St Mark's Basilica

The **Patriarchal Cathedral Basilica of Saint Mark** ([Italian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_language): *Basilica Cattedrale Patriarcale di San Marco*), commonly known as **St Mark's Basilica** ([Italian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_language): ***Basilica di San Marco***; [Venetian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venetian_language): *Baxéłega de San Marco*), is the [cathedral](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cathedral) church of the [Roman Catholic Patriarchate of Venice](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patriarchate_of_Venice); it became the episcopal seat of the [Patriarch of Venice](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patriarch_of_Venice) in 1807, replacing the earlier cathedral of [San Pietro di Castello](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Pietro_di_Castello_%28church%29). It is dedicated to and holds the [relics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Relic#Christianity) of [Saint Mark the Evangelist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark_the_Evangelist), the [patron saint](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patron_saint) of the city.

The church is located on the eastern end of [Saint Mark's Square](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piazza_San_Marco), the former political and religious centre of the [Republic of Venice](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_Venice), and is attached to the [Doge's Palace](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doge%27s_Palace). Prior to the [fall of the republic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Republic_of_Venice) in 1797, it was the chapel of the [Doge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doge_of_Venice) and was subject to his jurisdiction, with the concurrence of the [procurators of Saint Mark](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Procurators_of_Saint_Mark) *de supra* for administrative and financial affairs.

The present structure is the third church, begun probably in 1063 to express Venice's growing civic consciousness and pride. Like the two earlier churches, its model was the sixth-century [Church of the Holy Apostles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_the_Holy_Apostles) in [Constantinople](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantinople), although accommodations were made to adapt the design to the limitations of the physical site and to meet the specific needs of Venetian state ceremonies. [Middle-Byzantine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byzantine_architecture), [Romanesque](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanesque_architecture), and [Islamic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_architecture) influences are also evident, and [Gothic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venetian_Gothic_architecture) elements were later incorporated. To convey the republic's wealth and power, the original brick façades and interior walls were embellished over time with precious stones and rare marbles, primarily in the thirteenth century. Many of the columns, reliefs, and sculptures were spoils stripped from the churches, palaces, and public monuments of Constantinople as a result of the Venetian participation in the [Fourth Crusade](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fourth_Crusade). Among the plundered artefacts brought back to Venice were the four ancient [bronze horses](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horses_of_Saint_Mark) that were placed prominently over the entry.

The interior of the domes, the vaults, and the upper walls were slowly covered with [gold-ground](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gold_ground) [mosaics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mosaic) depicting saints, prophets, and biblical scenes. Many of these mosaics were later retouched or remade as artistic tastes changed and damaged mosaics had to be replaced, such that the mosaics represent eight hundred years of artistic styles. Some of them derive from traditional Byzantine representations and are masterworks of [Medieval art](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medieval_art); others are based on preparatory drawings made by prominent [Renaissance artists](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renaissance_art) from Venice and Florence, including [Paolo Veronese](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paolo_Veronese), [Tintoretto](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tintoretto), [Titian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Titian), [Paolo Uccello](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paolo_Uccello), and [Andrea del Castagno](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrea_del_Castagno).

History[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=St_Mark%27s_Basilica&action=edit&section=1" \o "Edit section: History)]

**Participazio church (c. 829–976)**[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=St_Mark%27s_Basilica&action=edit&section=2" \o "Edit section: Participazio church (c. 829–976))]

*Further information:*[*Saint Mark's relics*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Mark%27s_relics)



The entry to St Mark's, believed to date to the Participazio church

Several medieval [chronicles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chronicle) narrate the *translatio*, the removal of Saint Mark's body from [Alexandria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexandria) in Egypt by two Venetian merchants and its transfer to Venice in 828/829.[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-2) The [Chronicon Venetum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chronicon_Venetum_et_Gradense%22%20%5Co%20%22Chronicon%20Venetum%20et%20Gradense) further recounts that the [relics of Saint Mark](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Mark%27s_relics) were initially placed in a corner tower of the *castrum*, the fortified residence of the Doge and seat of government located on the site of the present [Doge's Palace](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doge%27s_Palace).[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-3) Doge [Giustiniano Participazio](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giustiniano_Participazio%22%20%5Co%20%22Giustiniano%20Participazio) (in office 827–829) subsequently stipulated in his will that his widow and his younger brother and successor [Giovanni](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giovanni_I_Participazio) (in office 829–832) were to erect a church dedicated to Saint Mark wherein the relics would ultimately be housed. Giustiniano further specified that the new church was to be built between the *castrum* and the Church of Saint Theodore to the north. Construction of the new church may have actually been underway during Giustinian's lifetime and was completed by 836 when the relics of Saint Mark were transferred.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-4)

Although the Participazio church was long believed to have been a rectangular structure with a single apse, soundings and excavations have demonstrated that St Mark's was from the beginning a cruciform church with at least a central [dome](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dome), likely in wood.[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-5)[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-Howard-History-28%E2%80%9329-6) It has not been unequivocally established if each of the four crossarms of the church had a similar dome or were instead covered with [gabled wooden roofs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gable_roof).[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-7)

The prototype was the [Church of the Holy Apostles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_the_Holy_Apostles) (demolished 1461) in [Constantinople](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantinople).[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-Howard-History-29-8) This radical break with the local architectural tradition of a rectangular plan in favour of a centrally planned Byzantine model reflected the growing commercial presence of Venetian merchants in the imperial capital as well as Venice's political ties with Byzantium. More importantly, it underscored that St Mark's was intended not as an ecclesiastical seat but as a state sanctuary.[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-9)

Remnants of the Participazio church likely survive and are generally believed to include the foundations and lower parts of several of the principal walls, including the western wall between the nave and the [narthex](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narthex). The great entry portal may also date to the early church as well as the western portion of the crypt, under the central dome, which seems to have served as the base for a raised dais upon which the original altar was located.[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-Howard-History-28%E2%80%9329-6)[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-10)[[note 1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-11)

**Orseolo church (976–c. 1063)**[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=St_Mark%27s_Basilica&action=edit&section=3" \o "Edit section: Orseolo church (976–c. 1063))]

The Participazio church was severely damaged in 976 during the popular uprising against Doge [Pietro IV Candiano](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pietro_IV_Candiano) (in office 959–976) when the fire that angry crowds had set to drive the Doge from the *castrum* spread to the adjoining church. Although the structure was not completely destroyed, it was compromised to the point that the [Concio](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concio%22%20%5Co%20%22Concio), the general assembly, had to alternatively convene in the cathedral of [San Pietro di Castello](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Pietro_di_Castello_%28church%29) to elect Candiano's successor, [Pietro I Orseolo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pietro_I_Orseolo) (in office 976–978).[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-12) Within two years, the church was repaired and at the sole expense of the Orseolo family, indications that the actual damage was relatively limited. Most likely, the wooden components had been consumed, but the walls and supports remained largely intact.[[12]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-13)

Nothing certain is known of the appearance of the Orseolo church. But given the short duration of the reconstruction, it is probable that work was limited to repairing damage with little innovation.[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-Howard-History-29-8)[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-14) It was at this time, however, that the tomb of Saint Mark, located in the main apse, was surmounted with brick vaults, creating the semi-enclosed shrine that would later be incorporated into the crypt when the floor of the [chancel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chancel) was raised during the construction of the third church.[[14]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-15)

**Contarini church (c. 1063–present)**[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=St_Mark%27s_Basilica&action=edit&section=4" \o "Edit section: Contarini church (c. 1063–present))]

**Construction**[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=St_Mark%27s_Basilica&action=edit&section=5" \o "Edit section: Construction)]

Civic pride led many Italian cities in the mid-eleventh century to begin erecting or rebuilding their cathedrals on a grand scale.[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-16) Venice was similarly interested in demonstrating its growing commercial wealth and power, and probably in 1063, under Doge [Domenico I Contarini](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Domenico_I_Contarini) (in office 1043–1071), St Mark's was substantially rebuilt and enlarged to the extent that the resulting structure appeared entirely new.[[16]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-Demus-Church-72-17)



Antonio Pellanda, reconstruction of the western façade of the Contarini church (1881)

The northern transept was lengthened, likely by incorporating the southern lateral nave of the Church of Saint Theodore.[[17]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-18) Similarly, the southern transept was extended, perhaps by integrating a corner tower of the *castrum*. Most significantly, the wooden domes were rebuilt in brick. This required strengthening the walls and [piers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pier_%28architecture%29) in order to support the new heavy [barrel vaults](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barrel_vault), which in turn were reinforced by [arcades](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arcade_%28architecture%29) along the sides of the northern, southern, and western crossarms. The vaults of the eastern crossarm were supported by inserting single [arches](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arch) that also served to divide the chancel from the choir chapels in the lateral apses.[[18]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-19)[[19]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-20)

In front of the western façade, a narthex was built. To accommodate the height of the existing great entry, the vaulting system of the new narthex had to be interrupted in correspondence to the portal, thus creating the shaft above that was later opened to the interior of the church. The crypt was also enlarged to the east, and the high altar was moved from under the central dome to the chancel, which was raised, supported by a network of columns and vaults in the underlying crypt.[[20]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-21) By 1071, work had progressed far enough that the investiture of Doge [Domenico Selvo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Domenico_Selvo) (in office 1071–1084) could take place in the unfinished church.[[16]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-Demus-Church-72-17)

Work on the interior began under Selvo who collected fine marbles and stones for the embellishment of the church and personally financed the mosaic decoration, hiring a master mosaicist from Constantinople.[[21]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-22)[[22]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-Dodwell-arts-184-23) The [Pala d'Oro](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pala_d%27Oro) (golden [altarpiece](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Altarpiece)), ordered from Constantinople in 1102, was installed on the high altar in 1105.[[23]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-24)[[24]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-D-Vasilescu-704-note-32-25) For the [consecration](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consecration) under Doge [Vitale Falier Dodoni](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vitale_Faliero) (in office 1084–1095), various dates are recorded, most likely reflecting a series of consecrations of different sections.[[25]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-26) The consecration on 8 October 1094 is considered to be the dedication of the church.[[26]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-27) On that day, the relics of Saint Mark were also placed into the new crypt.[[27]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-Muir-Ritual-87-28)

**Embellishment**[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=St_Mark%27s_Basilica&action=edit&section=6" \o "Edit section: Embellishment)]



The juncture of the southern and western crossarms, showing the original brickwork and the subsequent embellishment

As built, the Contarini church was a severe brick structure. Adornment inside was limited to the columns of the arcades, the [balusters](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baluster) and [parapets](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parapet) of the galleries, and the [lattice](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latticework) altar screens. The wall surfaces were decorated with moulded arches that alternated with engaged [brickwork](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brickwork) columns as well as niches and a few cornices.[[28]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-29) With the exception of the outside of the apse and the western façade that faced [Saint Mark's Square](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piazza_San_Marco), the stark brick exterior was enlivened only by receding concentric arches in contrasting brick around the windows.[[29]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-30)

The western façade, comparable to middle-Byzantine churches erected in the tenth and eleventh centuries, was characterized by a series of arches set between protruding pillars.[[30]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-Demus-Church-98-31) The walls were pierced by windows set in larger [blind arches](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blind_arch), while the intervening pillars were adorned with niches and circular *[patere](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patera_%28architecture%29%22%20%5Co%20%22Patera%20%28architecture%29)* made of rare marbles and stones that were surrounded with ornamental frames.[[31]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-32) Other decorative details, including [friezes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frieze) and [corbel tables](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corbel#Corbel_tables), reflected [Romanesque](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanesque_architecture) trends, an indication of the taste and craftsmanship of the Italian workers.[[32]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-Demus-Church-99-33)

With few exceptions, most notably the juncture of the southern and western crossarms, both the exterior and interior of the church were subsequently sheathed with [revetments](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/revetment) of marble and precious stones and enriched with columns, reliefs, and sculptures.[[33]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-Howard-32-34) Many of these ornamental elements were [spolia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spolia%22%20%5Co%20%22Spolia) taken from ancient or Byzantine buildings.[[34]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-35) Particularly in the period of the [Latin Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latin_Empire) (1204–1261), following the [Fourth Crusade](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fourth_Crusade), the Venetians pillaged the churches, palaces, and public monuments of Constantinople and stripped them of polychrome columns and stones. Once in Venice, some of the columns were sliced for revetmets and *patere*; others were paired and spread across the façades or used as altars.[[35]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-36) Despoliation continued in later centuries, notably during the [Venetian–Genoese Wars](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venetian%E2%80%93Genoese_Wars).[[36]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-37)[[37]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-38) Venetian sculptors also integrated the spoils with local productions, copying the Byzantine capitals and friezes so effectively that some of their work can only be distinguished with difficulty from the originals.[[38]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-39)

**Later modifications**[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=St_Mark%27s_Basilica&action=edit&section=7" \o "Edit section: Later modifications)]

*See also:*[*History of medieval Arabic and Western European domes*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_medieval_Arabic_and_Western_European_domes)



The lateral aisle of the western crossarm, showing the arcade that strengthens the vault and the walkways above which were created with the removal of the galleries

In addition to the sixteen windows in each of the five domes, the church was originally lit by three or seven windows in the apse and probably eight in each of the [lunettes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lunette).[[39]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-40) But many of these windows were later walled up to create more surface space for the mosaic decoration, with the result that the interior received insufficient sunlight, particularly the areas under the galleries which remained in relative darkness. The galleries were consequently reduced to narrow walkways with the exception of the ends of the northern, southern, and western crossarms where they remain. These walkways maintain the original relief panels of the galleries on the side facing the central section of the church. On the opposite side, new balustrades were erected.[[40]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-41)

The narthex of the Contarini church was originally limited to the western side. As with other Byzantine churches, it extended laterally beyond the façade on both sides and terminated in niches, of which the northern remains. The southern terminus was separated by a wall in the early twelfth century, thus creating an entry hall that opened on the southern façade toward the Doge's Palace and the waterfront.[[41]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-42) In the early thirteenth century, the narthex was extended along the northern and southern sides to completely surround the western crossarm.[[42]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-Demus-Decoration-128-43)

Also, in the first half of the thirteenth century, the original low-lying brick domes, typical of Byzantine churches, were surmounted with higher, outer shells supporting bulbous [lanterns](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roof_lantern) with crosses.[[43]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-44) These wooden frames covered in lead provided more protection from weathering to the actual domes below and gave greater visual prominence to the church.[[44]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-45)[[45]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-46)[[46]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-47) Various Near-Eastern models have been suggested as sources of inspiration and construction techniques for the heightened domes, including the [Al-Aqsa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Aqsa_Mosque) and [Qubbat aṣ-Ṣakhra](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dome_of_the_Rock%22%20%5Co%20%22Dome%20of%20the%20Rock) mosques in Jerusalem and the conical frame erected over the dome of the [Church of the Holy Sepulchre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_the_Holy_Sepulchre) in the early thirteenth century.[[47]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-48)

Mosaics[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=St_Mark%27s_Basilica&action=edit&section=20" \o "Edit section: Mosaics)]

*See also:*[*Late Antique and medieval mosaics in Italy*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Late_Antique_and_medieval_mosaics_in_Italy)

**Decorative programme**[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=St_Mark%27s_Basilica&action=edit&section=21" \o "Edit section: Decorative programme)]

**Interior**[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=St_Mark%27s_Basilica&action=edit&section=22" \o "Edit section: Interior)]



Petrus F., mosaic of Christ Pantocrator in the semi-dome of the apse with the [Christogram ICXC](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christogram%22%20%5Cl%20%22ICXC%22%20%5Co%20%22Christogram) (1506)

The location of the main altar within the apse necessarily affected the decorative programme.[[116]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-118) The [Christ Pantocrator](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christ_Pantocrator), customarily located in the central dome over the altar, was placed in the [semi-dome](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semi-dome) of the apse.[[117]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-119) Below, interspersed with three windows, are late-eleventh and early-twelfth-century mosaics that portray [Saint Nicholas of Myra](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Nicholas), Saint Peter, Saint Mark, and [Saint Hermagoras of Aquileia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermagoras_of_Aquileia) as the protectors and patrons of the state, Saint Nicholas being specifically the protector of seafarers.[[118]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-120)

Over the high altar in the eastern crossarm is the Dome of [Immanuel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immanuel) (God with us). It presents a young Christ in the centre, surrounded by stars. Radially arranged underneath are standing figures of the Virgin and Old-Testament prophets, the latter bearing scrolls with passages that largely refer to the [Incarnation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Incarnation_%28Christianity%29).[[119]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-121) Rather than [seraphim](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seraph) as was customary in middle-Byzantine churches, the [pendentives](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pendentive%22%20%5Co%20%22Pendentive) of the dome show the [symbols of the Four Evangelists](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_Evangelists#Symbols).[[120]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-Demus-Decoration-89-122)

An extensive cycle narrating the [Life of Christ](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life_of_Christ_in_art) covers much of the interior, with the principal events located along the longitudinal axis. The eastern vault, between the central dome and the chancel, contains the major events of the infancy ([Annunciation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annunciation), [Adoration of the Magi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adoration_of_the_Magi), [Presentation in the Temple](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presentation_of_Jesus_at_the_Temple)) along with the [Baptism of Christ](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baptism_of_Jesus) and the [Transfiguration](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transfiguration_of_Jesus). The western vault depicts the events of the [Passion of Jesus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passion_of_Jesus) on one side (the [kiss of Judas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kiss_of_Judas), the [trial before Pilate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pilate%27s_court), and the [Crucifixion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crucifixion_of_Jesus)) and the [Resurrection](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resurrection_of_Jesus) on the other side (the [Harrowing of Hell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harrowing_of_Hell) and the [post-resurrection appearances](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post-resurrection_appearances_of_Jesus)). A secondary series illustrating Christ's miracles is located in the transepts.[[121]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-123) The series seems to have derived from an eleventh-century Byzantine Gospel.[[122]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-124) The transepts also contain a detailed cycle of the [Life of the Virgin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life_of_the_Virgin): these scenes were probably derived from an eleventh-century [illuminated manuscript](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illuminated_manuscript) of the [Protogospel of James](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_of_James%22%20%5Co%20%22Gospel%20of%20James) from Constantinople.[[123]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-125)[[124]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-Dodwell-arts-186-126) As a prelude, a [Tree of Jesse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tree_of_Jesse) showing the ancestors of Christ was added to the end wall of the northern crossarm between 1542 and 1551.[[125]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-127) Throughout the various narrative cycles, Old-Testament prophets are portrayed holding texts that relate to the New-Testament scenes nearby.[[126]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-128)

The Dome of the Ascension occupies the central position, whereas in the Church of the Holy Apostles it was located over the southern crossarm.[[127]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-Demus-Decoration-88-129) The dome, executed in the late twelfth century, is exemplary of middle-Byzantine prototypes in Constantinople.[[128]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-130) In the centre Christ ascends, accompanied by four angels and surrounded by standing figures of the Virgin, two angels, and the [Twelve Apostles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apostles_in_the_New_Testament). As customary for the central dome in middle-Byzantine churches, the pendentives contain the Four Evangelists, each with his [gospel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel#Canonical_gospels).[[120]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-Demus-Decoration-89-122)

As in the Church of the Holy Apostles, the Dome of Pentecost is located over the western crossarm.[[129]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-131) In the centre is an [hetoimasia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hetoimasia%22%20%5Co%20%22Hetoimasia), an empty throne with a book and dove. Radiating outward are silver rays which fall on the heads of the Apostles seated around the outer rim of the dome, each with a flame on his head. In keeping with Pentecost, as the institution of the Church, the side vaults and walls of the western crossarm largely illustrate the subsequent missionary activities of the Apostles and their deaths as [martyrs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_martyr).[[127]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-Demus-Decoration-88-129) The specific events in the lives of the various Apostles and the manner of their deaths adhere to Western traditions, as narrated in Latin [martyrologies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martyrology%22%20%5Co%20%22Martyrology) that derive in part from the Book of Acts but to a greater extent from [apocryphal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apocrypha) sources. However, the single representations and the overall concept of presenting the lives of the saints in a composition that combines several events together in one scene have their parallels in Greek manuscript illustrations of the middle-Byzantine period.[[130]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-132)

The western vault illustrates [Saint John's vision](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Revelation) of the [Apocalypse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apocalypse) and the Last Judgement. On the wall below there is a thirteenth-century [deesis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deesis%22%20%5Co%20%22Deesis) with Christ enthroned between the Virgin and Saint Mark.[[131]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-133)

**Narthex**[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=St_Mark%27s_Basilica&action=edit&section=23" \o "Edit section: Narthex)]

The decorative programme of the western and northern wings of the narthex seems to have been planned in its entirety in the thirteenth century when the eleventh-century narthex was extended along the northern and southern sides of the western crossarm. However, a stylistic change in the mosaics is evident in the northern wing, indicating that the execution of the programme was interrupted, presumably to await the completion of the vaulting system.[[42]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-Demus-Decoration-128-43)



The Dome of the Creation in the narthex (thirteenth century)[[132]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-134)

Unlike in middle-Byzantine churches where the theme of the Last Judgement is often represented in the narthex, the decorative programme narrates the stories of [Genesis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Genesis) and [Exodus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Exodus): the main subjects are the [Creation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_creation_narrative) and the [Tower of Babel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tower_of_Babel) along with the lives of [Noah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noah), [Abraham](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham), [Joseph](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_%28Genesis%29), and [Moses](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moses).[[133]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-135) Special emphasis is given to the stories of the [sacrifice of Abel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abel) and the [hospitality of Abraham](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham#Three_visitors), located prominently in the lunettes on either side of the entry to the church, due to the analogies with Christ's death and the [Eucharistic meal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eucharist).[[134]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-136)

It has long been recognized that the individual scenes are very close to those of the [Cotton Genesis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cotton_Genesis), an important fourth or fifth-century Greek [illuminated manuscript](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illuminated_manuscript) copy of the Book of Genesis: about a hundred of the 359 [miniatures](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miniature_%28illuminated_manuscript%29) in the manuscript were used. Of Egyptian origin, the manuscript may have reached Venice as a result of the commercial relations of the Venetians in the Eastern Mediterranean or as booty of the Fourth Crusade.[[135]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-137) The sixth-century [Vienna Genesis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vienna_Genesis) was also in Venice in the early thirteenth century and may have influenced artistic choices.[[136]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-138) With regard to the Dome of Moses, the scenes most closely resemble [Palaeologan art](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byzantine_art%22%20%5Cl%20%22Palaeologan_age%22%20%5Co%20%22Byzantine%20art), suggesting an unknown manuscript from the third quarter of the thirteenth century as the iconographic source.[[137]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-139)

While the Byzantine renderings of the Old-Testament stories in illuminated manuscripts provided suitable models, Byzantine churches themselves did not generally give importance to the Old Testament in their decoration, considering the stories to be shadows of the history of salvation, inferior to the reality of the New Testament. The impetus for the Venetians to choose the Old Testament as the theme of the narthex was instead of western derivation and reflected an interest that had developed in Rome beginning in the late eleventh century.[[138]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-140)

The narration begins in correspondence to the former southern entry of the church with the Dome of the Creation, which opens with the spirit of God hovering above the waters and concludes with [Adam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam) and [Eve](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eve) cast out from the [Garden of Eden](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garden_of_Eden). As in the Cotton Genesis, Christ is portrayed as the agent of creation.[[139]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-141) Underneath, the pendentives contain [cherubim](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cherub), the guardians of Eden, and the lunettes illustrate the story of [Cain and Abel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cain_and_Abel).[[140]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-142) The stories of Noah and of the Tower of Babel with the [confusion of tongues](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tower_of_Babel#Confusion_of_tongues) and the dispertion of the nations occupy the vaults on either side of the entry to the church.[[141]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-143) The story of Abraham, from the [calling of the patriarch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham#Origins_and_calling) to the [circumcision](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_male_circumcision#Abrahamic_religions) of [Isaac](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaac), is narrated in a single dome and the two lunettes underneath, whereas the story of Joseph, the most extensive, occupies the next three domes.[[142]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-144) The story of Moses, until the [Crossing of the Red Sea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crossing_the_Red_Sea), is limited to the final [bay](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bay_%28architecture%29).[[143]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-145)

**Style**[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=St_Mark%27s_Basilica&action=edit&section=24" \o "Edit section: Style)]





Mosaics in the Dome of Immanuel: the prophet [Jeremiah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeremiah), dating to the first quarter of the twelfth century, (left) and the prophet [Isaiah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaiah), probably executed between 1170 and 1180 (right)[[144]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-146)

The oldest mosaics in St Mark's, located in the niches of the entry porch in the narthex, may date to as early as 1070.[[145]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-147) Although Byzantine in style, they are somewhat antiquated with respect to contemporary trends in Byzantium. Most likely, they were executed by mosaicists who had left Constantinople in the mid-eleventh century to work on the cathedral of Torcello and then remained in the local area.[[146]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-148) More modern but still archaic in style are the figures in the main apse which were done in the late-eleventh and early-twelfth centuries.[[147]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-149)

The most important period of decoration was the twelfth century when Venice's relations with Byzantium alternated between political tensions that limited artistic influence from the East and moments of intense trade and cooperation that favoured the Venetians' awareness of eastern prototypes as well as the influx of Byzantine mosaicists and materials.[[148]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-150) The three figures in the Dome of Immanuel that date to the first quarter of the century ([Jeremiah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeremiah), [Hosea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hosea), and [Habakkuk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Habakkuk)) are the work of highly skilled mosaicists, likely Greek-trained. They demonstrate the greater classicism and realism of middle-Byzantine painting in Constantinople but also local trends in the harsher and broken lines.[[149]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-151) In succeeding phases of work in the choir chapels and the transept, Byzantine miniatures were copied more or less faithfully for the mosaics, but any eastern influence that could reflect the latest artistic developments in Constantinople is hardly traceable.[[150]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-152) A new and direct awareness of artistic developments in Constantinople is indicated in the Dome of Pentecost, executed sometime in the first half of the twelfth century.[[151]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-153)



Mosaic in the right lateral nave depicting the [Agony in the Garden](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agony_in_the_Garden) (early thirteenth century)[[152]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-154)



[Andrea del Castagno](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrea_del_Castagno), attributed (cartoon), mosaic in the Mascoli Chapel depicting the [Dormition of the Virgin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dormition_of_the_Mother_of_God%22%20%5Co%20%22Dormition%20of%20the%20Mother%20of%20God) (1448?)[[153]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-155)

In the last third of the twelfth century, a large portion of the mosaics in the Dome of Immanuel and the entirety of the Dome of the Ascension and of several vaults in the western crossarm had to be completely redone in consequence of a catastrophic event, the nature and date of which are not known.[[154]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-156) Local influence is evident. But the more vigorous poses, agitated draperies, expressiveness, and heightened contrast show the partial assimilation of the developing dynamic style in Constantinople.[[155]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-157) The mosaics in the Dome of the Ascension and those depicting the Passion in the nearby vault represent the maturity of the Venetian mosaic school and are one of the great achievements of [Medieval art](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medieval_art).[[156]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-158)

After the removal of the galleries, the mosaic decoration was extended onto the lower walls, beginning in the thirteenth century. The first mosaic, depicting the [Agony in the Garden](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agony_in_the_Garden), represents a synthesizing of various traditions, both eastern and western. Traces remain of the complicated patterns of the late Komnenian period. But the statuesque quality of the figures, which are also more rounded, reflect contemporary developments in Byzantine art such as can be seen at [Studenica Monastery](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Studenica_Monastery%22%20%5Co%20%22Studenica%20Monastery). Concurrently, an elegance associated with western Gothic appears and is fused with the Byzantine traditions. The Gothic influence becomes more pronounced in later mosaics of the period with patterned backgrounds that derive from the [stained-glass windows](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stained_glass) in French churches.[[157]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-159)

The interior mosaics were apparently complete by the 1270s, with work on the narthex continuing into the 1290s. Although some activity must have still been underway in 1308 when the [Great Council](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Council_of_Venice) allowed a glass furnace on [Murano](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murano) to produce mosaic material for St Mark's during the summer, by 1419 no competent mosaicist remained to repair the extensive damage to the main apse and western dome caused by a fire that year. The Venetian government had to consequently seek assistance from the [Signoria of Florence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Signoria_of_Florence%22%20%5Co%20%22Signoria%20of%20Florence) which sent [Paolo Uccello](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paolo_Uccello).[[158]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-160) Other Florentine artists, including [Andrea del Castagno](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrea_del_Castagno), were also active in St Mark's in the mid-fifteenth century, introducing a sense of [perspective](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perspective_%28graphical%29#Renaissance) largely achieved with architectural settings. In this same period, [Michele Giambono](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michele_Giambono) executed mosaics.[[159]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-161)

By the time a new fire in 1439 made repairs once again necessary, a number of Venetian mosaicists had been trained. Some of the replacement mosaics they created show a Florentine influence; others reflect Renaissance developments in the detailing and the modelling of the figures. But overall the replacement mosaics in this period closely imitated the design of the damaged works and were intended to look medieval.[[160]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-162)



Tintoretto workshop (cartoon), mosaic in the central nave depicting the [Presentation of Jesus at the Temple](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presentation_of_Jesus_at_the_Temple) (sixteenth century)[[161]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-Lorenzetti-203-163)

Efforts to maintain the stylistic integrity of the medieval works whenever repairs and restorations became necessary were largely abandoned in the sixteenth century. Often in the absence of any need to restore mosaics but under the sole pretense of replacing old mosaics with [Renaissance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renaissance_art) and [Mannerist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mannerism) ones, renowned artists such as Titian, Tintoretto, Paolo Veronese, Giuseppe Salviati, Palma Giovane increasingly competed for work in the church, preparing preliminary sketches for 'modern' mosaics, considered artistically superior, with little attempt to stylistically integrate the new figures and scenes into the older compositions.[[162]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-164)

In addition to damage from fire and earthquake as well as from the vibrations that resulted whenever cannon were fired in salute from ships in the lagoon, the normal decay of the underlying masonry made it necessary to repeatedly repair the mosaics.[[163]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-Demus-Decoration-9-165) In 1716, Leopoldo dal Pozzo, a mosaicist from Rome, was commissioned to assume responsibility for the repair and maintenance of the mosaics in St Mark's, the local craftsmen having once again largely died out. Dal Pozzo also executed a few new mosaics based on preliminary drawings by [Giovanni Battista Piazzetta](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giovanni_Battista_Piazzetta) and [Sebastiano Ricci](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sebastiano_Ricci).[[163]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-Demus-Decoration-9-165) An exclusive contract for restoration was stipulated in 1867 with the mosaic workshop run by the [Salviati glassmaking firm](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salviati_%28glassmakers%29%22%20%5Co%20%22Salviati%20%28glassmakers%29), whose highly criticized restoration work often involved removing and resetting the mosaics, usually with a considerable loss of quality. Although the original iconographic programme has been largely preserved, despite centuries of restoration and renewal, and roughly three-fourths of the mosaics maintain their earlier compositions and styles, only about a third can be considered original.[[164]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-166)

|  |
| --- |
| * **St Mark's Basilica**
* ***Basilica di San Marco***
 |
| main façade of St Mark'sMain façade |
| **Location** | [Venice](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venice), Italy |
| **Denomination** | Roman Catholic |
| **Consecrated** | 8 October 1094 |
| **Titular saint** | Mark the Evangelist |
| **History** |
|

|  |
| --- |
| **Current status** |

 |
| **Designation** | Cathedral (minor basilica)1807–present |
| **Episcopal see** | Patriarchate of Venice |
|

|  |
| --- |
| **Prior status** |

 |
| **Designation** | Ducal chapel[c.](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/circa#English) 836–1797 |
| **Tutelage** | Doge of Venice |
| **Building details** |
|

|  |
| --- |
| **dark interior with golden mosaics** |
| Central nave looking east |

 |
|

|  |
| --- |
| **Construction** |

 |
| **Built** | [c.](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/circa#English) 829–[c.](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/circa#English) 836 |
| **Rebuilt** | [c.](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/circa#English) 1063–1094 |
| **Styles** | Byzantine, Romanesque, Gothic |
|

|  |
| --- |
| **Specifications** |

 |
| **Length** | 76.5 metres (251 ft) |
| **Width** | 62.6 metres (205 ft) |
| **Outer height(central dome)** | 43 metres (141 ft) |
| **Inner height(central dome)** | 28.15 metres (92.4 ft)[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mark%27s_Basilica#cite_note-1) |