

Holy Cross Day 14th September

(Refrain)

Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim
till all the world adore his sacred name.

1. Come, Christians, follow where the Master trod,
our King victorious, Christ the Son of God.

2. Led on their way by this triumphant sign,
the hosts of God in conquering ranks combine.

3. Each newborn servant of the Crucified
bears on the brow the seal of him who died.

4. O Lord, once lifted on the glorious tree,
your death has brought us life eternally.

5. So shall our song of triumph ever be:
praise to the Crucified for victory!

"George Kitchin wrote "Lift High the Cross" in 1887, while he was the Church of England Dean of Winchester, for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. It has been suggested that the hymn was inspired by the story of Constantine the Great's conversion to Christianity after seeing a cross with "In hoc signo vinces" (In this sign you will conquer) on it. It is based on Matthew 16:24.

In the modern calendar, **three events** are commemorated on this day

- the discovery of the True Cross in Jerusalem in 326 by St Helena

- the placing in the church which Emperor Constantine, son of Helena, had had built on the site believed to be that of the Holy Sepulchre, Jesus' burial place, of one-third of the True Cross (the other thirds had been taken to Rome and Byzantium (Constantinople), the then capital of the Roman Empire)

- the restoration to Jerusalem of the Cross by the Emperor Heraclius in 624, after he recaptured the city from the Persian Emperor Chosroes 11 who had conquered it in 614.

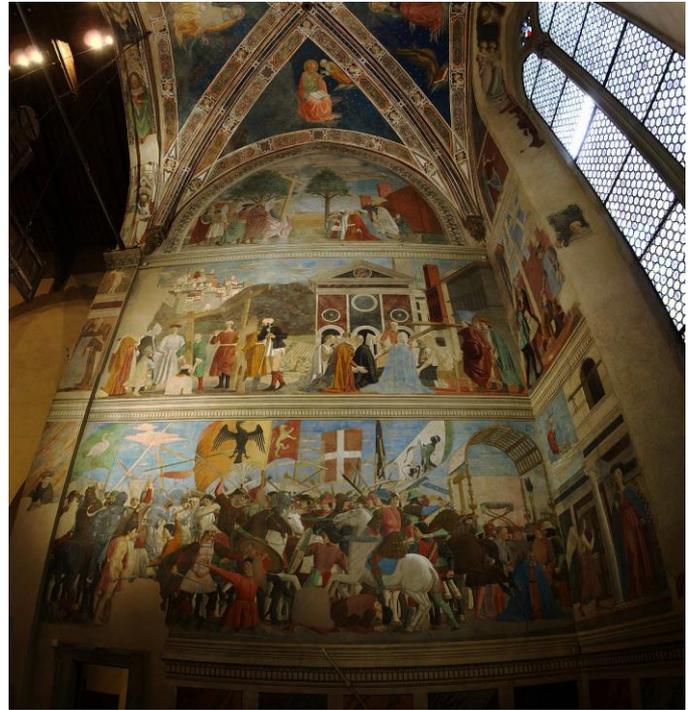
The frescoes by Piero della Francesca in the church of S. Francesco (Francis) in Arezzo, Tuscany which deal with these themes are now considered to be among the most outstanding works of the 15th century.

The church was begun in 1290; its very plain exterior, which was never provided with the intended marble cladding, opens into a wide, simple space.



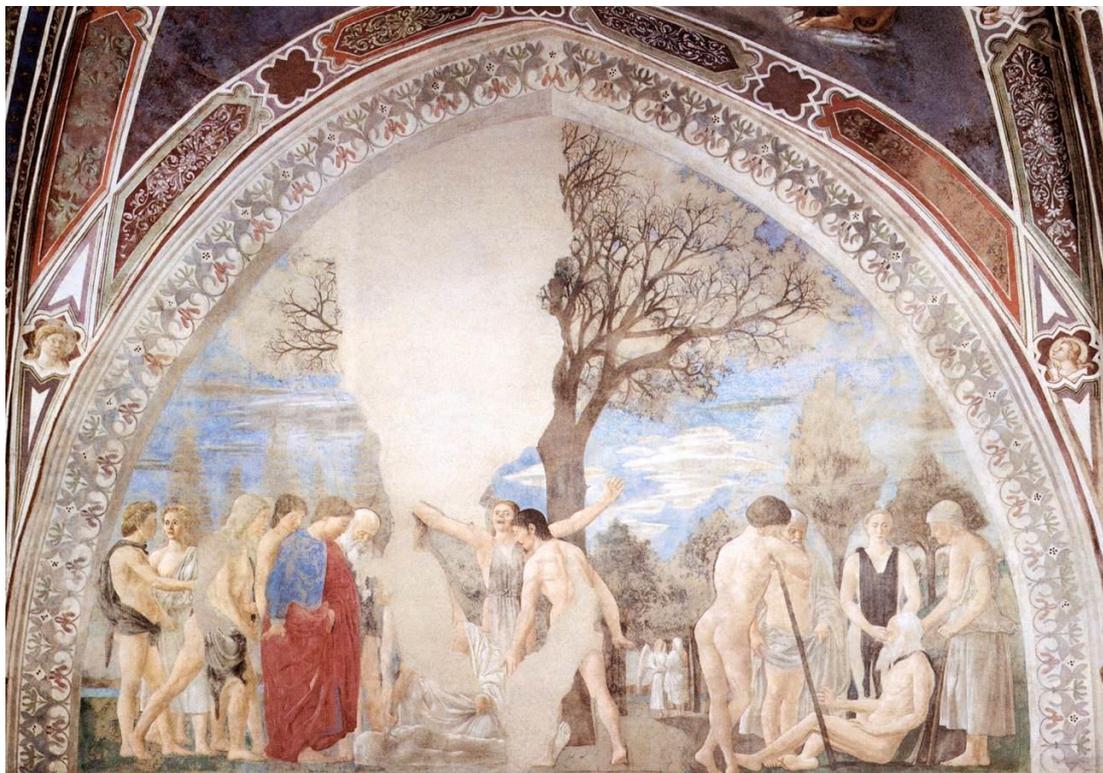
At the east end, over the altar; hangs a huge crucifix, painted on a wood panel, typical of Italian churches around 1400.

Behind the altar the chancel (the space for the clergy and choir) is completely covered in fresco. The work was commissioned by a local family, the Bicci. Piero della Francesca worked on it from 1452-1458 and 1459 to 1466. (It was common for artists to divide their time among a number of projects, but Piero seems to have been particularly slow to finish this and other works.)



An early tradition, formed by theological, rather than historical considerations, told that the cross on which Jesus died had been cut from the tree under which Adam had been buried. (In many images of the Crucifixion a skull appears at the foot of the Cross, alluding to this.)

Thus the Arezzo cycle begins with the death and burial of Adam.



The tree which grows is chopped down in the time of Solomon, but proves impossible to work. It is therefore used as a bridge. On her way to meet Solomon the Queen of Sheba recognizes its holiness, and bows down. This scene is much reproduced, because it is a perfect example of the grave, hieratic, and geometric character of Piero's work. He was a skilled mathematician, and wrote a text on geometry.



The night before he is to engage in battle with his rival for Emperor, Maxentius, Constantine has a dream – “In this sign you will conquer.” He is victorious (In the battle scene his hand, holding out the cross, is exactly in the middle of the composition.)





The next scene combines two episodes – in Helena’s search, three crosses are found – the Cross of Christ is identified when it restores a youth to life.



Below, the scene depicts the battle between Heraclius and the Persian Chosroes (Khosrau) and recapturing the Cross. The scene to the right depicts the legend of Chosroes’ blasphemous utilization, setting it up to represent the Son, with a rooster as the Holy Spirit and himself as the Father. Here he is being executed in front of his altar.



Finally, the barefoot Heraclius is shown returning the Cross to Jerusalem.

