

The Life of St. Bartholomew

BARTHOLOMEW, a Galilean, was one of the twelve apostles. His name is most probably not a given name, but a family name. He is listed among the twelve apostles in the three synoptic gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke. He also appears as one of the witnesses of the Ascension (Acts 1:4, 12, 13).

He is generally supposed to be the same person as Nathanael. In the synoptic gospels, Philip and Bartholomew are always mentioned together, while Nathanael is never mentioned; in the gospel of John, on the other hand, Philip and Nathanael are similarly mentioned together, but nothing is said of Bartholomew. Also in John, Nathanael is introduced as a friend of Philip.

Eusebius of Caesarea's *Ecclesiastical History* states that after the Ascension, Bartholomew went on a missionary tour to India, which Jacobus de Voragine, Archbishop of Genoa wrote in 1275, "is the end of the world." According to legend, he lived in a temple of the idol, Astaroth, and healed people in Jesus' name of all manner of illnesses which the local priests were only able to "make better for a while." When the sick then went to another temple for healing, they were told that when Bartholomew, the apostle of God, entered the temple, the idol was "bound with chains of fire" which prevented it from acting. Legend says that the devil reported to his followers, "if ye find him, ye pray him that he come not hither, that his angels do not to me as they have done to my fellow."

According to de Voragine, Bartholomew wore the same white coat and white mantle for twenty-six years and "his clothes never waxed old [nor] foul." He was reported to pray a hundred times by day and a hundred times by night. It was said he was never hungry or tired, but always glad and joyous, and that he spoke all manner of languages and understood them.

While in India, he converted many in the region to Christ and endured many trials and persecutions. He then went into Armenia in Asia Minor. Here he brought the king Polymius, and his wife and twelve cities to the Christian faith. The new faith spread throughout the land and in 301 AD, Armenia became the first nation to adopt Christianity as a state religion, establishing a church that still exists independently of both the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox churches.

The manner of his death has several variations. The conversion of Polymius' household and the twelve cities aroused the hatred of the priests and inflamed the king's brother so that he commanded that Bartholomew be flayed alive and beheaded. Other sources report that he was crucified. Some say he was crucified upside down, and before he died was flayed, and at last was beheaded. In any event, his martyrdom is uncontested.

It is said that he was buried at Albanopolis, the city in Armenia where he died, and his remains were later moved to at least two other locations. Finally they were taken to Rome by Emperor Otto III (reigned 994-1002) and placed in a church on the island in the Tiber dedicated to St. Bartholomew.

Bartholomew is the patron saint of bookbinders, butchers, cobblers, leather workers, plasterers, trappers, nervous diseases, neurological diseases, the city of Gambatesa, Italy, and the country of Armenia.

His feast day is celebrated on August 24th in the Episcopal Church.



St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church in Richmond, Virginia, held its first service August 20, 1961, and was originally located off Three Chopt Road near Parham. The current building was built and the congregation moved to the present location in 1973. On December 28, 1981, fire destroyed the building; reconstruction was completed in December 1982. In 1986, St. Bartholomew's became a self-supporting parish of the Diocese of Virginia.

Compiled by Jill Wood 2007