

Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross

Chapel of



St. Helena

Built by the Crusaders, today it is the Armenians who officiate at the Chapel of St. Helena. The floor mosaic depicts the principal churches of the Armenian nation. The four columns are crowned with Byzantine capitals, two in Corinthian style and two "basket" capitals which the Crusaders took from the ancient Al-Aqsa Mosque.

The windows in the dome receive light from the raised courtyard of the Deir es-Sultan Monastery, located behind the apse of the church, with its small cells for Ethiopian monks.

From a door at the rear one enters the Chapel of St. Vartan and the Armenian Martyrs, open only upon request, where an ancient drawing of a boat was found bearing the inscription Domine Ivimus, «Lord, we went», believed to be the oldest mark of veneration left by an ancient pilgrim prior to the construction of the church.

Where is Christ's Cross today?

Below you will find another version of the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. In the Armenian Church this is a Tabernacle Feast, this year we will celebrate it on September 13th.

This is a Universal Feast Day in the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. Each member of the Universal Church has a slightly different story—that is why we consider the accounts 'legends' or 'traditions'. It is not important who has the 'true' accounting. What is important is that Christians from the Universal Church understand the significance of the Holy Cross.

In the Armenian Church **Basil (rahan in Armenian)** has always been associated with the celebration of the feast. How did this tradition start? Some say that basil is a symbol of royalty, befitting the Savior who was crucified as a king. Others preserve a beautiful story of the miraculous growth of basil at the foot of the Cross of the Lord after the cross had been removed. Basil continued growing there despite the fact that pious people continually cut it and took it home.

On the Sunday of the Exaltation of the Cross, the Armenian Church Liturgy includes the service of the Andasdan (Blessing of the field or four corners of the world.) The purpose of this ceremony is to bring fruitfulness and fertility to the fields and gardens. In ancient times the ceremony of Andastan was conducted outside the church, in the fields and gardens. According to the church calendar the "world" is symbolized by the round central part (adyan) of the church. The processional cross is adorned with basil, and the four corners of the church are blessed as a sign of the sanctification and renewal of God's creation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Here's another account... After the death and resurrection of

Christ, both the Jewish and Roman authorities in Jerusalem made efforts to hide the Holy Sepulcher, Christ's tomb in the garden near the site of His crucifixion. The earth had been mounded up over the site, and pagan temples had been built on top of it. The Cross on which Christ had died had been hidden (tradition said) by the Jewish authorities somewhere in the vicinity.

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According to tradition, first mentioned by Saint Cyril of Jerusalem in 348, Saint Helena, nearing the end of her life, decided under divine inspiration to travel to Jerusalem in 326 to excavate the Holy Sepulcher and attempt to locate the True Cross. A Jew by the name of Judas, aware of the tradition concerning the hiding of the Cross, led those excavating the Holy Sepulcher to the spot in which it was hidden.

Three crosses were found on the spot. According to one tradition, the inscription *Jesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum* ("Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews") remained attached to the True Cross. According to a more common tradition, however, the inscription was missing, and Saint Helena and Saint Macarius, the bishop of Jerusalem, assuming that one was the True Cross and the other two belonged to the thieves crucified alongside Christ, devised an experiment to determine which was the True Cross.

In one version of the latter tradition, the three crosses were taken to a woman who was near death; when she touched the True Cross, she was healed. In another, the body of a dead man was brought to the place where the three crosses were found, and laid upon each cross. The True Cross restored the dead man to life.

In celebration of the discovery of the Holy Cross, Constantine ordered the construction of churches at the site of the Holy Sepulcher and on Mount Calvary. Those churches were dedicated on September 13 and 14, 335, and shortly thereafter the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross began to be celebrated on the latter date. The feast slowly spread from Jerusalem to other churches, until, by the year 720, the celebration was universal.

In the early seventh century, the Persians conquered Jerusalem, and the Persian king Khosrau II captured the True Cross and took it back to Persia. After Khosrau's defeat by Emperor Heraclius II, Khosrau's own son had him assassinated in 628 and returned the True Cross to Heraclius. In 629, Heraclius, having initially taken the True Cross to Constantinople, decided to restore it to Jerusalem. Tradition says that he carried the Cross on his own back, but when he attempted to enter the church on Mount Calvary, a strange force stopped him. Patriarch Zacharias of Jerusalem, seeing the emperor struggling, advised him to take off his royal robes and crown and to dress in a penitential robe instead. As soon as Heraclius took Zacharias' advice, he was able to carry the True Cross into the church.

For some centuries, a second feast, the Invention of the Cross, was celebrated on May 3 in the Roman and Gallican churches, following a tradition that marked that date as the day on which Saint Helena discovered the True Cross. In Jerusalem, however, the finding of the Cross was celebrated from the beginning on September 14.

Why Do We Celebrate the Feast of the Holy Cross?

It's easy to understand that the Cross is special because Christ used it as the instrument of our salvation. But after His Resurrection, why would Christians continue to look to the Cross?

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Christ Himself offered us the answer: **"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me"** (Luke 9:23). The point of taking up our own cross is not simply self-sacrifice; in doing so, we unite ourselves to the sacrifice of Christ on His Cross.

When we participate in Divine Liturgy/Badarak, the Cross is there, too. The "unbloody sacrifice" offered on the altar is the re-presentation of Christ's Sacrifice on the Cross. When we receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion, we do not simply unite ourselves to Christ; we nail ourselves to the Cross, dying with Christ so that we might rise with Him.

"For the Jews require signs, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews indeed a stumbling block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness . . ." (1 Corinthians 1:22-23). Today, more than ever, non-Christians see the Cross as foolishness. What kind of Savior triumphs through death? For Christians, however, the Cross is the crossroads of history and the Tree of Life. Christianity without the Cross is meaningless: Only by uniting ourselves to Christ's Sacrifice on the Cross can we enter into eternal life.

Why do Christians of the Universal Church (Catholic & Orthodox) make the Sign of the Cross when they say, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit"?

Making the Sign of the Cross may be the most common of all actions that the people of the Universal Church. We make it when we begin and end our prayers; we make it when we enter and leave a church; we start each Divine Liturgy/Badarak with it; I grew up Catholic and our tradition was that we may even make it when we hear the Holy Name taken in vain and when we pass a church where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved.

But do you know why we make the Sign of the Cross? The answer is both simple and profound.

In the Sign of the Cross, we profess the deepest mysteries of the Christian Faith: the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and the saving work of Christ on the Cross. The combination of the words and the action are a creed- Havadamk -a statement of belief. We mark ourselves as Christians through the Sign of the Cross.

And yet, because we make the Sign of the Cross so often, we may be tempted to rush through it, to say the words without listening to them, to ignore the symbolism of tracing the shape of the Cross on our own bodies. A creed is not simply a statement of belief—it is a vow to defend that belief, even if it means following Our Lord and Savior to our own cross.

The Armenian Orthodox are not the only Christians to make the Sign of the Cross. All Eastern Catholics Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic do as well, along with many high-church Anglicans and Lutherans (and a smattering of other Mainline Protestants).

Read the article regarding a pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulcher on the Eastern Diocese Web-page:

<http://www.armenianchurch-ed.net/wpblog/tag/holy-sepulcher/>