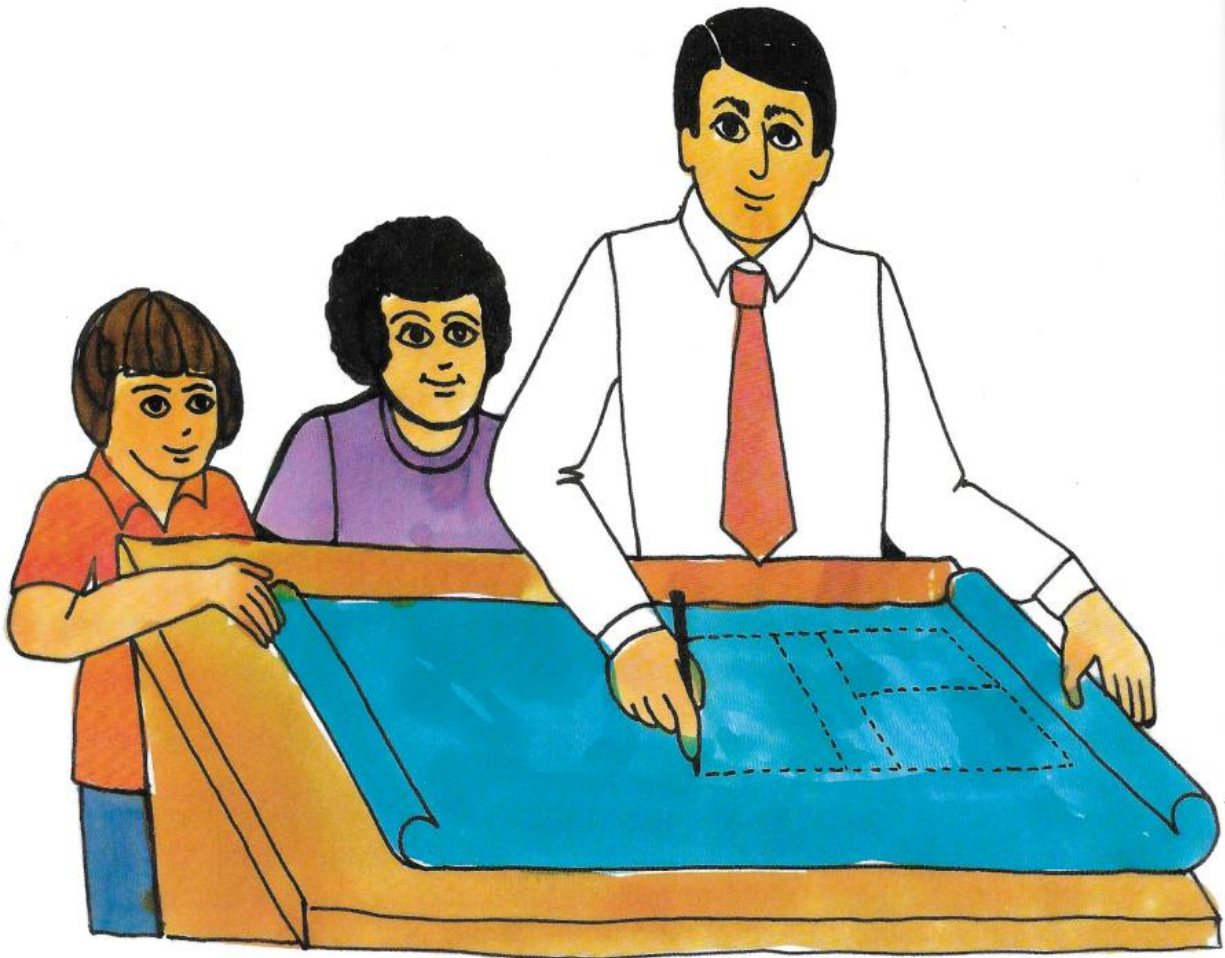
"My uncle left me this piece of property when he died. It was quite an inheritance. I never expected it. My wife and I are excited about building a house there. It will be our dream house. We have been living in apartments since we got married, but we have always wanted a home of our own. We want to have more children so we want a home for our family that will be big enough for all of us."

Mark and Leon had talked to their parents about having a home for the Boyajian family. Each person in the family had his own ideas about what it would be like. Mark wanted a room all his own. He had

been sharing a room with his little brother Leon since Leon was born. Leon wanted his room to be near the bathroom. Mother wanted a big kitchen with a small family room next to it. Dad wanted a garage attached to the house so it would be easy to carry in packages.

Grandmother was going to come to live with the Boyajians. Her room would be on the same floor as the kitchen and living room so she wouldn't have to climb stairs.

Building a dream house was going to be fun. It would have something in it that everyone wanted and needed. The family would live in it for a long time. The boys would grow up there. Then one day they would grow up and leave home to start their own families. Then they would build their own dream houses.



about the Armenian Church. If they zero in on certain characteristics like clerical vestments, or church shape, fine. If not, ask if they smell something when they enter an Armenian church. They will probably identify a special smell, though they will not be able to name it. Explain to them that special smell is incense, which is burned in every Armenian church all over the world. Note that the incense reminds us of how our prayers rise up to God. Then light the charcoal and place in incense burner, and place one or two small pieces of incense on charcoal.

Let the children smell the fragrance of the incense, and watch it waft toward the ceiling. Ask them to name times when they have smelled it in church; perhaps the only time will be during the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. Put incense to one side so that it will continue to perfume the classroom while doing next activity. (10 min.)

6. Open books to page 83. Have children look at the various sections on the page. Explain that just as we have incense which makes us recognize the specialness of the Armenian Church, so there are other things which also make us special. Have them look at the first row of crosses. Ask them to identify which of the crosses in the row is an Armenian-style cross. Have them circle that one. Point out the differences between the first cross and third, and the Armenian cross. Point out the particularly Armenian characteristics of the cross to the children. Then do the same with the other items on the page. Discuss with children "what makes each item Armenian?" Then if time permits, have children draw pictures of other things they see in an Armenian Church. (10 min.)

7. *Optional Activity* (if time permits): Do puppet play for the Kindergarten class.

8. Clean-up, closing prayer, evaluation.

At-Home Activity: Children to do puppet play for their parents.

Session 2—Etchmiadzin

Key Concepts

1. God blessed us by showing Gregory where to build Etchmiadzin.
2. Etchmiadzin is the Mother Church of all Armenians.
3. The church St. Gregory built has been passed on to us.

Objectives

Students will

1. Read a story, "Gregory Builds a Church," and answer questions about it.

2. Do a color-by-number picture of Holy Etchmiadzin.
3. Mount a picture of Holy Etchmiadzin with one of St. Vartan Cathedral and a Polaroid picture of their own parish church.

Background for Teacher

St. Gregory was instrumental in the proclamation of Christianity as the national religion of Armenia. The conversion of the king made it possible for those Christians who were existing "underground" to surface, and practice their faith openly.

Shortly after the conversion of the king and the establishment of Christianity as the state religion, Gregory set about building churches. The first of these was Holy Etchmiadzin, which was to become the Mother Church for all Armenians. Gregory's zeal and desire to provide a spiritual home for the Armenian people bore fruit in the construction of Holy Etchmiadzin, "the place where the Only-begotten descended." As a father seeks to provide a home for his family, so Gregory was concerned with providing a spiritual home for his family, the Armenian people.

The importance of Etchmiadzin for Armenians throughout succeeding generations cannot be minimized. No matter where Armenians have been scattered, they have looked to Holy Etchmiadzin as a symbol of their faith and endurance. Not only is Holy Etchmiadzin the headquarters of the Armenian Church, but it has helped shape the religious and spiritual heritage of the Armenian people.

See also article on Holy Etchmiadzin in *Saints and Sacraments*.

Materials Needed

- Pencils, crayons, markers
- Glue or paste
- Construction paper
- Polaroid camera and enough film for every child to have a group picture in front of parish church

Procedure

1. Welcome children enthusiastically. Open with "Before a Task" prayer, from *Prayers for Armenian Children*, page 29.

2. Review and discuss the puppet play the children studied last week. Inquire if they performed it for their parents. How did their parents like it? Which characters did they like best? Ask why Sts. Thaddeus and Bartholomew went to Armenia. Help the children recount the events which led Thaddeus and Bartholomew to preach the Good News in Armenia.

3. Introduce the lesson by asking children questions about St. Gregory: "Who was St. Gregory? What happened to him? What did he do for the king? What was the king's name? What happened to the king? How did Gregory and Drtad become friends again?"

Then note that after Gregory healed King Drtad, he

and Drtad sought to serve our Lord together. After Drtad had been baptized, and the thousands of people with him, the need for a spiritual home became very strong.

Talk about their homes with them. What makes each child's home special? Let each name one special thing about his/her own home. Then remind children that we have a spiritual home, too, and that is the Church. And the most important of all Armenian churches in the whole world is *Holy Etchmiadzin*. Have children repeat the name *Holy Etchmiadzin* until each one can pronounce it fairly well.

(10 min.)

4. Have children open books to page 84, "Gregory Builds a Church." Read story with children, and then ask the following questions: Why were Gregory and Drtad friends? What did they want to do for Jesus? Why did they need to build a church? How did Gregory know what kind of church to build? What did they name the church? Why did they give it such a name? What do we call *Etchmiadzin*? Why is it the Mother Church?

Have children study the pictures of the form of Holy Etchmiadzin.

(15 min.)

5. Open to page 87 in student text. Have children color the picture of Holy Etchmiadzin.

(10 min.)

6. Now have children read story on pages 87-88, "The Boyajians' New Home." After completion of story, ask: "Why did the Boyajians need to build a home? What kind of home were they going to build? Whom did Gregory build the home for? Mr. Boyajian?" (Help children draw the parallel between the home Mr. Boyajian built for his family, and the home Gregory built for his family. Help them see that the Boyajian family needed a home to live and work and play together, just as the Armenian family needed the church for its spiritual home.)

(10 min.)

7. Take children outdoors to a point on the church property where you can photograph the group with the church as background. Take Polaroid pictures of the group, enough so that each child will have one. After photographing, return to classroom. Then give each child a picture of Holy Etchmiadzin and St. Vartan Cathedral from their activity packet. Distribute construction paper to each child. Have children color and mount the pictures (first Etchmiadzin, then St. Vartan Cathedral) on paper. Under Etchmiadzin, children should write, "Our Mother Church"; under St. Vartan, "Our Cathedral." Then mount the picture of children in front of parish church, and write "Our Church." Have children decorate and draw a frame around picture, or mount entire page on larger piece of construction paper. Remind children to show their families.

(15 min.)

8. Clean-up, closing prayer, evaluation.

9. *At-Home Activity*: Ask each child to bring in a Bible from home. A note to parents, reminding them

to furnish their child with one, would be helpful.

Session 3—St. Mesrob's Travels

Key Concepts

1. St. Mesrob travelled through Armenia establishing churches.
2. He invented the alphabet to enable the people to read God's Word in their own language.
3. We are beneficiaries of St. Mesrob's work, and must carry it on in our own time.

Objectives

Students will

1. Read and discuss the story of St. Mesrob.
2. Sing the Mesrob Song.
3. Make a mobile of the *ABCs of the Armenian Church* flash cards for display in classroom.

Background for Teacher

St. Mesrob was the key figure in the invention of the Armenian alphabet, and a participant in the translation process which rendered the Bible into Armenian, providing the people with the Word of God in their own language. However, one of his more significant contributions is his missionary activity, which resulted in the establishment of schools to teach people their own written language.

To understand the situation of the Armenian people at the beginning of the fifth century, one must imagine a life without the printed/written word. Such a situation would be intolerable for us, without doubt. Yet it was into this society that Mesrob came into his own, moving from the military into the priesthood. Mesrob saw first-hand the inadequacies of trying to teach the Armenians in the villages and provinces the Good News without benefit of a written language. Once he addressed himself to this lack and, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, "discovered" the 36 letters, he turned his efforts to the education of the people.

Although the "official" religion of the country was Christianity, pockets of paganism existed in the land. Mesrob travelled through the countryside, teaching the faith, and instructing the people in the skills of reading and writing their own language. Mesrob established schools and churches. He sought out intelligent young men, whom he trained to become teachers and clergymen themselves. He left teachers behind in each province, so that the work of enlightenment and education would continue.

Although Mesrob is far removed from our time, the task of "translating" the faith into our own language and understanding still remains. New Mesrobs must