

The Life of Saint Helena (Bottom Windows)

Our stained glass bottom windows do not only tell us the story of St. Helena, our holy patroness. They remind us that we must be like her, performing our tasks in life, being devoted to the Sacraments, serving Christ in the poor, and always finding the Cross of Jesus in our own lives. May we always love the Cross of Jesus as St. Helena did.

"We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world."



By God's gracious plan, Helena's son Constantine was to go into battle at the Milvian Bridge (312) to determine who would reign as Emperor. Before the battle, Constantine (who was not yet a Christian and who was actually baptized only on his deathbed) had a vision of a Cross in the sky, over which were found the words *"In hoc signo vincis,"* "In this sign you will conquer." Constantine trusted the power of the cross of "the God of the Christians", instructed his soldiers to put the cross on the shields and battle standards, and won the battle and the Imperial power. In thanksgiving, he resolved in 313 to enact a policy of religious freedom (often called the Edict of Milan, although there was no actual edict in writing) allowing the Christians to worship freely. The fourth window in our church recognizes the freedom of the Church from the catacombs (the underground places where Roman Christians had to meet secretly for Mass) and St. Helena's role in bringing this about.



Constantine wished to pay special honor to the Cross of Jesus. He asked his mother Helena (now the Empress) to embark on a journey to Jerusalem to find the True Cross of Jesus. Despite her advanced years (almost eighty), Helena accepted the task and went to Jerusalem in the year 326 with her son's soldiers. After ascertaining from the people where the Cross might be buried, they came to the hill of Calvary. A pagan temple had been built on that spot to the pagan goddess Venus by the Emperor Hadrian, who wanted to destroy all remembrance of the place of Jesus' Crucifixion. Ironically this pagan Emperor in effect made it easier for Helena's soldiers to establish where they should dig to find the True Cross. The Church historian Eusebius of Caesarea commented on the pagans' futile attempt to destroy remembrance of the True Cross, "Poor men! They thought it was possible to hide from the human race the splendor of the Sun that had risen over the world. They did not understand that it is impossible to keep hidden under earth Him who has won victory over death!" Helena's soldiers demolished the pagan temple and excavated the area underneath and found three crosses, one belong to Jesus, the others to the two thieves crucified with Him, but all unmarked. (They also found the nails used in the Crucifixion of Jesus and the titulus or charge: INRI, the Latin abbreviation for "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.) Helena was advised by Bishop Macarius of Jerusalem to trust in God's power and to touch each of the crosses to a crippled woman. When the True Cross was touched to the woman, she was cured. The second window in our church depicts this scene.



While St. Helena left most of the True Cross in Jerusalem, she returned to Rome, bringing a substantial portion of the Cross with her, to be venerated in that holy city. The fifth window depicts St. Helena and her son Constantine holding the True Cross for veneration



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The historian Eusebius writes this beautiful summary of the life of St. Helena not long after her death:

"Especially abundant were the gifts she bestowed on the destitute and the unprotected poor. To some she gave money; to others an ample supply of clothing. She liberated some from imprisonment or from the bitter servitude of the mines. Others she delivered from unjust oppression, and others again she restored from exile. While her character derived luster from such deeds, she was far from neglecting personal piety toward God. She might be seen continually frequenting His Church. She adorned the houses of prayer with

splendid offerings, but did not overlook the churches of the smallest cities. This admirable woman was to be seen, in simple and modest attire, mingling with the crowd of worshippers and testifying her devotion to God by her pious conduct."

The first window reminds us that St. Helena found Christ in the service of the poor and recognizes her works of charity.

The seventh window in our church depicts an angel giving St. Helena the Cross with the inscription, "St. Helena exchanges the Crown for the Cross," reminding us that her earthly power was secondary to her devotion to the Holy Cross. It can truly be said that, long before St. Helena found the Cross of Jesus on the hill of Calvary, she found the Cross of Jesus in her own life and in her own heart.





The remaining windows (all on the Benedict Avenue side of the church) are depictions of St. Helena and the seven sacraments. The eighth window depicts her own baptism.

WINDOW 9

The ninth depicts her reception of Confirmation.



The tenth reminds us of St. Helena devoutly receiving Holy Communion.



The eleventh tells us of her sorrow for her sins in the Sacrament of Confession (Penance).

The twelfth window portrays St. Helena receiving the Holy Anointing (previously called Extreme Unction, now called the Sacrament of the Sick).



The thirteenth window sees St. Helena as devoted to new priests in the Sacrament of Holy Orders.



The fourteenth and final window shows St. Helena's love for the Sacrament of Matrimony.