

*The Catholic Company presents*



## **What happened to the True Cross?**

How did the Church find the relics from Jesus' crucifixion?

Have you ever wondered what happened to Jesus' cross? Known as "the True Cross," for hundreds of years this highly-venerated relic was thought to be lost.

Anti-Christian Romans sought to dispel any effort to spread the Good News; that included destroying objects from Jesus's crucifixion. According to tradition, the True Cross was buried in the ground with the crosses of the two thieves who were crucified with Jesus.

Almost 300 years later, after the Roman Emperor Constantine's conversion to Christianity, he sent his mother, St. Helena, to the Holy Land in search of the True Cross. According to legend, St. Helena followed in Jesus' footsteps by performing corporal works of mercy—such as feeding the hungry and visiting the sick—on her way to Jerusalem. Once in the Holy Land, some legends say a commoner led her to the True Cross, while others believe that St. Judas Cyriacus helped her find it.

St. Helena found all three crosses buried in the ground, but wasn't sure which one belonged to Jesus. There are many different legends about how St. Helena and the bishop of Jerusalem confirmed which one was the True Cross. One myth claims the bishop of Jerusalem had an ill woman touch all three crosses. As soon as the woman touched the True Cross, she was healed.

Upon discovering the True Cross, St. Helena ordered a church to be constructed on the site where she found it. This church is known as the Church of the Resurrection, or the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. St. Helena brought a piece of the True Cross back to the empire's capital city, Constantinople, and left another part at the Church of the Resurrection, where Christians made a yearly pilgrimage to see the relic.

Throughout the next thousand years, the piece of the True Cross at the Church of the Resurrection changed hands many times. It was captured in 614 by the Sassanid emperor, and then restored to Jerusalem by the Byzantine Emperor

Heraclius. Later, when the Islamic rulers took Jerusalem at the beginning of the 11th century, Greek Orthodox Christians protected and hid the relic of the True Cross, a small piece of wood embedded in a gold cross.

This relic was restored to the Church of the Resurrection when Europeans in the First Crusade captured Jerusalem. Finally, in 1187, it was captured by Saladin, the leader of the Muslim military campaign against the Crusader states in Levant. This piece of the True Cross has never returned and was last seen in the city of Damascus.

The piece of the True Cross that was preserved in Constantinople was shared among the Venetians and the new Eastern Roman Empire. However, threatened with bankruptcy, this new empire decided to sell the relics. St. Louis, King of France, bought several pieces of the True Cross and preserved them in Sainte-Chapelle in Paris. Most of these relics disappeared during the French Revolution. All that remain are a few fragments and a Holy Nail; these are preserved with the other relics in the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris.

To learn more about the fascinating history of relics from Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, [check out \*Relics from the Crucifixion\*, sold here.](#)