

Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian

O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, faint heartedness, lust of power, and idle talk.

But give rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience and love to Thy servant.

Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own transgressions and not to judge my brother, for Thou art blessed for ages of ages.

Amen.

The Life of Venerable Ephraim the Syrian

St. Ephraim the Syrian



St. Ephraim^[1] the Syrian, a teacher of repentance, was born into a Christian family in the beginning of the IV century in the town of Nisibis^[2] (in Mesopotamia^[3]) on the easternmost frontier of the Roman Empire.

From his youth St. Ephraim was in obedience to Bishop James^[4] of the Nisibian Church. St. James was a participant of the I Ecumenical Council at Nicaea^[5] (325). It was under the tenure of St. James that St. Ephraim was ordained a deacon, a rank in which he remained until his death. St. Ephraim instructed everyone, — both verbally and in writing, — in repentance, faith and piety, and denounced the Arian and other heresies.

After the capture of Nisibis by the Persians in 363, St. Ephraim resettled, along with the other refugees, to the city of Edessa^[6]. There he continued to serve in the church, preach the word of God and help people in works of charity and love.

The end of St. Ephraim's life was crowned with a heroic deed of compassion and love. There was a dire famine in Edessa and the saint persuaded the wealthy to render aid to those in need. From the offerings of the wealthy, he bought food for the hungry, built a facility for the elderly and personally took part in attending to the needs of the poor and feeble. St. Ephraim died in his cell near Edessa in the summer of 375, at the end of the famine.

St. Ephraim wrote his works in Syriac^[7], most of them in the style of lyrically poetic odes. St. Basil the Great^[8], Bishop of Caesarea of Cappadocia^[9] was an admirer of St. Ephraim and greatly valued his theological knowledge. The present day Church Typicon prescribes that certain of his writings are to be read during Great Lent. St. Ephraim also wrote many prayers and hymns. His Prayer of Repentance “O Lord and Master of my life...”, which summons Christians to spiritual renewal, is read frequently during Great Lent.

The Russian Orthodox Church commemorates St. Ephraim the Syrian on February 10.

1. Ephraim – from the Hebrew, *fruitful*.
2. Nisibis – present day Nusaybin, in southeast Turkey.
3. Mesopotamia – from the Greek, *between rivers*, i.e. between the Tigris and the Euphrates.
One of the most ancient centers of civilization.
4. James – from the Hebrew, *hee*; Genesis 25:26. A similar name is found in ancient Mesopotamian tablets of the XVIII century BC.
5. Nicaea – ancient city of the Roman Empire, site at the modern village of Iznik in northwest Turkey at the east end of lake Iznik.
6. Edessa – present day Urfa, southeastern part of Turkey.
7. Syriac – a dialect of Aramaic used as the liturgical language by several eastern Churches.
8. Basil – from the Greek, *royal*.
9. Caesarea of Cappadocia – capital of the Roman Province of Cappadocia, present day Kayseri in central Turkey.

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