



Light of the East



Reflections for our Spiritual Journey

Epiphany of Our Lord Byzantine Catholic Church, Roswell, Georgia

Exaltation of the Holy Cross

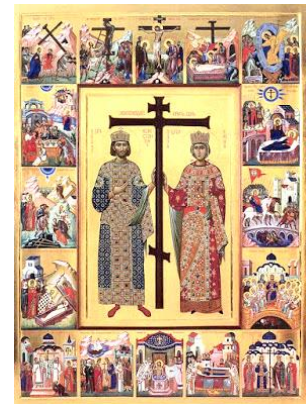
September 14



The *Universal Exaltation of the Precious and Life-Giving Cross* is one of the most revered observances in all Eastern Christianity. In 325 A.D., after the persecutions against the Christians had just ended, Christians were free to express their religious feelings and to adorn their places of worship with symbols of the faith, such as the cross. Empress Helen, a devout Christian and mother of the Emperor Constantine the Great went to Jerusalem to undertake a mission to retrieve the cross upon which Christ had been crucified. After a futile search, the Empress was attracted by the scent of

basil in the area where Jesus had been put to death. She ordered excavation, and three crosses were unearthed. A paralyzed person was positioned on each of the crosses to determine the cross upon which Christ had died. When he was placed on the true cross, the person recovered miraculously and walked. Patriarch Makarios, who had also witnessed the miracle at the historic site, raised the cross and blessed the people with it as they responded, "Lord, have mercy".

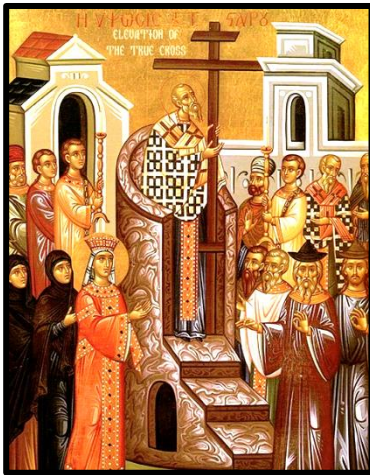
This became the occasion of the institution in all the Churches of the *Exaltation of the Precious Cross*, not only in memory of the event of the finding of the Cross, but also to celebrate how an instrument of shame was used to overcome death and bring salvation and eternal life. The Feast is an opportunity outside of the observances of Holy Week to celebrate the full significance of the victory of the Cross over the powers of the world, and the triumph of the wisdom of God through the Cross over the wisdom of this world. This Feast also gives the Church an opportunity to relish the full glory of the Cross as a source of light, hope and victory for Christ's people. It is also a time to celebrate the universality of the work of redemption accomplished through the Cross: the entire universe is seen through the light of the Cross, the new Tree of Life which provides nourishment for those who have been redeemed in Christ.



The Cross, The Preserver of the Universe

Saint John Maximovitch

By the Cross, the Son of God having become man, accomplished our salvation. He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross (Phil. 2:8). Having stretched out His hands



upon the Cross, the Saviour with them, as it were, embraced the world, and by His blood shed on it, like a king with red ink, He signed the forgiveness of the human race. The Cross of the Lord was the instrument by which He saved the world after the fall into sin. Through the Cross, He descended with His soul into hell so as to raise up from it the souls who were awaiting Him. By the Cross, Christ opened the doors of paradise which had been closed after our first ancestors had been banished from it. The Cross was sanctified by the Body of Christ which was nailed to it when He gave Himself over to torments and death for the salvation of the world, and it itself was then filled with life-giving power. By the Cross, the prince of this world was cast out (John 12:31) and an end was put to his authority. The weapon by which he was crushed became the sign of Christ's victory.

The demonic hosts tremble when they see the Cross, for by the Cross the kingdom of hell was destroyed. They do not dare to draw near to anyone who is guarded by the Cross. The whole human race, by the death of Christ on the Cross, received deliverance from the authority of the devil, and everyone who makes use of this saving weapon is inaccessible to the demons.

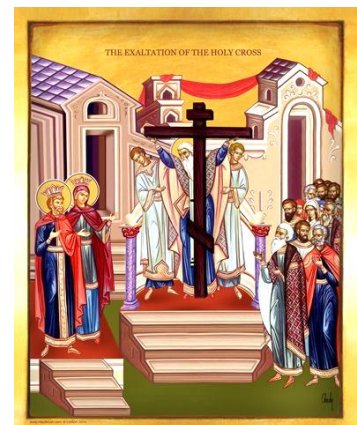
Invisibly and unceasingly there gushes from it the Divine grace that saves the world. The Sign of the Cross is made at all the Mysteries and prayers of the Church. With the making of the Sign of the Cross over the bread and wine, they become the Body and Blood of Christ. With the immersion of the Cross, the waters are sanctified. The Sign of the Cross looses us from sins. "When we are guarded by the Cross, we oppose the enemy, not fearing his nets and barking." Just as the flaming sword in the hands of the Cherubim barred the entrance into paradise of old, so the Cross now acts invisibly in the world, guarding it from perdition.

For "the Cross is the preserver of the whole universe, the Cross is the beauty of the Church, the Cross is the might of kings, the Cross is the confirmation of the faithful, the Cross is the glory of angels and the scourge of demons" (Matins of the Feast).

Icon of the Feast of the Exaltation

The icon of the Feast tells the story of the finding of the Cross and of its Exaltation. Patriarch Macarius is standing in the pulpit elevating the Cross for all to see and venerate. On each side of the Patriarch are deacons. The elevated Cross is surrounded and venerated by many clergy and lay people, including Saint Helen, the mother of Emperor Constantine.

In the background of the icon is a domed structure that represents the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem. This church was constructed in Jerusalem and dedicated to the Holy Resurrection by Emperor Constantine. The church was consecrated on September 13, 335. On the following day, September 14, the celebration of the Exaltation of the Venerable and Life-Creating Cross was established and continues to today.



Save Your people, O Lord, and bless Your inheritance. Grant victory to Your Church over evil and protect Your people by Your cross.

Exalt the Lord our God and worship at His footstool, for He is holy.