

April 17

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Simeon Bar Sabbae (d. 341) pastor and martyr

On the fourteenth day of Nisan of the year 341, Good Friday for the Christians of Syria, the catholicos Simeon Bar Sabbae of Seleucia-Ctesifont was martyred together with one hundred members of his flock. They were all bishops, priests or deacons of the East Syrian church. The Persian king Sapor II had ordered their death in the hope of stifling Christian opposition to war and eliminating the threat he felt Christians posed to the kingdom of Persia.

Historical facts about Simeon's life are limited. It is known that he was elected catholicos of Seleucia-Ctesifont after his predecessor was dismissed, and that he had to wait until the previous catholicos had died before beginning his ministry. There is a relative abundance of information concerning the last phase of Simeon's life, which culminated in martyrdom.

The king of Persia had ordered taxes to be doubled in order to meet the country's growing war expenses. Simeon, aware of the dire poverty in which many of his faithful lived, refused to obey Sapor's decree. Christians were immediately persecuted, and their churches were destroyed. When they still refused to pay the new tax, Simeon was arrested along with the clergy who had led the opposition.

Sapor used many tactics to try to convince Simeon to change his mind, but none of them worked. Simeon shed his own blood after watching his companions die one by one.

The commemoration of Simeon Bar Sabbae, celebrated by the Assyrian and Chaldean churches on the sixth Sunday of summer, soon spread to the Byzantine East, but it almost never appears in West Syrian calendars.

BIBLICAL READINGS

2 Tim 2:1-10; Jn 15:17-16:2

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (9 barmudah/miyazya):

Zosima of Palestine (6th cent.), monk (Coptic Orthodox Church)

LUTHERANS:

Louis de Berquin (d. 1529), witness to the point of bloodshed in France

Max Joseph Metzger (d. 1944), witness to the point of bloodshed in Bavaria

MARONITES:

Agapitus I (d. 536), pope; *Anthusa* (8th cent.), nun

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:

Simeon Bar Sabbae, bishop of Persia, *and companions*, martyrs

Acacius (5th cent.), bishop of Melitene

Nicetas of Albania and Serres (d. 1808), neomartyr (Serbian Church)