

Unit Four: A World Church

Lesson 1

Holy Etchmiadzin



Pray Together

Hanoon Hor, yev Vortvo, yev Hokvooyn Surpo, Amen. Lord, we know that you have not called us to believe on our own. You do not expect us to fight our doubts alone. You have called us into the Church, the great community of believers, guided and sustained by the Holy Spirit. In that community, we are united with all those throughout the world who believe in you. Thank you, Lord, for the faith of the Armenian Church which goes all the way back to the apostles, to the risen Lord himself. Amen.

adapted from a prayer by the theologian Hans King



Spiritual Heart of the Armenian Church

Holy Etchmiadzin

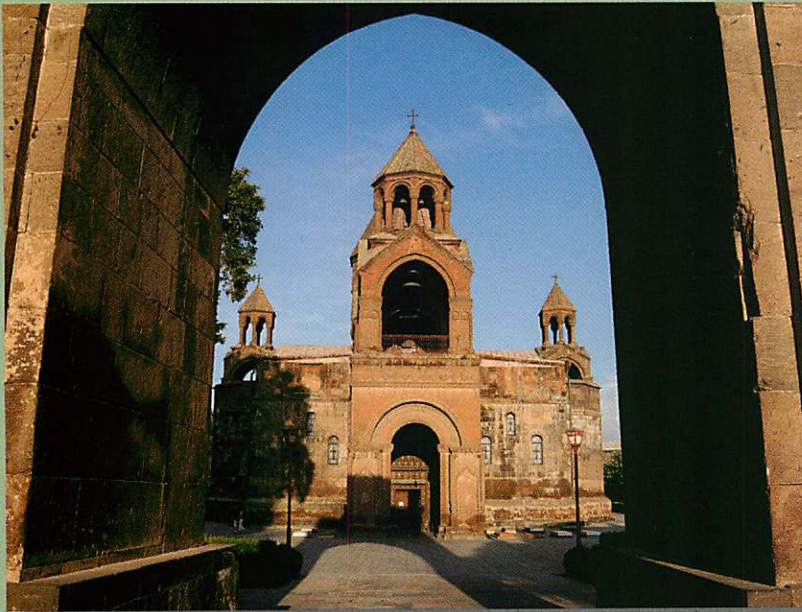
What do you think of when you hear those words? Rugged mountains? Ancient battles? Our church fathers? All of those things make up part of the history of Etchmiadzin, but its most important function is as the spiritual center of the Armenian Church.

A city had been in the area since about the 4th or 3rd century BC, when it was called Vartkesavan. It was not until the time of St. Gregory the Illuminator that Etchmiadzin took on its current greatness. In 301 AD, St. Gregory had a vision of Jesus descending to earth with a golden hammer in his hand. In the vision, Jesus struck the ground with the hammer, and a dome supported by four columns appeared, with a glowing cross above.

Here's the description from where it was recorded in the 5th century account by Agathangelos: *Gregory saw a large pillar with a base of gold; the pillar was made of fire topped by a cloud above which was a bright cross. This pillar represented the Church.*

There were three other columns, all with red bases, columns of cloud, topped by a fire and also a bright cross; all three were symbols of the martyrs. Above these four pillars was a dome of cloud and above that was a great throne of fire topped by a cross.





After this vision, Gregory and King Drtad built a church in the place indicated by the golden hammer. Gregory renamed the spot “Etchmiadzin,” which means “the place where the Only-Begotten Son descended.”

Afterward, chapels for Sts. Hripsime, Gayane, and others were built at Etchmiadzin. Monasteries opened, and the city became our Holy See, or center of religious authority. Over the centuries, the See has been moved to Sis, Ani, and other places. These moves happened to protect the Church in times of danger, or when the civil government or population relocated. Even when the church officials operated from another city, or when Armenians were scattered all over the globe, our hearts always

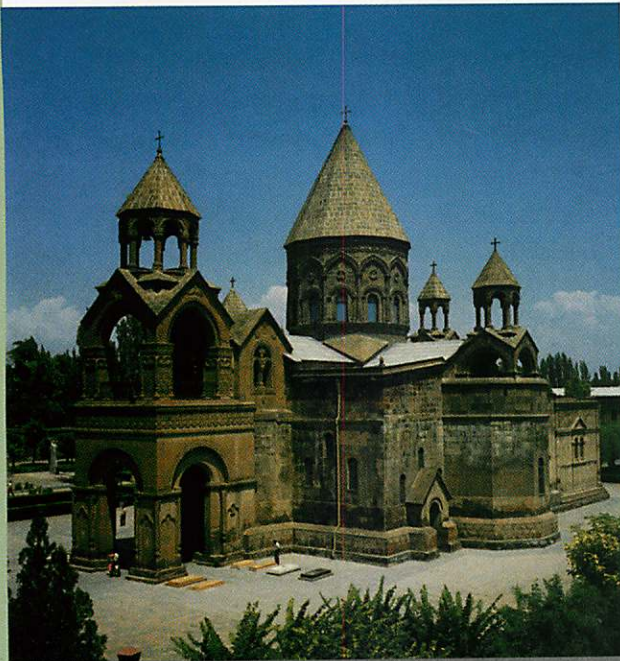
look to Etchmiadzin as the center of our spiritual and cultural world. The Mother See keeps our direction constant and offers strength to a community that spans thousands of miles.

- Have you ever been to Holy Etchmiadzin?
- If not, have you ever known someone who journeyed there? What did they say about it?
- How important is it for Armenian believers to visit Etchmiadzin?

Your Own Etchmiadzin

As Holy Etchmiadzin has always been the center of our church as a whole, your parish church is like a mini-Etchmiadzin. Just as the Armenian Church around the world receives its direction and focus from the Holy See, your parish church - grounded in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and on centuries of Holy Tradition with Scripture as a foundation - and your family are the places you look for grounding and guidance in the whirlwind of modern life.

1. How have you seen your parents support your parish?
2. What are things you can do as a young member of the congregation to keep your church vibrant and healthy?
3. As you grow up and go to college, how can you keep close ties with the Armenian Church and her teachings?
4. Where do you see yourself in relation to the church in fifteen or twenty years?



Did You Know?

Etchmiadzin is full of beautiful, fragrant rose bushes.



Words to Live By

“Like living stones, let yourself be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood.”

1 Peter 2:5

The Architect of Our Faith

Read 1 Kings 6:2-10 to see the detailed plan God gave Solomon for the building of the temple. As a class, list some of the elements of this magnificent temple.



Our Armenian Way

Our Catholicos is the spiritual leader for Armenians all over the world. The first Catholicos was St. Gregory the Illuminator, and for a while only his descendants could hold the position. Today, the highest-ranking member of the Church authority is elected for life by the world-wide delegation of the National Ecclesiastical Assembly, the supreme legislative body of the Armenian Church; he is then consecrated by twelve bishops.

The Catholicos is the representative of a line of authority that began with the apostles, with Jesus Christ as the supreme head of the church. Calling important councils, blessing holy chrism, and ordaining bishops are some of the many responsibilities of the Catholicos.

The general title of His Holiness is “Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians.” For official documents, the title is “(ordained name of Catholicos), Servant of Jesus Christ, By the Mercy of God and the Will of the Nation, Chief Bishop and Catholicos of All Armenians, Supreme Patriarch of the Pan-National Pre-Eminent Araratian See, the Apostolic Mother Church of Universal Holy Etchmiadzin.” Imagine having to put that signature on all your work!

