



***Sankt Servatius  
Katholisch in Siegburg***

## **A walk around Saint Servatius parish church of Siegburg**



*Welcome to  
the Roman Catholic church  
of Saint Servatius.  
Come inside and take a  
look around.*

### **The baptismal font ①**

After a few steps you come to the Romanesque baptismal font with a modern metal cover. Many centuries have left their traces in this church. The font is placed near the entrance since baptism is the gateway to Christianity.

### **Not the first church in this place**

A thousand years ago there must have been a small church here that was dedicated to Saint Servatius, the first bishop of Maastricht in the Netherlands. Why did they choose this patron? - On top of the hill behind our church there was a fortified castle controlled by Count Palatine Henry, a member of an important high ranking noble family. Other members of his family were advocates for the collegiate church of Saint Servatius at Maastricht. Henry dedicated the little church to the patron saint of his family and the present church still bears his name.

### **The foundation of abbey and town**

Count Henry would have liked to enlarge his territory towards Cologne, but was defeated by the troops of Anno II, Archbishop of Cologne and Prince-Elector of the Holy Roman Empire. In 1064 Anno founded a Benedictine Abbey in the place of the castle and dedicated it to the Archangel Michael. The head of the monastery was given the right to mint coins, to levy tolls and to hold markets. As a consequence the small settlement soon turned into the medieval town of Siegburg, which thus owes its existence to the foundation of the abbey.

### **Construction of the Romanesque basilica**

About a hundred years after the foundation of the abbey, the small town needed a new, bigger church and they decided on a three-aisle basilica with two galleries and a church tower at the west end. Do you see that parts of the walls are painted red? These are the Romanesque elements of the building that had massive walls and a flat ceiling covering the nave. Moreover, two galleries were added, because more space was needed for the growing parish community and the many pilgrims who, after the death of Archbishop Anno II in 1075, came to Siegburg to visit his grave in the abbey on top of the hill.

## **The life-size figures of the central nave ②**

Walk down a few steps in the central aisle to look at the eight life-size figures of the apostles at the columns to the right and left. The two statues near the organ loft date from the 19th century, the other six were made in about 1510 in the workshop of "Meister Tilman" in Cologne. The Apostle John is the only one that can easily be identified. He is young, beardless and holds a chalice in his left hand. The other figures have, in the course of time, lost their characteristic attributes.

③ Further down the aisle, to the left, you can see the life-size figure of Mary, Mother of God, with her child Jesus. The lime-wood sculpture was carved in about 1640 in the workshop of Jeremias Geisselbrunn, artist at Augsburg in Bavaria. Mary is represented as the Queen of Heaven wearing a crown and holding a sceptre in her left hand.

## **Original entrances**

In the middle of the church the rows of the pews give way to pathways to the left and to the right. At the southern end you will see a confessional, at the northern end a statue of the Madonna. Originally the entrances to the church were located there, in the middle of the long sides of the church building.

## **The Lady chapel ④**

Now proceed from the middle aisle to the small Lady chapel. During the recent repair work four marble columns were discovered under thick layers of paint and plastering. They were made from the calcareous sinter deposits in the Roman aqueduct which carried water from the Eifel hills to Cologne. The use of these precious columns underlines that this must have been the main entrance hall of the church.

## **The Romanesque side aisle ⑤**

From the Lady chapel two steps lead down to the northern side aisle. On closer inspection you will see that the steps must have been tomb slabs that, in the course of the centuries, were tread on by very many people. Until 1807 the area around the church was the graveyard of Siegburg and there were also quite a number of graves inside the church, such as the grave of the Knütgen family, famous potters from the 16th century. The few remaining tomb slabs are no longer in their original positions, so we do not know where exactly the graves used to be. Most of the gravestones are now hidden under the wooden benches in the central nave.

You are standing in the northern side aisle which gives a good impression of the original character of the Romanesque building. Massive walls, sturdy pillars, small windows and low barrel vaults. The church was sanctuary and shelter.

## **The baroque altar of Saint Servatius ⑥**

Now walk down the side aisle to the baroque altar from the 18th century right at the end. There, Saint Servatius, the patron saint of our church, welcomes you in liturgical clothes, mitre, cross necklace, book and crozier. He died in 384 A.D. at Maastricht where he was buried. During the Advent and Christmas seasons the statue of Saint Servatius shares space with the nativity scene in our church.

## **The choir in Gothic style ⑦**

Next, take a seat in one of the benches in the central nave so that you have an opportunity to look at the altar and the space around it. The chancel is not built in Romanesque style. Round arches have been replaced by pointed arches. Look how high the column with the statue of the Mother of God is. The ceiling bosses in the arches are nearly 18 metres above the floor. See how much light can flood into the building through the large stained glass windows and how impressive the colours are. What was it that caused the rethinking of the conception? - Building the Romanesque church ended with the erection of the west tower in 1220. Soon after, in 1248, in Cologne a new cathedral was constructed in Gothic style and this was the model for Siegburg.

Changing the Romanesque church at Siegburg began in about 1265, in the new style, to create a room aspiring to Heaven, filled with light. Between nave and chancel a temporary wall was erected so that nave and side aisles could be used for divine service, while behind the wall a new Gothic choir was erected following the model of Cologne Cathedral, in smaller dimensions, of course. But after finishing the choir, financial difficulties led to a building freeze. It was only 200 years later, in about 1503, that building could continue in Gothic style. Parts of the Romanesque structure, however, were left standing, which explains the present composite state of the architecture of Saint Servatius.

### **The windows in the chancel ⑧**

Depending on the position and intensity of the sun in the course of days and seasons the large coloured window areas create changes in the atmosphere. After the demolitions in World War II Cologne church architect Willy Weyres redesigned the choir windows, taking his inspiration from the Gothic windows in the choir of Cologne Cathedral. In the centre he designed a Bible window in which scenes from the Old Testament are juxtaposed with corresponding scenes from the New. What was announced in the Old is fulfilled in the New Testament.

### **The neo-Gothic high altar ⑨**

After the dissolution of Siegburg Abbey under Napoleon in 1803, the treasure of the monastery came into the possession of Saint Servatius parish church in 1812. It was only in 1914 that Benedictine monks returned to Siegburg where they stayed until 2012.

The neo-Gothic high altar was designed in 1904 to enable pilgrims to invoke the protection of Saint Anno by walking around the altar and passing under the shrine of the founder of the abbey. The portrait above the niche for the shrine shows Archbishop Anno II with his crozier and a model of the abbey in his hand. The paintings on the open side wings show scenes from Anno's life, on the left the benefactor Anno distributing bread to the poor, and on the right the powerful prince-bishop Anno accepting the submission of Count Palatine Henry.

Today the niche behind the sanctuary lamp, the eternal light, contains the shrine of Apollinaris of Ravenna from the middle of the 15th century. The Anno shrine may be viewed in the treasury of Saint Servatius.

On the tabernacle you can see Moses and Melchizedek, to the right and left of the tabernacle the twelve Apostles. Above them, next to the niche for the shrine, you can see six figures; five of them are saints that are especially venerated at Siegburg: Benignus of Dijon, Apollinaris of Ravenna, Mauritius, Innocentius, Honoratus of Arles; the sixth figure represents Archangel Michael, the patron saint of the abbey.

### **Lectern, altar and crucifix**

The lectern (ambo), altar and the crucifix above were designed by Cologne artist Sepp Hürten (1928 – 2018), the corpus was sculpted in about 1500 in the Alpine region. The chancel is the centre of the divine service and here, too, traces of many centuries of adoration may be found.

### **The Pietà and the Sacred Heart altar ⑩**

It is only a few steps to the Pietà, a statue of Mary holding her dead son in her arms. The impressive figure from 1918 is quite close to the Sacred Heart altar dating from 1909. Often people come to mother and son with their personal requests.

Quite spectacular in the south choir are the medieval paintings on the walls that remind us that the inside walls of churches in the Middle Ages were not white but painted, thus creating a very special atmosphere.

## The carvings at the church benches

Finally go back to the middle aisle to have a look at the 19th century carvings at the church benches. Besides ornaments depicting plants you may also detect pictures of animals, for instance a bear licking honey, a wolf in sheep's clothing or an owl holding a mirror.

## The organ and its historical façade 11

On your way back to the entrance through the central isle you may look at the beautiful historical organ façade from 1930 showing angels making music. The organ builders Klais from Bonn installed the organ in 1894, which was later modernized and enlarged in 1930 and 1990. It now includes an auxiliary rank and a modern stepper system that offers new ways of programming the registration. The angels on the façade illustrate that music in a church is played for the honour of God.

## The medieval treasury 12

In the southern side aisle, just a few steps from the baptismal font, there is the entrance to the treasury on the south gallery. There you can see four large shrines from the 12th and 13th centuries, among them the famous shrine of Saint Anno that was made in the workshop of Nicholas of Verdun in Cologne. Moreover you can see further reliquaries, portable altars, Anno's comb and crozier. Since 1812 Saint Servatius houses the treasures of the dissolved Benedictine abbey on the Michaelsberg. The treasury is well worth a visit.

## A short walk around the church square

On leaving the church you can see right in front of you, in the direction of the market, the oldest profane stone building of the town, the first rectory. **(A)** Building started in 1220, the year when the west tower of the Romanesque church was finished.

Turning to the right to walk around Saint Servatius you can see the annex that originally was the main entrance **(B)** and a few steps further, in the niche of a smaller annex, the figure of Jesus as Man of Sorrows **(C)**. The original is now preserved in the treasury. The last building to the left of the church square dates from 1777 and used to be a school **(D)**. Right in front of you, just across Mühlenstraße, you can see the rectory from 1744 **(E)**. The first building in the same place was erected in 1358. To the right, on top of Michaelsberg, you may detect the former abbey and the abbey church of St Michael **(F)**.

The outside of Saint Servatius reveals the change from Romanesque to Gothic style very well **(G)**. Quite remarkable are the gargoyles, whose withered originals are preserved in the city museum. Look back to the church tower. From where you are now you can see the elaborate design of the different sections of the tower.

The square around the church, the churchyard, used to be the burial place for the inhabitants of Siegburg until 1807. Walk around the east choir and there you will see, next to the entrance to the sacristy, three gravestones from the 16th to 18th centuries **(H)** and, right in front of them, a baroque crucifixion group **(I)**. And just a few steps further a humble memorial reminds of Paul Sauer, the last German priest at Bunzlau, one of the twin towns of Siegburg **(J)**.

Saint Servatius church is situated on a raised area at the foot of Michaelsberg, secure from the floods of the Sieg and Agger rivers. Together with the Abbey, Saint Michael's Mount, the market and the town wall it forms the heart of Siegburg. Many generations have left their traces in and around Saint Servatius. Thank you for visiting!

*Heinz Peter Lob, January 2023*



