

St. John's Church



in Luckenwalde



Origins and Changes

In the beginning there was the Zinna monastery. Founded in 1170, the monastery was the mother of all other churches in the spiritual, cultural and administrative area. Thus St. John's Church in Luckenwalde is probably also a work of the Cistercians from Zinna.

Since there are no written sources about the origin and older times of the church, the building itself must tell its story. The irregularly set fieldstones of the lower wall layers, which extend above the centre of the windows, reveal that the church was originally a simple hall church with an indented choir. Later, probably in the second half of the 15th century, the church was provided with cross vaults and the necessary support pillars. Dark red brick were used for this, as is customary in monasteries.



Inside, a row of four massive octagonal columns divides the hall into two naves - an unusual floor plan that is more suitable for liturgical celebrations than for sermon services.

Seen from the outside, originally, only one side of the church seems to have been intended to be seen/recognized: The east side facing the thoroughfare. Here stood out a simple stepped gable, decorated with a so-called German band. Later a five-sided chancel with a star vault was placed in front of it. The towerless rear side in the west, on the other hand, presented itself as a completely unadorned fieldstone wall with a hipped roof over it. Behind it, the town ended at that time; there was still no way across the River Nuthe in this direction.

The interior of the church was already completed about 1500, definitely before the Reformation. Back then the church interior was richly painted. Sadly those paintings have been incompletely preserved.

The church got its final exterior form at the beginning of the 20th century: In 1902, it was extended to the west and the west gable was erected. This gable was clearly based on the ornamental model of the old two-storey chapel in the south.

Wall and Ceiling Painting

In 1901, the medieval wall and ceiling paintings were only discovered under a coat of paint from a later period. They depict St Catherine on the north wall, St Sebastian on the eastern pillar, the family tree of Christ on the left side of the triumphal arch (starting from the lion of Judah via David's father Isai/Jesse to the cross), the symbols of the Evangelists



and the face of Christ on Veronica's face-cloth in the chancel above the windows, as well as various coats of arms. Some of them are known, others obviously represent guild marks, other ones are still awaiting interpretation. In particular, it is not clear what significance the coats of arms had in the church as a whole.

The pictures in the vault caps, which date from the late Middle Ages, seem mysterious to us today: They depict the various manifestations of sin and their effects. The plants each mark the human organs with which they sin – sin is painted to grow out of them. Martin Luther said that we sin "in thought, word and deed", that is: with our head, mouth and hand or even fist. The eye might also sin: In medieval symbolism, the eye stands for man's lust. A young blond woman is shown to sin with all of her body, either actively or passively when unintentionally becoming the object of male's desire. A fool's cap implies how sin can make people foolish to the point of losing control. Some faces lost their human faces. They wear animal disgraceful masks.



A skull with an hourglass admonishes: *Memento mori* - remember that you must die. But it also points to the Bible's verse that "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life". Sin is deadly: it destroys relationships among people as well as the relationship with God as the source of life and man's relationship with himself. Looking up, everyone should examine him/herself critically and ask him/herself: "Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?"

(Romans 7:24)

The spectator is now invited to take the next step forward to the altar. There, by virtue of divine forgiveness, he may leave sin and its consequence, death, behind to receive life anew.

Chancel and Altar

Above the altar, heaven opens up. Here the spectator is surrounded by the flowers and plants of paradise. Here the Supper of Christ gives the gift of life. Before you on the altar you see saints who have already reached their destination before you. Above the path to the altar you can see the crucified Christ. He atoned for man's sin and at the same time carried it away from the world thus taking its deadly power. "I am the gate," says Jesus Christ (John 10:9), "whoever enters through me will be saved."



Since the penultimate renovation in 1961, five late medieval wooden sculptures have been standing in a new altar shrine. From right to left: John the Baptist as the church's namesake, Margarethe, Mary with the Child, Barbara and Peter. In old photographs he can still be seen holding the key. "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven", Jesus says to Peter (Matthew 16:19). Unfortunately, the key has been lost, but Peter can be recognised by his typical forelock.

Baptismal Font

The chalice-shaped baptismal font from the late Middle Ages symbolically represents the church's baptismal doctrine. The foundation is formed by the symbols of the four evangelists Matthew (angel), Mark (lion), Luke (bull) and John (eagle). The same symbols can also be found in the medallions above the side windows of the chancel. The Gospels form the foundation of the Christian faith and the Church, whose rite of entry is baptism.



From the Middle Ages to modern times, the baptism of newborn children was a regular custom. The child to be baptised was completely immersed in water and lifted out. The double meaning of water as a death-bringing and life-giving element plays a role here. By immersion, the person is given over to the crucified and dying Christ. By being lifted out, he shares the life of the Risen One – as explained by the Apostle Paul.

In the baptismal font, this idea is indicated by the octagonal shape of the chalice. Eight biblical people, were saved from the deadly Flood: Noah with his wife and their three sons with their wives. Incidentally, there are baptismal chapels from the early Middle Ages with an octagonal floor plan in numerous other places.

The upper edge of the baptismal font, decorated with flowers, points to the infinity of God - the circle has no beginning and no end. In baptism, the person is immersed in the eternity of God and thereby destined for eternal life.

The baptismal font, made of sandstone, was damaged at some point and unprofessionally patched. The "fountain" has not been tight ever since. Nowadays, a flat silver-plated bowl, donated in 1861, is sufficient for both infant and adult baptisms. In the Protestant Church, immersion has been replaced by wetting with water.

Triumphal Cross and Memorial

With his two works of art, the wood sculptor Hermann Lohrisch (Kleinmachnow) has built a bridge from the origins of Christianity to the current church. A triumphal cross hovers high above the steps to the chancel.

On the north side of the church is a memorial to the victims of war and violence. (1964) Inmates of the prisoner-of-war camp 'Stalag III A' as well as war victims among the soldiers and the civilian population are depicted; they all stand under the blessing Christ. This sculpture bears witness to the peace that Christ offers and the church has vowed to return to.



Organ

The organ, an instrument built by the company Eule (Bautzen) in 1966, was completely overhauled for its 30th anniversary. It got equipped with an additional stop in the main work, which was actually already planned when the organ was built. The organ was last overhauled in 2009.



Church and Market Tower

The origin of the separate tower, which has been serving the church as a bell tower since 1485, is unclear. Originally it won't have belonged to the church. It is irregularly built of fieldstones and could have been built around the same time as the church. However, the buildings have no spatial relation to each other; the church stands in an east-west direction and the tower is oriented towards the square of the market. So it is probably rightly called the "market tower".

In 1995, the tower was restored and has since presented itself as a worthy landmark of the city of Luckenwalde. The church was ceremoniously reopened on Reformation Day in 2009 after two years of extensive external and internal renovation.



Forty metres above the city, the weather vane on the tower shows the Lamb of God bearing the sin of the world. With this word, John the Baptist had pointed to Jesus Christ; with the attribute of the lamb, John is also depicted on the altar. Thus the flag establishes a symbolic relationship between the massive campanile and the church.

Text by Detlev Riemer

Please consider donating:

Payee:	Ev. Kirchenkreisverband Süd
Bank:	Berliner Sparkasse
IBAN:	DE44 1005 0000 4955 1904 27
BIC:	BELADEBEXXX
Purpose of Payment	„Johanniskirche Luckenwalde“

Imprint:

Ev. Kirchengemeinde Luckenwalde, the church board

Markt 13, 14943 Luckenwalde, 03371 / 610 925

www.evkirche-luckenwalde.de

Translation: Fam. von Faber + Steinker

Layout: Christian von Faber, June 2021