



**The Holy, Glorious, Great, God—crowned
Sovereigns Constantine and Helen,
The Equals to the Apostles
Whom the Holy Church Celebrates on May 21.**

This great and renowned sovereign of the Christians was the son of Constantine Chlorus (the ruler of the westernmost parts of the Roman empire), and of the blessed Helen. He was born in 272, in (according to some authorities) Naïssus of Dardania, a city on the Hellespont. In 306, when his father died, he was proclaimed successor to his throne. In 312, on learning that Maxentius and Maximinius had joined forces against him, he marched into Italy, where, while at the head of his troops, he saw in the sky after midday, beneath the sun, a radiant pillar in the form of a cross with the words; “By this shalt thou conquer.” The following night, our Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him in a dream and declared to him the power of the Cross and its significance. When he arose in the morning, he immediately ordered that a *labarum* be made (which is a banner or standard of victory over the enemy) in the form of a cross, and he inscribed on it the Name of Jesus Christ. On the 28th of October, he attacked and mightily conquered Maxentius, who drowned in the Tiber River while fleeing. The following day, Constantine entered Rome in triumph and was proclaimed Emperor of the West by the Senate, while Licinius, his brother-in-law, ruled in the East. But out of malice, Licinius later persecuted the Christians. Constantine fought him once and again, and utterly destroyed him in 324, and in this manner he became monarch over the West and the East. Under him and because of him all persecutions against the Church ceased. Christianity triumphed and idolatry was overthrown.

In 325 he gathered the First Ecumenical Council in Nicea, which he himself personally addressed. In 324, in the ancient city of Byzantium, he laid the foundations of the new capital of his realm, and solemnly inaugurated it on May 11, 330, naming it after himself, Constantinople; since the throne of the imperial rule was transferred thither from Rome, it was named New Rome, the inhabitants of its domain were called Romans, and it was considered the continuation of the Roman Empire. Falling ill near Nicomedia, he requested to receive divine Baptism, according to Eusebius (*The Life of Constantine*, Book IV, 61, 62), and also according to Socrates and Sozomen; and when he had been deemed worthy of the Holy Mysteries, he reposed in 337, on May 21 or 22, the day of Pentecost, having lived sixty-five years, of which he ruled for thirty-one years. His remains were transferred to Constantinople and were deposited in the Church of the Holy Apostles, which has been built by him (see *Homily XXVI on Second Corinthians* by Saint John Chrysostom).

As for his holy mother, *Helen*, after her son had made the Faith of Christ triumphant throughout the Roman Empire, she undertook a journey to Jerusalem and found the Holy Cross on which our Lord was crucified (see Sept. 23 and 14). After this, Saint Helen, in her zeal to glorify Christ, erected churches in Jerusalem at the site of the Crucifixion and Resurrection, in Bethlehem at the cave where the Saviour was born, and another on the Mount of Olives whence He ascended into Heaven, and many others throughout the Holy Land, Cyprus, and elsewhere. She was proclaimed Augusta, her image was stamped upon golden coins, and two cities were named Helenopolis after her in Bithynia and in Palestine. Having been thus glorified for her piety, she departed to the Lord being about eighty years of age, according to some in the year 330, according to others, in 316.

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Dismissal Hymn. Plagal of Fourth Tone

HAVING seen the image of Thy Cross in Heaven, and like Paul, having received the call not from men, Thine apostle among kings entrusted the commonwealth to Thy hand, O Lord. Keep us always in peace, by the intercessions of the Theotokos, O only Friend of man.



Kontakion. Third Tone
On this day the Virgin

ON this day Constantine * and blessed Helen, his mother, * have revealed the Cross, the Wood, * worthy of all veneration. * For the Jews, it is dishonour; * but faithful rulers * have it as a weapon vanquishing their opponents. * For our sakes hath it been shown forth * as a great ensign, * dread and most awesome in war.

Selected Hymns
From
THE MENAION
VESPERS

*After the Proemial Psalm, we chant Blessed is the man. For Lord, I have cried,
We allow for six verses and chant three Stichera of the Feast and the following of the Saints:*

Fourth Tone. Unto them that fear Thee

AS a mighty weapon given unto our Emperor * Thy most honored and precious Cross, * by which he reigned on the earth * righteously and justly, * shining forth in piety; and Thy mercy hath been vouchsafed * to him the Kingdom of Heaven by Thy grace. * With him, we all now glorify Thy man-befriending economy, * O my Jesus, Almighty Lord, * Thou divine Saviour of our souls.

THOU hast richly given to Thy pious servant, O Friend of man, * David's meekness and gentleness, * the wisdom of Solomon, * and the Orthodoxy * of Thy Twelve Apostles, since Thou art alone King of kings * and Lord of lords, * Who dost govern all that is. * On this account, we glorify Thy man-befriending economy, * O my Jesus, Almighty Lord, * Thou divine Saviour of our souls.

THOU wast first to subjugate the sceptre unto Christ willingly, * ever-memorable Emperor, * perceiving Him to be God * and the King of all things, He Who giveth vict'ry, the Benefactor unto all, *above all power and principality. * O thou who lovest Christ, for this cause was thy kingdom made prosperous * by Christ Jesus, the Friend of man, the divine Saviour of our souls.

Glory. *Second tone. By Byzantium*

RECEIVING from God the best of rich gifts, O most mighty King, exceedingly great Constantine, thou rightly becamest eminent in them; for shining brightly with the rays of the All-holy Spirit through Baptism, thou becamest

invincible among kings, offering the inhabited world and the God-fearing imperial city unto thy Creator as a dowry. Wherefore, since together with Helen, thy mother, thou hast boldness, cease not to entreat Christ God that forgiveness of sins and great mercy be granted unto all who celebrate thy memory.

MATINS

SESSIONAL HYMNS

Plagal of Fourth Tone. By conceiving the Wisdom

RAISING up thy perception to Heaven's heights, * and considering the comeliness of the stars, * through them, thou wast brought to know * the divine Lord of all that is; * for amidst them the weapon of Christ's Cross shone brilliantly; * the words: Conquer and rule in this sign, were inscribed thereon. * Wherefore, having opened thy soul's eyes, thou didst read there * the words written for thy sake * and didst learn what way thou shouldst take, * O all-venerable Constantine. * Intercede with Christ our God * that forgiveness of all transgressions be * granted to them that with longing keep thy memory.

OIKOS

LET us the faithful honour Constantine with his mother Helen; for hearing the words of the Prophet, who spake of cedar, pine, and cypress, they understood him to refer to the tripartite Cross, whereby the saving Passion was accomplished; and they brought forward all the Jews' envy and slander: and finding it, they revealed it. Wherefore, unto all men they have been shown forth as victors, bearing the invincible weapon, the great ensign, dread and most awesome in war.

SYNAXARION

- ✠ On the twenty-first of this month we commemorate the holy, glorious, God-crowned and great sovereigns Constantine and Helen, the Equals to the Apostles.

Verses

As the earthly Sovereigns had the earthly crown in common,
So now they have in common the crown celestial.

On the twenty-first died Constantine with his mother.

- ✠ On this day we celebrate the Synaxis of the Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos of Vladimir.

By the intercessions of Thy Saints, O Christ God, have mercy on us. Amen.

The Making of a Christian Emperor Saint Constantine the Great, Equal to the Apostles

By Father Panagiotes Carras

"By this, conquer."

(An excerpt from the concluding remarks :)

"In his beautiful life, we see how God put this rugged soldier through the fire, took this rough diamond and cut and polished it until [, by] the end of his life, it glittered like fire. In this amazing Saint who is called Equal to the Apostles, we see the positive response to the great outpouring of grace upon him. He was a co-worker with God, he was God's man.

Unhappily, most modern books in English on Saint Constantine portray him as a villain, a shrewd politician, and a conniver. Here we once more recall the story of the demons that were thwarted by the Cross. Diocletian, seeing this sign, became infuriated at the Christians and instituted a great persecution against them. But the young Constantine saw the truth.

May the light that enlightened Saint Constantine to see the truth always be with us and protect us from the darkness that would conceal our Lord from us. May we always follow in the footsteps of Saint Constantine rather than those who follow the demons. May each one of us respond as Saint Constantine did to the great mystery of the cross and become co-workers with God, men and women of God. Finally, let us each take up our own cross, that symbol of immortality and trophy of victory over death, and by it let us conquer.

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