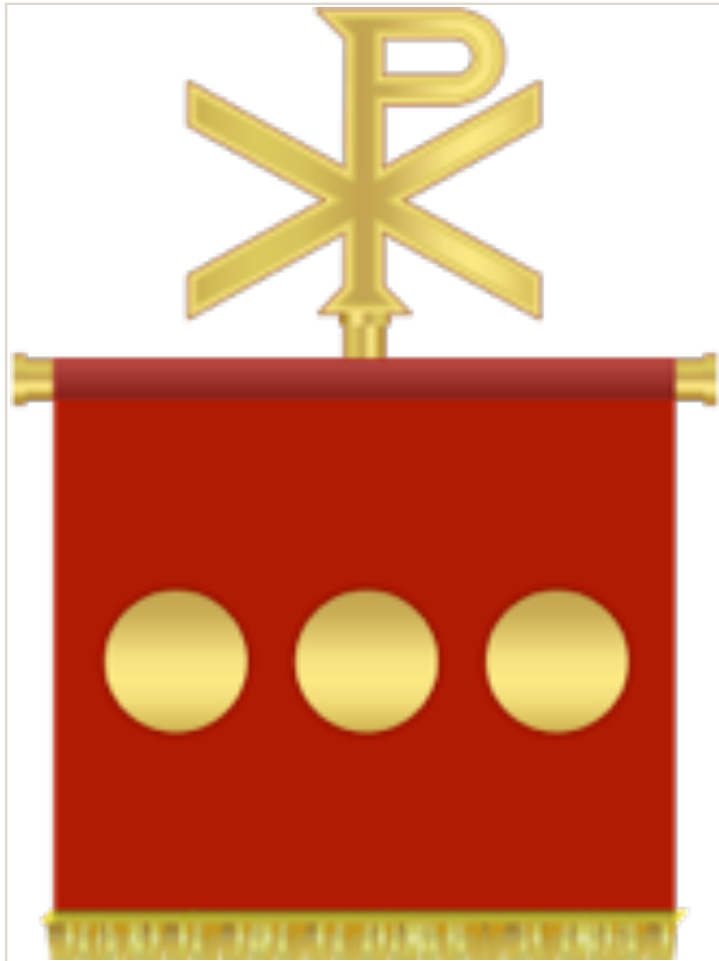


Emperor Constantine I's Visions of the Holy Cross in the Heavens Three Times



Labarum of Constantine I, displaying the “Chi-Rho” symbol

Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labarum>

From the “The Fourteenth Day of the Month of September,” Homily on the Elevation of the Precious and Life-giving Cross of the Lord,” St. Demetrius of Rostov, The Great collection of The Lives of the Saints, Chrysostom Press, Hot Springs, MO, 1994, p. 250-252.

When the persecutor Maxentius ruled in Rome, he brought much evil upon the people. Not only did he persecute and torment the Christians, but he also slew pagans as well, seizing their possessions. Acting shamefully, he ill-treated even noble families. He was bitterly hated by all Rome on Account of his cruelty and defiled way of life. Consequently, the Romans secretly sent word to the Emperor Constantine, who then ruled in Briton together with his mother Helen,

begging him to come and deliver them from the tormentor. Constantine first wrote to Maxentius as a friend, imploring him to cease his violence. Maxentius, however, not only did not listen to him and failed to correct himself but sank even deeper into depravity and evil. He rose up against Constantine, not wishing to acknowledge him as co-Emperor and as his equal in rank. Constantine had been elected to the throne by the entire Roman Army, but Maxentius ascended the throne of the Roman Empire in a tyrannical fashion, for the people had not assented to his enthronement. He was chosen by only a handful of nobles, to whom he had promised gifts and honors, whereas Constantine was named Emperor by general consent.

When Constantine heard that Maxentius refused to correct himself and only sank into even greater evils, he decided on war. However, his troops were few in number, and bearing in mind the evil wiles Maxentius was likely to devise, Constantine hesitated. He knew Maxentius had shed much human blood in worshipping devils and had offered in sacrifice to the demons many children, maidens, and pregnant women, attempting to gain the favor of his vain gods. Realizing that Maxentius possessed great demonic power, Constantine began to pray to the One God, Who rules over heaven and earth and is worshipped by the race of Christians, that He grant him a token of victory over the tormentor. As he fervently prayed, the image of the Cross of the Lord formed of stars and shining more brightly than the sun, appeared at noonday. The inscription on it was "BY THIS SIGN CONQUER." All of his soldiers also saw the sign, including the commander Artemius, who was later put to death for Christ's sake by the Emperor Julian, and they marveled. The greater part of them, however, were afraid that the struggle would go against them, because among the pagans, the image of the cross signified misfortune and death, inasmuch as thieves and evildoers were punished by execution on the cross. Even the Emperor Constantine doubted. As he slept that night, however, Christ the Lord Himself appeared to him and again revealed the sign of the precious Cross which had appeared the day before, and He said to Constantine, "Make an image of this sign, and command that it be carried in front of the army, and not only Maxentius but all your enemies will be overcome."

A coin of Constantine (c.337) showing a depiction of his labarum spearing a serpent.

When the Emperor awoke, he related the vision to his nobles. He summoned expert goldsmiths and commanded them to fashion of gold, pearls, and precious stones a copy of the precious Cross, like the one which had appeared to him. Moreover, he ordered all his troops to make the sign of the Cross on all their weapons, helmets, and shields.

When the impious Maxentius learned that Constantine had entered Italy and was descending upon Rome, he most impudently led the Roman Army out against him. Constantine ordered that the precious Cross be carried before his army, and when his forces engaged Maxentius' army, Maxentius was defeated by the power of the precious Cross, and a multitude of his soldiers were cut down. Maxentius himself was forced to flee across a bridge he himself had built, pursued by the Emperor Constantine. By the power of God, however, the bridge collapsed, and the wretch was drowned in the river with his soldiers like Pharaoh of old; and the river was filled with horsemen, their horses, and weapons. The great Constantine then entered Rome in triumph, and the people greeted him with honor and great rejoicing. Constantine gave thanks to God, Who had granted him victory over the persecutor by the power of the precious and life-creating Cross. In commemoration of that most glorious victory, he set up a cross in the center of the city of Rome on a tall pillar of stone upon which was inscribed: "This city was delivered from the yoke of the tormentor by this saving sign."

Later, Constantine was engaged in a conflict with the Byzantines, whose obscure city had been founded by a Greek, one Byzas, during the time of Manasses, King of the Jews. Twice Constantine had been defeated by the Byzantines, which greatly incensed him. One evening, as he lifted his eyes up to heaven, he saw an inscription spelled out with stars, which said: *Call upon Me in the day of thine afflictions, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me.*" [Psalm 49] This startled the Emperor, and when he again raised his eyes to heaven, he saw once again a cross formed of stars, with the inscription "BY THIS SIGN CONQUER." And so, with the Cross preceding his troops, he overcame his foes and took the city of Byzantium.

In yet a third war fought by Constantine with the Scythians along the River Danube, the weapon of salvation appeared in the heavens, bringing victory as it had before. Thus, he became convinced of the power of Christ, Who was crucified upon the Cross. Believing in Him as the only True God, he was baptized together with his praiseworthy mother Helen, who was full of love for God. It was Helen whom he sent to Jerusalem with great riches to search for the precious Cross.