



# JUBILEE CHURCHES

Basilica of San Giovanni  
Battista dei Fiorentini





DICASTERY FOR EVANGELIZATION

SECTION FOR FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS  
REGARDING EVANGELIZATION IN THE WORLD



MINISTERO  
DEL TURISMO  
REPUBBLICA ITALIANA

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Jubilee journeys

## Basilica of San Giovanni Battista dei Fiorentini

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## 4 themed routes to follow

The Jubilee is a great event for all peoples during which each and every pilgrim can immerse themselves in the endless mercy of God.

It's the Year of return to the essence of fraternity, mending the relationship between ourselves and the Father.

It's the Year that calls us to conversion, an opportunity to take stock of our lives and ask the Lord to direct them towards holiness. It's the Year of solidarity, of hope, of justice, and of commitment to the service of God, living in joy and peace with our brothers and sisters.

But, above all, the Jubilee year has at its center the encounter with Christ.

For this reason, the Jubilee asks us to get moving and to overcome the confines in our lives. When we move we don't just change place physically, but we transform ourselves too. For this reason, it's important to prepare well, to plan the route and



have a clear sight of our destination. In a sense the Holy Year pilgrimage begins before the journey itself: its starting point is the decision to do set out on the path.

To fully experience the 2025 Jubilee, through walking and prayer, four routes have been prepared for pilgrims within the city of Rome, each with its own theme.

### Europe in Rome

The Pilgrim Path of the Churches of the European Union, includes visits to 28 churches and basilicas, historically linked to EU member countries for cultural or artistic reasons or because they served as places of welcome for pilgrims from individual member states of the European community.

### Pilgrimage of the Seven Churches

Originally the idea of Saint Philip Neri in the 16th century, the pilgrimage of the Seven Churches is one of the most ancient Roman traditions. It's a 25 km route winding through the streets of Rome.

### Jubilee Churches

This is one of the churches designated as a meeting place for pilgrims. Catecheses will be held in these churches in different languages to rediscover the meaning of the Holy Year. They will also offer the sacrament of Reconciliation and host events aimed at nourishing the faith with experiences of prayer.

### Women Patrons of Europe and Doctors of the Church

This is a pilgrimage that involves stopping in prayer in those Roman Churches linked to Saint Catherine of Siena, Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein), Saint Brigid of Sweden, Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus, and Saint Hildegard of Bingen.

# The Basilica of San Giovanni Battista dei Fiorentini

Saint John the Baptist, the precursor of Jesus and the greatest of the prophets, is the patron saint of the city of Florence. Not infrequently, therefore, many Florentine artworks are dedicated to him. This is what happened with this basilica, built in the years of the Renaissance by citizens of Florence working in Rome. In the same way as residents from other places did, the Florentines formed themselves into an Archconfraternity and it was thanks to the commitment of this association that the church

Magnificent. Jacopo Sansovino started the grandiose work, which, after about a century, was completed by a succession of other architects, including Michelangelo Buonarroti.

The façade (**on the cover**), elegant and solemn in style, dates back to 1734. Structured over two orders and narrowing upwards through the use of semi-pillars, it was commissioned by Pope Clement XII, Lorenzo Corsini, (also of Florentine origins), and built by Alessandro Galilei. The Pope's coat of arms

is clearly visible above the central entrance. The drama of the facade is accentuated by a rich play of protrusions and recesses, by the voids made up of doors and windows, by the niches and by the graceful spiral curves that connect the central body with the lateral wings. A sculptural display stands out above the façade (**fig.1**), carved by various artists of note. On



fig.1

was built. It became a real reference point in Roman society, together with its neighboring hospital. Building work began in 1519, when Giovanni de' Medici was Pope, taking the name Leo X. He was the son of the famous Lorenzo the

the balustrade above, can be seen from left to right, the Florentine saints Maria Maddalena de' Pazzi, Filippo Benizi, Pietro Igneo, Bernardo degli Uberti, Eugenio Diacono, and Caterina de' Ricci. On the central entrance the allegorical figures



of Charity and Fortitude sculpted by Filippo della Valle are visible; while above, next to the portals, there are bas-reliefs with scenes from the life of St John the Baptist (the Visitation, the Baptism of Jesus, Preaching and Martyrdom) by Domenico Scaramuccia. And, of course, the Florentine lily is present – the symbol *par excellence* of Florence. We will often also find it inside the church. The dome had already been vaulted by Carlo Maderno in 1614: in its clear octagonal shape and its vertical thrust with a Gothic feel, it recalls the similar construction by Brunelleschi for the dome of Florence cathedral – Santa Maria del Fiore – in the Tuscan capital. The high drum, on which the ribs of the vault are grafted, is enlivened by windows and niches; the

construction culminates in the lantern surmounted by the globe with the cross. The interior (**fig.2**), which is bright and essential, is the work of Giacomo della Porta, who planned it in the shape of a Latin cross and with three naves distinguished by pillars with fluted pilasters and round arches. At first sight, it recalls the ‘feel’ of Florentine Renaissance churches, characterized by the use of *pietra serena* on white plaster. The beautiful geometric patterned floor dates back to the end of the 19th century, while the organ on the counter-façade dates back to the 17th century.

Many Tuscan masters worked on the decoration of the church between the 16th and 17th centuries. Their works define the layout of the chapels, of which there



fig.2

are four on each side.

Overlooking the right nave are the chapels of *San Vincenzo Ferrer*, with the altarpiece by Domenico Cresti known as Passignano, and of *San Filippo Benizi* decorated with frescoes with *Stories of the Apostles Simon and Jude*: in the

sacristy you can see the *Bust of Clement XII*, a valuable portrait painted by Filippo della Valle. Next is the *chapel of St Jerome*, embellished with paintings showing the *Penitent Jerome* by Santi di Tito dated 1599, *Jerome translating the Bible* by Ludovico Cardi known as Cigoli, the

*Construction of the Church* by Passigano and with the pillars frescoed by Stefano Pieri. The next space is dedicated to St Philip Neri, with the altarpiece of the *Apparition of the Virgin*, which is a copy of a painting by Carlo Maratti, and two reliefs at the top with episodes from the life of the Florentine saint, to whom the wooden cross on the altar belonged. The bronze bust, from 1999, is by Giuseppe Ducrot. For some years Philip Neri was rector of this church: therefore his memory is particularly felt in San Giovanni dei Fiorentini. On the floor we can see the mosaic coat of arms of Cardinal Ludovico Maria Torrigiani, while on the entrance pillars the frescoed images of the *Risen Jesus* and the *Chosen Soul* prefigure the ultimate meaning



fig.3

underarch are to be found the portraits of the Firenzuola brothers, patrons of the oratory. In the space preceding the

of the religious experience.

Our visit proceeds to the transept, where we can admire a masterpiece of

baroque art, *Saints Cosmas and Damian*, which Salvatore Rosa painted in 1669. It is a composition which is dramatically characterized by almost 'violent' strokes of light and an exaggerated expressiveness.

Under the altar the relics of the saintly martyrs Proto and Giacinto are kept. On the right there is access to the chapel of *Merciful Jesus*, this image was inspired by the visions of Saint Faustina Kowalska. Funeral monuments are to be found in the transept: they are those of Ottaviano Acciaioli, Ottavio Corsini, Antonio Barberini and Pier Francesco de Rossi. Next is the chapel of the *Madonna della Misericordia*, designed by Carlo Maderno and enriched by frescoes - *Stories of the Virgin* - by Agostino Ciampelli and Anastasio Fontebuoni; in the pillars you can see depicted the prophets *Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Amos and Daniel*. The image of *Mary with Child* (fig.3), after being damaged in a sacrilegious attack when a bowl was thrown at it, was transferred to this church and set in a gilded copper frame, which was in turn encased in richly inlaid polychrome marble. According to some scholars, the painting, with its fine lines, could be by Filippino Lippi.



fig.4

The high altar, the work of Pietro da Cortona and Francesco Borromini, was completed by Ciro Ferri. We find ourselves in the presence of a real jewel of the Baroque style and mentality: art as a theater full of color and light, dominated by the extraordinary sculptural group by Antonio Raggi depicting the *Baptism of Jesus* (fig.4), from 1686. From a sky of clouds and angels, the Eternal Father sends the dove of the Holy Spirit down to the Son,



while John the Baptist pours the water of the River Jordan on his head. From above, on the tympanum, the allegorical figures of *Justice* and *Fortitude* appear, virtues to which the Baptist bore witness in an extraordinary way, even to the shedding of his own blood. The work was entrusted to the sculptor of the Falconieri family, whose tombs are in the walls of this area. Under the presbytery, Borromini created a funerary crypt for members of the same family, with essential and sharp lines. Borromini and Maderno also lie buried in this church, as the plaques on the floor under the dome remind us.

The left nave of the basilica is enriched by the chapel of the *Crucifix*, introduced by elegant stuccos on the pillars and frescoed by Giovanni Lanfranco in 1623 with scenes of the *Prayer of Jesus in the garden* and the *Ascent to Calvary* and of the *Glorification of Christ*. There follows the transept chapel dedicated to *St Mary Magdalene*, with a canvas by Astolfo Petrazzi; on the right is the relic of Mary Magdalene's foot. Then comes the chapel of *St Francis*: the Poverello of Assisi is admirably portrayed there by Santi di Tito while contemplating the Crucifix, while Niccolò Circignani known as Pomarancio frescoed the walls with episodes from his life. The subsequent chapel decorated by Agostino Ciampelli and Antonio Tempesta is named after *Saints Anthony the Abbot and St Lawrence*, while Giovanni Angelo Canini painted the two canvases of the *Apparition of the Risen Jesus to*

*the Disciples* and the *Conversion of Saint Paul*. The next space houses the sculptural group of the *Baptism* by Francesco Mochi, planned for the main altar but subsequently removed and, after various developments, placed here; the statues of *Saints Peter and Paul* temporarily placed at the entrance to the church are by the same artist. The chapel frescoed by Giovanni Balducci with scenes of the *Virgin Mary narrating the childhood of Je-*



fig.5



sus to Saint Luke and Saint Paul and the *Life of Sant'Egidio* is dedicated to another Florentine saint, St Maria Maddalena de' Pazzi, while Francesco Curradi created the altarpiece with the *Apparition of Mary to the saint*. Finally, the chapel of St Sebastian presents the dramatic scene, painted by Giovanni Battista Vanni, of the saint being pierced by arrows and cared for by women.

As is the case with many other churches, in this basilica there are (in addition to the tombs already noted) many tombstones of important Florentine families, and the tombs of many famous characters. Some of them stand out for their beauty and solemnity: the tomb of the Marchioness Francesca Calderini Pecori Riccardi, with its lively bust; that of Ugolino Mannelli Galilei, a neoclassical work by Giuseppe Fabris which presents Justice in sad contemplation of the deceased while a rooster invites vigilance while awaiting the final

resurrection; the tomb of Girolamo Sanminiati and that of Gaetano Forti. Above all visitors should note that of Gregorio Capponi (**fig.5**), designed by Ferdinando Fuga and adorned with the mournful images of Michelangelo Slodtz: against the background of a black obelisk, the deceased appears in a cameo supported by two putti while at his feet, on the splendid blanket resting on the sarcophagus, a skull commemorates human frailty; a female figure, an allegory of Meekness, meditates on the great mystery of the passing of life, having closed a book in her hands while a larger one remains open on the ground, on which the lamb rests.

It is by following the one whom John the Baptist indicated as the Lamb of God that our life can have direction and definitive salvation beyond pain and death. This is the most authentic and profound meaning of the Jubilee.