

SEPTEMBER 14
THE UNIVERSAL EXALTATION
OF THE PRECIOUS AND LIFE-GIVING CROSS

The Feast Day of the Exaltation of the Cross traces its roots to c. 326 AD when the Empress Helena, the mother of Constantine, journeyed to Jerusalem to look for the true cross. An old Jew named Judah told her that the Cross was buried under the Temple of Venus that Hadrian had built on Golgotha. Helena ordered that the Temple of Venus be torn down and the ground under it excavated. Having done that, they found three crosses. John Chrysostom (4th Century) in Homily LXXXV on John 19 stated that they suspected which cross was the real one: first from its lying in the middle (John 19:18), and second from the title written by Pilate (John 19:19).

But they still needed to dispel all uncertainty as to which, if any, was the real one. At that moment a funeral procession was passing by; Patriarch Macarius of Jerusalem suggested that they place the crosses one by one on the dead man. When they placed the first two on him, nothing happened. When they placed the third on him, he was restored to life. After that, they placed it on a sick woman and she recovered. Patriarch Macarius then raised up the cross for everyone to see and all the people sang, "Lord have mercy" with tears and joy. Empress Helena then had a silver casing made to contain the Cross.

In the early 7th Century, the Persians conquered Jerusalem and carried off the Cross to Persia. Fourteen years later, the Greek Emperor Heraclius conquered Persia and brought the Cross back to Jerusalem and placed it in the Church of the Resurrection on Golgotha. September 14th, then, celebrates both the occasion of the finding of the Cross by Helena, and its return by Heraclius. The Eastern Church began celebrating the Exaltation of the Cross in the 4th Century. The Western Church eventually did so also after the 7th Century.

The Exaltation of the Cross is a feast day that is not celebrated much in the West today, however. Some Western Churches celebrate Holy Cross Sunday in mid September using the Gospel lesson for the Sunday Before the Exaltation of the Cross and the Epistle for the feast day of the Exaltation. But this is not commonly done. Lutherans sometimes use the Epistle lesson for the Sunday after the Exaltation for Reformation Sunday in November. In both cases, the ideas are expressed that the Cross has become more than just a piece of wood that the Lord died on. However, the Word of the Cross is not emphasized in either case as it is in the Eastern Church. In the West, both Holy Cross Sunday and Reformation Sunday are one day events. In the East, the celebration of the Exaltation of the Cross takes in two Sundays (before and after) with a major feast day in between. In addition to the above, taking up one's cross is also the theme of the 3rd Sunday in Lent (The Adoration of the Cross) and All Saints Sunday (the 1st Sunday after Pentecost.)

Prepared by Mark Kern, member of St. Athanasius

GREAT VESPERS

LORD I CALL: All stikhera of the Feast, tone 6
As the Cross is lifted on high,

it urges all of creation
to praise the undefiled Passion of Christ, Who was lifted up on it.
For by the Cross He killed the one who killed us,
and brought us back to life when we were dead.
He adorned us in beauty,
and in His compassion made us worthy to live in heaven.
Therefore we rejoice and exalt His name, //
and magnify His infinite condescension.

Moses prefigured you, O precious Cross,
when he stretched out his hands on high,
and put the tyrant Amalek to flight.
You are the boast of the faithful, the support of those who suffer,
the glory of the Apostles, the champion of the Righteous,
and the preservation of all the Saints.
Therefore, beholding you raised on high,
creation rejoices and celebrates,
glorifying Christ Who has joined together through you that which was divided //
in His infinite goodness.

O most venerable Cross,
attended by ranks of rejoicing Angels,
as you are exalted today at the divine command,
may you lift up again
all those who through the stolen food had been cast out and were sunk in death.
Therefore, as we venerate you in faith with heart and lips,
we draw sanctification from you and cry aloud:
“Exalt Christ, the God transcendent in goodness, //
and venerate His divine footstool!”

GLORY...NOW AND EVER... Feast, tone 2:

Come, all you nations,
let us fall down in worship before the blessed Tree,
by which eternal justice has come to pass!
For he who deceived Adam by a Tree
is caught by the lure of the Cross;
and he who held under his tyranny the creature endowed by God with royal dignity
is brought down in a headlong fall.
The serpent's venom is washed away by the blood of God,
and the curse of just condemnation is undone
when the Just One is condemned by an unjust judgment.
For it was fitting that the Tree should be healed by a Tree,
and that by the Passion of the passionless God
what was wrought on the Tree should destroy the passions of man, who was condemned.

But glory to Your dread dispensation for our sakes, O Christ the King, //
through which You have saved us all //
since You are good and the Lover of mankind!

Old Testament Readings

The reading from Exodus.

Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the Desert of Shur. For three days they traveled in the desert without finding water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.)

So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, “What are we to drink?” Then Moses cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. There the LORD made a decree and a law for them, and there he tested them.

He said, “If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you.”

Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water. The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt.

The Reading from Proverbs

My son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.

Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed.

The reading from Isaiah. The Lord says, “Your gates will always stand open, they will never be shut, day or night, so that men may bring you the wealth of the nations — their kings led in triumphal procession. For the nation or kingdom that will not serve you will perish; it will be utterly ruined.

“The glory of Lebanon will come to you, the pine, the fir and the cypress together, to adorn the place of my sanctuary; and I will glorify the place of my feet. The sons of your oppressors will come bowing before you; all who despise you will bow down at your feet and will call you the City of the LORD, Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

“Although you have been forsaken and hated, with no one traveling through, I will make you the everlasting pride and the joy of all generations. You will drink the milk of nations and be nursed at royal breasts. Then you will know that I, the LORD, am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.”

LITYA: tone 1

Today the holy saying of David truly has come to pass,
for behold, in the sight of all,
we venerate the footstool of Your undefiled feet,
and, putting our hope in the shadow of Your wings,
we cry aloud to You, O all-compassionate Lord:
“May the light of Your countenance be marked as a sign upon us!
Exalt the horn of Your Orthodox people
by the Exaltation of Your precious Cross, //
O Christ of many mercies!”

Glory...Now and ever... tone 4:

Moses prefigured the power of Your precious Cross, O Christ,
when he put to flight his adversary, Amalek, in the wilderness of Sinai;
for when he stretched out his arms in the form of a cross, the people prevailed.
Now the outcome of these deeds has come to pass for us.
Today the Cross is exalted, and the demons are put to flight.
Today all creation has been set free from corruption,
for through the Cross all the gifts of grace have shone upon us.
Therefore, rejoicing, we all fall before You and cry://
“How marvelous are Your works, O Lord! Glory to You!”

APOSTIKHA: All Feast, (Special Melody: ‘Hail, Life-giving Cross, Tone 5):

Hail, life-giving Cross, unconquerable trophy of godliness,
Door to Paradise, help of the faithful,
Rampart set about the Church.
Through thee corruption is utterly destroyed,
The power of death is swallowed up,
And we are raised from earth to heaven:
Invincible weapon, adversary of demons,
Glory of martyrs, true ornament of saints,
Haven of salvation, bestowing on the world great mercy.

Rejoice, O Cross of the Lord,
For through you, we have been freed from the curse!
The enemy is shattered at your elevation,
O Cross, the all venerable sign of true joy!
You are the strength of kings,
The power of the righteous,
The majesty of priests, and the help of us all!
You are a rod of strength under which we, like sheep, are tended,
Weapon of peace surrounded by fearful angels
And the freedom from danger for us who sign ourselves with you!
You are the divine glory of Christ who grants the world great mercy!

Rejoice, O guide of the blind,
Physician of the sick and resurrection of the dead!
You have lifted us up when we had fallen into mortality!
Through you, corruption is destroyed and incorruption flowers forth.
As we are made divine and the devil is cast down!
Today, you are glorified in the hands of bishops,
We glorify Him who was crucified on you as we draw from you great mercy!

Glory...Now and ever... tone 8:

Your precious Cross, O Christ God,
which Moses of old prefigured in his own person
when he overthrew Amalek and put him to flight;
which David commanded to be worshipped,
calling it your footstool.
This Cross we sinners worship today with unworthy lips,
and praise You, Who deigned to be nailed upon it,
and we cry to You://
“With the thief, make us worthy of Your Kingdom, O Lord!”

TROPARION OF THE FEAST, TONE 1:

O Lord, save Your people,
And bless Your inheritance.
Grant victories to the Orthodox Christians
Over their adversaries;
And by virtue of Your Cross,
Preserve Your habitation.

DIVINE LITURGY

FESTAL ANTIPHONS

TROPARION, Tone 1

O Lord, save Your people,
And bless Your inheritance.
Grant victories to the Orthodox Christians
Over their adversaries;
And by virtue of Your Cross,
Preserve Your habitation.

KONTAKION, Tone 4

As You were voluntarily raised upon the Cross for our sake,
Grant mercy to those who are called by Your Name, O Christ God;
Make all Orthodox Christinas glad by Your power,
Granting them victories over their adversaries,
By bestowing on them the invincible trophy, Your weapon of peace.

PROKEIMENON, Tone 7: Extol the Lord our God; worship[at His footstool for it is holy.
Vs. The Lord reigns; let the peoples rage.

EPISTLE: (125) 1 Corinthians 1:18-24 Brethren, the message of the Cross is foolishness to them that perish, but unto us who are being saved, it is the power of God... For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God...

GOSPEL: (60) John 19:6-11, 13-20, 25-28, 30-35 Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him." The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made himself the Son of God." Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was more afraid, and went again into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" but Jesus gave him no answer. Then Pilate said to Him, "Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You and power to release You?" Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin." When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" But they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!" Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus and led Him away. And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the center. Now Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Then many of the Jews read this title, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from

that hour that disciple took her to his own home. After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!" So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "it is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe.

COMMUNION HYMN: The light of Your countenance has shone on us, O Lord. Alleluia...

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