



Living the Church Year Lesson Plan: St. James of Nisibis

Ages 9-14

St. James of Nisibis (Sourp Hagop Mdzpnahayr)

Ages: 9-14

Length: 30-40 Minutes

Theme: Faith, Holiness, and Trusting God

Learning Objectives

By the end of the lesson, students will:

- Learn who St. James of Nisibis was.
- Understand why he is honored in the Armenian Church.
- Learn about his participation in the Council of Nicea.
- Hear the famous story of his journey toward Mount Ararat and Noah's Ark.
- Reflect on how they can imitate his faith and devotion.

Opening Prayer (2 Minutes)

Lord Jesus Christ, thank You for the example of Your saints. As we learn about St. James of Nisibis, help us to grow in faith, trust, and love for You. May we follow the examples of the saints and seek to live holy lives. Amen.

Introduction: Who Was St. James of Nisibis? (5 Minutes)

Ask the students:

- Have you ever heard of someone named Hagop (James)? What is the name of our church?
- Why do we honor saints in the Armenian Church?

Explain:

St. James of Nisibis lived in the fourth century, about 1,700 years ago. Although he was partly Assyrian, he was related to St. Gregory the Illuminator and became one of the most beloved saints of the Armenian Church. Many Armenian churches are named after him, and many Armenian boys and men bear the name Hagop (James) because of his influence and holiness. (It is not totally clear which Hagop our St. Hagop church was named after. It was likely James the Apostle, but we can celebrate all three feasts of James (James of Nisibis, James the Brother of the Lord & James the Apostle).

The Life of St. James (8 Minutes)

Tell the story:

St. James was educated in Caesarea, one of the great Christian centers of his time. He became Bishop of Nisibis in Mesopotamia. He attended the First Ecumenical Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. along with the 318 bishops who defended the true faith of the Church. He became famous for his holy life, prayer, fasting, and miracles. Because of the many miracles attributed to him, people called him "**Skantchelakords**", meaning "**Wonder-Worker**."

Discussion

- Why do you think people respected St. James?
 - What qualities made him a good Christian leader?
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The Story of Mount Ararat (10 Minutes)

Tell the famous tradition:

St. James deeply wanted to see Noah's Ark, which had come to rest on Mount Ararat after the Great Flood. Even though he was elderly, he began the difficult climb up the mountain.

As he climbed, he became tired and stopped to rest. While sleeping, an angel appeared and told him that reaching the summit would be impossible. The angel then gave him a piece of Noah's Ark and said: "Take this and satisfy your desire."

St. James accepted God's gift with humility and returned home. Tradition teaches that this piece of the Ark is preserved at Holy Etchmiadzin.

Discussion Questions

- Why did St. James want to find Noah's Ark?
- What does this story teach us about faith?
- How did St. James show humility?

Teaching Point

Sometimes God answers our prayers differently than we expect. St. James did not reach the top of Mount Ararat, but God still blessed him because of his faith.

Activity: Following the Example of St. James (5 Minutes)

Ask students to name qualities they admire in St. James.

Write their answers on the board:

- Faith | Prayer | Courage | Humility | Patience | Trust in God

Then ask:

Which one of these qualities would you like to practice this week?

Allow each student to choose one.

Armenian Church Connection (3 Minutes)

Explain:

The Armenian Church remembers St. James during the Advent season.

He was honored by great Armenian saints:

- St. Gregory of Narek wrote about him.
- St. Nerses the Grace-Filled composed a hymn in his honor called "*Victorious and Holy Father*" (*Haghtogh yev Soorp Hayrabed*).

His feast is also a special day for churches dedicated to St. James and for people named Hagop.

Review Questions

1. Who was St. James of Nisibis?

2. What important church council did he attend?
 3. Why was he called a "Wonder-Worker"?
 4. What mountain did he try to climb?
 5. What did the angel give him?
 6. What virtues did St. James demonstrate?
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Take-Home Challenge

This week, learn more about the example of St. James by choosing one of these:

- Go online and try to find how many Armenian Churches are named Hagop.
- Tell anyone in the church named Hagop or Jack, 'Anoonovd Apres' or Have a Blessed Name Day!
- St. James climbed a dangerous mountain in his old age for his faith. What is the most daring thing you've heard someone do for their faith? What might you do?