

St Marina

ST. MARINA was born in the third century in Pisidian Antioch, in what is now central Turkey. Her parents were noble people, but pagans, and she was raised to worship idols. Her mother died when she was a child and her father, the pagan priest Edesius, entrusted her upbringing to a nurse maid with whom she lived in the tranquility of the countryside.

It was a time of severe persecution of Christians. Some concealed themselves in the wilderness, but others courageously went about spreading the light of Christ. It was from one of these that the twelve-year-old Marina first heard about the Lord Jesus Christ. When she learned that the only begotten Son of God had come down from heaven and became man, that He endured suffering and death in order to save a sinful and unworthy people, her heart filled with love for Him, and she sought every opportunity to hear more about her Lord. She wanted so much to be baptized, but because of the persecution she couldn't find a priest to perform the holy Mystery. She left it up to God's holy will and meanwhile loudly confessed the name of the Lord to anyone who would listen, even though she knew she might suffer because of it.

Indeed, her first persecutor was her own father. When he discovered that his daughter had adopted the faith of the Christians, he was furious and became hateful, even cruel towards her. But she took refuge in the love of her Heavenly Father, Who never abandons His faithful children.

One day, when she was fifteen years old, she was on her way to the fields to look at her father's sheep, when she was met by the regional governor, Olymbrius, a cruel persecutor of Christians. He was attracted by the girl's beauty and struck up a conversation. "Where are you from? Who is your father? What is your name?" Marina answered his questions and boldly added that she believed in the God of the Christians and that she hoped to dedicate herself to His service. The governor ordered his soldiers to bring her with them to Antioch. Hopeful that he would have little difficulty in convincing her to give up her faith, he did not mistreat her, as he saw in her a good prospect for marriage.

The next day the governor ordered Marina to be brought for questioning and tried everything to persuade her to bring sacrifice to the gods, but the bride of Christ remained steadfast. "I have learned to know the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one Divinity in Trinity, and to bring to Him the sacrifice of praise," replied the girl. "I cannot give to lifeless idols that honor which belongs to my Creator." The governor tried various tactics: he tried to win her over through promises, then he tried to frighten her with threats. Nothing availed. "I want to remain a faithful slave of my God," said Marina, "Who voluntarily suffered for my sake. He did not spare His most pure Body for my sake and endured death on the Cross. Should I not be prepared to suffer and die for Him? You do not frighten me with your threats. In the midst of sufferings, my Lord, in Whom I have placed my hope, will strengthen me."

When Olymbrius realized that Marina would never renounce her heavenly Bridegroom, his pity for the young Christian vanished and he gave her over to cruel tortures. Marina was beaten mercilessly with rods so that blood poured forth from the deep wounds. As the crowd watched the young martyr, many wept and urged her to obey the governor, but the young martyr remained steadfast in her sufferings.

The enraged governor then ordered that she be fastened to a column and her flesh torn apart with iron hooks. Pieces of flesh fell to the ground, exposing her bones; the earth was crimson with her blood. Even the cruel governor covered his face with his hands and turned away, unable to bear the bloody spectacle. Finally, the young martyr, barely alive, was thrown into a dark, dank prison cell.

"Mereiful God Who livest on high," prayed the suffering Marina, "revive my spirit. Heal my wounded body. Give me strength to overcome my adversary that in me Thy name be glorified."

As night fell the devil struck at the young girl with fear and despair. Dreadful phantoms appeared before her eyes, strange rumblings issued from underground... But the martyr concentrated her mind on God and never ceased praying. And the Lord confirmed her faith with a miraculous sign.

She suddenly saw over her head a dazzling gold cross, on top of which sat a snow-white dove, and a voice came from above:

'Rejoice Marina, dove of Christ. You have vanquished the evil foe. Rejoice and be glad, daughter of Mount Zion. For soon, like the wise virgins, you will enter the bridal chamber of your immortal Heavenly Bridegroom"

An indescribable joy seized Marina's heart. At the same time she became aware that her tortured flesh was being healed and she felt her strength returning. The rest of the night she spent praising and thanking God.

In the morning the governor had the great martyr brought forth from the prison. Yesterday barely alive, she now stood before him, beautiful and healthy. The astonished governor attributed her miraculous recovery to the pagan gods. "It is my God who healed me," replied the great martyr. "He is the healer of souls and bodies."

St George

[St. George](#) was born about 280 A.D. of a Christian family that was wealthy and of noble origin, in the city of Capadocia, a city of the Eastern Empire, in Asia Minor.

He followed the usual career of young nobleman and joined the Roman army, where his ability and charm brought him quick promotion. The Emperor heard about him and as a result made him a tribune or an officer in the Imperial Guard.

One story says that he was a friend of Constantine another officer, who later became the first Christian emperor. The legend says that St. George came with Constantine to Britain and visited some holy places as Glastonbury and Caerleon. On his return to Nicomedia, the capital of the Eastern Empire where Diocletian settled, he met the fierce storm of persecution.

Diocletian gave orders for the issue of a formal edict against the Christians on February 23, in the year 303 A.D., being the feast of Termini.

The provisions of this edict which was published on the next day in the market place, were as follows: "All churches should be levelled to the ground. All sacred books to be burned. All Christians who hold any honorable rank are not only to be degraded, but to be deprived of civil rights. Also, All Christians who are not officials are to be reduced to slavery".

In great courage, the young man George, pushed his way through the market place to read the proclamation, and then in front of the awe-stricken crowd, he deliberately tore down the Imperial edict and threw it away. Consequently he was arrested and brought to the presence of Diocletian.

Some historians believe that St. George was not the young man who tore the proclamation, but as the edict was proclaimed and the great church in Nicomedia was ransacked and destroyed by the pretorian guard, he liberated his slaves, distributed all his wealth to the poor and prepared himself for martyrdom. He entered Diocletian's palace and rebuked him for his behaviour against the Christians.

The Emperor tried to seduce him by promises that he would be granted a higher position in the Empire. But as these promises failed to attract him, the Emperor began to threaten him with unbearable tortures that he will inflict on him. Lastly he put him in prison.

ST. GEORGE'S CHASTITY:

Diocletian knew that nothing, except sin, could destroy the strength, and demolish the integrity of this Saint. Thus he arranged for a very beautiful woman to spend the night with him in prison and try to debauch him. St. George who could only look forward to heavenly joy, began to pray and within a short while he managed to swing her heart to the Christian faith. Soon she seriously began to inquire about salvation, and by the morning she declared that she found her true Bridegroom Jesus Christ. With great courage she announced her Christianity to the emperor and his men, and joined the other saintly martyrs.

ST. GEORGE'S SUFFERINGS

It is not the purpose of this paper to go through the tortures that were applied to St. George, in depth, but nevertheless I wish to bring to light his utmost love for Christ, by listing some of them. His body was torn by a special instrument that had metallic teeth, and our Lord Jesus rose him, after his death and many pagans were converted. He was put in a lime, and the water was poured on it. Again the Lord returned him back to life. The emperor became very agitated, imagining that the Saint was using magic. He called his top magician, Athanasius and requested him to prepare a lethal poison to kill St. George. The Saint signed over the parchment with the sign of the cross before drinking it, of course no harm came to him.

The Emperor's councillors informed him that St. George's magic was in fact contained in the sign of the Cross itself. Another cup was also given to the Saint, but this time with his hands tied behind his back. The Saint signed it by his head saying: "shall I drink it from here or here or here or here!!!"

During all these tortures, although the Saint had enough pains and sufferings of his own, but nevertheless kept on talking to Diocletian about the powers of the Christian faith. At the end the Emperor asked him if he could raise a dead man he knew of. St. George prayed to our Lord and the dead man came back to life. The result of that was the conversion of both the dead man and the magician as well as many others. They all were martyred.

IN THE EMPEROR'S PALACE

When all methods failed to incite St. George, the Emperor invited him in his palace to entertain him. He offered him an appointment as a prince if he only sacrificed once to the idols. The Saint replied "Tomorrow you will see the powers of your gods"

At the palace, St. George met Empress Alexanefra, who had a fair idea about the Saint's God. She spoke with him, but the conversation quickly changed its course and the Saint began to preach to her about Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world.

On the following day many people went to the temple to witness St. George's sacrifice to the idols. The Saint stretched his hands, raised his eyes to Heaven..and in a moment, the idols collapsed and fell to the ground!!. The crowds shouted "we believe in George's God" At this, the Emperor and his men put an end to the lives of the new Christians, St. George, and Empress Alexandra in 303 Baramouda, 303 A.D.

St. George was buried in his mother's home that was situated on the seashore at Lydda, in Palestine. Before long his fame was spread all over the world. King Constantine, who took over after Diocletian, considered that St. George was the true model of the young christian man, and ordered a church to be built over his grave. In Egypt, the Copts call him, "The Prince of Martyrs", and built over 200 churches named after him. Moreover he is a personal friend of the majority of the Copts, who believe in the power of his prayers for them. The Greeks call him "the Great Martyr".

St Simon the Tanner

Saint Simon the Tanner lived towards the end of the tenth century when Egypt was ruled by the Fatimid Caliph Al-Muizz, and [Abraam the Syrian](#) was the 62nd [Coptic Pope](#) (975 - 978).

At the time, many Copts (Coptic [Christians](#)) in Egypt were engaged in handicrafts. Saint Simon worked in one of those crafts widespread in Babylon (Old Cairo) which was tanning, a craft still known there till this day. This profession involved also other crafts that depend on the process, from where St. Simon carried several titles related to skins; Saint Simon the Tanner, the Cobbler, the Shoemaker.^[1]

The Caliph Al-Muizz, who reigned during 972-975 AD,^[2] used to invite different religious leaders to debate in his presence. In one of those meetings in which the patriarch Abraham, also known as Pope Abraam and a Jew named [Yaqub \(Jacob\) Ibn Yusuf Ibn Killis](#) (and in another account of this story, was known as Moses) were present, Abraham got the upper hand in the debate. Plotting to take revenge, Ibn Killis quoted the verse where [Jesus Christ](#), said in [Gospel of Matthew](#): *If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to the mountain, Move from here to there, and it will move, nothing will be impossible for you* ([Matthew 17:20](#)), and demanded that the Pope prove that his religion is right by means of this. After hearing Ibn Killis say this, the caliph asked Abraham *What sayest thou concerning this word? Is it your gospel or not?*^[2] The patriarch answered *Yes, it is in it*. After hearing Abraham answer, the caliph demanded that this very miracle be performed by Abraham's hand, or else he and all the Copts would be killed by the hand of the sword. It was then after hearing this that the patriarch asked for three days to complete the miracle.^[2]



The Hanging Church, Cairo, built in the 3rd or 4th century AD.

Abraham compiled a group of monks, priests and elders. He told them to all stay in the church for three days for a penance. On the morning of the third day, Abraham was praying in the [Church of the Holy Virgin al-Mu'allaga](#), when he saw

the [Holy Virgin](#). The Holy Virgin told him to go to the great market. She said to him: “there thou wilt find a one-eyed man carrying on his shoulder a jar full of water; seize him, for he it is at whose hands this miracle shall be manifested.”^[2] Abraham listened to the Holy Virgin and went to the market where he met the man the Holy Virgin spoke of. The man whom the Virgin spoke of was Simeon the tanner, who had plucked out his eye because of a passage from the bible ([Matthew 5:29-30](#)) which said: *If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.*

Simeon told Abraham to go out with his priests and all his people to the mountain with the caliph and all his soldiers. Simeon then told Abraham to cry out *O Lord, have mercy* three times, and each time to make the sign of the cross over the mountain.^[2] The patriarch followed the words of Simeon the tanner (who was in the crowd of people) and the mountain was lifted. After the miracle was performed in the presence of the Caliph, the Pope turned left and right looking for St. Simon the Tanner, but he had disappeared and no one could find him (a sign of the saint's great [humility](#)). The caliph then turned to Abraham and said *O patriarch, I have recognized the correctness of thy faith.*

Till this day, there is no proof that Caliph Mo'izz converted to christianity but he did welcome the beloved pope warmly.

In commemoration of this miracle, the Coptic Orthodox Church observes three extra days of fasting before the beginning of the [Nativity Fast](#) (Advent).

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