

HELENA, PROTECTOR OF THE HOLY PLACES

Helena should be the patron saint of all mothers who help their sons achieve great things.



Helena was born at Drepanum in Bithynia about 250. Although only a stable-maid or innkeeper's daughter, she caught the eye and affections of a Roman general, Constantius Chlorus, while he was stationed in Asia Minor on a military campaign. She bore him a

son, Constantine, in about 272.

But Constantius was ambitious, and when he became co-emperor (Caesar) in the West in 292, he abandoned Helena in order to marry the stepdaughter of his patron. Helena and her son were sent to live in the court of Diocletian at Nicomedia, where Constantine grew up as a member of the inner circle. Helena never remarried, and lived close to her son, who was devoted to her.

Then, in 306, Constantius died, and Constantine became Augustus of the Roman Empire. He brought his beloved mother to live at the imperial court. When Constantine became the first Christian emperor of Rome, Helena also became a Christian. She was devout, dressing modestly, and giving generously to churches, the

poor, and to prisoners. But soon Constantine had other plans for her: they agreed that she would help him locate the relics of Judeo-Christian tradition in Palestine. To aid her, Constantine gave her the title Augusta Imperatrix, and unlimited access to the imperial treasury. And so, from 326-28, even though she was very old, Helena explored the Holy Land on behalf of her son, the Emperor. She went to Bethlehem and founded the Church of the Nativity.



She went to the Mount of Olives and founded the Church of Eleona. She went to Calvary, and tore down a temple built to Venus over the tomb of

Jesus. Constantine then ordered the building of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.



Helena also seems to have also founded the chapel at St Catherine's Monastery. Helena died in 330 in the Holy Land, with Constantine at her side. He brought her body back to Constantinople and buried her in the imperial vault in the Church of the Apostles.

We owe to this special mother and son the preservation and honouring of the most famous sites of Christianity.