

# St. Ephrem the Syrian

June 9

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306–373 • Mesopotamia (present-day Turkey)

Ephrem grew up Nisibis, a city often besieged, attacked, and passed from ruler to ruler as the Romans and Persians struggled for power in the region. Now it was a time of peace in Nisibis. The Romans were in control, and people of many different religions lived in the city.

Ephrem was a Christian teacher and deacon. Because he was a teacher, Ephrem wanted to do his part to teach people of different religions about Jesus. He loved God so much that he wanted others to love God, too.

Ephrem's love for God overflowed into song. He wrote beautiful hymns: chants soft and low, powerful and glorious, joyful and sad. He knew that beautiful music touches the heart.

Everyone who sang and listened to Ephrem's words learned the truth about Jesus. He wrote hundreds and hundreds of hymns—each one a little lesson in praise of God.

But peace in Nisibis did not last. The king of Persia threatened to conquer the city, and the new Roman emperor hated the Christians and refused to help them so long as they remained true to Christ. After many attempts to take the city by force failed, the Romans agreed to give it to the Persians to stop the war. The Persian king cruelly persecuted the Christians, forcing them to flee Nisibis if they wanted to remain safe. Ephrem and other Christians found refuge in the city of Edessa. There, too, Ephrem found much work to do as a teacher. Many more people needed to learn the truth about Jesus!

Ephrem continued to write hymns. He led a choir of female singers in the middle of the market square. The shoppers would stop to listen to the beautiful voices and come away praising Jesus in their hearts.

Near the end of his life, a terrible famine struck Edessa. Ephrem spoke to the wealthy of the city and convinced them to give food to the poor and starving. Soon he withdrew to a cave and died a holy death in prayer and solitude.

St. Ephrem, help my love for God be a song in my heart!