

EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS

The Feast of the Holy Cross is one of the greatest feasts of the Eastern Churches. It is frequently mentioned in ecclesiastical writings and always has as its object the triumph of Christ, His Resurrection, and the veneration of the Holy Cross, the sign of victory over death. The feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross was first instituted in order to commemorate the dedication of the Church of the Resurrection on September 13, 335. The Emperor Constantine built this church and the one in Bethlehem, and they are both in existence today. The Church of the Resurrection had five naves and, in the interior, a circular structure covered by a dome, which protected the sanctuary of the sepulcher or tomb of Christ. The date of September 13 was chosen in order to supplant the pagan feast of the Temple of Jupiter in Rome.

The second historical event, which is the source of our present feast, was the return of the Holy Cross to Jerusalem under Emperor Heraclius. The Wood of the Cross had been preserved in the Church of the Resurrection until May 4, 614, when the Persians captured Jerusalem, burned the Church of the Resurrection, and carried off the Cross. After the victory of Emperor Heraclius over the Persians, the Cross was returned to Jerusalem on September 14, 628. It is said that the Emperor, dressed in his royal vestments, carried the Cross through the streets of Jerusalem. He was stopped by the Patriarch, who demanded that he remove his splendid vestments in order to become more like the scorned Christ. The Emperor agreed and walked through the streets barefooted. A crowd of faithful accompanied him and prostrated before the Holy Cross.

*We bow down to the Tree of your Cross, O Lover of Mankind,
since You, the Life of all, were nailed upon it.
O Savior, You opened Paradise to the thief who turned
to You in faith. You counted him worthy of blessedness
when he confessed to You, crying: 'O Lord, remember me!'
As You accepted him, also accept us as we call out:
'We have all sinned; in your merciful kindness,
do not forsake us.'*