

the queen as a kind proof of his devotion.”

One interesting way that Margaret evangelized the Scottish is by drink! She noticed that many people would not offer a prayer of thanksgiving after their meal, so after meals she began to offer a prayer and pass around a cup with a special drink to all present. Everyone wanted to stay for this special drink! This became a custom called Grace Drink or St. Margaret’s Blessing.

In 1093, Margaret became frail and ill. Meanwhile, Scotland’s Alnwick Castle was attacked by King William Rufus’ English troops. Margaret’s husband and sons went to battle, and both King Malcolm and Prince Edward were killed. Prince Edgar returned from Alnwick to his mother’s side, but he worried about how the news of his father and brother’s deaths would affect her. When she inquired about them, he lied.

A mother through and through, however, she saw through his words to the truth. She raised her hands to heaven and said, “I thank thee, Almighty God, that in sending me so great an affliction in the last hour of my life, thou wouldst purify me from my sins, as I hope, by thy mercy.” After lying in bed a while longer, she repeated a phrase from the liturgy of that time; “O Lord Jesus Christ who by thy death hast given life to the world, deliver me from all evil!” Then, she passed away. She was in her late forties.

When her son David took the Scottish throne, he built a private chapel for the royal family at Edinburgh Castle, and named it after his mother. Following the rise of Protestantism, it fell into disuse. The chapel was recovered in the 1800s. Today St. Margaret’s Chapel is the city’s oldest surviving building, and is maintained by a guild of women whose membership is exclusively reserved for those with a first or middle name ‘Margaret,’ or deriving thereof.

Margaret was canonized by Pope Innocent IV in 1251. She is the patron saint of Scotland, and the Scottish people have united under her name many times. Most recently, the national Church of Scotland signed a Declaration of Friendship with the Catholic Church on May 23, 2022, entitled the Saint Margaret Declaration; recognizing each other as brothers and sisters in Christ and partners in announcing the kingdom of God in Scotland.

#### Socials with the Saints

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*Sources include: Memoir of Margaret by Turgot, Lives of the Saints (Alban Butler), The Catholic Layman’s Library (John P. Bradly, ed.), Edinburgh Castle, Dunfermline Abbey*



## ***St. Margaret of Scotland***

*English Princess, Scottish Queen*

**Born:** circa 1045

**Died:** November 16, 1093

**Fest Day:** November 16 (June 16 in Scotland)

**Patronage:** Scotland, Learning, Widows, Queens, Parents of Large Families, Against Loss of Children

As a youth, Margaret had a tumultuous life. She was the granddaughter of King Edmund Ironside of England, who may

have been murdered. His children were smuggled out of the country.

Margaret was born during family exile in Hungary, while the Danish invaded England. Still, she was able to spend much of her youth in the British Isles.

It was another invasion led by William the Conqueror in 1066 that compelled her family to flee England once again. Their ship wrecked on the Scottish coast. The Scottish king, Malcolm III Canmore, came to their assistance and allowed them to live in the safety of his court. He had been exiled in England as a youth, after Macbeth had killed his father. Malcolm had returned to Scotland and rightfully claimed the throne by killing Macbeth.

Margaret was in her early twenties at this time, and her beauty and goodness caught the king’s attention. He proposed marriage. This was refuted by her, her brother Edgar, and all of Edgar’s noblemen. She preferred to serve God as a virgin. Malcolm continued to request her hand from Edgar until he could not refuse him, as the family was in Malcolm’s debt and under his power. The two were married around 1070, and she became Queen of Scotland.

That year, Margaret established a priory church in Dunfermline, on the site where she had been married. There, she brought in a small Benedictine community to found the first Benedictine house in Scotland. Building this church was intended by her as a work of God toward the redemption of her husband’s soul, for her own soul, and for her future children. In 1128, the couple’s son King David I raised the priory to the status of an abbey by expanding it on a grand scale. Today, Dunfermline Abbey contains his remains as well as those of his mother and of King Robert the Bruce—who led the battle for Scotland’s independence from England in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

Malcolm’s manners and temper were softened by Margaret’s gracious and

kind character. One ancient author writes, “She incited the king to works of justice, mercy, charity and other virtues, in all which by divine grace she induced him to carry out her pious wishes. For he, perceiving that Christ dwelt in the heart of his queen, was always ready to follow her advice.”

King Malcolm was comparatively uncultured, and he could neither read nor write. Margaret, however, could do both. She was bright, and eager to learn. Malcolm sought her counsel in political and state matters. The priest who regularly heard Margaret’s confession wrote a memoir about her life in which he said that she was a combination of sweetness and discipline to such a degree that both women and men loved and respected her, despite her status as a foreigner. When she found herself among educated men of the day, Margaret would ask them profound questions. The men, in turn, were impressed by her intellect, wisdom, and ability to express herself.

Since Margaret’s arrival in Scotland, she had observed its need for reforms and improvements in the practice of the Christian faith. As queen, she called for national synods, which passed reforms to end usury, simony, and incest. The observance of Sundays, feasts, and fasts were also reformed, including obligatory Communion at least during Easter. In an act that would lay the foundations for later improved Scottish-English relations, Margaret standardized Latin as the language for all Scottish Christians to worship. At her royal court, she formed a women’s embroidery guild which prepared sacred linens and vestments for liturgies.

Margaret and Malcolm had six sons and two daughters. She oversaw her children’s education with a keen eye, and instilled the faith in them. They were known to be good to one another. Her confessor would write that she prayed constantly for her children, “poured out night and day with tears.” The holiness of two of her children would be recognized by the faithful; Edmund called Blessed, and David called Saint. Her daughter Edith-Matilda married Henry I of England and became known as Good Queen Maud.

To maintain her own spiritual life, Margaret at times would retreat to a cave to pray. She was careful not to indulge herself in all that *could* have been at her disposal as queen. She often fasted and spent hours at night in prayer and devotion. Before each Christmas, she would observe Advent as another Lent. During both Advent and Lent, her husband often accompanied her to church for early morning prayer. Upon their return, she would find six poor persons to give alms and wash their feet. During these seasons and sometimes on other occasions, Margaret and Malcolm would host a meal for three-hundred poor persons, serving them with dishes like the royal family themselves would use, and even bending down on their knees to attend to these guests.

Margaret’s confessor reflected, “From her, [Malcolm] learnt how to keep the vigils of the night in constant prayer; she instructed him by her exhortation and example how to pray to God with groanings from the heart and abundance of tears. I was astonished, I confess, at this great miracle of God’s mercy when I perceived in the king such a steady earnestness in his devotion, and I wondered how it was that there could exist in the heart of a man living in the world such an entire sorrow for sin.”

Her love for the poor is Margaret’s most outstanding and well-known virtue. She often visited and cared for the sick. She also founded hostels for visitors & pilgrims, and paid the ransom for many captives. At times, Malcolm would offer gold coins at church, and Margaret would take them and give them to a beggar. Sometimes he ignored it; other times, he laughingly teased her that he would have her arrested, tried, and found guilty of pillaging.

Whenever Queen Margaret appeared in public, the poor would flock to her. She attended to them all. It is said that whenever she sat down to eat, she would first feed nine orphans and twenty-four adults. Although perhaps not literally, these numbers demonstrate her impact on the poor of Scotland.

Her confessor wrote, “Every action of her life was regulated by the balance of the nicest discretion, which impressed its own distinctive character upon each single virtue. When she spoke, her conversation was seasoned with the salt of wisdom; when she was silent, her silence was filled with good thoughts... I may say, in short, every word that she uttered, every act that she performed, showed that she was meditating on the things of Heaven.”

One miracle is associated with Margaret during her lifetime, and it is related to her devotion to daily reading of Scripture. She owned an illustrated book which contained various passages from the Gospel. At some point, the book was accidentally dropped into a river. When it was recovered, however, it had only a small watermark on the cover, with no other damage. This book is now preserved by the Bodleian Library at Oxford University. A copy is on display in St. Margaret’s Chapel at Edinburgh Castle.

Her books were one way that Margaret’s husband learned to express his growing spiritual devotion. Although he couldn’t read, “he would turn over and examine books which she used either for her devotions or her study; and whenever he heard her say that she was fonder of one of them than the others, this one he too used to look at with special affection, kissing it, and often taking it into his hands. Sometimes he sent for a worker in precious metals, whom he commanded to ornament that volume with gold and gems, and when the work was finished, the king himself used to carry the volume to