



## *St. Barbara*

### December 4

The Holy Great Martyr Barbara lived during the reign of Emperor Maximian. Her father, the pagan Dioscorus, was a rich man in the Syrian city of Heliopolis. After the death of his wife, he devoted himself to his only daughter.

Realizing Barbara's extraordinary beauty, Dioscorus hid her from the eyes of strangers. He built a tower where only her pagan teachers were allowed to see her. From the tower, there was a view of hills stretching into the distance. By day she was able to gaze upon the wooded hills, the swiftly flowing rivers, and the meadows covered with a blanket of flowers; by night the harmonious and majestic heavens twinkled and provided a spectacle of inexpressible beauty. Soon she began to ask herself questions about the Creator of so splendid a world. Gradually, she became convinced that the soulless idols were merely the work of human hands. Although her father and teachers offered them worship, she realized that the idols could not have made the surrounding world. The desire to know the True God so consumed her soul that Barbara decided to devote all her life to this goal, and to spend her life in virginity.

The fame of Barbara's beauty spread throughout the city, and many sought her hand in marriage. Despite the entreaties of her father, she refused all of them. Barbara warned her father that his persistence might separate them forever. Dioscorus decided that his daughter's temperament had been affected by her life of seclusion. He therefore permitted her to leave the tower and gave her full freedom in her choice of friends and acquaintances. Barbara met young Christian maidens in the city, and they taught her about the Creator of the world, the Trinity, and the Divine Logos. Through the Providence of God, a priest arrived from Alexandria disguised as a merchant. After instructing her in the mysteries of the Christian Faith, he baptized Barbara, then returned to his own country.

At this same time, a luxurious bathhouse was being built at Dioscorus's home. By his orders, the workers prepared two windows on the south side, but Barbara, taking advantage of her father's absence, asked them to make a third window, thereby forming a Trinity of light. On one of the walls of the bathhouse, Barbara traced a cross into the marble with her finger. Later, her footprints came to be imprinted on the stone steps. The water of the bathhouse had great healing power, with St. Simeon Metaphrastes comparing it to the stream of Jordan and the Pool of Siloam.

When Dioscorus returned and saw the changes to the bathhouse, Barbara told him about how she had come to know about the saving power of the Son of God and the futility of worshipping idols. Dioscorus became enraged, grabbing a sword and almost striking her

with it. Barbara fled, but her father rushed after her. His path became blocked by a hill, which opened up and concealed St. Barbara in a crevice.

After a long and fruitless search for his daughter, Dioscorus encountered two shepherds on the same hill. One of them showed him the cave where St. Barbara had hidden. Dioscorus found his daughter, beat her, and placed her under guard, attempting to wear her down with hunger. Finally, he handed her over to the prefect of the city, Martianus. St. Barbara was beaten incessantly. By night, she prayed fervently to her Heavenly Bridegroom, and the Savior Himself appeared and healed her wounds. Upon seeing that her wounds were healed, she was subjected to new tortures. In the crowd where Barbara was being tortured was a virtuous Christian woman, Juliana. Her heart was filled with sympathy for the voluntary martyrdom of the beautiful young woman, and she also wanted to suffer for Christ. Juliana began to denounce the torturers in a loud voice, and they seized her.

Both women were repeatedly tortured. Their bodies were raked and wounded with hooks, and they were led naked through the city amidst derision and jeers. Through the prayers of St. Barbara, the Lord sent an angel who covered the nakedness of the holy martyrs with a splendid robe. Shortly thereafter, Sts. Barbara and Juliana were beheaded, with Dioscorus himself delivering the fatal blow to his own daughter. The wrath of God was not slow to punish both Martianus and Dioscorus – they were killed after being struck by lightning.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [www.oca.org](http://www.oca.org)