

# Exaltation of the Holy Cross

## Activity Book



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Read the Account of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross

The feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross is celebrated on September 14<sup>th</sup>. It celebrates the cross changing from a symbol of shame and torture to a symbol of victory.

### **The feast recalls 3 historical events:**

1. The discovery of the True Cross by St. Helena.
2. The dedication of 2 churches built by Emperor Constantine.
3. The bringing back of the True Cross to Jerusalem.

After Jesus died, it is said that the Jewish and Roman authorities tried their best to destroy the Christian faith. They saw it as a threat to both the Jewish faith and to the Roman Empire. They worked hard to obscure the holy tomb where Jesus had been buried. In AD 70 when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, both these holy places seemed to have vanished from history. Later when the Romans rebuilt Jerusalem, they built a pagan temple on top of the place where Jesus had been buried.

In 326 AD St. Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine decided to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, to visit the places where Jesus had walked. She also wanted to find the tomb where He had been buried.

When she reached Jerusalem, she wanted to find the tomb, but she did not know where to start looking. She talked to some devout Jewish Christians. They guided her to the place where it was said Jesus had been buried. The place was right under the pagan Roman temple. St. Helena had the place excavated (dug) and the place where the Lord Jesus had been buried was found!

As the excavation continued, she found 3 crosses under the ground. Everyone believed these were the very crosses on which Jesus and the 2 thieves on His sides were crucified. They wanted to find out which cross was the one that Jesus was crucified on. The Bishop of Jerusalem, Bishop Macarius had a good idea. He brought a woman who was sick and had her touch all 3 crosses. When she touched the True Cross, she was instantly healed. That is how the True Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ was discovered.

A few years later, St. Helena's son, Emperor Constantine built a church on the Holy Sepulchre and a shrine on Mt. Calvary, to mark the discovery of these 2 important sites. The church was dedicated on September 14<sup>th</sup>. Ever since, the church has celebrated this feast on September 14<sup>th</sup>.

200 years later a Persian Empire (the Sassanians) came and destroyed both of these holy places and took the True Cross with them back to Persia.

A few years later, the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius fought the Persians and defeated them and brought the True Cross back to Jerusalem and gave it to the Christians.

Later in the 10<sup>th</sup> century the Crusaders rebuilt the church of the Holy Sepulchre and kept the True Cross back there.

### **Significance of the Feast**

It reminds of that God sent His son to die on the cross for our sins. God used an instrument of torture to work out our salvation. It was a transition from an instrument of torture to an instrument of life and salvation. It is a reminder how God uses normal things, sacramental objects to assist us in our salvation. We remember the victory of the Lord Jesus on the cross for us.

### **How the Feast is Celebrated**

*When the True Cross was discovered and brought to the Holy Church for dedication, Bishop Macarius lifted up the cross in the sight of everyone who had gathered there. There were many people who had come to see it, including St. Helena, her court members and many other people from far and wide. As soon as the cross was lifted up, everyone said, "Kyrie Eleison (Lord have mercy)."*

During the liturgical service we reenact this event. The cross is elevated (lifted) up in front of the congregation. Then the priest turns the cross in all 4 cardinal directions (north, east, south and west). This shows that the cross is the instrument of salvation for all people. During this time the congregation responds by saying, 'Kyrie Eleison (Lord have mercy in Greek).'

We also venerate (show respect) the cross by bowing before the cross, remembering our Savior who died on it to bring our salvation.

*When St. Helena was looking for the True Cross, she saw Thulasi (Basil) leaves growing in a particular place. When she dug under it, that is where she discovered the True Cross.*

For this reason we use Thulasi leaves during this feast. As the cross is carried into the church during the procession it is usually displayed with the thulasi leaves. Sometimes the leaves are placed on the icons in the church. The leaves are also given to the church members to take home with them.

### **Carry Our Own Crosses**

As Christians we are called to carry our own cross. Jesus said, 'He who follows me, he must first be willing to carry his own cross.' What is our cross? It is the sufferings, the difficulties, the persecutions that every Christian goes through in their journey to eternal life. These are our crosses, which are permitted by God to mold us and shape us and change us to become more and more like Christ.

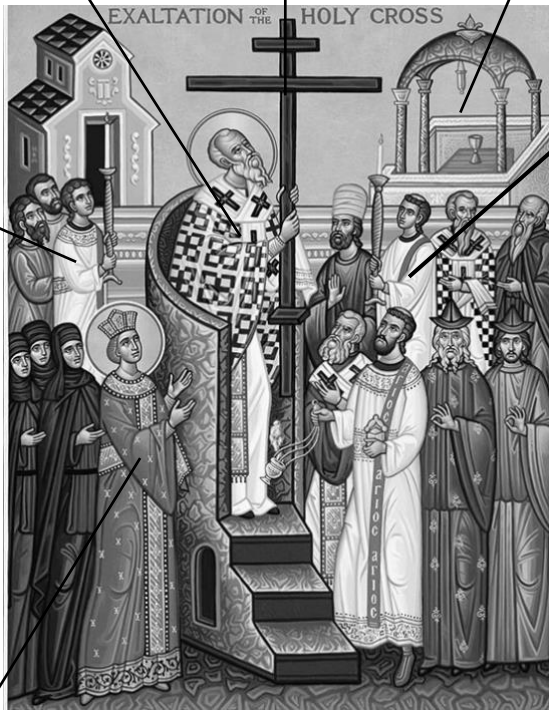
Scan the code to watch a video about the account of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.



## Read about the Icon of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross

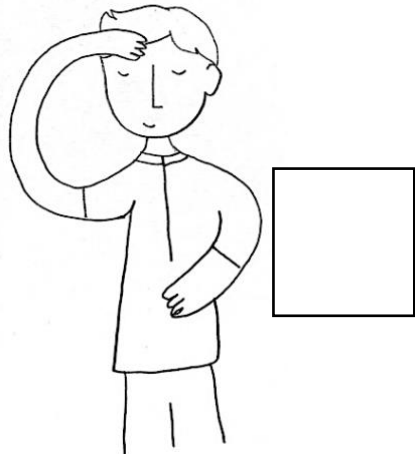
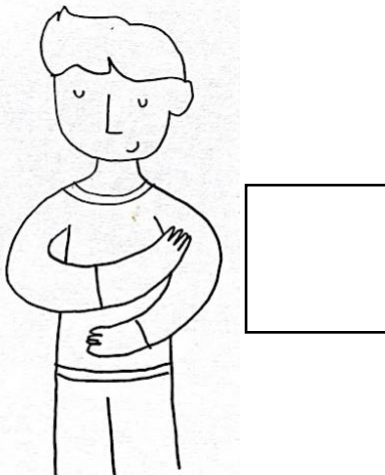
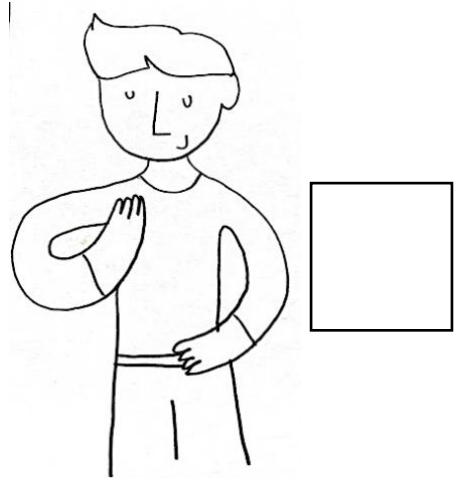
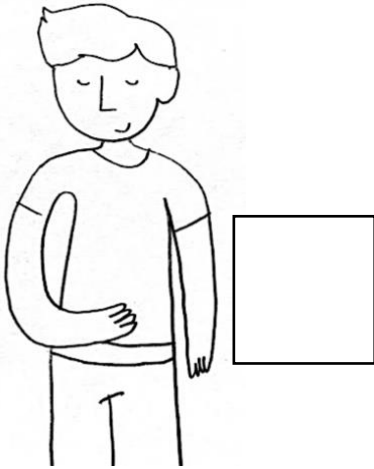
The icon tells the story of the finding of the Cross and of its Exaltation. Bishop Macarius is standing in the pulpit elevating the Cross for all to see and venerate. On each side of the Bishop are deacons holding candles. The elevated Cross is surrounded and venerated by many clergy and lay people, including St. Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine. In the background of the icon is a domed structure that represents the Church of the Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

### Identify the Parts of the Icon

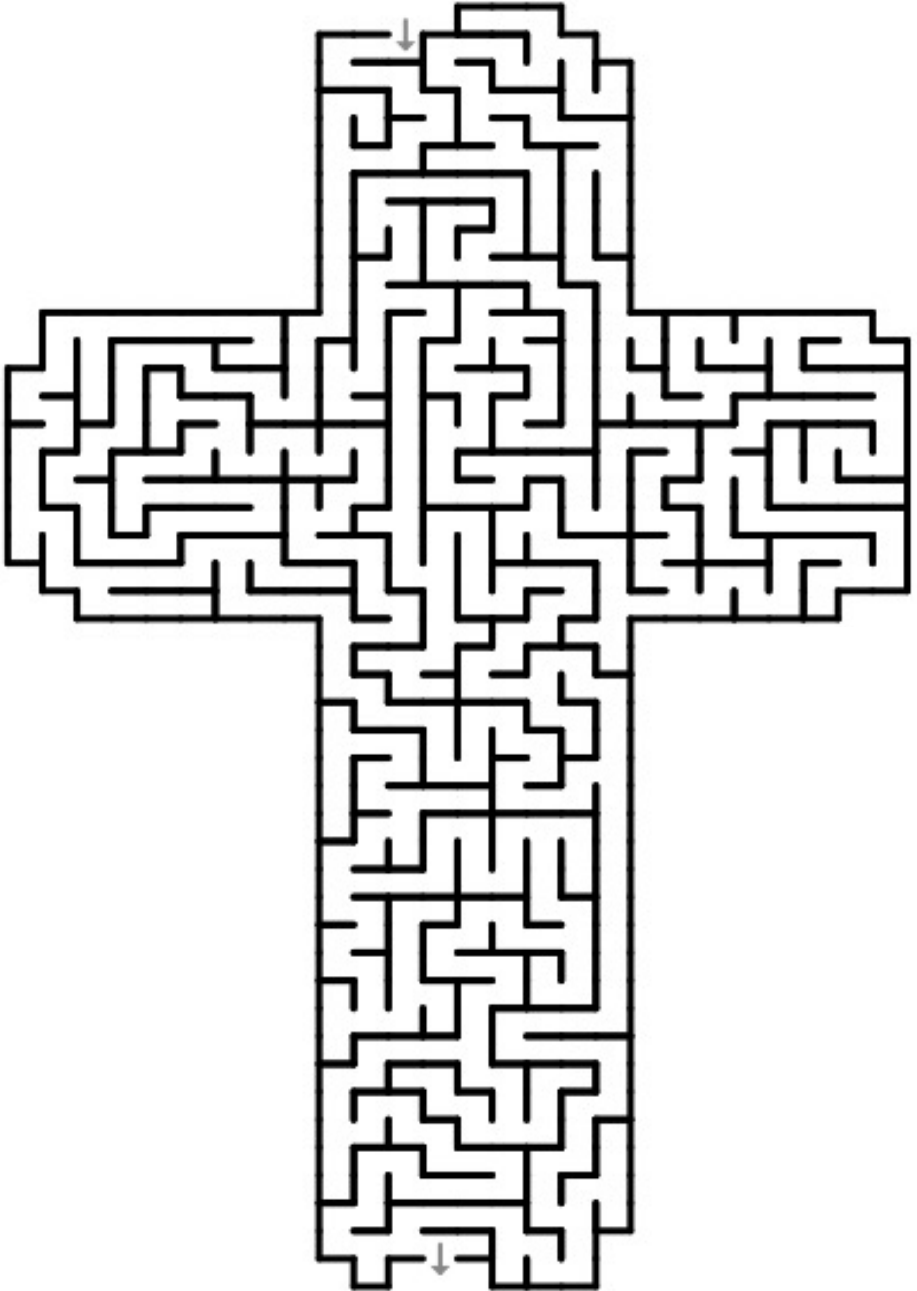


**Sign of the Cross-** Christians make the sign of the cross when they pray. Put 3 fingers on your right hand (thumb, index finger and middle finger) together. The other 2 fingers are bent down to the palm of the hand. First touch the forehead, then the middle of the chest, left shoulder and finally the right shoulder. This gesture acknowledges that God in heaven came down to earth as a man, to take the sinners to the right hand of God. Practice making the sign of the cross. You can do the sign of the cross when you wake up in the morning, when you pray, when you go to church, when you go to bed at night and even when you feel afraid or don't know what to do.

**Put the correct number in each box to show the order in which the sign of the cross is done.  
Color the pictures.**



Cross Maze



# Match the Crosses



Plain Latin



St. Andrew's



St. Peter's



Celtic



St. Thomas



Russian Orthodox



St. George / Greek



Patriarchal



Jerusalem / Crusader



St. Andrew's



St. Thomas



Russian Orthodox



Patriarchal



St. George / Greek



Plain Latin



Celtic



Jerusalem / Crusader



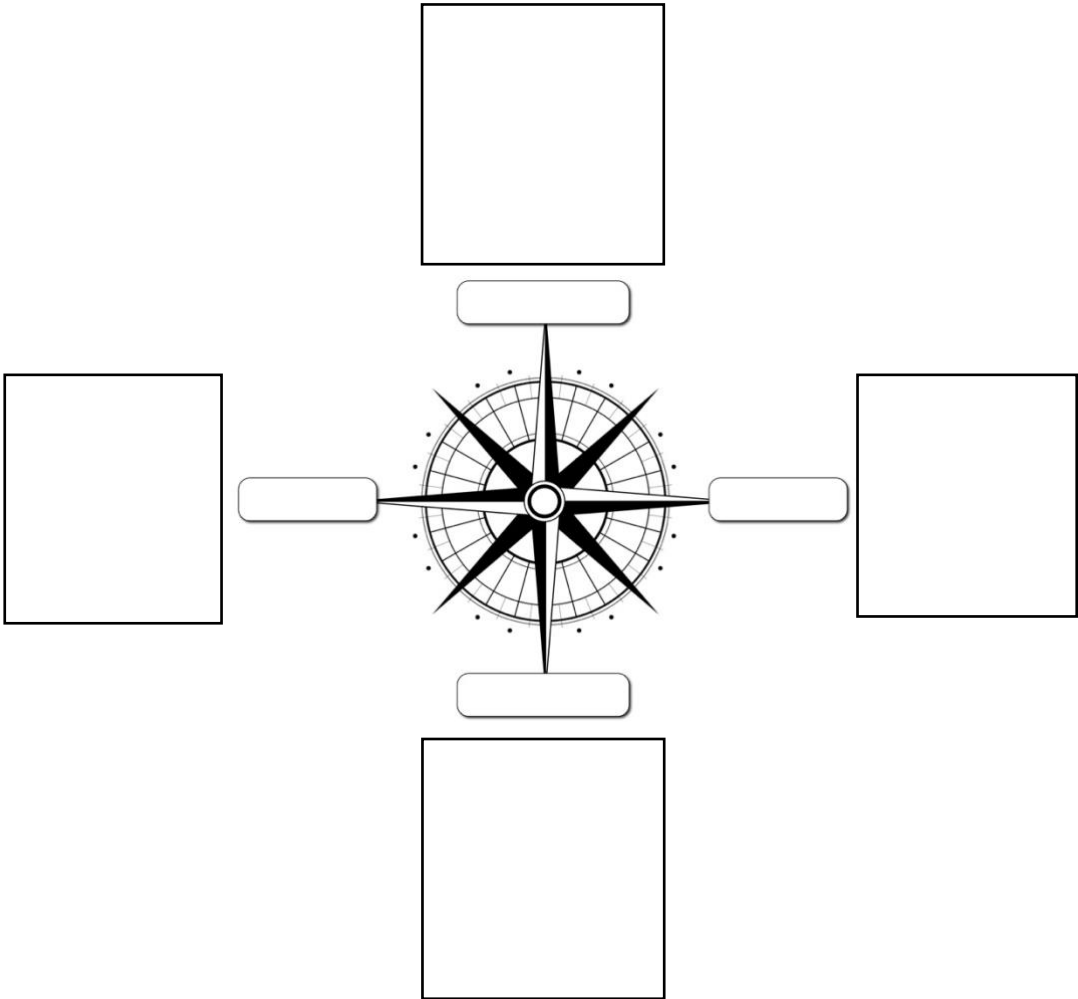
St. Peter's





During the service the celebrant lifts up the cross in the 4 cardinal directions.  
This shows that the cross is the instrument of salvation for all people.

**Label the 4 cardinal directions and draw a cross in each of the boxes.**



Christians around the world wear cross necklaces. This reminds them of the cross that Jesus died on. It also let's others know that they are Christians.

If you have a cross necklace, wear it proudly.

**Draw cross necklaces on the people from around the world.  
Color the pictures.**



## Answer the Questions

### From the Account

- What is the date of the feast?
- Why do we celebrate the feast on this particular day?
- We celebrate the cross changing from a symbol of \_\_\_\_\_ to a symbol of \_\_\_\_\_.
- What 3 historical events do we remember during the feast?
- What 2 groups of people tried to destroy Christianity after Jesus' death?
- What two significant places seemed to have vanished by AD 70?
- What did the Romans build on top of the place where Jesus was buried?
- Who decided to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in AD 326?
- Who guided St. Helena to the place where Jesus had been buried?
- How many crosses were found?
- How did they find out which cross was the True Cross, the one that Jesus was crucified on?
- What was the name of the Bishop of Jerusalem when the cross was found?
- What was the name of St. Helena's son?
- What 2 things did Emperor Constantine build?
- On what day was the Church of the Sepulchre dedicated?
- Which empire came and destroyed the 2 holy places and took the cross?
- Who fought the Persians to get the cross back?
- Who rebuilt the church of the Holy Sepulchre and kept the True Cross back there?
- Bishop \_\_\_\_\_ lifted up the cross in the sight of all who had gathered.
- When the cross was lifted up, the people said, "\_\_\_\_\_."
- During the service the celebrant lifts the cross in all 4 \_\_\_\_\_ directions.
- What are the 4 cardinal directions?
- The cross is the instrument of \_\_\_\_\_ for all people.
- What does 'Kyrie Eleison' mean? What language is it?
- What kind of leaves did St. Helena see growing in a particular place?
- As Christians we are called to carry our own \_\_\_\_\_.
- What might our cross be?
- How does our cross help us to be more like Christ?
- What do many Christians wear to remind them of the cross Jesus died on?
- When can we make the sign of the cross?

### From the Icon

- What is the name of the Bishop in the center of the icon?
- What is the Bishop standing on?
- Who are holding the candles on both sides of the bishop?
- Who are the people standing around the bishop?
- What does the domed structure represent?
- Who is the woman in the icon that is wearing a crown?

Listen to the ancient hymn of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross while you color the picture of St. Helena.

**Troparion of the Holy Cross**

'Save O Lord, Your people, and bless Your inheritance,  
Grant victory to the faithful against the adversaries of the faith,  
And protect Your Kingdom by the power of Your Cross.'



Scan the code to listen  
to the hymn in English,  
Arabic and Greek

