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# Seasoning the Seasons™

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Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross

## The Exaltation of the Holy Cross: September 14



St. Helena  
Cima da Conegliano, circa 1495  
National Gallery of Art,  
Washington, DC, USA

On September 14, the Church celebrates the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. Tradition holds that early in the fourth century Saint Helena, mother of the Byzantine Emperor Constantine, journeyed to Jerusalem to search for the cross on which Jesus had been crucified. Tradition held that this cross was buried along with the two crosses on which the two men crucified with Jesus died. Saint Helena is said to have found the three crosses buried under a sweet-smelling herb at Golgotha. (This herb was named "basil" from the Greek word meaning king.) Not knowing which of the three crosses was the cross on which Jesus died, Saint Helena was instructed to hold each cross up to a local woman who was dying. When the third cross touched the dying woman, according to tradition, she was miraculously healed. Saint Helena had found the True Cross!

Saint Helena needed to get the word back to her son, Constantine, that she had found the True Cross. But in the fourth century there were no cell-phones, social media, or e-mail systems. So as she began her journey, Saint Helena is said to have arranged for a relay system of bonfires to spread the good news from Jerusalem back to Constantinople (which is now the city of Istanbul, Turkey). She had her servant on the first mountain light a bonfire, then when the servant on the next mountain saw the fire he set a bonfire, and so forth until the fire relay reached Constantinople.



The Emperor Constantine had a church built at the site where Jesus' empty grave had been and he built a basilica. In the middle of these two churches was a

shrine marking the spot where Jesus had been crucified. These churches\* were dedicated on September 14 in the year 335. Pilgrims would come to venerate the wood of the Cross. Since that time a feast has been celebrated on September 14 by all Eastern Christians. Rome adopted this feast in the seventh century. (\*These churches were destroyed, rebuilt, and destroyed again. The present day Church of the Holy Sepulcher was built by the Crusaders and dedicated in 1149.)



Facade and Parvis of the  
Church of the Holy Sepulcher  
© by Photographer: Deror avi  
Photo taken September 26, 2008

Since these early centuries of Christianity, when pilgrims came to Jerusalem to celebrate this feast they would join in procession following the cross, which was lifted up and carried in procession to lead them. And this year on September 14, you, too, could take the opportunity, uniting yourself with Christians around the world, to celebrate the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross! Just as Christians have done for hundreds and hundreds of years, you can begin your prayer this day with a procession following the cross. You can gather prayerfully outside of church, school, or even your own home, then

process into and around the church (or your school or home), singing and praying, recalling that you, too, are a “pilgrim” on earth, as you follow Jesus. The cross is the main symbol of Christianity. It is therefore very appropriate and meaningful to celebrate with a procession following the cross on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.