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I SPY IN MY LITTLE "I"CON



THE EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS

On **September 14**, we commemorate a great discovery, the finding of the **True Cross**! It had been lost for many years, having been buried during the time of the persecution of the Christians when all remnants of the Christian religion were destroyed. Temples to the Roman god, Jupiter and to the goddess, Venus were erected upon the spot. Later on, when the **Emperor Constantine (St.)** was converted and Christianity was restored to the Byzantine Empire, he sent his mother, **Empress Helena (St.)**, in pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the year **326 AD**, to discover and preserve the holy sites.



Elevation of The Cross, Dmitry Shkolnik
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Do you see the Empress Saint Helena? She is in the red dress in the lower left corner of the icon. She wears a crown because she is the Emperor's mother.

St. Helena was given a letter to show to the Patriarch of Jerusalem, giving her permission to explore wherever she willed. She inquired everywhere for clues as to where The Cross might be and eventually was helped by an elderly Jew named Jude. **Jude (St.)** is the man in the blue hat depicted on the lower right corner of the icon. He and his family (perhaps depicted by the younger man in the red hat) were later converted to Christianity and baptized. **Saint Jude** took the name **Cyriacus (St.)** and later he became **Bishop of Jerusalem**! When Saint Helena found the spot on which the crucifixion was to have taken place, she ordered the pagan temples to be torn down, and the earth excavated. Three crosses were found there, along with four nails and the board on which the inscription bearing the inscription, "**Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews**".

They had found the site of **The True Cross**, but not knowing which one was Christ's and which were those of the thieves, Saint Helena had the wood of each touched to the body of a dying woman. When the True Cross touched the woman, she was restored. News of this became widespread and huge crowds came to the site to venerate the Relic. They came, begging Patriarch Macarius (St.) to elevate The Cross as high as he could so they could admire and venerate it. **THIS** is the event we see depicted in the festal icon. Do you see **Patriarch Saint Macarius** in the center of the icon? He is elevating The Cross there for the crowd! Later Saint Constantine had ordered a new temple to be built in Jerusalem to house the relics, on the spot of Golgotha itself. The construction took 10 years and St. Helena sadly did not live to see it. It was dedicated to the Holy Resurrection, and the feast of the **Exaltation of the Holy Cross** was established the very next day and celebrated for the first time on **September 14, 335 AD**.

-Written by Lynne Wardach

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