

THE ICON OF THE EXALTATION OF THE HOLY & LIFE-GIVING CROSS

The Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross originated in Jerusalem in 355 to commemorate the dedication of the Basilica of the Resurrection. When the true cross of Jesus was found shortly afterwards, this event was commemorated on the same day. In time, the Feast of the Exaltation supplanted the feast of the dedication.

In 395, St. John Chrysostom wrote of three crosses which were discovered beneath Golgotha by the Empress Helena. Many other writers speak of miracles which occurred through contact with the true cross. It was through one of these miracles that the True Cross was recognized by St. Helena and St. Macarius, the Bishop of Jerusalem.

The Holy Cross was kept in the Basilica of the Resurrection in Jerusalem until 614, when the Persians conquered the city and burned the church. In 628, Emperor Heraclius III defeated the Persians and returned the Holy Cross to Jerusalem. A portion of the cross was taken to Rome in the seventh century by Sergius I, a Pope of Byzantine origin.

Icons of the Feast usually portray St. Macarius in the center of the Icon, elevating the Holy Cross and showing it to the people. This elevation or uplifting of the Cross shows its prominence as the sign of victory. Hence the name "Exaltation" or "Elevation of the Holy Cross." St. Constantine the Emperor, and St. Helena, his mother, are frequently shown, although some icons depict only St. Helena. Gathered about the Cross with St. Macarius and St. Helena are bishops, priests, and hymnographers. With them, too, we are joined in oneness of mind and purpose as we sing: "We bow to Your cross, O Lord, and we praise Your holy resurrection."



*Lord save your people
and bless your inheritance.*

*Grant vict'ry to our country
over its enemies.*

*And preserve your community
by the power of your Cross.*

TROPARION OF THE HOLY CROSS

HOMILY OF ST. ANDREW OF CRETE ON THE EXALTATION OF THE HOLY & LIFE-GIVING CROSS

By the Cross, whose feast we celebrate, darkness was driven away and light was restored. We celebrate today the feast of the Cross, and together with the Crucified One we lift ourselves towards the Most High so that, leaving earth and sin below, we may enjoy the celestial goods. Such is the nature and the greatness of the possession of the Cross. Who possesses the Cross has a treasure. And when we say a treasure, this means that which, by name and fact, is more excellent than all other goods, in which, by which and for which our salvation is realized and our original state of justice is restored.

Had there been no cross, Christ could not have been crucified. Had there been no cross, He Who is Life Itself could not have been nailed to the tree. And if Life had not been nailed to it, There would be no streams of immortality pouring from Christ's side, blood and water for the world's cleansing. The legal bond of our sin would not be cancelled, we should not have attained our freedom, we should not have enjoyed the fruit of the tree of life and the gates of paradise would not stand open. Had there been no cross, death would not have been trodden underfoot, nor hell despoiled.

Therefore, the Cross is something wonderfully great and precious. Great because it is the origin of so many innumerable benefits, whereby the miracles and sufferings of Christ play a decisive role in His work of salvation. Precious because the Cross signifies at once both the suffering and the trophy of the same God: the suffering, because in the Cross He suffered a voluntary death; the trophy, because in the Cross the devil was mortally wounded and, with him, death was overcome. In the Cross the doors to the region of the dead were demolished, and the Cross was converted into the universal salvation of - and for - the entire world.

The Cross is also called the glory and exaltation of Christ. The Cross is the overflowing chalice that the Psalms tell us about, and the culmination of all the torments that Christ suffered for us. Christ Himself teaches us that the Cross is His glory, when He says: The Son of Man has already entered into His glory, and God has received His glorification by Him, and at the same time God will clothe him in His same glory. And also: Glorify me, Father, with the glory that I had together with You before the world existed. He also said: Father, glorify Your name. And, spontaneously, these words were allowed to be heard from Heaven: I have glorified You and will glorify You once more. These are all words that refer to the glory that Christ would achieve on the Cross.

Christ also teaches us that the Cross is His exaltation, when He says: I, when I am raised up on high, will draw all men to Myself. It is clear that the Cross is the glory and exaltation of Christ.

The doctrine of the cross is foolishness to those who perish, but to those who are saved, that is, to us, it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the prudence of the prudent I will reject" ...

We for our part preach a crucified Christ, to the Jews indeed a stumbling-block and to the Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God.