



St. Barbara

Born: mid third century

Died: late third century to early fourth century (executed by her father) Variously given

Venerated: in Catholic Church Eastern Orthodox Church Oriental Orthodoxy Aglipayan Church Anglicanism

Feast: 4 December (Catholic Church) and (Eastern Orthodox Church) 8 Koiak (Coptic Orthodox Church)

Saint Barbara known in the Eastern Orthodox Church as the Great Martyr Barbara, was an early Christian Greek saint and martyr. Accounts place her in the 3rd century in Heliopolis of Syria, present-day Baalbek, Lebanon.

There is no reference to her in the authentic early Christian writings nor in the original recension of Saint Jerome's martyrology. Her name can be traced to the 7th century, and veneration of her was common, especially in the East, from the 9th century.

Because of doubts about the historicity of her legend, she was removed from the General Roman Calendar in the 1969 revision, though not from the Catholic Church's list of saints.

Saint Barbara is often portrayed with miniature chains and a tower. As one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers, Barbara continues to be a popular saint in modern times, perhaps best known as the patron saint of armourers, artillerymen, military engineers, miners and others who work with explosives because of her old legend's association with lightning, and also of mathematicians. Many of the thirteen miracles in a 15th-century French version of her story turn on the security she offered that her devotees would not die without making confession and receiving extreme unction.

Life

Torture of St. Barbara

According to the hagiographies, Barbara, the daughter of a rich pagan named Dioscorus,

was carefully guarded by her father who kept her locked up in a tower in order to preserve her from the outside world. Having secretly become a Christian, she rejected an offer of marriage that she received through her father.

Before going on a journey, her father commanded that a private bath-house be erected for her use near her dwelling, and during his absence, Barbara had three windows put in it, as a symbol of the Holy Trinity, instead of the two originally intended. When her father returned, she acknowledged herself to be a Christian; upon this he drew his sword to kill her, but her prayers created an opening in the tower wall and she was miraculously transported to a mountain gorge, where two shepherds watched their flocks. Dioscorus, in pursuit of his daughter, was rebuffed by the first shepherd, but the second betrayed her. For doing this, he was turned to stone and his flock was changed to locusts. Dragged before the prefect of the province, Martinianus, who had her cruelly tortured, Barbara held true to her Christian faith. During the night, the dark prison was bathed in light and new miracles occurred. Every morning, her wounds were healed. Torches that were to be used to burn her went out as soon as they came near her. Finally, she was condemned to death by beheading. Her father himself carried out the death-sentence. However, as punishment, he was struck by lightning on the way home and his body was consumed by flame. Barbara was buried by a Christian, Valentinus, and her tomb became the site of miracles. This summary omits picturesque details, supplemented from Old French accounts.

According to the Golden Legend, her martyrdom took place on December 4 "in the reign of emperor Maximianus and Prefect Marcien" (r. 286–305); the year was given as 267 in the French version edited by Father Harry F. Williams of the Anglican Community of the Resurrection (1975).

Veneration

Saint Barbara and her tower, French, (Villemoustaing, Aube) ca 1520–30 polychromed limestone

The name of Saint Barbara was known in Rome in the 7th century; her cult can be traced to the 9th century, at first in the East. Since there is no mention of her in the earlier martyrologies, her historicity is considered doubtful.

Her legend is included in Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum historiale* (xii.64) and in later versions of the Golden Legend[8] (and in William Caxton's version of it).

Various versions, which include two surviving mystery plays, differ on the location of her martyrdom, which is variously given as Tuscany, Rome, Antioch, Baalbek, and Nicomedia.

Saint Barbara is one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers. Her association with the lightning, which killed her father has caused her to be invoked against lightning and fire; by association with explosions, she is also the patron of artillery and mining.

Her feast on December 4 was introduced in Rome in the 12th century and included in the Tridentine Calendar. In 1729, that date was assigned to the celebration of Saint Peter Chrysologus, reducing that of Saint Barbara to a commemoration in his Mass.: 98 In 1969, it was removed from that calendar, because the accounts of her life and martyrdom were judged to be entirely fabulous, lacking clarity even about the place of her martyrdom.: 147 But she is still mentioned in the Roman Martyrology, which, in addition, lists another ten martyr saints named Barbara.

In the 12th century, the relics of Saint Barbara were brought from Constantinople to the St. Michael's Golden-Domed Monastery in Kyiv, where they were kept until the 1930s, when they were transferred to St. Volodymyr's Cathedral in the same city. In November 2012, His Holiness Patriarch Filaret of The Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kiev Patriarchate brought a small part of St. Barbara's relics to St. Andrew Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral in Bloomingdale, Illinois.

Her feast day for Roman Catholics, and Anglicans is December 4.

Patronage

Saint Barbara is venerated by Catholics who face the danger of sudden and violent death at work. She is the patron of miners, tunnellers, armourers, military engineers, gunsmiths, and anyone else who worked with cannon and explosives. She is invoked against thunder and lightning and all accidents arising from explosions of gunpowder. She became the patron saint of artillerymen.

The Spanish word *santabárbara*, the corresponding Italian word *Santa Barbara*, and the obsolete French *Sainte-Barbe* signify the powder magazine of a ship or fortress. It was customary to have a statue of Saint Barbara at the magazine to protect the ship or fortress from suddenly exploding. Saint Barbara is the patron of the Italian Navy.

Within the tunnelling industry, as a long-standing tradition, one of the first tasks for each new tunnelling project is to establish a small shrine to Santa Barbara at the tunnel portal or at the underground junction into long tunnel headings. This is often followed with a dedication and an invocation to Santa Barbara for protection of all who work on the project during the construction period.