

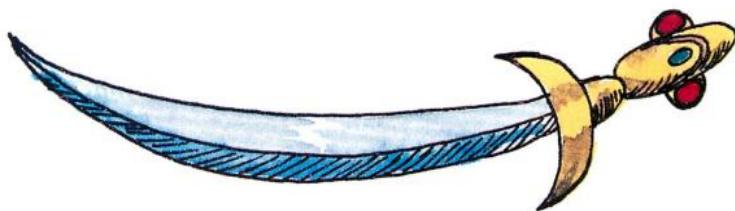
St. Santookht

THE CROWN OR THE SWORD St. Santookht's Story

After Jesus' resurrection and Pentecost, the apostles started on their mission to spread Christianity to all nations. St. Thaddeus traveled through the Middle East and finally up into Armenia. The Armenians were pagan at that time. They believed in many gods. The chief god was the god of fire, so they worshipped fire. As St. Thaddeus traveled to Armenia he told all those who would listen about Jesus and many became Christians. On his journey, he preached to all who were interested in learning about Jesus and the new life he gave.

While St. Thaddeus was in Armenia, he visited the town of Shavarshan where King Sanadrook lived. Many people were converted and gave up their old religions to follow the teachings of Jesus and inherit the kingdom of God. Princess Santookht, a girl about sixteen years old, heard about St. Thaddeus and this new religion. She wanted to learn more about it so she dressed as a townswoman and secretly went to hear St. Thaddeus speak. She knew her father would be upset if he found out she was doing this. He believed in many gods and was a fire worshipper.

As Santookht listened to St. Thaddeus, she began to realize that what he was teaching was much better than fire worship. She realized that only God's love and loving God could make a person completely happy. She knew that to love God you have to love



people. She learned that Jesus is God's own son and that he was a person just like herself. Thaddeus told her how Jesus was crucified, but came back to a new life, a better life, three days later. He told her how Jesus visited the apostles and continued to teach them until he went up to heaven to be with God the Father. Jesus said he would be with them always and that the Holy Spirit was coming to live in them. Thaddeus told Santookht how the apostles were able to understand everything better when the Holy Spirit came to them and they were able to speak in different languages so they could spread the Good News about Jesus to everyone. He told her that if she believed in Jesus, she would have a new life with Jesus in God's kingdom. This was the special gift of love that Jesus gave to all who believed in him and followed his teachings.

Princess Santookht listened carefully and knew that what Thaddeus told her was true. She began to love Jesus, even though she had never actually met him. And she knew she must become a Christian, a follower of Jesus. She asked to be baptized and received Holy Communion. It was easy for her to choose to become a Christian because she knew it was the right choice, but she knew her father would be angry that she did not believe in the same things he believed in.

When King Sanadrook learned that his daughter had become a Christian, he was angry, very, very angry. He wanted Armenians to continue to be fire worshippers. He was afraid that if the Armenian people gave up fire worship and became Christian the gods would be angry at him. He wanted his daughter to change back to her old religion. Sanadrook sent for his chief priest, a mokbed. The mokbed was told to go to Princess Santookht and convince her to give up her new beliefs. But every time he said something to the princess, she answered him calmly and truly. The mokbed tried and tried, but he could not convince her. In fact, Princess Santookht made him feel that what she believed was right and better than what he believed. When he reported this to the king, Sanadrook became even more angry. He had many Christians killed and others tortured.

He called his daughter to him and told her she must change her religion. She refused. He thought if he put her in prison that would force her to give up believing in Jesus. She was a princess and had everything she wanted, good clothes, good food, a palace to live in, and everything! Being in prison would make her change her mind, he thought.

After a while, King Sanadrook sent to the prison for his daughter.

He was surprised and upset when she was brought before him. She was thin, dirty and dressed in rags. But her face was peaceful and strong. The king had a table in front of him with a crown and a sword on it. He asked Santookht if she was ready to become a fire worshipper again. If she was, she could have the crown, or else be killed by the sword. He asked her to choose the crown or the sword.

The crown or the sword. An earthly kingdom or a heavenly one. Choose! For Santookht there was no choice. She knew she could not turn away from the gift of love, the gift of everlasting life, the gift of the kingdom of God. No kingdom on earth was worth it. If she chose the crown, she would be turning away from Jesus, turning away from the truth. Knowing how badly she would hurt her father, knowing how much her father wanted her to stay alive and become his little princess again, she could not choose the crown. Bravely and strongly she faced her father and told him she chose the sword.

King Sanadrook was angrier than he had been before. His daughter did not do what he wanted her to do. She hurt his feelings by refusing his gift of the crown. He was afraid his gods would be angry at him for what his daughter did. He feared they would hurt him. He told the guards to take Santookht away and kill her.

Santookht was beheaded by the sword. News of her death spread throughout Armenia. Even more people than before were curious about this new religion that was so great that a princess would choose it and death over living in a palace and being a queen. They asked the new Christians to tell them about Jesus. And the new Christians were convinced that they had done the right thing when they chose believing in Jesus. Princess Santookht showed them that it was right and good. It was better than anything on earth! They became stronger in their faith.

King Sanadrook was still angry. He ordered St. Thaddeus to be taken and killed; and the new Christians were persecuted. But Christianity could not be killed. The people knew that believing in a god of fire and other gods was false and believing in Jesus was true. Christianity spread until finally many years later Armenia became the first Christian nation.

St. Santookht died but lives again with Jesus in the kingdom of God. She is the first martyr of Armenia. We honor her for what she did and try to follow her good example. We try not to let the goodness of this earth pull us away from God's gift of the kingdom of heaven. We tell Santookht's story to every Armenian boy and girl to show how she responded to God's gift of love and how we can too.



- Why was Stephen put on trial? (Because his friends were jealous, because he was Christian, etc.)
 - What was Stephen's punishment? (Stoning.)
 - Did killing Stephen stop people from becoming Christians? (No.)
 - How do you think Stephen felt about being chosen to be a deacon? (Proud.)
 - How did Stephen feel about those who stoned him? (He forgave them.) (20 min.)
3. Continue: "Now let's read a story about a modern day deacon. Look and listen for how a deacon of today is different from Stephen." (Read aloud "Hi, my name is Joseph . . .", by turns.)

Questions for discussion:

- Who makes a deacon a deacon today? (Bishop.)
- Who made Stephen a deacon? (Apostles.)
- What does a deacon do today? (Helps the priest in church.)
- What did Stephen do? (Helped take care of the community's needs.)
- Do both deacons still serve at the table of the Lord? (Yes.)
- Did Stephen teach people about Jesus? (Yes.)
- Do deacons become priests? (Not always.)
- What kind of deacon would you choose to be and why? (10 min.)

4. Do the "Stephen" crossword puzzle as a way of reviewing the story.

(Answers: Across 3. pray, 5. Stephen, 7. Christ, 8. speak, 9. first, 10. yes. Down 1. stoned, 2. deacon, 4. apostles, 6. protomartyr, 8. serve.) (10 min.)

5. Now look with children at litanies on page 31a of the Divine Liturgy book. Then say: "What has happened in the liturgy is: The bread and wine have been transformed by the Holy Spirit into the body and blood of the Lord during the singing of Vortee Asdoodzo. We have sung a hymn to the Father, a hymn to praise and thank God, a hymn to the Son and a hymn to the Holy Spirit. Now we start singing a litany, a list of prayers, to ask God and all the saints to remember us as we worship.

"As you can see, when we mention the saints, we first mention St. Mary, the Holy Mother of God, then St. John the Baptist, and then St. Stephen. We show his importance to our church by mentioning his name here. We also want to remember what Stephen did by mentioning his name.

"Let me see if you remember. Who was St. Stephen and what did he do?" (Answers should include that he was one of the first deacons of the church, that he helped the community by serving at the table, distributing the daily food, that he defended his beliefs even unto death.) (5 min.)

6. Have students do "A Deacon's Job" activity. Then ask them: "If you were a deacon, what part of the job would you like most? Do you think God is calling or will call you to do something special for him?" (Allow

children to express their thoughts.) "When we love someone, we want to do what he/she wants us to do. God's plan for us may not be one that will make us famous like Stephen, but it will be one that makes us happy knowing we are responding to God's love." (Answers: SN, N, SN, SN, SN, S.)

(10 min.)

7. **Homework:** Stephen's stole.

Closing prayer: Lord, make me an instrument of thy will. Amen.

Vocabulary

martyr

protomartyr

intercede, intercessor, intercessory

robe (shabig)

stole

poorvar

Session 3—St. Santookht

Key Concepts

1. St. Santookht responded to God's love by choosing to remain his follower even at the cost of her own life.

2. We too should learn to make sacrifices for Jesus.

Objectives

Students will

1. Tell the story of St. Santookht.

2. Describe Santookht's role in the conversion of Armenia.

3. State that Santookht gained everlasting life in the Kingdom of God.

Background for Teacher

Santookht was the young daughter of King Sanadrook. Armenians were pagan at this time and so was the king. They worshipped gods of fire, water, etc., much like their Persian neighbors.

When St. Thaddeus entered Armenia, many Armenians had already grown dissatisfied with their pagan religion and were interested in the God of the Jews. St. Thaddeus made a great impression on them. As Christianity was not a popular religion, meetings were kept secret. Many accepted Christ.

It is thought that Santookht started attending these meetings through a servant of hers. She might have started going to them on her own. She disguised herself and sought lessons in the teaching of Christ. As you can read from the text and from resources such as *Saints for Children from the Tradition of the Armenian Church*, *Sampler of Saints*, and *Great Stories: From the History of the Armenian Church*, the work of St. Thaddeus and the martyrdom

of St. Santookht, followed by the work of St. Bartholomew, enabled Christianity to be firmly established in Armenia.

Materials Needed

- Sword and crown (both can be made from cardboard and covered with aluminum foil.
- A Burger King or Happy Birthday crown can be used for the crown.
- Two pieces of wood nailed together might be used for the sword.

Procedure

Before children enter class, place hand-made sword and crown in the center of the table.

1. As students prepare for class, putting away coats, getting settled, they will naturally ask about the sword and crown. Tell them that by the time class is over they will know. When all are ready to start the session, begin with a prayer. Then review very quickly the story of St. Stephen and how he responded to God's gift of love. (5 min.)

2. State that the two items on the table will play a part in a choice someone had to make. Ask the group about the use of the two items and who would use them. Ask if anyone can see any religious significance in them.

Have children open their texts and look at the picture on the first page of the lesson. Tell them you will read them a story while they look at this picture and follow along in their texts. (10 min.)

3. Read the story, *The Crown or the Sword* (page 101). After reading the story, ask for volunteers to retell the story in proper order. Using the pictures on page 104 as a guide, have the children take turns filling in events and details. If possible, have all the students participate.

When the children have finished filling in the story, ask the following questions:

Who gave St. Santookht instruction in Christianity? Why was it necessary to receive secret instruction?

How did she show that she accepted Christianity? (Baptism and communion.)

Who gave Santookht the strength to stand up to the king when he demanded she give up Christianity?

Is that same reason of her strength available to us? How?

What is the significance of the sword and the crown? What does the sword represent and what does the crown represent?

What was she really choosing when she chose the sword? (10 min.)

4. Announce that there is another story today about a young boy who also was faced with a choice.

Direct the class to the story of Aram on page 105 and ask for volunteers to read aloud while the others

follow along. Again, try to include as many students in the reading as possible, but do not embarrass poor readers.

At the completion of the oral reading, ask the class the following questions (try to call on different students to answer the questions and be sure to call on those who did not read, if they raise their hand.):

Did Aram make a good/wise choice? Why? Why not?

Could you have made such a choice if this happened to you?

Have you ever experienced anything similar to this? Can you tell us about it?

What is a "Godsend"?

Lead the class into comparing the two stories by discussing the attitudes of Santookht and Aram's father. Bring out the selfishness, prejudice, and close-mindedness of both men. Also bring out the willingness of Santookht and Aram to give of themselves and respond to God's love by loving others and forgetting their own safety or wishes. (15 min.)

5. Tell the class that they are going to have an opportunity to make some choices now. Direct the children to look at the worksheet on pages 108 and 109. Ask for volunteers to read the first situation and possible choices. Allow students to mark their choices, then discuss those choices and why they were made. Complete the worksheet together in a like manner. (10 min.)

6. Look at the last page together. (We are called to respond to God's gift of love by making choices as Jesus would want us to.) Direct children to make up their own prayer asking God to help them in making the right choice and write the prayer in the space provided on the page. If they think of a prayer that would be good for the rest of the class to use, they may share it next week. (10 min.)

7. Assign the crossword on page 110 for homework. End with a prayer asking God to guide us in our choices, or use St. Nersess' prayer in the text.

Answers to the Crossword Puzzle

Across: 4. Santookht, 5. life, 7. baptized, 10. Thaddeus. *Down:* 1. sword, 2. martyr, 3. Christianity, 8. apostle, 9. God's.

Extending the Lesson

Have the children role play the story.

Children can discuss that by choosing the sword, St. Santookht chose the crown of heaven.

Children can make up an intercessory prayer directed to St. Santookht.

Children can paint a mural depicting the story of St. Santookht.