

## **An article on the Sunday before the Elevation of the Holy Cross by His Eminence, the Most Reverend Metropolitan of Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines Basilios**



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**September 6th , 2019 | By His Eminence, Metropolitan Basilios**

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**This Sunday is known as ‘The Sunday before the feast of the elevation of the Holy Cross’;  
the reading of the Gospel is from St. John 3:13-17.**

The feast and commemoration of the Elevation (or Exaltation) of the Honoured and Life-giving Cross falls on September 14 in the Holy Orthodox Church’s ecclesiastical calendar. On this day we commemorate two events connected with the Precious

Cross of Christ: the finding of the Cross on Golgotha by the equal-to-the-apostles King Constantine and his mother St. Helena, and the returning of the Cross to Jerusalem from Persia.

As we read during the service;

“Heaven has shown the good man of worship and the wise king of holy determination’s use of the power of the Holy Cross in which the hostile enemies were destroyed, the heresy was stopped, and faith in God spread in the countries of the earth, so we praise Christ our God as He is Glorified.”

Saint Constantine saw the sign of the Cross in the sky, shimmering with bright light, and around it this inscription “With this sign you Concore.”

As this is a major feast in the Orthodox Church, the Church prepares the faithful to celebrate the elevation of the Holy Cross by reminding them during the preceding Sunday. This, if anything, demonstrates the importance of this feast and the relevance of the Cross in the life of a Christian.

A part of the Holy Church’s mission is to prepare the believers spiritually and liturgically to celebrate the major feasts within the church, for example, the Nativity of our Lord and Savior in the flesh is preceded by “Sunday before Nativity” or “Sunday of the Fathers” to remind us of the promises and prophecies that speaks of the coming of the Lord.

During the time preceding the Resurrection of Christ (Pascha), which is considered the Feast of Feasts and the Season of Seasons; preparations start on the Sunday week ahead of the major feast; The Palm Sunday, or Sunday of Entrance into Jerusalem and the start of the Salvific Passions. Thus, also with the feast of the Holy Cross, it is preceded by the Sunday before the elevation, as a preparation for the feast, to remind the believers of the prophecies that spoke in the Old Testament of the Cross with symbolic images, confirmed by the voluntary and accepted death of the Lord on the Cross.

The significance of this feast is evident in the fact that it replaces the Resurrection if the feast falls on Sunday. In the sense that if the day of the Elevation of the Cross falls on Sunday, the readings shall be for the Feast of the Cross, not for the Resurrection, and the Gospel of the Matins of the Resurrection is not read but for the feast.

The Gospel passage begins by reminding the faithful of an incident from the Old Testament that acts as a symbol and prefigurement of Christ's rise on the cross. The Lord says: *"As Moses lifted the Snake in the wilderness, this is how the Son of Man should be lifted."*

In the Old Testament, Moses the Prophet constructed a snake from copper and erected it on a pillar in the wilderness, according to the Lord's word, so that the children of Israel, who are inevitably bitten by the snake, should look at the copper snake as an antidote to their bites and eventual death. The Lord said to Moses:

"Make you a burning snake and put it on the banner of all those who have been bitten and looked at it will live. Moses made a fiery serpent of copper and placed it on the flag, and when someone was bitten, and looked at the copper snake will live."

(Numbers 21:8-9)

The Katavasia of the Feast of the Cross (from the Matins hymns) speaks of various images and symbols of the Old Testament; the rod of Moses, which struck the Red Sea in the form of a cross and saved the Hebrew people by helping them escape from the Pharaoh's chariots, the copper Serpent on a banner that heals from the snake bite just by looking at it. There is also the example of Moses, when he extended his hands in the form of a cross and triumphed over the Giants, as well as the blossoming rod of Haroun. The feast's Katavasia compares between the "old tree" (i.e. the tree of knowledge of good and evil) from which by eating from has exposed us in paradise and brought death to mankind and, the lifegiving wood, thus the Tree of life, the Cross, which when it was planted in the earth, brought salvation and life to mankind.

"Today the death that came to man through eating of the tree is abolished through the Cross."

The Lord Jesus continues in the Gospel of John saying:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

The Cross has become the title of self-denial or self-emptying (Kenosis) as the Apostle Paul says in his letter to The Philippians:

“But he emptied himself by taking the image of a slave in the likeness of people. Found in the body as a human being, He emptied Himself and obeyed to death the “death of the cross.”

(Philippians 2:7-8)

The Cross has become a path of giving, sacrifice and love for others. *“There is no greater love than for a man to offer himself for his loved ones.”* The Cross has become an instrument of salvation, a title of love and a ladder that ascends believers from earth to heaven and is a source of pride for them if they follow the example of their Master, if they imitate His exemplary Divine Love and extreme humility.

“But God forbid that I should boast except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”

(Galatians 6:14)

**“To Thy Cross, O Master, we bow and Thy Holy Resurrection, we Glorify.”**

Amen.

Yours in Christ,  
+ Metropolitan Basilios

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- Source: [antiochian.org.au](http://antiochian.org.au)