

SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

Fifth Avenue · New York City

Wednesday, August 24, 2022
The Feast of Saint Bartholomew

Solemn Eucharist
5:30 p.m.

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A Sermon by
The Rev. Matthew Moretz, *Vicar*
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Saint Bartholomew was one of Jesus' twelve original apostles. In the synoptic gospels, Bartholomew is listed with the other apostles (Matthew 10:3, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:14) but not referred to elsewhere. In the Acts of the Apostles, Bartholomew is mentioned as being in the upper room in Jerusalem with the others (Acts 1:13). But the Gospel of John tells us much more about Bartholomew, although he is referred to as Nathanael.

According to John, it was Philip who introduced Bartholomew to Jesus. Jesus first saw him sitting under a fig tree and later remarked, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit" (John 1:43-49). John also says that Bartholomew was present when Jesus showed himself by the Sea of Tiberias (John 21:2).

We think now that Bartholomew and Nathanael were almost certainly one and the same person and that Bartholomew was a patronymic (a modification of the father's name borne by the son). The apostle's full name could have been "Nathanael Bartholmai," i.e., the son of Tolmay.

In addition to what scripture tells us of Bartholomew's life, a fair number of stories about this saint have accumulated over the centuries. No doubt some were embroidered in the retelling. Butler's, *Lives of the Saints*, tells the story of Bartholomew's martyrdom and describes him as "a native of Cana in Galilee, a doctor in the Jewish law."

In the Golden Legend from the 13th Century Bartholomew is reported going as far as "India" (which could have been all sorts of places) to spread the gospel. He is supposed to have left a copy of St. Matthew's Gospel in Hebrew in India. While in Armenia he gained the favor of King Polemius by curing his daughter of some malady. Polemius and his family then converted to Christianity. But this conversion so infuriated King Astrages, Polemius' brother, that Bartholomew was martyred by the gruesome method of being flayed alive.

Other traditions have his final days elsewhere, "Bartholomew is traditionally said to have been flayed alive in Armenia."

According to Eusebius' *History of The Church*, 323 A.D., Bartholomew is reported to have "preached the gospel of Christ in India; thence he went into Greater Armenia, and when he had converted many people there to the faith he was flayed alive by the barbarians, and by command of King Astyages fulfilled his martyrdom by beheading."

The flaying knife became the symbol for St. Bartholomew in art. When Michelangelo painted the "Last Judgement" on the wall of the Sistine Chapel in Rome, he depicted St. Bartholomew holding a knife in one hand and his skin in the other!

In our reredos, Bartholomew has his skin, and his clothes, solemnly holding a Gospel Scroll, an eternal evangelist. Thanks be to God for his friendship with our Lord.