



**ST
EPHRAEM
THE SYRIAN**

306-373 AD



BIOGRAPHY OF:

St Ephraem

Deacon and doctor of the Church.

He is the most important writer of the Syrian patristic age

Known as one of the greatest of the Syrian fathers and poets.



Benedictin Abbey
Beuron, Germany

The Syrians venerated him, giving him especially the title of "**Malphono**" **ملفنا** the teacher; and also called him "**Harp of the Holy Spirit,**" "**eloquent mouth,...**" **doctor of the world,**" and "**pillar of the Church.**"



Several of his hymns were adopted in the Syrian liturgies and his praises were sung by the whole East. He was born at Nisibis of Christian parents, became an ascetic, and was made headmaster of the School of Nisibis.



The city was besieged by Sapor II in 338, 346, and 350 and passed into his hands in 363.

St Ephraem and most of the Christians went to the Roman territory and lived at Edessa where most of his writings were composed.



On his journey to Edessa he rescued the people of Samosata from the influence of false teaching of a counteract heresy by teaching Orthodoxy in hymns.



He seems to have resumed his hermit's life near the city. He traveled to Caesarea to see St Basil in 370 after seeing him in a dream as a column of fire reaching from earth to heaven, and is said to have received diaconate from him.



He groaned in spirit when he saw him seated in a magnificent pulpit arrayed with shining garments. However when he saw the Holy Spirit in a shape like a dove sitting upon his shoulder suggesting to him the word, St Ephraem turned to praise him.

One example of the influence of St Ephraem's teaching on St Basil

It had been usual at Caesarea in the Doxology to say, “Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, to the Holy Ghost,” but after St Ephraem’s visit, St Basil inserted "and" before the third clause.

When the people murmured, he answered that his Syrian visitor taught him this 'and' as necessary for the more clear manifestation of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.



St Basil gives two reasons for trusting his Syrian friend: First, that St Ephraem led a very ascetic life. Secondly, that "St Ephraem is a thinker, and has a thorough knowledge of the divine philosophy,"



St Ephraem wrote about the first Adam-second Adam typology which would demand as a logical extension the equation of Mary, not with Eve, but with the earth from which the first Adam sprang: *The virgin earth of old gave birth to the Adam who is Lord of the earth, but today another virgin has given birth to the Adam who is Lord of heaven*

MAIN WRITINGS

St Ephraem was an extraordinarily prolific writer; Sozomen (III. 16) acknowledged that he had written 300,000 verses.

St Ephraem was the earliest advocate of the poetic genre of the madroshe, the teaching songs, in communicating the Orthodox faith of the Church to a wide audience.

Many of St Ephraem's poetic works were translated into Greek by the latter part of the 4th century by Flavian of Antioch and Diodore of Tarsus.

As Sts Basil and Gregory were both strongly influenced by Origen, St Ephraem's independence is the most remarkable.

The subjects of the hymns were the life of Christ, including His Nativity, Baptism, Fasting, Ministry, Passion, Resurrection and Ascension. He also wrote about repentance, the dead, and the martyrs.

His major works fall into three categories:

1- Exegetical

His commentaries are in prose, and in the Antiochian tradition, excellent in their exposition. There are extant commentaries (Syriac) on *Genesis* and *Exodus* and Armenian versions of treatises on *Tatian's Diatessaron*, *Acts of the Apostles*, *Epistles of St Paul* (including three to Corinthians and excluding one to Philemon).

2- Dogmatic-Polemical

Practically all his treatises are polemical - against Bardaisan, Marcion, etc. The fantastical tenets of Bardaisan, A Gnostic who flourished at the end of the 2nd century, had been embodied in 150 psalms. To combat their influence, St Ephraem composed numerous hymns and trained young women who desired the conventual life, to sing them in chorus.

On Feasts of the Lord, days of the martyrs, and days of the week St Ephraem would gather round him his choirs, and so the poems of Bardaisan lost their influence.

3- Homiletic

These are in meter and the homilies usually run into equisyllabic lines (seven-syllable lines - the Ephraemic meter). His moralizing discourses, monitory or penitential, form the greater part of his works. There are four poems against Julian the Apostate.

His poems are doctrinal, moral, polemical, liturgical, poems of Nisibis etc. and "his harp resounds to the praises of St Mary more frequently than that of any other poet or orator of Christian antiquity.

He loves to sing of her stainless virginity, her truly divine maternity." (Bardenhewer).

At an early date his works were translated
into Greek, Armenian, Coptic, Arabic, and
Ethiopian.

He wrote in *Hymns Preserved in Armenian*,
no. 1:

*Blessed is the person who has consented to
become the close friend of faith and of
prayer:*

*he lives in singlemindedness and makes
prayer and faith stop by with him.*

*Prayer that rises up in someone's heart
serves to open up for us the door of heaven:
that person stands in converse with the Divinity
and gives pleasure to the Son of God.*

*Prayer makes peace with the Lord's anger
and with the vehemence of his wrath.*

*In this way too, tears that well up in the eyes can open the door of
compassion.*



Pointure sur bois (0.34x0.29) fin 11e siècle. Sinaï, monastère Ste Catherine



Glory be to God Forever.

Amen.