

Church in the Valley of Grace

## Church of Naantali





#### Naantalín 💮 seurakunta



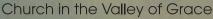
Naantali Parish

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## Church of Naantali

The Church of Naantali served originally as the church of the Catholic Bridgettine convent located on this particular site. Today, the church is the only building remaining of the medieval convent.

On 23 August 1443, the King of Sweden, Christopher of Bavaria signed an order permitting the building of a Bridgettine convent in Naantali. This date is considered the foundation day of the convent and the town of Naantali. The Convent was inaugurated by Bishop Konrad Bitz in 1462.

Painted during the inauguration ceremony, the Consecration Crosses with the face of Christ still decorate the end walls of the church.





# 'Lord, make haste and lighten the night.'

The wooden sculpture of Christ with the crown of thorns is from the late 15th century.

#### The Convent

The convent in Naantali was named Vallis Gratiae, the Valley of Grace, and it was a double-cloister, open both for women and men. The nuns and monks lived within their own sections, separated by stone walls. While the nuns were not allowed to leave the Convent, the monks were able to travel in order to manage its affairs. The Convent was governed by the abbess, and in temporal matters, even the head of the monks, the general confessor, was accountable to the abbess.

The main duties of the clerical monks were to receive confessions and to administer religious ceremonies. The monks also copied and translated Biblical texts, and moreover, they were skilled carpenters. Among the brothers in the 15th century was Jöns Budde, one of the first known authors in Finland. The nuns, in addition to their devotions, were engaged in studies and handicrafts decorated with elaborate gold embroidery. Bridgettine convents were also known for their herbal gardens. A manual concerning the medicinal use of herbs was written at the Convent of Naantali.

The cloth embroidered by Bridgettine nuns in Naantali depicts the birth of Christ. It is assumed to have been made for the altar of the Virgin Mary in the early 16th century.



#### Saint Bridget

The founder of the Bridgettine order, Saint Bridget (Sancta Birgitta) was born in a noble family in Sweden in 1303. Since early childhood, she experienced spiritual revelations, and based on them, she stipulated the rules for a new monastic order.

In addition to the spiritual life, St. Bridget was influential in the political life of the era. She was particularly concerned about the matters of the poor, children and women. In 1370, the Pope confirmed the rule of her order, and subsequently, Bridgettine convents were founded all over Europe.

St. Bridget's last pilgrimage was to Jerusalem. Fatigued by the journey, she died in 1373. The first Bridgettine convent was inaugurated in Vadstena, Sweden in 1384. St. Bridget was canonized in 1391.

St. Bridget was nominated Europe's patron saint in 1999.



St. Bridget, a detail from the altar screen of the Church of Naantali. An open book is one of St. Bridget's attributes.

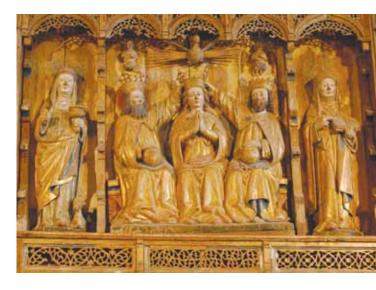
The sculpture of a veiled and crowned saint was probably carved in the Nordic countries in the early 15th century.



Throughout the centuries, the Church of Naantali has remained externally rather unchanged, but inside, this hall church with its three aisles is today very different from its convent days.

#### The altar of the Virgin Mary

The altar of the Virgin Mary, which was reserved for the nuns, was located in the eastern end of the Convent's church. Along the aisles, there were several smaller altars – the estimated number is 23 – dedicated to various saints. Since the Reformation, the only altar of the church has been in its current location in the eastern choir.



The wooden altar screen is probably from the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries. The central panel depicts the Coronation of the Virgin Mary.

The limestone baptism font dates back to the convent times.



#### The main altar of the Convent church

The main altar of the Convent church was at the end where we now find the main entrance. In one of her revelations, St. Bridget was instructed that there be 'silent water' behind the main altar of the church. In Naantali, a peaceful bay of sea opens to the west, so the altar was placed at the western end of the church. Six stairs led to the main altar, with side altars dedicated to the 12 apostles at the stair ends.

Via the 'Gate of Grace and Glory', the nuns were permitted to ascend to the main altar only twice in their lives: first, when they took their vows, and second, when they were committed to eternal rest.



According to tradition, a novice took her vows under the consecration crown and was then consecrated a nun.

The blessed communion wafer was stored in the sacrament cabinet, the 'hostiarum'.



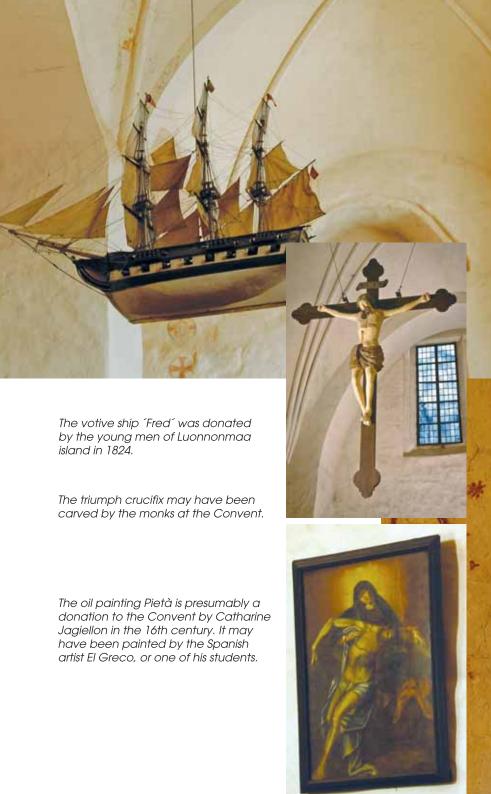
## Limewashed white walls Biblical texts in the vernacular

Painted on the end walls, the Consecration Crosses with the face of Christ are particular to the Church of Naantali. Otherwise, the walls are limewashed, and there are no wall paintings typical to the churches of the Catholic era. St. Bridget's advanced idea was that, in the Bridgettine convent churches, the priests should preach in the vernacular language, so there was no need to illustrate the Biblical texts by means of wall paintings. The other wall paintings found in the church are memorial obituaries and repairmen's signatory marks.

In the convent days, the church had two galleries along the side walls. The northern gallery was used by the nuns when returning from the church to their dwellings; monks used the southern gallery. The central floor was in the use of the parishioners and pilgrims.



There were separate entrances for women and men at both sides of the present-day altar. The men's entrance is still in use. The present-day porch used to serve as the monk chancel, and the sacristy behind the altar was reserved for the nuns.







A scale model of the Bridgettine Convent of Naantali in 1443-1544; made by Sister Lydia of the Daughters of Mary in 1993.



The stone wall and the well are the only visible remnants of the medieval convent.



Monk brother Jöns Budde's memorial stone in the churchyard was donated by Amos Andersson in 1921. A short section of the original convent stone wall stands near the memorial.



After the convent era, the Church of Naantali has twice been destroyed by a fire, in the 17th and 18th centuries. In the 1628 fire, practically all of the vaults collapsed; the only medieval vault remaining today is found to the left of the main entrance. The walls also suffered major damage. After the fire, the Church stood unrepaired for decades, with rain and frost further damaging the structures. In 1756, it was again destroyed by a fire. Save for the north-westernmost vault, the vaults of the main hall were rebuilt in the 1860´s.

The renaissance-style pulpit was donated by the Army Commander of Finland, Henrik Fleming and his spouse Fbba Bååthe in 1622.



#### Restoration

The most recent restoration of the Church of Naantali took place in the years 1963-65. According to the plans by architect Olli Kestilä, the floor was lowered to its original level by removing the graves below the floor.

The galleries were re-built in the side aisles, and the medieval altar screen was returned to its original location. The altarpiece painted by R.W. Ekman in the 19th century now hangs on the northern wall. The organ loft was removed, and the organ was moved to the floor level. New pews were installed, and the walls were plastered and painted.

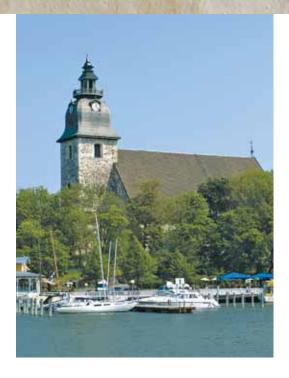
The altarpiece painted by R.W. Ekman, ´A sinful woman in the house of the Pharisee.´

The organ was manufactured by Kangasalan Urkurakentamo in 1990, and follows the tradition of the 17th century Dutch baroque organ style. The organ has 36 registers and a total of 2310 pipes.





## Church of Naantali pen for all



Since the days of the convent, the Church of Naantali has welcomed all visitors. Today it serves as the main church of the Evangelical-Lutheran parish of Naantali.

In summertime, the church is a popular wedding site, and since 1999, it has also been open for travellers as a 'Road Church'. Arranged annually in early June, the Naantali Music Festival gathers chamber music enthusiasts from all over the world to the Church of Naantali.

'O Lord, give peace to my heart.'





### Saint Bridget's Prayer

Lord, make haste and lighten the night.
As a dying person is longing, I long for You.
Speak to my soul and tell me
That nothing happens without Your permission,
And that nothing that You permit is hopeless.
O Jesus, Son of God,
As You were silent
Before those who condemned You,
Restrain my tongue
Until I understand how I am to speak.

Show me the way
And make me willing to walk it.
It is precarious to delay,
And it is dangerous to continue the journey.
So fulfill my longing
And show me the way.
I come before You,
As the sick seek their healer.
O Lord, give peace to my heart.