



Construction of the cathedral

The construction of the cathedral was entrusted to the Parler's building workshop in 1388. Johann, the son of Peter Parler, took charge of the whole project. The church was initially designed as a triple-nave cathedral-type building, with an ambulatory around the chancel. The construction started from the east. In the beginning, the progress was very fast - in 1391, the chancel with unfinished vaulting was consecrated, and in 1403, baptising and burying was permitted by a papal bull. In the same year, the cathedral got its name: New Corpus Christi and St Barbara's Chapel. A year later, Johann Parler changed the plans when he decided to add one more aisle to each side of the nave-aisles. The result was a cathedral with five naves. Before the outbreak of the Hussite wars, the cathedral was built to the height of the ambulatory level in its present length, and only the ambulatory chapels and the outer nave-aisle were vaulted; the choir and the central nave were covered by a temporary ceiling at the ambulatory level.

The Hussite wars stopped the construction. The works resumed in 1481 thanks to the Royal Hofmeister, Michal Smíšek of Vrchoviště, who organised a collection for the church vaulting. Master Hanuš, who was the stonemason of the Parlers' school, led the works; the construction continued according to the Johann Parler's plan. Master Hanuš worked on the cathedral until he died in 1489. In a relatively short time, he managed to vault the endings of the chapels as well as the nave-aisles and to partly build a triforium (a wall-thick ambulatory under the choir windows).

While the cathedral gained a unique exterior decoration during the Rejsek's era, in the next period, associated with the master architect Benedikt Ried, the concept of the five-aisle cathedral changed radically. Ried approached the construction quite originally: he attached the inner galleries to the upper part of the cathedral and thus created a second church upstairs consisting of three naves above the ground five naves. By doing that he fulfilled the need of free space for the preacher's speech and choral singing and achieved an exceptional brightness of the interior. In 1532, while the master Benedikt was still alive, the cathedral was roofed by three typical tent-like roofs.

Benedikt Ried worked on the St Barbara's Cathedral until 1534. Before his death, he drew up further plans based on which Mikuláš and Jan Vlach continued the work since 1540. They used a stellar vault with intertwined curved ribs to roof the triple-nave hall, built the organ loft and finished the tracery of the windows. The works went on slowly till 1558 when the cathedral was provisionally closed by a temporary wall in the west due to lack of funds. In 1595, this wall was extended with a gable and decorated with a two-cubit high chalice.

In the period following the Battle of White Mountain, when the recatholicisation was taking place in the Czech lands, the Jesuits came to the utraquist Kutná Hora (1626). They took over the administration of the cathedral. In many ways, they adapted it to the needs of their Order and to the Baroque style. The Gothic frescoes were painted over with white paint. The chalice was taken down, and the original tented roof was replaced by a gabled one with three ridge turrets. The late Gothic altar was replaced by a Baroque one and pews for the faithful were placed in the cathedral. In the years 1667 - 1670, the Jesuits built a Jesuit college next to the cathedral, which in 1727 they connected to the cathedral by an elevated roofed gallery made of stone and leading to the sacristy. This passageway was demolished at the end of the 18th century when the building served as military quarters.

In 1773, when the Jesuits Order was abolished, the cathedral was passed to the State religious fund. The fund did not take good care of the cathedral, so it gradually fell into disrepair until 1877, when the Museum and archaeological society Vöcl was founded. This society resolved to restore the cathedral into its original shape. The reconstruction was led by architect Josef Mocker and later by Ludvík Láblér. The temporary western wall was demolished, and a new façade was built with an extra vaulted bay. The late Gothic frescoes were restored, the Baroque main altar was replaced by a neogothic copy of the original altar. In 1905, the cathedral was consecrated again and was handed over to the Archdeanery Kutná Hora for administration.



ST BARBARA'S CATHEDRAL

Gothic cathedral with five naves

The late Gothic jewel and one of the four cathedral-type buildings in Bohemia is together with the Cathedral of the Assumption of Our Lady and St John the Baptist and the historic centre of Kutná Hora inscribed on the World Heritage List of UNESCO.

Kutná Hora is historically known for silver mining, thanks to which it became the economic centre of the Bohemia at the beginning of the 14th century. The lands on which the mining settlements, and later the town itself, were established belonged to the Cistercian Order. They had their monastery with a cathedral in the nearby village of Sedlec. The citizens of Kutná Hora wanted to break free from their influence. They decided to establish a Brotherhood of Corpus Christi, which took the first steps towards the construction of a new cathedral, the splendour of which would reflect the glory and wealth of the silver Kutná Hora as well as the deep religiousness of its citizens. They bought lands outside of the town borders from the Prague Chapter. For the construction, they chose a place in the vicinity of the miners' St Barbara's chapel. The chapel was preserved near the cathedral until 1626.

✿ The legend about the founding of the cathedral

One of the old legends of Kutná Hora tells a story about three miners who worked in the mine and mined silver. An accident happened, and the mine collapsed. The miners' lamps went out, and they could not get back to the surface. Because they were religious, they turned to their patroness, Saint Barbara. They prayed and begged her for help. One miner wished to see the light of day and the sunshine at least once again. The second one wanted to meet his family one more time to say goodbye. The third one begged for one more year of life. Saint Barbara answered their wishes and led them out of the buried mine. The first miner came out and died right after he saw the sunshine. The second miner died at home, surrounded by his family. The third miner lived for one more year, during which he had a vision that Saint Barbara was calling him to come to her. He followed her to a rocky promontory, where the cathedral stands today. There he saw a tree with Saint Barbara standing in front of it. The miner cut down the tree and carved out a statute of the saint. All miners used to go to her to pray and ask for protection. In the course of time, a chapel, and later this cathedral, were built here.

The cathedral is dedicated to an early Christian martyr, Virgin Barbara, who is worshipped as a helper in need, as an intercessor for a good death and a patroness of all people who practice a dangerous profession, especially miners. It was the miners with their hard and perilous work who contributed the most to the boom of the medieval town and to the construction of the cathedral, which they dedicated to their holy protectress.

✿ The legend of Saint Barbara

Barbara was a daughter of a wealthy pagan merchant Dioscurus. She lived almost two thousand years ago in the then Roman Empire. It was a time when people loved luxury and amusement, the rich lived inconsiderate lives, and hardly anyone cared for others. But Barbara wanted to live a life that would not be empty. She searched for something which would give her life meaning. She met Christians who were persecuted at the time and were dying for their faith. Barbara decided that she wanted to belong only to Christ. However, her father was afraid of Christians, and when he found out that Barbara had herself baptised, he locked her in a tower. She did not let herself be discouraged and instead started meditating on Christ to gain strength and endure all the sufferings for him. She studied the teaching of Christ and found comfort in him. She even managed to organise punching a hole in the tower where she was imprisoned to create a third window. Barbara wanted the three windows to remind her of the Holy Trinity in whose company she wished to live. In a desperate attempt to break her belief, Dioscurus brought her to a court, which had her tortured; despite that, Barbara did not give up her faith. Her father was so angry that in the end, he beheaded her himself. They say that when Barbara was dragged to the place of execution, the hem of her clothes brushed against a bush. A small twig got stuck on her skirt. When she died, white flowers bloomed on this dry twig. These flowers serve as a reminder of her bravery, innocence and faith.

1 Chancel (choir), the oldest part of the cathedral.

Main altar. The neogothic copy of the original late-Gothic altar. The central theme is the Last Supper. The wings of the altar depict different saints - Barbara, Methodius, Dorothy, and Adalbert on the right, and Cyril, Virgin Mary, Wenceslas, and Catherine on the left. Above the communion table, you can see the four Church Fathers, from the left, Saint Gregory, Saint Augustine, Saint Jerome and Saint Ambrose.

Tabernacle. To the right of the altar is a stone tabernacle made by Matěj Rejsek at the beginning of the 16th century where the Eucharist (consecrated host) is kept.

Vault above the chancel. The net vault is decorated with emblems of countries and uilds. On the inscription tape, you can recognize the signature of the author, Matěj Rejsek. The main keystone of the vault depicts Christ with a chalice and a host.

Triforium. The narrow decorative ambulatory, thick as the wall under the choir windows, was originally a walk-through, but it was sealed off during the reconstruction. There are only two places in the Czech Republic, where you can see the triforium - here in Kutná Hora and in the St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague.

2 Eight apse chapels around the chancel, a typical feature of Gothic cathedrals.

A St Catherine's chapel. On the altar stands the Gothic Madonna (1380). It is the oldest and the most precious statue in the cathedral.

B St Blaise's chapel. The chapel is decorated with stained glass from 1913, which depicts the Francis Joseph I. during his visit to Kutná Hora on 21st June 1906.

C Holy Cross chapel. The year 1560 is preserved in the painting under the window.

D St Wenceslas's chapel. The chapel was formerly dedicated to the patron saint of goldsmiths, St Eligius.

E St Basil's chapel. A painting of St Francis Xavier is part of the chapel decoration.

F St Dorothy's chapel. On the left side at the wall is the original medieval communion table, above which you can find the late-Gothic fresco of St Christopher.

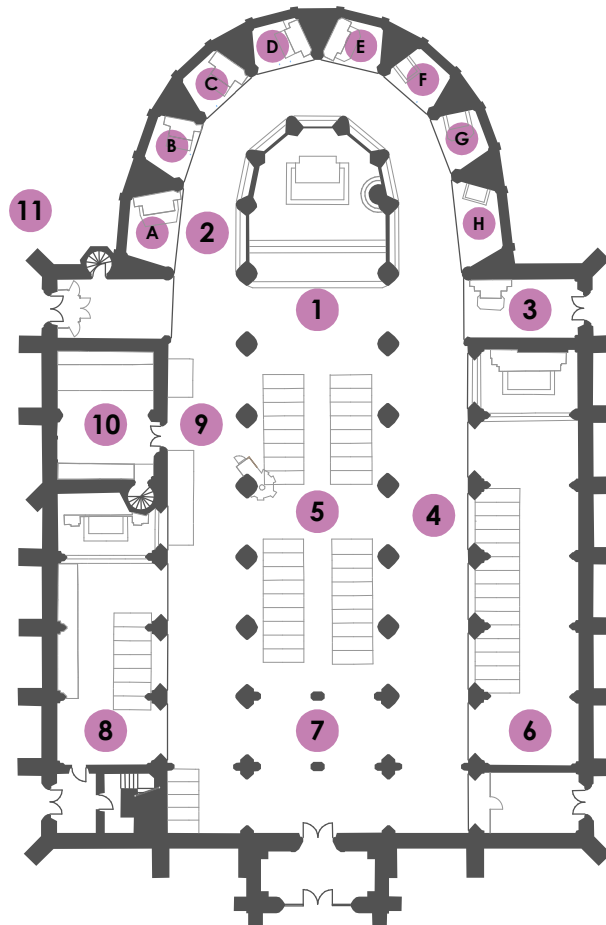
G Smíšek's chapel. The unique collection of the late-Gothic frescoes depicts, among others, the Smíšek family (under the window), the crucifixion of Christ (on the left) and the Queen of Sheba (on the right).

H The Miners' chapel. The late-Gothic frescoes depict scenes from the life of ordinary miners.

3 The Baroque altar of St. Agatha and the four early Baroque paintings from the life of St Wenceslas decorate the south transept from which the exit leads towards the former Jesuit churchyard.

4 The statue of a miner (1700), polychrome wood. The statue reminds us of the fact that the construction of the cathedral was closely related to the silver mining in Kutná Hora. The miner is dressed into a white miner's coat, holding a miner's lamp in one hand and a work tool of the mining foreman, so-called Steiger, in the other. The miners used to work six days a week, 10-14 hours a day. At the beginning of the 16th century, they used to descend as much as 500 m below the ground, which was the world record at that time.

The numbered points in the map indicate the direction of the tour and places with the best view.



5 The stellar vault is supported by intertwined curved ribs. In the bays between them, you can see the emblems of the guilds and coat of arms of the citizens of Kutná Hora.

Inner galleries. The longitudinal inner galleries upstairs carry four early-Baroque statues on their parapets symbolizing Christian virtues: Justice, Prudence, Fortitude, and Temperance.

The organ. The Baroque organ case dates back to 1767. The instrument itself was made by Jan Tuček in 1903 and rebuilt in 1974. The organ has three keyboards, 52 registers and 3,991 pipes.

The pulpit. The core is made of stone (1566), the Baroque wooden panelling and the canopy are from 1655.

Generously decorated wooden pews (17th century). No two carvings decorating the sides of the pews are the same.

Roman Catholic Parish - Archdeanery Kutná Hora

www.khfarnost.cz, facebook.com/chramsvbarbory/,
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6 Minters' chapel.

Altar of the St Francis Xavier (end of the 17th century). Today, the Eucharist is kept in his tabernacle.

Frescoes on the western wall of the chapel. In the lower part, several Passion scenes, which were probably part of a larger cycle, have been preserved: from the left it is Christ in front of Caiaphas, the crowning of Christ with a crown of thorns and flagellation. Those are the oldest frescoes in the whole cathedral (they were created around 1450). Above them, you can see two minters who are making so-called planchets out of a silver sheet, and a minter who is producing the coins of Kutná Hora. Angels with censers and musical instruments suggest that there used to be a fresco in place of the current window probably depicting the Virgin Mary or Christ.

Stained glass of the Saint Agnes of Bohemia (2013). The latest part of the cathedral decoration, the author of which is Tomáš Rafl. He captured Saint Agnes caring for a sick beggar.

7 Overall view from the main entrance to the altar. The cathedral is oriented from west to east with the intention that the space is supposed to take in both the first and the last rays of the sun. A person coming through the main entrance is symbolically going out of the dark into the light, which is the resurrected Christ.

8 Chapel of St Ignatius of Loyola (17th century). The western wall is painted with a Baroque fresco depicting The Vision of St Ignatius injured in the Battle of Pamplona, the author of which is Jan Karel Kovář.

Confessionals (1665) carry sculptures of the saints - James, Peter and Paul - on the moulding.

Metal chest served as the cathedral treasure chest.

Entrance to the staircase leading up to the inner galleries. Going upstairs takes 84 stairs.

9 Choir pews (1480 - 1490). They are part of the original cathedral inventory and were made by Jan Nymburský.

Epitaph (gravestone). The wooden frame is from 1615; the middle scene of the great Calvary comes from the second half of the 16th century.

Painting of the Assumption of Saint Barbara. The artwork by a brilliant Jesuit author Ignác Raab was initially placed in the centre of the main Baroque altar which was situated in the chancel since the 18th century. The painting depicts the cathedral with the original tented roof, the stone passageway leading to the Jesuit college and the St James' Church on the right.

Stone flame-themed tracery above the door to the sacristy is a typical element of the Parler Gothic.

10 Sacristy. A room for keeping the liturgical objects and for preparing ceremonies.

Lavabo. The stone washbasin is used by priests to wash their hands before the ceremonies.

Paintings of the Jesuits. They were placed in the central nave during the Jesuits' times.

Exhibition of reliquaries and sacral objects.

11 Corpus Christi Chapel.

Thank you for visiting the St Barbara's Cathedral and the Corpus Christi Chapel.