

### Lesson 5

# Women of the Early Church: Taking Part in God's Plan



### Pray Together

Hanoon Hor, yev Vortvo, yev Hokvooyñ Surpo, Amen.

Dear Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for the brave and devoted messengers of your Word that continue to appear among us. You showed us in your own ministry how all people are called to follow you and become leaders themselves, men and women, young and old, all have gifts to inspire and lead others. Help us to use our talents and gifts to serve others, all for your glory, Amen.

## Quick Quiz

Mark the correct answer.

1. Paul's original name was

- a  Saul                      b  Abram                      c  Pharoah                      d  Barnabas

2. Paul temporarily lost his eyesight while traveling to

- a  Ephesus                      b  Egypt                      c  Nineveh                      d  Damascus

3. Paul was eventually martyred in

- a  Jerusalem                      b  Damascus                      c  Rome                      d  Bethlehem

4. Hripsimé is usually associated with

- a  Sarai                      b  Moses                      c  Gayané                      d  Esther

5. Through \_\_\_\_\_, God restored King Drtad's sanity

- a  St. Athanasius                      b  St. Gregory                      c  St. Nersess                      d  St. Vartan

# Lifted Up by Jesus

A good portion of the turmoil in the world is caused by the abuse and oppression of women. Some people even try to use religion to justify their unkind treatment of the female half of the population. God does not discriminate. Jesus came for us all, male and female, because as Romans 3:23 says “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

The Lord Jesus understood very well that women were, at best, on the sidelines in society. This was especially true in Biblical times, when women were little more than property. God automatically elevated the status of women when he chose to send his Son to earth through the Virgin Mary, a woman. He could just as easily have had Jesus walk down off a mountain or descend from the stars.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus showed unusual compassion toward the women he encountered. He welcomed their participation in his life and work, even though it would have been unheard-of for a Jewish man, especially an important one, to interact with women in this way.

Read the following Scripture verses. Beside each one, write whether the woman featured in the event was a “helper” to Jesus or was a “receiver” of his mercy.

Matthew 26:6-13 \_\_\_\_\_

Mark 5:24-34 \_\_\_\_\_

Mark 12:41-44 \_\_\_\_\_

Mark 16:9 \_\_\_\_\_

Luke 4:38-39 \_\_\_\_\_

Luke 10:38-42 \_\_\_\_\_

Luke 13:10-16 \_\_\_\_\_

John 4:4-15 \_\_\_\_\_

John 11:32-44 \_\_\_\_\_



## Did You Know?

St. Shushanik was the great-granddaughter of St. Sahag.

## Lydia and Phoebe: Two Among Many

There were many women healed and instructed by Jesus, even many more than the stories you have just read about in Scripture! After Jesus' resurrection, many more were called to play exciting roles in the early church. One was **Lydia**, a business woman (Acts 16: 11-15:40). Lydia is described as someone from Thyatira, a city in Lydia in Asia Minor. This city was renowned for its luxurious dyed goods and Lydia herself was a successful seller of purple cloth, which was particularly valuable. Think about a dynamic business woman today and you'll get the picture.

Having moved to the Macedonian city of Philippi, Lydia heard Paul speak with a group of women at Sabbath services. Her heart overflowed with love for Jesus and she became an energetic convert, opening her home for Paul and his helpers to stay. After his brief imprisonment, Paul again was welcomed into her home. She may have even hosted Christian worship in her home, as many women did in these early years.

### A. What qualities of business leadership would make Lydia a successful Christian leader?

Another woman mentioned in the New Testament was **Phoebe** (Romans 16:1-2). In these two fascinating verses, Paul refers to her as sister and deacon (v. 1, sometimes given a misleading translation as "servant")

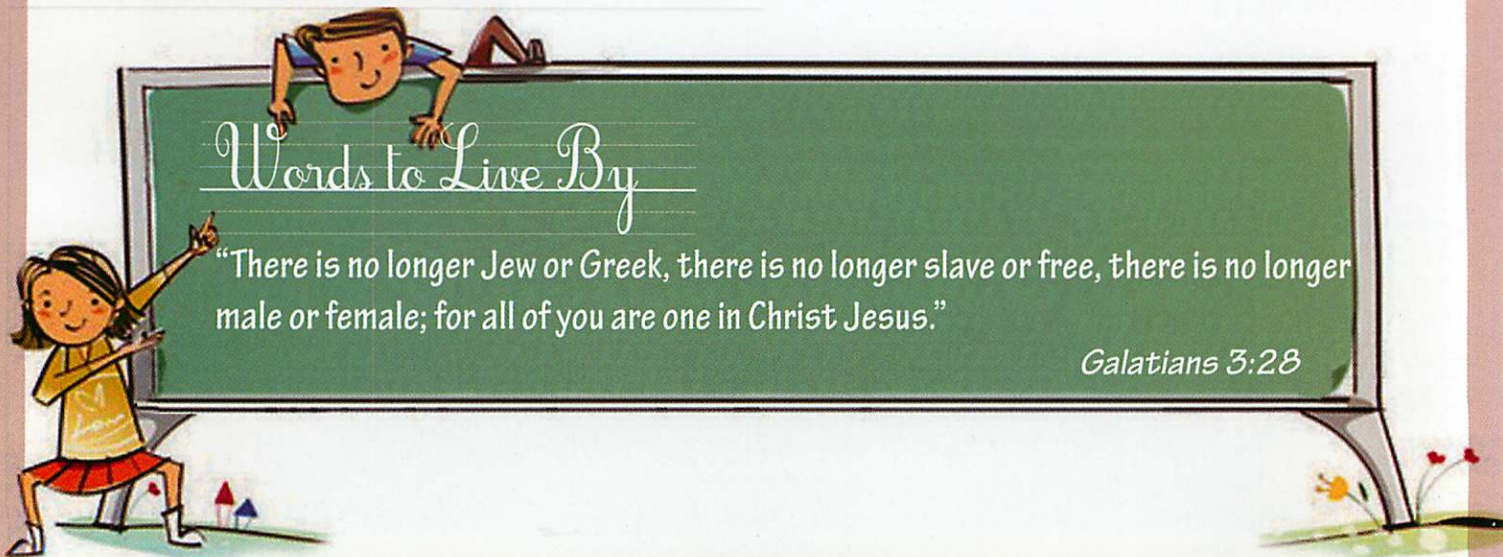
and as "prostates" (v. 2) – a word found nowhere else in the New Testament but indicating a leadership role. So she seems to have most definitely been a known leader of the church in Cenchreae, a seaport near Corinth, a woman of responsibility and influence. Think of women who work in the church today, either in your parish or at Diocesan headquarters. Phoebe may have had even more authority than women are granted today!



After his reference to Phoebe, Paul mentions many women hard at work in the faithful community. Look at Romans 16: 3-16.

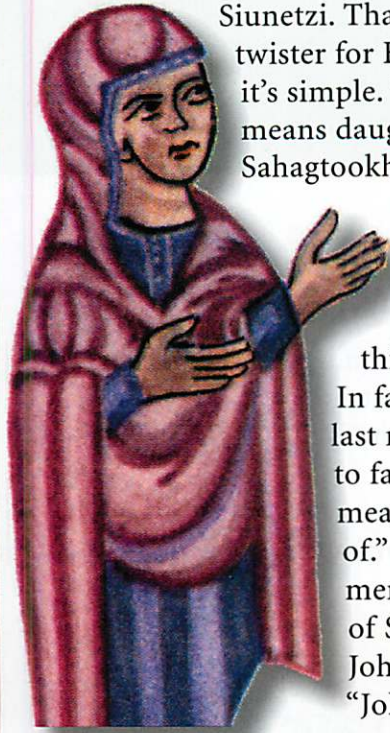
### B. Name five of the women mentioned and a phrase describing them:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_



## A Woman of Prayerful Poetry

Seven hundred years after Christ, a musician and poet lived in the village of Karni, in historic Armenia. Her name was Sahagtookht



Siunetzi. That might be a tongue-twister for English speakers, but it's simple. The ending "tookht" means daughter. So who was Sahagtookht? Literally: "Sahag's daughter." In an age when everyone traced their lineage through their father, this wasn't uncommon. In fact, even Armenian last names often refer back to fathers, with the "ian" meaning "family of or son of." The Sahagians are members of the family of Sahag. In English, the Johnsons are members of "John's clan."

The "etzi" is an ending that means "from" or "of." So she was also from the region of Siunik.

Some of her poems were in the popular acrostic style. These poems would use the letters of her name as the first letter of each 4-line verse. Let's try writing a poem about our faith in Sahagtookht's style. We'll make it easy and have each verse consist of two lines. Make the initial letters of your name larger and darker and leave a space between the two lines. Here's an example by a student named Sam.

**S**haring my faith with family and friends  
Is what church is all about

**A**nd of course God is at the center  
Guiding my ways and my heart

**M**ake me grow in faith, Lord  
To really know life's meaning and purpose

You can rhyme verses if you like. The prayer-poem's title should be

**My Faith.**

## Our Armenian Way

From the time of St. Gregory the Illuminator through the Armenian Genocide of the 20th century, Armenian women have had the reputation of remaining faithful to Jesus no matter what the consequences. Saint Shushanik is an example of these women who put God before even their own lives. The daughter of Vartan Mamigonian, she was married to Vasken of Ghougark sometime before 451 AD. The couple had four children, three boys and a girl. Around 466, Vasken decided to abandon Christianity for the pagan religion of the Persians. He ordered Shushanik to convert with him, but she refused. For seven years or so Vasken subjected her to beatings, starvation, imprisonment, and other tortures in order to make Shushanik change her mind. She prayerfully endured until about 474 AD, when she was released from her earthly existence to join her beloved Lord in heaven.

