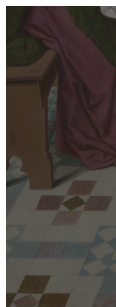
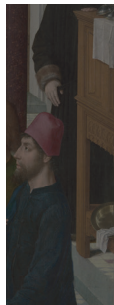
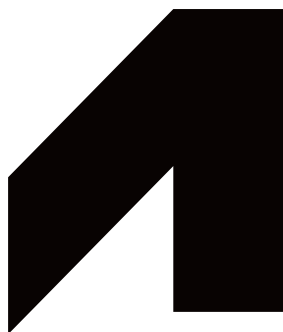


Museum  
Leuven



# BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH

DISCOVER THE LAST SUPPER BY BOUTS



**DIERIC BOUTS** THE LAST SUPPER



# TABLE OF CONTENTS



**SAINT PETER'S CHURCH** 4-5

**BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH** 6-7

## WORKS OF ART

- |   |         |
|---|---------|
| 1. Tower model                                    | 8-13    |
| 2. Sarcophagus of Henry I of Brabant              | 14-19   |
| 3. Head of the Crooked Christ                     | 20-25   |
| 4. Edelheere Triptych                             | 26-31   |
| 5. The Martyrdom of St. Catherine and St. Clement | 32-37   |
| 6. The Chapel of Proud Margaret                   | 38-43   |
| 7. The Last Supper                                | 44-49   |
| 8. The Martyrdom of Saint Erasmus                 | 50-55   |
| 9. Sacrament Tower                                | 56-61   |
| 10. Rood cross ensemble                           | 62-67   |
| 11. Sedes Sapientiae                              | 68-73   |
| 12. Brewers' chapel                               | 74-79   |
| 13. Font and chandelier in the baptistery         | 80-85   |
| 14. The Charles Borromeo chapel                   | 86-91   |
| 15. Precious metalwork                            | 92-97   |
| 16. Pulpit  | 98-103  |
| 17. Choir stalls                                  | 104-109 |

**ALSO IN THE CHURCH** 113-119

**TIMELINE** 120-123

**COLOPHON** 124



# SAINT PETER'S CHURCH

## MORE THAN A THOUSAND YEARS OF HISTORY

→ Saint Peter's Church is about 500 years old, but people have been coming to this spot to pray and attend mass for more than a thousand years.

A **Romanesque-style church** was built here in or around 986. The only surviving part is the crypt. It probably dates from the 11th or 12th century.

## A CENTURY OF WORK

→ In the first quarter of the 15th century, work started on the construction of a new, **Gothic church**. At this time, Leuven was a very prosperous city - in 1425 it even got a university, the first in the Netherlands. The new church was also expected to exude this wealth.

Work started with the choir and lasted about a century.

There were successive master builders in this period.

Despite this, the result is remarkably homogenous and harmonious. That is because the master builders seldom deviated from the original design.

Around 1500, the church was almost finished. Only the west door was missing. Joost Massys designed **three gigantic towers** for it – one of which would have been the tallest in the Low Countries at some 150 metres. However, Massys had not taken the unstable subsoil into account, and during construction the structure slowly subsided. Only the base of the three towers from the design remains. The church entrance itself was never completed either.



## RESURRECTED FROM THE ASHES

→ Saint Peter's Church has suffered greatly in the more than 500 years of its existence. In 1798, when French revolutionaries were in charge here, **a large part of the church's treasures was publicly sold off**. That would have happened at the Long Steps, at the foot of the church entrance.

In 1914, at the start of the First World War, German soldiers tried to set the church on fire. And in 1944, an allied **aerial bombardment** caused serious damage. Among other things, the organ and various altars in the chapels were lost forever.

Restoration of the church began after the Second World War. The work on the outside lasted until 2011. Then it was the turn of the interior. Since 2020, you can admire the church in its full glory again.





# BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH

This visitors' guide will lead you through the church, a **highlight of Brabant Gothic**. Along the way, you will become acquainted with its artistic treasures: a unique collection of Flemish masterpieces that are still in their **original location**, but presented in a modern, accessible way. The 15th-century monument – an external location of M Leuven – has, as it were, been given a 21st-century jacket.

## DISTINCTLY LEUVEN

→ More than five centuries ago, **Dieric Bouts** (c. 1410-1475) painted two absolute masterpieces for Saint Peter's Church: *The Last Supper* and *The Martyrdom of Saint Erasmus*. Both are a must-see for art lovers from home and abroad.



Bouts belongs to the **Flemish Masters**: a select circle of painters who, from the late Middle Ages, made this region the European centre of painting. He came from Haarlem, but became **Leuven's city painter** and continued to live and work here until his death. He situated religious scenes in everyday, sometimes distinctly Leuven settings, thus bridging the gap between heaven and earth.

## VIBRANT CITY

→ But Saint Peter's Church has many other masterpieces to offer. For example, the *Edelheere Triptych*, Jan Borman's *Rood cross*, the impressive *Sacrament tower*, the tomb of Henry I, and the chapel of Proud Margaret are more than worth (re)discovering. And thanks to modern digital technology, you will also get to know the **stories behind the art treasures**, the church, and the vibrant city that has been their home for so long.

We wish you a pleasant visit!



# MODEL OF THE WEST TOWERS OF SAINT PETER'S CHURCH

**JOOST MASSYS**

→ 1524-1530  
Avesnes stone

**TOWER MODEL**

This model is unique in its kind. Because it has been preserved, but mainly because it gives an idea of what the Saint Peter's Church might have looked like. It is a tangible reminder of one of the largest unfinished architectural projects of the late Gothic.





## FROM ROMANESQUE TO GOTHIC

→ Saint Peter's Church has a curious construction history. A **Romanesque church** had been located on this site since the 10th century. Around 1400, it was demolished to make way for the **Gothic church that stands here today**. The work took more than a century. The old Romanesque westwork, on the side of the current de Layensplein, was only demolished in 1499. Eight years later, the first stone was laid for a new Gothic-style westwork.

Models such as these had a dual function. They helped to convince doubting clients, and the builders could rely on them during their work. Models first appeared in the early 16th century, but were **usually made from wood**. Stone models such as this example **were exceptional**.



## EXCEPTIONAL EXAMPLE

→ The work on the westwork was supervised by the Master of the tower works, **Joost Massys**. On 11 April 1524, he was commissioned by the Leuven city magistrate to make this model, **in collaboration with the Leuven sculptor Jan Beyaert**. The model shows how the central tower and the northern side tower would have looked from the fourth level. This makes it likely that the construction had already progressed to the third level at that time.



There would also have been a third, southern side tower. This is not visible on the model, but can be seen on a **design sketch** that Massys had made some twenty years earlier, on a piece of parchment that is currently in M Leuven. The three towers would have been gigantic: about **150 metres for the central tower**, and about **130 metres for the side towers**.



## JOOST MASSYS

c. 1465-1530

**Joost Massys** began his career as a smith – just like, so legend has it, his famous brother Quinten Massys. He worked his way up to **visiteerdere** or supervisor at the Saint Peter's Church construction site. Around 1505, he was appointed as master builder of the west towers. He made both a parchment design sketch (based on an earlier design by Matheus de Layens) and the stone model that is now in the church. Together with the sculptor Jan Beyaert (active c. 1499-1534), he worked on the model until his death in 1530. It was never finished, just like the actual towers.



### TOWER TORN DOWN

→ The imposing towers would never materialize. **Construction was stopped in 1541.** The southern tower, which was to have been built first, was already about 50 metres high at the time. However, the marshy subsoil proved unable to withstand the enormous weight, and the ambitious project also weighed heavily on the city's coffers. **After 1570, the tower began to sink.** In 1613, it was reduced to its current height. The rest of the westwork was also partly demolished. This is still clearly visible if you stand in front of the church.

### OUT OF SIGHT...

→ A few days after Massys' death in **1530**, his model was given a place **in the town hall**. It stood there until shortly **after 1900**, when it was dismantled and **moved to the cellar**.



### ...BUT NOT OUT OF MIND

→ It was **restored in the 1930s**, following international protests about its poor condition. **In 1935**, it was relocated to **Saint Peter's Church**. During the **Second World War**, the model was **damaged** by bombing. In subsequent years, grabby visitors' hands broke off several pieces of stone. To repair the damage, this masterpiece was thoroughly **cleaned and conserved in 2017-2018**.

### DISCOVER LEUVEN

1. M Leuven still has the original parchment design sketch by Joost Massys that the model is based on.
2. Today, Saint Gertrude's Church has the highest church tower in Leuven, at some 71 metres.

### DISCOVER FLEMISH BRABANT

3. According to the plans, Saint Sulpitius Church in Diest was also expected to have a gigantic tower. However, construction stopped prematurely due to a lack of funds. You can discover the Gothic Saint Sulpitius Church and other architectural highlights of Diest via the Orange Walk.





# SARCOPHAGUS OF DUKE HENRY I OF BRABANT

UNKNOWN

→ c. 1235

Tournai marble and natural stone

'In the year of our Lord 1235, on 5 September, died Henry I, fourth Duke of Lorraine. In good and pious memory.' So reads the translation of the Latin inscription on the footstone of this sarcophagus.





In addition to being Duke of Lorraine, Henry I (1165-1235), nicknamed **the Courageous**, was also the first Duke of Brabant. His father Godfrey, Landgrave of Brabant, played a key role in the defence of Jerusalem in 1183. As a token of gratitude, the German emperor elevated the eighteen-year-old Henry to duke. **Leuven was the most important city of Brabant** at that time, ahead of Brussels. Henry founded Saint Gertrude's Abbey in Leuven and probably also built the castle on Keizersberg.

#### EUROPEAN POLITICIAN

→ Henry was **very influential in European politics**. For example, he played a decisive role in internal conflicts in the German Empire and he befriended the French king Philip II. After the death of his first wife, Matilda of Boulogne, he married Philip's daughter Maria Capet. During the third crusade (1189-1192), Henry led sieges of the cities of Sidon and Beirut.

In 1235, the German emperor was looking for someone to escort his fiancé from England to Germany. The now 70-year-old duke Henry was given the honourable commission, but died en route in Cologne. His body was transferred to Leuven, his city of residence. He was given **a sarcophagus** in the middle of the choir of the – then still Romanesque – Saint Peter's Church. Being buried close to the altar was an (expensive) **privilege of prominent families** and senior clergy.



#### YOUNG MAN WITH CURLS

→ Henry's image is idealized: we see an affable, smiling young man with sumptuous curls and a strong beard. He wears a long gown and dukes' robes, and he is holding a sceptre; his left hand plays with the cord of the cloak on his chest. At his head, two angels wave a censor. **Henry's sarcophagus is the oldest of its kind preserved in Belgium.**

#### WHERE IS HENRY?

→ Even after his death, Henry's wanderings were not over. In the 15th century, a Gothic church replaced the Romanesque one. The sarcophagus was again given **a place of honour in front of the high altar**. It remained there until 1800, when it was dismantled to make more room for worship. It is found again thirty-five years later, buried outside the church, near the Long Steps. It takes until 1859 for the sarcophagus to get a new home: the chapel of Saint John in the Oil in the southern ambulatory. However, a chance find in 1929 **reveals that Henry's remains are not in the sarcophagus after all.**

→ Did you know?

#### DUCHESS

The title of duke or duchess of Brabant still exists, and is carried by the crown prince or princess of Belgium.



Saint Peter's Church had been badly damaged during the First World War. Workers are busy repairing when they find **the skeletons of three men** in a crypt in front of the high altar – the original location of the sarcophagus. Scientists succeed in attributing the bones to **Henry and his father and grandfather**, partly because there had been **a hereditary skull defect** in the family.



All's well that ends well, you might think. But in 1998 the sarcophagus moves once again from Saint Anthony's chapel to the chancel. During this operation, for whatever reason, the remains are mixed up: **Henry II's coffin is laid in the tomb of Henry I, and the remains of Henry I are bricked up behind a wall in the crypt**, together with those of his father and grandfather.

### FINAL RESTING PLACE

→ This historic error was discovered during the restoration of the sarcophagus in 2019. Since then, the sarcophagus has been relocated again to the Saint Anthony chapel, where there is less risk of it being damaged. **The bones of the four dukes of Brabant in their zinc coffins have a new collective tomb in the church crypt, underneath the choir.**



### DISCOVER LEUVEN

1. In 1206, Henry founded Saint Gertrude's Abbey. It would expand into one of the richest religious institutions in Brabant.
2. Henry established a castle on Keizersberg. The castle has since disappeared, but the name of the site recalls this glorious history.
3. Leuven's Great Beguinage was also founded under Henry's reign, probably by him personally.

### DISCOVER FLEMISH BRABANT

4. The now vanished castle at Tervuren was perhaps the most beautiful residence of the dukes of Brabant. Construction started under Henry. The current Warande Park in Tervuren was once the hunting grounds of the dukes of Brabant.

### I BECOMES II

→ On 21 March 1930, Henry I and his two forefathers are given **a collective tomb** at yet another location: the **Saint Anthony** chapel – the first southern apse chapel. The sarcophagus is rebuilt above the tomb. The remains are placed in new zinc coffins, together with glass tubes containing **certificates with a description of the operation and the research**. Five years later, the remains of Henry II the Magnanimous (1207-1248) are also interred here. He was Henry's son and had been buried in Villers-la-Ville Abbey.

Across from Henry's sarcophagus you will find that of his first wife, Matilda of Boulogne (+ 1210/11), and their daughter Maria of Brabant (+ 1260).

Incidentally, another descendant of Henry I is buried in Leuven: his grandson Henry the Gentle (c. 1231-1261) lies in the Predikheren (Dominican) Church, together with his wife Adelaide of Burgundy (1233-1273).



# HEAD OF THE CROOKED CHRIST

## UNKNOWN MAKER

→ c. 1200  
oak

## CROOKED CHRIST

This weathered head is the only thing left of a medieval statue of Christ. The rest of the statue was lost during the First World War.





## HISTORY

→ In **August 1914**, shortly after the start of the war, German troops captured Leuven. They mistakenly thought that the residents were shooting at them and took horrible revenge. They killed hundreds of civilians and razed much of the city. Saint Peter's Church was also badly damaged. **Many artworks in the church were lost.**

## MIRACLE STATUE

→ One of these artworks was the so-called **Crooked or Brown Cross**, an oak crucifix in late Romanesque style. For centuries it had been **one of Leuven's miracle statues**. In times of threat and disaster it was carried in procession through the city. This ritual originated in the 14th century and continued until the French Revolution. Subsequently, the statue remained in the church, where it **went up in flames** in 1914.



## DISCOVER LEUVEN

1. The university hall, where the library was located, was also destroyed. Many manuscripts were lost, including the university's founding edict. As a reminder of the destruction, the façade of every rebuilt house in Leuven was given a carved gable stone.

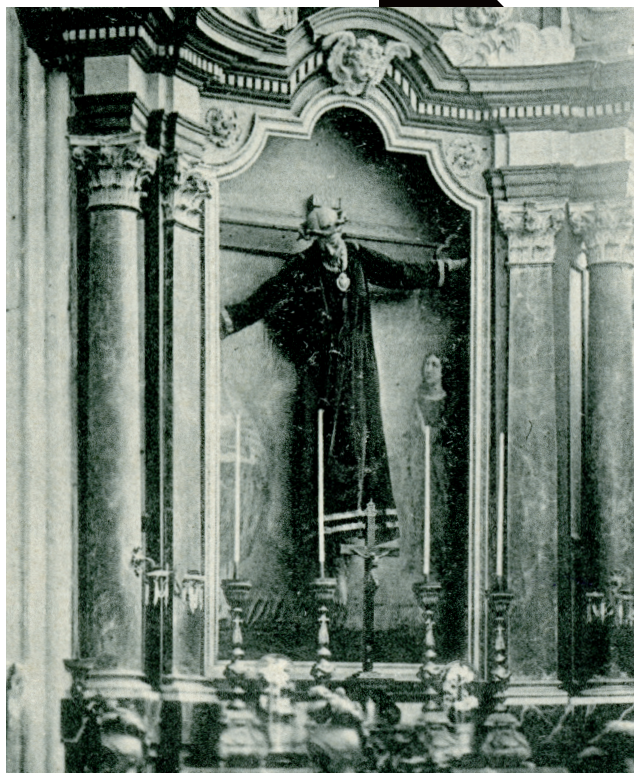
## DISCOVER FLEMISH BRABANT

2. In the '14-'18 Experience Centre in Tildonk, you can get an idea of what life was like for someone from Flemish-Brabant during the First World War.



### NEW HEAD

→ Yet, the statue was not lost entirely: **the head survived**. In 1914, it was not in the church, but rather **in the studio of the sculptor Egide Goyers**. He had restored the Crooked Christ in the 1840s and replaced the head with a less damaged copy – a fairly common restoration practice at the time. The original head later ended up in France. In 1955, the city was able to buy it back and it regained its spot in Saint Peter's Church.



### STOP THIEF!

→ The Crooked Christ owes its name to its posture. The statue represented a crucified Christ, but contrary to the norm, the upper body leaned forward and the right arm appeared to make a grasping movement. According to **folk legend**, there was a remarkable explanation for this: **when a thief wanted to steal a golden crown from the church, the statue is supposed to have leaned forward** to grasp the scoundrel by the collar. Ever since, miraculous powers have been attributed to the Crooked Christ.

A more likely explanation for the unusual posture is that **the statue was originally part of a group representing the Descent from the Cross**. Such sculptural groups were very popular in the 12th and 13th century, especially in Southern Europe and France. It is possible therefore that the statue was made in this period and in this region.



# EDELHEERE TRIPTYCH

## FOLLOWER OF ROGIER VAN DER WEYDEN

→ 1443  
oil on panel

### TRIPTYCH WITH THE DESCENT FROM THE CROSS AND DONOR PORTRAITS OF WILLEM EDELHEERE AND ALEYDIS CAPPUYNS

Around 1435, **Rogier van der Weyden** painted a Descent from the Cross for the chapel of Our Lady of Ginderbuyten, nearby what is nowadays Leuven's Tiensepoort. Today, that work is in the Prado in Madrid and is, justifiably, world famous. Van der Weyden depicted ten figures on a golden background radiating a restrained but intense emotion. Its composition is breathtaking too: **the bodies of Mary and Jesus are, as it were, echoes of each other.**







→ *The Descent from the Cross* must instantly have been regarded as an absolute masterpiece. This is evident from, among other things, the **many copies** that were made of it in subsequent years. The so-called Edelheere Triptych was the first in a long line. It is about five times smaller, but otherwise it is a faithful copy by an unknown artist, probably from Leuven. **The client was a patrician from the city, Willem Edelheere.** He commissioned the work for the altar of his family's burial chapel, where it hangs once again today.



Rogier van der Weyden, *The Descent from the Cross*, c. 1430-1435.  
Oil on panel. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado, inv. P002825.

## INTENSE SORROW

→ The centre panel of the triptych shows how the body of Christ is taken off the cross by Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, and a servant, as described in the Bible. **Mary's position mirrors that of her dead son** – an intervention that the painter uses to express her intense sorrow and compassion. She is supported by John the Evangelist and by her half-sister Salome. It's possible that another half-sister, Mary of Clopas, stands behind them. The hand-wringing woman on the right is Mary Magdalene, a follower of Christ. We do not know who the man behind Mary Magdalene is.



On the **left-side panel**, on the same golden background as the central panel, Willem Edelheere and his sons Willem and Jacob kneel. Behind them is Saint James the Greater.





On the **right-side panel**, we see Willem's wife Aleydis Cappuyns, their daughters Aleydis and Catharina and Saint Aleydis. In the middle of both panels, at the top, is the coat of arms of the person portrayed.



The **rear side of the panels** is badly worn. On the reverse of the right panel, we again see Mary swooning, supported by John, this time in grisaille (grey monochrome). The Holy Trinity is depicted on the back of the left panel: God the Father, Christ, and a dove that represents the Holy Ghost flanked by two standing angels holding a lily and a sword.



There is an inscription on the back of the right-hand panel: "dese tafel heeft verree(r)t he(re)n Wille(m) Edelhee(re) // en(de) Alyt syn werdinne int iaer ons heeren mcccc en xliij". ("This panel was made in honour of Mr Willem Edelheere and his wife Aleydis in the year of our Lord 1443"). This is how we know that **the work dates from 1443**. In that year, it was placed on the family altar in Saint Peter's Church, in memory of Willem, who had since died.



#### COAT RACK OR MASTERPIECE?

→ You might say it is miraculous that the *Edelheere Triptych* has survived, because the work has suffered a great deal. In the 18th century, it moved to the canons' vestry, where it served as a **coat rack**. X-rays still reveal where coat hooks punctured the centre panel. Around 1825, the dismantled triptych, together with a few planks of wood, **was offered for sale at a flea market**. Fortunately, Joseph-Pierre Geedts, director of the Leuven Academy for Fine Arts, noticed it. He immediately warned the dean, who ensured that the masterpiece returned to the church.



# THE MARTYRDOM OF ST. CATHERINE AND ST. CLEMENT

JAN ROMBOUTS AND STUDIO

→ c. 1525-1535  
oil on panel

THE MARTYRDOM

These two panels have always been in Saint Peter's Church. They are by Jan Rombouts from Leuven (c. 1480-1535). He worked as an artist, glass painter, and print maker. At the same time, he was a wealthy and influential man, who held important offices in the city.







→ **Rombouts' career illustrates nicely the transition from Gothic to Renaissance.** His early work is still strongly in the style of Dieric Bouts. In his later work, like these panels, you can already recognize the influence of Bernard van Orley, the Brussels painter who introduced the stylistic elements of the Renaissance to the Southern Netherlands.

Rombouts was only rediscovered **a short time ago**. Until recently, his work was attributed to the Leuven city painter Jan Van Rillaer (c. 1520/25-1570). Rombouts sometimes signed his work with the monogram IANR, which was previously read as IVR, hence the confusion.

## AWAITING THE COUP DE GRÂCE

→ The panels were originally the **side panels** of an altarpiece. The **central part is missing or lost**. Initially, the panels tapered, but later, probably in the 19th century, they were sawn at the top.

The panels are painted on both sides. The inside of the right-hand panel is dedicated to **Saint Catherine**. She refused to marry the Roman emperor Maxentius, who then sentenced her to death by torture. According to legend, a bolt of lightning destroyed the torture instrument – you can see this in the background – after which Catharine was beheaded. In the foreground, she kneels to pray, waiting for the coup de grâce. In the top left, the angels carry her body to Mount Sinai.



## FORCED LABOUR IN THE QUARRIES

→ The inside of the left-hand panel shows scenes from the life of **Saint Clement**, a theme that is seldom depicted in painting. **Clemens Romanus was one of the first popes.** He converted many heathens, including Theodora, the wife of Sisinnius. He secretly followed her to the church where Clement preached, but became blind and deaf on the spot. At Theodora's request, Clement miraculously healed him. However, Sisinnius immediately had Clement imprisoned for sorcery. That scene is represented in the middle of the panel: on the right, Clement is arrested; on the left, the furious Sisinnius has drawn his sword. In the foreground, Theodora tries to reason with her husband. After the arrest, Saint Peter appeared to Theodora: this can be seen on the left in the background.





→ Clement was sentenced to forced labour in the marble quarries on the Black Sea. In the scene at the back right, horses drag a block of marble away. Behind this, you can see how Clement met his end: on the emperor's orders, he is thrown into the sea with an anchor around his neck.

### JAN ROMBOUTS

c. 1480-1535

Jan Rombouts, born and bred in Leuven, was a very versatile artist: painter, glass painter, printmaker. From around 1515 to his death in 1535, he carried out various assignments in the city. He was also an important figure in Leuven's politics. From 1519, he held the position of dean in the city council almost continuously. In 1530, he lived in the same street as Dieric Bouts's son Albrecht, in what is now the Parijsstraat.



### INFRARED RESEARCH

On the outside of both panels you can see **fragments of what was once Christ bearing the cross**. Possibly, it was made by **another painter**: the figures have large, rather schematically drawn eyes that we do not find anywhere else in Rombouts' work. We see, among others, Simon of Cyrene helping Christ to bear the cross, a weeping Mary with John, and Saint Veronica with the Sudarium. The tableau is done in **grisaille** (grey monochrome), but we have only known this since 2011-12, when a more recent layer of red paint was removed during a restoration.

**Infrared reflectography** was carried out on this work, a technique that makes the sketch under the layers of paint largely visible. As a result, we know that Rombouts **meticulously prepared his design**.



# THE CHAPEL OF PROUD MARGARET

Behind the chancel, in the ambulatory, is the chapel of Blessed Mary. In 1535, a side chapel was built in honour of Proud Margaret (1207-1225), a popular **Leuven saint**.





→ The story of **Proud Margaret** takes place in the Middle Ages. Margaret's uncle and aunt decide to sell their inn and all their possessions and move to a monastery. The evening before their departure they receive two last **travellers**. They prepare a meal for them and send their niece to the shop to fetch a jug of wine.

When the girl returns, her uncle and aunt lie dead on the floor – murdered and robbed by the travellers. The villains kidnap Margaret and try to rape her outside the city. However, the girl resists so much that they have to give up their attempts. **They kill her and throw her body into the River Dyle.**

### MIRACULOUS HEALINGS

→ Miraculously, Proud Margaret's body floats **upstream** back into the city, reaching **Henry I, the Duke of Brabant**. He manages to catch and punish the thieves. Margaret's grave becomes a **place of pilgrimage** and soon miraculous healings are reported. The people of Leuven try several times to have Proud Margaret declared a saint, but without success. She is eventually **beatified** in 1902.



The **neo-Gothic reliquary**, made from gilt copper and decorated with semi-precious stones, dates from the same year. It was made by the workshop of Wilmotte and was funded by generous gifts from parishioners, especially from young servant girls – who worshipped Proud Margaret as their patron saint. The shrine contains Proud Margaret's remains. Until 1902, they had been kept in a coffin. The engraved images on the sides tell her story.



### DISCOVER LEUVEN

1. This statue from 1981 by the artist Willy Meysmans shows how Proud Margaret drifted upstream into Leuven.
2. The inn where Margaret worked was in the Muntstraat. Today, you will find a succession of cafés, taverns, and restaurants there.
3. In 1535, the chapel of Proud Margaret was added to the church, as the final resting place for her bones.

### DISCOVER FLEMISH BRABANT

4. The Demer and Dyle walking network combines some 340 kilometres of hiking routes through Flemish-Brabant. Get a breath of fresh air on the dyke in Werchter, where the Demer and Dyle Rivers meet. You can also enjoy the unique nature of the green valley.



### COURT PAINTER TO THE EMPRESS

→ In the chapel, you can also see a series of five paintings about the legend of Proud Margaret. They are the work of **Pieter Jozef Verhaghen**, an artist who was born in 1728 in Aarschot, but who lived in Leuven for a long time. He painted in the style of Rubens. His commercial insight, efficiently organized studio, and seamless painting style made him very successful. In 1773, he was even made court painter to the Austrian empress Maria Theresa. He produced the series about Proud Margaret in 1760.



→ Did you know?

### LEUVEN CARNIVAL

The shrine of Proud Margaret is almost always closed. It is only opened during the Leuven Carnival, on the first Monday of September, when you can see her bones and skull.



The statue of Proud Margaret originally stood in a niche on the facade of the town hall. In her left hand, she holds a **wine jug**, a reference to her work as a serving girl in the inn.





# ALTARPIECE OF THE HOLY SACRAMENT

DIERIC BOUTS

→ 1464 - 1468  
oil on panel

THE LAST SUPPER

*The Altarpiece of the Holy Sacrament* – better known as *The Last Supper* – is a milestone in painting in the Low Countries. The triptych counts as **the masterpiece by Dieric Bouts** (c. 1410-1475). And it can still be found in Saint Peter's Church, the place for which he painted it at the time.







## DIERIC BOUTS

c. 1410-1475

Dieric Bouts was one of the most important Flemish Primitives – you can mention him in the same breath as Jan Van Eyck or Rogier van der Weyden. He originally came from Haarlem, but settled in Leuven. He married there in 1448 and remained there until his death. He painted two of his iconic masterpieces, *The Last Supper* and *The Martyrdom of Saint Erasmus*, in Leuven. They can still be admired in their historic setting – Saint Peter's Church. Bouts also made two monumental justice scenes, *The Justice of Emperor Otto*, for Leuven town hall: these are now kept in the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium in Brussels.

→ Bouts received the commission from the Brotherhood of the Holy Sacrament in 1464. The contract explicitly stated that the painter had to be assisted by two theologians from Leuven University. They were tasked with ensuring that the **religious imagery** was correct. Bouts received 200 Rhenish guilders for the painting, roughly the price of a large townhouse. It was therefore a huge assignment: **he would work on it for four years** and was not allowed to take on any new work during this time.

## CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE

→ Central is the Last Supper of Jesus and his apostles. That took place the day before the crucifixion and is commemorated in every Eucharist. **The four side panels show stories from the Old Testament:** top left, *Melchizedek offers bread and wine to Abraham*; bottom left *The Jewish Paschal Lamb*; top right, *The Gathering of the Manna*; and bottom right, *Elijah who is fed by the Angel in the wilderness*. **All four have food as a theme** and are considered prophecies about the life of Christ.





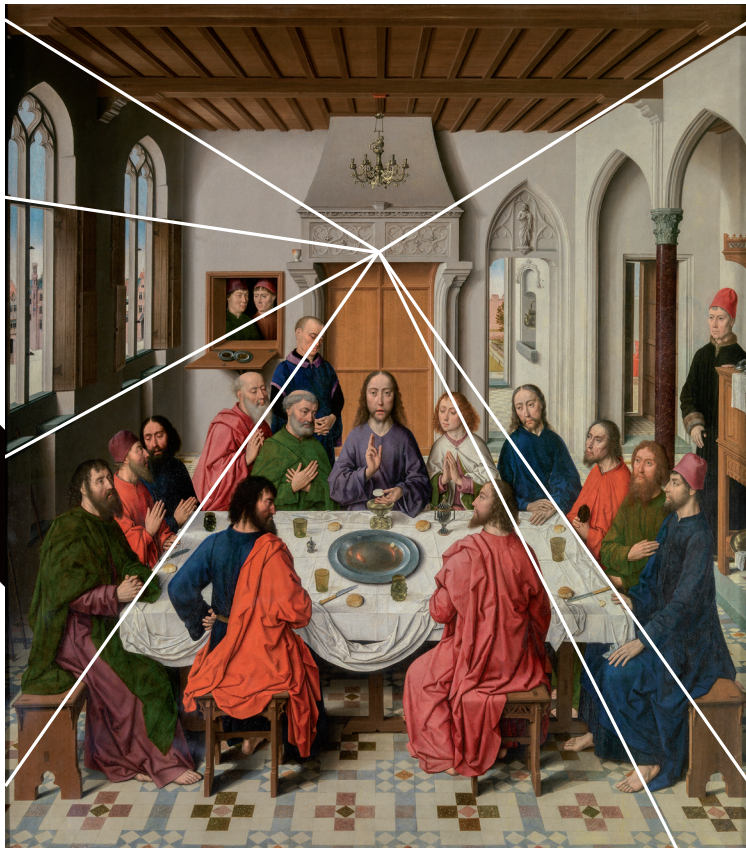
→ Did you know?

### WORLD FIRST

Bouts was the first painter to depict the Last Supper on such a large scale.

Leonardo da Vinci did not paint his world-renowned fresco until 1495 – 1498.

→ Bouts was the first painter to depict the Last Supper on such a monumental scale. For that reason alone it is a highlight of art history. Moreover, the work bears witness to an impressive **knowledge and command of perspective**. The space in which Jesus and the apostles sit is a **perfect geometrically constructed composition**, with Christ's blessing gesture as focal point – literally and figuratively. The perspective lines converge on the crossbeam of the chimney. The **illusion of depth** that Bouts thus creates is a first for Flemish painting.



Also special is how Bouts locates the Bible story in a **recognizable 15th-century setting**. Beyond the doorway on the right is a small Gothic garden, and the windows look out onto a market square. Through the window on the far left, you can even see one of the **towers of Leuven town hall** – still without its spire, because the town hall was still in scaffolding at the time. The interior is filled with contemporary furniture and household goods. There are two empty plates on the hatch on the left: apparently the supper is already over.



### FIRST LANDSCAPE PAINTER

→ We find another ground-breaking element on the side panels: **Bouts is the first artist to devote so much attention to landscapes**. He uses different colour zones and positions hills, roads, and figures exactly in the right place. In this way, he creates depth and leads us into the landscape. For this reason, some art historians even call Bouts the very first true landscape painter.



# TRIPTYCH WITH THE MARTYRDOM OF SAINT ERASMUS

## DIERIC BOUTS

→ before 1464  
oil on panel

## THE MARTYRDOM OF SAINT ERASMUS

This triptych dates from the beginning of the 1460s, and, like *The Last Supper* (p. 44-49), it is the work of Leuven city painter Dieric Bouts (c. 1410-1475).



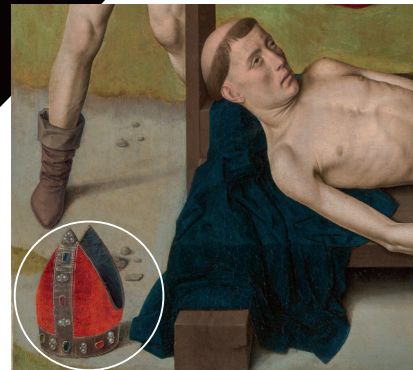




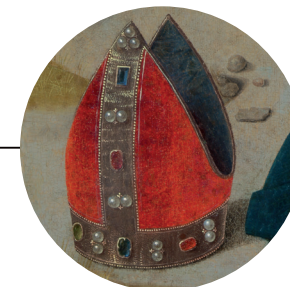
→ The man lying in the central panel is **Saint Erasmus**. He lived in the 3rd century AD and was Bishop of Antioch, in what today is Turkey. The Roman emperor Diocletian proscribed Christian faith and had Erasmus arrested and tortured. According to legend, however, an angel freed Erasmus and brought him by boat to Italy.

### BLOODLESS HORROR

→ Because of that sea voyage, initially the saint was depicted with **a windlass entwined in a mooring rope**. But many believers misinterpreted that attribute: they thought it was a torture instrument, used to disembowel someone. In the time that Bouts painted this work, this **erroneous interpretation** was the way to represent Saint Erasmus.



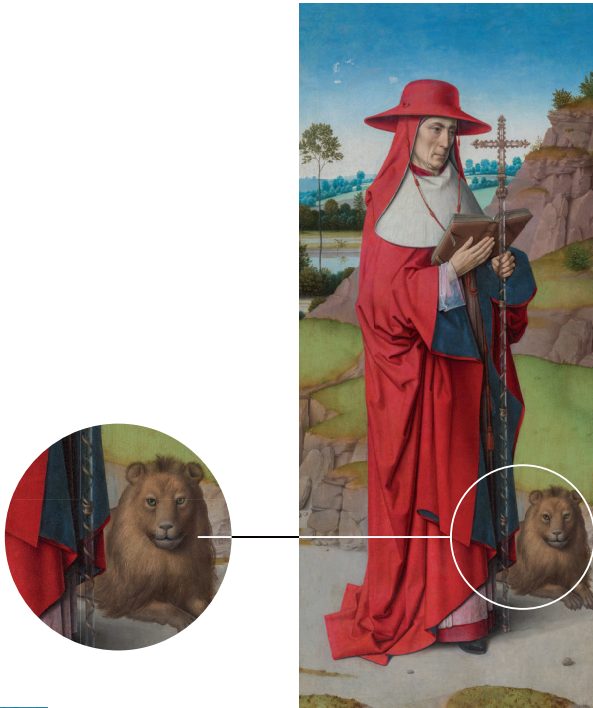
Typical of Dieric Bouts is how **serenely** he depicts the horror of the torture. There isn't a single drop of blood to be found. Even the torturers, the judges in the background, and the victim watch impassively. In the front left, you can see Erasmus's cloak and bishop's mitre.



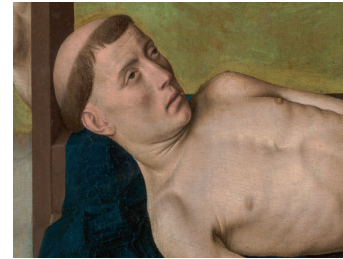
Bouts finds a handy way to connect the central scene with the side panels: he lets the mountainous landscape continue.







On the right-hand panel, we see **Saint Bernard of Clairvaux**, a 12th-century church reformer. He emphasized piety, meditation, and an ascetic lifestyle. According to legend, he cast out devils, hence the demon at his feet.



### THRICE SALVATION

→ This triptych represents three ways in which Christians can secure their **salvation: martyrdom** (like Erasmus), **study** (like Jerome), and **leading a pious, strict life** (like Bernard). The work was probably commissioned by Gerard De Smet (+1469), teacher at the Saint Peter's Collegiate School. Not only did he know Bouts personally, but we also know that a mass had to be read for him of the saint's days of Erasmus, Jerome, and Bernard.



# SACRAMENT TOWER

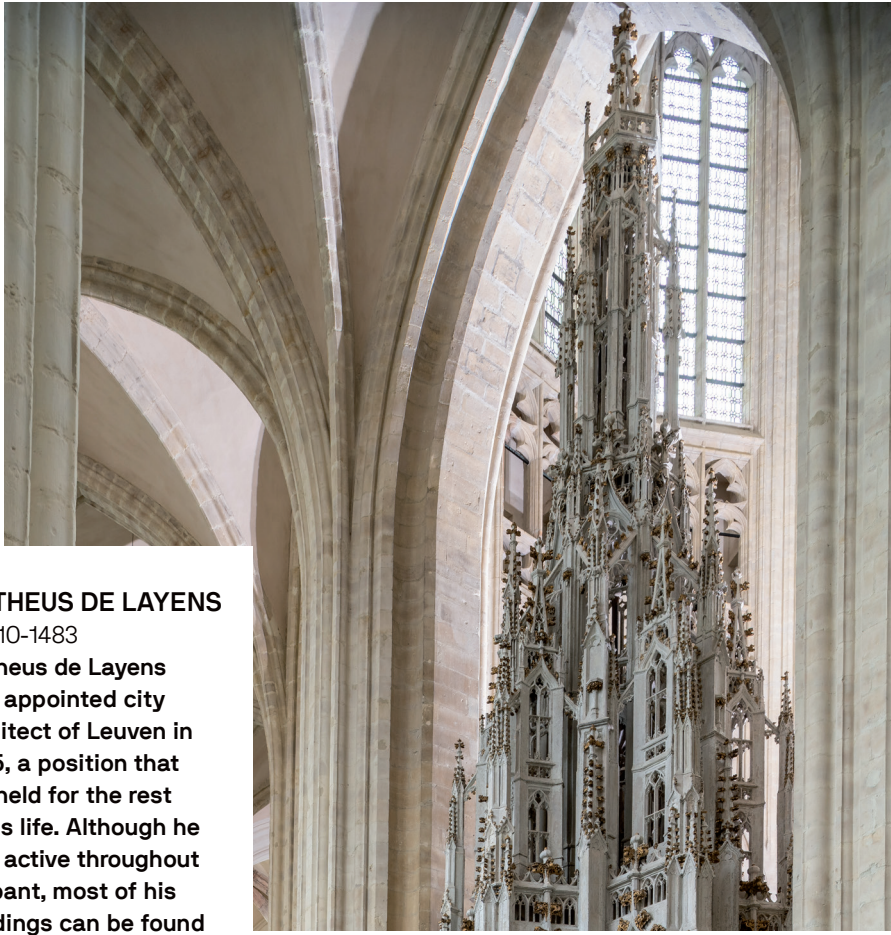
## MATHEUS DE LAYENS

→ c. 1450  
Avesnes stone

This beautifully elaborated sacrament tower is no less than 12 metres high. It was designed circa 1450 by city architect Matheus de Layens, commissioned by the Brotherhood of the Holy Sacrament. A few years later, this same brotherhood would commission the triptych *The Last Supper* from city painter Dieric Bouts.







## MATHEUS DE LAYENS

c. 1410-1483

Matheus de Layens was appointed city architect of Leuven in 1445, a position that he held for the rest of his life. Although he was active throughout Brabant, most of his buildings can be found in Leuven's city centre: the town hall, Saint Jacob's Church, the (original) Tafelrond and parts of Saint Peter's Church, including the sacrament tower.

## SPECTACLE-TABERNACLE

→ A sacrament tower is actually a **gigantic tabernacle**, a holder for the Host (consecrated wafers). The priest took the Host out of it during worship. That's why there are four little doors in the tower. The front two were opened during high mass in the church; the two at the back during masses in the chapel of the Brotherhood, on the other side of the tower. The Hosts for the masses in the chapel were kept in a different space, separated from the rest of the tower by a railing.



## INSPIRED BY VAN DER WEYDEN?

→ Roughly halfway up the tower, immediately above the little doors, you can see **six large niches**. Each niche is crowned by a baldachin, a sort of canopy. **Scenes from the suffering of Christ** feature in the niches: the Mount of Olives, the Arrest of Jesus, the Crowning with Thorns, the Flagellation of Christ, the Crucifixion, and the Mercy Seat. They have all been painted over repeatedly; only on the Mercy Seat have later layers of paint been removed revealing the **original polychromy**.



The carving of the **Mercy Seat** - a seated God the Father, supporting the dead body of his son - **strongly resembles a painting from the studio of Rogier van der Weyden** that is kept in M. That painting was commissioned between 1430 and 1440 for the first chapel in the southern ambulatory. So, it was already in the church when the sacrament tower was erected. Art historians infer from this that the maker of the tower may have been inspired by the painting.



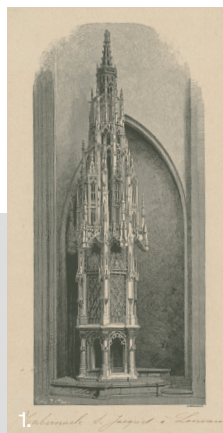
## OLDEST IN BELGIUM

→ Over the centuries, the tower has lost some elements. Until the French Revolution there was **a fence** around it. And between the doors, under the smaller baldachins, there used to be apostle figures. The originals are lost, but in the 19th century they were replaced by copies with reliquaries.



## DISCOVER LEUVEN

1. The now closed Saint Jacob's Church in Leuven houses a surprising art treasure: a copy of the sacrament tower of Saint Peter's.



## DISCOVER FLEMISH BRABANT

2. The country's biggest sacrament tower, a masterpiece by the Renaissance sculptor Cornelis Floris, is in Saint Leonard's Church in Zoutleeuw. It dates from the mid-16th century and is no less than 18 metres tall. The Halewijn walk takes you past both Saint Leonard's Church and Het Vinne provincial domain, with the largest natural inland lake in Flanders

Beautiful examples of surviving sacrament towers can also be found in Saint Sulpitius Church in Diest and the church in Zuurbemde (Glabbeek).



Sacrament towers occur regularly in this region from the mid-15th century. In the 17th century, however, the Church decided that henceforth tabernacles should stand in the middle of the altar. From then on, very few sacrament towers were erected. The example in Saint Peter's Church is **the oldest preserved specimen in Belgium**. In Leuven alone there used to be six others: in Saint Quinten's Church (which had two sacrament towers), in Park Abbey, in Saint Gertrude's Abbey, in the Celestine Priory in Heverlee, and in **Saint Jacob's Church. Only the latter still exists**. It was made in 1537-39, following the example of the tower in Saint Peter's Church. Elsewhere in the Province of Flemish Brabant, in Zoutleeuw, Glabbeek-Zuurbemde, and Diest, fine examples from the 16th and the 17th century have been preserved.

The sacrament tower was cleaned and restored in 2018-2019.





# ROOD CROSS ENSEMBLE

## JAN II BORMAN AND STUDIO

→ c. 1490  
polychromed oak

This monumental, oak rood cross ensemble is a masterpiece of Brabant late Gothic. It was made in the Brussels studio of Jan II Borman (c. 1460-1520), the most famous **descendant of a renowned woodcarvers' family with Leuven roots.**

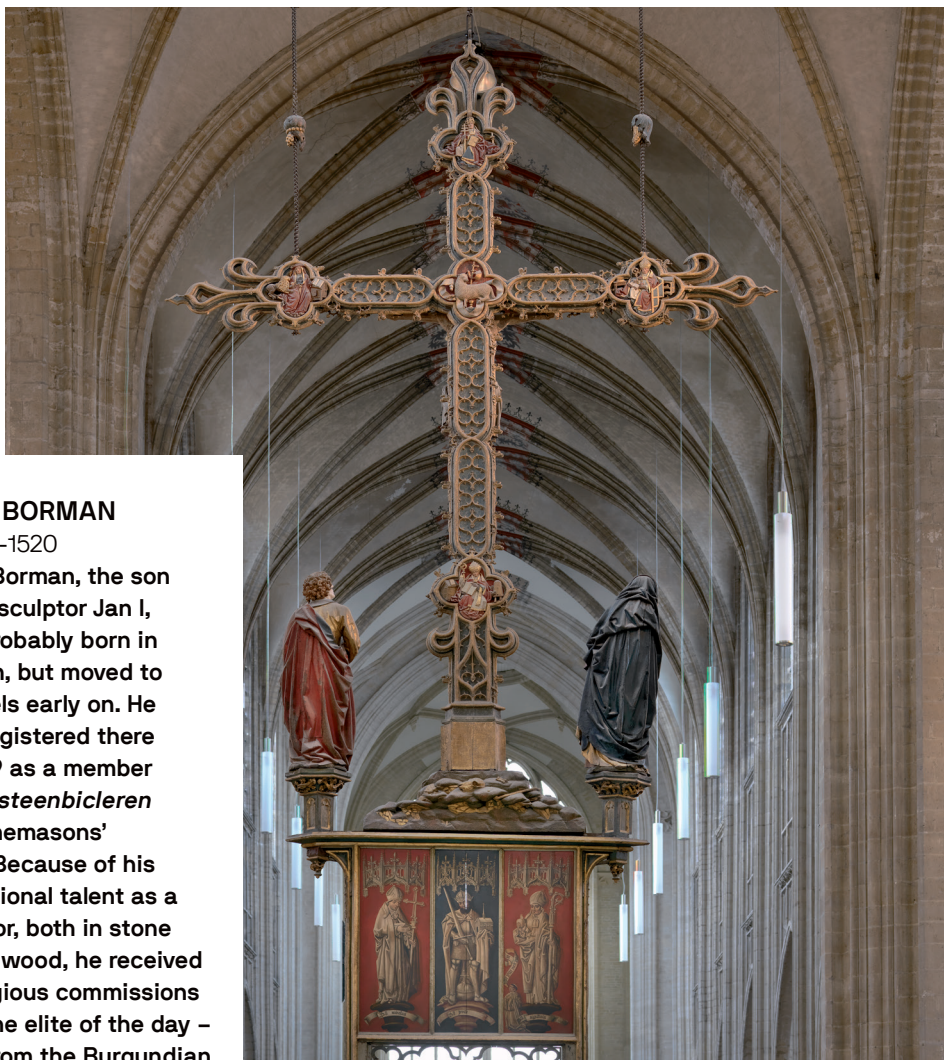




## JAN II BORMAN

c. 1450-1520

Jan II Borman, the son of the sculptor Jan I, was probably born in Leuven, but moved to Brussels early on. He was registered there in 1479 as a member of the *steenbicleren* or stonemasons' guild. Because of his exceptional talent as a sculptor, both in stone and in wood, he received prestigious commissions from the elite of the day – even from the Burgundian and Habsburgs courts. After his death, his sons Pasquier and Jan III successfully continued his workshop.

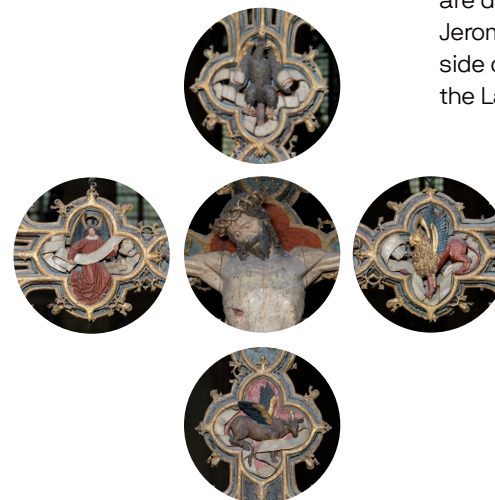


→ What is certain is that it dates from after 1488: specifically, **the rood screen** (the dividing wall between the choir and the nave), which the cross rests on, dates from that year. This position is characteristic for rood crosses, which mark **the boundary between the chancel, where the altar stands, and the nave, where the worshippers sit.**

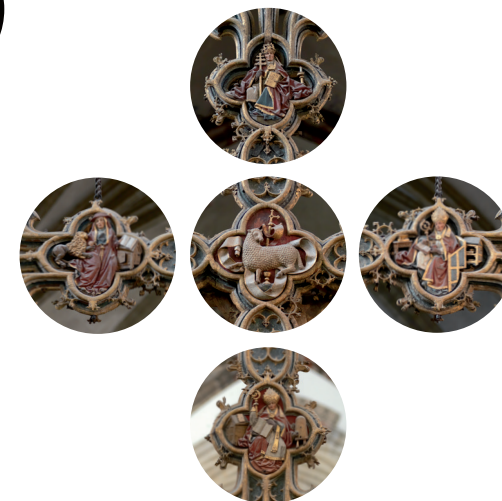
## WHO'S WHO?

→ The most important part of the ensemble is, of course, the cross. It stands on a sculpted hill that represents Golgotha, the mountain where Christ was crucified – you can even see a skull and bones. The four arms of the cross end in lobes in the shape of a fleur-de-lys, to which bas-reliefs have been applied. On the front, they feature **the symbols of the four evangelists**: a lion (Mark), an ox (Luke), an angel (Matthew), and an eagle (John). On the back of the lobes, **four Church Fathers** are depicted: Augustine, Ambrose, Jerome, and Gregory. On the reverse side of the cross is a medallion with the Lamb of God.

## FRONT



## BACK





→ Under the cross you can see a rectangular wooden supporting structure. On the corners are **two large statues on plinths**: they represent **Mary and John the Evangelist**. One level below are three shallow niches, each with a smaller statue. From left to right, we see Gregory, the apostle Peter, and Jerome. On the back of the supporting structure, Church Fathers – or Founders – are again depicted, this time painted in grisaille (grey monochrome). In this case, it is Ambrose, Henry, and Augustine. It is possible that the painter is Jan van der Coutheren, from Leuven, who was active from 1520 until about 1546.



→ Did you know?

### BEST MASTER SCULPTOR

Jan II Borman's contemporaries also knew what a fantastic artist he was. In 1513, he was praised in a prestigious contract as 'die beste meester beeldesnydere' – the best master sculptor.

### EXTRAORDINARILY EXPRESSIVE

→ The rood cross ensemble is particularly appealing due to its expressiveness. The figures of the crucified Christ, John, and Mary **are represented in an extraordinarily expressive and realistic way**, with an explicit attention for detail – this may indicate that Jan II Borman sculpted them. The composition is cleverly conceived and extremely effective. While John is transfixed by Christ, Maria turns her eyes away. At the same time, she points her hand towards her crucified Son, thus forcing the viewer to look up at Him. It is possible that Borman's composition was inspired by the **Crucifixion by Rogier van der Weyden** at the Escorial in Madrid.



Rogier van der Weyden, *The Crucifixion*, c. 1455.  
Oil on panel. El Escorial, Real Monasterio de San Lorenzo, inv. 10014602.

### DISCOVER LEUVEN

1. M Leuven owns the world's largest collection of Borman objects.

### DISCOVER FLEMISH BRABANT

2. The monumental rood cross in Saint Martin's Basilica in Halle is attributed to Jan I Borman, the father of Jan II. The Geuze cycling route takes you past the rood cross in Halle and past the Church of Our Lady in Alseberg: there you can also find a rood cross ensemble by the Borman family.





# SEDES SAPIENTIAE

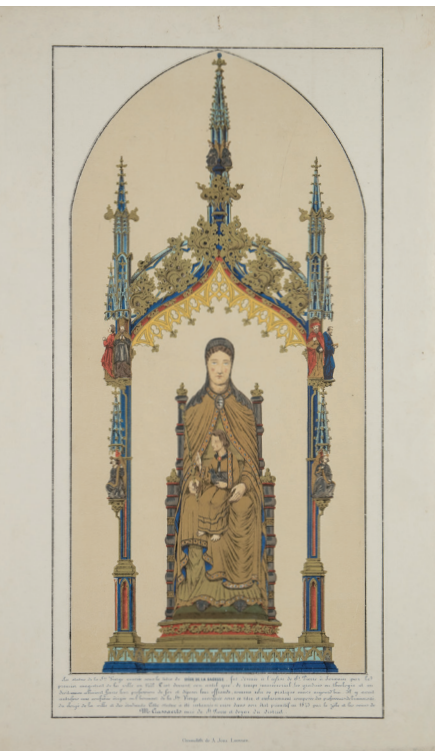
**CLAES DE BRUYNE**

→ 1442  
polychromed oak

This 15th-century Sedes Sapientiae is one of the showpieces of Saint Peter's Church. A Sedes Sapientiae (Latin for 'seat of wisdom') is a representation of Mary, seated on a throne and with the baby Jesus in her lap. The motif first appears in the 5th century. From the 8th to the 13th century, it is the most common way to portray Mary.







→ The Leuven Sedes was commissioned from **Claes de Bruyne**, a Brussels woodcarver. He based it on an earlier, Romanesque statue. The city donated it to the church as a procession statue: it was carried through the streets during the **Ommegang** (lit. "walk around"), a medieval pageant that took place in Leuven every year. Silver crowns and a sceptre accompanied the statue: these can now be seen in the display cases in the southern side aisle.



→ Did you know?

## MERCY SEAT

Not only Mary, but also God the Father is sometimes portrayed with the dying Jesus in his lap – a so-called Mercy Seat.

In Saint Peter's Church, you can find this image on, among other things, the sacrament tower.

The baby Jesus wears a purple robe, the quintessential royal colour, and blesses worshippers. In his left hand he carries a dove, the symbol of the Holy Ghost. The relationship between mother and son is **distant**: Mary holds her hands protectively around Jesus, but does not touch him. The statue does not show a mother's love for her child, but rather **Mary presenting the Christ child to the world**.

## MOTHER AND SON

→ In the statue, you can still clearly recognize the shape of the wood block from which it was carved – the sides of the seat were originally the edges of the block. Mary sits up straight. She is **lightly carved**: the chest is not elaborated, the arms are not detached from the body, and the feet merge into the block. The legs are visible under the robe, but the folds show little relief. This **formal, impersonal rendering** is further emphasized by the **symmetrical representation** of Mary.





## UNIVERSITY SEAL

→ Since 2020, the Sedes has returned to its original location in the northern transept. It had been placed there in 1658, in a portico altar, by **the Mechelen sculptor Lucas Faydherbe**. The altar was destroyed in an allied bombing during the night of 11-12 May 1944. The Sedes was badly damaged. After the war, the fragments were **carefully reconstructed and repaired by Jozef Van Uytvanck**, a Leuven sculptor. The restored statue was moved to the nave, but is now back at its original location.



If the image is familiar to you: the Sedes Sapientiae has been part of the seal of **Leuven university** since 1909.



## DISCOVER LEUVEN

1. The university still defines the city's appearance. For example, the University Library is certainly worth a visit.
2. Since the middle ages, the main building of the university has been the University Hall in the Naamsestraat, originally Leuven's Cloth Hall.

## DISCOVER FLEMISH BRABANT

3. Flemish-Brabant is a true knowledge province. In addition to Leuven University there is also, for example, Living Tomorrow in Vilvoorde, a research centre where the future is already coming to life.





# BREWERS' CHAPEL

HENDRIK DANCO

→ 1756

Leuven's brewers were united in a guild. Because so much beer was sold, it was one of **the richest and most powerful guilds** in the city. It had its own chapel, here, in Saint Peter's Church, since the 15th century.





→ For centuries, Leuven has been known for its beer – and, remarkably enough, it owes this renown to its university. In the Middle Ages, people drank a lot of beer. Not only did it contain less alcohol than it does today, it was also healthier than water, which was frequently polluted. Most people brewed at home, for their own use, but the students and professors of Leuven university had no time or space for this. And so **breweries** arose that did this for them. They worked with expensive ingredients, because students had the money to pay for better beer. And once they graduated, many still had the rich Leuven beer delivered to their own hometown. This is how Leuven's brewers became widely known.



Hendrick van Steenwijck II and Frans Francken II, *Interior of Saint Peter's Church, Leuven*, c. 1600-1640. Detail. Oil on canvas. Brussels, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, inv. 1533.

→ Did you know?

### MARBLE

The brewers' guild decorated this chapel with an expensive marble gate and altar. To the right of it is a chapel of the less wealthy apothecaries' guild. They could not afford marble, so they chose for wood instead.

→ In 1507, the brewers' guild commissioned the Leuven joiner Jan Petercels to make **a retable or altarpiece for the chapel**. The contract clearly defined what the work should represent: the life and miracles of Saint Arnold (patron saint of brewers), Saint Ghislain, and Saint Job, based on drawings by Matthijs Keldermans. Moreover, the contract stipulated that the carving must be carried out by the renowned woodcarver Jan II Borman.





## DISCOVER LEUVEN

1. Leuven's Oude Markt is also known as Europe's longest bar.
2. Stella Artois beer has only been around since 1926, but the history of the brewery dates back to 1366.
3. After two hundred years, beer is being brewed in the Park Abbey again: in 2019, the Braxatorium Parcensis brewery opened its doors there.

## DISCOVER FLEMISH BRABANT

Flemish-Brabant is the absolute heart of Belgium's beer country. Beer is inextricably linked with the region, the tradition, and the people.

4. At Hof ten Dormal in Tildonk, they produce 'Bouts', a beer brewed according to a medieval recipe.
5. Lovers of specialty beers should definitely visit De Kroon Brewery in Neerijse. One of its founders is a beer professor at Leuven University.



→ The retable was finished in 1509, but unfortunately nothing of it survives. In 1756, it was replaced with a Baroque altar with a beautifully sculpted gate around it, which is still there today. It was made by the **stonemason Hendrik Danco**, who also made Rubens' tombstone for Antwerp's Saint James' Church. **Brewers' attributes** are depicted in the marble cartouches to the left and right of the doorway: a hop basket (a sort of sieve) and a brewing stick (used for stirring).



Only the painting on the altar, a canvas by Balthasar Beschey from 1768, still recalls the old retable: it shows Arnold, Ghislain, and Job.

Miraculously, this part of the northern aisle survived both world wars relatively unscathed. This brewers' chapel, therefore, is **historically very valuable**.



# FONT AND CHANDELIER IN THE BAPTISTERY

## BAPTISTERY

Children were baptised in this chapel from the late Middle Ages. It contains some beautiful examples of precious metalwork.



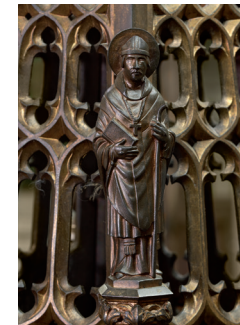


→ The **six-lobed font**, in brass, was made by an unknown metalworker and dates from the late 15th century. It is decorated with architectural motifs that also recur inside and outside the church: openwork niches, pinnacles (turrets), ornamental leaves, tracery, such as the Gothic pointed-arch windows at the top...



Only the **font cover** was made **recently**. The original disappeared during the forced sale of property in 1798, when French revolutionaries were in charge here. The current, copper cover was designed in 1954 by the Leuven sculptor Joseph Van Uytvanck. It was made by Devroye Frères, a famous metalworking studio in Brussels. Devroye had already forged a pair of crowns and a sceptre for the Sedes Sapientiae statue in 1946.

There are **six bronze figurines** around the spire on the cover. They depict figures who had a special connection with the church and/or the city: Our Lady with child; Peter, the patron saint of the church; Charles Borromeo and Proud Margaret, to whom chapels are dedicated elsewhere in the church; Albert of Louvain, a medieval bishop who was worshipped locally; and John the Baptist, a reference to the baptistery itself.







→ On the edge of the cover, next to a Latin inscription with the names of the donors, is the monogram IVU of the designer Van Uytvanck.

## FONT CRANE

→ The cover is attached to an impressive, wrought-iron **font crane**. It is used to open the font and hinges on two pivots. The font crane, like the font, dates from the late 15th century. The same is true of the wrought-iron **chandelier**. Previously, this hung in the chancel, where the modern, spherical-shaped chandelier in gold-coloured Italian glass now hangs. The 15th-century chandelier originates from the lost chapel of Our Lady of Ginderbuyten, which was just outside the city walls. Following restoration in 2019, the green and gold polychromy can be seen beautifully again.



## THE SECRET OF THE SMITH

→ Tradition has it that the font crane and the chandelier were made by none other than **Quinten I Massijs** (1466-1530). He is primarily known as a painter, but is said to have begun his career as a **metalworker**. A gilt inscription on the underside of the chandelier refers to this: 'CONNUBIALIS AMOR DE MULCIBRE FECIT APELLEM' ('Marriage turned Vulcan into Apelles'). 'Malciber' is a nickname for Vulcan, the Roman god of fire and smiths; Apelles was considered the most famous painter of Antiquity. The inscription alludes to an old story: Massijs is said to have traded metalworking for painting due to a love affair. Only, the inscription was added much later. It's most likely **a fable**. Perhaps the font crane and the chandelier aren't by Quinten I Massijs himself, but by someone in his milieu – we know that there were several smiths in his family. But even that remains a **hypothesis**.

→ Did you know?

## SUSTAINABLE

The font is still used for baptisms. Nowadays, though, the water is poured into a plastic bowl to prevent damage to the font.



# THE CHARLES BORROMEO CHAPEL

This chapel is dedicated to Charles Borromeo. He was **Bishop of Milan** when the city was hit by **the plague** in 1576. All the dignitaries fled, but Borromeo remained to tend to the sick and dying. Moreover, he compelled all of Milan's clergy to do the same. He was canonized in 1610. Since then, he has been worshipped **throughout Catholic Europe** – also here in Leuven.







→ The chapel's showpiece is a **marble Baroque altar** by **Lucas Faydherbe** from 1641-1660. It is dedicated to Saint Dorothy (you can see a natural-stone statue of her all the way at the top) and to Saint Charles Borromeo. The painting above the altar shows him giving Communion to Milan's plague victims.

It is a **faithful copy** of a canvas from 1668 by Gaspar de Craeyer. That was taken by French soldiers in 1794 and given to the Louvre for safekeeping. It is now in the Museum of Fine Arts in Nancy. The museum's curator, Jean-Mathias Schiff, painted this copy in the 1920s.



Gaspar de Craeyer, *Saint Charles Borromeo administers the sacrament to the sick during the plague in Milan*, 1668. Oil on canvas. Nancy, Musée des Beaux-Arts, inv. 69.



## PAINTED ON GLASS

→ The **stained-glass window from 1638** features scenes from Charles Borromeo's life. It was commissioned following the founding of the Brotherhood of Saint Charles Borromeo, who managed the chapel. Its maker was **the Leuven glass painter Jan de Caumont** (1577-1659). Leuven had been a major centre for glass production in the Netherlands since the 15th century, and De Caumont was one of the standard-bearers. He was the **city's official glass painter** and from here worked on commissions throughout the Duchy of Brabant. For example, he made 41 stained-glass windows for **the cloister of Park Abbey**, which you can view in situ.



→ Between the two windows of the chapel is **the tomb of Thomas Stapleton** from 1694. Stapleton, an Irish jurist, was professor of law in Leuven and was elected **rector of the university** no less than nine times. His bust stands in a niche, between two winged angels. A painting of Charles Borromeo by Abraham van Diepenbeeck (1596-1675) hangs next to the memorial stone.



# PRECIOUS METALWORK

In two chapels in the southern side aisle you will find display cases with stunning examples of **religious precious metalwork**. It is only a fraction of the many hundreds of liturgical and devotional objects that the church once had. Every family, brotherhood, trade or guild that maintained its own chapel or altar had to decorate it, preferably as sumptuously as possible. Unfortunately, as a result of changing tastes, political power shifts, and, in particular, both world wars, much of the church silver was lost. But what has survived **reflects the history of the city and recalls forgotten rituals and customs**.





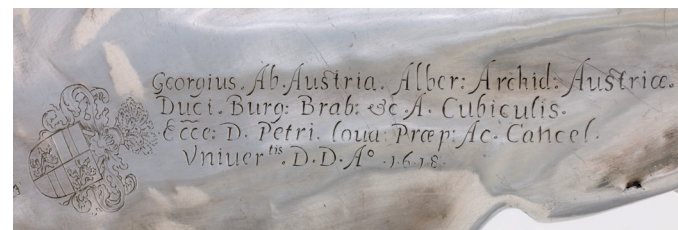


## RELIC STATUES

→ Consider, for example, the series of **eight relic statues**. They were made between the early 16th and early 17th century by metalworkers from Leuven and Brussels, and they are **true masterpieces**. Originally, they all contained a small relic of the saints they represent, in a holder on the body or in an attribute: Our Lady with Child, Virgin and Child with Saint Anne, Catharina of Alexandria, Saint Stephen, Mary Magdalene, Saint Laurence, Saint Peter and Saint Paul. Notice the **finely elaborated details**: the wavy hair on the shoulders of Mary and Catherine, the lavish clothing of Laurence and Mary Magdalene, or the realism with which Peter and Paul's hands, feet, and face are represented.



We know the origins of the Peter and Paul pair of statues. They were made in 1618 by the Leuven silversmith Jan Wynants. They were commissioned by Archduke Albrecht of Austria (1559–1621), Governor General of the Southern Netherlands. According to the inscription on the back of the statues, they were a gift to his chamberlain, George of Austria. He was also provost of Saint Peter's Church and chancellor of the university.





## CIBORIA AND MONSTRANCES

→ The display cases also contain liturgical ware. Particularly significant is a **Baroque giant ciborium**. Ciboria were used to store consecrated Hosts. This specimen is exceptional: due to its large size, but also because the lid is signed by the maker, **Rombout Dauw sr.** The year is also legible: 1716. Dauw was one of the most important silversmiths in 18th-century Leuven, and, based on the inscription on this ciborium, art historians have been able to identify other silverwork by him.



In addition to ciboria, you can see **monstrances**. Monstrances were used for the worship of the Holy Sacrament, a larger consecrated Host. They were carried in **processions** or shown during special masses (the word derives from *monstrare*, Latin for 'to show'). They have a **glass cylinder or medallion** in the middle, so that worshippers get a good view of the Host. Because, according to the Catholic faith, the Host is the body of Christ, monstrances are usually lavishly decorated. Just like chalices and ciboria, they often contain symbolic references to the Communion and sacrifice of Christ.



## CROWNS AND SCEPTRES

→ But perhaps the most appealing to the imagination are **the crowns and sceptres of the Sedes Sapientiae** – the renowned medieval statue of the Virgin Mary that you can see in the northern transept. Until the 1950s, it was carried in the annual procession through the city. It is not surprising, then, that over the centuries it has always been magnificently adorned. Unfortunately, not all the crowns and sceptres have survived, and the specimens in this display case have also had an eventful history.

In the course of the **19th century**, Mary and Jesus were given a **neo-Gothic crown**. Around 1900, these disappeared from Leuven in obscure circumstances. In the 1920s, on the occasion of its 500th anniversary, the university gifted new crowns, but they were destroyed during the allied aerial bombing of Leuven in May 1944. In 1946, the Brussels metalworking studio **Devroye Frères** made a **new pair of crowns and a sceptre in neo-Byzantine style**. Three years later, however, **the original neo-Gothic crown of Mary** appeared at an auction in New York. The university bought it and donated it to the church. The crown is decorated with lilies and roses. It is sometimes still used to adorn the Sedes statue, together with the 17th-century sceptre by an anonymous Leuven silversmith.





# PULPIT

JACQUES BERGÉ

→ 1742  
oak

This impressive pulpit is 9 metres tall – one of the tallest in the country. It is a highly expressive example of Baroque sculpture from the Southern Netherlands.







## 18TH-CENTURY ATTRACTION

→ The pulpit fits precisely between two pillars, but **it was not originally intended for Saint Peter's Church**. The Brussels sculptor Jacques Bergé (1696–1756) made it for the church of the **Norbertine abbey at Ninove** between 1739 and 1742. He was paid 6,500 guilders. Money well spent, because the pulpit made a big impression on 18th-century churchgoers. It was even listed as an attraction in travel reports and guides.



→ The first thing you notice is **the rocks and palm trees** – elements that you might not immediately expect to see in a church. They look exotic and form the backdrop for the dramatic scenes that play out at the foot of the pulpit. At the same time, they are **key structural elements**. The rocks provide a solid base for the 'tub' of the pulpit. The palm trees support the **sounding board**: the canopy above the tub that reflects the priest's words, so that the worshippers can hear him better. Thanks to this clever construction, the pulpit is entirely self-supporting and does not have to be attached to a pillar or a wall.

But in the early 19th century, Ninove Abbey ran into financial difficulties. It was forced to sell the pulpit to the Saint Peter's Church for 2,400 guilders. The transport to Leuven cost a further 1,214 guilders. The pulpit was installed on 15 June 1807. A week later, it was used for the first time.





## AUGUSTINE BECOMES PETER

→ The origin of the pulpit also explains **the imagery**. At the front, we see the dramatic high point from the calling of **Saint Norbert** (c. 1080–1134). As a young man, Norbert led a luxurious life at the court of the German emperor Henry V (1081–1125). However, a thunderbolt from God threw him from his horse and the Lord urged him to take a different course. Norbert obeyed and began to live a devout and simple life. He would later establish the monastic order of Norbertines.



→ Originally, the statue on the back of the pulpit represented the conversion of **Saint Augustine** – the Norbertines follow his monastic rule. But you can't have a pulpit in Saint Peter's Church without Saint Peter. Hence **a cockerel** was added to the rocks, a reference to what Jesus said to Peter the night before his crucifixion: 'Before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times'. The statue was also given two – now lost – **keys**. These are the typical attributes of Saint Peter: they are used to unlock Heaven's Gate and the world. In this way, Augustine was **transformed into Peter** for the people of Leuven. It also explains why, unusually, the apostle is depicted wearing sandals. On the other representations of Peter that you will encounter in this church, he is **always barefoot**.





# CHOIR STALLS

## CLAES DE BRUYNE AND GORT GORIS

→ 1439-1442  
oak

In 1442, the Brussels woodcarver Claes de Bruyne made the famous Sedes Sapientiae in this church. However, that was not his first commission for Saint Peter's. Shortly before, he had made an oak choir stall (the choir is the place where the high altar stands), in collaboration with the carpenter Gort Goris. It was commissioned on 12 January 1439 by the Chapter – the church management, so to speak – and was delivered three years later. The city and the Chapter each paid half.







Stalles de l'église de St.-Gertrude à Louvain.  
Dessiné de M. Brasseur, d'après Van der Schueren.

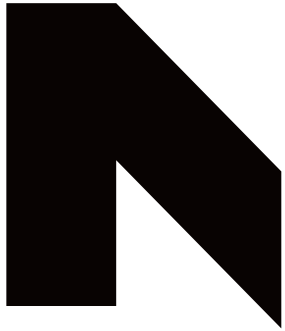
→ The choir stalls were constructed according to a classical design. On both sides of the choir were two rows of seats. The back rows were a bit higher than the front ones and had a back wall and a canopy. The rows were L-shaped: they had a short end on the side of the rood screen (the dividing wall between the choir and nave, where ordinary worshippers followed the mass). These short ends later disappeared. Of the two rows, only one has survived, probably the top one. This was reserved for canons, vicars, scribes, and honoured guests who participated in the Choir Prayer. The lost bottom row was less elaborate and meant for lower clergy.



### LITTLE LEDGES

→ Underneath every seat you will find a **little ledge or 'misericord'**, a projection that you could lean against when the seat was folded up. The little ledges are beautifully designed – with **moralistic motifs, but also with contemporary, bizarre, or naughty scenes**. Look for the jester who is pulling a silly face and sticking out his tongue, the two-headed eagle, the veiled old woman peering out of a window, the mermaid, or the horned monster spreading its bat-like wings...





The choir stalls remained untouched until the French occupation at **the end of the 18th century**. On 3 August 1798, they were sold at **public auction**. They remained virtually intact until 1803; only the back walls and the bottom row of seats were removed. But in subsequent years, the stalls were **largely dismantled**. For example, 17 misericords moved to the collection of the **Victoria & Albert Museum in London**. What was left was badly damaged during the two world wars. Of the ninety-six original seats, there are now only **six rows left, each with five seats**.



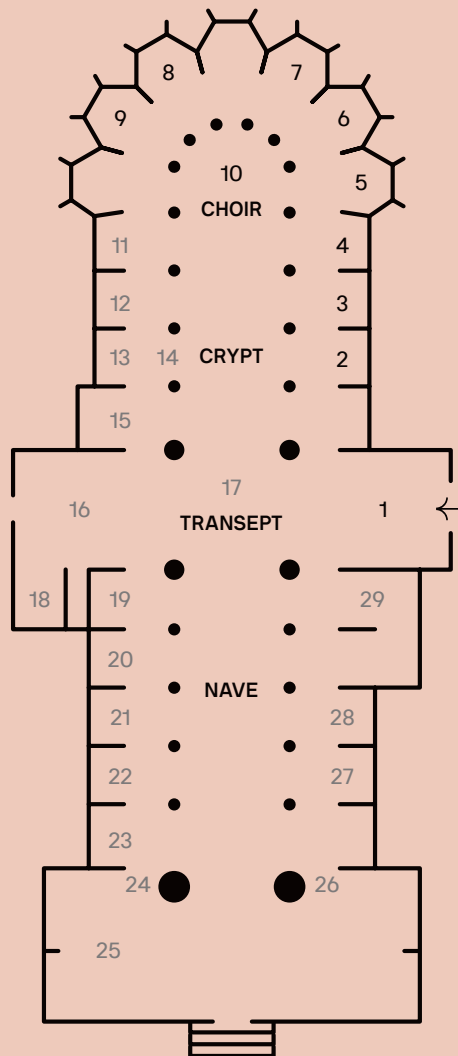




# ALSO IN THE CHURCH



# ALSO IN THE CHURCH



→ 1

**Saint Joseph with the Christ child, on a pedestal, with putti**, mid-18th century, terracotta, painted white

**Sarcophagus of Guillaume Van Bockel and Barbe Vandermaelen**, H. Wijnandts and J.B. Verdeyen based on a design by Herman de Fierlandt, 1873, French white stone

**The Martyrdom of Saint Stephen**, unknown, after Pieter Paul Rubens, 17th century, oil on canvas

→ 2

**Sarcophagus of Michael Scribaens** (+1504) and his three wives, attributed to Jan III Borman, c. 1504, Avesnes stone

**Vitrine containing molten bronze from the old bells, a burnt arm, possibly from the Black Christ, and a hand from an unknown statue**, bronze and polychromed wood, burnt in WW1

→ 3

**Altar of Saint Ignatius of Loyola and Francis of Assisi with Ecce Homo**, after Gerard Seghers, Antwerp, c. 1628, oil on canvas

→ 4

**Triptych with the martyrdom of Saint Dorothy**, Josse van der Baren, 1594-95, oil on panel

→ 5

**Triptych of Saint Ivo**, Josse van der Baren, 1607, oil on panel

→ 6

**Sarcophagus of Jacobus Bogaerts**, attributed to Jan III Borman, c. 1520-25, polychromed Avesnes stone

**Sarcophagus of Adam Bogaerts**, Leuven, c. 1550, Avesnes stone

→ 7

**Female saint**, Leuven, early 16th century, polychromed wood

**Saint John in the Oil**, retable fragment, attributed to Jan I Borman, late 15th century, polychromed oak

**Saint Anna te Drieën**, Brabant, c. 1480, polychromed oak

**Christ on the cold stone**, Leuven, early 16th century, polychromed oak, burnt in WW1

→ 8

**Fall of the rebellious angels**, Leuven or Antwerp, 1st half of the 16th century, oil on panel

**Beheading of Saint John the Baptist**, Leuven or Antwerp, 1st half of the 16th century, oil on panel

→ 9

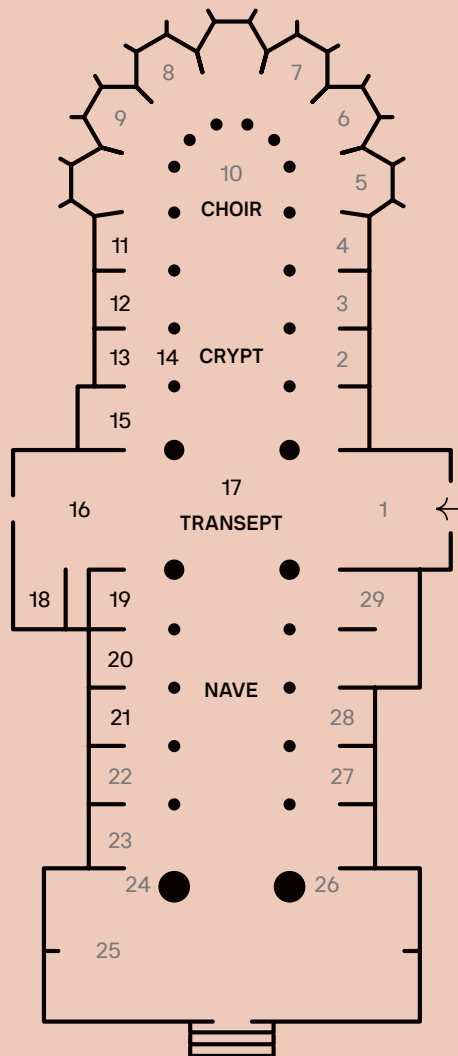
**Communion bench**, Alexander Van Papenhoven, 1708, marble

→ 10

**High altar**, Frans Vermeylen, Benoît Van Uytvanck & son, 1921, with copper figurines of Proud Margaret, Saint Peter, Saint Albert of Leuven, and Charles Borromeo



# ALSO IN THE CHURCH



→ 11

**Sarcophagus of Anthonis Berthyns**, Leuven, c. 1563, polychromed Avesnes stone

**Altar of Saint Julian**, 1863, with Christ on the cross, Leuven, 2nd half of the 19th century, oil on canvas

→ 12

**Sarcophagus of Joannes Keynooghe**, Leuven, c. 1460, polychromed natural stone

→ 13

**Saint Peter**, Theodor Van Loon, 1st half of the 17th century, oil on canvas

**Saint Peter and two Renaissance panels** from the organ destroyed in WWI, Jean Crignon, 1556, oak

→ 14

**Romanesque crypt**, 11th century, including tomb from 2020 with the remains of four Dukes of Brabant: Godfrey II, Godfrey III, Henry I, and Henry II

→ 15

**Sarcophagus of Matilda of Boulogne and Marie of Brabant**, Leuven, mid-13th century, bluestone and white limestone

→ 16

**Sarcophagus of Petrus Franciscus Xaverius De Ram** (1802-1865), Herman de Fierlandt, 1871, marble

**The Great Flood**, Lambert Mathieu, 1838, oil on canvas

→ 17

**Rood screen**, Leuven, 1488-1490, gilded Avesnes stone

→ 18

**Calvary**, Southern Netherlands, 2nd half of the 17th century, oil on canvas

→ 19

**Saint Michael with the dragon and two angels**, Oscar Algoet based on a design by Benoit Van Uytvanck, c. 1900, mural

**Altar of Saint Joseph and the Holy Guardian Angel**, Benoit Van Uytvanck, c. 1900, polychromed wood and plaster

**Cast of a 15th-century statue of Our Lady**, Léon Bressers, 1921, polychromed plaster

**The Sacred Heart of Christ**, unknown, 19th century, polychromed wood, until 1914 on the high altar in the choir

→ 20

**Altar of Saint Ivo with Calvary**, Southern Netherlands, 2nd half of the 17th century, oil on canvas

**The Adoration of the Magi**, Antoine Clevenbergh, c. 1775-1800, oil on canvas

**Saint Blaise of Sebaste**, Southern Netherlands, 1st half of the 18th century (?), polychromed wood

→ 21

**Altar of Saint Nicholas of Myra**, with Saint Nicholas rescuing sailors from the storm, Jan Baptist vanden Kerckhoven, 1772, oil on canvas

**Bust of Saint Roch or Saint Jacobus Major**, Southern Netherlands, 2nd half of the 17th century, polychromed wood

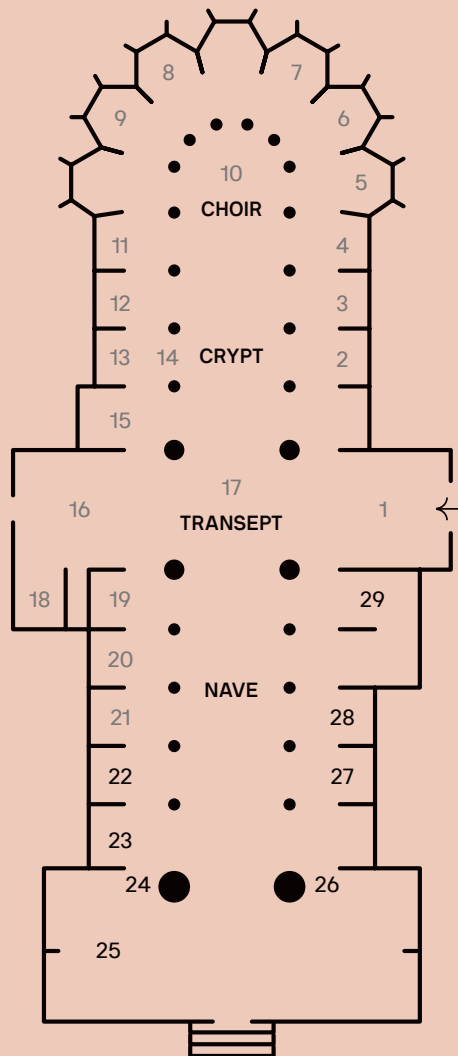
**The life of Saint Roch** (reproduction), Master of the Saint Nicholas triptych, Leuven, 1st half of the 16th century, oil on panel

**Saint Roch Healing the Plague Victims** (reproduction), Master of the Saint Nicholas triptych, Leuven, 1st half of the 16th century, oil on panel

**Saint Roch** (from the altar of Saint Ivo), 17th century, polychromed oak



# ALSO IN THE CHURCH



→ 22

**Saint Albert of Leuven**, unknown, 2nd half of the 17th century (?), polychromed wood

→ 23

**Saint Francis**, unknown, 19th century, polychromed wood

**Altar of the Most Holy Name of Jesus with the Adoration of the Magi**, Southern Netherlands, 1744, oil on canvas

**The governors of the Brotherhood of the Most Holy Name of Jesus**, Southern Netherlands (Gonzales Coques?), mid-16th century, oil on panel

**The birth of John the Baptist**, Southern Netherlands, mid-17th century, oil on panel

**Mary with child (the Immaculate Conception)**, Benoît Van Uytvanck, c. 1875-1924, polychromed wood

**Saint Marcouf**, Egide Goyers, c. 1850-1874, polychromed wood

→ 24

**Christ on the cross**, attributed to the studio of Jan I Borman, c. 1480-90, polychromed oak

→ 25

**The miraculous draught of fishes**, de Dieudonné after Pieter Paul Rubens, 19th century, oil on canvas

**Our Lady**, unknown, 19th century, polychromed wood

**Christ on the cross**, Lancelot Volders, 1703, oil on canvas

**The Adoration of the Shepherds**, Jan Cosiers & Deodat van der Mont, 1643, oil on canvas

**Saint Rita**, unknown, 19th century, polychromed wood

→ 26

**The crucifixion of Saint Peter**, Southern Netherlands, 17th century, oil on canvas  
**Baroque frame**, 17th century, oak

→ 27

**The Black Christ destroyed in 1914**, Alfred Delaunois, 1939, oil on canvas

**The mission of Jesus in the temple**, Antoine Clevenbergh after Pieter Jozef Verhaghen, c. 1775-1800, oil on canvas

**Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas**, Pieter Jozef Verhaghen, c. 1775-1800, oil on canvas

→ 28

**Sarcophagus of Peter van Tienen**, attributed to Jan III Borman, c. 1523, stone

→ 29

**'Let the children come to me'**, Antoine Clevenbergh after Pieter Jozef Verhaghen, c. 1775-1800, oil on canvas

**The Crooked Christ**, Paul Victor Maes, 1953, oil on canvas

**Altar of Saint Peter**, Fernand Colin (marble) & Holemans (bronze) based on a design by Raymond Lemaire, c. 1940, marble and bronze

**Christ appears to Margaret Maria**

**Alacoque**, Southern Netherlands, 17th century, oil on canvas

**Saint Joseph and Jesus**, unknown, 19th century, polychromed wood



# TIMELINE

## 1000 YEARS OF BUILDING HISTORY

986

### 11th century:

Construction of the forerunner to the current church, in a Romanesque style. Only the crypt has been preserved



### First quarter of the 15th century:

Construction of the current Gothic church begins

1500



**986**  
Saint Peter's Church  
is founded

1000

**1054**  
Saint Peter's is  
elevated to a  
collegiate church

1100

**1235**  
Duke Henry I of  
Brabant dies and is  
buried in the choir

1200

1300

**1425**  
Sulpitius of  
Vorst appointed  
master builder

**1439**  
Jan II Keldermans  
appointed  
master builder

**1448**  
Matheus de  
Layens appointed  
master builder

1400

**1458**  
A fire damages the  
superstructure of the  
Romanesque westwork

**1459**  
Construction of a  
lantern tower at the  
intersection of the  
nave and the transept

**1488**  
Rood screen erected

**1494**  
Alart Du Hamel  
appointed master builder

**1497**  
Construction of the  
southern entrance starts;  
it will remain unfinished

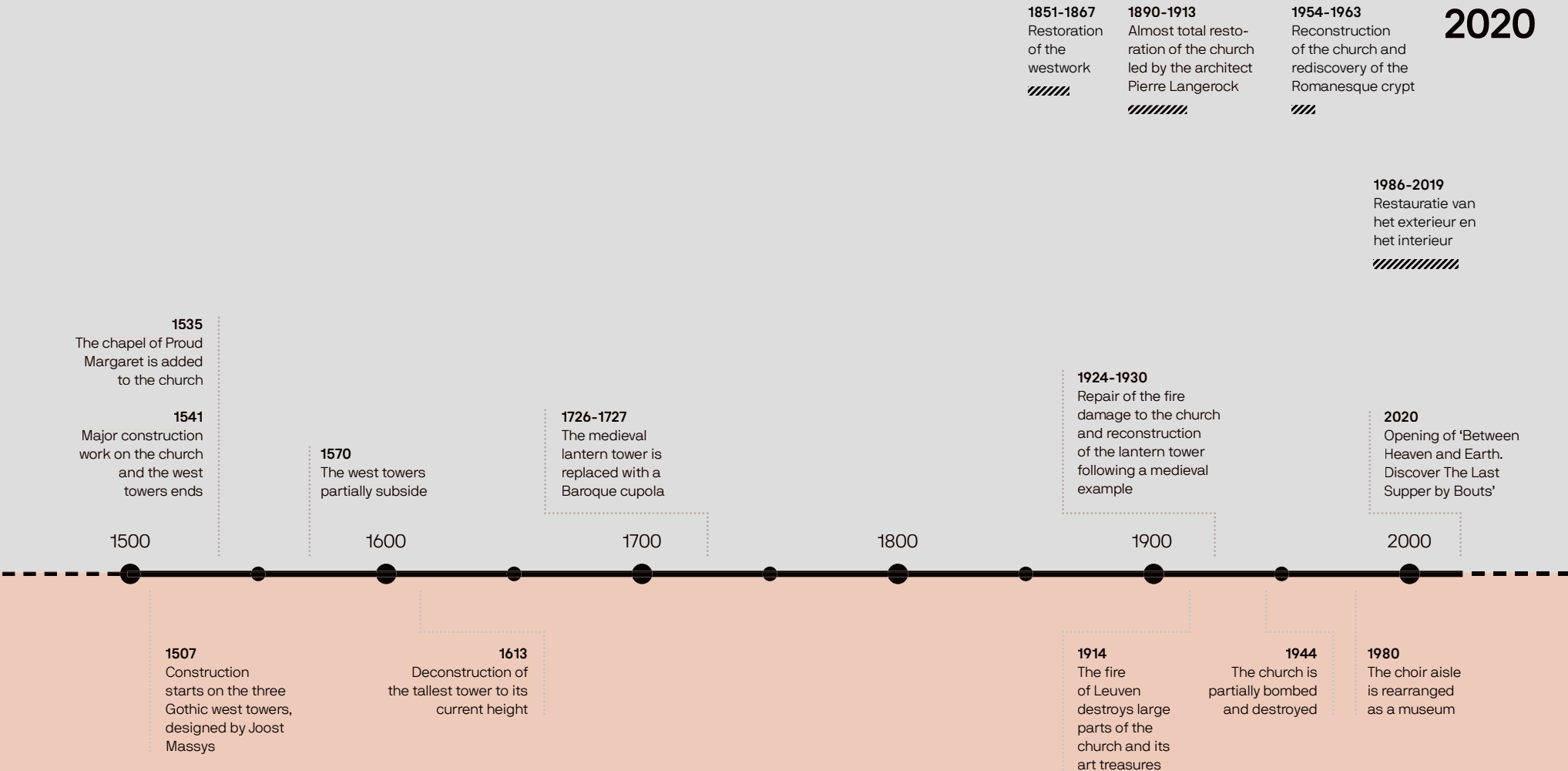
**1499**  
Demolition of the  
Romanesque westwork

1500



# TIMELINE

## 1000 YEARS OF BUILDING HISTORY



# COLOPHON

→ The updated museum presentation in Saint Peter's Church is a key project of the impulse programme Flemish Masters by Toerisme Vlaanderen. M Leuven worked in collaboration with Visit Leuven, Toerisme Vlaanderen, and Toerisme Vlaams-Brabant npo.

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50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 71, 76, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82,  
83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 107, 108, 109

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70, 72, 73, 74, 75, 78, 82, 83, 90, 104, 105, 106, 110, 111

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