

Lesson 25 - Exaltation of the Precious Cross

Objectives

By the end of this lesson the student should know that:

- Know that the precious cross was unearthed by St Helena and placed in Jerusalem's Church of the Resurrection in the fourth century.
- Know that the cross was captured by Persian invaders then recovered by Emperor Heraclius in the seventh century.
- Recognize that the Great Feast of the Exaltation of the Precious Cross celebrates both these events with special ceremonies honoring the cross.
- Understand that the cross is a symbol of Christ's victory over sin and death through obedience and love.

For the Catechist

The impetus to search for the cross of Christ ultimately stemmed from the experience of Constantine the Great before the battle of the Milvian Bridge (see Lesson 18). Upon the discovery of the cross, Constantine's mother, St. Helena, sent a portion to her son, and it became the centerpiece of the imperial treasury in the new Christian capital, Constantinople.

Our Church currently observes three festivals of the precious and life-giving cross during the year, each one with a slightly different focus. They are:

- ***The Great Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (September 14)*** - originally celebrated in Jerusalem and commemorating the discovery of the cross by St Helena and its enthronement in the Church of the Resurrection as well as its restoration by Emperor Heraclius who recovered it from the Persians. This is the feast that is the focus of this lesson.
- ***The Veneration of the Holy Cross (Third Sunday in the Great Fast)*** - another Jerusalem custom whose purpose is to encourage the faithful to complete the observances of the Great Fast by reminding them of the saving passion of Christ.
- ***The Procession of the Holy Cross (August 1)*** - an old custom of the Church in Constantinople. The cross would be carried in procession through the various quarters of the city on each day of the Dormition Fast, beginning on this day, to sanctify the city and deliver it from the plagues of summer.

This lesson should be held before or during the Feast of the Exaltation of the Precious Cross which runs from September 14* through the 23rd. Since many church school programs have yet to begin at that time, you may wish to postpone this lesson until the Great Fast, adjusting your presentation to include the aims of the Veneration of the Holy Cross, mentioned above. Alternatively, you may present it after Lesson 18 to stress the connection with Constantine's acceptance of Christianity.

Materials Needed:

Opening Prayer: Icon corner, student texts

Introduction: Easel or wall pads, markers,

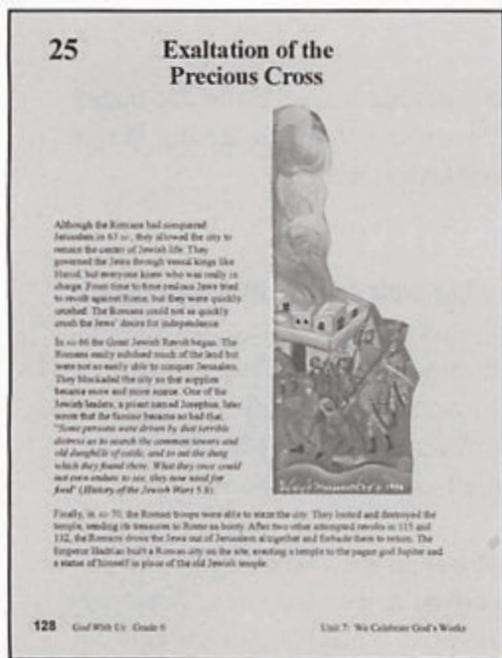
Guided Reading: Abingdon's Bible Maps for Children, Bible

Activity A: Cross, candles, prayer sheets

Activity B: Come Bless the Lord Icon Packet #21 and Teaching Pics #F2.

Activity C: Kingdom Tree Worksheet

4. Guided Reading, Page 128



Before the reading, **summarize the objectives of the lesson** on a wall pad or easel pad so that the page can be preserved and used for review next week.

Have the students read Christ's prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem before He was arrested (Matthew 23:37-38) and on His way to be crucified (Luke 23:27-30).

Then have the students **read the three paragraphs on page 128** to see how these prophecies were fulfilled. Ask:

- When were these prophecies fulfilled? (*AD 70-135*)
- How many years was that after Christ said them? (*c. 40-100 years*)
- Who fulfilled them? (*The Romans*)
- Why did the Romans destroy Jerusalem (*The Jews had repeatedly revolted.*)

Point out that ancient cities usually had walls around them to keep invaders out; invaders would usually surround the walls and starve the people into surrendering by keeping supplies from getting in.

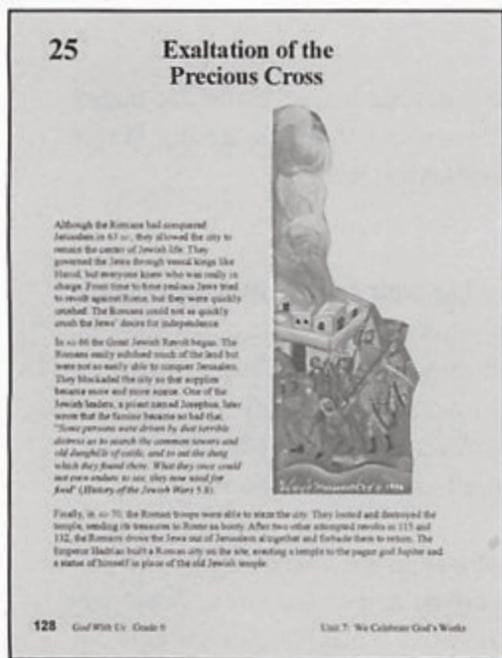
Say that after the Romans finally destroyed the city in AD 135, they built a Roman city called Aelia on the same site but would not allow Jews to live there. The Christians who lived there remembered the places of Christ's suffering; but because of the Roman Persecutions, there were no churches on these sites.

Using the sketch of Jerusalem in *Abingdon's Bible Maps* show that Golgotha, the place of Christ's death and burial, was outside the city walls at the time of Christ. Later the city expanded and Golgotha is now inside the city walls.

Background Reading (Fasting):

"Since the cross always remembers the central act of our salvation, this feast (September 14) is traditionally solemnized in the East as a day of fasting in honor of our Lord who suffered on the cross. Special celebrations on the Saturdays and Sundays before and after the feast focus on the theme of the meaning of the Cross and emphasize its importance. They invite us to follow closely after our Lord Jesus Christ, who taught, 'if a man wishes to come after me, he must deny his very self, take up his cross and follow in my steps' (Mk 8:34)" (*LLII* 46).

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"Since the cross always remembers the central act of our salvation, this feast (September 14) is traditionally solemnized in the East as a day of fasting in honor of our Lord who suffered on the cross. Special celebrations on the Saturdays and Sundays before and after the feast focus on the theme of the meaning of the Cross and emphasize its importance. They invite us to follow closely after our Lord Jesus Christ, who taught, 'if a man wishes to come after me, he must deny his very self, take up his cross and follow in my steps' (Mk 8:34)" (*LLII* 46).

4. Guided Reading, Page 128

25 **Exaltation of the Precious Cross**



Although the Romans had conquered Jerusalem in 63 BC, they allowed the city to remain the center of Jewish life. They governed the Jews through vassal kings like Herod, but everyone knew who was really in charge. From time to time zealous Jews tried to revolt against Rome, but they were quickly crushed. The Romans could not as quickly crush the Jews' desire for independence.

In AD 66 the Great Jewish Revolt began. The Romans easily subdued much of the land but were not so easily able to conquer Jerusalem. They blockaded the city so that supplies became more and more scarce. One of the Jewish leaders, a priest named Josephus, later wrote that the famine became so bad that, "Some persons were driven by that terrible distress as to search the common sewers and old dunghills of cattle, and to eat the dung which they found there. What they once could not even endure to see, they now used for food" (History of the Jewish Wars 5.8).

Finally, in AD 70, the Roman troops were able to seize the city. They looted and destroyed the temple, sending its treasures to Rome as booty. After two other attempted revolts in 115 and 132, the Romans drove the Jews out of Jerusalem altogether and forbade them to return. The Emperor Hadrian built a Roman city on the site, erecting a temple to the pagan god Jupiter and a statue of himself in place of the old Jewish temple.

God with Us Grade 6 Unit 7: We Celebrate God's Works **128**

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Background Reading (Fasting):

"Since the cross always remembers the central act of our salvation, this feast (September 14) is traditionally solemnized in the East as a day of fasting in honor of our Lord who suffered on the cross. Special celebrations on the Saturdays and Sundays before and after the feast focus on the theme of the meaning of the Cross and emphasize its importance. They invite us to follow closely after our Lord Jesus Christ, who taught, 'if a man wishes to come after me, he must deny his very self, take up his cross and follow in my steps' (Mk 8:34)" (*LLII 46*).

Seeking the Cross Pages 129-130



If this lesson is being taught after Lesson 18, review with the students Constantine's experience of the cross that led to the end of persecution and the ultimate Christianization of the Roman Empire.

Otherwise, simply begin by having the students **read the first two paragraphs of this section.** If the students have viewed *Time Travel Through the Bible*, remind them of the work of biblical archaeologists shown there. Note that it has been said that St Helena was the "first biblical archaeologist" because of her search for the precious Cross.

Alternatively, **ask the students** what historical relics we might find if we started digging beneath our church? (*Indian, colonial items*) Then ask what one might expect to find digging in the Holy Land? (*Old or New Testament artifacts*) Note that archaeologists are still exploring these areas and are always finding items of historical importance.

Read the remaining paragraphs of the section, noting that the Church of the Resurrection (what Western Christians call the Holy Sepulcher) has been destroyed and rebuilt many times over the centuries. Note that during the Crusades the original church and the separate shrines of Calvary and the tomb were placed under one

Background Reading (The Bronze Serpent):

"The Jews during their journey in the desert were bitten by serpents, (as we read in the book of Numbers: 'With their patience worn out by the journey, the people complained against God and Moses: 'Why have you brought us up from Egypt to die in this desert, where there is no food or water? We are disgusted with this wretched food'. In punishment the Lord sent among the people serpents, which bit the people, so that many of them died.) To heal the people, Moses, following God's order, made a bronze serpent and mounted it on a pole, and whenever anyone who had been bitten by a serpent looked at the bronze serpent, he recovered' (Numbers 21:5-9).

"The specific principle at work in the utilization of the bronze serpent is sympathetic magic. In this instance one combats pernicious snakes by enlisting in the cause a more powerful snake, or, to be precise, an empowered snake capable of destroying the hostile one. The term 'sympathetic' means the identity in form or in nature of the friendly power with the hostile power. In modern immunology one uses serums of the same composition as the disease or virus to fight its infectious effects. A bronze image of a snake is, therefore, an appropriate artifact for the purposes involved. The gaze of the afflicted person set in motion the curative powers of the serpent. It may be that the bronze serpent was thought of as returning the gaze, or radiating power, and in so doing destroyed the poison in the boy of the afflicted person.

(continued on next page)

roof. It is this way today, but archaeologists have found remains of Constantine's churches beneath the present one.

Note that we can still visit these holy places today. A replica has been built in Washington DC so that people who could not visit Jerusalem could get an idea of what the original is like.

Rescuing the Cross Page 130



Ask the students to recall what they have learned about Jerusalem this year and how many times it has been conquered by other powers. Ask: who were some of the conquerors in the time before Christ? (*The Assyrians, Babylonians, and Romans*) Note that in the seventh century it would be the Persians who took it from its Christian rulers, the Roman Empire. The precious cross would play a part in that event.

Have the students **read this section** then discuss why Christians might have felt it especially important to deliver Jerusalem from the Persians. (*To safeguard Christ's tomb and to recover the cross.*) These same reasons would lead to the calling of the First Crusade.

The Trophy of Victory Page 123

Read and discuss the following section. Emphasize that, while the Church cherished having the cross of Christ, the meaning of the cross is more important than the wood itself. The cross represents God's Plan of Salvation for us. It symbolizes Christ's sacrifice of Himself for our salvation. Even if Christians in different parts of the world never saw the physical cross, they still would be redeemed by Christ's saving death on the cross. This is why churches all over the world

Background Reading (*The Bronze Serpent continued*):

"So comparing His cross to the serpent of bronze lifted up by Moses, Jesus tells us that all those who are bitten by the serpent of sin can be healed by a look of faith to the life-giving Cross. The moment a sinner does that he is saved, just as God said to Moses: 'if anyone who has been bitten looks at the bronze serpent, he will recover'. Anyone who has been bitten; no matter how far the poison had advanced in its progress to a fatal issue, if he but looked he should live. Such is the Gospel declaration: 'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him may not die, but may have eternal life'. Whoever: there is no exception. Not sin but unbelief can bar the sinner's way to the Savior" (*Archbishop Cyril Boustros*).



have come to celebrate the feast of the precious cross whether they have a part of it or not.

Review the sidebar on page 131 which indicates the customs associated with the Feast of the Cross. Discuss which are observed in your parish and encourage the students to participate.

5. Activity A ("Procession" of the Cross)

Organize a "procession of the cross" among students in the class. Obtain a large cross from your parish church and have students take turns bringing it home. When the cross is in someone's home, it should be put in a prominent place and surrounded with candles, flowers and incense. The family should offer the prayers on Worksheet A each evening. The cross could be kept in a home for one week, then brought back to class and given to another student's family. If parishioners live near one another, the cross may be passed from house to house on a more frequent basis.

6. Activity B (A "Day of the Cross")

Discuss with the students what the cross means to them. Reflect on the custom of wearing a cross around our neck. Note that a cross is often given to us at baptism as part of our baptismal clothing. We put aside the white robe after the ceremony but keep the cross.

Plan a day on which all the class members will wear their crosses. Arrange for them to visit other church school classes and the parish coffee hour to enlist the participation of others in this "day of the cross." On the day itself have the students erect a large cross or hang a cross banner outdoors or in the parish hall as the focus of the day. If you regularly have pastry at the coffee hour, arrange to serve only hot cross buns on this day. One or two students could give a brief explanation of the meaning of the cross in our life and/or explain the icon of the Feast from the *Come Bless the Lord* Icon Packet #21 and *Teaching Pics* #F2.

7. Activity C (The Kingdom Tree)

Remind the students of Jesus' Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32) and the project of the Kingdom Tree. Have the students add a branch representing Saints Constantine and Helen (fourth century) and the Emperor Heraclius (seventh century), responsible for the finding and recovery of the cross.

8. Time Line

Refer to the time line poster. Have the students brainstorm the names of people mentioned in this lesson (*SS Constantine and Helena, the nun Egeria, Emperor Heraclius*) and indicate the period in which each lived. Write in the names and dates under each appropriate heading.

9. Summary

End the lesson by summarizing the lesson from the aims on page 352, from the elements in the student text on which you focused and/or from any other points raised in the lesson.

10. Closing Prayer

Conclude with the Hymn for the Veneration of the Cross on page 132 or the verse "Before Your cross" from the appropriate prayer sheet at the end of this lesson.

Prayers before the Cross

- Leader:* In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (one God). Amen.
- All:* Holy God, holy mighty One, holy Immortal One, have mercy on us (3 times).
Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and always and forever and ever. Amen.
All-holy Trinity, have mercy on us.
Lord, forgive our sins.
Master, pardon our transgressions.
Holy One, look upon us and heal our infirmities for Your name's sake.
Lord, have mercy (3 times).
Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and always and forever and ever. Amen.
Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
- Leader:* Through the prayers of our holy fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us.
- All:* Amen.
O Lord, save Your people and bless Your inheritance. Strengthen all believers in every good deed and preserve Your community by the power of Your Cross.
- Leader:* Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.
- All:* O Lord, save Your people...
- Leader:* Now and always and forever and ever. Amen.
- All:* O Lord, save Your people...
- Leader:* O Christ our God who chose of Your free volition to be elevated upon the Cross, grant Your mercy to Your new people who are called by Your name. In Your power gladden the hearts of our public authorities. Strengthen them in every good deed so that Your true alliance may be for them a weapon of peace and a standard of victory.
- All:* We bow in worship before Your Cross, O Master, and we give praise to Your Holy Resurrection (3 times, with a prostration each time).
- Leader:* Through the prayers of our holy fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us.
- All:* Amen.

Prayers before the Cross

Leader: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

All: Holy God, holy mighty One, holy Immortal One, have mercy on us (3 times).
Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and always and forever and ever. Amen.
Most holy Trinity, have mercy on us.
Lord, cleanse our sins.
Master, forgive our transgressions.
Holy One, visit and heal our infirmities for Thy name's sake.
Lord, have mercy (3 times).
Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and always and forever and ever. Amen.
Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Leader: Through the prayers of our holy fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us.

All: Amen.
Save, O Lord, Thy people and bless Thine inheritance. Grant unto Thy faithful Christians victory over their enemies, and with Thy Cross protect Thy people.

Leader: Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

All: Save, O Lord, Thy people ...

Leader: Now and always and forever and ever. Amen.

All: Save, O Lord, Thy people ...

Leader: Thou who of Thy own good will didst ascend the Cross, Christ our God, grant Thy mercies to Thy new chosen people, who are called by Thy name. Give the joy of Thy power to the faithful Christians, leading them to victory over their enemies. Grant that they may enjoy Thy aid, the armor of peace and victory insuperable.

All: We worship Thy Cross, O Master, and we praise and glorify Thy Holy Resurrection (3 times, with a prostration each time).

Leader: Through the prayers of our holy fathers, Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on us.

All: Amen.

Prayers before the Cross

Leader: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

All: Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy and Immortal, have mercy on us (Three times).
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and forever.
Amen.
Most Holy Trinity, have mercy on us; Lord, cleanse us of our sins; Master, forgive our transgressions; Holy One, come to us and heal our infirmities for your name's sake.
Lord, have mercy. (*Three times*)
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and forever.
Amen.
Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Leader: Through the prayers of our holy fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us.

All: Amen.
Save Your people, O Lord, and bless Your inheritance. Grant victory to Your Church over her enemies and protect Your people by Your Cross.

Leader: Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

All: Save Your people, O Lord ...

Leader: Now and ever and forever. Amen.

All: Save Your people, O Lord ...

Leader: Willingly raised upon the Cross, O Christ our God, You bestowed Your mercies upon a new people bearing Your name. With Your power grant joy to our Church, giving her victory over enemies. With the invincible standard, Your weapon of peace, as an ally.

All: Before Your Cross, we bow down in worship, O Master, and Your Holy Resurrection we glorify (*3 times, with a prostration each time*).

Leader: Through the prayers of our holy fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us.

All: Amen.

Prayers before the Cross

Leader: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

All: Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy and Immortal, have mercy on us (Three times).
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and forever and ever.
Amen.
Trinity most holy, have mercy on us; Lord, cleanse us of our sins; Master, pardon our transgressions; O Holy One, visit us and heal our weaknesses for your name's sake.
Lord, have mercy. (*Three times*)
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and forever and ever.
Amen.
Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Leader: Through the prayers of our holy fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy onus.

All: Amen.
O Lord, save Your people and bless Your inheritance. To all who do battle with sin and evil, grant victory; and by the power of Your Cross protect Your people.

Leader: Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

All: O Lord, save Your people...

Leader: Now and forever and ever. Amen.

All: O Lord, save Your people...

Leader: It was of Your own free will that You were raised upon the Cross. Generously bestow Your mercies upon Your new community named for You, O Christ God! By Your power gladden the faithful and let them triumph over every evil, for Your Cross is their ally and their weapon is peace, assuring unfailing victory.

All: To Your Cross, O Master, We bow in veneration and we glorify Your Holy Resurrection (*5 times, with a prostration each time*).

Leader: Through the prayers of our holy fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy onus.

All: Amen.

Prayers before the Cross

Leader: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

All: Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy and Immortal, have mercy on us (Three times).
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and forever and ever.
Amen.

Trinity most holy, have mercy on us; Lord, cleanse us of our sins; O Lord, pardon our transgressions; O Master, look upon our weaknesses and heal them, O Holy One, for the sake of your name.

Lord, have mercy. (*Three times*)

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and forever and ever.
Amen.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Leader: Through the prayers of our holy fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy onus.

All: Amen.

Save Your people, O Lord, and bless Your inheritance. Grant victory to Your faithful people against enemies, and protect Your community by Your Cross.

Leader: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

All: Save Your people, O Lord ...

Leader: Now and forever and ever. Amen.

All: Save Your people, O Lord ...

Leader: By Your own choice, O Christ our God, You were lifted on the Cross. Grant Your mercies to Your new community that bears Your name. By Your power gladden the faithful and grant them victory against enemies. May they have the help of Your instrument of peace, the invincible sign of victory.

All: To Your Cross, O Master, we bow in veneration and we glorify Your Holy Resurrection (*3 times, with a prostration each time*).

Leader: Through the prayers of our holy fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy onus.

All: Amen.

The Kingdom Tree

Add branches marked Saints Constantine and Helen (fourth century), Egeria (fifth century), and the Emperor Heraclius (seventh century), responsible for the finding and recovery of the cross.

