



## **Saint Gregory of Datev; Soorp Krikor Datevatzi**

A.D. 1346-1410

This famous luminary of the Armenian Church was born in T'mkaberd, a city in the province of Vayots Dsor, in Armenia. His pious parents, who lost their young children, prayed incessantly to God to give them another child and appealed for the intercession of St. Gregory the Illuminator. When the child was born, he was named Gregory at baptism.

At the age of fifteen, Gregory of Datev (Krikor Datevatsi) entered the Monastery of Aprakunik to study under the renowned philosopher and theologian St. John of Orot'n (Soorp Hovhanness Vorotnetsi 1315–1388), with whom he remained for twenty-eight years. He became a great defender of the character of the Armenian Church and a brilliant scholar; he knew Latin fluently and had studied the Greek philosophers extensively. Along with his teacher, Gregory traveled in 1373 to Jerusalem, where he was ordained a celibate priest. He received the degree of doctor of the church in Erzinka (present-day Erzincan, eastern Turkey) and in 1387 was elevated to the rank of supreme doctor (dzarakooyv vartabed) of the church at the Monastery of Aprakunik. At the death of John of Orot'n and upon his express wish, Gregory became the dean of the theological school, which in 1390 moved to the Monastery of Datev in the Siunik province of Armenia. Because of the extensive notes and records made by Gregory, a portion of the literary legacy of John of Orot'n has survived to this day.

During Gregory's tenure as head of the Monastery of Datev, the enclave reached its flourishing pinnacle as a center of science, culture, art, and spiritual life. It had three schools (philosophy and theology, calligraphy and manuscript illumination, and music), where they taught philosophy, religion, Armenian language and grammar, literature, history, rhetoric, manuscript copying, miniature painting, natural sciences and astronomy, mathematics, architecture, music and singing, pedagogy and social sciences, and other subjects. Studies lasted seven to eight years. The monastery had a rich library, with more than ten thousand manuscripts and books. Gregory himself also taught courses on philosophy, theology, grammar, musical theory, and other subjects. His hundreds of students, among them famous writers like Tovma Medzopetsi and Arakel Siunetsi, played a remarkable role in Armenian cultural and religious life. The Monastery of Datev was widely known as a theological and educational center. However, the monastery would be set on fire and destroyed by Shahrokh, youngest son of Tamerlane (Timur Leng) in 1435.

Described as a silver tongued, pious and revered man of faith, Gregory was known as the saint who could evoke respect from Christian and Muslim alike, opposing tyrannical masters and curing those in need of a doctor. The saint healed the ailing by laying of hands, and cast out demons. It is believed that even Tamerlane and his son have come to kneel before the saint.

In 1408, apparently due to the political unrest after the death of Tamerlane in 1403, Datevatzi and his students moved to the monastery of Medzop, near Lake Van, but returned to Datev after a year. The great teacher and writer passed away on December 25, 1409, after a short  
Line art by Kalyn Babikyan, based on icon by Daniel Varoujan Hejinian at Saints Vartanantz Armenian Orthodox Church in Chelmsford, Massachusetts. Overview written by Deacon James Magarian.

illness at the age of 64. Before his death, knowing of his imminent passing, the saint celebrated the liturgy, blessed his disciples and gave up his spirit glorifying the Lord. His tomb is located adjacent to Sts. Peter & Paul Cathedral at Datev Monastery. He has been described as the 4th Illuminator by those who keep his memory and teachings alive to this day, as well as on carvings on his tomb.

Until April 23, 2015, when the martyrs of the Armenian Genocide were canonized, Gregory of Datev was the last saint recognized by the Armenian Church.

Regarded to be the greatest teacher of the Armenian Church, St. Gregory of Datev's most famous work is the *Book of Questions (Kirk Hartsmants)*, which examines questions of faith and has been compared to the works of Western theologians like Thomas Aquinas and Albertus Magnus. This book also contained a critique of the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church, since Catholic missionaries had entered Armenia in the fourteenth century and created the Armenian branch of the Dominican order - called *Fratres Unitores* - with proselytizing aims. He authored numerous significant theological treatises, commentaries of the works of Aristotle and David the Invincible Philosopher, and two collections of sermons (one for the summer and one for the winter). These homilies, whose style and depth set a new standard for Armenian preaching, were completed in 1407. In his two commentaries on the Lord's Prayer, Gregory examines and reveals the deep significance and meaning of each word of the Lord's Prayer, thereby providing ways for the faithful to apply the prayer to their lives. Today in Yerevan, Armenia, the Matenadaran (manuscripts library) preserves a Bible copied in 1297 which Gregory of Datev illustrated in 1378. He is often referred to as "the second Gregory the Illuminator," in addition to being compared to the Saints, John Chrysostom and Gregory Nazianzus the Theologian.

Gregory of Datev dominated the thought and orientation of the Armenian Church in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as monk, author, educator, theologian, philosopher, scientist, orator, apologist, painter, calligrapher, and polyglot.

His feast day is observed on the Saturday before the fourth Sunday of Great Lent. At each Divine Liturgy of the Armenian Church, St. Gregory of Datev is remembered during intercessory prayers.

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