

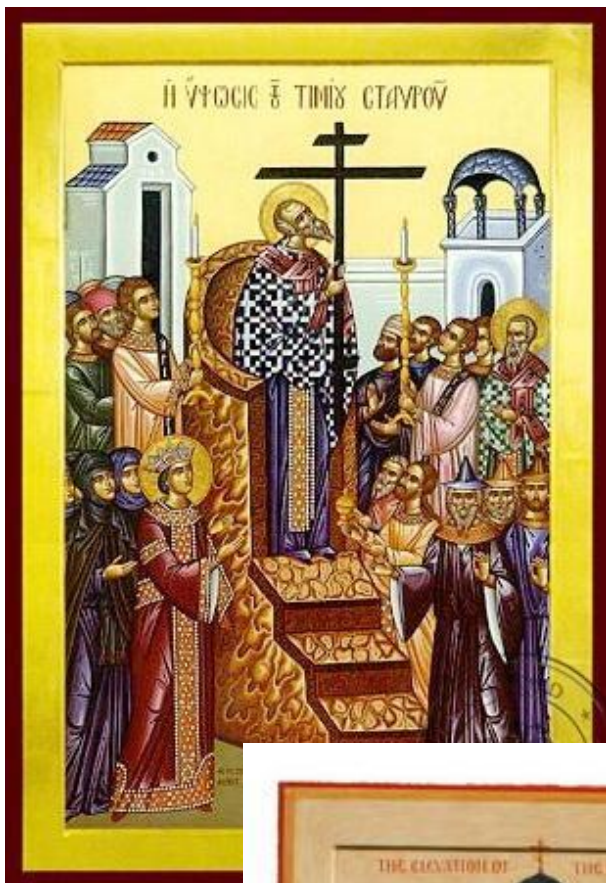
The Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross is celebrated on 14th September. Aidan Hart's book, [Festal Icons](#), describes the history of the feast and of the images associated with it in great detail and I recommend this to any who wish to dig deeper.

It's origins date back to the 4th century, when the Emperor Constantine dreamt of the cross as the sign of his forthcoming victory over Maxentius at the battle of the Milvian bridge in 312 due to the intervention of Christ. When Constantine won he converted and created an edict by which Christianity would be tolerated in the Roman empire.

This feast is associated with a number of themes. First as a symbol of protection in battle as typified by the Troparion for the Feast:

O Lord save your people and bless your inheritance. Grant victory to our nation over its enemies.

The Kontakion, another hymn, of the Feast makes it clear that the sign of Christ's victory is peace. It is for the glory of Him and not the temporal ruler nor should such a victory be source of national pride.



O Christ God who chose by Your free volition to be elevated upon the holy Cross, grant Your mercies to Your new people who are called by Your name; in Your power gladden the hearts of our civil authorities; strengthen them in every good deed so that Your true alliance may be for them a weapon of peace and a standard of victory.

When I read this it reinforces for me the idea that the nation is a natural entity, and that the one who has authority over nations is not the United Nations, but rather, Christ the King. If we want world peace each nation should strive vigorously to be in conformity to the standard of peace that the Holy Cross represents, and where necessary fighting just wars.

Other themes celebrated by the Feast are the healing power of the cross, primarily but not limited to spiritual healing by which we are raised up with Christ from spiritual death due to his sacrifice. It is also the symbol of the Tree of Life, the fruit of which is Christ himself of which we partake in the Eucharist. Furthermore, it is a symbol of unity of people, the standard of peace, by Jews and Gentiles can be in harmony. As St Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 22-24:

Jews demand signs and Greeks search for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the

wisdom of God.

The typical icon of true cross by the around 327 AD. was uncertainty as Jerusalem, Makarios they should observe a woman was healed

Makarios is shown (and sometimes the entourage of present as well.

In an interesting of Anglo-Saxon warring kingdoms of



the feast shows an event after the finding of the mother of Constantine, the Empress Helena in Three crosses were found in Jerusalem and there to which was the true cross, so the Patriarch of suggested that each should be elevated and that the effects. When the true cross was elevated a of serious illness and this was taken of the sign.

centrally elevated the cross, while the Empress Emperor her son) look on. Very often a vast deacons and subdeacons and laity are shown

aside, Hart describes in his book the rich history devotion to the cross. In the history of the Britain prior to the uniting of England. The

Venerable Bede describes in his Ecclesiastical History that around 634 AD. an exiled prince, Oswald, of Northumbria had a dream similar to Constantine and ordered that all should venerate the cross prior to a battle with his pagan father, the King. The lead to the unity first of Northumbria as a Christian Kingdom and was seen as the precursor to the subsequent conversion of the whole country.

In Anglo-Saxon literature, the Exaltation of the Cross takes its most vivid form in the epic poem *"The Dream of the Rood"* written from the perspective of the tree that became the Cross. "Rood" is the Anglo Saxon word for the Cross, and may be seen preserved in usage in such terms as HolyRood, and in the term "rood screen" which was the ornate wooden screen that separated the chancel from the nave. The rood screen is so called because it was surmounted by the Rood itself, a large figure of the crucified Christ. Commonly, to either side of the Rood, there stood supporting statues of saints, normally Mary and St John.

In *The Dream of the Rood*, the cross has a voice and can feel and express emotion – ripped from its roots in the wood, it says:

*"Men bore me on their shoulders there, until they fixed me on a hill;
many enemies fastened me there. Then I saw the Lord of mankind
hasten with great courage, because he wanted to climb upon me.
There I did not dare, against the Lord's word,
to bend or break when I saw the earth's surface tremble. I could have felled all those enemies, but I stood fast.
The young hero stripped himself – he was God Almighty,
strong and stout-minded. He mounted the high gallows,
courageous in the sight of many, when he intended to save mankind.
I trembled when that man embraced me; yet I dared not bow to the ground,
fall to the surface of the earth, but I had to stand fast.
As a rood was I reared. I lifted the mighty King,
the Lord of the heavens; I did not dare to bend.
They drove me through with dark nails. On me those sores are seen,
open wounds of wickedness. I dared not harm any of them.
They mocked us, both together. I was entirely bedewed with blood
poured out from that man's side, after he sent forth his spirit.
I experienced on that hill many cruel events, I saw the God of hosts
severely stretched out.*

*Darkness had covered with clouds the Ruler's body,
the shining brightness. A shadow passed dark under the heavens. All creation wept,
lamented the king's fall. Christ was on the cross."*

To this day there are surviving crosses from the period that were carved to commemorate this feast and devotion to the cross:.



Above and below, Irton Cross in Cumbria, northern England



An Anglo-Saxon crucifixion from Romsey, Kent.



A British cross from the Romanesque period.