

## Saint Barbara – Patroness of Gunners



21 Gun salute provided by 4 Field Artillery Regiment personnel during Presidential Inauguration in 2011.

The feast of St Barbara is marked by military personnel in different parts of the world. In the Middle East, her feast is celebrated by children disguised in various costumes visiting their neighbours and receiving presents. This recalls the generosity of people to Barbara as she tried to escape the wrath of her father following her conversion to Christianity.

Indeed, her feast is being observed today in refugee camps in the Middle East by Arab Christians who are fleeing their homes, churches and towns in Iraq and in Syria during the past number of months.

Barbara lived in modern day Baalbek (Lebanon). Her father Dioscuros was the military governor of Heliopolis (a Syrian city) and on the death of his wife, he became over-protective of his daughter, confining her to a tower in his palace. Barbara delighted in the beauty of creation, developing a conclusion that there must be one Creator, a wise and Almighty Giver of Life. From some of her father's servants, she learned the new teaching of the Christian faith which was spreading through the Roman Empire.

Barbara was baptised by Origen of Alexandria in a pool which her father was constructing in his palace. In honour of her baptism, she inscribed a cross in the wall and arranged for the construction of a third window to represent the Holy Trinity.

Dioscorus tried to force Barbara to renounce her Christian faith through torture and imprisonment. Following her execution, her father was struck by lightning and killed.

As a result, Barbara is associated with lightning and with things which are explosive! In the Middle Ages with the advent of gunpowder, Barbara was invoked as protection against accidents or explosions. Hence she is invoked as patroness of Gunners, of Ordnance personnel, Engineering personnel, Fire Brigades and Mining.

Barbara is normally depicted holding a chalice or a palm branch to represent her martyrdom. A tower with three windows also features as in the statue alongside in Domus Sanctæ Marthæ in Vatican City State.

In the sixth century the relics of St Barbara were transferred to Constantinople. Six hundred years later, they were transferred to Kiev by Barbara, the daughter of the Byzantine Emperor Alexius Comnenos, following her marriage to the Russian prince Michael Izyaslavich. St Barbara's relics are venerated at Kiev's St Vladimir cathedral, where an Akathist to the saint is prayed each Tuesday.

Happy Feastday to all Gunners and all who invoke St Barbara!