



# Main Church *Iconography*

SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

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## ***Sts. Constantine and Helen***

*May 21*



The Church calls St. Constantine “the Equal of the Apostles,” and historians call him “the Great.” He was the son of the Caesar Constantius Chlorus. His mother was St. Helen, a Christian of humble birth.

St. Constantine was born in 274, and was raised to respect Christianity. His father did not persecute Christians in the lands he governed. This was at a time when Christians

were persecuted throughout the Roman Empire. After the death of Constantius Chlorus in 306, Constantine was acclaimed by the army at York as emperor of Gaul and Britain. His first act was to grant the freedom to practice Christianity in the lands subject to him. The pagan emperors hated Constantine and they plotted to overthrow and kill him, but Constantine bested them in a series of battles, defeating his opponents with the help of God. He prayed to God to give him a sign which would inspire his army to fight valiantly, and the Lord showed him a radiant Sign of the Cross in the heavens with the inscription, “In this Sign, conquer.”

When he became the sole ruler of the Western Roman Empire, he issued the Edict of Milan, which guaranteed religious tolerance for Christians and later extended the provisions of the edict to the eastern half of the Empire. After three hundred years of persecution, Christians could finally practice their faith without fear. He transferred his capital to the East, to the city of Byzantium, which was renamed Constantinople. Constantine was deeply convinced that only Christianity could unify the immense Roman Empire with its diverse peoples. He supported the Church in every way. He recalled Christian confessors from banishment, he built churches, and he showed concern for the clergy.

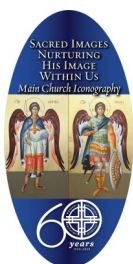
The holy and right-believing Empress Helen, Equal to the Apostles, was the mother of Emperor Saint Constantine the Great. Born the lowest of commoners, she became the consort of the future Roman Emperor Constantius Chlorus and the mother of the future Emperor Constantine the Great. In her final years, she made a religious tour of Syria, Palestine and Jerusalem, during which she discovered the True Cross. Her feast day is on May 21, together with her son.

The emperor also wanted to find the actual Cross upon which our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified. For this purpose, he sent his own mother, the holy Empress Helen, to Jerusalem. Patriarch Macarius of Jerusalem and St. Helen began the search, and through the will of God, the Life-Creating Cross was miraculously discovered. We commemorate the Uncovering of the Precious Cross and the Precious Nails by the Holy Empress Helen on March 6.

While in Palestine, the holy empress did much of benefit for the Church. She ordered that all places connected with the earthly life of the Lord and His All-Pure Mother, should be freed of all traces of paganism, and she commanded that churches should be built at the sites of the Crucifixion and Resurrection, in Bethlehem at the cave where our Saviour was born, another on the Mount of Olives whence He ascended into Heaven, and many others. The Emperor Constantine ordered a magnificent church in honor of Christ's Resurrection to be built over His tomb. St. Helen gave the Life-Creating Cross to the Patriarch for safe-keeping, and took part of the Cross with her for the emperor. After distributing generous alms at Jerusalem and feeding the needy, the holy Empress Helen returned to Constantinople, where she died in the year 327.

Because of her great services to the Church and her efforts in finding the Life-Creating Cross, the Empress Helen is called "the Equal of the Apostles."

*Apolytikion: He beheld the image of Your Cross in the Heavens and, as Paul, he too did not receive the call from men. Your Apostle among Kings placed the care of the Royal City in Your hands. Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O only Loving Lord, keep it ever in peace.*



**For further inquiries contact a member of the  
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