

St. Barbara's Traditions in Lebanon

The Feast of St. Barbara, known locally as “Eid el Berbara,” is celebrated with unique Lebanese customs that honour her escape, resilience, and divine protection.

Costumes and Masks

People dress up in elaborate costumes and masks to commemorate St. Barbara's flight from her captors, during which she disguised herself to evade recognition. This act of ingenuity and bravery is at the heart of the celebration.

Songs and Sweets

Children go door-to-door singing the traditional song “Heshleh Barbara” (a video clip of Sabah's cover is attached above) while collecting sweets, candies, and treats. The joyful chorus fills neighborhoods and brings communities together in celebration of Barbara's miraculous escape.

Traditional Sweets

Families prepare special dishes like qatayef (stuffed pancakes), awaymat (honey dumplings), maakroun (fried dough in syrup), and qamhiyeh (a wheat-based dessert) as part of the festivities. Each dish holds symbolic significance, celebrating life, faith, and abundance.

Planting Wheat

One of the most meaningful customs is planting wheat, lentils, or chickpeas in small pots. This tradition commemorates the story of Barbara running through wheat fields during her escape. According to legend, as she ran, the wheat grew instantly, concealing her tracks and protecting her from her pursuers. These sprouted seeds are later placed under the Christmas tree as a symbol of renewal and growth.

St. Barbara's Legacy

St. Barbara's impact extends far beyond Lebanon. She is the patron saint of architects, builders, miners, artillerymen, and prisoners. Across the Christian world, her story symbolizes courage, faith, and divine justice.

Interestingly, her feast day is also celebrated by Lebanon's Muslim Alawite community, reflecting the cultural and spiritual interconnection that St. Barbara's story inspires. This shared observance highlights her story's universal themes of resilience and divine protection, transcending religious boundaries.

Sacred Sites and Global Recognition

Churches and shrines dedicated to St. Barbara can be found across Lebanon, including the Church of St. Barbara in Batroun and a shrine in Maad, Jbeil. These sites attract pilgrims who seek her intercession for protection, strength, and healing.

Extract from Article by N. Haddad

