

Life of St. Ephraim the Syrian

Ephraim was born early in the 4th century to Christian parents in Nisibis. He always lived ascetically and devoted himself to prayer, fasting, writing and studying Holy Scriptures. He composed many hymns, poems, commentaries and homilies throughout his life.

Ephraim lived during an exciting time in the Church. The First Ecumenical Council, held in 325, condemned the teachings of Arius, who believed that Christ was a created being. Heretics often composed songs with catchy tunes that spread the false teachings about Jesus. The popularity of these songs greatly disturbed the young monk Ephraim. He wrote new words and set them to the same tunes. Soon, songs telling the truth about God and Jesus Christ replaced the words from the heretical Arian teachings.

In 363, Ephraim fled to Edessa when the city was surrendered to Persia's King Sapor. There he taught the scriptures to the city's many nonbelievers. By this time, his poetry and hymns had become an essential part of the church life and were chanted in the services throughout the territory of Syria.

In 371, Ephraim traveled to Caesarea, where he was eventually ordained a deacon by Archbishop Basil the Great.

Ephraim continued to write hymns. One of his best-known works is the famous Lenten prayer that begins, "O Lord and Master of my life ... ". He died in 373.

*"O Lord and Master of my life,
take from me the spirit of sloth, despair, lust of power and idle talk;
but give rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience and love to your servant,
Yes, O Lord and King,
grant that I may see my own transgressions and not judge my brother,
for blessed are You unto ages of ages. Amen."*