

November 29

Jacob of Serugh (451-521) pastor

Today the West Syrian church commemorates one of its greatest writers and poets, Jacob of Serugh. The story of his life is told in the History written by his contemporary James of Edessa.

Born in 451 in the village of Qurtam on the Euphrates, Jacob studied at Edessa's renowned theological school. At the age of twenty-two he became a monk, and soon began to transform his meditation of Scripture into strikingly beautiful religious poems.

After his ordination to the priesthood, Jacob became an ecclesiastical visitor for the local church of Hawra, a position that allowed him to become acquainted with all of Syria. During the last years of his life, in 518, he was elected bishop of Batnan-Serugh. Jacob died on November 29, 521, and because of his literary gifts, the church of Syria honored him with the title "harp of the Holy Spirit," which his master St. Ephrem had also received.

Of his 763 poems, only about a third have survived. In these works, frequent, incisive references to the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures illuminate Jacob's evocations of the beauty of God's actions in history, as they are reflected in the merciful gaze of Christ.

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

ANGLICANS:

Day of intercession and thanksgiving for the missionary work of the church

WESTERN CATHOLICS:

Saturninus (3rd cent.), bishop of Tolosa and martyr (Spanish-Mozarabic calendar)

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (20 hatur/hedar):

Anianus (1st cent.), 2nd patriarch of Alexandria (Coptic Orthodox Church)

Theodore the Stratilate (d. 319), martyr (Coptic Catholic Church)

LUTHERANS:

Saturninus, martyr at Rome

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:

Paramonus of Bisalthia and 370 companions (d. 250), martyrs

WEST SYRIAN ORTHODOX:

Jacob of Serugh, vescovo