

Santa Maria Maggiore



Piazza di Santa Maria Maggiore

Santa Maria Maggiore is a 5th century papal basilica, located in the rione Monti, and is notable for its extensive Early Christian mosaics. The basilica is built on the summit of the Esquiline hill, which was once a commanding position. ⁽¹⁾ ⁽ⁱ⁾

History

Ancient times

The church is on the ancient Cispius, the main summit of the Esquiline Hill, which in ancient times was not a heavily built-up area. Near the site had been a Roman temple dedicated to a goddess of childbirth, Juno Lucina, much frequented by women in late pregnancy. Archaeological investigations under the basilica between 1966 and 1971 revealed a 1st century building, it seems to have belonged to a villa complex of the Neratii family. ⁽¹⁾ ^(k)

Liberian Basilica - Foundation legend - Civil war

According to the Liber Pontificalis, this first church (the so-called Basilica Liberiana or "Liberian Basilica") was founded in the August 5, 358 by Pope Liberius. According to the legend that dates from 1288 A.D., the work was financed by a Roman patrician John, and his wife. They were childless, and so had decided to leave their fortune to the Blessed Virgin. She appeared to them in a dream, and to Pope Liberius, and told them to build a church in her honor on a site outlined by a miraculous snowfall, which occurred in August (traditionally in 358). Such a patch of snow was found on the summit of the Esquiline the following morning. The pope traced the outline of the church with his stick in the snow, and so the church was built. The legend may actually derived from the memory of a violent and localized downpour of hail from a severe August thunderstorm. ⁽¹⁾ ⁽²⁾ ^(f)

The church was, according to many historians, the first in Rome that was dedicated to the Mother of God, and it was called at the founding **Ecclesia Sanctae Dei Genitricis** (Holy Mother of God Church) and then **basilica sanctae Mariae** or simply Santa Maria. Because of the legend

of its founding the Church is sometimes called **Sancta Maria ad Nives**, **Santa Maria delle Nevi** or **Madonna delle Nevi**, the Madonna of the Snow. The church was also called **Santa Maria Liberiana** after Pope Liberius. It was later named **Santa Maria del Presepe** after what is said to be a fragment of the crib of the Child Christ was housed here. It was finally named **Santa Maria Maggiore**, being the largest of the twenty-six churches in Rome dedicated to the Virgin Mary. ^{(2) (i)}

The death of Pope Liberius caused a civil war among Roman Christians, because no agreed procedure for electing a pope had yet been established. Pope St Damasus I and a rival called Ursicinus were elected, and respective their supporters started to kill each other. Damasus obtained the support of the Imperial government and the possession of the Lateran, but Ursicinus had a strong following in the city and set up a rival court in the Liberian Basilica. After he refused the emperor's order to vacate, the partisans of Damasus laid siege to the basilica and killed over a hundred people inside it. Apparently the besiegers got onto the roof, ripped off the tiles and pelted those inside with them. There is no record of the church after that, and after such destruction and desecration it might have been abandoned. The exact location of the first building has been lost. ^{(1) (f)}

Re-foundation

The rebuilding of Santa Maria Maggiore began in 432, only a year after an ecumenical council met at Ephesus. Pope Sixtus III (432-440) is usually considered the builder of the new church to commemorate the declaration at the Council of Ephesus in 431 that Our Lady was Mother of God (Theotokos). This date is based on the inscription on the mosaic of the triumphal arch. But this inscription appears to have been inserted into an already existing mosaic. So it is possible that the church and mosaic may have predated Sixtus. ^{(1) (i)}

As far as the construction is concerned, one thing at least has become clear in recent years: the entire nave, including the triumphal arch and the two aisles, forms one structural unit and is considerably earlier in date than the present transept and apse. The clerestory walls of the nave and the wall of the triumphal arch are bound together and they have the same masonry. They belong to the same building period and this period was the fifth century. ^{(1) (b)}

The nave of this survives structurally intact, and has original mosaic decoration. It was the first church dedicated to Our Lady in Rome, pre-dating Santa Maria Antiqua by about a century. As such, its original name was simply Sanctae Mariae. ^{(1) (2)}

It is not known how or when the relic of Christ's manger arrived here. In a recording of a donation to the church by one Flavia Xantippa in the 6th century, the name ad Praesepe first appears. The relic of the manger is referred to in Italian as La Sacra Culla. ⁽¹⁾

The basilica became the focus of a monastic colony comprising several monasteries in the last quarter of the first millennium. Many, if not most, of the original monks were refugees from the Iconoclast persecutions in the Byzantine Empire and from the conquests of Islam, and so worshipped in the Eastern rites. The monks at the time would have had liturgical duties in the basilica, but the church itself never became monastic. By the beginning of the 11th century the area around the church had become countryside. Before the Renaissance, the basilica was not on the road to anywhere. ⁽¹⁾

Fabric of original basilica

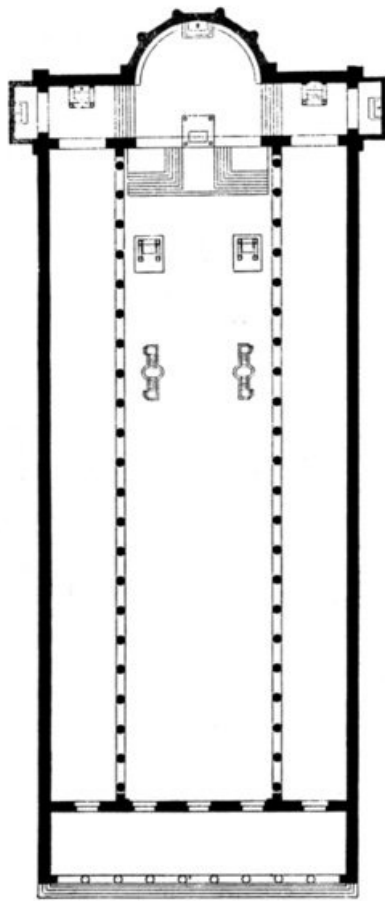
Up to the early 9th century, it is thought that the church was much as Pope Sixtus had left it. That is, it was of basilical form with a central nave and side aisles, and a semi-circular apsidal sanctuary at the end of the central nave. There were no side chapels then, and also no transept. The side aisles were separated from the central nave by two rows of ancient columns, a total of forty supporting two horizontal entablatures. There was a round-headed window above each gap between columns, a total of twenty-one in each nave side wall (half of these were later blocked). The apse originally had five windows. ⁽¹⁾

Mosaics embellished the nave side walls between the entablature and the windows, and over the triumphal arch of the apse (these survive). Further mosaics were in the apse conch and on the counter-façade (these do not). It is on record that the counter-façade mosaic incorporated a long dedicatory epigraph destroyed in the 18th century, similar to a surviving one at Santa Sabina. The original floor was made of scavenged marble revetting slabs, laid irregularly. It is still there, only about 5 cm below the Cosmatesque floor which was laid on top of it. ⁽¹⁾

Alterations to the original fabric began with Pope Paschal I (817-24), who re-arranged the sanctuary. He provided a new high altar with eight steps in porphyry, over a devotional crypt or confessio. Also, the bishop's throne was moved back from the center of the apse to the far point in

its curve. Based on the masonry, half of the 21 windows in each clerestory wall were walled up during this period. ⁽¹⁾ ^(b)

The church emerges into mediaeval history when Pope St Gregory VII was kidnapped there while celebrating Mass in 1075, by a crew of rebel citizens led by one Cencio I Frangipane. He was rescued the next day. This is an early hint of a mediaeval attitude among ordinary Romans that the basilica belonged especially to them, since Pope Sixtus allegedly built it for them (there is an epigraph in the apse mosaic that supports this view). The kidnapping was on Christmas Eve, and the pope was celebrating the Vigil Mass of the Nativity. This is the first evidence of a tradition that continued until the 19th century. ⁽¹⁾ ⁽²⁾



6. ROM: STA. MARIA MAGGIORE.

In the reign of Pope Eugene III (1145-53), a new external entrance loggia was added with a single-pitched roof on eight Ionic columns arranged in pairs. Also, the extant Cosmatesque pavement was laid in the nave. The names of the patrons of the latter are recorded: Scoto and Giovanni di Paparone. A schola cantorum or choir enclosure was provided for the far end of the nave, together with a pair of ambones or pulpits halfway down the nave for the proclamation of Scripture. These lost items also had Cosmatesque decoration. The external Oratory of Bethlehem was rebuilt on the orders of Pope Innocent III (1198-1216), becoming the Chapel of the Manger (Cappella del Presepe) on the site of the present Cappella Sistina. ⁽¹⁾

13th century

Between 1256 and 1259, two Gothic shrines were erected either side of the sanctuary. The left hand one was sponsored by the Senate and People of Rome (Senatus Populusque Romanus -SPQR), and was for the famous and venerated icon of Our Lady, Salus Populi Romani. The other one was donated by Giacomo and Vinia Capocci, and was used for exhibiting relics for veneration. It was known as the Tabernacolo delle Reliquie. ⁽¹⁾

The icon was probably originally painted for the basilica in the 12th century, although an 8th century Byzantine provenance has also been claimed. A tradition grew up that it had been painted by St Luke, but this derives from the legend of the original icon of the Theotokos Hodegetria at Constantinople. ⁽¹⁾

There was a major intervention under Pope Nicholas IV (1288-92), who demolished and rebuilt the apse of the church. A slightly larger new apse was provided, not circular but polygonal with five sides and with four windows pointed in the Gothic style. The old triumphal arch was left standing at the end of the nave. Between the old triumphal arch and the new apse a transept of the same height as the nave was inserted, slightly wider than the combined nave and aisles. The new apse conch was provided with a magnificent mosaic, which survives. Also, the entrance façade over the loggia was embellished with mosaics as part of the same project. The transept was apparently going to receive a fresco cycle, but work was interrupted. A small part of the decoration survives high up in the far left hand corner, and features tondi with portraits of saints and prophets. The artist is unknown. A fragment of a scene of the *Creation of Adam* suggests that the left hand end of the transept was to be illustrated with scenes from the Old Testament, and the opposite end with some from the New. The Chapel of the Manger was also re-fitted and embellished by Arnolfo di Cambio. This widely admired work was later destroyed accidentally, but some crib figures survive. It had a vault in mosaic, and a Cosmatesque floor and fittings. ⁽¹⁾ ^(e)

14th century

As the "People's Basilica", the church was the setting for the coronation of Cola di Rienzo as Tribune of Rome after he briefly succeeded in overthrowing the papal government on behalf of the citizens in 1347. The popes were residing at Avignon at the time, and law and order in Rome had

collapsed. The abbot of San Paolo fuori le Mura was nominally in charge, but in practice the local nobility were terrorizing and exploiting the population. ⁽¹⁾

The church was damaged in an earthquake in the following year, and restored by 1377. The right hand campanile was damaged and became dangerous, and so was rebuilt by Pope Gregory XI (1370-78) on his return to Rome from Avignon. This is over the first bay of the right hand side aisle. There was, however, also a second campanile, over the corresponding bay of the left hand aisle. This one, however, was destroyed in the 18th century restoration. It is thought that the original pair of campanili was erected in the 12th century, but the first documentary reference to bells dates to the late 13th century. ⁽¹⁾

Renaissance

Up to the 15th century, the roofs of the nave and aisles in the interior were open. In 1455, Pope Callixtus III (1255-58) had the central nave covered by a flat coffered wooden ceiling allegedly designed by **Giuliano da Sangallo**, which is probably not correct since he was only ten at the time. The story is that the later gilding was done using the first shipment of gold to Spain from the conquered Inca Empire, presented to Pope Alexander VI (1492-1503) by Ferdinand and Isabella. Both popes belonged to the Borgia family, hence its heraldry is displayed in the ceiling. ⁽¹⁾

The side aisles were vaulted on the orders of Cardinal Guillaume d'Estouteville (1443-83), who was Archpriest of the church at that time. The cardinal also commissioned a new baldacchino or high altar canopy, and relief panels from this by **Mino da Fiesole** are now on the apse wall. As part of this restoration project, two entrances flanking the apse were opened and side chapels in the ends of the transept fitted out. ^{(1) (a)}

By this period, the sacristy and other ancillary accommodation for the church were located in a huddle of structures next to the bottom end of the right hand aisle. Most of these have gone but the Chapel of St Michael survives as the shop, and has frescoes by the school of Piero della Francesca. This is the oldest surviving side chapel, and was evidently built or re-fitted at this time. ⁽¹⁾

The Sack of Rome in 1527 despoiled the Chapel of the Manger. As the main focus of devotion here it had become a treasure-house, and had altar gates of silver, an altar frontal of beaten gold and a golden statue of the Madonna and Child weighing over two kilograms. All were lost. ⁽¹⁾

St Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, offered his first Mass as a newly-ordained priest at the altar of the Cappella del Presepe in 1537. This was the midnight Mass of Christmas. ⁽¹⁾

Further external side chapels began to be added to the basilica itself soon after, with access arranged by the simple expedient of knocking a hole through the ancient aisle side wall. The Cappella Cesi was first, about 1550, and the Cappella Sforza next door followed in 1573. The latter was allegedly designed by **Michelangelo**. ⁽¹⁾

16th century

The basilica saw massive patronage by Pope Sixtus V (1585-90), who began work on the Cappella Sistina in the year before his election when he was still Cardinal Felice Peretti. This was primarily intended as his mortuary chapel, but doubled up as the basilica's Blessed Sacrament Chapel. The architect was **Domenico Fontana**, who used some of the polychrome marble spolia available from the demolition of the ancient Septizodium. The result was an edifice that could count as a church in its own right. The old and much admired Cappella del Presepe by **Arnolfo di Cambio** was in the way, and the initial intention was to move it to the center of the new chapel. Unfortunately, the attempt failed and the structure fell to pieces. The mosaics and Cosmatesque work were destroyed, but several elements including the crib figures were scavenged and so survive in the present structure. ⁽¹⁾

The pope also ordered new roads to be built to improve access to the basilica. To provide a direct link between the city center and the church he laid out the Via Painisperna. The Via Merulana (actually begun by his predecessor, Pope Gregory XIII) linked the basilica with the Lateran. Then, the Strada Felice was built to Trinita dei Monti. The works were overseen by **Domenico Fontana**. A large formal piazza was laid out to the north of the basilica, and an obelisk provided in 1587 that was sourced from the Mausoleum of Augustus. ⁽¹⁾

After the pope died, the ongoing work of restoration was completed by Cardinal Domenico Pinelli in 1593. His heraldry was inserted into the Cosmatesque floor. One last work accomplished was to replace nine of the 5th century mosaic panels on the nave side walls with works in fresco, owing to the fact that they had fallen off or were about to do so. Unfortunately, the frescoes did not

17th century

The Cappella Sistina received its twin, the Cappella Paolina, at the start of the 17th century. This was intended as the mortuary chapel of Pope Paul V (1605-21), and was begun in 1605. The structure was completed in 1611, but decorative work went on for another five years. The architect was **Flaminio Ponzio**. As part of the chapel's construction, the colonnade outside it was altered by moving two columns apart and inserting an arch into the wall above. The same was done for the Cappella Sistina opposite. Unfortunately, six of the 5th century mosaic panels were destroyed as a result. ⁽¹⁾

The pope also commissioned **Ponzio** to rebuild the mediaeval sacristy wing. He demolished the old baptistry and sacristy, and replaced them with a new multi-storey block also including a set of papal apartments. ⁽¹⁾

Pope Paul commissioned **Carlo Maderno** in 1614 to erect the Colonna della Pace in front of the basilica, with a statue of Our Lady on top. ^{(1) (5)}

However, it seems that the intention in the 17th century was to focus on the back end of the basilica as the focus of the church's monumental civic presence. In 1669, **Bernini** was appointed by Pope Clement IX (1667-69) to remodel the apse. **Bernini's** proposal included a surrounding colonnade, but Clement X (1670-76), the next pope, cancelled the project owing to the proposed expense. In 1673, **Carlo Rainaldi** was appointed to execute a scaled-back project. This involved exterior cladding being added to the old apse instead of its replacement, the alteration of the exteriors of the windows and the adding of a symmetrical frontage to the transept. This was extended to front the sacristy block of the Cappella Paolina to the right (the church's left) and a large aula adjacent to the Cappella Sistina. **Rainaldi** then added the impressive, curving sweep of stairs in front. His work has remained unchanged. ⁽¹⁾

18th century

A major restoration was ordered by Benedict XIV (1740-58), who chose **Ferdinando Fuga** as the architect. The work took several years from 1741. The entrance frontage of the church had been very unsatisfactory for over a century, so **Fuga** built another five-storey ancillary block to the left of the basilica's façade, matching that put up by **Ponzio** to the right. To erect this he demolished the two-storey mediaeval accommodation block for the canons which had survived till then. He also connected the two blocks with a new façade built in front of the old one. This incorporated a second-storey Loggia of Blessings over the entrance portico, and fortunately the old mosaic on the original façade was mostly left alone. It survives on the back wall of the loggia. ⁽¹⁾

In the sanctuary **Fuga** provided a new baldacchino in 1749, and preserved some of the reliefs from the mediaeval one by attaching them to the apse wall. He also built a new Chapel of the Crucifix (also known as the Chapel of the Relics) off the right hand aisle. He dismantled the two Gothic tabernacles in the sanctuary, and used the porphyry columns for this chapel. ⁽¹⁾

The Cosmatesque floor of the central nave was carefully restored, and missing areas replaced with new. One patch of new work bears the date 1750, a Jubilee year for which the church's restoration was finished. On the other hand, the floors of the side aisles were replaced with marble tiles. ⁽¹⁾

Fuga also re-vamped the colonnades. Previously, the ancient columns had been used as found by the original 5th century builders of the basilica and were of differing lengths and widths. Uniformity was achieved by packing the bases as needed. **Fuga** carefully removed the columns one by one, pared down the thicker ones and cut short the longer ones so that the set was uniform. Then he provided a new set of bases, and new capitals. So, although the nave side walls are ancient and bear their original mosaics (mostly), the colonnades actually count as 18th century. ⁽¹⁾

Very unfortunately, **Fuga** cleared out most of the many sculptural funerary monuments that adorned the side aisles. He moved a few to the exit vestibules at the far ends of the aisles and the near end of the left hand aisle, but the rest are lost. ⁽¹⁾

Modern times

Not much has been done in the way of alterations to the basilica since. In 1825 **Giuseppe Valadier** created a baptistry out of what used to be the choir chapel of the canons, who had to move into the Cappella Sforza. In 1864 the confessio of the high altar was refitted by **Virginio Vespignani**, with the assistance of **Francesco Podesti**. ⁽¹⁾

Attention needed to the roof of the transept in 1931 led to the discovery of fragments of

13th century wall frescoes hidden by the 15th century vault. This restoration went on until 1933 and also involved the aula in the far right hand corner, which bears an epigraph on its frieze recording the fact. In 1932, the baldacchino of the high altar was chopped down in order to improve the view of the apse mosaic behind. ⁽¹⁾

By the end of the 20th century, the basilica was in a poor state of repair. In 1984 Pope St John Paul II appointed a Welsh canon, Dilwyn Lewis, as Vicar Capitular to oversee a major restoration of the basilica's fabric and functions. An extensive program of restoration began in 1990, during which time major parts of both the exterior and interior of the church, including the mosaics, were restored. Pope St John Paul opened the new museum in in 2001 Renovation of the Cappella Sistina followed in the early 21st century, and the chapel was closed for several years. ⁽¹⁾ ⁽⁹⁾

Exterior

Layout and fabric

The layout closely resembles a 2nd century imperial basilica. The ancient brick fabric of the original basilica is completely invisible from the outside, owing to later additions. The central nave has a single pitched and tiled roof, and a second roof with a transverse gable covers the transept. The apse has a semi-dome in lead (invisible from the street). The mediaeval campanile is over the first bay of the right hand aisle. ⁽¹⁾ ⁽⁹⁾

The entrance façade has an open portico in the first storey, and a Loggia of Blessings over this in the second. This contains 13th century mosaics. The façade is flanked by two identical ancillary blocks, the right hand one containing the sacristy and the papal apartments and the left hand one the ceremonial stairs to the Loggia of Blessings. This left hand block is continued down the left hand side of the church as a five-storey accommodation wing, and joins onto the Cappella Paolina. It conceals two large side chapels (the Cappella Sforza and Cappella Cesi). The right hand ancillary block is not so extended down the right hand side, and so the Cappella Sistina is free-standing. There is a screen wall here instead, delimiting a courtyard in which privileged members of the basilica staff can park their cars. ⁽¹⁾

More ancillary accommodation occupies the far corners beyond the two large domed chapels (Sistina and Paolina), and the far frontages of these are incorporated into the apse façade which is mostly clad in travertine limestone. ⁽¹⁾

Apse frontage

This monumental apse frontage on the Piazza Esquilino, by Carlo Rainaldi in 1673, is arguably more impressive than the entrance façade, and is the first part of the church you will see if you arrive by the Via Cavour. ⁽¹⁾

The obelisk in front is one of a pair that used to embellish the Mausoleum of Augustus, which was discovered fallen and buried in three pieces in 1519. It was repaired and re-erected here in 1587, on the orders of Pope Sixtus V. Its companion is now in the Piazza del Quirinale. These two are about 14.75 meters high, and bear no hieroglyphs. Hence they are not Pharaonic, and it is uncertain whether they were quarried in Aswan, Egypt to order for the mausoleum or were left-over builders' stock after the temple-building campaigns of the Ptolemaic dynasty. ⁽¹⁾

The apse of the church is set into an impressive symmetrical composition, which is best viewed by the Via Cavour. There, the octagonal lead domes of the two side chapels are visible on their high drums, each side of which has a large rectangular window with a segmental pediment. Interestingly, the two domes are almost identical but not quite -the little lead cupolas of the lanterns are slightly different. Rainaldi actually composed the design with this viewpoint in mind; as you get closer, the dome drops from view. Rainaldi dealt with the hill slope by installing an impressively wide and curved set of stairs, in two flights. ⁽¹⁾

The apse itself has four round-headed windows on the outside, separated by Corinthian pilasters in shallow relief which support an entablature. These windows have molded frames, and omega cornices supported by strap brackets. Below each window is an almost square blank panel, in relief within a frame. The front of the apse has no window, but instead an epigraph detailing the restoration by Pope Clement X. Above is his coat-of-arms, borne by angels. The roofline has a pin balustrade which conceals the lead semi-dome of the apse conch, and incorporated in this are plinths for five statues by Francesco Fancelli (1624-81), a local Roman sculptor. This set is his major surviving work. *King David* and *SS Peter, Paul and Dominic* are represented. ⁽¹⁾

Flanking the apse are two doorways with raised triangular pediments, which lead into the far ends of the basilica's side aisles. Above these is a pair of almost square windows with omega

cornices over a star emblem, derived from the heraldry of Pope Clement. The entablature of the apse is continued on both sides over the entire façade, and above this behind the apse is the back wall of the transept which has more framed blank panels and a pin balustrade. ⁽¹⁾

The pair of protruding two-storey zones flanking these entrance doorways themselves contain two doorways with segmental pediments, which lead into the ancillary accommodation on each side. There is a pair of Corinthian pilasters on the first storey of each, and a pair of Doric ones on the second. The first storey has a window with a triangular pediment, but the second storey has a window with an omega cornice over a scallop shell. ⁽¹⁾

Finally, the ancillary accommodation frontages each have four Corinthian pilasters supporting the entablature over which is another pin balustrade. In between the capitals are putto's heads with swags. Two rectangular windows with segmental pediments flank a large tablet, the left hand one bearing an epigraph recording the work of Pope Sixtus V and the right hand one that of Pope Paul V. Here the symmetry of the façade breaks down, because the right hand tablet is embellished with three heraldic shields which for some reason were never provided for the left hand one. It might have been that the missing shields were removed by the French occupiers at the end of the 18th century, since they certainly defaced papal heraldry elsewhere on the exterior of the basilica.

Unlike the central part of the façade, which is entirely clad in limestone, these two ancillary frontages are rendered in yellow ochre behind the architectural details. The ancillary frontage on the right, fronting the sacristies of the Cappella Paolina, was actually designed and erected by **Ponzio**, and **Rainaldi** used it as an inspiration for his own design. Especially, the pin balustrades are a **Ponzio** feature and occur elsewhere in the basilica's fabric. ⁽¹⁾

Cappella Paolina frontage

From the apse, the Cappella Paolina is to the right. First comes the side of the ancillary block by **Ponzio**, which actually contains the sacristy of the chapel. This has a very similar design to its frontage flanking the apse, except that there is a central statue of *St Jerome* as a hermit in the Syrian Desert, under a triangular pediment. Also, the frontage here is on an enormously high plinth.

The slightly earlier frontage of the chapel itself, by **Ponzio** 1611, is two-storeyed, the lower storey forming three sides of a hexagon on a plinth of the same height. The central portion has four Corinthian pilasters supporting the entablature, with a large tablet proclaiming the construction of the chapel by Pope Paul V which is topped by three heraldic shields having defaced heraldry as well as a six-winged putto's head representing a seraph. The tablet is flanked by a pair of statues in round-headed niches with segmental pediments, having smaller tablets above them with the names of the saints (not easy to read). The narrower diagonal zones to each side each have a statue and two pilasters. The left hand side statue is of *St Luke*, holding the icon of *Salus Populi Romani* which he allegedly painted. The left hand central statue is of *St Matthew* by **Francesco Mochi**, the right hand central one is of *St Matthias* with the battle-axe with which he was allegedly martyred, by an otherwise unknown sculptor named **Andrea Sansino**, and the right hand side one is of *St Epaphras* by **Stefano Maderno** with the assistance of **Francesco Caporale**. *St Matthias* is here because his alleged relics are under the high altar. It is nowadays thought that **Maderno** and **Caporale** were responsible for his statue, too. The second storey of the chapel displays its Greek cross plan, and is embellished with Doric pilasters. ⁽¹⁾

Beyond the chapel is the frontage of the canons' palazzo, a good 18th century late Baroque five-storey façade by **Fuga** in red brick with stone details. The two entrances (the left hand one blocked up) have arched portals under nested pediments, a triangular one within a segmental one. These are supported on brackets with triglyphs. The lintels bear the name of Pope Benedict XIV. The fourth storey windows have little pin balustrades, except for an anomalous one on the right which is actually the back window of the Cappella Sforza. ⁽¹⁾

Cappella Sistina frontage

From the apse, the Cappella Sistina is to the left. The frontage of the ancillary block here actually differs from the corresponding frontage next to the Cappella Paolina. There is no central statue, but a window instead. Also, the pilasters have doubletting strips. There is an epigraph on the frieze of the entablature, proclaiming a major restoration in 1933 under the aegis of Pope Pius XI:

An. Iub. MCMXXXIII Pii XI P. M. XII a mundo Red. MCM.

The chapel is separated from the street by a stone screen wall, delineating the former carriage yard of the basilica (now basically a car park). The chapel itself, by **Fontana** 1685, displays its Greek-cross plan in its exterior. The street frontage differs substantially from that of its twin, and has two storeys. The first storey has four Corinthian pilasters with doubletting and tripletting strips, with a central framed panel having a segmental pediment which looks like a blocked window. The second

storey, above the entablature, has four blind pediments (without capitals) supporting a roofline entablature. The roof around the dome drum is flat. ⁽¹⁾

You can see the surviving mediaeval fabric of the Chapel of St Michael peeping over the screen wall next to the Cappella Sistina. ⁽¹⁾

Next is the sacristy block, by **Ponzio** and built at the same time as the Cappella Paolina. It displays a relief panel with the coat-of-arms of Pope Paul V. ⁽¹⁾

Column of Peace

The Colonna della Pace in front of the basilica is the only surviving column of the Basilica of Maxentius from the Forum, and is a gigantic ribbed Corinthian monolith, described as being of Parian marble. It was erected here on its very high plinth by **Carlo Maderno** in 1614, on the orders of Pope Paul V. Two eagles and two dragons in bronze adorn the plinth, which derive from the pope's family of the Borghese. The statue of the *Immaculate Conception* on top is in cast bronze which was formerly gilded, and the wax model for it was by **Guillaume Berthelot**. The actual caster was **Orazio Censore**. ⁽¹⁾ ⁽⁵⁾

The fountain accompanying the column is by **Carlo Maderno**, but is not in its original form. It used to be embellished with more Borghese heraldry, but this has been removed. ⁽¹⁾

Campanile

The mostly Romanesque campanile or bell-tower is the highest one in Rome, at 75 meters. It was rebuilt between 1370 and 1378 on the orders of Pope Gregory XI on his return to Rome from Avignon, replacing an earlier one damaged in an earthquake. It is over the first bay of the right hand side aisle, and rests on the ancient foundations there. The steep pyramidal cap was added when Pope Paul V had the tower restored, and there was another restoration under Pius VII (1800-23). A major problem was lightning strikes, and this pope ordered a lightning conductor fitted. ⁽¹⁾

The red brick tower has six storeys, but only four are visible above the façade. Each of these four upper storeys used to have arched openings on each face, but the lower two have had theirs blocked and the second one up now contains the basilica's public clock. Above the clock face is the heraldry of Pope Paul V again. ⁽¹⁾

The storeys are separated by decorative cornices, formed from medallions in marble in between dentillations in brick. A matching string course connects the arch springers in each storey. Originally, each face of each storey had a row of five colored ceramic dishes set into the fabric above the arches, each surrounded by a recessed circular frame, with two others flanking the arches and one in between them. Many of these dishes have perished, and some are obscured. Most were green. The idea was to provide a cheap alternative to the old practice of sawing decorative discs from ancient columns of rare stones, usually porphyry or green serpentine. ⁽¹⁾

The first visible storey has two blocked Gothic arches on each face. The second storey has a pair of double arches, blocked up. The third storey has these arches in their original state, each pair being separated by a marble column. The top storey has these two pairs of arches set within two larger arches, the tympani of which have each a stone quatrefoil opening. ⁽¹⁾

The oldest bell that the campanile had was a famous one called "La Sperduta", dated 1289. This is no longer used, but has been in the Vatican Museums since the early 20th century. The story is that the odd name, "The Lost One", derives from its having been donated by a pilgrim who was lost in the vicinity on a dark night and who oriented himself by means of the basilica's bells being rung. The tradition has been maintained through the centuries of ringing the bell at 21:00 each evening. ⁽¹⁾ ⁽⁴⁾

Façade (1)

The façade was designed in 1743 by **Ferdinando Fuga**, on the orders of Pope Benedict XIV. He employed a strong chiaroscuro effect, a play on light and shadows, in his design of the central section which fronts the ancient façade of the basilica. Below is the entrance portico, and above is a so-called Loggia of Blessings from which the pope could bless a crowd in the piazza. ⁽¹⁾

What **Fuga** started with was the block containing the sacristy and papal apartments to the right, which was already a hundred and thirty years old and was by **Flaminio Ponzio**. He decided to match this with a symmetrical block to the left, and connect the two buildings with his two-storey loggia. The façade and the two flanking blocks are certainly very different in style, but **Fuga** tried to unite them by giving the combined roofline a pin balustrade. The flanking frontages display two gigantic matching coats-of-arms supported by angels. The 18th century one on the left is anonymous, but the 17th century one on the right is by **Nicolas Cordier** and **Ambrogio**

Buonvicino. The latter is of much better quality. ⁽¹⁾

The actual façade of the basilica has two storeys, and is entirely in travertine limestone. The first story has five rectangular portals, separated by six rectangular piers. The two on each side have an applied semi-column, with the combined capitals done in Ionic style. However the central pair of piers differ, in that their inner sections are replaced by free-standing Ionic columns flanking the portal and that they have full columns in front instead of semi-columns. The piers support an entablature with a dentillated cornice, and the columns and semi-columns support six posts in front of this. These posts support three pediments over the entablature, the flanking ones being triangular and with scallop shells in their tympani and the central one being segmental. The latter is over the coat-of-arms of Pope Benedict XV, which interrupts the entablature. On the triangular pediments are pairs of putti with Papal emblems, but on the central pediment sit two allegorical figures.

Humility is by Pietro Bracci, and *Chastity* by Giovanni Battista Maini. The pairs of putti are by Pieter Antoon Verschaffelt (left) and René-Michel Slodtz (right). ⁽¹⁾

These pediments are in front of the attic plinth of the second storey, also with six posts. In between the pediments the attic is embellished with two floral swags. The posts support six plinths, with a pin balustrade between them. The outer two plinths have a pair of statues, *Bl Nicholas Albergati* by Filippo della Valle to the left, and *St Charles Borromeo* by Francesco Queirolo to the right. The inner four plinths support Corinthian semi-columns (outer pair) and columns (inner pair), which themselves support four posts in front of an entablature with a dedicatory epigraph mentioning the pope. On this entablature is a second pin balustrade, the one that runs along the rooflines of the flanking blocks, and this balustrade contains four plinths for statues. ^{(1) (4)}

The second storey only fronts the central nave of the basilica, hence is narrower. In between the outer pair of statues and its sides are a pair of understated concave sweeps. In between the semi-columns and columns are three large arched portals opening into the Loggia of Blessings. The two flanking ones have arches with molded archivolt springing from Doric impostes and fitting under the entablature, but the central one is much larger. It has a pair of free-standing columns supporting the archivolt, which rises through the entablature into a crowning triangular pediment. Defacing the keystone is a large stucco relief of the *Holy Spirit in Glory*. Finally, the central finial is replaced by a statue of the *Madonna and Child* on a high Baroque plinth with the monogram of the Blessed Virgin. This statue of *Our Lady* is by Giuseppe Lironi, and the *Holy Spirit* is by Filippo Della Valle 1743. ⁽¹⁾

The roofline balustrade plinths have four statues of popes. The identities of the popes concerned are uncertain, as seem to be the proper attributions to the four sculptors responsible. They were: Agostino Corsini, Carlo Monaldi, Bernardino Ludovisi and Mariani. ⁽¹⁾

One hundred and fifty years separate the construction of the two palaces flanking the façade. Flaminio Ponzio built the structure on the right, which contains the sacristy complex, in 1605, while the papal quarters on the left was designed by Ferdinando Fuga in 1743 to give an overall uniformity to the site. ⁽⁴⁾

Epigraph of Pope Eugene III

When Fuga built his portico, he had to demolish the 12th century portico put up by Pope Eugene III (1145-53). This had a horizontal roofline entablature supported by eight Ionic columns arranged in pairs, and with a dedicatory epigraph on its frieze. Fuga had the sense to preserve the inscription, which he affixed to a side wall of the sacristy block where it survives. It reads: ⁽¹⁾

Tertius Eugenius, romanus p[a]p[a] benignus, obtulit hoc munus, Virgo Maria,
tibi, que Mater [Ch]risti fieri merito meruisti, salva perpetua virginitate tibi, es via,
vita, salus totius gl[ori]a mundi, da venia[m] culpis virginitatis hono[s]

("Eugenius III, blessed Roman pope, offered this sacred gift to you, Virgin Mary, who deservedly merited to be the Mother of Christ. Perpetual virginity was preserved for you, you who are the life, salvation and glory of the whole world, give healing to the guilty, O honour of virginity").

Portico and loggia

Entrance portico (2)

When Fuga rebuilt the portico in 1743, he kept and re-used the eight ancient columns of the mediaeval portico that he demolished. Four of these are in grey granite, and four in red. He installed

two to flank the central portal, two flanking the central entrance to the basilica and the other four at either end of the portico. The lower portico fronts five separate entrance doors. The middle three open into the central nave of the basilica, and the far right hand one leads into the campanile. The one on the far left hand side leads into the left hand aisle, and is the Holy Door (3) which is only open during Jubilees (Holy Years). There is a doorway in the left hand end, which gives access to the formal staircase leading to the Loggia of Blessings. When Vespignani refitted the confessio in the 19th century, he moved some mediaeval reliefs and memorials to this staircase lobby. Here now also is a large seated statue in bronze of *Pope Paul V* by Paolo Sanquirico (1620), which used to be in what is now the shop (Chapel of St Michael). This important work had been neglected, but was recently restored. ⁽¹⁾

At the right hand end of the portico is a bronze statue of *King Philip IV* of Spain, one of the benefactors of the Basilica. The statue is by Girolamo Lucenti to a design by Bernini. It is within a round-headed niche with olive sprays in its conch, set within a aedicule consisting of two of the ancient columns supporting a triangular pediment. The statue was completed in 1692, per the inscription on the base. ^{(1) (4) (g)}

The barrel vault is attractively decorated in a geometric design in cream, light grey and gold, the pattern being based on a six-pointed star containing a rosette. The central bay has a little cupola with square coffering, having the Monogram of Our Lady in the middle. The pendentives have plant fronds, of four different species including rose and olive. The stucco details are by Filippo della Valle. ⁽¹⁾

The central bronze door dates from 1949, is by Lodovico Pogliaghi. He actually begun work on the wax model in 1937, but the actual casting was twelve years later. The figurative panels depict episodes from the life of Our Lady, framed by images of prophets, Evangelists and four women of the Old Testament who prefigure her. The main panels are, from bottom to top and left to right:

The Birth of Our Lady,
The Presentation of Our Lady,
The Annunciation,
The Visitation,
The Nativity,
The Assumption,
The Crucifixion,
The Deposition,
Pentecost and
The Ascension of Christ.

The side figures are, bottom to top and left to right:

Abigail,
Rebecca,
St Mark,
St John the Evangelist,
Judith and
Esther.

At the top are the coats-of-arms of Popes Pius XI (left) and Pius XII. At the bottom are smaller panels depicting *The Expulsion from Paradise* (left) with the *Prophet Isaiah, and Elijah on Mount Carmel with King David*. In the floor in front of this door is the coat-of-arms of Pius XII in pietra dura. ^{(1) (4)}

The bronze Holy Door was blessed by Pope St John Paul II on 8 December, 2001, after the Millennium Jubilee. It is by Luigi Enzo Mattei, and was paid for by the Knights of the Holy Sepulcher. The main panels depict the *Risen Christ appearing to Our Lady* (an old tradition, not in the Bible, has it that she was the first person to whom he appeared after his Resurrection). The right hand side depicting *Christ* is modeled after the image on the Shroud of Turin, and the left hand one shows *Our Lady* as modeled on the icon *Salus Populi Romani*. In the upper left corner is a depiction of the *Annunciation at the Well at Nazareth*, a story drawn from apocryphal Gospels, while on the right there is a depiction of *Pentecost*. The lower corners show, on the left, the *Council of Ephesus* which proclaimed Mary as *Theotokos* (Mother of God) and, on the right, the *Second Vatican Council* which declared her to be *Mater Ecclesiae* (Mother of the Church). The coat-of-arms of Pope St John Paul II, as well as his motto *Totus Tuus*, is above the door, while the two shields further down are those of Cardinal Carlo Furno, archpriest of the Basilica in 2001, and of the Knights of the Holy Sepulcher. (The Cardinal was Grand Master of the Knights as well, hence their patronage.) ^{(1) (4)}

Over the doors are four sculptured relief panels. The sculptors and subjects are given as, left to right: ⁽¹⁾

Pope St Martin I and the Exarch Olympius, by Giuseppe Lironi;
Pope St Gelasius I Oversees the Burning of Heretical Books, by Luigi Enzo Mattei;
Pope St Hilary Holds a Council, by Pietro Bracci;
John the Patrician and Pope Liberius, by Bernardino Ludovisi.

Loggia of Blessings

Access to the Loggia of Blessings is via the museum, and is included in the ticket. The loggia has a simply decorated barrel vault, with cut-away lunettes exposing the parts of the mediaeval mosaic that would otherwise be covered by it. This vault springs from corbels decorated with putti by **Filippo Della Valle**. ⁽¹⁾

There are now four stucco angels looking rather out of place here, with gilded clothing and holding sprays of vegetation. They are by **Pietro Bracci**, and were executed in 1749 for the new baldacchino provided by **Fuga** for the high altar. However, in 1932 it was decided that the top of the baldacchino should be chopped off to improve the view of the apse mosaic, and so the angels were moved here. From the loggia, one can see San Giovanni in Laterano in the distance at the other end of the ruler-straight Via Merulana. ⁽¹⁾

Loggia mosaic

The famous late 13th century mosaic here used to decorate the façade of the basilica above its old portico, before **Fuga** built his new portico and loggia in front of it. It dates from the restoration ordered by Pope Nicholas IV (1288-92), and was executed by **Filippo Rusuti**. He was a pupil of the **Jacopo Torriti** who executed the apse mosaic. There are two registers, the upper one being signed by **Rusuti**. The work was completed in 1308. Note how the wall behind the upper register curves out slightly. This is a cavetto cornice, and was provided so that the mosaic was not foreshortened in the view of anyone standing just in front of the old mediaeval portico. The lower register contains an oculus or round window, a feature of the original 5th century basilica. ⁽¹⁾

The center of the upper register depicts Christ as *Pantocrator* (Ruler of All), in a traditional Byzantine style. He sits on a scarlet cushion on a richly decorated throne and holds a book, which displays the text *Ego sum lux mundi, qui...* ("I am the light of the world who [takes away the sins of the world]"). The background is dark blue with golden stars and is bounded by a pale blue circle or tondo, which represents the entire Universe. On the lower part of the band around the tondo is **Rusuti's** signature: *Philipp[us] Rusuti fecit hoc opus*. This signature was an example of a new trend towards individuality in producing artworks for churches in the 13th century. In ancient times artists had often signed their works, but in the early Middle Ages those responsible for church decoration had usually seen themselves as part of a workshop, rather than as individual creative artists needing recognition. The Cosmati family are another good example of early signers. Four angels accompany the tondo with Christ's image, two of them holding candlesticks. By the feet of these two angels are two small figures, depicting Cardinals **Pietro** and **Jacopo Colonna** who oversaw the completion of the mosaic after Pope Nicholas had died. (The family's shield is depicted four times around the oculus, but the dedicatory inscription that used to be above it was destroyed by **Fuga**.) ⁽¹⁾

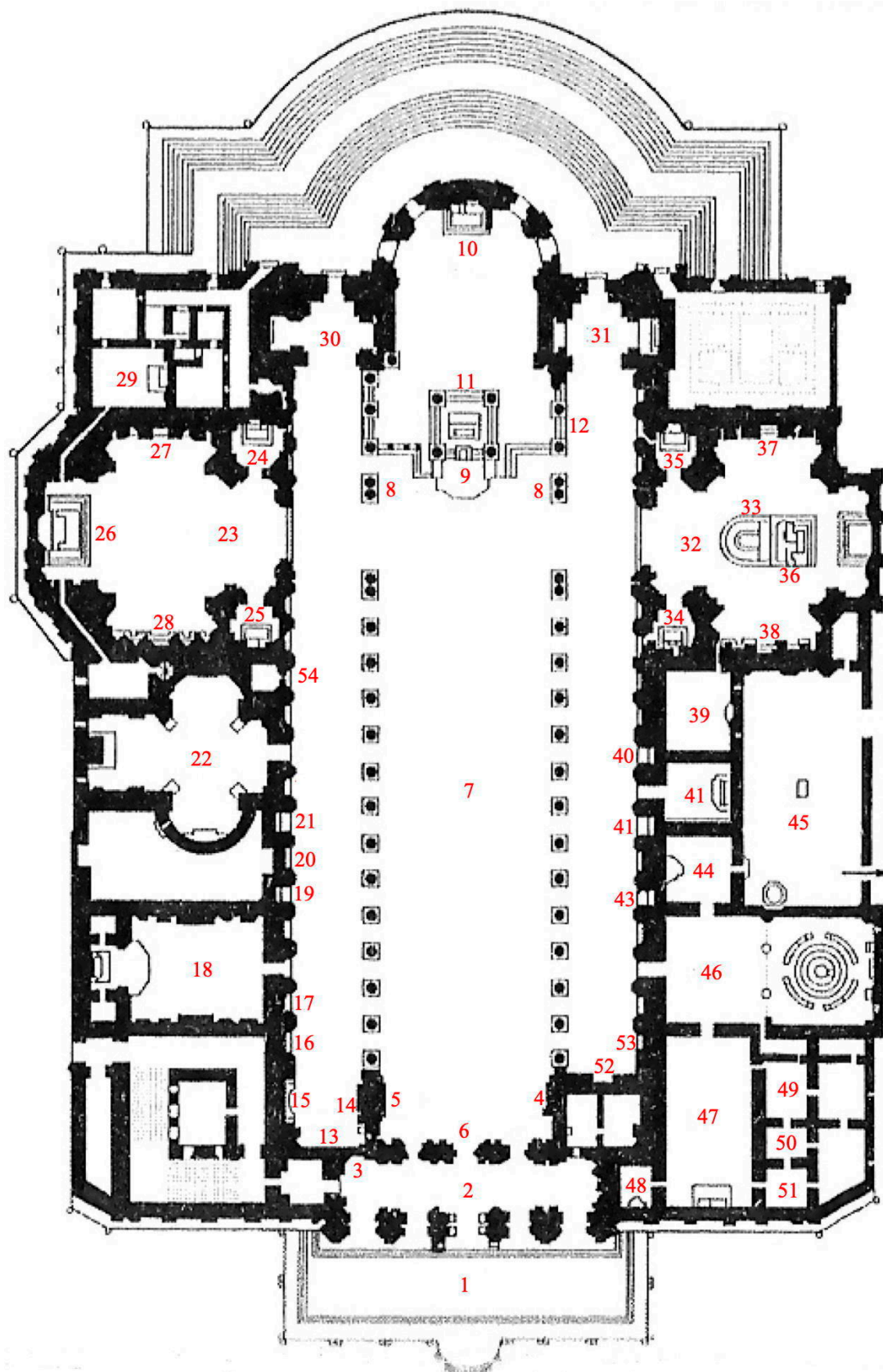
To the sides of the central depiction are Our Lady, Apostles and saints. The saints are identified by means of Latin inscriptions, but the Virgin Mary is identified with a Greek lettering, a contracted form of *Mater Theou* (Mother of God). Closest to Christ are the Virgin and St John the Baptist. Further to the left are SS Paul, James the Great and Jerome (the last included because his relics were thought to be somewhere in the church). To the right of St John are SS Peter, Andrew and Matthew. Above are symbols of the Evangelists. ⁽¹⁾

This depiction is a type of artwork that is usually only found associated with the sanctuary of a church. The effect of having it on the façade was to turn the whole piazza into a locality for worship when the great pilgrim processions of the Middle Ages reached it on the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin. While the dogma was only defined solemnly in 1950, the Feast and the doctrine it is based on go back to at least before the year 500, and it was (and remains) the most important Marian celebration in the calendar of the Catholic Church. In the Middle Ages, the Pope would celebrate Mass from the portico on that day. ⁽¹⁾

The lower register has scenes from the foundation legend of the basilica. The style of clothes and the papal insignia depicted belong to the 14th century, rather than to the 4th century when the events allegedly took place, but this was standard practice in mediaeval representations. There are four scenes: ⁽¹⁾

The Dream of Pope Liberius,
The Dream of the Patrician John,

Plan



Interior

Layout

The 5th century Roman basilical plan has been well preserved inside. The edifice has a nave with side aisles. Then comes a shallow transept, and finally an external semi-circular apse. The overall length of the interior is 86 meters. The high altar with its confessio is at the far end of the nave, with the transept actually behind it, which is an unusual arrangement. Originally, the 5th century basilica did not have any transept. The transept was added by Pope Nicholas IV (1288-1292) when he had the apse rebuilt. ⁽¹⁾

Unlike other old Roman churches which might have a number of external side chapels, the basilica has a few very large ones. The two enormous papal mortuary chapels of the Cappella Sistina and Cappella Paolina could count as churches in their own right. They are through the archways cut into the side colonnades in 1611. To the left are two other large chapels, and to the right one smaller one. Most of the near right hand side is taken up by a wing containing the sacristy and baptistry, with the Papal apartments on the first floor above. The mediaeval Chapel of St Michael is accessed through the baptistry, and is now the shop. The museum is accessed through this in turn. ⁽¹⁾

Central Nave and Sanctuary

Nave (7)

Originally the nave had twenty-one bays, flanked by colonnades containing a total of forty-two Ionic columns supporting an entablature rather than arcades (this arrangement is known as a trabeation). Thirty-eight of the columns are of Hymettus marble quarried from near Athens in Greece, while the other four are in grey granite. The marble is white, with a vague grey streak. It is certain that the columns are spolia, and probably came from more than one ancient Roman building since they were not originally a matching set. They look uniform now because Fuga in the 18th century cut down in order to match them up. The Ionic capitals and the bases are also by him, so the colonnades are really 18th century. ⁽¹⁾ ^(f)

The regularity of the column spacing was disturbed twice in the basilica's history. The first event was when two campanili were built at the near ends of the aisles, probably in the 12th century. Blocking walls were inserted into the first two bays in order to support these, and the first pair of columns moved back (they are still there, but incorporated into the walls). The second intervention was in 1611, when the two large arches were cut into the nave walls in front of the papal chapels and the columns to each side moved back. Fuga put the four granite ones here in his restoration. ⁽¹⁾

The entablature supported by the columns has a scrollwork design with little birds on its frieze and modillions (little brackets) on its cornice. In between the modillions the cornice displays a star and a pine cone in turn. Above the cornice the nave side walls each have a row of Corinthian pilasters, originally one above each column, which support the second entablature on which the ceiling now rests. Originally, there was a round-headed window between each pair of pilasters, but half were blocked in 1593 and given frescoes instead (twenty-two in total). The frieze of this second entablature is embellished with scrollwork containing putti and bulls (the bull is an emblem of the Borgia family), and the lower parts of the ribbed pilasters are gilded. This second entablature replaced the original 5th century one which had acanthus leaf decoration. Fragmentary evidence of this has survived. Below these windows and former windows are original 5th century mosaics depicting Old Testament scenes, which makes them the oldest surviving cycle of Christian mosaic panels in a church in Rome. (There are older single mosaics, such as the one in the apse of Santa Pudenziana nearby which is fifty years older.) Research has firmly dated their creation to 432–440, in the pontificate of Pope Sixtus III. The style of the depictions is Classical, that is pre-Byzantine. ⁽¹⁾

Nave floor

In the reign of Pope Eugene III (1145-53), the extant exquisitely intricate Cosmatesque floor in the central nave was laid. The names of the patrons are recorded: Scoto di Paparone and his son Giovanni. They were commemorated in an intricate central panel which showed them on horseback with a dedicatory inscription, but this is unfortunately lost. This pavement was restored in 1593 by Cardinal Pinelli, and again by Fuga in the 18th century when some areas were re-laid. It is easy to tell which these are, as the year 1750 is included and also the quality is not so good as the original's. Also, the wide borders in white marble tiles around the Cosmatesque panels are 18th century. The work now includes a memorial slab for the cardinal, with his heraldry in polychrome inlay. ⁽¹⁾ ⁽⁴⁾

Nave ceiling

Up to the 15th century, the roofs of the central nave and aisles were open. In 1455, Pope Callixtus III had the central nave covered by a flat coffered wooden ceiling allegedly designed by **Giuliano da Sangallo**, which is probably incorrect as he was only ten at the time. It was actually begun by **Leon Battista Alberti**, and completed by **Sangallo**. The story is that the later gilding was done using the first shipment of gold to Spain from the conquered Inca Empire, presented to Pope Alexander VI (1492-1503) by Ferdinand and Isabella. Both popes belonged to the Borgia family, hence its heraldry is displayed in the ceiling. Most of the coffers are identically treated, with a central gilded rosette and several orders of gilded molding in the frame. The background is white, and the effect is spectacular. ⁽¹⁾

This enormous ceiling covers the entire central nave, including as far as the triumphal arch behind the high altar. It was restored by **Fuga** in 1750, and again in 1825 by **Valadier**. The gilding was restored by the former, so even if the Peruvian legend as to the source of the original gold is true it does not apply to the gilding displayed now. ⁽¹⁾

Side aisle fabric

The side aisles were vaulted on the orders of Cardinal Guillaume d'Estouteville (1443-83). In both aisles, opposite each column is an engaged Ionic pilaster in shallow relief revetted in grey-streaked marble, supporting an entablature from which the barrel vault springs. The nave columns support the matching entablature on the other side. Over each pair of pilasters and pair of columns is a semi-circular lunette, those in the side wall containing windows. The vault is divided into sections by semicircular ribs embellished with three rosettes each. Each section has a large six-pointed star within a wreath. The color scheme is gold on cream. These 15th century vaults were later interrupted by the frescoed vaults of the entrance bays of the papal chapels. Fitted into the wall between each pair of pilasters is a molded marble frame, some of these functioning as doorways and others as niches. Over each of these is a stucco relief panel in gold on cream, featuring a wreath. Some of the niches contain side altars, but the majority contain confessionals. The decorative elements are all by **Fuga**. ⁽¹⁾

Papal memorials in entrance vestibule

The old supporting walls of the 12th century campanili created an entrance vestibule at the beginning of the nave by blocking off the lower ends of the side aisles. These two walls proved useful places to locate two matching papal funerary monuments. ⁽¹⁾

The monument of Pope Clement IX (1667-1669) **(4)** is to the right, and was designed by **Carlo Rainaldi** in 1671. The seated statue of the pope is by **Domenico Guidi**, while the allegorical representation of *Faith* is by **Cosimo Fancelli** and that of *Charity* is by **Ercole Ferrata**. Above the statues are round reliefs depicting *the decoration of the Ponte Sant'Angelo*, that Clemens IX commissioned from **Bernini**, on the right; and *a religious ceremony in St. Peter's Basilica*, on the left. The monument is in polychrome marble, featuring white, red, green and yellow, and the effigy is in an aedicule with a pair of Corinthian columns in red marble supporting a segmental pediment. The two Virtues are in rectangular side niches, set back slightly under a pair of horizontal entablatures and with a pair of red marble Corinthian pilasters at the outer corners. Below the monument is a light gray marble panel with a holy water font in the form of a shell, made of gray marble. ^{(1) (2)}

To the left of the entrance is a monument of Pope Nicholas IV **(5)** (1288-1292), designed by **Domenico Fontana** in 1574 at the request of Cardinal Felice Peretti, and was built by **Alessandro Cioli**. This was over three centuries after the death of the pope. The lower wall of the tomb consists of a high light gray marble panel that carries a holy water font in the form of a shell made of gray marble. Above is a somewhat smaller brown panel with an inscripted tablet. The effigy is in an aedicule with a pair of Corinthian columns in red marble. The statue of Nikolaus IV, seated and blessing, is by **Leonardo Sormani**. The side panels are two female statues, also made by **Sormani**. On the right, is *Justice* and on the left, *Truth*. The monument is crowned by a curved gable field over the Pope and his coat of arms on each side. Originally, the monument was on the wall of the sanctuary but was moved here during the **Fuga** restoration. It is the earlier of the two memorials, and is in the same style although more ornately decorated. Both memorials have very fine holy water stoups in the form of shells stuck to their fronts. ^{(1) (2)}

Counter-façade **(6)**

The two entablatures of the nave side walls are united into one by being carried across the counter-façade. This has a large round window or oculus, which intrudes into the higher entablature

and is in fact original to the 5th century basilica. In 1995 it was provided with stained glass by János Hajnal which depicts *Our Lady, Mother of the Church*. She is shown symbolically as the union of the Old and New Testaments, with the Menorah and the Tablets of the Law on the left and the Cross and Eucharist on the right. ⁽¹⁾ ⁽⁴⁾

This window is flanked by five ribbed Corinthian pilasters, the outer two folded into the corners, in the style of those on the nave walls. These flank two larger frescoes over two smaller ones. The former are part of the nave wall cycle dealing with the life of Our Lady, and are mentioned again below. The latter match the panels of the ancient mosaic cycle on the side walls, also dealt with below. ⁽¹⁾

The lower entablature is supported on the counter-façade by five Ionic pilasters in grey-streaked white marble, the outermost pair again being folded into the corners. Over the main entrance is a broken triangular pediment, occupied by the coat-of-arms of Pope Clement VIII supported by angels. A smaller coat-of-arms supported by putti and actually on the entablature is of Pope Benedict XIV, and was executed by Giovanni Battista Ledoux (1750). On the entablature over the side entrances are the shields of Cardinals Pinelli (left) and Girolamo Colonna (right), while below the three shields are tablets recording the restorations that the pope and cardinals supervised. ⁽¹⁾

Nave mosaics

The 5th century figurative mosaic panels on the nave side walls are of first importance. The order of the cycle is from the left hand side near the high altar down to the entrance, and again from the right of the high altar to the entrance again. There are now thirty-six panels left of the original forty-two, since six were lost when the Pauline and Sistine Chapels were built. Some of the thirty-six were heavily restored with paint during the Middle Ages, and some were reconstructed in fresco in 1593 and later. This is especially the case with those nearer the entrance. A total of nine mosaics on the thirty-six have been completely lost, leaving twenty-seven mosaics. The fresco work replacing these nine and the missing bits in other panels has not survived well. ⁽¹⁾

The left hand cycle features scenes from the lives of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Twelve panels survive. Most of these each depict a story in two or three conjoined scenes. Proceeding from the head of the left aisle, to the left of the altar, down the aisle toward the entrance: ⁽¹⁾

1) *The Offering of Bread and Wine to Abraham by Melchisedec*. Abraham is returning from winning a battle with invading kings, in a single scene. This is regarded as a prophecy of the Eucharist, hence the presence of Christ in heaven. (Gn 14:18).

2) *The Visit of the Three Men of God to Abraham at the oaks of Mambré*. There are three scenes. Abraham welcomes the three guests, Sarah prepares bread for Abraham, and Abraham serves them at table (Gn 18:1-8).

3) *The Parting of Abraham and Lot with their Families*. This is when Lot set out for Sodom, depicted in the top right hand corner. The separate scene below shows shepherds with their animals, because the separation was caused by lack of pasture in one place (Gn 13:1-12).

(The next three panels have been destroyed for the Cappella Paolina. Unfortunately, nobody recorded the subjects beforehand. One hypothesis is that the scenes were The Destruction of Sodom, The Escape of Lot and The Marriage of Isaac and Rebecca.)

4) *Jacob Steals the Blessing of Esau*. The top panel shows Isaac blessing Jacob, with Rebecca on the right. The damaged lower panel shows Esau belatedly arriving with a meal of game (Gn 27:22-31).

(The next panel shows *The Dream of Jacob at Bethel* (Gn 28:10-22), a fresco painted in 1593 to replace a lost mosaic).

5) *The Arrival of Jacob at the Household of Laban*. There are three scenes. Laban is in a yellow tunic, Jacob in a blue one and Rachel is in an orange dress with crimson stripes. The lower part is frescoed (Gn 29:12-13).

6) *Jacob is Tricked into Marrying Leah Instead of Rachel*. The top scene shows him agreeing to work as a shepherd for seven years in order to marry Rachel. The bottom scene is lost, but would have shown him tricked into marrying Leah instead (Rachel's sister) (Gn 29:15-24).

7) *Marriage of Jacob and Rachel*. The top scene shows Jacob leaving the sheep to marry Rachel, and the bottom shows the wedding (Gn 29:28-30).

8) *Payment by Laban to Jacob for his Services*. The top scene shows the agreement to share the flock, and the bottom one the division. The agreement was that Jacob would have the parti-colored sheep, hence some are depicted thus (Gn 30:25-35).

9) *Return of Jacob to Canaan*. There are three scenes: Jacob encourages the sheep to produce parti-colored offspring (read the Bible narrative if you want to know how), God tells Jacob to return to Canaan and Jacob tells his two wives that they are going (Gn 30:37-31:16).

(The next panel has a fresco depicting *Jacob Recognises the Bloody Tunic as Joseph's* (Gn 37:33) - this episode is much later, when Joseph was sold as a slave into Egypt by his brothers. The scene is out of place, and was chosen when the fresco replaced the lost mosaic in 1593.)

10) *The Meeting of Esau and Jacob in Shechem*. There are three scenes. The top left one shows a messenger from Jacob meeting Esau in Canaan, the top right one shows the messenger telling Jacob that Esau was on his way and the badly damaged bottom scene showed the meeting of the two brothers (Gn 32:3-33:5).

(The next panel has a 1593 representation of *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, again out of place in the cycle. It is fairly clear that the original scene was The Rape of Diana at Shechem.)(Gn 22:1-19)

11) *Hamor Asks for Marriage of his son to Dinah*. He was the father of Shechem who raped Jacob's daughter. The top scene shows him making the petition, and the bottom scene shows the sons of Jacob debating the matter (Gn 34:1-7).

12) *The Men of Shechem Agree to Circumcision*. The top scene is the proposal made by the sons of Jacob, and the damaged bottom one is the men of the city agreeing to it (Gn 34:8-23).

(The last three panels have frescoes dating to 1593, and there is a fourth panel on the counterfaçade which was never part of the original sequence. They depict: *The Prophet Elisha Divides the Jordan with Elijah's Mantle*, and *Makes the Bitter Water Sweet* (2K 2:13, 19-22); *Daniel in the Den of Lions* (6:17-24), *The Fall of Jerusalem* (2K 25:7) and the fourth is *Jacob Wrestles with the Angel* (Gn 32:22-32).

The right hand wall depicts The Journey to the Promised Land. Fifteen mosaic panels survive. Proceed from the back toward the altar:

(The first panel, to the right of the high altar, shows *The Apotheosis of a Martyr* and is a 1593 fresco. The original scene would have been Moses in the Reeds.)

13) *The Career of Moses at the Court of Pharaoh*. He is shown being adopted by Pharaoh's daughter at the top, and disputing with philosophers below (Ex 2:9-10). The second scene is not Biblical, but is based on a legend mentioned by Philo.)

14) *Moses Marries Zipporah, and the Burning Bush* (Ex 2:21, 3:1-4).

(The next three panels were destroyed for the Cappella Sistina. They are recorded as having depicted The Meeting of Moses and Aaron, Moses and Aaron Before Pharaoh and The Institution of the Passover.)

15) *The Crossing of the Red Sea* (Ex 14:16-31).

16) *The Miracle of the Quails*. There are three scenes -the people complaining about not having meat to eat, God talking to Moses and the actual arrival of the "quails" (actually sandgrouse) (Ex 16:2-13).

17) *The Bitter Waters are Made Sweet*, and *Moses Orders Josua to Fight Against Amalec*. There are two separate episodes depicted (Ex 15:24, 17:9).

18) *Victory Over Amalec* (Ex 17:10-13).

19) *Return of the Spies from Canaan*, and *Revolt of the People*. The latter scene shows the Ark of the Covenant in the Tabernacle (Nu 13:26-33, 14:10).

20) *Moses Hands Over the Ten Commandments*, *Moses Dies on Mount Nebo* and *Preparations for Entering the Promised Land*. The Ark features again (Dt 31:24-29, 35:1-5, Js 3:6).

21) *The Crossing of the River Jordan*, and *The Spies at Jericho* (Js 3:14-4:11, 2:1-6).

22) *The Angel Appears to Joshua*, *The Flight of the Spies from Jericho* and *The Report of the Spies to Joshua* (Js 5:13-16, 2:15-24).

23) *The Capture of Jericho* (Js 6:1-18).

24) *The Amorite Kings Attempt to Capture Gibeon*, and *Joshua Sends Assistance*. (Js 10:5-9).

25) *The Defeat of the Amorite Kings*, and *The Miraculous Fall of Hail*. (Js 10:10-11).

26) *The Sun Stands Still at Gibeon* (Js 10:12-14).

27) *The Kings Are Brought to Josua to be Executed*. (Js 10:22-25). This panel is damaged.

(The next two panels are lost, and have been replaced with 1593 frescoes. They depict *The Carrying of the Ark of the Covenant* and *The Seven-Branched Candlestick*. The fresco panel on the left hand side of the counterfaçade depicts *The King of Israel*.)

Nave frescoes

Above the nave side wall mosaics, on the blocked windows mostly, are a series of late Mannerist frescoes featuring scenes from the life of Our Lady. The set was commissioned by Cardinal Pinelli originally, and were mostly painted in 1593 (except for three). They have helpful labels in Latin over them. The cycle starts to the right of the high altar, and runs clockwise. The frescoes are: ⁽¹⁾

The Angelic Glory by Giovanni Battista Ricci,

SS Joachim and Anne with The Immaculate Conception by Ferraù Fenzzone,

The Birth of Our Lady by Aureliano Milani (1742) (added in the Fuga restoration, over the arch to the Cappella Sistina),

The Presentation of Our Lady by Baldassare Croce (she's the little girl running up the steps),

The Marriage of Our Lady by Croce,

The Annunciation by Ricci,

The Visitation by Ricci,

The Dream of St Joseph by Fenzzone,

The Adoration of the Shepherds by Andrea Lilio,

The Adoration of the Magi by Croce,

The Circumcision of Christ by Orazio Gentileschi,

The Flight to Egypt by Fenzzone,

The Return from Egypt by Fenzzone, (the last two are on the counterfaçade),

The Holy Family in the Temple by Ventura Salimbeni,

The Marriage of Cana by Ricci,

The Way to Calvary by Fenzzone,
The Crucifixion by Croce,
The Deposition by Croce,
The Resurrection by Lilio,
The Ascension by Ricci,
Pentecost by Ricci,
The Dormition by Croce (1614) (the big picture over the arch to the Cappella Paolina),
The Assumption by Ricci (1614) and
The Coronation of Our Lady as Queen of Heaven by Ricci.

Triumphal arch mosaic (8)

The triumphal arch into the transept is, unusually, behind the high altar and is supported on simple engaged piers. These are revetted in grey-streaked marble, and have a shallow Ionic pilaster on the inward faces. ⁽¹⁾

The mosaic above the arch was commissioned by Pope Sixtus III when he built the basilica in the 5th century. This was after the Council of Ephesus in 451, which proclaimed Mary as Theotokos (Mother of God), and the theme is picked up in the great 13th century apse mosaic behind which was commissioned by Pope Nicholas IV (1288-92). The arch here originally enclosed the 5th century apse, but it became a triumphal arch when Pope Nicholas demolished the old apse and built a transept with a new apse further back. It should be remembered that this mosaic is part of the overall cycle of the nave mosaic panels described above, being part of the same commission. ⁽¹⁾

Below the keystone is a scene known as the *Hetoimasia*. It features an empty jeweled emperor's throne, on which is the jeweled case of the True Cross. On the footstool is the Scroll with Seven Seals. St Peter stands to the left, St Paul to the right and above are the symbols of the four Evangelists. Below is an epigraph reading Xystus Episcopus Plebi Dei, ("Sixtus the bishop to the People of God") referring to Pope Sixtus. This is the epigraph that began the tradition that the basilica belonged to the Roman people, rather than to the pope or the nobility. ⁽¹⁾

The spandrels of the arch each have four scenes, one above the other. The scenes on the left are (top to bottom): ⁽¹⁾

1) *The Annunciation*. Unusually, there are three angels instead of the one featuring in the Bible narrative, and one of these is talking to St Joseph who is to the right. The number three is an allusion to the three "men of God" who visited Abraham at the Terebinth of Mambré before the destruction of Sodom. (This Old Testament scene is featured in the second of the nave mosaics to the left.) The building to the right, behind St Joseph and with an open portal, is the House (or family) of David to which he belonged. The building to the right with closed doors might be representing Heaven, which would only be opened at the Incarnation about to happen when Mary gives her consent to the angel, or the womb of Our Lady as the New Temple. The Blessed Virgin is depicted enthroned as an Augusta (a Roman empress) and dressed in cloth-of-gold, and is similarly depicted in the other scenes. ⁽¹⁾

At least one scholar interprets this scene as the Old Testament story of the *Annunciation to Abraham and Sarah* (Gen 21:1-2) that Sarah will have a son, which prophesies the Incarnation. ^(h)

2) *The Adoration of the Magi*. Two of the Magi are to the right, and one to the left. They are dressed rather outlandishly, in bright colors and with tight trousers instead of tunics. This was the artist's way of indicating that they were foreigners. Christ is depicted as a boy-emperor on his throne, with the Blessed Virgin depicted seated to his right in the same dress as in the panel above. The figure seated to his left might be St Anne, Christ's grandmother, but her identity is uncertain. St Joseph features again to the far left. Note the Star of Bethlehem between the four angels behind Christ.

3) *The Massacre of the Innocents*. The figure seated on the left is actually Herod, who is shown with a halo. This is evidence that the halo did not have a sacred significance in the religious art of the early Church, but was merely a way of highlighting the most important people in a composition. The soldiers are still recognizably ancient Roman.

4) *Jerusalem*. This stylized depiction actually includes some real topographical data. The gate opens onto a colonnade, the Cardo or porticoed street that ran north to south in the city as rebuilt by the emperor Hadrian (he called it Aelia Capitolina). Behind, you can make out the rotunda of the Anastasis or Holy Sepulchre, and the Martyrion or great Constantinian basilica that accompanied it.

Below the city is a flock of sheep.

The scenes on the right are:

5) *The Presentation of Christ at the Temple*. The Holy Family accompanied by angels is to the left, with the prophetess Anna. To the right is Simeon the Elder leading a crowd, with the Temple behind and the two doves or young pigeons. To the extreme right is a separate scene where Simeon is warned in dream that he is about to meet the Messiah. ⁽¹⁾

At least one scholar interprets this scene as the story of the *Betrothal and Vision of Mary and Joseph*. ^(h)

6) *The Legend of Aphrodisius*. This scene is not in the Bible, but depicts an ancient story featuring St Aphrodisius. According to it, he was a priest at the Jewish temple of Leontopolis in Egypt, who helped the Holy Family during their exile in that country. The temple here functioned identically to that in Jerusalem, with a hereditary priesthood and cursus of sacrifices. The depiction shows him leaving the city in procession in order to meet the Holy Family, depicted to the right with three angels. ⁽¹⁾

There is some disagreement among scholars concerning this scene. Another interpretation is the *Meeting of David, Isaiah, and Christ*. ^(h)

7) *The Magi Report to Herod*.

8) *Bethlehem*, with more sheep.

The intrados (underside) of the arch is decorated with a pattern formed of four-petalled flowers in alternate blocks of color, red, green and blue. It is a stylized rainbow, with the chi-rho symbol at the top. ⁽¹⁾

Transept

The transept added by Pope Nicholas IV (1288–1292) has no structural unity in the interior layout. This is because it has blocking walls inserted between the triumphal arch piers and the apse, thus creating a choir. The far sides of these walls are occupied by two entrance vestibules for the doorways flanking the apse, which are basically extensions of the nave side aisles. ⁽¹⁾

In contrast to that of the nave, the ceiling of the sanctuary is very straightforward. It is in wood, with large shallow square coffers painted alternately light red and yellow with pale green frames. Each coffer has a starburst symbol, of different geometric types. ⁽¹⁾

The side walls of the choir each have a cantoria or corbelled-out opera box for solo musical performers, by Fuga, and now contain a pair of organs. Below each are three panels with purple and white brecciated marble slabs in gilded frames with verde antico surrounds. ⁽¹⁾

Apse mosaic - conch (10)

The famous mosaic decoration of the apse is divided in two sections: the mosaic in the half-dome, or conch, and the five scenes from the lives of Mary and Christ underneath it between the windows. The mosaic in the conch depicts the *Coronation of the Virgin*. It was executed 1290-1295 by Jacopo Torriti, a Franciscan friar who signed the work - Iacobus Torriti pictor hoc opus mosaicum fecit - in the extreme lower left hand corner of the conch. Torriti had worked on frescoes for the Upper Church of San Francesco in Assisi and came to Rome to work for the Franciscan Pope Nicholas IV. Traditionally, in the iconography of apse mosaics Christ was shown alone as Ruler (Pantokrator) and Teacher, but here he is shown with Our Lady. He shares a single royal throne and scarlet cushion with her, and is in the act of crowning her with a jeweled crown. In his other hand is an open book, reading :

Veni electa mea, et ponam in te thronum meum

("Come, my chosen one, and I will put you on my throne").

Her figure is only slightly smaller than his, and her blue velvet octagonal footstool is only slightly less grand than his. The footstools stand together on a single scarlet plinth. This is Marian devotion at its most exalted. The starry orb surrounding them represents the Universe, including the Sun and Moon below the footstool plinth. There is an epigraph below the orb, reading

Maria Virgo assumpta est ad ethereum thalamum in quo Rex Regum

stellato sedet solio. Exaltata est sancta Dei Genitrix super choros

angelorum ad celestia regna.

("The virgin Mary is taken up into the eternal bedroom, in which the King of Kings sits on his starry throne. The holy Mother of God is exalted above the choir of angels to the heavenly kingdoms").

The orb is accompanied by a flock of angels on each side. Then, on a golden background, come two processions. These are fronted by two little kneeling figures representing the donors of the mosaics, Pope Nicholas on the left and Cardinal Giacomo Colonna on the right. The left hand procession is composed of SS Peter, Paul and Francis, and the right hand one by SS John the Baptist, John the Evangelist and Anthony of Padua. ^{(1) (c) (e) (k)}

Behind the saints arise two gigantic scrolled acanthus vines, which contain birds and flowers. The birds are accurately depicted. There is a pheasant, two peacocks and two blackbirds. Also, there is a rabbit and a hawk killing a snake on the right, and a crane on the left. ⁽¹⁾

In the top of the conch is a stylized curtain, symbolic of the hidden presence of God the Father. The bottom of the conch depicts the River Jordan as a symbol of baptism, with little scenes of waterfowl and people doing things on boats. There are actually two rivers springing from the center, and ending at two pagan river gods at either corner. ^{(1) (c)}

Apse mosaic - wall

The apse below the mosaic work was decorated by Fuga. Just below the conch, on the upper wall of the apse, Torriti's scheme continues with panels depicting scenes from the life of Our Lady. These are in between the windows, and are:

The Annunciation,

The Nativity,

The Dormition,

The Adoration of the Magi and

The Presentation of Christ.

The central scene, *The Dormition*, is the most important. It shows Our Lady on her bier, accompanied by the Apostles, some holy bishops to the left and holy virgins to the right. Christ is standing within a rainbow, holding her soul depicted as a young girl. Above are heavenly beings, including King David (labelled). The top left hand corner shows Mount Zion, and the top right hand one the Mount of Olives. ^{(1) (c)}

The insides of the windows, however, are original 13th century work since they have kept the pointed Gothic shape. In between them are tripletted Ionic pilasters in the grey-streaked marble which is one of Fuga's trademarks in the basilica. These support a continuation of the nave entablature, broken by the windows and the cantorie. ⁽¹⁾

In the center of the curve of the apse wall is a large painting by Francesco Mancini (1750), depicting *The Adoration of the Shepherds*. To either side are the wooden choir stalls of the canons, fitted into the curve of the apse, and in front is a completely gilded wooden free-standing bishop's throne. ⁽¹⁾

Between the stalls and the lower mosaic panels are four reliefs which used to be part of the mediaeval high altar baldacchino demolished by Fuga. They are by Mino del Reame (1451), and depict: ⁽¹⁾

The Nativity,

The Miracle of the Snow,

The Assumption and

The Adoration of the Magi.

The surrounding wall is revetted in verde antico. ⁽¹⁾

Around the outer corners of the curved apse wall are two more mosaic panels, which have nothing to do with Our Lady but concern the two saints whose relics are allegedly in the basilica. The left hand one shows *St Jerome Instructing SS Paula and Eustochium in the Scriptures*, and the right hand one shows *St Matthias Preaching to the Jews*. The church holds relics from these two saints. ^{(1) (c)}

Apse mosaic - arch

The apsidal arch has a separate mosaic from the apse, but it is part of the same commission, executed 1290-1295 under Pope Nicholas IV by Jacopo Torriti, a Franciscan friar. The arch intrados bears two vines, arising from pots at either end held by pairs of putti. The vines bear various different kinds of fruit, in between nine tondi bearing portraits of saints (not labelled or identified). In the keystone is the chi-rho symbol again. ⁽¹⁾

The spandrels of the arch show the twenty-four elders of the Book of Revelation

(Apocalypse), above which are the four symbols of the Evangelists. The archivolt bears another two vine-scrolls, not so complicated and with no pots. These contain flowers, birds and little putti and meet at a tondo on the keystone displaying the Lamb of God. Either side of this tondo are the Seven Candlesticks of the Apocalypse. ⁽¹⁾

High altar (11)

The high altar is a so-called "papal altar", reserved for the celebration of Mass by the Holy Father. The sacrament can be celebrated on it by others only with special permission. The altar and baldacchino were erected by **Ferdinando Fuga** in about 1750, with sculptural details by **Pietro Bracci**. Fuga demolished the late 14th century baldacchino provided by Cardinal Guillaume d'Estouteville, and put up the present very impressive work in porphyry and gilded bronze with details in what looks like verde antico but is actually painted wood. ⁽¹⁾

Four massive porphyry Corinthian columns spirally entwined with gilded bronze palm fronds support a cornice via four posts bearing acanthus leaf embellishments. In between the posts are pendant rows of bronze plaques featuring winged putto's heads and palm fronds. On the cornice facing the nave is a set of crossed Papal keys. There is a low saucer dome, coffered on the inside in squares. The spiral palm fronds were added by **Valadier** in 1823. In 1932 the baldacchino was modified by removing the top part in order to improve the view of the apse mosaic. The angels removed were moved to the Loggia of Benedictions where they remain. Originally, the four porphyry columns were part of a set of six which formed an open screen in front of the mediaeval high altar. They supported a horizontal marble entablature. ⁽¹⁾

On the base of each column is the coat-of-arms of Pope Benedict XIV (1740-1758).

The altar itself is a porphyry urn containing the relics of St Matthias, and is accompanied by bronze angels designed by **Bracci**. Matthias was the thirteenth Apostle, elected after Judas Iscariot committed suicide. Also in this urn are the relics of SS Simplicius, Faustinus and Beatrix, and portions from those of SS Lawrence and Stephen. Apparently some bones were found during the construction of the altar in the 18th century which were surmised as being those of St Jerome and these are in here as well, but these are extremely dubious. ⁽¹⁾

Confessio (9)

The confessio is the open devotional crypt in front of the high altar, on an arch plan with a pair of longitudinal staircases flanking it in two flights. It had been fitted out by Cardinal d'Estouteville in the 14th century, but Pope Pius IX commissioned **Virginio Vespignani** to re-fit it in 1864. The result was sumptuous, with the floor and walls revetted in polychrome marble panelling, but mediaeval reliefs and memorials were removed. A large statue of the Pope Pius IX by **Ignazio Jacometti** was added in 1883. ⁽¹⁾

Above the altar in the confessio is a reliquary which holds five pieces of wood. These are venerated as the Sacra Culla, the Holy Manger into which Christ was put at Bethlehem. Pope Theodore I (642-649) was said to have brought it to Rome shortly after the fall of Jerusalem in 638, but there is a documentary reference from the previous century which shows that the relic was already there. So the authenticity is uncertain, and one suggestion is that it might have been the manger in one of the first Christmas cribs at the basilica. The silver-gilt reliquary was donated by the Ambassador of Portugal, and designed by **Giuseppe Valadier**. It replaced an 18th century reliquary looted by the French at the end of that century. It is in the form of a soup-tureen with hanging festoons, and with a figure of the *Holy Child* on top. The reliquary has several crystal windows through which the Culla can be seen. ^{(1) (4)}

Tomb of Bernini (12)

A short distance away from the confessio, in the floor to the right of the high altar, is the simple tomb-slab covering the entrance to the crypt of the family of **Gian Lorenzo Bernini**. It displays the family's heraldry, and the epitaph:

Nobilis familia Bernini hic resurrectionem expectat

("Here the noble family Bernini waits for the Resurrection").

The architect himself has been given a short Latin epitaph of his own which is carved into the step adjoining: ⁽¹⁾

Ioannes Laurentius Bernini, decus artium et Urbis, hic humiliter quiescit

("Gian Lorenzo Bernini, the glory of the arts and of the city, here rests humbly").

Left Aisle Monuments and Chapels

Monuments in near end of left hand aisle (13)

The bottom end of the left hand aisle, which begins with the blocked Holy Door (3), contains several interesting funerary monuments. The description begins with the Holy Door and works towards the entrance to the Cappella Cesi,

Next to the Holy Door is a monument to the Siennese nobleman Fabio Sergardi (d. 1568). It is an inlaid marble slab with his heraldry in black marble relief, flanked by a pair of Ionic pilasters supporting a little triangular pediment. His epitaph mentions that he was from Siena. ⁽¹⁾ ⁽²⁾

Above the Holy Door and the monument just mentioned is a 15th century double-decker monument which used to be at the other end of the aisle before being moved here probably by Fuga. It commemorates the French brothers Cardinal Philippe de Lévis 1475, and Archbishop Eustache de Lévis 1485. They had been bishops in succession of the see of Arles. The monument has four storeys. Firstly there is the epitaph of Eustache, flanked by two copies of the de Lévis shield. Then comes the recumbent effigy of Eustache, flanked by plinths having little statues in niches. The one on the left is St Catherine of Alexandria, that on the right is fairly obviously St Eustace. The effigy itself has an epigraph added, explaining that the monument is to two brother bishops. Above a dividing cornice is the effigy of Philippe, and finally his epitaph below another shield and a sheltering archivolt. It is known that the shield replaced a lost mosaic of Our Lady. Philippe and his epitaph is flanked by four stacked plinths containing little statues of allegorical figures of *Prudence*, *Justice*, *Temperance* and *Fortitude*. The archivolt is embellished with winged putto's heads, and has coffering on its intrados. The identity of the sculptor is unknown. ⁽¹⁾

The de Lévis memorial is flanked by a pair of matching polychrome marble wall monuments to Cardinals Pier Francesco Ferrero (1566) and his nephew Guido Luca Ferrero (1585). Black marble epitaphs framed in yellow Siena marble are topped by circular tondi containing the busts of the deceased. These busts, like the ones for Benedetti and Toledo mentioned below, have porphyry torsos. ⁽¹⁾

The large polychrome marble and alabaster monument to Cardinal Francisco de Toledo Herrera (14) (1596) is very impressive. He was a Spanish Jesuit theologian, one of the most important and influential scholars in Rome at the time. His specialties were the philosophy of Aristotle, the theology of St Thomas Aquinas and biblical exegesis. He was instrumental in the revision of the Latin Vulgate which led to the Clementine edition. The bust of the monument has a porphyry or red marble torso as well. ⁽¹⁾

The bottom of the aisle is a little enclosed space formed by the old blocking wall to the left of the basilica's main entrance, which used to support a campanile. Then comes a spectacular monument to Agostino Favoriti, (1685) (15) by Filippo Carcani from a design by Ludovico Gimignani. The cardinal is shown sitting at a desk with drapery partly concealing his heraldry in grey marble, in front of a large triangle in Siena marble. The desk is on a plinth in verde antico, and this is in turn on a concave plinth in red jasper flanked by a pair of pedestals. On the latter are large allegorical figures of *Fortitude* (with the lion) and *Religion*. A putto with a book is also in attendance. The plinths have reliefs of musical instruments which are worth examining. ⁽¹⁾

The next memorial is to Cardinal Mariano Pierbenedetti (1653) (16), a good example of polychrome marble Baroque. White, black, yellow and pavonazzetto marbles are used. A pair of Ionic columns in a pinkish marble supports a segmental pediment with a broken cornice. The portrait bust has a white marble head set on a porphyry torso, in imitation of an ancient fashion. ⁽¹⁾

The next side wall niche contains a neo-Classical memorial to Antonio Maria Traversi (1842) (17). He was the titular Latin Patriarch of Constantinople at the court of Pope Gregory XVI, but he was never a cardinal. He was extremely erudite in the arts and the sciences of the time, and the pope commissioned the memorial. As well as a bust, it has a tablet showing an allegorical figure of *Religion* between instruments associated especially with physics and astronomy. The monument was made by Giuseppe de Fabris. ⁽¹⁾

Cappella Cesi (18)

The next external chapel is dedicated to St [Catherine of Alexandria](#). It was designed for the Cesi family by Guidetto Guidetti in about 1550, although it is thought that Martino Longhi the Elder was also involved. The family had a strong interest in the church of Santa Caterina dei Funari, hence the dedication. Their crest of a tree over stylized mountains features in the heraldry here. The chapel later passed to the Massimo family, and their heraldry also features. ⁽¹⁾

The chapel has an overall rectangular plan, of four bays. The first three bays form the nave, while the fourth bay is a shallow rectangular sanctuary flanked by a pair of tiny walled-off sacristies. The nave has a pair of limestone Corinthian pilasters on each wall, and a double pilaster in the same

style folded into the four corners. The side wall pilasters stand on a blank dado with stone skirting and cornice, but the end wall pilasters stand on very high stone plinths. These pilasters support an entablature with a blank frieze and dentillate cornice, which is slightly recessed between each pair of pilasters. In between the pilaster capitals is a sub-frieze embellished with reliefs of swags and ribbons. The undecorated ceiling vault springs from this, in four sectors meeting at an elongated octagonal oculus. There is a lantern, with eight little round-headed windows. Each sector has a lunette containing a window frame, but now only the right hand side one has an actual window, the others were blocked by Fuga in the 18th century. ⁽¹⁾

The entrance is under an archway fitted into the pair of pilasters on this wall, with a molded archivolt springing from Doric impost. In its tympanum is the heraldry in relief of Cardinal Federico Cesi, with a separate identifying tablet. Flanking the present entrance are two former doorways blocked up, perhaps by Fuga, and over these are two similarly designed marble tablets commemorating the foundation of the chapel and its restoration in 1827. This restoration and these tablets were commissioned by Cardinal Francesco Saverio Massimo, hence his family's shield is displayed above them. ⁽¹⁾

Cardinals Federico and Paolo Emilio Cesi, who were brothers, are buried here and have matching memorials in the side walls by **Guglielmo della Porta**. Paolo died first, in 1537, and his monument is to the left. It is inserted into a shallow arched niche, and has a pair of Corinthian columns in pavonazzetto marble supporting a triangular pediment. The frieze of the entablature, the pediment tympanum and the background revetting are all in a white-veined black marble. On top of the pediment a pair of putti hold the cardinal's heraldry, and a winged putto's head with swags is below the entablature. There is a black marble sarcophagus on a plinth bearing the epitaph, and on this is a reclining effigy of the cardinal (also in black marble), propped up on his elbow. This pose is derived from ancient Etruscan tomb effigies. His brother died in 1565. His memorial is almost identical, but the pose of his effigy is less alert. Also, black and white marble is used for the columns. The side walls have four large paintings. Counterclockwise from the entrance, they are: ⁽¹⁾

St Catherine Debates with the Philosophers of Alexandria by **Louis Cousin**, [Il Gentile];

St Catherine Breaks Her Wheel by **Giovanni Angelo Canini**;

The Mystical Marriage of St Catherine by **Carlo Cesi** and

The Apotheosis of St Catherine by the same.

The little sacristies have a pair of entrance doors flanking the sanctuary. Over these are two paintings each. The larger ones depict *St Peter* (to the left) and *St Paul*, and are by **Giovanni Battista Ricci**. The smaller ones above are by **Girolamo Siciolante**, and feature *St John the Evangelist* (to the left) and *St Matthew*. ⁽¹⁾

The spandrels of the triumphal arch feature a *Prophet* and a *Sibyl* by **Siciolante**, obviously influenced by **Michelangelo**. The window embrasure above the triumphal arch feature two angels also by him. The ceiling vault is otherwise undecorated. ⁽¹⁾

The little sanctuary has a triumphal arch almost matching that of the entrance (the archivolt is slightly higher, and the keystone touches the entablature). The barrel vault behind has frescoes of angels with the Holy Spirit. The altar is approached by two marble steps. The aedicule has a pair of verde antico Corinthian columns supporting a triangular pediment. This has modillions, and the tympanum and frieze are in the same marble. The altarpiece is topped by a relief panel with a central cabochon again in the same stone, flanked by swags and ribbons. The altarpiece shows *The Martyrdom of St Catherine*, which is a masterpiece by **Siciolante**. ⁽¹⁾

Altar of Pope St Leo the Great (19)

The next altar is dedicated to Pope St Leo the Great, and the oval altarpiece of the pope having a vision of *Our Lady* is by **Sebastiano Ceccarini**. The stucco angels holding the altarpiece are by **Bracci**. Like the other altars in the aisle are part of Fuga's restorations. ⁽¹⁾ ⁽²⁾

Statue of Our Lady of Peace (20)

The large statue of the *Madonna and Child*, with the title of Regina Pacis ("Queen of Peace") is by **Guido Galli** (1918). It was commissioned by Pope Benedict XV in response to the First World War, and the pope also inserted the title into the Litany of Loreto. ⁽¹⁾

Altar of St Francis of Assisi (21)

Next is an altar dedicated to St Francis. It is in the same style as the other side aisle altars installed by Fuga, with an elliptical altarpiece supported by two angels by **Bracci**. The altarpiece here

Sforza Chapel (22)

The next external chapel is a complete contrast in style. The project was begun by Cardinal Guido Ascanio Sforza di Santa Fiora when he was archpriest of the basilica in 1556, but there was a hiatus before construction could start. Unfortunately, Guido died in 1564 and the project was taken up by his brother Cardinal Alessandro Sforza. ⁽¹⁾

Recently discovered documents proved not only that the design of the chapel was Michelangelo's own but the great artist had personally supervised "every detail, day by day" until his death. The chapel is dedicated to the Virgin Mary of the Assumption, and was begun in 1562. After Michelangelo's death Tiberio Calcagni and Giacomo Della Porta, two of his pupils, had put the finishing touches to it. But by then Michelangelo had already put the imprint of his genius on it. ⁽³⁾

Fuga altered the entrance in his 18th century restoration, but left the interior alone. The chapel was restored in 2004. Msgr Michael Jagosz, head of the museum at Santa Maria Maggiore, supervised the restoration. The chapel was restored to its original splendor. Restorers stripped away ugly accretions such as wooden panelling to reveal the pale travertine marble of the original and "the harmony of ascending lines". ^{(1) (3)}

The plan is based on a reversed Latin cross. There is a shallow entrance bay, then a square crossing and finally a rectangular sanctuary which is slightly shallower than a square. The crossing has a shallow cupola integrated with its pendentives, and this springs from four diagonal posts at the crossing corners themselves supported by four Corinthian columns on high plinths. To each side is a segmental apse containing a tomb of one of the two founding cardinals, with a semi-dome or conch which rises higher than the pendentive archivolt of the crossing cupola. This conch springs from another pair of columns, set back diagonally from the crossing ones. The posts above the columns are continued around the entire interior as an entablature with a dentillate cornice. The entrance bay and the sanctuary are barrel-vaulted, and the latter has a large trapezoidal window above the cornice with a curved top. ⁽¹⁾

The decoration is very cool and serene, being almost all in white except for the tombs and the altar wall. Further, there is no applied stucco decoration or relief carving, leaving a completely smooth, blank stucco surface in the cupola. The columns and other architectural elements are in travertine limestone. ⁽¹⁾

The altar aedicule in itself is a straightforward design, involving a pair of Corinthian columns in green brecciated marble supporting an entablature and segmental pediment. The entablature frieze and tympanum of the pediment are also in green marble. The altarpiece is *The Ascension of Our Lady* by Girolamo Siciolante da Sermoneta. The aedicule is flanked by four windows, two square ones over two rectangular ones, and these windows have splayed frames facing the altar in order to maximize the natural light falling onto it. A pair of angels sits on the pediment, and above these is a painted panel flanked by a pair of caryatids and topped by a broken triangular pediment into which a dedicatory epigraph on an oval tablet is inserted. This pediment also has a pair of angels reclining on it. The painting, in oils, is of *The Coronation of Our Lady* and is by Cesare Nebbia. The frieze of the interior entablature behind the top pediment has vine-scroll decoration, elsewhere it is blank. ⁽¹⁾

The lunette above the entablature has a large trapezoidal window, flanked by frescoes of two prophets accompanied by angels and putti. These are by Nebbia. A third pair of stucco angels is over the window, supporting a second dedicatory tablet. ⁽¹⁾

The memorials of the two cardinal brothers are a matching pair. Each occupies one of the side apses, with the Tomb of Cardinal Alessandro Sforza on the right, and the tomb of Cardinal Guido Ascanio Sforza on the left. One description suffices for both monuments, which are thought to be by Della Porta who used polychrome marbles. There are a pair of Composite columns flanking the monument. Above these, the conch has two wide undecorated ribs, and in the center another trapezoidal window with a winged putto's head over it. The frontal has an early Baroque hint in its black marble tablet with incurved sides, framed with pink marble and flanked by a pair of plinths with heraldry in relief. These support a pair of yellow marble Corinthian columns, themselves supporting an entablature with a yellow marble frieze and dentillation on its cornice. There is a triangular pediment on which two angels with trumpets sit, and a putto with a cross is at the apex. In between the columns is a black marble sarcophagus with a winged putto's head on it. Above this is a white marble molded frame containing an arrangement like a little aedicule. This has a second frame in green marble on three sides, but topped by a broken segmental pediment in white

marble with a winged putto's head in its break. This pediment is on a pair of triglyphs, and shelters an oval tondo containing a portrait of the deceased which is itself over a black marble epitaph tablet. Finally, a pair of etiolated caryatids flanks the columns. ^{(1) (2)}

After Cappella Sforza four rectangular niches. The first niche houses a confessional and an inscription for Cardinal Alessandro Sforza on the wall above, in which the cardinal is praised for having initiated the decoration of the family chapel in the back. The next niche is the entrance to another small room. Here is a door frame with a cut out with an inscription, and a second memory for inscription Pope Paul V on the wall above it. The next niche is actually an entrance to one of the Cappella Paolina's small side chapels here closed with a grid. In front stands a confessional and the door frame read the inscription

"In honorem S. Franciscæ Paul V Pont Max AS MDCXI"
("Pope Paul V (had built this chapel) in honor of
Santa Francesca (Romana) in the Salvation Year 1611").

Tomb of Pope Francis (54)

Next are four small niches, the first and last have confessionals and inscriptions. On April 26, 2025 the coffin of Pope Francis was laid to rest in the second niche, next to the following chapel containing his beloved *Salus Populi Romani*. ⁽ⁿ⁾

Cappella Paolina (23)

The left-hand twin of the Cappella Sistina was founded by Pope Paul V Borghese (1605-1621), and is named after him. The edifice was designed by **Flaminio Ponzio**, who was also responsible for the memorials to Pope Paul and Pope Clement VIII. The chapel was built between the years 1606 and 1611, but the decoration was not completed until the end of 1616. The chapel was consecrated on January 27, 1613. Colored marbles, gilding, and precious stones combine to give an impression of dazzling splendor which surpass the harsher color effects of the Cappella Sistina.

^{(1) (4) (i)}

As well as a papal mortuary chapel, the building has had two other functions. Firstly, it became the burial place of the Borghese family and a hypogeum was provided under the sacristy on the right. As a result, the family became responsible for the chapel's upkeep for centuries and so the edifice is sometimes called the Cappella Borghese. Secondly, it became the shrine of the venerated icon of *Our Lady, Salus Populi Romani* and as such has been a focus of popular local devotion to the present day. This is the beloved icon of Pope Francis, who visited the chapel and prayed in front of it many times during his papacy. ⁽¹⁾

Eugenio Pacelli celebrated his first Mass on the altar beneath the icon in 1899, and in 1939 he returned as Pope Pius XII to celebrate a Mass of Thanksgiving after his election. The people of Rome gathered here in numbers in 1944, when the Battle of Anzio was fought nearby and the British were proposing to carpet-bomb the city. ⁽¹⁾

The chapel remains the main focus of the ordinary liturgical life of the basilica. Ordinary Masses and Marian devotions will be found taking place here. As a result, access to visitors is controlled and you will not be allowed to enter if a liturgical event is taking place. ⁽¹⁾

When the chapel was built, both it and the Cappella Sistina opposite were provided with entrance arches in the nave colonnades in 1611. The archivolts of these each have a pair of stucco angels reclining on them by **Ambrogio Buonvicino**, and a large picture above on the nave side wall. Here, the latter is *The Dormition of Our Lady* by **Baldassare Croce**. The vault of the entrance bay has a fresco depicting *Doctors of the Church* by **Giovanni Baglione**. The ornate wrought iron railings at the entrance are designed by **Gregorio de' Rossi**. ⁽¹⁾

Layout

The layout of the chapel is on a Greek cross plan, with short wide arms and a central dome. The entrance arm is flanked by two little octagonal chapels. The left hand arm contains the shrine of Pope Paul V, and the right hand one the memorial of Pope Clement VIII. The high altar is against the far wall. The sacristy consists of a suite of rooms occupying a block with an entrance to the right of the altar, and a very small room is down a corridor from a corresponding entrance to the left. A very narrow passage runs from the former to the latter behind the altar. ⁽¹⁾

Despite being over a quarter of a century later, the fabric of this chapel is very similar to that of the Cappella Sistina and **Ponzio** obviously made a conscious and careful effort to copy it. However, there are subtle and interesting differences and it is an interesting artistic exercise to visit

this chapel immediately after looking at the other one in order to appreciate them. ⁽¹⁾

The floor design is centered on a large tondo containing the heraldry of Pope Paul in pietra dura. On the other hand, the intricate pietra dura patterning on the pilasters in the Cappella Sistina is eschewed here, being replaced by simple revetting in red marble. This seems to be because this decoration was out of fashion in the evolution of Baroque by then, rather than because of any wish to save money. ⁽¹⁾

The marble reliefs are more deeply carved here, the frescoes use darker tones and the gilded stucco work is more lavish (white on gold rather than gold on white). The overall effect is to give a more chiaroscuro effect in here compared to the impression given by the other chapel -perhaps more mystical than ecstatic. ⁽¹⁾

The interior of the dome is occupied by one fresco, without ribs. This is thought to be the first example in Rome of this sort of depiction of the empyrean, which was to prove very popular. The frieze of the interior entablature is in green marble, not red. Finally, there are no wall frescoes below the entablature. Flanking the altar in their place are two cantorie or opera-boxes for solo musical performers. ⁽¹⁾

The two small side chapels to the left and right behind the entrance arch are dedicated to St. Charles Borromeo and to Santa Francesca Romana, the patron saint of Rome. They were built shortly after the canonization of the two saints by Pope Paul V on 29 May 1608 and on 1 November 1610, respectively. The murals in the chapels were entrusted to two artists, **Croce** and **Baglione**. ^(d)

Chapel of San Carlo Borromeo (24)

The little domed octagonal chapel to the right just inside the entrance gate is dedicated to St [Charles Borromeo](#). The altarpiece portrait is by **Baldassare Croce**, and the side wall frescoes showing scenes from his life are by **Giovanni Baglione** who also executed the angels in the vault. ⁽¹⁾ ^(d)

Chapel of Santa Francesca Romana (25)

The matching chapel on the left hand side is dedicated to St [Frances of Rome](#). The altarpiece in oil, *The Miracle of Santa Francesca Romana*, has been recently restored. The altarpiece, biographical scenes on the walls and the *Glory of Angels with Musical Instruments* in the vault are all by **Baglione**. ⁽¹⁾ ^(d)

Altar (26)

The enormous gilded bronze, red marble and alabaster altar aedicule dominates the far wall. The designer was **Girolamo Rainaldi**, apparently helped by **Giovanni Battista Crescenzi** and **Antonio Tempesta**. The actual execution of the work was by **Pompeo Targone**. It has two pairs of gigantic ribbed Composite columns in red marble with gilded ribs, supporting the halves of a split segmental pediment, on which sit two angels executed by **Guillaume Berthelot** from a design by **Camillo Mariani**. Into the gap between the halves is inserted a gilded relief panel with its own little segmental pediment, which depicts *Pope Liberius and the Miracle of the Snow*. This is by **Stefano Maderno**. The three smaller angels standing on top of its little pediment are by **Egidio Moretti**. The altar itself, in the form of an ancient sarcophagus in lapis lazuli with bronze fittings, is 18th century. ⁽¹⁾

The side walls flanking the altar have statues below the cantorie. That to the left is of *St John the Evangelist* by **Francesco Mochi**, and that to the right is of *St Joseph* by **Ambrogio Buonvicino**. ⁽¹⁾

Salus Populi Romani

The basilica's venerated icon of Our Lady was enshrined here in 1613. It is called [Salus Populi Romani](#), "Well-being (or Salvation) of the Roman People" The icon itself is within an extremely elaborate frame made up of five bronze angels by **Berthelot**, and with two little putti on top by **Camillo Mariani**. The work is difficult to date, but it is at least a thousand years old. Legend claims that it was executed by none other than St Luke the Evangelist, but this is clearly not true. The original icon to which that legend belonged was the Hodegetria, which was venerated at the Panaghia Monastery at Constantinople until it was destroyed by the Turks. ⁽¹⁾

However, the icon here is not of the Hodegetria type in which Our Lady points to the Christ-Child with her hand, but depicts her with her hands crossed in front of him as she holds him. It is claimed that this is a very old style of depiction, and that the original icon might be "late antique" (late 6th or early 7th century). However, there has been massive repainting. Unlike with other old icons in the city, here no attempt has been made in the latest restoration to remove overpainting, hence the original paintwork cannot be discerned. The oldest visible painting is of

Christ's tunic, tentatively dated to the 8th century, but most of the rest is 12th century. The expressions of the faces and the haloes are certainly inventions of this period. ⁽¹⁾

According to tradition, it was this icon that Pope St Gregory the Great carried in procession through the streets in 593, when Rome was suffering from an epidemic. On his way back from St Peter's, he saw St Michael the Archangel standing on the tip of the Mausoleum of Hadrian, later named Castel Sant'Angelo because of this vision. The archangel sheathed his sword when he saw the procession, and the city was saved. Later instances of processions with this icon are much better recorded. The last time was in 1837, when Pope Gregory XVI had it carried through the city during a cholera epidemic. Both figures in the icon have been crowned, originally by Pope Clement VIII but again by Pope Gregory XVI after the French had looted the basilica and stolen the crowns. ⁽¹⁾

From the very beginning of his pontificate, Pope John Paul II requested that an oil lamp burn day and night under the icon as witness to his great devotion to the Madonna. ⁽⁴⁾

Memorial to Pope Clement VIII Aldobrandini (27)

The memorial to the right commemorates Pope Clement VIII. The focus of the first storey is a large seated statue of the pope by **Silla Longhi**, in a round-headed niche with a molded archivolt in yellow Siena marble. This is flanked by four Corinthian columns in a pale green brecciated marble, which are on high plinths and which support an entablature with an alabaster frieze. The columns flank two marble reliefs depicting important political events in the pope's reign. The one on the left shows *The Conquest of Esztergom* in Hungary from the Ottomans in 1595, and is by **Camillo Mariani**. Unfortunately he died before he could finish it, and the work was completed by **Mochi**. The one on the right shows *The Conquest of the Rebels at Ferrara*, an event after the Papal government inherited the town in 1598. The work is thought to be by **Giovanni Antonio Paracca, Il Valsoldo**. ⁽¹⁾

The second storey has four caryatids sculpted by **Pietro Bernini**. These separate three marble reliefs that are, from left to right: *The Reconciliation of Kings Philip II of Spain and Henry IV of France* by **Ippolito Buzzi**, *The Coronation of Pope Sixtus* by **Pietro Bernini** again and *The Canonization of SS Julian of Cuenca and Raymond of Peñafort* by **Il Valsoldo**. ^{(1) (i)}

The side walls have statues by **Nicolas Cordier**. The right hand one is of *St Dionysius the Areopagite*, and the left hand one is of *Aaron*. ⁽¹⁾

Memorial to Pope Paul V Borghese (28)

The matching memorial to Pope Paul V is on the left. The statue of the pope is by **Longhi** again, but the head had to be finished by **Cordier**. The two lower relief panels are, to the left *The Emperor Rudolf In Battle Against the Turks* by **Maderno**, and to the right *Pope Paul Orders the Fortification of Ferrara* by **Buonvicino**. ⁽¹⁾

The caryatids are by **Pompeo Ferrucci** and **Francesco Buzio**. The upper reliefs are, left to right: *The Canonization of SS Frances of Rome and Charles Borromeo* by **Il Valsoldo**, *The Coronation of Pope Paul* by **Ippolito Buzzi** and *The Papal Audience* by **Cristoforo Stati**. The statues in the side wall niches are by **Nicolas Cordier**: *St Bernard* is to the left, and *King David* to the right. ⁽¹⁾

Sacristy (29)

The sacristy of the chapel, also designed by **Ponzio**, has frescoes by **Il Passignano**. It is the first room entered in a suite of four, with the doorway to the right of the altar. The fresco cycle mostly depicts Old Testament scenes: ⁽¹⁾

The Sacrifice of Noah, Balaam and the Donkey,
The Ark of the Covenant,
The Vision of Nebuchadnezzar.

Also there is a fresco of *The Teutonic Knights*, apparently. ⁽¹⁾

The ceiling vault depicts *Our Lady, the Source of Graces* and the altarpiece depicts *Christ and Our Lady Free Souls from Purgatory*. The aedicule has a pair of alabaster columns. ⁽¹⁾

The neighboring large room, the Sala del Capitolo, had two early 16th century paintings which have been taken to the Museum, since they are not viewable here. One is by **Domenico Beccafumi**, *The Madonna and Child with SS Catherine and Anthony*, and the other is *The Way to Calvary* by **Giovanni Antonio Bazzi**. The wooden ceiling has the heraldry of Pope Paul, and can be compared to that in the Sala dei Papi. ⁽¹⁾

The entrance to the burial crypt of the Borghese family is also here. Popes Paul V and Clement VIII are buried therein, allegedly in porphyry sarcophagi. Pauline Bonaparte was also buried there and this is because she had married into the family. ⁽¹⁾

Vaults

Each of the vaults of the four cross-arms has three frescoes each and the wall lunettes bounded by the vaults also have frescoes. The side frescoes in the vaults each have a segmental pediment on which a pair of angels sit, which are by **Cordier**. ⁽¹⁾

The entrance vault has three frescoes by **Giovanni Baglione**, showing the fates of three emperors who opposed the true Catholic faith. From left to right they are: ⁽¹⁾

The Fate of Leo III the Isaurian,

The Death of Julian the Apostate and

The Punishment of Constantine V Copronymus.

The 8th century emperors Leo and Constantine were propagators of Iconoclasm and vicious persecutors of monastic communities rejecting that heresy, with the result that many took refuge in Rome. The lunette here has no frescoes, because it is occupied by a large window. ⁽¹⁾

The right hand vault, over the memorial to Pope Clement VIII, is frescoed throughout by **Guido Reni**. In the lunette on the right is *Our Lady Vests St Ildephonsus*, and on the left is *An Angel Heals the Severed Hand of St John Chrysostom* (derived from a fictional legend). The vault has in the center *The Holy Spirit*, *SS Gertrude*, *Cunegunda* and *Pulcheria* to the right and *SS Cyril of Alexandria*, *Ildephonsus* and *John Chrysostom* (? -or John Damascene) on the left. ⁽¹⁾

The altar wall has no window in its lunette, but instead a large fresco by the **Cavalier d'Arpino** of *The Vision of St Gregory Thaumaturgus*. *Our Lady* and *St John the Evangelist* are at the left. This is historically the first instance of a vision of Our Lady to a private person on record. The vault has *St Luke* by the **Cavalier** in the middle, but the two side frescoes by him perished and were replaced by works by **Domenico Corvi**. *SS Irenaeus and Cyprian* are on the right, and *SS Ignatius of Antioch and Theophilus of Antioch* on the left. ⁽¹⁾

The left hand vault, over the memorial to Pope Paul V, is also frescoed by **Reni**. The lunette has *The Emperor Heraclius Defeats Shah Chosroes II* on the right, and *Narses Defeats Totila the Goth* on the left. In the middle of the vault is *God the Father*, with *St Francis* to the left and *St Dominic* on the right. ⁽¹⁾

Dome

The archivolts enclosing the pendentives of the dome are embellished with coffers containing gilded stucco angels playing musical instruments. Below each pendentive is an angel, by **Buonvicino**. The pendentives feature frescoes by the **Cavalier d'Arpino**, depicting four prophets each with an angel and holding a scroll with an epigraph. Counter-clockwise from the entrance, they are:

Daniel (Abscissus est lapis de monte sine manibus, et factus est mons magnus -

"A rock was cut from the mountain without hands, and it became a great mountain"),

Jeremiah (Femina circumdabit virum - "The woman will enclose the man"),

Isaiah (Ecce virgo concipiet filium - "Behold, the virgin will conceive a son") and

Ezekiel (Dominus Deus Israel ingressus est per eam -

"The Lord God of Israel has entered by 'her' [actually the door of the temple]"). ⁽¹⁾

The dome sits on an entablature with a dedicatory inscription on its frieze. The fresco is by **Ludovico Cardi, Il Cigoli**, (1610-1613) and depicts *Our Lady with the Apostles and Angels*. In the lantern is *God the Father*, also by **Cardi**. ⁽¹⁾ ⁽ⁱ⁾

Traditionally, during the Mass here on the 5 August (the Dedication of the Basilica) white rose petals were dropped from the lantern of the dome in memory of the foundation legend involving snow. In recent years, these have been replaced with dahlia petals. They are smaller and fall straight down, while rose petals can drift onto the monuments and cause a nuisance. ⁽¹⁾

Far left entrance vestibule monuments (30)

In the aisle just beyond the Cappella Paolina are memorials to Cardinal Prospero Publicola Santacroce (1589), attributed to **Prospero Bresciano**. His remains were later transferred to the church of Santa Maria in Publicolis. Here also is the monument to **Bartolomeo Sacchi**, 1481. The eagle holding a sack is a pun on the name of this noted humanist. ⁽¹⁾ ⁽⁶⁾

The left hand side aisle ends in a back entrance flanking the apse. The monuments here were also moved by **Fuga**. In the niche near the door are three other monuments. That to Monsignor Clemente Merlini (1642) on the right. Recent research has produced an attribution to **Giuseppe**

Peroni, of the school of Algardi. The memorial is entirely in red marble, except for the black marble epitaph tablet and the heraldry in the broken segmental pediment at the top. The four pilasters have skulls in place of capitals, and the bronze bust is in a wreathed tondo. ⁽¹⁾

To the left is a memorial to Girolamo Manili (1634), designed by Giuliano Finelli. The far wall has a monument to Giovan Francesco Pasqualino (1582), attributed to Ludovico Scanzo. ⁽¹⁾

Right Aisle Monuments and Chapels

Far right entrance vestibule monuments (31)

On the right hand side of the apse is an identical entrance arrangement to that found at the end of the left hand aisle, involving a continuation of the left hand side aisle to a back exit. The vestibule has several wall monuments. To the left is one in polychrome marble to Cardinal Marcello Crescenzi (1552). This is flanked by a pair of mediaeval epigraphs, the one on the right being dated 1325. ⁽¹⁾

To the right is a large niche. The right hand side wall of this niche has a memorial to Ludovico Cerasoli (1591), and the left hand wall has an attractive Baroque monument to Giovanni Pietro Moretti (1646). ⁽¹⁾

Occupying the far wall of this niche is the early 14th century tomb, in Gothic style, of the Spanish cardinal Gonzalo Gudiel, Archbishop of Toledo and Cardinal Bishop of Albano, who died in 1299, whose remains were transferred to the metropolitan cathedral in Toledo in 1301. The work as a whole is thought to be of the school of Arnolfo di Cambio. It has a reclining figure of the cardinal on a draped bier bearing five shields with his heraldry, with an angel at each end. Above is a mosaic sheltered by a Gothic canopy with fine Cosmatesque decoration including a sixth shield. The mosaic shows the *Cardinal being presented to the Madonna and Child by SS Matthias and Jerome*. The former holds a scroll reading *Me tenet ara prior* ("The high altar has possession of me"), while the latter's scroll reads *Recubo p[rae]sepis ad antru[m]* ("I rest next to the grotto of the crib"). The mosaic on the tomb is signed by Giovanni di Cosma, one of the family after which the Cosmatesque technique is named. The inscription reads

Hoc op[us] fec[it] Ioh[ann]es Mag[ist]ri Cosme, civis Romanus
("This work was made by Cosma, a citizen of Rome").

The monument was originally near the high altar, but was moved here by Fuga. The marble slab frontal below the effigy was inserted by him. ⁽¹⁾

Cappella Sistina (32)

To the right of the high altar is the enormous domed Blessed Sacrament Chapel, also called the Cappella Sistina after its founder, Pope Sixtus V. The pope had actually begun work in 1584, the year before his election when he was still Cardinal Felice Peretti. The architect was Domenico Fontana, who used some of the polychrome marble spolia available from the demolition of the ancient Septizodium. Work continued on the edifice until 1587, and on its decoration and monuments until 1590. ⁽¹⁾

The much admired 13th century Cappella del Presepe by Arnolfo di Cambio was in the way, and the initial intention was to move it to the center of the new chapel. Unfortunately, the attempt failed and the structure fell to pieces. The mosaics and Cosmatesque work that it contained were destroyed, but the crib figures and a few other elements were scavenged and so were installed in the confessio of the new chapel. The relic of the Sacra Culla was also kept here until the end of the 18th century. ⁽¹⁾

St Jerome, Doctor of the Church and translator of the Bible into Latin in the 4th century, was allegedly enshrined in or near the old chapel. He had lived as a monk next to the basilica of the Holy Cave in Bethlehem, and it had been thought fitting to preserve his relics here, in the "Bethlehem in Rome". Somehow, the actual location of the relics of the saint has been forgotten. ⁽¹⁾

There was a restoration by Filippo Raguzzini in 1726. ⁽¹⁾

In the French occupation at the end of the 18th century the precious metal fittings of the chapel, including the reliquary of the Sacra Culla, were looted. After the restoration of Papal government, the relic was given a new reliquary but then kept in the more secure Chapel of the Relics. It was then transferred to the newly renovated confessio of the main basilica, where it is now to be seen. ⁽¹⁾

There was an extensive restoration of the frescoes in 1871, and another thorough restoration of the fabric at the start of the 21st century. For the latter the crib figures were moved to the

underground part of the Museum, but should now (2015) be back in the confessio. ⁽¹⁾

When the Cappella Paolina opposite was built, both chapels were provided with entrance arches in the nave colonnades in 1611. The archivolts each have a pair of stucco angels reclining on them, and a large picture above on the nave side wall. Here, the work is *The Birth of Our Lady* by **Aureliano Milani** (1742), added in the Fuga restoration. ⁽¹⁾

The side aisle bay in front of the chapel has a frescoed vault depicting the four Evangelists. *SS Matthew, Mark and John* are by **Andrea Lilio**, but *St Luke* is by **Ferdinando Sermei**. The iron railings separating the chapel from the aisle are worthy of notice, and have a row of candlesticks on top. ⁽¹⁾

The chapel is on a Greek cross plan, with short wide arms and a central dome. The entrance arm is flanked by two little octagonal chapels. The left hand arm contains the shrine of Pope St Pius V, and the right hand one the memorial of Pope Sixtus V. The far arm contains a plinth for a papal throne. The altar with its tabernacle is in the central spot, with the confessio in front of it. A small sacristy is tucked in between the right hand side chapel and the Chapel of the Relics. ⁽¹⁾

The decoration of the entire chapel is extremely sumptuous. It is thought to be the first major example in Rome of the use of Baroque polychrome marble revetting to cover wall surfaces. The inner corners of the Greek cross are occupied by the four massive engaged piers supporting the dome. These are chamfered on their inner corners, and flanking each chamfer is a pair of Corinthian pilasters in shallow relief. These are revetted with exquisite polychrome pietra dura work, including a star from the heraldry of Pope Sixtus. These pilasters support an entablature that runs around the entire interior, and has a red marble frieze. Its cornice has dentillation and egg-and-dart molding, as well as fronded modillions interspersed with rosettes. ⁽¹⁾

Chapel of St Lucy and the Holy Innocents (34)

The little domed octagonal chapel to the right just inside the entrance gate is dedicated jointly to St Lucy and the Holy Innocents. Over its entrance is *Herod Orders the Massacre of the Innocents* by **Salvatore Fontana**. The altarpiece is *The Holy Communion of St Lucy* by **Paris Nogari** -Pope Sixtus V is depicted with the saint. The altar mensa is on an ancient sarcophagus containing alleged relics of five of the Holy Innocents. The frescoes on the walls and cupola are by **Giovanni Battista Pozzo the Elder**, and show *The Martyrdom of St Lucy* to the right, *The Massacre of the Innocents* to the left and scenes from the life of St Lucy in the vault. ⁽¹⁾

In here is the tomb of Cardinal Ugo Poletti (1997), former Cardinal Archpriest of the basilica. There is controversy attached to his memory, specifically because the basilica had been left in a state of serious disrepair while under his authority. ⁽¹⁾

Chapel of St Jerome (35)

The matching little chapel on the left hand side is dedicated to St Jerome. Over its entrance is *The Annunciation* by **Fontana** again. The wall frescoes are by **Andrea Lilio**, and depict *St Jerome Washes the Feet of Pilgrims* to the right and *St Jerome Learns Aramaic* to the left. These scenes are set in the Holy Land. The cupola frescoes are by **Fontana** and **Pozzo**. The altarpiece used to have a portrait of the saint by **Fontana**, but the one there now is by **Giovanni Micocca** (1817). ⁽¹⁾

The altar contains carvings from the mediaeval altar of St Jerome, destroyed to build the Cappella Sistina. They are attributed to **Mino da Fiesole**. ⁽¹⁾

Confessio (33)

In front of and below the main altar is the Confessio. It is the descendent of the 13th century Cappella del Presepe, although as mentioned the attempt to preserve the entire mediaeval chapel by moving it bodily to here proved a failure. ⁽¹⁾

The vase-shaped aperture is protected by a pin balustrade, with a single staircase splitting into two at a landing. The entry has a pair of bronze gates with papal heraldry. Below the landing, in a niche opposite the altar, is a statue of *St Cajetan holding the Christ-Child* by **Nicolas Cordier**. The saint had a great devotion to the original crib chapel and, in a letter that the saint wrote to a nun at Brescia, he explained that when he was once lost in prayer at this spot, the Holy Child climbed into his arms. He was to be instrumental in spreading the popularity of cribs in churches at Christmas. The floor has a porphyry roundel surviving from the original Cosmatesque floor of the old chapel. ⁽¹⁾

The altar, which also has Cosmatesque details, is protected by a shallow arch with two carvings in its spandrels by **Arnolfo di Cambio**. The left hand one is of *King David*, holding a text

reading:

Introite in atria salutis, adore Dominum in aula sancta eius
("Enter the halls of salvation, worship the Lord in his holy chamber").

The right hand one is of the prophet *Isaiah*, and his text reads

Et pannis involutum reclinavit in praesepio
("She laid him in the manger, wrapped in rags").

There is some gold mosaic background, and the intrados of the arch also has mosaic work in dark blue with stars. It is thought that this arch was over the entrance to the old chapel. Above the altar is a little round-headed niche. Before the recent restoration this contained a relief of *The Nativity* with an angel above it, by a sculptor given as "Cecchino da Pietrasanta". In recent years this has been in the Museum, but it might have been put back now (2015) the restoration is completed. ⁽¹⁾

The basilica's website seems to indicate that the crib figures by **Arnolfo di Cambio** (1290) have been put back in their side niche in the confessio here after being on display in the Museum. The four original statues are of *St Joseph*, the *Three Magi* (two carved together standing, and one separately kneeling) and the *Ox and Donkey* (only their heads together are shown). *The Madonna and Child* are both missing, and it is surmised that they were damaged beyond repair when the old chapel collapsed during the attempt to move it. The replacement is a statue by **Giovanni Antonio Paracca, Il Valsoldo**. The original works by **Arnolfo** are superbly executed, and the patterning in shallow relief on the clothes of the Magi is especially worth attention. The depiction of St Joseph is considered a masterpiece, and his expression of thoughtfulness seems to be a hint of the old Byzantine iconographic tradition showing him in doubt. ⁽¹⁾

The Confessio is only open to tours organized under the museum ticket, which you have to purchase. ⁽¹⁾

Tabernacle (36)

The free-standing altar, behind the confessio, is completely dominated by the enormous gilt bronze tabernacle dating from 1590. This is the form of a model of the chapel, being carried by four life-size angels who are also holding candlesticks. The original design was by **Giovanni Battista Ricci**, the angels were executed by **Sebastiano Torrigiani** and the tabernacle itself by **Lodovico del Duca**. There is another, much smaller tabernacle on the altar which seems to have been the actual working repository of the Sacrament. ⁽¹⁾

Behind the altar is a stepped podium intended for a papal throne, although there is not one here now. Over this is a tablet with a dedicatory epigraph, flanked by a pair of pilasters in the style of those on the dome piers. The capitals of these are extended by a sub-frieze below the entablature, featuring reliefs of putti with garlands and with the heraldry of Pope Sixtus in the middle. A pair of frescoes flank the pilasters to the sides of the tablet, with three frescoes above it. Top, left to right: ⁽¹⁾

Census in Bethlehem by **Pozzo**,

Nativity by **Salvatore Fontana** (or perhaps **Pozzo**),

The Annunciation to the Shepherds by **Lilio**.

left of tablet: *St Paul* by **Pozzo**,

right of tablet: *St Peter* by **Lilio**.

The side walls of this cross arm have a pair of statues of *SS Peter* (right) and *Paul* by **Leonardo Sormani**, sculpted from designs by **Prospero Bresciano**. Over St Peter is a fresco of *The Wise Men with Herod* by **Pozzo**, and over St Paul is *The Annunciation* also by **Pozzo** although **Cesare Nebbia** has been suggested. ⁽¹⁾

In the back corners are a pair of beautiful gilt statues of an angel holding a candle holder. On the base is the crest of Pope Pius IX.

Shrine of Pope St Pius V Ghislieri (37)

The far wall of the left hand side arm is completely occupied by the shrine of Pope St Pius V, executed by **Domenico Fontana** (1588). This two-storey composition could serve as the façade of a small church, and the tip of it touches the cornice of the interior entablature. ⁽¹⁾

The focus of the first storey is a large seated statue of the pope by **Sormani**, in a round-headed niche with a molded archivolt in yellow Siena marble. This is flanked by four Corinthian columns in a pale green brecciated marble, which are on high plinths and which support an entablature with a red marble frieze. Below the statue the relics of the pope are in a recumbent wax

effigy within a black marble, bronze and glass reliquary. He was enshrined here in 1823. ⁽¹⁾

In between the columns are two marble reliefs by **Nicolas Mostaert**. The one on the left was also worked on by **Egidio della Riviera**. It depicts *Pope St Pius Commissioning Count Sforza di Santa Fiora to Fight the Huguenots in France*. The right hand relief shows *Pope St Pius Commissioning Marcantonio Colonna to Fight the Ottomans*. This led to the Christian victory of the Battle of Lepanto. ⁽¹⁾

The second storey has four caryatids supporting a cornice. Over the inner two is a broken segmental pediment containing the pope's heraldry. The caryatids flank three further reliefs, depicting (left to right): ⁽¹⁾

The Victory of Lepanto by **Egidio della Riviera**,

The Coronation of Pope St Pius by **Nicolas Mostaert** and

The Victory Over the Huguenots by **Egidio della Riviera** again.

The right hand side wall here has a statue of *St Dominic* by **Giovanni Battista della Porta**, with a fresco over it by **Pozzo** showing *The Visitation*. The left hand side wall has a statue of *St Peter Martyr* by **Il Valsoldo**. Over this is a fresco of *The Journey to Bethlehem* by **Ercole de Maria**. The reason why these two Dominican saints feature here is because the pope belonged to the Order. ⁽¹⁾

Tomb of Pope Sixtus V Peretti di Montalto (38)

Pope Sixtus V (1585-1590) is buried on the right-hand side of the chapel. Although he has never been canonized, he was venerated as a saint here for a long time. The monument is by **Domenico Fontana**, and matches the slightly earlier shrine of Pope St Pius V very closely. ⁽¹⁾

The central statue of the pope is by **Giovanni Antonio Paracca, Il Valsoldo**. The flanking reliefs depict *The Justice and Benignity of Pope Sixtus* by **Mostaert** to the right, and *The Faith and Charity of Pope Sixtus* by **Il Valsoldo** to the left. The three reliefs in the second storey are by **Egidio della Riviera**, and are (left to right): ⁽¹⁾

The Canonisation of St Diego of Alcalà,

The Coronation of Pope Sixtus and

The Reconciliation Between Emperor Rudolf and King Sigismund.

The right hand side wall has a statue of *St Anthony of Padua* by **Pietro Paolo Olivieri**. Over it is a fresco of *The Flight to Egypt* by **Ercole de Maria**. The left hand side wall has a statue of *St Francis of Assisi* by **Flaminio Vacca**, and over it is a fresco of *The Adoration of the Magi* by **Pozzo**. ⁽¹⁾

Vaults

The four short barrel vaults of the chapel's cross arms each have three frescoes on its archivolt, and enclose two frescoes in a large lunette with a window in the center. The theme of the frescoes are the *Old Testament ancestors of Christ*, as given in the genealogy at the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew. ⁽¹⁾

Over the entrance, the archivolt has *The Patriarch Jacob and His Sons* by **Giacomo Stella** to the left, *A Choir of Angels* by **Pozzo** in the middle and *Eliud, Eleazar, Matthan and Jacob* by **Salvatore Fontana** to the right. (The latter-named Jacob was the father of St Joseph.) The lunette has *The Sacrifice of Isaac* by **Stella** to the right, and *The Holy Family* by **Paris Nogari** to the left. ⁽¹⁾

Over the tomb of Pope Sixtus V, the archivolt has *Kings Manasseh and Amon* by an artist called **Orvieto** to the left, *The Holy Spirit* by **Pozzo** in the middle and *Abiud and Eliakim* by **da Orvieto** to the right. The lunette has *Kings Josiah and Jeconiah* to the left and *Shealtiel and Zerubbabel* to the right, again by **da Orvieto**. ⁽¹⁾

Over the far wall, the archivolt has *Kings Solomon and Rehoboam* by **Nogari** to the left, *A Choir of Angels* by **Pozzo** in the middle and *Kings Uzziiah and Jotham* by **Nogari** to the right. ⁽¹⁾

Over the shrine of Pope St Pius V, the archivolt has *Ezron and Ram* to the left by **Hendrick van den Broeck**, known in Italian as **Arrigo Fiammingo**. The middle has *The Holy Spirit* again by **Pozzo**, and the right has *Boaz, Obed and Ruth* by **Nogari**. The lunette has *Aminadab and Nahshon* by **van den Broeck** to the left, and *Solomon, Boaz and Rahab* by **Lattanzio Mainardi** to the right. ⁽¹⁾

Dome

The pendentives of the dome are bounded by four archivolts with rectangular coffering embellished with gilt stucco representations of saints, winged putto's heads and papal emblems, behind which are the four short barrel vaults of the cross arms. These are identically treated, with two rectangular fresco panels flanking a central elliptical one and more gilt stucco decoration. ⁽¹⁾

The pendentives continue the ancestor theme. *Jesse and David* by **Nogari** are top left, *Ahaz and Hezekiah* by **Nebbia** are top right, *Tamar, Perez and Zerah* by **Lattanzio Mainardi** are bottom left and

Azor, Zadok and Achim by Nebbia to the bottom right. ⁽¹⁾

The drum of the dome has eight large windows, each with a pediment which alternates between triangular and segmental. These windows are separated by tripletted ribbed Corinthian pilasters, gilded on their lower parts and supporting an entablature on which the ellipsoidal dome rests. This has eight ribs, and the sectors are occupied by frescoes of *The Heavenly Host* by Pozzo, Mainardi, Nebbia and Stella. ⁽¹⁾

Around the base of the lantern is a band of gilt stucco angels sitting in bunches of grapes. Inside that band is the script:

IESV CHRISTO DEI FILIO DE VIRGINE NATO SIXT V

(Jesus Christ, God's Son, born of a virgin, Sixtus V)

In the center of the lantern is *God the Father*.

Sacristy (39)

The chapel's little sacristy is accessed via a doorway to the right of the above monument. The walls are frescoed by Pozzo; to the left is *The Annunciation*, the altarpiece is *The Adoration of the Shepherds* and to the right is *The Adoration of the Magi*. The lunettes have landscape paintings by Paul Bril, and the vault has scenes from the history of the chapel attributed to Pozzo. ⁽¹⁾

The most important item in here is the washbasin. It bears a 15th century relief carving by Isaia da Pisa, featuring a vase with acanthus leaves between a pair of angels. It is thought that this is a surviving fragment of a lost Tabernacle of the Blessed Sacrament commissioned by Cardinal Guillaume d'Estouteville(1443-83). ⁽¹⁾

In the sacristy a set of vestments worn by Pope St Pius V used to be kept tucked away, but these are now properly displayed in the Museum. ⁽¹⁾

The chapels and altars following the Cappella Sistina along the left aisle are described: The first niche has a confessional over which is an inscription from Pope Benedict XIV. The next niche has a confessional in front of a boarded door which leads to the small Chapel of St. Lucy. The third niche is empty. The fourth niche has a confessional, over which is an inscription from Pope Pius X. ⁽²⁾

Altar of the Annunciation (40)

In the first niche after the papal chapel is the elliptical altarpiece depicts *The Annunciation*, and is by Pompeo Batoni. There is no aedicule or reredos, but the lively late Baroque design by Fuga. As with all of the side altars, the stucco angels are by Pietro Bracci. ⁽¹⁾

Chapel of the Holy Relics (41)

The next chapel was an 18th century addition, designed by Ferdinando Fuga and built about 1750. It is actually dedicated to the Crucifix, and the altarpiece is a wooden crucifix from the first half of the 15th century. It used to be over an altar to the right of the basilica's entrance before the erection of the memorial to Pope Clement IX. In his fitting out Fuga used ten porphyry Corinthian columns which used to be part of the basilica's mediaeval sanctuary fittings before his restoration. The walls are revetted in yellow Siena marble, and the same stone is used for the relic depositories, which are behind artfully forged, gilded metal grilles. These are designed as aedicules, with triangular pediments. Among the relics the head of Santa Bibiana, which is displayed on the saint's feast day on December 2, and relics of San Tommaso di Canterbury. ^{(1) (2)}

Eight of the ten columns used to belong to the two Gothic tabernacles that once flanked the high altar. The Tabernacolo delle Reliquie on the right used to be used for the veneration of relics including that of the manger, and had been sponsored by Giovanni and Vinia Capocci in 1256. A Cosmatesque panel commemorating them was saved when the tabernacle was demolished, and is now at the church of San Michele in Vico nel Lazio. ⁽¹⁾

There is a memorial to the artist Girolamo Muziano who was buried here after his death in 1592. ^{(1) (2)}

After the chapel there are two altars occupying niches in the aisle side walls.

Altar of Bl Nicholas Albergati (42)

The first altar is dedicated to Bl [Niccolò Albergati](#), and the elliptical altarpiece of him is by Stefano Pozzi. There is no aedicule or reredos, but the lively late Baroque design by Fuga has the altarpiece apparently being supported by angels in stucco. These are by Bracci. ⁽¹⁾

Albergati is also honored with a statue on the façade. He was an engaging character, but an obscure one nowadays. The reason why he has such a profile in the basilica is because he was the Cardinal Archpriest here for three years from 1440. ⁽¹⁾

Altar of the Holy Family (43)

The next altar is dedicated to the Holy Family, and is in exactly the same style, except that Bracci executed his angels in different poses. The elliptical altarpiece showing *The Holy Family with St Anne* is by Agostino Masucci. ⁽¹⁾

Basilica shop (former Chapel of St Michael and Peter in Chains) (44)

The next chapel is the former mediaeval Chapel of SS Michael and Peter in Chains, which is now the basilica's shop. After the 18th century restoration of the basilica by Fuga, it had a long period of being simply a vestibule on the way out into the basilica's side courtyard. ⁽¹⁾

Access is from the door in the right wall of the antechamber of the baptistry.

There was a chapel here in mediaeval times, which was refitted and frescoed in the restoration by Cardinal Guillaume d'Estouteville (1443-83). He enlarged it and provided an apse, which no longer exists. The cross-vaulted ceiling used to be supported by columns which have been removed, but the cardinal's heraldry is still displayed at the meeting of the ribs. This cross-vault has fragments of 15th century frescoes depicting the four Evangelists. These are attributed either to Piero della Francesca, or to Lorenzo da Viterbo. A lunette displays *Christ in the Tomb with Two Angels*, and a wall has an unfinished *St Michael Conquering the Dragon*. These two works are tentatively attributed to Benozzo Gozzoli. ⁽¹⁾

The frescoes were rediscovered in 1913, having been hidden by a false ceiling after the 18th century transformations of the basilica by Fuga. ^(a)

The museum was inaugurated by Pope John Paul II in December, 2001. ⁽⁴⁾

Courtyard (45)

Beyond this former chapel is the enclosed cortile or side court of the basilica. You go through here to reach the museum. The most interesting item to be seen is a memorial erected by Pope Clement VIII in 1596 to commemorate the conversion of King Henri IV of France (he had been a Protestant before ascending the throne). It is a thin tapering shaft in the form of the barrel of a cannon on a plinth, with a crucifix on top. This monument used to stand in the street in front of Sant'Antonio Abate all'Esquilino nearby, but was moved here in 1881 because it had become a hazard to traffic. Most of the cannon is in red granite, but the mouth of the barrel is in grey. On top of the latter is a stylized Composite capital in limestone, on which stands the crucifix. This has a corpus in bronze, and the ends of the cross have fleurs-de-lys also in bronze. Very unusually, the reverse side of the crucifix has a bronze statuette of the *Mother and Child*. ⁽¹⁾

Also here is an octagonal wellhead in travertine limestone, dating from the reign of Pope Gregory XIII. A frieze epigraph commissioned by the same pope, commemorating a restoration, is on a wall together with the famous portico frieze epigraph by Pope Eugene III(1145-53), already described. They were put there by Fuga. ⁽¹⁾

Baptistry (46)

The sacristy block, including the baptistry, was designed and built by Flaminio Ponzio in 1605 as part of his massive program of additions to the basilica ordered by Pope Paul V. The baptistry itself was originally the Chapel of the Winter Choir, where the canons celebrated the Divine Office in winter when they found the main basilica uncomfortably cold. However, in 1825 Pope Leo XII ordered the canons to move out to the Cappella Sforza and for Giuseppe Valadier to convert the old chapel into a baptistry. The pope provided an ancient porphyry basin from the Vatican Museums to be the new font. ⁽¹⁾

The baptistry has two bays, an antechamber and the baptismal chamber proper. The former has two large side doors, the one on the left leading into the Chapel of St Michael (now the shop, also the place where you can buy a museum ticket) and the one on the right accessing the sacristy suite. These two ceremonial doors are each flanked by two much smaller doors for daily use. The two bays are separately vaulted. ⁽¹⁾

The square antechamber has a vault in the form of a truncated pyramid with four lunettes, three containing windows and one the arch into the baptistry proper. The slopes have rows of coffering in yellow within pale grey on white, and the lunettes contain wreaths in the same color scheme. The charming central panel is by Domenico Cresti, Il Passignano, and features a band of

five angels on vocals, organ, lute, violin and flute with others in attendance. A pair of putti hold up the music that they are playing, which is an antiphon in honor of the Immaculate Conception. The words are:

Gaude Maria, a Deo electa ante quam genita, quae benedictionibus es praevisa dulcedinis
("Rejoice Mary, chosen before birth by God, who are foreseen with blessings of sweetness").
The arch lunette bears the coat-of-arms of Pope Paul V. ⁽¹⁾

On the left hand wall in the antechamber are memorials to Innocenzo Merlo (1704) with a good half-length portrait to the left, and to the right a famous one to the "Marquis Antonio Nigrita", who died at Rome in 1608. He was an ambassador sent to Rome by Alonso II, ruler of the Kingdom of Kongo in what is now modern Angola. The king was keen to propagate Christianity in his kingdom as part of a modernizing campaign in response to Portuguese aggression. So he sent one of his nobles, Antonio Emanuele N'Funta to Rome but unfortunately the young man seems to have died of malaria. He was given a sumptuous funeral. The bust is by **Francesco Caporale**, although guides asserted for centuries that it was by **Bernini**. Over the door to the gift shop is a majolica tondo of *St Joseph with the Christ-Child*. ⁽¹⁾

On the wall containing the entrance door are two busts of popes, in oval tondi with triregnum and crossed keys above being held by putti. The one on the right is of Pope Clement XII, and that on the left is of Pope Benedict XIV. Over the door is a cameo portrait medallion of Pope Clement XI, flanked by two large epigraph tablets recording restorations by Pope Leo XII and Pope Gregory XVI. On the right hand wall of the antechamber are two monuments with good busts. That to Odoardo Santarelli (c.1640) by **Alessandro Algardi** is to the right, and that to Ludovico Sarego (1625) to the left. Over the door is an epigraph proclaiming the restoration by Pope Pius IX, and a small bust of him dated 1864. Flanking the epigraph are two stone candlesticks bearing a little bronze dragon and eagle, the Borghese family emblems. ⁽¹⁾

The baptistry proper is entered through a railing gate flanked by a pair of ancient Ionic columns in red granite from Aswan in Egypt. These support an archivolt over the entrance, and to each side a horizontal entablature runs to an Ionic pilaster. These entablatures then split into two, to run below the vaults of antechamber and baptistry. In the latter it is supported by two further pairs of the granite pilasters on each side, their capitals containing putto's heads. ⁽¹⁾

The baptistry vault is frescoed by **Il Passignano** again, and features *The Immaculate Conception with Prophets and Doctors*. It is richly decorated with gilded stucco ornament featuring caryatids and putti, and has Our Lady in the central panel. *Four prophets* are in the diagonal panels, and the four *Latin Doctors of the Church* are in the larger lunette panels. More putti occupy the smaller ones. The two side lunettes display frescoes from the apocryphal legend of Our Lady's birth, and feature *SS Joachim and Anne Enter the Golden Gate of the Temple*, and *The Annunciation to St Joachim*. ⁽¹⁾

In front of the far wall the vault springs from two Ionic columns in cipollino marble from Euboea in Greece. These flank the altar aedicule, which has a pair of verde antico Corinthian columns supporting two fragments of a split segmental pediment on posts. The frieze of the entablature is also in verde antico. Into the pediment is inserted a panel of alabaster, with a putto's head above. The altar frontal is also in alabaster, with bronze and verde antico details. The altarpiece is a marble bas-relief of *The Assumption* by **Pietro Bernini**, the father of Gian Lorenzo. Above the aedicule is an orange glass panel featuring *The Mystery of the Trinity Adored by Angels*. ⁽¹⁾

The font is sunken below floor level, being approached by three circular steps, and is surrounded by a circular pin balustrade with four portals flanked by eight bronze ball finials. It is an ancient porphyry pedestal basin, and has bronze fittings added. In the center of the lid is a gilded bronze statue of *St John the Baptist*, executed by **Giuseppe Spagna** after a design by **Valadier**. ⁽¹⁾

The side walls display more very good polychrome marble Baroque funerary monuments. To the right there are three. The memorial of Giovanni Angelo Frumento, attributed to the workshop of **Carlo Maderno** with bust attributed to **Gian Lorenzo Bernini**, 1621. Frumento was a canon of the Basilica, and managed the rebuilding and fresco decoration of Santa Susanna Basilica for Cardinal Rusticucci in 1600, and the Cappella Paolina for Pope Paul V from 1609 to 1613. The other two are for Cristoforo Battello and Francisco Herrera. Below the middle one is a famous portrait bust of Pope Benedict XIII by **Bracci**. To the left are (near to far) memorials to Alessandro Bonaventura and Cardinal Decio Azzolini seniore (1587). ⁽¹⁾ ^(m)

Sacristies

The sacristy is actually a suite of four rooms occupying the ground floor of the block by **Ponzio** (1605), to the right of the basilica's façade. This is a very unusual location for a church sacristy, which is usually near the high altar. There is firstly a large room called the Sacristy of the

Canons (47), accessed from the antechamber of the baptistry, off which is the little Chapel of the Annunciation to the far right. On the near left is a door to the "small sacristy", which again has a small chapel off its far right hand side. Off the far left hand side of the Sacristy of the Canons is a room now used as the canons' chapter house (aula capitolare) (49). A little spiral staircase gives access to the upper storeys of the block, including the Sala dei Papi (see below). This staircase was designed by **Gian Lorenzo Bernini**.

The basilica possesses a relic of St Thomas Becket, which is described as a tunic (La Tunica) in yellow silk allegedly stained with his blood (not from his martyrdom, but from his practice of taking the discipline as a penance). The blood would make this a first-class relic. The item was examined recently, and described as a dalmatic of the right period.

Sagrestia dei Canonici (47)

The large doorway to the right in the antechamber of the baptistry leads immediately into the canons' sacristy. This is the largest room in the suite, and preserves its original intricately carved set of wardrobes in walnut. The carving includes the Borghese emblems of Pope Paul V. The ceiling vault by **Il Passignano** depicts *The Coronation of Our Lady*, and the lunettes by him show scenes from her life. The altar has an altarpiece depicting *The Madonna and Child* by **Scipione Pulzone**, **Il Gaetano**.

Chapel of the Annunciation (48)

To the right of the altar mentioned above is a little chapel, the far wall of which is actually the right hand side wall of the basilica's entrance portico. Its decoration is by **Il Passignano** again, who executed the altarpiece depicting *The Annunciation* and the vault fresco showing *Our Lady with the Scapular*.

Sagrestia Minore (49)

The "smaller sacristy" (now the actual working sacristy) has its own entrance from the antechamber of the baptistry, which helpfully has sagrestia written on its lintel. The two vault frescoes by **Il Passignano** depict *The Rest of the Holy Family in Egypt* and *The Circumcision of Christ*. The walls display two reliefs by **Luigi Capponi**: *Our Lady with Angels*, and *SS Jerome and Bernard*.

Chapel of the Holy Spirit (50)

Opening off the far right hand of the sagrestia minore is a little chapel dedicated to the Holy Spirit. It has a fresco depicting *Pentecost* by **Il Passignano**.

Aula Capitolare (51)

The chapter house or meeting room of the canons used to be a chapel, and opens off the far left hand side of the sagrestia dei Canonici. The vault fresco depicting *The Dormition of Our Lady* is by **Il Passignano**, but the frescoes of four allegorical virtues are by **Luigi Fontana**. They are: *Charity, Faith, Humility and Virginity*.

On the walls are displayed some more relief sculptures from the mediaeval high altar baldacchino demolished by **Fuga**. You have already seen some panels from this on the apse wall of the basilica. They are by **Mino del Reame** (1451). The attribution is because the relief here of the *Madonna and Child* is signed opus Mini. The other fragments here depict *Christ*, and also saints and prophets in tondi.

Sala dei Papi

If you were to go up the **Bernini** spiral staircase in between the aula capitolare and the sagrestia minore, you will arrive at the Room of the Popes (Sala dei Papi) on the next floor up. The staircase rises further. However, as an ordinary visitor you have to access this room via the Museum. There, you will be given a tour which will take you to the Loggia with its mosaics, and then to this room via a doorway in the right hand end of the Loggia.

The room was fitted out in (1605), and the early Baroque fireplace bears this date. The unpainted coffered wooden ceiling bears the heraldry of Pope Paul V. This room contains some museum displays, as well as a collection of pictures. The most important of the latter is *The Procession of St Charles Borromeo* by **Domenico Muratori**. Also on display are portraits of popes, canons and kings of Spain. The exhibits are mostly of liturgical vestments and texts, but also on display is the handle end of a broken and corroded sword which was originally buried with **Gian Lorenzo Bernini**.

Back in the aisle, the niche after the surface pillar stands a confessional against the wall under a stone with an inscription in memory of the work Pope Pius XI had commissioned in the Church.
(2)

Cappella Patrizi (52)

At the bottom of the right hand side aisle is the so-called Cappella Patrizi. This family of Roman nobles liked to pretend that they were descendants of John the Patrician of the foundation legend, hence the altarpiece depicts *Our Lady Appears in a Dream to John the Patrician*. It is by **Giuseppe Puglia, Il Bastaro**, (1635). The altar is dedicated to Our Lady of the Snow. Its impressive aedicule features a pair of black marble Corinthian columns supporting the separated halves of a split triangular pediment, into which is inserted a panel bearing the family's heraldry and which is supported by a pair of angels with festoons. The altarpiece is lavishly framed in what amounts to a mini-aedicule inserted into an arch within the larger one, with a pair of little pinkish-grey marble Composite columns supporting a split segmental pediment into which a dedicatory tablet is inserted.
(1)

The altar is flanked by a pair of matching memorials to Costanzo Patrizi (1623) (on the right), with a bust by **Alessandro Algardi**, and to Patrizio Patrizi (1611) the sculptor of which is anonymous. On the wall to the left of the altar is a memorial for Cardinal G. B. Patrizi, who's heart is buried here. In the floor in front the altar is a large tombstone in multi-colored marble for Francesco Patrizi. In a corner of the stone, dated 1635, shows Patrizi family's arms, consisting of six horizontal bands, alternately in the colors silver and black. (1) (2)

On the wall on the left when facing the altar is another good polychrome marble memorial to Massimiliano Pernštejn (53), a nobleman from Prague who was already in the Papal diplomatic service when he died aged eighteen in 1593. The sculptor of the bust and the pair of weeping putti is unknown. Under bust in the oval niche is a memorial inscription on a black stone in a golden marble frame, flanked by two sets of flat columns with inlaid green marble. They carry a lintel, also in the green marble, and a broken, curved gable field with the Pernštejn arms in the center. The lower part of the tomb is made up of a sarcophagus in black marble with gold decoration. On each side of the domed lid stands a little angel crying. (1) (2)

The porphyry urn put under the high altar by Fuga in his restoration used to be in this chapel, and contained the alleged relics of John the Patrician and his wife. The authorities then decided that these were lacking in authenticity, and so buried them under the nave floor. (1)

Behind the chapel is a small room that gives access to the campanile. (2)

Location:

Address: Via Labicana 95, 00184 Roma

Coordinates: [41° 53' 51"N 12° 29' 54"E](#)

Info:

Telephone: 06-77.40.021

Liturgy

Mass is celebrated, usually in the Cappella Paolina:

Weekdays 7:00, 8:00, 9:00, 10:00, 12:00, 18:00.

Sundays 7:00, 8:00, 9:00, 10:00 (solemn high Mass in Latin), 11:30, 12:15, 18:00.

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place from 9:00 to 16:30, Monday to Friday.

Confessions can be made from 7:00 to 12:00, and 15:30 to 19:00. A collegio dei elemosinieri of Dominicans has the responsibility for hearing them. The friars speak several different languages, and the basilica is one of the most important locations in Rome for both locals and pilgrims wishing to approach the Sacrament of Penance.

Vespers is celebrated in choir on weekdays at 16:15, and Sundays at 17:00.

Feast Day

The church's dedication is celebrated in the general calendar of the Catholic church with an optional memoria on 5 August.

The title of the celebration is now given as the "Dedication of the Basilica of St Mary Major". However, before 1970 the title was "Dedication of the Church of Our Lady of the Snow" in acknowledgement of the fictional foundation legend. Recommendations to change the name of the feast had been made as far back as the 18th century, but the change was

delayed owing to a wish to respect the dignity of other churches worldwide with an official dedication to Santa Maria ad Nives.

Traditionally, on this day white rose petals were dropped from the dome of the Cappella Paolina during the Mass. In recent years, these have been replaced with dahlia petals.

Artists and Architects:

Agnolo da Orvieto (17th cent), Italian painter
Agostino [Corsini](#) (1688-1772), Italian sculptor
Agostino [Masucci](#) (1691-1758), Italian painter of the late-Baroque or Rococo period
Alessandro [Algardi](#) (1598-1654), Italian high- Baroque sculptor, architect
Alessandro Cioli (16th cent), Italian stonemason
Ambrogio [Buonvicino](#) (1552-1622), Italian sculptor and stucco maker of the late-Renaissance or Mannerist period
Andrea [Lilio](#) [aka *L'Anconitano*] (1555-1642), Italian painter
Andrea Sansino (17th cent.), Italian sculptor
Antonio [Tempesta](#) [aka Tempesti] (1555-1630), Italian painter and cartographer
Arnolfo [di Cambio](#) (1240-1310), Italian architect and sculptor
Aureliano [Milani](#) (1675-1749), Italian painter of the late-Baroque period
Baldassare [Croce](#) (1558-1628), Italian painter of the late-Mannerist period
Benozzo [Gozzoli](#) di Lese (1421-1497), Italian painter of the Renaissance period
Bernardino [Ludovisi](#) (1694-1749), Italian sculptor
Camillo [Mariani](#) (1565-1611), Italian Mannerist sculptor
Carlo [Cesio](#) or Cesi (1622-1682), Italian painter and engraver of the Roman school
Carlo [Maderno](#) (1556-1629), Swiss-Italian architect [also see [here](#)]
Carlo [Marchionni](#) (1702-1786), Italian architect/sculptor
Carlo [Monaldi](#) (c.1683- c.1760), Italian sculptor (and also see [here](#))
Carlo [Rainaldi](#) (1611-1691), Italian architect of the Baroque period
Cecchino da Pietrasanta (16th cent), Italian sculptor
Cesare [Nebbia](#) (c.1536-c.1622), Italian Mannerist painter
Cosimo [Fancelli](#) (c.1620-1688), Italian sculptor of the Baroque period from Rome
Cristoforo [Stati](#) [aka da Bracciano] (1556-1619), Italian sculptor
Domenico [Corvi](#) (1721-1803), Italian painter
Domenico [Crespi](#) (or Cresti) [aka *Il Passignano*] (1559-1638), Italian painter of a late-Renaissance or Contra-Maniera (Counter-Mannerism) style
Domenico di Pace [Beccafumi](#) (1486-1551), Italian Renaissance-Mannerist painter
Domenico [Fontana](#) (1543-1607), Swiss-born Italian architect and engineer of the late Renaissance.
Domenico [Guidi](#) (1625-1701), Italian sculptor of the Baroque period
Domenico Maria [Muratori](#) (1661-1744), Italian painter of the Baroque period
Egidio [della Riviera](#) (Gillis van den Vliete) [aka *Fiammingo*] (17th cent), Flemish sculptor
Egidio Moretti (17th), Italian sculptor
Ercole [de Maria](#) (d. 1640), Italian painter of the Baroque period
Ercole [Ferrata](#) (1610-1686), Italian sculptor of the Baroque period
Ferdinando [Fuga](#) (1699-1781), Italian architect in the Baroque style
Ferdinando Sermei (17th cent), Italian painter
Ferraù [Fenzone](#), [aka *il Faenzone*] (1562-1645), Italian Mannerist painter from Faenza
Filippo [Carcani](#) [aka *Filippone*] (17th century), Italian sculptor
Filippo [della Valle](#) (1698-1768), Italian late-Baroque or early Neoclassic sculptor
Filippo [Raguzzini](#) (1690-1771), Italian architect
Filippo [Rusuti](#) (1255?-1325?), mosaics maker
Flaminio [Ponzio](#) (1560-1613), Italian architect of the Mannerist period
Flaminio [Vacca](#) or Vacchi (1538-1605), Italian sculptor
Francesco Buzio (17th cent), Italian architect and sculptor
Francesco [Caporale](#) (17th cent.), Italian sculptor
Francesco Fancelli (1624-1681), Roman sculptor
Francesco [Mancini](#) (1679-1758), Italian painter
Francesco [Mochi](#) (1580-1654), Italian early-Baroque sculptor
Francesco [Podesti](#) (1800-1895), Italian painter
Francesco [Queirolo](#) (1704-1762), Italian sculptor, from Genova

Giacomo [della Porta](#) (c.1533-1602), Italian sculptor and architect
Giacomo [Stella](#) (1545-1630), Italian painter of the late-Renaissance or Mannerist period, from Brescia
Gian Lorenzo [Bernini](#) (1598-1680), Italian Baroque sculptor and architect [also see [here](#)]
Giovanni Angelo [Canini](#) (1609-1666), Italian painter and engraver of the Baroque period
Giovanni Antonio [Bazzi](#) [aka *Il Sodoma*] (1477-1549), Italian Renaissance painter
Giovanni Antonio [Paracca](#) [aka *Il Valsoldo*] (1546-1597), Italian sculptor from Valsoldo
Giovanni [Baglione](#) [aka *il Sordo del Barozzo*] (1566-1643), Italian Late Mannerist and Early Baroque painter
Giovanni Battista [Crescenzi](#) (1577-1635), Italian painter and architect of the early-Baroque period
Giovanni Battista [della Porta](#) (ca.1542-1597), Italian sculptor
Giovanni Battista Ledoux (18th cent), Italian sculptor
Giovanni Battista [Maini](#) (1690-1752), Italian sculptor of the Late-Baroque period
Giovanni Battista Pozzo the Elder (1560-1588), Italian painter
Giovanni Battista [Ricci](#) [aka *da Novara*] (c.1537-1627), Italian painter
Giovanni [di Cosma](#) (early 14th cent), Italian architect / mosaic artist
Giovanni [Micocca](#) (1763-1825), Italian painter
Girolamo [Lucenti](#) (1627-1692), Italian sculptor of the Baroque period
Girolamo [Rainaldi](#) (1570-1655), Italian Mannerist architect
Girolamo [Siciolante](#) da Sermoneta (1521-c.1580), Italian Mannerist painter
Giuliano [da Sangallo](#) (c. 1443-1516), Italian architect of the High Renaissance
Giuliano [Finelli](#) (1601-1653), Italian sculptor of the Baroque period from Tuscany
Giuseppe [Cesari](#) [aka *Cavaliere d'Arpino*] (1568-1640), Italian Mannerist painter
Giuseppe [de Fabris](#) (1790-1860), Italian sculptor of the Neoclassic period
Giuseppe [Lironi](#) (d. 1746), Italian sculptor
Giuseppe Peroni (b. 1627), Italian sculptor
Giuseppe [Puglia](#) [*del Bastaro*] (1600-1636), Italian painter
Giuseppe Spagna (17th cent), Italian sculptor
Giuseppe [Valadier](#) (1762-1839), Italian architect and designer, sculptor, urban planner and archeologist, a chief exponent of Neoclassicism in Italy
Gregorio de Rossi (17th cent), Italian sculptor, bronze castor
Guglielmo [della Porta](#) (c. 1500-1577), Italian architect and sculptor of the late-Renaissance or Mannerist period
Guidetto [Guidetti](#) (d. 1564), Italian architect
Guido Galli (1873-1956), Italian sculptor
Guido [Reni](#) (1575-1642), Italian painter of high-Baroque
Guillaume [Berthelot](#) (1580-1648), French sculptor
Hendrik [van der Broeck](#) [aka *Arrigo Fiammingo*] (1530-1597), Flemish painter of the late-Renaissance or Mannerist period
Ignazio [Jacometti](#) (1819-1883), Italian sculptor
Ippolito [Buzzi](#), [or Buzio] (1562-1634) Italian sculptor
Isaia Ganti [da Pisa](#) (1410-1464), Italian sculptor
Jacopo [Torriti](#) (13th century), Italian mosaicmaker and a Franciscan monk
János “Giovanni” [Hajnal](#) (1913-2010), Master glassmaker from Budapest (Stained glass and mosaics)
Lattanzio [Mainardi](#) (17th cent), Italian painter of the late-Renaissance or Mannerist period
Leon Battista [Alberti](#) (1404-1472), an Italian humanist author, artist, architect, poet, priest, linguist, philosopher and cryptographer
Leonardo [Sormani](#) (ca. 1550-1590), Italian sculptor
Lodovico del [Duca](#) (c. 1520-1604), Italian sculptor
Ludovico [Gimignani](#) (1643-1697), Italian painter during the Baroque period
Ludovico [Cardi](#) [aka *Cigoli*] (1559-1613), Italian painter and architect of the late Mannerist and early Baroque period
Lodovico [Pogliaghi](#) (1857-1950), Italian painter, sculptor and decorator
Ludovico Scalzo (16th cent), Italian sculptor
Luigi [Capponi](#) (1445-1515), Italian sculptor
Luigi Enzo [Mattei](#) (b. 1945), Italian sculptor
Luigi [Fontana](#) (1827-1908), Italian sculptor, painter, stuccoes and architect
Luigi [Primo](#) [aka *Louis Cousin* or *Luigi Gentile da Bruxelles*], (1605-1667), Flemish painter of the

Baroque period
 Martino [Longhi](#) the Elder (1534-1591), Italian architect
 Michelangelo di Lodovico [Buonarroti](#) Simoni [aka Michelangelo] (1475-1564), Italian sculptor, painter, architect, poet, and engineer of the High Renaissance who exerted an unparalleled influence on the development of Western art
 Mino [da Fiesole](#) (c.1429-1484), Italian sculptor of the early Renaissance period
 Mino [del Reame](#) (15th cent), Italian (Neapolitan) Renaissance sculptor
 Nicolas [Cordier](#) (Niccolò Cordieri) [aka *il Franciosino*] (1567-1612), French sculptor of late Mannerism
 Nicolas [Mostaert](#) [aka *Nicolò Pippi D'Arras*] (1578-1604), Flemish sculptor from Arras
 Orazio Censore († 1622), sculptor, bronze founder
 Orazio Lomi [Gentileschi](#) (1563-1639), Italian late-Mannerist/early-Baroque painter
 Paolo [Sanquirico](#) (1565-1630), Italian sculptor and medallist
 Paris [Nogari](#) [aka *Romano*] (1536-1601), Italian painter of the Renaissance period
 Paul [Brill](#) (1554-1626), Flemish Baroque painter
 Pieter Antoon [von Verschaffelt](#) (1710-1793), Flemish sculptor and architect from Ghent
 Pietro [Bernini](#) (1562-1629), Italian sculptor
 Pietro [Bracci](#) (1700-1773), Italian sculptor of the Late Baroque
 Pietro Paolo [Olivieri](#) (1551-1599), Italian sculptor and architect
 Placido [Costanzi](#) (1702-1759), Italian painter of the late-Baroque period.
 Pompeo [Batoni](#) (1708-1787), Italian painter
 Pompeo [Ferrucci](#) (1565-1637), Italian sculptor
 Pompeo [Targone](#) (1575-1630), Italian goldsmith
 Prospero [Antichi](#) [aka *il Bresciano*], (c. 1555/1565-1592), Italian sculptor
 René-Michel [Slodtz](#) [aka *Michelangelo Slodtz*] (1705-1764), French sculptor from Paris
 Salvatore Fontana (17th cent), Italian painter
 Scipione [Pulzone](#) of Gaeta, [aka *il Gaetano*] (1550-1598), Italian late Renaissance-Mannerist painter
 Sebastiano [Ceccarini](#) (1703-1783), Italian Baroque painter
 Sebastiano Torrigiani (1573-1596), Italian sculptor
 Silla [Longhi](#) da Veggiù (c.1550-1617), Italian sculptor
 Stefano [Maderno](#) (1576-1636), Italian late-Renaissance sculptor and stuccoist from Bissone
 Stefano [Pozzi](#) (1707?-1768), Italian painter, designer, draughtsman and decorator
 Tiberio [Calcagni](#) (1532-1565), Italian architect and sculptor
 Ventura [Salimbeni](#) (1557-1613), Italian painter from Siena
 Virginio [Vespignani](#) (1808-1882), Italian architect

Burials and Memorials:

St. [Matthias](#)

St. [Jerome](#) {Eusebius Hieronymus Sophronius} (346-420)

Pope [Honorius III](#) {[Cencio](#) SAVELLI} (d. 1227)

Pope [Nicholas IV](#) {Girolamo [MASCI](#), O.F.M., (1227-1292)}

Buried in simple tomb in the choir. In 1574, Cardinal Felice Peretti Montalto, O.F.M.Conv., future Pope Sixtus V, erected in that basilica a beautiful monument in his memory, work of Domenico Fontana.

Pope St. [Pius V](#) {Michele [GHISLIERI](#), O.P., (1504-1572)}

Pope Sixtus V built a funeral monument in his honor in the chapel of SS. Sacramento

Pope [Sixtus V](#) {Felice Cardinal [PERETTI MONTALTO](#), O.F.M. Conv., (1521-1590)}

Buried in the chapel of Presepe, which he had founded

Pope [Clement VIII](#) {Ippolito [ALDOBRANDINI](#), seniore, (1536-1605)}

Buried in the Paoline Chapel

Pope [Paul V](#) {Camillo [BORGHESE](#), (1552-1621)}

Buried in the Borghese chapel

Pope [Clement IX](#) {Giulio [Rospigliosi](#) (1600-1667)}

Pope [Francis](#) {Jorge Mario Bergoglio (1936-2025)}

Stefano di Cardinal [CECCANO](#), O.Cist., (?-1227)

Pietro Cardinal [CAPOCCI](#), (ca. 1200-1259)

Buried in the chapel of S. Barbara, which he had built

Pietro Cardinal [COLONNA](#), (ca. 1260-1326)

Buried next to the tomb of Pope Nicholas IV

Nicola Cardinal [CAPOCCI](#), (?-1368) {also see [here](#)}

Stefano Cardinal [COLONNA](#), (died c.1379)

Buried in the tomb of his family in the chapel of the Nativity

Agapito Cardinal [COLONNA](#), (died 1380)

Buried under the pavement before the main altar, at the feet of his father, Pietro Colonna.

Bartolomeo Cardinal [MEZZAVACCA](#), (c.1350-1396)

Stefano Cardinal [PALOSIO](#), (died 1396)

Antonio Cardinal [ARCIONI](#), (died 1405)

Buried near the altar dedicated to S. Girolamo

Francesco pseudocardinal [LANDO](#), (died 1427)

Buried in a chapel that he had built

Antonio Cardinal [CASINI](#), (died 1439)

Philippe Cardinal de [LÉVIS](#), (1435-1475) {also see [here](#)}

Buried over the Holy Door

His brother Eustache, his successor in the see of Arles, was buried in the same tomb in 1489.

Pietro Cardinal [ISVALIES](#), (died 1511) {also see [here](#)}

Leonardo Cardinal [GROSSO DELLA ROVERE](#), (1464-1520) {also see [here](#)}

Paolo Emilio Cardinal [CESI](#), (1481-1537) {also see [here](#)}

Buried in the chapel of his family

Marcello Cardinal [CRESCENZI](#), (1500-1552) {also see [here](#)}

Guido Ascanio Cardinal [SFORZA DI SANTA FIORA](#), (1518-1564) {also see [here](#)}

Buried in the chapel of his family

Federico Cardinal [CESI](#), (1500-1565) {also see [here](#)}

Buried in his family's chapel

Pier Francesco Cardinal [FERRERO](#), (1510-1566) {also see [here](#)}

Alessandro Cardinal [SFORZA](#), (1534-1581) {also see [here](#)}

Buried in the sepulcher of his family

Guido Luca Cardinal [FERRERO](#), (1537-1585) {also see [here](#)}

Filippo Cardinal [BONCOMPAGNI](#), (1548-1586)

Decio Cardinal [AZZOLINI](#), seniore, (1549-1587)

Francisco Cardinal de [TOLEDO HERRERA](#), S.J., (1532-1596) {also see [here](#)}

Domenico Cardinal [PINELLI](#), seniore, (1541-1611)

Buried in the tomb he had prepared in front of the Confessione

Mariano Cardinal [PIERBENEDETTI](#), (1538-1611)

Buried in the chapel of the Presepe

Bartolomeo Cardinal [CESI](#), (1566-1621)

Buried in his family's tomb

Alessandro Cardinal [DAMASCENI PERETTI](#), (1571-1623) {also see [here](#)}

Buried in the chapel of the Santo Presepio , Holy Crib

Andrea Cardinal [BARONI PERETTI](#), (1572-1629)

Buried in the Chapel del Presepe, at the feet of the tomb of Pope Sixtus V

Scipione Cardinal [CAFFARELLI-BORGHESE](#), (1576-1633) {also see [here](#)}

Buried in the tomb of his family

Pietro Maria Cardinal [BORGHESE](#), (1599-1642) {also see [here](#)}

Buried in the tomb of his ancestor in the Borghese Chapel

Francesco Cardinal [CENNINI DE' SALAMANDRI](#), (1566-1645) {also see [here](#)}

Buried at the foot of the tomb of Pope Pius V in the chapel Paolina

Francesco Cardinal [PERETTI DI MONTALTO](#), (1595-1655) {also see [here](#)}

Buried in the chapel of Sixtus V

Federico Cardinal [SFORZA](#), (1603-1676) {also see [here](#)}

Buried in the chapel of his family

Giacomo Filippo Cardinal [NINI](#), (1629-1680)

Buried in the tomb of the canons

Mario Cardinal [ALBERIZZI](#), (1609-1680)

Buried in the chapel of Beata Vergine Maria

Giacomo Cardinal [ROSPIGLIOSI](#), (1628-1684)

Buried in the tomb of the canons

Felice Cardinal [ROSPIGLIOSI](#), (1639-1688)

Buried in the tomb of the canons

Giambattista Cardinal [PATRIZI](#), (1658-1727)

His heart was deposited in the chapel of his family
Francesco Scipione Maria Cardinal [BORGHESE](#), (1697-1759)

Buried in his family's tomb in the chapel Borghese
Gian Francesco Cardinal [ALBANI](#), (1720-1803)

Buried in the tomb of the canons
Scipione Cardinal [BORGHESE](#), (1734-1782) [also see [here](#)]
Buried in the Borghese Chapel
Aide and favorite nephew of P. Paul V
Great patron of the arts, discoverer of Bernini
Ugo Cardinal [POLETTI](#), (1914-1997) [also see [here](#)]

Archbishop Eustache de Lévis (d. 1485)
Buried in his brother's tomb

Pietro Colonna
<father of Cardinal Agapito COLONNA>

Girolano [Muzian](#) (1532-1592)
Mannerist painter

Gian Lorenzo [Bernini](#) (1598-1680)
Artist, sculptor, he is considered to be the founder of the Baroque style

Pauline [Borghese](#) (1780-1825)
Sister of Napoleon Bonaparte
Buried in Cappella Paolina crypt

Clement Merlini

Antonio Maria Traversi

Titular Latin Patriarch of Constantinople at the court of Pope Gregory XVI

Bartolomeo [Sacchi](#) (1421-1481)
Italian Renaissance humanist writer and gastronomist

Links and References:

- (1) [Roman Churches Wiki](#)
 - (2) [Annas Rome Guide](#) (Danish)
 - (3) "Michelangelo's final chapel is a revelation", article timesonline web site, dtd November 27, 2004
 - (4) [Basilica's website](#)
 - (5) [Column of Peace](#) (in Italian)
 - (6) [The Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church](#) web site by Salvador Miranda
 - (7) [Article on the crib figures](#)
-
- (a) Gill, Meredith J.; "Where the Danger Was Greatest": A Gallic Legacy in Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome; *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 59. Bd., H. 4 (1996). pp 498-522 (jstor 1482889)
 - (b) Krautheimer, Richard; "Recent Publications on S. Maria Maggiore in Rome"; *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (Jul. - Sep., 1942), pp. 373-379 (jstor 499778)
 - (c) Gardner, Julian; "Pope Nicholas IV and the Decoration of Santa Maria Maggiore"; *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 36. Bd., H. 1 (1973), pp. 1-50 (jstor 1481871)
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- (j) Wittkower, Rudolf, revised by Joseph Connor and Jennifer Montagu; ART AND ARCHITECTURE IN ITALY 1600-1750, 3 Vols.; Yale University Press; 1999
- (k) Hughes, Robert; Rome: A Cultural, Visual, and Personal History; Vintage Books; 2012
- (m) Ostrow, Steven F.; "Giovanni Angelo Frumenti and his tomb in S. Maria Maggiore: a proposed new work by Gian Lorenzo Bernini"; *The Burlington Magazine*; July 2016
- (n) News announcement from Vatican News Service.

Other related links:

[Official diocesan web-page](#)

[Italian Wikipedia](#) page

[More pictures of the basilica](#) at Wikimedia Commons.

[Museum website](#)

[Virtual Tour of the Basilica and Loggia](#) (on the basilica's website)

"De Alvaiis" gallery on Flickr - [Exterior](#)

"De Alvaiis" gallery on Flickr - [Loggia](#)

"De Alvaiis" gallery on Flickr - [Apse](#)

"De Alvaiis" gallery on Flickr - [Interior](#)

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[Info.roma](#) web-page

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[Roma SPQR](#) web-page

"[Romasegreta](#)" web-page

[Medioevo.roma](#) web-page

[Blog](#) by David Macchi

[Description of nave mosaics](#) on Gliscritti (in Italian)

"[World Gallery of Art](#)" gallery of mosaics

[Youtube video](#) by Smarthistory