



WELCOME TO

THE CHURCH OF OUR LADY



WELCOME TO THE CHURCH OF OUR LADY IN AARHUS

The Church of Our Lady consists of three very different spaces:

- THE 11th Century CRYPT CHURCH, the oldest vaulted stone church in Scandinavia and the oldest building in Aarhus.
- THE CHURCH OF OUR LADY (formerly St. Nicholas' Church), the first cathedral in Aarhus.
- THE MONASTERY, a Dominican chapter house and reception room for visitors to the monastery.

Combined, the three spaces illustrate a long history tracing back to the Viking age, with elements of all stylistic phases of Medieval church architecture. On these grounds, Aarhus has one of its oldest and most beautiful cultural monuments.



THE CRYPT CHURCH

THE CRYPT CHURCH

- the oldest vaulted stone church in Scandinavia

The Crypt Church (app. 1060) is Scandinavia's oldest stone church and the oldest building in Aarhus. It was built by Bishop Christian as a Trinity church – i.e. a church for the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Trinity is mirrored in the three aisles and three apses, each of which once had its own altar.

The church is built of tufa and boulders. The walls and pillars have been covered by a layer of plaster for many years yet still reveal faint remnants of frescos. Benches built into the side walls allowed some of the congregation to be seated, while some simply stood on the floor.

The Crypt Church was discovered under the floor in the Church of Our Lady during a comprehensive restoration in 1955. It is uncertain when the Crypt Church was abandoned and filled with rubble, but discoveries indicate that it had been used as a church in the 1300s. Some time after that it was used by the Dominicans as a storeroom for fire-wood, and later still as a burial ground.

THE ÅBY-CRUCIFIX in the Crypt Church is a replica of the oldest crucifix found in Denmark. The original Åby-crucifix (app. 1050-1100) was found in the Åby Church a few miles from the center of Aarhus and is now kept at Denmark's National Museum in Copenhagen. It is a typical Roman crucifix with Jesus depicted in a uniquely Scandinavian fashion – dressed as a prince with a Viking-style moustache. He is portrayed as a strong king who prevailed over death by being crucified. A king that powerful reminded the Vikings of the Nordic warrior God Thor.



THE CRYPT CHURCH WAS DISCOVERED IN 1955



THE ÅBY-CRUCIFUX

THE CHURCH OF OUR LADY (formerly St. Nicholas' Church)

- from cathedral to monastery

Around the year 1080, St. Nicholas' Church, the first cathedral in Aarhus, was built and named after the patron saint of seafaring people. It was constructed on top of the Crypt Church which then functioned as a sanctuary underneath the cathedral.

It lost its status as a cathedral when St. Clement's Church (the current Cathedral of Aarhus) was built in the 1200s. Around 1240 the Dominican monks arrived in Aarhus. They took over St. Nicholas' Church, rebuilt the old tufa cathedral and turned it into a gothic building made of large medieval bricks. The Northern wall of the Church of Our Lady is the oldest wall in the building and consists partly of tufa from the original cathedral, which can be seen from the Monastery Garden.

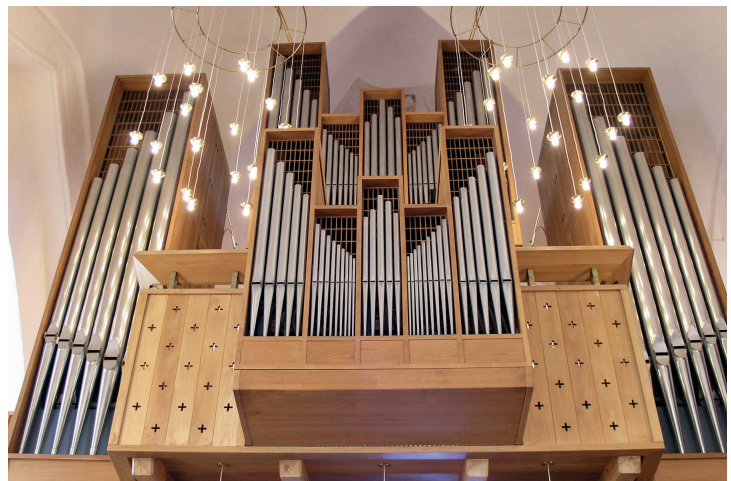
During the Middle Ages the monks expanded the church. Around 1250 the chancel was enlarged so that the many monks could gather there during services. The main aisle dates from around 1350, the side aisle from approximately 1450 and the tower from about 1500. During the Reformation the monks had to leave the monastery. Shortly after this the church was renamed the Church of Our Lady and became a parish church.

THE ALTARPIECE (app. 1525-30) is a winged altarpiece from the studio of Danish-German Claus Berg, one of the most significant wood carvers of the late Middle Ages. His style can be described as baroque-gothic and his composition and details are known for their dramatic motion. The centerpiece is a typical medieval depiction of a suffering Christ on the cross. On the open wings we see the twelve apostles, three famous Dominican monks and St. Nicholas. During Lent the wings of the altarpiece are closed to cover the centerpiece, revealing a series of paintings of Christ, a number of biblical persons and Catholic saints.

THE FRIEZE OF COATS OF ARMS (1300s) is the only one of its kind in all of Jutland. The major part of it was painted in the 1300s but a few of the insignias are from the beginning of the 1500s. The frieze represents a registry of the parishioners who made contributions to the Dominican Monastery. The coat of arms with the three lions and hearts behind the altarpiece has been identified as representing Valdemar IV Atterdag (early 1300s). Later the motif became the coat of arms of Denmark and can still be found on Danish 10 and 20 kroner coins as well as on the Queen's flag.



THE ORGAN (1962) was built with 36 voices by the organ master Troels Krohn from Frederiksborg Orgelbyggeri near Copenhagen. It was restored in 1978 and again in 1991 by the experienced organ builders Marcussen & Søn and expanded to 50 voices.





THE ALTARPIECE - details



THE PULPIT (app. 1598) consists of six panels depicting the four evangelists plus the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ.

THE BAPTISMAL FONT (app. 1650-1680) is made of cast iron with a basin made of copper ore.



THE MEMORIAL TABLETS for people buried in the church are from the 1600s and the first half of the 1700s. They depict or describe mayors, merchants and other significant citizens of Aarhus and their families. Many of these were buried under the church floor, and when the Crypt Church was excavated in 1956 traces of a burial site were found.



MONASTERY YARD AND MONASTERY

- *before and after the Reformation*

Shortly after the Dominicans took over St. Nicholas' Church the construction of three monastery wings was begun, and now the Church of Our Lady represents a fourth, or southern wing of the monastery. It is one of the best-preserved monastery complexes in Denmark. Here the mendicants lived an ascetic life. Around the year 1530 the Reformation forced the monks to leave the monastery. In 1541 King Christian III decided that the monastery was to be used as a hospital for the ill and poor. Today the monastery has been turned into apartments for seniors over 60.

THE MONASTERY CHURCH is from the end of the 1300s. It has served as a chapter house for the monks and as a reception room for their guests. The frescos are from 1517 and were painted over during the Reformation. The church room was consecrated as a hospital church in 1888. In 1967 the church council of the Church of Our Lady took over the little church room, which was completely restored in the year 2000. Today the Monastery Church is open for all and is used for services, baptisms and weddings.

THE GLASS MOSAIC (from 2000) was made by the renowned Danish artist Per Kirkeby who has created works for a number of Danish churches. In his works, Kirkeby often uses basic religious symbols like the tree, for instance. The characteristically round red and black figures of the mosaic resemble tree stumps, and the two vertical beams resemble fallen logs. Sometimes a downed tree appears in the Bible as a symbol of death.

If the two beams are moved a bit they can form

a cross. The round figures might also resemble blood cells and thus make an association with the ritual of the Eucharist. Therefore thoughts of basic Christian themes like death and resurrection, sin and forgiveness seem natural.



GLASS MOSAIC WINDOW by Per Kirkeby



THE MONASTERY CHURCH



THE MONASTERY YARD

TIMELINE



- 930: King Frode's stave church is built. It is the first church in Aarhus described in old records. It burns down in 1051.
- 1060: The Crypt Church is built in the same place as the stave church.
- 1080: St. Nicholas' Church (first cathedral of Aarhus) is built on top of the Crypt Church, which functioned as a sanctuary.
- 1201-1221: St. Nicolas' becomes a parish church when St. Clement's Church (now the Cathedral of Aarhus) is built.
- 1239-1246: The Dominicans take over St. Nicholas' and rebuild the church.
- 1246-1541: The Dominicans expand the church, build a monastery and a yard. At some point the Crypt Church is filled with rubble and soil.
- 1530: The Dominicans leave Aarhus.
- 1541: The king decides that the monastery should be turned into a hospital for the sick and poor. St. Nicolas' is renamed the Church of Our Lady and becomes a parish church.
- 1856: The Monastery of Our Lady is turned into apartments for the elderly.
- 1888: The former Dominican chapter house and reception room is turned into a chapel for the residents at the monastery. It later receives the name The Monastery Church.
- 1955: The Crypt Church is rediscovered in connection with a thorough renovation of the Church of Our Lady.
- 1957: The Crypt Church is reopened.

