

The feast of the Exaltation of the Holy 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. Through one of these miracles St. Helena and St. Macarius, the bishop of Jerusalem, recognized the true cross.

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.

The icon portrays St. Macarius in the center, elevating the Holy Cross and revealing it to the people. This elevating of the cross shows its prominence as the sign of victory - hence the name "Exaltation Elevation of the Holy Cross." St. Constantine the Emperor, and St. Helena, his mother, are shown with the monks of Jerusalem. With them we join in oneness of mind and purpose as we sing: "We bow to Your cross, O Lord, and we praise Your holy resurrection.

TROPARION

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