

## **St. Margaret of Antioch — St. Margaret's Church — July 17, 2016**

Margaret of Antioch is considered the patron saint of St. Margaret's Church, Westminster Parish, Annapolis MD. The following describes

- Antioch
- The Legend of Margaret of Antioch
- Margaret of Antioch as one of 14 Helper Saints (Holy Helpers/Intercessors)
- How Margaret of Antioch likely became the patron saint of our church



### **Antioch**

Antioch (Antakya) was a populous city of ancient Syria. In 2016 with a population of 250,000 it is a major city in south-central Turkey, 12 miles northwest of the Syrian border and caught up in the Syrian Civil War.

The UN reports that in Antakya and other nearby cities Syrian refugee boys and girls are paid minimum to stitch, cut and measure camouflage material that they then help older refugees piece together for uniforms that are smuggled to ISIS in Syria.

Founded in 300 BCE, the city was the center of the Seleucid Kingdom until 64 BCE when it was annexed by Rome, becoming the capital of the Roman Province of Syria. Pontius Pilate's Roman superior, the Governor of Syria, would have held office here during the time of Jesus' crucifixion except that the office of governor was vacant at the time.

It was the third largest city of the Roman Empire after Rome and Alexandria and one of the earliest centers of Christianity. Perhaps here followers of Jesus were first called Christians. The city was headquarters for St. Paul 47–55 CE, long before the gospels were written. By the fourth century CE the Church of Antioch ranked with the churches of Jerusalem, Rome, Alexandria, and Constantinople. The bishops of Antioch had become influential in theology and ecclesiastical politics.

Antioch prospered in the fourth and fifth centuries CE. The sixth century CE brought with it natural disasters and political and religious events from which the city never fully recovered. Antioch was absorbed into the Arab caliphate in 637 CE. In 1098 CE it was captured by the Crusaders and in 1268 CE the city was taken by the Mamlūks, who razed it to the ground.

By 1517 CE Antioch was a small village when taken by Ottoman Turks, remaining part of the Ottoman Empire until after World War I, when it was transferred to Syria under French mandate. France allowed the town and surrounding areas to rejoin Turkey in 1939.



**Icon**  
**1965 gift**  
**commissioned**  
**and given by the**  
**Rev. Robert**  
**Schenkel, rector,**  
**1963 - 1968**

## **The Legend of Margaret of Antioch**

*Margaret of Antioch* in the West, and *Marina the Great Martyr* in the East, is celebrated as a saint by the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches on July 20, and on July 17 in the Orthodox Church. The Greek (Catholic) Church celebrates Marina on July 13.

Margaret of Antioch is not to be confused with Margaret of Scotland, Margaret of England, Margaret of Hungary, Margaret of Cortona, Margaret the Barefooted, Margaret Clitherow, and Margaret Ward.

The only Margaret appearing in *Holy Women, Holy Men* (2010) and its predecessor publication *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*, published by the Episcopal Church, is Margaret of Scotland, celebrated on November 16. Having given birth to 12 children, eight surviving, she may have been a better candidate for the patron saint of childbirth than the virgin Margaret of Antioch.

Nothing certain is known of Margaret of Antioch who probably existed more in legend than in fact. According to legend, she was the daughter of an animist priest at Antioch where her mother died soon after her birth. Margaret was nursed by a Christian woman who lived about 20 miles from Antioch.

Margaret embraced the Christianity of her caregiver and consecrated her virginity to God. Consequently her father disowned her and she was adopted by her nurse, becoming a shepherdess. One day while watching the flocks of her mistress, a lustful Roman prefect named Olybrius caught sight of her and attracted by her great beauty sought to make her his concubine or his wife. He demanded that she renounce Christianity.

When neither cajolery nor threats of punishment succeeded in moving her to yield to his desires, he had her brought before him in public trial at Antioch. Threatened with death unless she renounced the Christian faith, Margaret refused the gods of the Roman Empire and was cruelly tortured. First an attempt was made to burn her but the flames left her unhurt. She was then bound hand and foot and thrown into a cauldron of boiling water but as she prayed her bonds were broken and she stood up uninjured.

Next she was imprisoned. While in prison she had an encounter with the devil in the form of a dragon. According to legend the dragon swallowed her. The cross she carried in her hand so irritated the dragon's throat that it was forced to disgorge her.

Finally the prefect ordered her to be beheaded. She was supposedly 15 years old when put to death in 304 CE at the time of the persecutions of Diocletian (303-305) CE. Other legends would have her beheaded in 257 ca. CE. Margaret's torture and death supposedly resulted in the conversion of many who witnessed these events.

Her story was immensely popular in the Middle Ages, spreading from the East all over Western Europe. She was declared apocryphal by Pope Gelasius I in 494 CE. By early eighth century she had become one of 14 Holy Helpers (more below). Devotion to her revived in the West with the Crusades (1096 - 1291). Her voice was one of the voices heard by Joan of Arc (1412 - 1431). She was reputed to have promised significant indulgences to those who wrote or read her life and invoked her intercessions.

St. Margaret of Antioch is represented in art 1) as shepherdess 2) as leading, escaping from, and standing above a dragon 3) with a sword 4) carrying a little cross in a girdle or in her hand, and 5) standing by a large cauldron. Relics (body parts and personal effects) said to belong to the saint are venerated in many parts of Europe including Rome, Montefiascone, Brussels, Bruges, Paris, Froidmont, and Troyes.

This virgin has been widely venerated for many centuries as the special patron of women who are pregnant, especially women experiencing difficult childbirth.

The devotion to Margaret of Antioch became widespread in England where more than 250 churches are dedicated to her, most famously, St. Margaret's, Westminster Abbey, the parish church of the British Houses of Parliament in London and the likely namesake of our St. Margaret's Church, Westminster Parish, Annapolis, Maryland.



### **Escutcheon**

Margaret of  
Antioch & Dragon  
1986 ca.  
handcrafted &  
given by  
Melissa Moss

### **Holy Helper**

Fourteen Holy Helpers are a group of saints once venerated together in the Roman Catholic Church because their intercessions were believed particularly effective against various diseases and other physical and spiritual conditions. Despite common belief, this group does not necessarily appear to originate in 14th century Rhineland, largely as a result of the German plague that became known as the *Black Death*.

Rather this group seems to have originated with Boniface. Saint Boniface 675 ca — 754 CE was a leading figure in the Anglo-Saxon mission to the Germanic tribes of the Frankish Empire during the eighth century. He established the first Christian churches in many parts of Germania, is the patron saint of Germany, the first archbishop of Mainz, and the *Apostle of the Germans*.

Before the start of Boniface' second mission into Germania, following the dismal failure of his first efforts there, he chose Christian figures paralleling indigenous animist minor deities for his ministry of conversion, drawing upon a number of legendary saints including Margaret of Antioch. Margaret went along as the saint whose intercession was sought 1) during childbirth, especially difficult childbirth, and 2) when escaping from devils.

Half the intercessory/ helper saints are perhaps historical figures (Blaise, Cyriacus, Erasmus, George, Giles, Pantaleon, Vitus) and the others more legend (Agathius, Barbara, Catherine of

Alexandria, Christopher, Denis, Eustace, and Margaret of Antioch). For one or another of the saints in the original set of 14, others were sometimes substituted including Anthony the Anchorite, Leonard of Noblac, Nicholas, Sebastian, Oswald the King, Pope Sixtus II, Apollonia, Dorothea of Caesarea, and Wolfgang of Regensburg. All have become, at best, — yes, even Margaret of Antioch — apocryphal in the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches.

The *fourteen angels* — including Margaret of Antioch — of the lost children's prayer in Engelbert Humperdinck's fairy opera *Hansel and Gretel*, are the Fourteen Holy Helpers:

*When at night I go to sleep,  
Fourteen angels watch do keep,  
Two my head are guarding,  
Two my feet are guiding;  
Two upon my right hand,*

*Two upon my left hand.  
Two who warmly cover  
Two who o'er me hover,  
Two to whom 'tis given  
To guide my steps to heaven.*



### **St. Margaret's Church, Westminster Parish**

William and Mary were crowned together as co-regents — King and Queen — of England, Ireland, and Scotland at Westminster Abbey, April 1689 by the Bishop of London, signifying the end of any return of Roman Catholic rule and closing out forever Puritan political influence in England and in the colonies. The Anglican Church was truly the Church of England.

In the colony of Maryland (including then portions of Pennsylvania, Delaware, and nearly all of what became the District of Columbia) on June 9, 1692, Colonial Governor Lionel Copley put his signature on the second act passed by the Assembly of the Crown Colony of Maryland making the Church of England (the Anglican Church) the official church of Maryland: *An Act for the Service of Almighty God and the Establishment of the Protestant* (i.e. not Roman Catholic) *Religion within this Province*.

The Act could not, however, change the hearts of those on the Broadneck Peninsula whose lives and systems of religious belief were by their influence by their Puritan heritage and traditions.

The Act established thirty Church of England (Anglican) parishes in the Maryland crown colony — all part of the Diocese of London, England. Four parishes were established in Anne Arundel County, including our *Broade Necke* Parish.

#### **Banner**

1992 acquisition  
for tricentennial  
celebration.  
Crafted by local  
artist Nancy

The name *Broade Necke* Parish did not last long — no more than 18 years. By 1710 — according to 18th century Greenberry family documents now in the possession of the Maryland State Archives. These documents were purchased by the Ridout family at auction out of Texas within the past 25 years for the Maryland State Archives and from them we have learned *Broade Necke* (Broad Neck) Parish had become *Westminster Parish* by 1710. The collection includes the 1710 hand written first draft and 1713 hand written final draft of the bequest made by Charles Greenberry to *Westminster Parish* of White Hall (Whitehall) Plantation upon the death of his wife. St. Margaret's Church received White Hall plantation upon the death of Charles Greenberry's wife in 1749.

There are no corresponding documents that mention St. Margaret's Church. Because Westminster Parish was part of the Diocese of London, and because Margaret of Antioch was (is) the patron of St. Margaret's Church, Westminster Abbey in London, it is safe to conclude that the London church is our namesake church and its patron — Margaret of Antioch — became our patron. The only other candidate — Margaret of Scotland — could not have been considered. The Church of England would never permit a Scottish saint as patron of an Anglican church.

Compounding difficulties in trying to establish when the our patron saint came into use, there is no record of any artifact featuring Margaret of Antioch appearing within our present church, and in any of the former churches, until the 1965 icon was placed high on the south wall of the transept (now south transept, in 1965 there was only one transept) by the Rev. Robert Schenkel, rector, where it remains in 2016.

The St. Margaret's Church banner was crafted featuring Margaret of Antioch for the 1992 tricentennial when that year it was agreed that Margaret of Antioch was indeed the patron of our church. This followed discussions encouraged by an exchange of articles appearing in *The Spire* written by Michael Winn, Melissa Moss, and the late Harvey Beardmore. This exchange now appears at [www.st-margarets.org/history--archives.html](http://www.st-margarets.org/history--archives.html), click on *St. Margaret -- Which Saint is our Patron 1992*.

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