

CONCERNING THE FEAST OF THE ELEVATION OF THE CROSS ON SEPTEMBER 14TH

—by Saint Nektarios of Pentapolis—

The Elevation of the Cross by Patriarch Zacharias of Jerusalem that took place in 626 AD is celebrated on September 14th

The feast of the Elevation of the Venerable Cross that is celebrated on September 14th is the second elevation of the Venerable Cross that took place during the reign of emperor Heraclius and Patriarch Zacharias of Jerusalem. This feast day was established on account of the following:

After the Persian Emperor Chosroes II conquered Palestine and Jerusalem, he subsequently took many Christian captives back with him to Persia, including Patriarch Zacharias, all whom he held hostage for fourteen years. During this conquest, the Persian emperor also looted and brought back with him the one half of the Venerable Cross.

Emperor Heraclius, however, set out on a campaign against Chosroes and utterly defeated him. Having done so, he liberated Patriarch Zacharias and all the other prisoners of war, and he retook possession of the Venerable Cross. When he returned to Jerusalem, Patriarch Zacharias from an elevated platform raised the Venerable Cross in the air for all the Christians to see.

Prior to setting out on his expedition, the Emperor had ordered that a service be held in Constantinople. During this service, the Patriarch along with all the clergymen, and in the presence of a prayerful Emperor and a multitude of Christians, sent up petitions to God, beseeching the Lord to grant victory to the Emperor and his army, so that they may be able to liberate the Venerable Cross and all the captives from the enemy's hands. Thus, after the glorious victory against the Persians in 626 AD, on account of gratitude to Christ, the Emperor commanded that this second Elevation of the Venerable Cross that took place in Jerusalem when he returned from the war be commemorated each year.

Ever since, the custom of celebrating this second elevation of the Venerable Cross spread throughout the entire Byzantine Empire and is commemorated up until today in all the Orthodox churches on September 14th.