

1 st ACE Contest ever – 2001/02 Season Katrina C, age 10 1 st prize – Junior School 9 Teacher

Constantine the Great's real name was Flavius Valerius Constantine. He was born in Naissus, or the present day Yugoslavia. He lived from 274 – 337 A.D. and was ruler from 306 – 337. He was the first Roman Emperor that was a Christian. He was the founder of Constantinople which is now called Istanbul. His father was Commander Constantius Chlorus. His mother was Helena, who later became a saint. Constantine has a lot of talent in commanding the military. His military skills helped him become powerful and become emperor. He united the Roman Empire, made a lot of changes in the government, and made Christianity legal. He made the Roman Empire strong.

Constantine's father started out as a commander of an army. He became a co-emperor or Ceasar in 293. Constantius took Constantine with him to a series of battles in Britain. The troops hailed Constantine as Augustus when his father died in 306. Constantine was a successful commander. In 312, he battled Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge, near Rome. Constantine believed that he won the battle because he dreamed that Christ appeared to him and told him to put the first two letters of his name on the shields of his army. He became an Augustus or Co-emperor of the Western Roman Empire. The Eastern Roman Empire co-emperor was Licinius. Constantine and Licinius struggled for power. Constantine won the struggle in 324. Constantine united the Roman Empire. He became the emperor of both the East and West Roman Empire.

As emperor, Constantine began the important administrative reforms. He reorganized and separated the civil and military authority. He gave the Senate back their powers they had lost in the third century. Constantine moved the capitol from Rome to

Constantinople. He had to maintain Rome's privileges and the new senate in Constantinople had a lower rank. He did that because he did not want to upset the old senate of Rome. He issued new gold coins that remained the standard of exchange until the Byzantine Empire. Constantine's tax laws were hard for the people. The citizens were supposed to pay the taxes in gold or silver. The people who were too poor to pay was beaten or tortured. Some parents had to sell their daughters to pay their taxes. The citizens felt fear and hatred for Constantine because of his harsh penalties. He was a harsh lawmaker.

In his early life, Constantine used to be a solar henotheist. He believed the Sol, the Sun God, is the "Highest God." He claimed that he saw a vision of Sol in 310 while in a grove of Apollo in Gaul. Constantine believed that his dream of Jesus helped him win the battle against Maxentius. At that time, people weren't allowed to practice the Christian religion. If they were caught, they would be executed. But with Constantine's new belief, he and Licinius issued the Edict of Milan in 313. This Edict made the Christian religion legal in the Roman Empire. As Constantine favored the Catholic Church, the Catholic Church was given legal rights and large financial donations. In 324, he outlawed pagan sacrifices because he wanted to enforce the Church's religious policy. The pagan temple's treasures were confiscated. The money was used to pay for the construction of new Christian churches. Gladiatorial contests were no longer legal. The Jews were forbidden to have Christian slaves. Constantine often participated in Church affairs. Along with the legate of Pope Sylvester I and all the Bishops of the Catholic Church, Constantine was at the first Ecumenical Council at Nicea in 324A.D. The council defined the Nicene Creed that we still used today.

Constantine died on May 22, 337. He was baptized shortly before his death. He became a saint to the Eastern Orthodox Church, but not the Roman Catholic Church. Constantine the Great was a military leader. His military strength helped him unite the two parts of the Roman Empire. He made laws with tough punishments. He made changes in the government that strengthened the Roman Empire. Most importantly, he made Christianity a legal religion. He changed Christianity in the world forever.