

(0914) HOLY CROSS DAY

(SEPTEMBER 14TH, 2021)

Readings: Numbers 21: 4 – 9 **OR** Philippians 2: 6 – 11; Psalm 77(78) 1,2,34 – 38; John 3:13 – 17

In AD 335 two churches, ordered by the Emperor Constantine, had been constructed in Jerusalem on what were believed to be the sites of the crucifixion of Our Lord and of his tomb. They were dedicated on 13th / 14th September. One of them was called *The Anastasis* – that is “The Resurrection” – and covered the tomb itself, while the other included a courtyard in which was the site of Calvary. Here stood what was what was believed to be the Cross, which had been discovered by the Emperor Constantine’s mother, Saint Helena.

In 614, the Persians conquered Jerusalem, destroyed much of the churches, and took the Patriarch and the Cross into exile. Sixteen years later the Emperor Theodosius defeated the Persian king, brought the Cross back in triumph to Jerusalem, and rebuilt the churches.

Today’s feast – observed by both Western and Eastern Christians – marks this event. But at a deeper level it celebrates the centrality of the Cross in the story of our salvation. In the same way that Corpus Christi allows us to rejoice wholeheartedly in the Eucharist, whose institution on Maundy Thursday is overshadowed by the imminent betrayal and arrest of the Lord, so today’s feast allows us to rejoice in the triumph of God’s love over evil, sin and death, which was accomplished on the Cross.

We should glory in the Cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ,

in whom is our salvation, life and resurrection,

in whom we are saved and set free.

In AD 1009 the churches were largely destroyed by order of the Caliph, and, although the Byzantine Emperor was allowed to rebuild the central part in 1048, it was impossible to recreate the earlier complex of buildings. Regrettably, the church which was built to celebrate the Resurrection is now known as ‘The Church of the Holy Sepulchre’!

The Anglo-Saxons had a great devotion to the Cross – shown both in the sculptured crosses of Northumbria and in the early poem *The Dream of the Rood*, depicting Christ as a victor.

Frescoes by Piero della Francesca in Arezzo, which are available online,

show the scenes of the return of the Cross to Jerusalem.