

## ***Lighting Fire Means “Burning the cold”***

The other belief behind these customs was that by lighting a bonfire in the middle of winter they are “Burning the Winter,” which is equivalent to the American tradition called “Ground Hog Day,” meaning that spring is near.

Like many ancient nations, Armenians believed in the cleansing power of fire. The fire would bring better weather patterns, their fields would yield abundant crops and their marriage would abundantly blessed. It is interesting to note that at the end of the celebration they would scatter the ashes of their bonfire in their farms, stables and orchards.

Fire is a symbol of sun and light. It was considered sacred. The family nest or the roof was called “Ojakh” (Fire place) and “Dzookh” (Smoke) and parishioners the “Dzkhagan,” which means somebody coming from a household and belonging to the larger house of the Church.

As previously mentioned, this was a pagan custom, which made its way into Christian life, as have many other customs. Pagan names of this custom are “Derundez” and “Meede”.

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Presentation of our Lord

The publication of this pamphlet was made possible through  
the “Der Nerses Manoogian Publication Fund”

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Educational Series

## ***Tradition of Diarnuntarach***

### ***Presentation of our Lord***

Diaruntarach is the feast of presentation of baby Jesus to the Temple 40 days after the nativity.

“When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him.

It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.

Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what

# Feast of Light

was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

**"Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."** (Luke 2:22-32)

The major tradition tied to Diarnuntarach is lighting a bonfire in front of the church and in neighborhood streets. This was a pagan tradition which was incorporated into Christian life with the understanding that fire is a source of light which is a symbol of Jesus.

On the eve of the feast, the priest lights a candle from the altar and invites the parishioners to light their candles from that candle and carry it to their homes.

The privilege of lighting the bonfire was given to the newlywed grooms. The first bonfire would be lit in the courtyard of the church and then people would take smoldering wood from that and light bonfires in their streets. In the province of Van, the priest would invite newly-wed grooms to church and let them wear robes and at the end of the ceremony participate in the procession, carrying officially the light from church to the world.

This fire symbolizes the idea of love and family, since all the newlyweds traditionally would dance around the fire, and when the flames decreased, they would jump over the fire together as couples, believing that their life would be free of mishaps and they would have a pleasant spring.

Over this fire would jump as well barren women and brides who had given birth to a child but were still in their 40<sup>th</sup> day. In the case of barren women, the object was to be cured of barrenness, and in the case of the latter the object was to be cleansed, since it was believed that after giving birth a woman was unclean and she needed to go through a process of cleansing, which is technically called the process of churching. Today, when we bring our babies to church for Karasounk, in effect we are doing two things: Presenting the child to the Altar of God, and helping the mother to be cleansed.



The newlywed couple dancing around the fire in Armenia.

**"People believed that by lighting a bonfire in the middle of winter they are "Burning the Winter," which is equivalent to the American tradition called "Ground Hog Day," meaning that spring is near.**



Young people dancing around the fire hoping that their marital prospects will improve.

St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Apostolic Church

DIARNUNTA RACH



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