

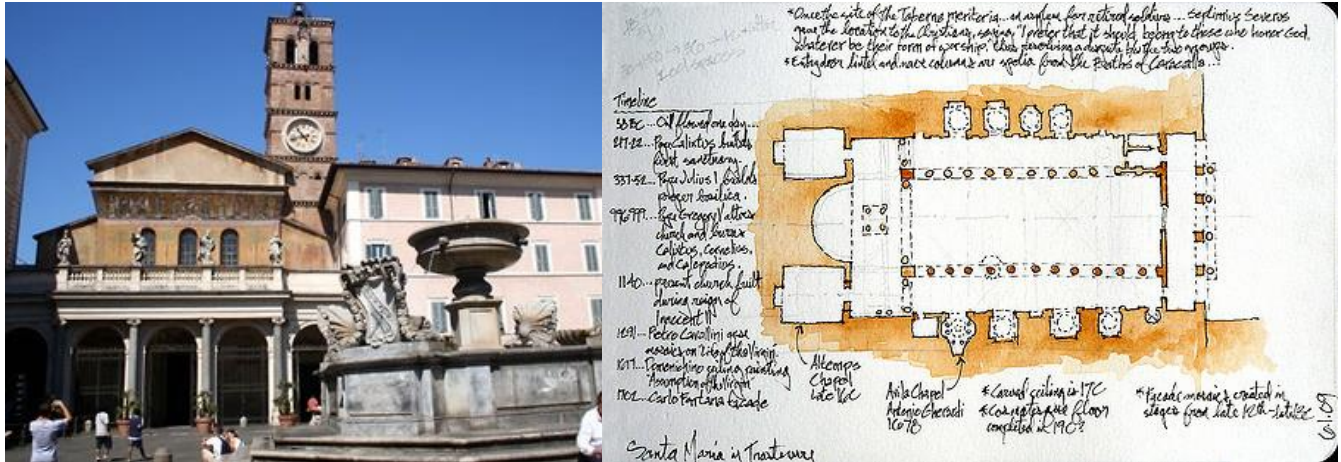
Basilica di Santa Maria in Trastevere

Via della Paglia 14C Piazza Santa Maria in Trastevere (00153)

Buses: 23, 280 and 780.

4th century, restored in 12th and 19th centuries.

7:30 AM – 9 PM (Every day)



The Basilica di Santa Maria in Trastevere (Our Lady in Trastevere), commissioned by Pope Callistus I, was founded during the third century, when **Christianity was not yet widely accepted**. Although it has been reconstructed on several occasions, it maintains its early **Medieval architecture**.

St Anthony statue, Santa Maria in Trastevere. The **symbol of Trastevere is a lion**, and it has been suggested that this lion was the inspiration for it. The church's exterior is notable for the stunning **golden mosaics on its facade** and for its bell tower, which dates from the 12th century. Once inside, the building is divided into three naves by a score of **columns from the Baths of Caracalla**. Despite the beautiful altarpieces and other decorative elements that fill the church, visitors' eyes fixate particularly on the golden mosaic located in the apse. To the left of the High Altar you can visit the Baroque-style Chapel of Altemps, which holds the Madonna della Clemenza, a life-size image of the Virgin. At the entrance of the left nave is the **sculpture of San Antonio, known for granting wishes**. Many people leave requests.

History

Dating from the **4th century AD**, Santa Maria in Trastevere has a long history and dazzling **12th-century mosaics**. Santa Maria in Trastevere was probably built around **350 AD under Pope Julius I (337-52)**. In this early period the church was known as titulus Callisti. It was partially destroyed by fire during the **sack of Rome in 410**, then repaired and rededicated to the Virgin Mary by Pope Celestine (422-32). The church was totally rebuilt in the 12th century by Pope Innocent II (1130-43), using **materials from the ancient Baths of Caracalla**. Most of the present building dates from this era, with the portico and some other remodelling from the 19th century.

Myth and Mystery

According to legend, on the day Christ was born a stream of pure oil flowed from the earth on the site of the church, signifying the coming of the grace of God. **A column next to the altar marks the spot.**

What to See at Santa Maria in Trastevere

Inside the church are 22 granite columns taken from the ruins of ancient Roman buildings. A **Cosmati column** to the right of the altar with the inscription FONS OLEI marks the spot of the miraculous flow of oil.

The restored mosaics on the apse vault and triumphal arch date from around 1140. The triumphal arch depicts the Four Evangelists, the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, caged birds representing sin, seven candlesticks, and a **Christogram (chi-rho)**. The apse vault shows the Coronation of the Virgin with saints and Pope Innocent II holding a model of the church.

The six mosaic panels lower on the apse (between the windows) were made by Pietro Cavallini on the subject of the Life of the Virgin in 1291. In the Nativity scene, note the little building just under the figure of Mary with a stream of oil flowing from it. The church keeps a **relic of Saint Apollonia** (her head) and a portion of the **Holy Sponge**.

Façade

The **narthex or portico** was rebuilt by Carlo Fontana in 1702. It has five arches of identical size, flanked by a pair of Ionic pilasters and with a deep entablature above. The façade of the nave above the narthex has a row of three identical round-headed windows in a brick wall which has very badly faded 19th century fresco work. Four date palms are in between the windows, while on the walls fronting the aisles are representations of the two cities of Jerusalem and Bethlehem which are now almost illegible.

From the top of the aisle rooflines to the triangular pediment above the façade is **cavetto**, that is, it bends outwards. This is **so that the mosaic it bears does not look foreshortened** when viewed from outside the narthex. This **mosaic is medieval**, probably from the 12th century. The subject now is the parable of the wise and foolish maidens, with ten of them flanking the Blessed Virgin in the center breast-feeding the Christ Child. The two foolish maidens on the near right side are not wearing crowns, and they have let their lamps burn out. However, examination reveals that they have been clumsily altered to this appearance, and there is dispute as to the original identity of these ten women. They may be Roman virgin martyrs, or merely imperial court attendants. There are two tiny figures kneeling either side of the Virgin, and **these are anonymous donors**. Above her is a small lamb, the Agnus Dei.

Nave

The nave has twelve bays, and is divided from the aisles by twenty-one antique granite columns of varying widths and with assorted ancient Ionic and Corinthian capitals. The odd number is because the right hand side of the first bay is occupied by the campanile and entrance lobby. The columns seem to come from a variety of sources, and warrant individual examination. It is thought that they, with their **capitals and bases came from the Baths of Caracalla**, but the original source of the **grey granite was a quarry in the Eastern Desert of Egypt** called Mons Claudianus, and of the **pink granite from one at Aswan in Egypt**. The capitals and bases are in limestone, and are intricately carved. If you look closely at some of the former, you will see **male and female faces peeping out. These have been identified as pagan deities**. It is recorded that they were deliberately mutilated in the 1860 restoration. The three windows above the entrance have 19th century stained glass, depicting the three saintly popes Julius, Callixtus and Cornelius.

Ceilings

Domenichino designed the gilded and coffered wooden nave ceiling, and also painted the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin (1617) in the octagonal cove in the middle. It is thought that the geometric pattern of the coffering is based on the Aldobrandini coat-of-arms, since a cardinal belonging to this family funded its creation.

Sanctuary mosaics -12th century

The mosaics on the **conch or semi-dome of the apse**, together with the wall into which it is inserted, were executed soon after the church was finished, perhaps 1148. The style is, interestingly, more Classical than Byzantine especially as regards the main central seated figures of Christ and Our Lady and St Peter on the right of them.

High altar

The **baldacchino** over the altar was added in the 19th century restoration. It is in a pseudo-mediaeval style and has four Corinthian columns, which are described as porphyry, with gilded capitals. The stone is certainly not the genuine imperial porphyry, which comes from a quarry in the eastern desert of Egypt and has not been quarried since the 4th century. The altar itself is the original 12th century one, and is made up of ancient marble slabs. The frontal now has a modern icon of the Holy Face in the very ancient Byzantine tradition known as the **Mandyllion**. Below the altar is the **confessio or underground chamber** where the relics of SS Callixtus, Cornelius, Julius & Calepodius are interred.

Relics of the Martyrs

At the steps at the end of the right aisle there is a **grated niche**. In it you can see some **chains, a marble ball** and some black and red marble stones. These last are ancient standard weights, which the Romans first kept in their temples and later in the churches. The **chains are described as having been used on martyrs** being taken to execution, while the **ball is said to have been tied around the neck** of Pope St Callixtus when he was martyred by being thrown into a well

Baptistry

The first chapel off the left hand aisle is the small octagonal baptistry, although it used to be dedicated to St Michael the Archangel before the re-ordering by Cardinal Altemps in 1592. The original date of erection seems to be in the 14th century. There was a restoration in 1920, ordered by Pope Benedict XV whose **coat-of-arms is above the entrance**. The wall behind the font shows The Baptism of Christ. The baptistry is now disused because it is too tiny.