

ST. HAGOP OF NISIBIS
(SOORP HAGOP MZPNA HAYRABED)

309 - 338 AD

Teacher, Theologian and Seeker of Noah's Ark

St. Hagop was born in Nisibis (Nusaybin, a town in present day southeastern



Turkey). Some sources say he was the nephew of St. Gregory the Illuminator; others cite him as a first cousin. Nonetheless, he was reared in an educated family and is revered as one of the great educators and mentors in the early church. Nisibis was an



important Christian center in Asia Minor and a transit point for the caravans traveling east and west. Being close to the southern border of historic Armenia, the Armenians since the beginning of literacy knew that town as Mtsbin [pronounced in Western Armenian Mudz-peen. A person from Mtsbin is called a Mtsbnatsi

(pronounced in Western Armenian Mudz-pun-atsee - thus St. Hagop, having been born there, is oftentimes referred to as St. Hagop Mtsbin (alternate transliterated spellings often mutate as Mtsbin has to Mzpna and the Hayrabad appellation refers to his

being a Patriarch). St. Leon has two windows devoted to him – one in the sanctuary and another in the small room adjacent to where the choir members don their shabigs (robes) on Sunday mornings.

St. Hagop of Nisibis is revered in the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Coptic Church, and the Eastern Catholic and Roman Catholic churches, but most especially in the Syriac Orthodox Church and the Armenian Church as he was a teacher to the famous St. Ephraim the Syrian, a prolific writer of Syriac hymns of the 4th century whose historical and religious works are hailed by Christians throughout the world. According to St.

Ephraim, St. Hagop founded the basilica and theological School of Nisibis, an important spiritual center of the early Church. (The Persians overtook Nisibis and, in 363 AD the school was moved westward to a preexisting school located in Edessa, Mesopotamia. There, under the leadership of St. Ephrem the Syrian, it gained fame well beyond the borders of the Syriac speaking world.)

Having been ordained a Bishop (320 AD), St. Hagop played a leading role among the 318 Christian leaders present during the sessions of the First Ecumenical Council in Nicea and merited the attention of St. Athanasius and other bishops of the Eastern and Western churches as well the Emperor Constantine The most important canon created at the Nicaean Council was the Nicene Creed, which the faithful chant during Divine Liturgy. In it we are unified by the same understanding of who God is, and who we are relative to Him—a declaration of faith that has united Christians throughout the world for 1,700 years. We affirm that our own faith is rooted and nourished by the "one, catholic and apostolic holy Church" with Jesus Christ as its head (Colossians 1:18). when the Nicene Creed was written in (325 AD). As Patriarch from Nisibis he earned great respect from the Emperor Constantine and other participants. (Two other councils accepted by the Armenian Church are the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D. and the Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D. A fourth council of Chalcedon, held in 451 A.D., made formulations on the nature of Christ that were rejected by Armenian and other Oriental Orthodox churches, distinguishing them from Roman Catholic and Byzantine Orthodox churches.)

However, St. Hagop is more popularly known and adored for seeking to find Noah's Ark as proof for skeptics. According to tradition, while St. James preached in and around Nisibis, he heard that people doubted the story of Noah's Ark. He was determined to provide his flock with evidence, so he set out on a journey to the top of Mount Ararat to find the remains of the ark. Sometime into his journey, before reaching his destination, he felt tired and decided to stop and rest before moving forward. After he continued on his journey, he took a second break. However, when he awoke, he found himself in the spot that he originally chose as his resting place. He continued on his journey, yet he encountered the same phenomenon for seven years. Nevertheless, Hagop steadfastly persevered on faith to reach his goal.

One day, while he slept, an angel appeared to him in a vision and brought him a piece of the wood from Noah's Ark. The angel told him that he could not see any more of the ark, but that the wooden remnant would be proof enough for the naysayers. St. Hagop prayed to God to produce an eternal miracle on the spot where he had the vision and immediately afterward a spring gushed forth, which exists to this day. The relic of Noah's Ark is carefully housed in the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.

In the Armenian Apostolic Church the Feast of St. Hagop of Nisibis is celebrated on the Saturday between December 12-18.

“The heavenly hosts rejoiced at the greatness of your feats by which you in the flesh became like the angels on high; we have you as intercessor for us before the Father in heaven. And we with a joyful voice celebrate your holy memory, O venerable witness of Christ, holy bishop Hagop; we have you as intercessor for us before the Father in heaven. You decided on severe toils to see Noah’s Ark and from the angel’s hand received a portion of the wood which served the human race as salvation; we have you as intercessor for us before the Father in heaven.”(Canon to St. Hagop, Bishop of Nisibis, from the Canons of the Armenian Apostolic Church)

Inscription for the window in the sanctuary entitled, St. Hagop reads: In Memory of Jack Chekemian and was installed during the 1965 construction.

Inscription for the window entitled St. Hagop Mzpnna, which is located in the small room adjacent to where choir members don their robes (shabigs) every Sunday reads: Donation by H. Hagopain & Family. It was also installed during the 1965 construction.

N.B. Deep appreciation is expressed to Father Krikor Maksoudian for sharing his profound knowledge of Armenian Church History.

Adapted from the following sources by Ruth Bedevian

<http://www.sourphagop.org/fests/englishsj.htm>

<http://milwaukeearmenians.wordpress.com/2011/12/17/st-james-hagop-of-nisibis/>

http://www.stjohnsarmenianchurch.org/images/DECEMBER_6.pdf

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/School_of_Nisibis

<http://www.armenianchurch-ed.net/feasts/st-james-of-nisibis/>