

St. Sarkis the Warrior and His Son, St. Mardiros

The feast day honoring St. Sarkis is movable. It occurs between January 11th and February 15th. Each year it follows the five-day Fast of Catechumens.

Sarkis was a Greek from the area of Cappadocia on the Anatolian plain. He was a proud, brave Christian and served as a Roman army officer during the reign of Emperor Constantine (roughly 337 A.D.). Sarkis' valor, strength, and bravery earned him the rank of general.

Sarkis used his position of power for spiritual growth, going from town to town purging the land of pagan idols, teaching the Gospel, and building churches where pagan temples once stood. Sarkis had a good model in the piety of the Emperor Constantine.

When Constantine died, Christianity throughout the region came under attack from the new Roman leader, Julian the Apostate. Under his leadership, pagans set about destroying churches and persecuting Christians.

Seeing this, Sarkis prayed. Jesus appeared to him and said, "It is time for you to leave your country and your clan, as did Abraham the Patriarch, and go to a country which I will show you. There you will receive the crown of righteousness prepared for you."

Sarkis left behind his noble title and power and headed with his son, Mardiros, to Armenia, where they were welcomed by King Diran, grandson of King Drtad.

While Sarkis and Mardiros were in Armenia, the Emperor Julian, attempting to take over the known world, continued to move eastward toward Antioch in Syria. Whenever the Roman army came upon Christians, they were instantly killed. Many people fled the invading armies. King Diran urged Sarkis to escape and seek refuge among the Persians.

When Sarkis and his son arrived in Persia, King Shapur, hearing of his bravery, appointed him a commander of the Persian military. As he continued to be victorious in battle, Sarkis also continued to give the credit to God.

When Julian's troops started raiding lands near King Shapur's kingdom, Sarkis was sent to defend the territory. Outnumbered by the Greek and Roman forces, Sarkis' troops were frightened. He told them that if they believed in the Creator of heaven and

earth, their hearts would never be shaken. Many of his soldiers were baptized by the priests traveling with the army, and they succeeded in fending off a Roman attack.

Some of Sarkis' soldiers, who had not been baptized, went to King Shapur and told him that Sarkis was rebelling against the Persian ruler by preaching belief in Jesus. The king called Sarkis back to the palace, where he, his son, and the newly-baptized soldiers were expected to attend a feast honoring the pagan gods.

At the temple, the king asked Sarkis to offer a sacrifice to the pagan gods. Sarkis refused, saying he would only worship the one, true God. The king began to criticize Sarkis and his faith. But Sarkis could not tolerate such talk, so he spat in the king's face and knocked down the temple idols. The king and his followers were enraged by Sarkis' actions, so they killed his son, Mardiros, before his eyes.

The king then ordered Sarkis imprisoned. In prison Sarkis was strengthened by his relationship with the Lord. King Shapur heard of this and ordered Sarkis' execution.

At his execution, Sarkis began to pray. An angel descended from heaven and told him, "Be strong. Do not fear the killers of your body; for the gate of the Kingdom of Heaven is open for you." Upon seeing the angel and understanding the power of everlasting life, many of the pagans who had gathered for the execution became Christians.

Sarkis made one last passionate plea for people to accept Jesus Christ, and then was killed.

His loyal Christian soldiers retrieved Sarkis' body and wrapped it in clean linen with the intention of burying his body honorably. When King Shapur heard of this reverence, he ordered the soldiers killed as well. Eventually, Christians found Sarkis' body and it was sent to Assyria, where it remained until the fifth century, when Mesrob Mashdots received his remains and moved them to Armenia.