

## Vartanants

## Heroes That Still Inspire Generations



by **Rev. Vatche Ekmekjian**

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Mostly in the month of February of each year, the Armenian church commemorates the Battle of Vartanants because its historical value has been shaping and empowering dozens of generations throughout our national history. Think about this: how many nations would still remember a battle fought and lost by their ancestors 16 centuries ago? Armenians are one of those few! Thanks to the visionary Armenian historian Yeghishe, who recorded the details of the battle for us to keep it alive.

In the 5th century AD, the Sassanid dynasty of the Persians aimed to get the Armenians as far as they could from their new religion adopted in 301AD that would identify them with their rivals, Byzantium, and ultimately implement what would in today's terminology be called 'globalization.'

From a historical perspective, the Sassanids were implementing the policy of melting pot and giving its multi-cultural empire a unified identity. They were successful with the Parthians, the Medes, and the Elamites, and thought that it would be a piece of cake with the Armenians as well. Even though the Sassanids were successful with the tool –

in this case, the war against the Armenians, but they failed with the objective because in the end, Avarayr was not a victory to the Sassanids but a victory to the Armenians who after thirty years of guerilla war, and under the leadership of Vahan Mamikonian, imposed the freedom of conscience on the Sassanids.

From a second perspective, Avarayr exemplified the virtue of heroism through people who knew what it meant to fight an uneven battle with the ratio of five to one against a superpower like the Sassanid empire. Heroism involves sacrifice. It is the act of going to an uneven battle, with the full awareness of the inevitability of death, knowing that it would inspire the coming generations with the same virtue. Vartan and his comrades embodied the faith and the intuition to look beyond the givens, beyond the ratio, and thus committed themselves in heroism, paid the ultimate price, but kept the faith in Christ alive. That is why as a nation, we keep commemorating this battle for more than a millennium and a half because it still talks to us inspires generations.

The 1036 fallen Armenian heroes of the Battle of Avarayr remind us of the first martyr of the church, Stephen, about whom the book of Acts speaks. The Scripture tells us he was **"full of faith and power, and performed great wonders and signs among the people"** (Acts 6:8). Some people could not stand him, his wisdom, and the spirit of the Truth he was filled with. Thus, the synagogue authorities collaborated to get rid of him to stop any movement that might start because of his testimony to the risen Christ. They even went to the extent of secretly persuading some men to say, **"We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God"** (v.9). When the Sanhedrin decrees to stone him to death (contrary to the Roman law) Stephen is stoned to death and his martyrdom becomes a bright light amid the darkness of his world and our world, reflecting the grace and goodness of Almighty God. His martyrdom bears many similarities with what happened to the military commander of the Armenian Army and those who were influenced by his leadership and charisma. Even though Christianity was a new

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## PACC EVENTS OF 2022

New Year and Armenian Christmas Sunday .....	January 2
Joint Armenian Christmas .....	January 5
Dry Creek Service Project (Youth).....	January 22
Broomball (Youth) .....	January 30 at 8:30 pm
Founders Day Sunday.....	February 27
Vartanantz Commemoration Thursday.....	February 24 FAPC
Lent Season Bible Studies Thursday nights .....	March 17, 24 March 31 & April 7
PACC Church Retreat .....	TBD
Dorcas-Men's Forum: Love Song .....	April 7
Palm Sunday .....	April 10
Maundy Thursday.....	April 14
Easter Sunday .....	April 17
Genocide Commemoration Gathering Sunday .....	April 24
Merchant Luncheon .....	May 5 & 6
Mother's Day.....	May 8
Memorial Day Picnic.....	May 30
PACC Annual Meeting.....	June 5
Graduation Elevation Sunday .....	June 5
Biannual Meeting Philadelphia.....	June 23-26
Summer Student Mission Trip .....	June TBD
Father's Day.....	June 19
Vacation Bible School .....	July TBD
Rally (Renewal) Sunday.....	September 11
Harvest Banquet.....	October 16
Thanksgiving Sunday.....	November 20
Congregational Budget Meeting.....	December 4
Christmas Eve Candlelight Service ....	December 24
Christmas Worship Celebration Sunday ...	December 25

## MODERATOR'S REPORT

*"I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow."*

*(1 Corinthians 3:6)*

This month I have been thinking about those who planted and watered the seed of Pilgrim Church. In particular, as we reach the anniversary of PACC's founding 120 years ago, we act rightly in commemorating the faithfulness of those brave families that united to form our church.

This year Covid-19 prompts us to postpone the Founder's Day commemoration for a few weeks into February, but we will still acknowledge our founder's both by commemorating them (including, of course, something edible), and by serving those parishioners no longer able to come to us. Look for details shortly.

Also in February, Armenians everywhere remember the bravery and sacrifice of Vartan Mamigonian and his followers in 451 A.D. We owe much to them for the survival of the Armenian church despite the opposition of one of the greatest world powers at the time.

Ultimately, though, we owe everything to God, who preserves all of us every moment of our lives. What a blessing to know that we can rely on God's omnipotent power and undying love to sustain us, as individuals and as Pilgrim Church, to accomplish His will in and through us! We serve a great God.

— By Moderator John Eleazarian

## Vartanants

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religion for the Armenians (just converted 150 years ago) it gave them the courage to declare that the Truth they found in Christ was incomparable to what the Persians used to believe in. The answer the Armenians gave at Avarayr was a bold declaration and an act of awareness that it is not 'by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of the One who created and called them.'

Today, Zoroastrianism is a struggling faith and religion, with some remnants who still follow its ideology and elements of faith. A couple of centuries after Avarayr, its adherents in Iran embraced the new religion that was imposed on them. Their high places which once contained the eternal fires are just touristic spots for today's visitors.

On the other hand, Armenians who suffered persecution, kept their faith, their churches, and their traditions. But we all know that this was not easy to achieve, and no one is able to say that the battle against the spirit of globalization of our faith and our identity is over. The enemy is still there but has changed its outfit and its tactics. The battle against the forces of evil still goes on.

Today's enemy is invisible and more concerned with the fortresses which constitute our minds, hearts, and Christian values. It is not a secret that as a nation our minds, our family values are under attack, our religious core beliefs are breached and our historical Christ-centeredness is targeted. It is about time that we go back to the spirit of God's commandment given to His people in 2 Chronicles 7:14 and receive it for ourselves too, ***"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."***

It is our duty as individuals, families, churches and a nation to be vigilant to the threats and guard our faith by leading a solid and a Christ-centered life, showing a genuine worship, pursuing Biblical values, and serving each other with love and solidarity, and the ***"gates of the hell shall not prevail against it"*** (Matthew 16:18).

## 2021 ANNUAL GIVING RECAP

*"Bring the full tithe 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)*



Happy New Year! I will let the graph speak for itself. We have received 100% of the budgeted amount for contributions. 2021 has been a roller-coaster of a year in so many ways but through it all God has been faithful. Thanks be to God for an amazing 2021. We look forward to and anticipate His blessings to fill 2022.

Do you have a bucket list? I do. It's pretty much places I'd like to visit. I had, no, I made an opportunity to go to one of those places recently. This one is not a spectacular place or one everyone else wants to go, or at least not with as much enthusiasm as I did. It is out of the way which for me makes it even more exhilarating and extraordinary because the journey of getting there brings adventure and expands my knowledge of other places and other times. And when I got there it was like Disneyland and you all know how much I like Disneyland. Actually it was even better. My expectations were not disappointed and I was filled with joy and awe that I finally made it there. I think heaven needs to be on our bucket lists. We'd take our relationship with Jesus more seriously. We'd read the bible with enthusiasm in anticipation of getting to heaven. We'd be exhilarated when serving our Lord to do His will so we could hear "good and faithful servant" when we meet Him. We'd find adventure in seeking Him in all we do so one day we can be with Him in heaven. I need to add a new place to the top of my bucket list!

***"Then shall your light break forth like the morning, and your healing (your restoration and the power of a new life) shall spring forth speedily; your righteousness (your rightness, your justice, and your right relationship with God) shall go before you (conducting you to peace and prosperity), and the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. The you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, Here I am." (Isaiah 58: 8-9a AMPC)***

(My hope of heaven is being met by my Mother and getting to eat everything she cooked that I miss so much and being able to sing all my favorite worship songs with hands lifted high and it would be OK if the music wasn't loud enough to drown out my voice!)

One name	His face
Holds weight above them all	Shines brighter than the sun
His fame	His grace
Outlasts the Earth He formed	As boundless as His love
His praise	He reigns
Resounds beyond the stars	With healing in His wings
And echoes in our hearts	The King above all kings
The greatest One of all	The greatest One of all

Excerpt from "No Other Name"  
Hillsong Worship Song Writers Joel Houston and Jonas Myrin

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### WITH SYMPATHY

We are deeply saddened by the passing of:

**Robert Manselian** – December 16, 2021

**Elizabeth Haroutunian** – January 10, 2022

**Joy Torigian** – January 12, 2022

**Rosemary Vartanian** – January 20, 2022

*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)*

### DEACON'S CORNER

***"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve..." (1 Peter 5:2)***

2021 was another unprecedented year as the COVID pandemic infiltrated our daily lives and the life of our church. Daily life forced us to quickly adapt different ways of doing things and connecting with each other.

In addition to their regular responsibilities, the Deacons found themselves, once again, taking temperatures and encouraging compliance to CDC Guidelines as parishioners entered the church for worship. Their shepherding efforts accelerated through visitation and home communion with the pastors, phone calls, cards and prayer for those unable to attend church.

Communion continued on the first Sunday of each month as parishioners were provided pre-packaged communion elements as they entered the service; and the Deacons were available, following the communion service, for anyone requesting prayer.

Collection of non-perishable food items continued throughout the year. During Lent, virtual Bible Studies were organized and the pastors were recognized in October for Clergy Appreciation Month. The congregation was encouraged to share their appreciation through phone calls and cards. During Christmas, arrangements were made for the youth to provide Christmas carols to many on the shepherding list.

In addition a group was established, led by Deacon Doreen Fischer, titled "Journey to

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# Deacon's Corner

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Resilience: Moving through challenges and loss to joy”, which offered participants connection with each other; reflection and interactive discussion; group activities and more. The 6-session group will resume in February. Anyone interested should call Doreen or the church office to register.

The Congregation is reminded to contact the pastors or Deacon Chair, Darlene Mickaels, with any prayer requests.

As we enter 2022, we look forward and are reminded in Lamentations 3:22-23, **“Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning, great is Your faithfulness.”**

–Deacon Roseann Saliba

## JOURNEY TO RESILIENCE

**Moving together through challenges and loss to hope and joy!**

**Are you** struggling with challenges or loss in your life?

**Are you** looking for a safe environment in which to share your thoughts and feelings with others who are experiencing the same challenges/loss?

**You are invited for a time of:**

- Connection with others
- Reflection and interactive discussion
- Group activities and more...

**February 19, March 5 & 19,  
April 2 & 23, May 7, 2022**

Pilgrim Armenian Congregational Church  
3673 N First Street, Fresno  
**HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE**

For information contact Doreen Fischer, (559) 908-0881, [dor82590@yahoo.com](mailto:dor82590@yahoo.com) or church office (559) 229-2915.



# Children's Ministry Update

Hello and Happy New Year!

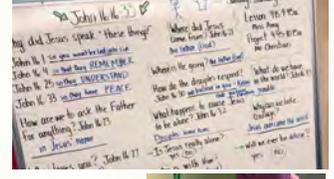
Children's Sunday School concluded the year with Christmas cookie decorating and candy cane crafts in addition to continuing the study of the Gospel of John. Currently, we are heading into the final five chapters while the 3-5 year old class is led through New Testament stories.

Since the garden is slow growing in the winter months, January's projects include a series of winter themed paintings using various art mediums including watercolor, crayon, oil pastel, acrylic, salt, pencil, marker, epsom salt, and glue. Completed projects are on display in the windows of the Christian Education building to be enjoyed by all!

Any Sunday is a great time for children to join in! Classes available for children 3 years through 6th grade.

9-9:15a check in • 9:15-10:15a class

The nursery is open! Nursery care provided for ages 0-2 years during worship service. –Melinda Eritzian, Children's Ministry Director



# Youth Service Project

On January 22, 2022 the students of PACC were given the opportunity to serve our neighbors affected by the Dry Creek fires of 2020. We cleared and chipped wood from a 10-acre area where forest area, and homes were burned. It is a gift to be able to serve others in the name of Christ Jesus, loving our neighbors as we are called to do.



SUNDAY

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY



# PACC CALENDAR OF EVENTS February 2022

<p>9:15 am Adult Sunday School 9:15 am Sunday School 10:30 am Worship/ Dorcas Guild Sunday/ Holy Communion/ Pantry Sunday</p>	<p>6:30pm Fruit of the Spirit women's Fellowship</p>	<p>10:00 am Women's Bible Study, Room 6</p>	<p>7:00 am Men's Forum Executive Board Meeting 7:00 pm Choir Rehearsal, Sanctuary</p>	<p>12:45 pm Dorcas Guild Circle, Overflow Room 6:00 pm High School 7:00 pm Choir Rehearsal 7:30 pm College Bible Study</p>	<p>7:00 am TGIF, Fireside Room 6:00 pm Junior High Bible Study</p>	<p>10:30 am Tabitha Circle,</p>
<p>9:15 am Adult Sunday School 9:15 am Sunday School 10:30 am Worship</p>	<p>10:00 am Dorcas Guild Executive Meeting, Library 6:30pm Fruit of the Spirit women's Fellowship</p>	<p>10:00 am Women's Bible Study, Room 6 6:30 pm Trustees, Overflow Room 7:00 pm Deacons, Fireside 7:00 pm CE Meeting, Zoom</p>	<p>12:45 pm Dorcas Guild Circle, Overflow Room 6:00 pm High School 7:30 pm College Bible Study</p>	<p>7:00 am TGIF, Fireside Room 6:00 pm Junior High Bible Study</p>	<p>7:00 am TGIF, Fireside Room 6:00 pm Junior High Bible Study</p>	<p>7:00 am TGIF, Fireside Room 6:00 pm Junior High Bible Study</p>
<p>9:15 am Adult Sunday School 9:15 am Sunday School 10:30 am Worship</p>	<p>Presidents' Day, Office/ GFLC Are Closed Pilgrim's Progress Articles Due 8:00 am Dorcas Guild Baking 6:30pm Fruit of the Spirit women's Fellowship</p>	<p>10:00 am Women's Bible Study, Room 6 6:30 pm Council Meeting, Overflow</p>	<p>6:00 pm High School 7:30 pm College Bible Study</p>	<p>6:30 pm Vartanants Commemorative Church Service, FAPC 7:00 pm Young Adult Bible Study</p>	<p>7:00 am TGIF, Fireside Room 6:00 pm Junior High Bible Study</p>	<p>7:00 am TGIF, Fireside Room 6:00 pm Junior High Bible Study</p>
<p>9:15 am Adult Sunday School 9:15 am Sunday School 10:30 am Worship Founders Day</p>	<p>6:30pm Fruit of the Spirit women's Fellowship</p>	<p>10:00 am Women's Bible Study, Room 6</p>	<p>6:00 pm High School 7:30 pm College Bible Study</p>	<p>7:00 pm Young Adult Bible Study</p>	<p>7:00 am TGIF, Fireside Room 6:00 pm Junior High Bible Study</p>	<p>7:00 am TGIF, Fireside Room 6:00 pm Junior High Bible Study</p>

**PILGRIM**  
*Armenian*  
CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

3673 North First Street  
Fresno, California 93726-6870

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

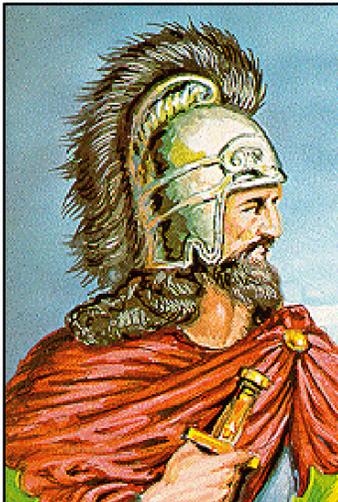
**SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP**

In-person 10:30 am

Online at 10:30 am

On our website: [pilgrimchurch.com](http://pilgrimchurch.com)

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**VARTANANTS  
COMMEMORATION  
CHURCH SERVICE**

**February 24 • 6:30pm**  
**First Armenian Presbyterian Church**

