

A MESSAGE FROM PASTOR NERSES BALABANIAN

Nothing New Under The Sun

A note from Badveli Nerses: This year we hosted the commemoration of Vartanantz virtually with the participation of the Central Valley Armenian churches. Below you will find the message shared on the occasion by the pastor of the Armenian Evangelical Church of New York City Badveli Haig Kherlopian. We are in the season of Lent. We are walking with our Lord Jesus Christ towards Calvary. His cross and resurrection are the central teachings of our faith. Vartan and his friends sacrificed their lives based on our Lord's sacrifice on the cross. Today we will continue to be faithful servants of our Lord, even when it is costly.



“What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.”

– Ecclesiastes 1:9

When we compare the Battle of Avarair with the war over Arstakh this past fall, it seems like there is nothing new under the sun. Back then, we were outnumbered by the Persian army. Today, we were outnumbered by the Azeris, Turks, and jihadists army. Back then, we were abandoned by the powerful Roman Empire. Today, we were abandoned by the powerful democratic countries. Back then, we were outgunned by the mighty war elephants. Today, we were outgunned by battle drones. There is nothing new under the sun.

In the account of Yeghisheh, there is an account of soldiers being baptized in the banks of the Dughmood River right before they entered battle to preserve their religious freedom. If you look on social media, there is a video of Armenian soldiers being baptized before they entered battle defending their homelands against Azeri aggression. Again, there is nothing new under the sun.

Vartanantz is a celebration of Armenia winning the spiritual war of preserving Christianity in the face of a forced conversion to Zoroastrianism. In the writings of Yeghisheh, who chronicles the events of Katch Vartan and the epic stand against the Persian horde, two letters are preserved that reveal the theological battle that was taking place. One letter is from the magi, who were the clergy of Zoroastrianism. In the first letter, the magi wrote what they found wrong with Christianity and why they insisted the Armenians relinquish their faith. The other letter is a response from the Armenian bishops, defending their belief in Jesus Christ. There is nothing new under the sun. These same critiques that the magi had back then are common critiques you hear about Christianity today.

The first grievance the magi had against Christianity concerned its view on creation. An ancient religion, Zoroastrianism maintains that two forces were at work in the creation of the world. These forces – a deity of light and a deity of darkness – are said to be in continual battle with one another. The opposite sides call to mind a backgammon game – only the world happens to be their board.

continued on next page

In Honor of Vartanantz:

Nothing New

Continued from page 1

The Armenian priests responded to the first complaint by saying that they believed in one God who made all things good. That God created the world *ex nihilo* – out of nothing – is Himself outside of space and time. They said, “God has not received a beginning from anyone else, but He is eternal through himself. He is not bound by space, for He himself is space. He is not confined within any time, for all time has its existence from Him.” God is the Creator who is control of His creation, and that creation is affirmed as good and not chaotic like the Zoroastrian belief.

When I was a student at Princeton Theological Seminary, I remember having a conversation with a physics professor who was a skeptic of Christianity. She began to tell me how she could trace back to the milliseconds right before the Bing Bang. We ended up talking about who or what was responsible for those milliseconds right before the bang. I went on to say, you can tell me how it happened but can you tell me why it happened? There are many people today who believe this world is random and there is no our Father in Heaven, Maker of Heaven and Earth, behind everything. Whether the randomness is due to atheism or ancient pagan gods fighting each other, people doubt the providence of our Father in Heaven. There is nothing new under the sun.

The second criticism that the Persian magi had regarded the Armenian lifestyle. Their complaint reads: “Do not believe your clergy when they say it is very sinful to accumulate wealth; they respect misery and denounce success. They ridicule the name of fate and mock fame severely. They love plainness of apparel and respect the dishonorable more than the honorable.” The way of life the Persians mocked was the life of Christ. Jesus reveals to us that humility is a virtue, that we should take care of the poor, and that we should serve others rather than be served.

Today many Armenians have fallen into the traps of caring about what they wear, how much they make and what they are driving. To focus on the created things over the Creator is idolatry. As the apostle Paul has stated, “***They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen***” (*Romans 1:5*). There is nothing new under the sun, people back then cared about the material more then the eternal back then as they do today.

The third critique the magi opposed was belief in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They had difficulty accepting central tenets of the faith such as the Virgin Mary, the shameful death of Jesus on the cross, and Jesus’ resurrection. This is the ultimate battle of Vartanantz and the ultimate battle

for us today is the Gospel of Jesus Christ true. If so, are we willing to die for the one who is victorious over Satan, sin and death through his death and resurrection? Are we willing to die for the one who is seated on the throne of heaven? There is nothing new under the sun, but those of us who are under the Son, know that God is doing something brand new. The Armenian clergy knew that Jesus was the risen Lord whether or not the Zoroastrians believed it to be true. They had received the forgiveness of sins and encountered the Holy Spirit; their only rebuttal was their willingness to be martyrs. Thus, they concluded their letter to respond to their third critique with this:

“From this faith no one can shake us, neither angels nor men; neither sword, nor fire, nor water, nor any, nor all other horrid tortures. All our goods and possessions are in your hands, our bodies are before you; dispose of them as you will. If you leave us to our belief, we will, here on earth, choose no other master in your place, and in heaven choose no other God in place of Jesus Christ, for there is no other God. But should you require anything beyond this great testimony, here we are; our bodies are in your hands; do with them as you please. Tortures from you, submission from us; the swords is yours, the neck ours. We are no better than our forefathers, who, for the sake of this faith, surrendered their goods, their possessions, and their bodies. Were we even immortal, it would become us to die for the love of Christ; He himself is immortal and so loved us that He took death on Himself, that we, by His death, might be freed from eternal death.”

There is nothing new under the sun, but everything is new under God’s only begotten son, Jesus Christ. Let us be encouraged by the faith of our ancestors by living the same faith today. Let us worship our Creator rather than the creation. Let us live like Christ rather than live for worldly gain. Let us be empowered by the Holy Spirit to scorn any earthly shame that comes from believing the Gospel, for it is the power of life over death.

Amen

Rev. Dr. Haig Kherlopian



God granted us the opportunity to worship Him outdoors for several months... we are now able to worship in the sanctuary maintaining CDC guidelines. Join us Sunday mornings at 10:30am

MODERATOR'S REPORT

Last year held challenges we have never seen before. Individuals, families, churches, businesses, and governments worldwide have been impacted due to the Global Pandemic.

It's not my desire to be a "downer"; however, I do believe it's essential to remind us that simply because the calendar has flipped to a new year, it doesn't mean all of our troubles are behind us. I have little doubt that 2021 will still hold many situations of praise and challenges that require us to look to God for answers.

Looking back over the many months of the pandemic experience, we see the evidence of God's grace and faithfulness to our church during this time. As we embark on 2021, it is my prayer that our labor will be fruitful for the advancement of His kingdom.

PRAYER

I would like to challenge ALL OF US to pray for:

- God's continued protection, guidance and wisdom for our pastors, church leaders and PACC Congregation.
- The situation in Artsakh and Armenia.
- Pray for our churches throughout the world
- Pray for the leaders of our city/county/state and the United States of America. May God grant them wisdom as they lead.

CHURCH MINISTRIES

The Church Council met February 23, 2021. We praise God that our church ministries continues through the various boards and committees. I pray for the leadership of the various ministries who remain committed and continue to serve with joy and excitement.

IN-PERSON WORSHIP SERVICE

We thank God that on Sunday, February 14, 2021 we were officially able to begin the in-person worship and live-stream service in the sanctuary, in accordance with the California CDC regulations for social distancing and wearing masks.

In closing, the Council wishes to remind the Congregation of the opportunity to support the church ministries through your donations. If God leads you to contribute, please refer to the PilgrimChurch.com website, where you will find a sub-menu called "On-line Giving"; or if you prefer you may send in your check by way of US Mail.

— by Moderator Edward Saliba

"As it is, there are many parts, but one body."
(1 Corinthians 12:20 NIV)

TRUSTEE'S REPORT

2020 PACC Budget Recap: At our last Board of Trustees, we reviewed the financial records for the 2020 year. I am excited and blessed to report that our church closed the 2020 financial budget, with a positive balance! This means that because of God's grace and your obedient giving, our church was able to meet all of our operating costs and budget needs. Because of our Lord's provision through your faithful giving, we also had extra funds to purchase the video equipment to allow us to stream our worship services, and gave us the opportunity to send relief and support to several ministries that eased the suffering of our brethren both in Fresno and around the world including those affected by the explosion in Lebanon and the horrific war in Armenia. And, with our Stay at Home Harvest Banquet, your faithful giving helped raise over \$24,000, which will be used for needed remodeling and renovations in the Christian Education building. Praise be to God! Our cup has overflowed with His blessings!

2021 Budget Alert: On the heels of the good news reported above, I would like to make you aware that our tithings and contributions for January and February of 2021 are significantly lower than budgeted. As a matter of fact during this time we only took in 29% of the monthly budgeted funds needed to cover our operating costs. This shortfall is particularly difficult because it has occurred at a time we have reopened the church for indoor services, and our expenses have increased significantly. I would ask you to prayerfully consider your ability to help erase PACC's current financial shortfall.

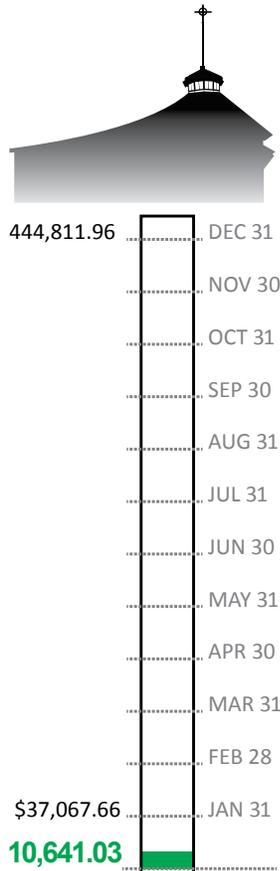
In many ways 2020 was a parched wilderness and a time of trial and suffering for so many. However, God truly used you to make a way in this wilderness and create springs of fresh water in the desert. I know that you will respond to the Lord's call and do the same in 2021. On behalf of your Board of Trustees, thank you for answering His call to provide for our church's financial needs. The Lord loves a cheerful giver, and that's exactly what our faithful parishioners at PACC have been in 2020. Please let your faithful tithing and offerings continue in 2021.

— by Board of Trustees' Chair Richard Matoian

2021 ANNUAL GIVING RECAP

*Bring the full tith into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house.
And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts,
if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down
for you a blessing until there is no more need.* (Malachi 3:10 ESV)

This is the first month of our new 2021 budget. The graph shown indicates the total budgeted amount for annual contributions necessary to operate our church home. The current month indicates where we should be at this time, based on the budget. The final amount shown is the actual contributions we have collected through the current month. For January 2021 we have received 29% of the budgeted amount of contributions necessary for the church to function. A shortage of over \$26,000. At the time of writing the February 2021 short fall is even more than



January. We are grateful that we are once again celebrating and worshiping in our church on Sunday mornings. We look forward to returning to more activities at our church home in the near future. As the church returns to more normal operations our monthly expenses will also increase. Our thanks to God for all His provision and blessings. May He help us to be faithful in returning to Him what is His.

My favorite words in my walk with Jesus are surrender and obedience because when I do them my life is unbelievable. However despite knowing everything can be amazing, I have the most trouble being faithful to those disciplines. I was recently blessed with an extended weekend at the ocean staying right on the beach. From the crashing waves,

to the glorious sunsets, surrounded by vivid color everywhere, I was immersed in God's creative majesty. I sang praise songs aloud outside and was grateful the sound of the ocean made sure no one heard me! I did several Bible studies outside and felt like I was being taught by Jesus Himself in that atmosphere. Every song I heard, every verse I read, every lesson I studied kept telling me I needed to let go and turn it over to God. The nature that surrounded me did. The world, God's world He created follows His commands and trusts Him. But those of us He created in His image make so many choices to go our own way and not follow until we're so far down in a pit we cry out for Him. In the above passage in Malachi I love that he says "...pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need." Just choose to obey and you will never need. What a peaceful, calm and joyful feeling that is. I lift up my hands in surrender and bow down to obey for such a blessing and gift

*Daily, daily I surrender
Grace for today is all that I need
Surprised by a mercy that's new
every morning
Awaken my soul to sing*

*I will trust where You lead
I will trust when I can't see
Morning by morning
Great is Your faithfulness to me
Excerpt from Morning by Morning
by Pat Barrett
- Treasurer Patrice Ruble*

Children's Ministry

Hello Church Family,

The Children's Ministry Team has been having so much fun this year enjoying our sweet time with the children!

During January we focused on winter themed projects. The children created gorgeous paper snowflakes, icicles, and snowy owls. They made special treats for the wild birds by making bird feeders from the pine cones on our church campus.

February has been all about Celebrating the Greatest Love! We've made fingerprint heart trees, which were displayed in the windows of the Christian Education building, and painted beautiful watercolor heart artwork. Students learned about Saint Valentine and what the Bible says about God's love for us. It was extremely exciting for the children to harvest the first of their broccoli! They were even able to take some home to eat. We can't wait to see what else they are able to produce.

We continue to grow in Biblical knowledge together as we have been steadily studying John 5-7 during January and February. We spend time reading the Word, discussing it, practicing memory verses, praying, and having a wonderful time.

We currently offer classes for grades 1-6.

Check in: 9-9:15a

Class: 9:15-10:15a

Please join us! New students are always welcome.

- by Children's Ministries
Director Melinda Eritzian



ANNOUNCEMENTS

.....

BIRTH CONGRATULATIONS

Steven and Carmen Garcia-Russell
on the birth of their daughter
Carmen Violeta Garcia-Russell
on January 7, 2021

Aram and Natalie Hajian
on the birth of their son
Arch Alex Hajian
on January 20, 2021
Grandparents:
Alex and Sonia Jemanjian

Jivan and Silvia Apitsaryan
on the birth of their son
Alex Apitsaryan
on January 28, 2021
Uncle and Aunt:
Misak and Jemma Israelyan

.....

WITH SYMPATHY: WE ARE DEEPLY SADDENED BY THE PASSING OF:

Valerie Garcia Luna
January 12, 2021

Rev. Victor Tasiah
January 30, 2021
(PACC Interim Pastor
June 1999-September 2000)

Our condolences to all the families

*Well done, good and faithful servant.
You have been faithful over a little;
I will set you over much.
Enter into the joy of your master.
(Matthew 25:21)*

.....

A message from Robert Manselian

Thank you for all the cards, letters, phone calls and music on behalf of my "100th Birthday" (December 11, 2020).

A message from Sandy Avakian

Maybe you called or said a prayer or sent a card or sent flowers or wrote a letter or came to the graveside service or made a donation... What you did in Harold's memory is appreciated by the families of Sandy Avakian, wife; Amanda Sullivan and Heather Buman, daughters and their families.

A message from Oscar Luna's parents Maurice & Marie DiBuduo

Dear Extended Family at Pilgrim Armenian Congregational Church,

Thank you for your thoughtfulness, your prayers, and for your sympathy and kindness.

We really appreciate what you have done for our family, but most of all we are happy to express our gratitude for being part of Valerie's journey in this earth. Our God called Valerie to His presence on January 12, 2021. Throughout Valerie's journey, our brothers and sisters at PACC prayed with us for healing, but God had a better plan to heal Valerie in heaven. No more pain, no more suffering, only infinite peace that comes from knowing our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are sad for our loss, but our family and friends have helped immensely with their comforting words and actions. We are grateful for your generosity to our children (Oscar, Valerie, and Aria). Thank you for loving them, for being there for them, and for always attending to their needs. We pray our loving God Bless each one of you in many ways to continue the ministry of caring for others.

The Grave Side Service was amazing! The music was just perfect as if Valerie had picked the songs. Saying Good bye to Valerie was much easier because of your sermon. The assurance that we have a home waiting for us in heaven, and the reality of living in a temporarily tent in this earth. Thank you Pastor Balabanian for such a beautiful farewell.

Thank you for the beautiful standing flower arrangement with the perfect colors Valerie loved.



Easter Lilies

If you wish to donate Easter lilies in memory of, in honor of, or in celebration of someone, please return this coupon to the church office (3673 N. First Street, Fresno CA 93726) or drop it in the offering plate by Sunday, March 28, 2021. Cost per plant is \$15. Your gift will grace the Chancel on Easter Sunday April 4, 2021, after which you may take the plants home.

PLEASE PRINT

In memory of: _____

In honor of: _____

In celebration: _____

By: _____

PILGRIM
Armenian
CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

3673 North First Street
Fresno, California 93726-6870

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP

In-person 10:30 am

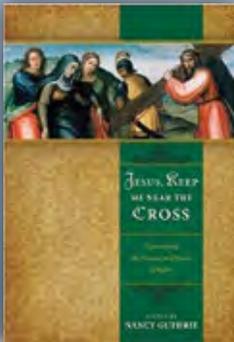
Masks Mandatory • Social distancing

Online at 10:30 am

On our website: pilgrimchurch.com

Non-Profit Org
US Postage
PAID
Permit No. 41
Fresno, CA

WEDNESDAY NIGHT
LENTEN STUDIES



**Jesus Keep Me
Near The Cross**

edited by **Nancy Guthrie**
Experiencing the
passion and power of Easter

**Wednesday,
March 3, 10, 17 & 24 • 7pm**



<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85331065755>

or by phone: call 1 (669) 900-9128
Meeting ID: 853 3106 5755

