ENGLISH

INFORMATION BOOKLETS

Basílica Sagrada Família

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Basílica Sagrada Família

Crypt, apse façade and Chapel of the Assumption

Thanks to Gaudí, the neo-Gothic architecture in the original project for the Sagrada Família has become modern architecture, admired worldwide.



The keystone on the central vault of the crypt, which represents the Annunciation, stands out for its beauty and symbolism.

The crypt

Although construction on the crypt was already under way when Gaudí joined the Sagrada Família, he was able to contribute solutions that demonstrate his innovative nature.



View of the whole crypt, after the latest restoration.

Following tradition, architect Francisco de Paula del Villar included a semicircular crypt under the apse in his project for the Temple. It was the first part of the Temple to be built, in 1882, 10 metres below ground level.
When Gaudí took over the project, he respected these plans and kept the neo-Gothic style Villar had designed. He did make some changes but they didn't affect the structure. Nevertheless, he changed the standard Gothic formulas and replaced the stairs that were to connect the Temple floor and the crypt with two spiral staircases, one on either side of the semicircle, leading into the crypt and connecting the Basilica's various triforiums and vaults. At the base of these staircases, Gaudí created two sacristies for the religious celebrations in the crypt.
Other significant changes Gaudí implemented were to dig out the soil around the outer wall of the crypt to prevent damp and allow light to shine in from the Temple and from outside. He achieved this mainly with stained-glass windows in the chapels that look onto the trench and, then, by raising the vault that covered the crypt and putting in windows to let light in.



Keystone on the central vault of the crypt, with the relief of the Annunciation.

Symbolic and decorative elements
Gaudí's other interventions focused on decorative and symbolic elements. So, he decorated the capitals of the columns with nature motifs and the keystones of vaults in the crypt chapels feature reliefs alluding to the saints they represent. The keystone on the central vault of this space is particularly noteworthy, featuring a polychrome relief by sculptor Joan Flotats, which stands out for its beauty and symbolism, and represents the Annunciation. Also noteworthy is the Roman mosaic on the floor of the crypt, with its grapes and grape leaves as symbols of the Eucharist and birds eating the grapes.

In the crypt, several pieces of religious furniture that Gaudí designed specially for the Temple stand out.

Some of the elements that stand out in the crypt are the various pieces of religious furniture that Gaudí designed and are currently found both in the crypt and the Liturgical path, in the cloister of Our Lady of Dolours and the main floor of the western sacristy. These pieces were done in wood and wrought iron, among other metals. Particularly noteworthy are the presbytery chairs, pews, Gospel lectern, tenebrae hearse, Easter candlestick, confessionals, two wardrobes for the sacristy and various crosses and candelabra.

Completion of the crypt
Construction of the crypt finished in 1889, although mass had been held there since the completion of the Chapel of Saint Joseph in 1885.



Lectern of the Gospel designed by Gaudí.

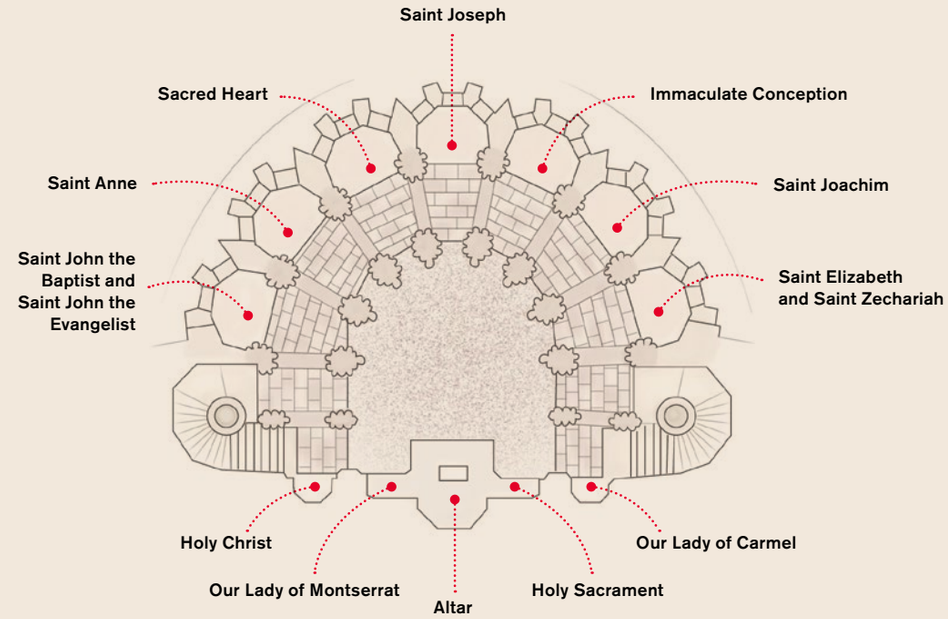


Altarpiece of the Holy Family, which presides over the crypt altar.

Crypt chapels

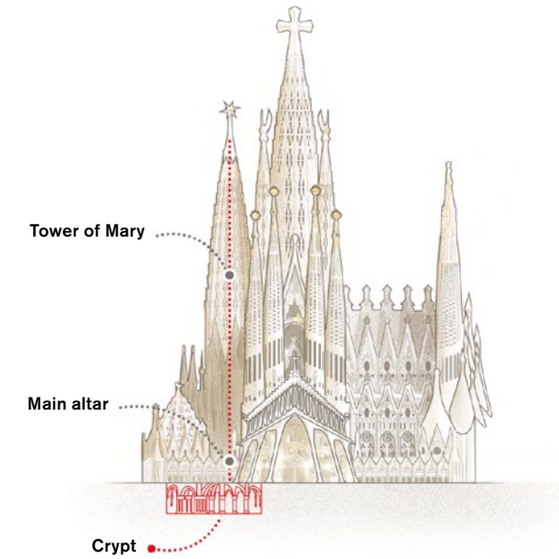
The configuration of the spaces in the crypt, as Gaudí designed it, is as follows: On the straight side of the semicircular floor plan, 30 x 40 metres, there are five chapels. The one in the centre has an altar, with a representation of the Holy Family, an altarpiece that sculptor Josep Llimona made for the chapel of prayer at Casa Batlló, with a frame designed by Gaudí. The altarpiece features a Holy Christ by sculptor Mani, made according to Gaudí's instructions. On one side of the altar, there is a chapel dedicated to the Holy Sacrament, next to which is the Chapel of Our Lady of Carmel, where Gaudí is interred, as he was devoted to her. And, on the other side is the Chapel of Our Lady of Montserrat and that of the Holy Christ, with the tomb of Josep M. Bocabella.
The seven chapels Gaudí put on the semicircular part of the crypt are dedicated to Jesus' family members. The central chapel is just in front of the altar and is dedicated to Saint Joseph. Facing this chapel, to the right we have those dedicated to the Immaculate Conception, Saint Joachim, and Saint Elizabeth and Saint Zechariah. To the left, we have the chapels of the Sacred Heart, Saint Anne and Saint John the Baptist and Saint John the Evangelist. In front of the apse chapels, there is a wide ambulatory and in the large central space between the altar and the ambulatory, pews for the congregation.

Floor plan of the crypt



Symbolic connection

An important aspect of Gaudí's contribution to the Temple is the symbolic vertical connections he created in the building. And it is in the crypt where an imaginary line begins, joining it to the tower dedicated to Mary, which rises up above the apse, through the keystone of the crypt vault, which represents the Annunciation; to the baldachin with Christ resurrected; to the candelabrum of the Holy Spirit on the main altar of the Temple, in the apse; to the representation of God the Creator on the central vault of the apse below the tower; and to the star that crowns this tower, which shows that the central theme of this part of the Temple is the mystery of the incarnation.



Location of the crypt



The Mediterranean animals on the apse façade transform into gargoyles that channel rainwater from the Temple roof.

Part of the apse façade.

The apse façade

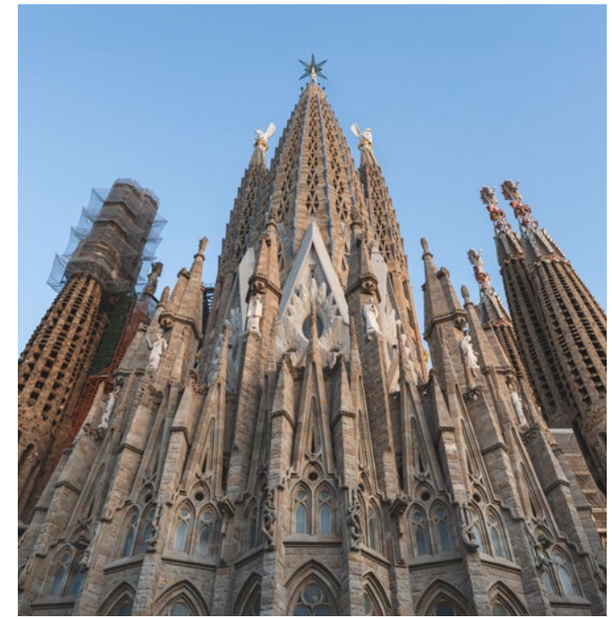
This façade is a great unknown of the Sagrada Família. And it is significant because, despite starting from the neo-Gothic architecture of the original project for the Temple, it has characteristics that are very typical of Gaudí's work.

This façade of the Sagrada Família, although not very well known, is very important both architecturally and symbolically. Built between 1890 and 1893, this façade is particularly important because it shows the transition from the neo-Gothic architecture of Francisco de Paula del Villar to Gaudí's own style, as seen in other parts of the Sagrada Família and first formulated here. Because, little by little, Gaudí began incorporating his contributions to the construction designed by the diocesan architect, and he did so in both structural and decorative elements.
It is interesting to note that, although construction traditionally begins with the foundations of a building and moves up progressively, storey by storey, Gaudí decided to turn this procedure on its head by completing one section of the Temple. This, he believed, would make it more difficult to stop construction. So, although Gaudí originally planned to begin building the whole apse after finishing its façade, he opted to turn next to the Nativity façade so that the generations that followed him could complete the works. As he didn't get to finish this façade, the apse façade is the only one that Gaudí was able to complete.

Gaudí's mark

The apse façade follows the floor plan designed by architect Villar for the Temple, which was an apse with seven apse chapels, polygonal in shape. If you look at the façade in perspective, it is clear that it isn't the standard for that time, and also that Gaudí knew the volume he wanted for the Temple as a whole, which, according to his project, would be pyramidal.
Noteworthy on this façade are the six buttresses that separate the chapels and the pointed pinnacles that are nearly 50 meters tall, crowned with plant motifs, including the wild plants that grew in the fields that once surrounded the spot where the Sagrada Família is being built, and buds on the pinnacles of the apse stairs. Each of the chapels is enclosed with three windows, also separated by buttresses and lower spires, also topped with plants. On the upper part of the tallest buttresses, Gaudí built a basement and a dais, between which he left space for images of the saints who have founded religious orders, which have already been put in place. So, there are pictures of Saint Benedict and Saint Anthony (by Manuel Cusachs), Saint Bruno, Saint Clare and Saint Bernard (by Montserrat Garcia Rius) and Saint Scholastica (by Francesc Fajula). Additionally, images of Saint Francis of Assisi (by Montserrat Garcia Rius) and Saint Teresa of Ávila (by Andrés Gallego de Montiel) have gone into the windows closest to the Nativity and Passion façades.

The apse façade is particularly important because it shows the transition from the neo-Gothic architecture of Francisco de Paula del Villar to Gaudí's own style, which he first formulated here.



Noteworthy on this façade are the six buttresses that separate the chapels and the pointed pinnacles crowned with plant motifs, including wild plants.









Symbolism of the façade
In his obsession with representing nature, Gaudí didn't forget Mediterranean fauna, especially the animals he found on the land where the Temple was being built. So, he used sea and land snails, lizards, frogs, toads and snakes as gargoyles to channel rainwater from the apse roof.

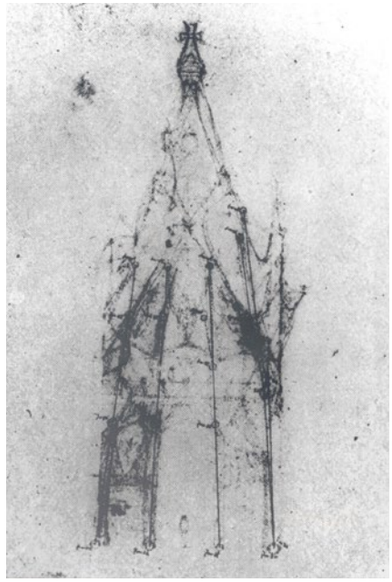
And we can't speak of the apse façade without noting that the Holy Family is also present here, as on the upper point of the ogive on the trefoil arches on each of the three windows in each apse chapels, we find the monograms of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.



Gargoyles on the apse façade, with animal motifs (above) and the initials JMJ on the three windows on one of the apse chapels (left).

The Chapel of the Assumption

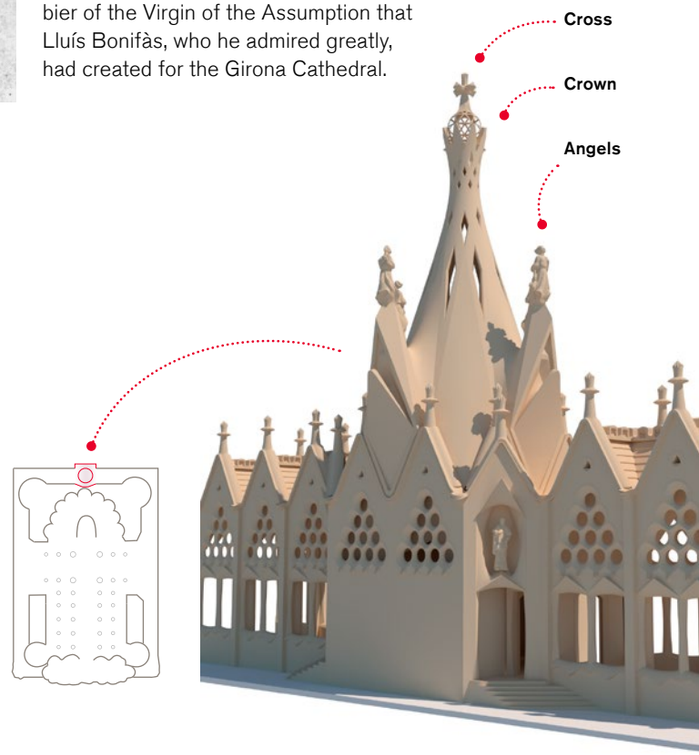
Gaudí put the Chapel of the Assumption just behind the apse. Although he began building the Temple apse, he didn't construct this chapel or the sections of the cloister on either side of it. He did, however, leave detailed plans for them.



Gaudí's sketch of the Chapel of the Assumption with the structural calculations and the current model of the project.

This chapel is located at the centre of the cloister, behind the apse. It has a square floor plan, measuring roughly ten metres on each side, and two entrances directly from the street. It will be covered with a 30-metre hyperboloid dome, topped with an imperial crown and a cross, and inside it will have a hyperbolic vault, as per the two drawings Gaudí left. For the chapel project, Gaudí drew inspiration from the shape of the bier or catafalque where the Virgin Mary is traditionally depicted as laying before ascending into heaven. So, the chapel will be like a mantle, as the architect explained to his disciples. And, to design the chapel, Gaudí drew on the bier of the Virgin of the Assumption that Lluís Bonifàs, who he admired greatly, had created for the Girona Cathedral.

For the chapel project, Gaudí drew inspiration from the shape of the bier or catafalque where the Virgin Mary is traditionally depicted as laying before ascending into heaven.



Glossary

Ambulatory Walkway that in some churches circles behind the presbytery. It was introduced in the Romanesque period to connect the main apse chapels and allow processions of pilgrims to pass through.

Apse chapel Chapel in the apse.

Buttress Pillar projecting from a wall that supports or reinforces it so it can bear the loads of a vault or an arch.

Chapel of prayer Building set aside for prayer and celebrating the Eucharist, generally. By extension, it is also a part of a home where mass can be held.

Keystone The stone in the centre of a vault that maintains the balance of the stones in the arches that comprise it.

Lantern Construction with a polygonal or cylindrical base that rises up from the point where two naves cross on a monumental building in order to bring in light and, generally, to act as a base for the dome.

Liturgical path Permanent exhibition in the section of the Basilica cloister dedicated to Our Lady of Dolours. It features a selection of liturgical items designed by Gaudí.

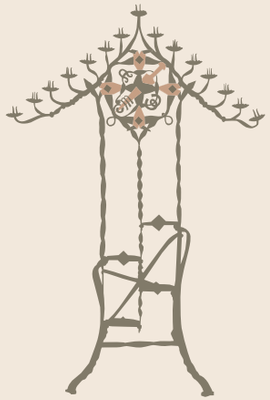
Monogram Drawing made up of two or more letters intertwined, representing a name or part of a name.

Ogive Pointed arch made up of two symmetrical curves that come together in a point.

Pinnacle Terminal architectural element that ends in a point.

Rib Moulding that sticks out from the bottom of a vault as reinforcement or decoration.

Tenebrae hearse Large candelabrum, triangular in shape, that holds fifteen candles, previously used while holding Tenebrae mass during Easter week.



Trefoil arch Arch made up of three overlapping circles.

Triforium Elevated walkway surrounding the apse in churches.

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