

# Saints in the Medieval Church



**The medieval parish church would have been full of images and statues of saints that were important to the parishioners. These images would have had candles called lights around them.**

Parishioners often formed fraternities to care for specific images and would leave gifts and lights to their chosen saints as a way of gaining the saints' protection. Saint Mildred's Church supported many saints and some of these were Jesus's family, placing an emphasis on Christ's humanity.

**Saint Mary** the mother of Jesus, was extremely popular in medieval Christianity. She was viewed as a role model for women, being free of sin and the perfect mother. She was also venerated as the Queen of Heaven.

**Saint Anne** the mother of Saint Mary, received special attention in the Middle Ages, although she is absent from the Bible. She is first mentioned in the second century, but in the Latin Church her cult grew from the twelfth century. She was often shown teaching Mary to read and, in depictions of the Annunciation, Mary was shown reading. Women often prayed to Saint Mary and Saint Anne if they wanted to become pregnant or at childbirth.

**Saint John the Baptist** was the son of Zachariah, a Jewish priest and Elizabeth, who was related to Saint Mary. He became a wandering preacher and baptised repentant sinners in the River Jordan. He baptised Jesus, calling him 'the Lamb of God'. Saint John was beheaded on Herod's orders.



**Saint James** the Greater is often depicted as a pilgrim with a cockle shell. A cousin of Jesus, he was the first apostle to be martyred. According to a later tradition, St James was said to have preached the gospel in Spain. It was also claimed that his relics were brought to Spain, becoming one of greatest medieval shrines at Santiago de Compostela.

**Credits:** Research and text by Beth Brown. Photograph of Epiphany (Wise Men bearing gifts) and St Anne teaching Mary to read from a thirteenth-century altar panel from Thornham Parva, Suffolk, courtesy of Musee de Cluny, Paris. Image of St John the Baptist with Lamb of God, from a fifteenth-century pulpit in St Faith's Church, Horsham, photograph: Imogen Corrigan, M. Phil. Late fifteenth-century alabaster figure of St James, photograph: the Met Museum, New York.



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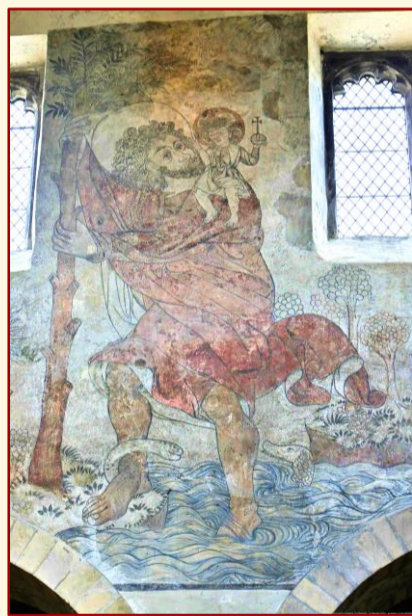
# Saints of the Medieval Church



**Saints played an integral role in the medieval parish, they were helpers in times of trouble and aided souls in purgatory.**

**Medieval Christians saw saints as intercessors to God and Christ, as models of behaviour and examples of the power of faith and good works.**

**Saint Katherine** was one of the most popular saints at Saint Mildred's Church. Medieval legend told how as a noble woman in early fourth-century Alexandria she objected publicly to pagan worship, and won the debate against the emperor's fifty philosophers. Refusing to give up her faith and marry the emperor, he had her tortured. He commissioned a wheel, spiked with knives but when she was strapped to the wheel, it broke, due to angelic intervention. She was later beheaded, and angels carried her body to Mount Sinai.



**Saint Christopher** is the patron saint of travellers. According to legend he was a man of great stature who lived alone by a ford. One day, a young child needed help crossing the river, the child was very heavy and, after fording the river, he asked the child why. The child revealed that he was Christ and was heavy because he carried the weight of the world with him. Many medieval people believed that looking on the saint's image would save them from harm that day.

**Saint Nicholas** was another very popular saint in the Middle Ages. He was a fourth-century bishop of Myra in Asia Minor. In medieval art, he was often depicted throwing three bags of gold to three girls through their open window to save them from prostitution and so that they could marry.

**Saint Erasmus** is said to have been an Italian bishop in the fourth century and suffered persecution under the pagan Roman emperors. His symbol is a windlass (or winder) because according to one account of his martyrdom he was executed by having his intestines wound out from his body using a windlass. He became the patron saint of sailors perhaps because a windlass looks like a ship's capstan. He was the least popular saint from the late medieval wills made by parishioners at St Mildred's.



**Credits:** Research and text by Beth Brown. Photographs of the fifteenth-century wall paintings in St Peter's and St Paul's Church, Pickering by Helge Klaus Reider (St Catherine) and Michael Garlick (St Christopher), fifteenth-century fresco of St Erasmus in Mariakyrkan, Båstad, Sweden, all Creative Commons Licenced.