

Through the miracle of the blazing cross, the true faith of Jesus Christ was protected ... forever!

Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Orthodox Church - Ukrainian Orthodox Church

EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS

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This Sunday, September 11, the Armenian Church commemorates the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (*Khachverats*), which is one of the five Tabernacle Feasts observed by the Armenian Church.

This holiday is a general celebration of the Holy Cross and is commemorated by most Christian churches on September 14. The Armenian Church celebrates it on the Sunday closest to the 14th.

The cross, once a means of death for criminals, gradually became the dominant symbol of the Christian world, an object of reverence and worship, and symbol of triumph over death. There are four feasts devoted to the Cross in the Armenian liturgical calendar, with the Exaltation being the most important. The other three are: Apparition of the Holy Cross, Holy Cross of Varak, and Discovery of the Cross.

The ceremony for the exaltation begins with the decoration of the Cross with sweet basil (*rehan*), a sign of royalty, and also symbolizing the living cross. After the Bible readings, the officiating priest lifts the Cross and makes the sign of the Cross, and blesses the four corners of the world (Antastan service), and asks the Almighty to grant peace and prosperity to the people of the world.

The *Khachverats* ceremony was prepared by Catholicos Sahag Tsoraporetsi (677-703). He also composed the hymn that is sung on this occasion. As with other Tabernacle Feasts, the Exaltation is preceded with a period of fasting (Monday to Friday), and followed by a memorial day (*Merelots*).

Name day commemorations this Sunday include: Khatchadour, Khatchig, Khatcherets, Rehan, Khatchkhatoun, Khatchouhi, Khatchperouhi, Khosrov, Khosrovanoush, Khosrovitoukhd.

The Precious Cross appeared in the sky over Jerusalem on the morning of May 7, 351 during the reign of the emperor Constantius, the son of St Constantine (May 21).

At that time the heresy of Arianism, which taught that Christ was merely a creature and not God, was causing great turmoil and division throughout the Empire. Even after the First Ecumenical Council at Nicea in 325, many people were drawn to this false teaching, and the Orthodox found themselves in the minority in many places.

Constantius, the ruler of the eastern part of the Empire, was a fervent supporter of Arianism. His brothers Constantine II and Constans, who were pious Orthodox Christians, ruled in the west. They were both killed in separate battles around 350, leaving Constantius as sole ruler. Also in 350, St Cyril (March 18) became Patriarch of Jerusalem and began his zealous struggle against Arianism.

In May of 351 a luminous Cross appeared over Jerusalem, stretching from Golgotha to the Mount of Olives, a distance of about five and a half miles. The Cross was wide as it was long, and shone more brightly than the sun. Many people left their homes and workplaces to gather in the church and glorify Christ. The historian Sozomen says that this wondrous sign led to the conversion of multitudes of pagans and Jews to Christianity.

A letter from St Cyril to the emperor describing this phenomenon, and admonishing him to become Orthodox, has been preserved. The apparition of the Cross remained over the city for a whole week.

The vision of the Cross over Jerusalem strengthened the Orthodox faithful and contributed to the return of many Arians to the Church. It is also a reminder of the awesome Second Coming of Christ, when "the sign of the Son of man shall appear in heaven (Matthew 24:30).