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Saint Helen, my most favorite Champion (Maria C. Khoury, Ed. D.)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)

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Holy Sepulchre

I was just visiting Shepherds' Field the other day that is the precise location where the angels appeared to the shepherds to share the Good News, that Jesus Christ was born, over two thousand years ago. And once again, although I am so terrible at my Arabic, Greek and English but I should surely know the Greek since it's my mother tongue but I am forgetting stuff as I mentioned in the first blog, beyond fifty years of age is becoming an issue for me. I saw this lovely sign in gold that gave credit to Queen Helena for the beautiful church at this very holy spot at the outskirts of Bethlehem, the exact city location is called Beit Sahour.

Queen Helena, I said to myself that is my most favorite saint. St. Helen, the most admired among the champions of the Church that I can possibly select from who walked the footsteps of Christ. Well, let me try again, not just walked the footsteps of Christ, but actually documented the life of Christ in the Holy Land with so many

churches. And Queen Helena to the Arab Christians is my most beloved St. Eleni, the Mother of Constantine the Great in my Greek upbringing. And it's worthy to note that Constantine was the first one to even call Palestine, "The Holy Land." So should I not be amazed that in a time and age when there were less technological, materialistic and wealthy resources, St. Helen did the most to document and maintain the very precious spots important in the life of Christ during the short time He was on earth. In this new millennium, despite all of the affluence and power we have, we are technically losing our Christian presence in the very land where Christ was born.



I am so stunned that every Christian location I might visit in the Holy Land gives some credit to St. Helen. She had spent more than two years looking for the True Cross here in Jerusalem and our oral history says that she set up camp in Taybeh,

the Biblical Ephraim where she also built by the way the church that is still here today named after St. George. What I love about St. Helen is that she did all this of age. So I continue to be amazed at her stamina and : Life Giving Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ even after she umbling blocks like the whole area of Golgotha in Jerusalem np.



Glory be to God for all things! St. Helen did not give up and

she kept asking the soldiers of the Byzantine army to keep digging for the True Cross after Constantine had the famous vision before his battle. Don't get confused because now we still have soldiers here that do not allow us free access to our holy Christian sites but in this current time since 1967 when Israel took over East Jerusalem (and since 1948 when Israel was created), it is the Israeli soldiers that deprive us of our basic human right to freely worship in Jerusalem, the most sacred holy place of all Christians where the Life Giving Tomb of Christ is inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre which was of course built by St. Helen.

We are told that St. Helen died approximately 327 A.D. and St. Constantine died around 337 A.D., recognized by the Church as equal to the apostles. Maybe they

never saw all the churches they commissioned completed but they asked for so many churches to be built including the Holy Nativity Church where Christ was born, the Holy Sepulchre in the very spot where Christ was crucified and resurrected and the Ascension Church on the Mt. of Olives where Christ ascended to heaven leaving behind His footsteps in stone.

What great use of empire money! Most of these churches have deteriorated or have been demolished by the invasions but the only church never destroyed in the Holy Land is the Holy Nativity Church in Bethlehem. Our Church of St. George in Taybeh has had natural destruction during the last 1600 years and is now just ancient ruins but it is an official archeological site protected by the Palestinian Authority. By the way, Constantine the Great was the first one to name churches after St. George who is also the patron saint of our village, helping us stay peaceful throughout the many wars, occupations and violence this land has experienced throughout the centuries.

Thus the little village where I live in now, Taybeh, holds St. Helen very dear to their oral history. When the local Christians told St. Helen that Christ was received here in Biblical Ephraim, right before his crucifixion, it was sometime after He raised Lazarus from the dead and before the glorious entry into Jerusalem; Jesus was looking to escape from the Jewish community to a place of refuge (John 11:54). We think this is the reason St. Helen built the first church in our area at the same time she asked for the Holy Nativity Church to be built. Our mosaics on the floor match the ones in Bethlehem as proof and we are still well known as the village of retreat famous for receiving Christ.

Sometimes I psychologically survive by reading daily readings from inspirational people and my most favorite are sent by Fr. Luke Veronis who sent this quote on the holiday of Martin Luther King: **“So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice? In that dramatic scene on Calvary’s hill three men were crucified. We must never forget that all three were crucified for the same crime—the crime of extremism. Two were extremists for immorality, and thus fell below their environment. The other, Jesus Christ, was an extremist for love, truth and goodness, and thereby rose above his environment.”** Martin Luther King, Jr.

This quote can mean so many things to so many different people but since I live with fanatics I develop inner peace by contemplating about my favorite champion. I can say that St. Helen was an extremist in preserving and documenting the

footsteps of our Lord Jesus. It is so evident that she had such a great passion to build churches everywhere the local people told her something important happened in Christ's life whether it was his birth, crucifixion, resurrection, miracles, etc. I just love St. Helen because she was a good extremist and that was actually supposed to be my name but my mother was a few years late giving birth to me so she had to dedicate my life to the Holy Mother of God and not name me after my paternal Grandmother which if you are a Greek in blood you must know how important that is in ancient tradition.

Either way, my favorite champion, St. Helen, was an extremist for the glory of God because everything she did was based on love. Her extreme passion for placing Christ first in her life is reflected anywhere and everywhere you go in the Holy Land today. "Come and See..." Closing this reflection, in Christ, may this Great Lenten journey be most blessed and holy for all of you. Christ is in our Midst.

By Maria C. Khoury, Ed. D.