

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Maruthas of Maipherqat

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: December 4

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IN BRIEF

Saint Maruthas of Maipherqat

Bishop of Maipherqat in Mesopotamia, physician and diplomat, key figure of the Council of Seleucia-Ctesiphon in 410.

Feast day	December 4
Born	second half of the 4th century
Died	after 410
Era	5th century

In this booklet

Life

Prayer to Saint Maruthas for Healing and Peace

Novena to Saint Maruthas

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Maruthas of Maipherqat

Saint Maruthas, or Marutha of Maipherqat, was a bishop of Upper Mesopotamia in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. A physician, diplomat and writer in the Syriac language, he was sent by the Roman emperor to the king of Persia, obtained an end to a persecution of Christians and brought back to his city the relics of many martyrs. He played a decisive role at the Council of Seleucia-Ctesiphon in 410, regarded as the founding act of the Church of the East. His feast day is December 4.

Who was Saint Maruthas?

Three *Lives* of Maruthas have survived, two of them in Greek, completed by Syriac and Arabic sources. Their information is often vague and sometimes contradictory. For a long time he was also confused with another Marutha, bishop of Tikrit in the seventh century. His life must therefore be pieced together with care, keeping what the sources agree on.

He seems to have been the son of a high official of the Eastern Roman Empire and to have trained as a physician. Under Emperor Theodosius I, he became bishop of Maipherqat, today Silvan, in southeastern Turkey. The city stood on the border between the Roman Empire and the Persian Empire of the Sassanids. Beyond that border, the Christians of Persia had suffered terrible persecutions during the fourth century.

Key dates

- **Second half of the 4th century**: Born in the Eastern Roman Empire; trains as a physician.
- **Under Theodosius I (379-395)**: Becomes bishop of Maipherqat.

- **399-400**: Embassy to the Persian king Yazdegerd I on behalf of Emperor Arcadius.
- **403**: Takes part in the Synod of the Oak, near Constantinople.
- **410**: Council of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, which organizes the Church of Persia.
- **Some years later**: Dies, on an unknown date.

Physician to the king of Persia

After the death of the Persian king Bahram IV, who had persecuted Christians, Emperor Arcadius sent a delegation to his successor, Yazdegerd I, who was known to be more tolerant. Maruthas was part of it, around 399-400.

According to the accounts, he won the king's trust by curing him of violent headaches with his medical skill. He then obtained an end to the persecutions and the freedom to reorganize the Church of Persia. A synod met in Ctesiphon, the capital, and Isaac was elected bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon.

The city of the martyrs

From this journey, or from another one, Maruthas brought back to his city a great number of relics of the Persian martyrs of the fourth century. Maipherqat then took the Greek name of Martyropolis, "the city of the martyrs." A book on these martyrs is also attributed to him, and it helped preserve their memory.

The Council of 410

In 403, Maruthas took part in the Synod of the Oak, near Constantinople, which deposed the bishop John Chrysostom. We do not know what role he played there. He then set out again for Persia, where Bishop Isaac had been imprisoned.

He carried a letter from the bishops of the Roman Empire, including the patriarch of Antioch, and persuaded Yazdegerd to summon a great council of the Christians of his kingdom, on the model of the one Constantine had

gathered at Nicaea.

The council met at Seleucia-Ctesiphon in 410, with some forty bishops. It adopted the canons of the Council of Nicaea brought by Maruthas and gave the Church of Persia its structure. The bishop of the capital became head of all the bishops, later called the catholicos, and five metropolitan sees were created, including Nisibis and Erbil. The king approved the decisions and guaranteed their application. This council, in which Maruthas played a decisive part, is regarded as the true foundation of the Church of the East.

A Syriac writer

Several texts in Syriac and Armenian are attributed to Maruthas. The best known is a *Catalogue of Heresies*, completed after him but largely his own work. At Isaac's request, he is also said to have written an account of the Council of Nicaea and canons for the Church of Persia. Other works linked to his name include a homily for the Sunday after Easter and a small glossary for translating Greek theological vocabulary into Syriac. Some other attributions are more doubtful.

Why pray to Saint Maruthas?

Saint Maruthas is not formally the patron of a profession, but his life makes him a natural intercessor for several groups. He put his skills as a physician and diplomat at the service of peace between two empires and of the freedom of persecuted Christians. He also kept alive the memory of the martyrs, by bringing back their relics and writing their story.

Catholics can pray to him:

- for doctors, nurses and all who care for the sick;
- for diplomats and those who work for peace between nations;
- for the Christians of Iraq, Iran and the whole Middle East;

- for the unity of the Churches of East and West, which met in his person.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Maruthas in art

Saint Maruthas is little represented in Western art. When he appears, it is as a bishop. The places and objects linked to his memory speak for him: the ramparts of Silvan, the "city of the martyrs," the ruins of Ctesiphon, and the Syriac manuscripts in which his writings were copied.

Where to pray to Saint Maruthas

- **Silvan** (Turkey): ancient Maipherqat, the "city of the martyrs," where he was bishop.
- **The Syriac Churches**: Christian communities of Syriac tradition, in the Middle East and in the diaspora, which keep his memory.

To pray with him, use the prayer to Saint Maruthas or the novena to Saint Maruthas.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Maruthas for Healing and Peace

As far as we know, there is no widespread traditional prayer in English to Saint Maruthas. Here is an original prayer, inspired by his life as bishop of Maipherqat, physician, peacemaker between Rome and Persia and guardian of the memory of the martyrs.

Healer, peacemaker, guardian of the martyrs

Maruthas cured the king of Persia, obtained freedom for persecuted Christians, brought the relics of the Persian martyrs to his city and helped the Church of the East receive its structure at the Council of 410. The prayer below draws on these gifts.

Prayer to Saint Maruthas

Saint Maruthas, physician and bishop, you used your knowledge to relieve the sick: bless doctors, nurses and all who care for the suffering, and give healing to those I entrust to you.

You crossed the border between two empires to speak for persecuted Christians: make me a builder of peace, patient and wise, where there is conflict around me.

You gathered the relics of the martyrs and wrote their story: help me never to forget those who gave their lives for Christ, and those who suffer for him today.

You worked for the unity and good order of the Church: pray for the Christians of Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey, and for the unity of all the Churches of East and West.

I entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence). Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Maruthas is celebrated on December 4. You can also pray to him:

- before a medical consultation, a treatment or an operation;
- for a doctor or a medical student;
- for negotiations, mediations and efforts for peace between peoples;
- for the Christians of the Middle East and the Syriac Churches;
- on the anniversary of a loved one who died for their faith or in persecution.

A short invocation for healers

> *Saint Maruthas, you healed the body of a king to open a door for the Gospel: guide the hands and minds of those who heal, and let their care reveal the tenderness of Christ. Amen.*

You may end with an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. To go further, pray the novena to Saint Maruthas or read the life of Saint Maruthas.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Maruthas

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Maruthas, bishop of Maipherqat, physician and peacemaker. It is not an official liturgical text. To end on his feast day, begin on November 26: the ninth day then falls on December 4. You may also pray it at any time of the year, for a sick person, a doctor, a peace effort or the Christians of the Middle East.

How to pray this novena

Each day, place your intention before God in a moment of silence. Read the short meditation, say the prayer of the day, then pray an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. The small act suggested for each day helps turn prayer into a concrete step.

You may begin each day with this opening prayer: *Lord, you made Saint Maruthas a healer of bodies and a servant of peace for your Church. Through his intercession, heal what is wounded in me and in the world, and hear the prayer I bring you today. Amen.*

If you miss a day, simply pick up where you left off. Faithfulness matters more than perfection.

Day 1: Gifts placed in God's service

Maruthas trained as a physician before becoming a bishop. He did not leave his skills behind: he put them at the service of the Gospel.

Prayer: Lord, you gave me talents. Through the intercession of Saint Maruthas, help me use them for your glory and the good of others. Amen.

Today: Use one of your skills to help someone, freely.

Day 2: A bishop on the border

Maipherqat stood on the frontier between Rome and Persia. Maruthas lived where two worlds met, and he learned to serve as a bridge.

Prayer: Lord, make me a bridge rather than a wall. Through the intercession of Saint Maruthas, help me understand those who are different from me. Amen.

Today: Listen with real attention to someone whose views differ from yours.

Day 3: The healer of the king

According to the accounts, Maruthas cured King Yazdegerd of violent headaches. A simple act of care opened the door to freedom for a whole Church.

Prayer: Lord, bless doctors and nurses. Through the intercession of Saint Maruthas, give healing to the sick I entrust to you. Amen.

Today: Pray for, or thank, a health worker you know.

Day 4: Freedom for the persecuted

Thanks to the king's trust, Maruthas obtained an end to the persecution of Christians in Persia. He spoke for those who had no voice at court.

Prayer: Lord, protect Christians who are persecuted today. Through the intercession of Saint Maruthas, give me the courage to speak up for the oppressed. Amen.

Today: Learn about the situation of Christians in one country of the Middle East.

Day 5: The city of the martyrs

Maruthas brought the relics of the Persian martyrs to his city, which became Martyropolis. He wanted their witness never to be forgotten.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the martyrs who gave their lives for you. Through the intercession of Saint Maruthas, make my faith as faithful as theirs. Amen.

Today: Read the story of a martyr, ancient or modern.

Day 6: Accepting what we do not understand

In 403, Maruthas was present at the Synod of the Oak, which deposed John Chrysostom. We do not know his role. Saints too lived through confused and painful moments in the Church.

Prayer: Lord, when the Church is divided or wounded, keep me faithful and humble. Through the intercession of Saint Maruthas, give me a spirit of peace. Amen.

Today: Pray for the Pope and for your bishop.

Day 7: The Council of 410

Maruthas persuaded the king to summon a council at Seleucia-Ctesiphon. The Church of Persia received the faith of Nicaea and a stable structure. Order and unity serve the life of the Church.

Prayer: Lord, give your Church unity in truth and charity. Through the intercession of Saint Maruthas, heal the divisions among Christians. Amen.

Today: Pray the Creed slowly, word by word.

Day 8: Finding the right words

Maruthas wrote in Syriac and is said to have compiled a glossary to translate Greek theological terms. He wanted the faith to be understood in every language.

Prayer: Lord, give me words that build up and enlighten. Through the intercession of Saint Maruthas, bless translators, teachers and catechists. Amen.

Today: Explain one point of your faith simply to someone who asks.

Day 9: Peace between peoples

Maruthas worked so that two rival empires could live in peace and Christians could live in freedom. His mission is still needed in the lands where he lived.

Prayer: Lord, give peace to Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey. Through the intercession of Saint Maruthas, inspire leaders and diplomats to seek justice and reconciliation. Amen.

Today: Offer a sacrifice or a gift for peace in the Middle East.

Closing prayer

Saint Maruthas, physician of bodies and shepherd of souls, peacemaker between empires and guardian of the martyrs, obtain for me the grace I have asked during these nine days, if it is God's will. Heal the sick I carry in my heart, make me an instrument of peace and keep me faithful to the faith of the Church. Pray for the Christians of the East and for all who care for the suffering. Amen.

To continue, you can pray the prayer to Saint Maruthas or read his life.

CREDITS

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