

**ՅԱԅՏԱԳՐԻ ԵՐԿՈՒ ՀԱՆԴԻՍԱՎԱՐՆԵՐԷՆ ՊՐ. ԵՂԻԱ ՏԻԳՐԱՆԵԱՆԻ
ՆԵՐԱԾԱԿԱՆ ԽՕՍԲԸ (ԱՆԳԼԵՐԷՆՈՎ)**

Your Holiness, Karekin the Second, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of all Armenians. Your Beatitude, Archbishop Toros Manougian, Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem and Jordan. Your Eminences, the Archbishops, Your Graces, the Bishops, Reverend Fathers, Honourable pilgrims, Respectable guests and audience.

Welcome to Jerusalem, the holiest of holy places in Christendom.

For two millenniums, it has been the spiritual home of the World's three great monotheistic religions - Judaism, Christianity and Islam. No other place in the world evokes stronger passions or more fervent hopes than this tiny city, it is the most sacred spot on earth. Few people would dare to refute that. It is a magnet towards which gravitate pilgrims and tourists from the four corners of the world - a visit that works in them a veritable uplifting and an exhilarating experience.

The city has been home for a vibrant community of Armenians for over 1500 years; in fact, Armenians have been living here ever since the beginning of the 4th century A.D. In 301, 17 centuries ago, Armenia declared Christianity as its state religion - the first nation ever to do so. Since then, and throughout its turbulent history, Armenians have been offering too many costly sacrifices on the altar of Christianity. Soon after the adoption of Christianity, pilgrims began trekking to the Holy Land on a spiritual journey that would rejuvenate their faith and reinforce their commitment to the new religion of peace and love.

Armenians settled in what is now known as the Armenian Compound which comprises the Armenian Monastery and the adjacent Armenian Quarter. Within its boundaries, there are three churches: The St. James Cathedral, built before the Crusader Era, is the jewel in the convent's crown; it forms the core of the Holy See of Jerusalem, while Holy Etchmiadzin remains the spiritual home of the Armenian Nation.

The Holy Archangels' church and convent. This is the first prison of Christ and in its garden there is the Holy Tree to which our Lord was tied and flagellated.

St. Saviour's church and convent, built on the site of the second prison of Christ and its adjacent cemetery where rest the deceased members of the Armenian Community. It is also there that once a year, on April 24, all the members of the Brotherhood, headed by His Beatitude, together with all the members of the Armenian Community, regardless of their political affiliations, stage a solemn procession, and congregate around the monument in the cemetery to honour the memory of the one and a half million Armenian martyrs, who were ruthlessly annihilated in the first genocide of the twentieth century. Speeches are delivered, which embody the eternal struggle of the Armenian Nation which knows how to survive despite all odds.

There are also two schools:- The new theological Seminary of the Armenian Patriarchate. Following the independence of Armenia and the easing of travel restrictions, there has been a steady infusion of young blood from the Motherland. Now some 50 young men, mainly from Armenia, receive their education there in preparation for their ordination into priesthood.

The Seminary has over centuries provided priests to the Armenian nation. In fact, many of the primates in various countries of the World, are graduates of the Theological School of the Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem.

The Sts. Tarkmanchatz Secondary School that imparts education to the children of the Armenian Community. For 70 years now, it has been shining like a beacon of hope, guiding generation after generation the children of our nation. It is a great blessing to our community in its contribution towards the preservation and propagation of our Armenian cultural heritage. The mission of all Armenian schools in the diaspora should be to save the Armenian language from extinction; this too is our sacred mission. Our message to our students is to infuse in their heart a profound love for our fledgling fatherland, to spare no efforts in upholding its national interests, as now, more than ever before, it stands in need of brave, dynamic, educated and dedicated young ladies and gentlemen.

It also has its printing press. The Mardigian Museum, and the residential quarters of the priests (The Bardizatagh) which was restored in 1993 by His Beatitude, Patriarch Torkom Manoogian.

The Armenian Compound is home for 2,500 Armenians, an equal number are scattered in various parts of the Holy Land.

Prior to the exodus of 1948, the Armenian presence here numbered 20,000 strong. For half a century now, the Armenian Community in Jerusalem has been steadily dwindling, prey to a relentless attrition that has brought the figure drastically down. Nevertheless, Armenians have continued to be a dynamic presence in the sacred city. The numerical factor is irrelevant, as the Armenian Patriarchate is one of the three major guardians of the Christian Holy Places, the other two being the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and Catholic Custodian of the Holy Places.

Among these shrines are the church of the Holy Sepulchre in the old city, the sanctuary of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives, the church of the Virgin Mary in the Valley of the Gethsemane, and the church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, besides the historical monasteries of Jaffa and Ramlé which are exclusively Armenian property.

The heavy responsibility of zealously safeguarding the rights and privileges of the Armenians in these holy shrines is a monumental duty that has to be shouldered by the Armenian Patriarchate.

Every Armenian has two capital cities, -- Yerevan, the capital of his Fatherland, and the Holy City of Jerusalem, and as such, it is incumbent on every Armenian, as a practising Christian, to pay a pilgrimage to Jerusalem at least once in his lifetime, just as every Armenian should likewise pay at least one visit to his homeland - Armenia, the land of his ancestors, and to Holy Etchmiadzin, the spiritual home of the entire Armenian nation.

Today, we are gathered here, to honour His Holiness, on his historic visit to Jerusalem, on the occasion of the Armenian Christmas, the dawning of a new year, of a new century and a new millennium.

We shall now pass to our programme:

Inside the convent, operate two organizations. They periodically provide the community with various kinds of entertainments - Cultural activities, lectures, sports, social gatherings, educational gatherings, and they have their Scouts' movements. Their presence in the community is undeniably of paramount importance, as they are considered an extension of the school.

The Homenetmen or the Armenian Athletic General Union was founded in Jerusalem in the year 1935, having for their aim the preservation and propagation of the priceless Armenian national and cultural heritage. To keep the members closely knit together, they introduce sports, and other activities. They have their choir and scouts movements. The songs on the programme are conducted by Mr. Varoujan Markarian accompanied on the piano by Mr. Tavit Boghossian, and the dances led by Mr. Dickran Sahagian. Mr. Serop Sahagian, chairman of the club, shall make a few words on this occasion.

The Hoyetchmen - The Armenian Young Men's Association, was founded in the year 1937, with the aim of familiarizing the community with and perpetuating our rich cultural legacy. The members of this association shall present their programme. An item on the programme which will be presented by Mrs. Aline Balian, is the Armenian national costumes' presentation. Twenty years ago, Armenian ladies prepared these costumes and made three consecutive, successful presentations. They were invited even to Europe. We ask you to closely observe the sumptuous style of the costumes, the elaborate embroideries, the harmonious colours which match perfectly together. Another item on the programme is a poetry recitation, by the poet Dr. Anoush Nakashian, she will recite "The Dance of Sassoun" by Kevork Emin. Mr. Hagop Shohmelian, the chairman of the Hoyetchmen for a long time, and now the chairman of the Armenian Democratic Party, shall make a few befitting words on this occasion.

We are indeed fortunate to have among us a visiting poet from Yerevan, Armenia, Sylva Gaboodigian whose poetry our children have studied and recited over the years. Now she is here in person and will be reciting to us a poem she has written on Jerusalem on the occasion of the New Millennium.

Again we are fortunate to have with us tonight the choir of the Eastern Diocese in New York, and its famous conductor Mr. Khoren Meikhanjian. He is a graduate of the National Conservatory of Yerevan. For 20 years, he was the second conductor of the Armenian State Choir. He is a graduate of Holy Etchmiadzin. For 40 years, he has conducted the choir of the Holy Etchmiadzin Cathedral. In 1980, he wrote the Holy Mass (Badarak) which was ratified by an encyclical by His Holiness the late Catholicos Vazken. In 1991, he received the title of professor. At present, he is conductor of the St. Vartan Choir, and is at the same time in charge of the music of the Diocese.

Maro Partamian is the recipient of several international awards and honours. She has performed with major opera companies and symphony orchestras, has given solo recitals and has appeared in several documentary films. "Who is who?" The world of women printed in Cambridge, England, and has several records. Armenian music has always been close to her heart since her childhood, and she sings in the Armenian church wherever she is. This is her second visit to the Holy Land.

Hasmik Meikhanjian is a graduate of the Komidas National Conservatory. For 5 years she took part in the Radio and T.V. choral groups of Armenia as a soloist and second conductor. She has performed concerts in several European capital cities. She is now the soloist of the St. Vartan Cathedral choir in New York.

Arpie Kouzouian, our soloist is from Cambridge Massachusetts. She works for the department of mental health. She has been working for the chronically and mentally ill population for 12 years. Arpie sings in the Holy Trinity church choir, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and has been singing in our choirs for over 30 years. Arpie has sung at the April 24th memorial service at the "State House" in Boston, Massachusetts.

Armenians are a music loving people. They resort to music both when happy or even when sad. Songs and music have accompanied them in their long march towards civilization.

Shakespeare, in his play "The Merchant of Venice" says:-

"The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treason, stratagems and spoils.
The motions of his spirit are dull as night,
And his affections dark as Erebus,
Let no such man be trusted,
Mark the music."