

St. Barbara and Her Tower

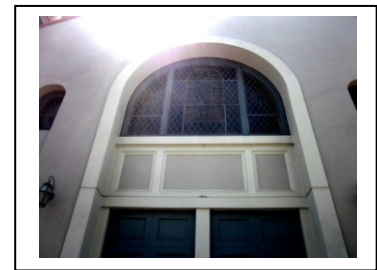
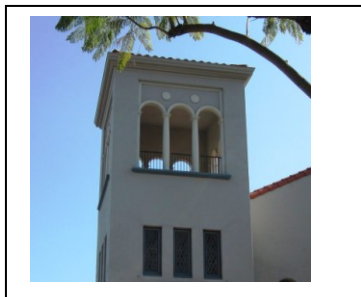


A parable is a mystery hidden in plain sight. In 1947, architect, Anton Johnson, created a visual parable for the Swedish congregation located on the corner of Lake Avenue and Santa Barbara Street. He gave them a church with a Mission Revival Watch Tower that is more symbolic than functional.

Santa Barbara Street, which is one block long in Pasadena, was named after St. Barbara, a third century martyr. She was born in Heliopolis, Phoenicia or modern day Lebanon. Legend has it that she was a young woman of great beauty. Her wealthy, over-protective, pagan father, Dioscorus, built a tower and locked his daughter inside in order to preserve her. At some point, she secretly became a Christian. When her father tried to marry her off to another rich pagan, she rejected the offer. (By the way, if the story sounds familiar, it may be that you read the Brothers Grimm fairy tale of Rapunzel which was modeled after the story of Saint Barbara.)



Later her father set off on a journey. Before he left, he instructed that a bathhouse with two windows be built for his daughter. After Dioscorus departed, Barbara, decided to change the architectural design and have three windows installed representing Father, Son, and Spirit. When her father returned, discovered three windows rather than two, Barbara confessed that she had become a Christian. Her father was so enraged, that he eventually beheaded Barbara, only to be struck by lightning a few days later. Since that time, the image of St. Barbara is always shown with her standing next to a tower as a witness to the resurrection.¹



Next time you visit Pasadena Covenant Church, take some time to stand in front of the tower with the doors to the sanctuary on your right. If you look left, you will see the Santa Barbara Street sign. If you look up at the tower, you will notice the three windows on the second floor. And if you look right to the central stained glass window above the entry doors, you will see the image of the resurrected Jesus.

For the past century, members of Pasadena Covenant Church have stood with Santa Barbara as witnesses to the resurrection, if only we have eyes to see and ears to hear.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Barbara#cite_note-7