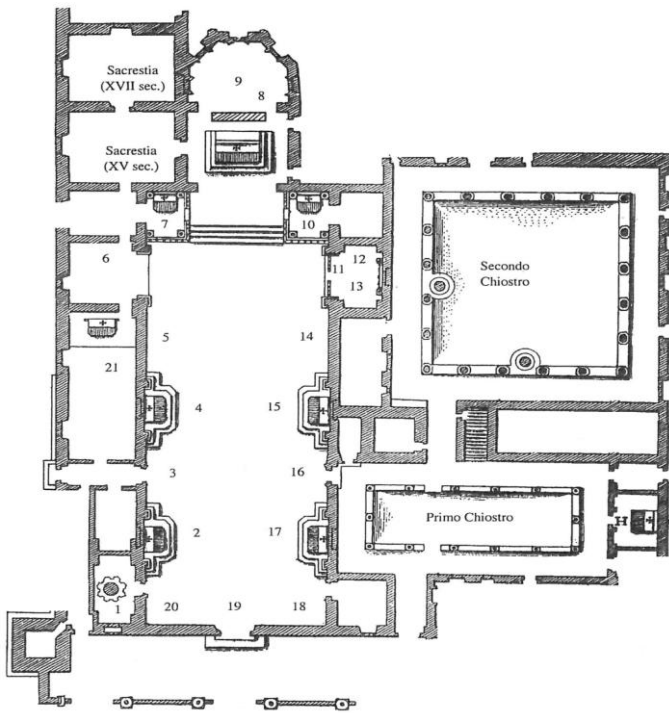


Plan of the Basilica

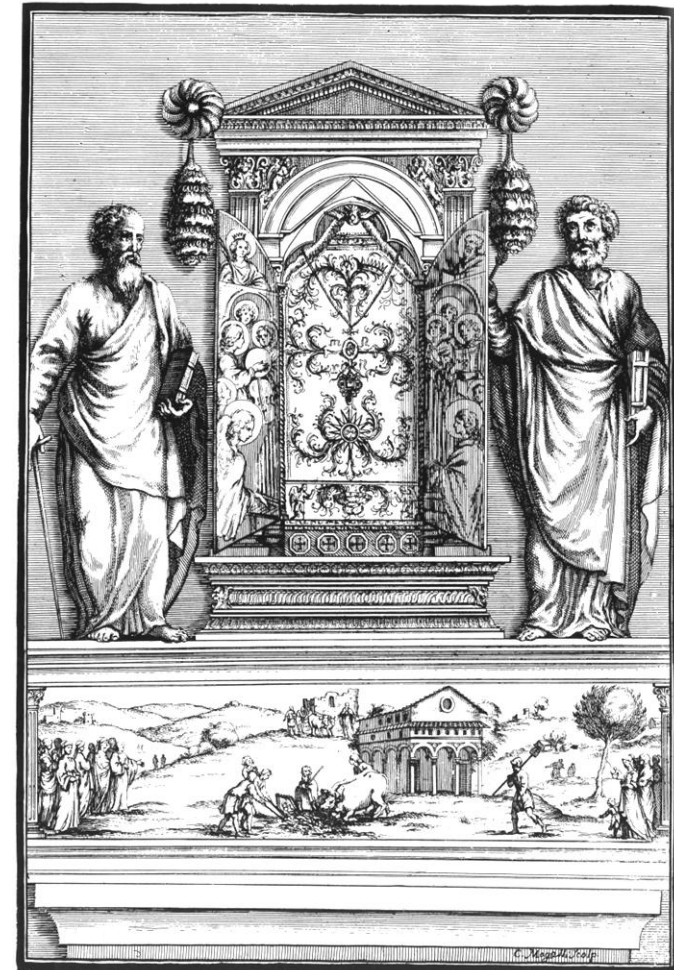


- 1) Baptistry
Baptismal font (1590)
Baptism of Jesus, oil on canvas (early 17th century)
- 2) Jacopo Chimenti called "l'Empoli" (1551-1640)
The Vocation of Peter and Andrew, oil on canvas (1606)
- 3) Giandomenico Ferretti called "l'Imola" (1692-1768)
A cattle plague, oil on canvas (ca. 1720)
- 4) Matteo Rosselli (1578-1650)
The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian, oil on canvas (1618)
- 5) Choir in sandstone (15th century)
- 6) Wooden choir stalls (15th-16th century)
Mariotto di Nardo (1394-1431)
The Holy Trinity, tempera on panel (1418)

- 7) Michelozzo (1396-1472)
Temple of the Adored Effigy of Saint Mary in Impruneta
Luca della Robbia (ca. 1399-1482)
Saints Paul and Luke (at the sides of the Effigy)
Decorations and ceiling in polychrome terracotta
G. B. Foggini (1652-1725) - C. Merlini - B. Holzamann
Antependium in silver
- 8) Pietro Nelli and Tommaso di Marco del Mazza
Polyptych: Madonna and Child with Saints (1375)
- 9) Wooden choir stall (16th century)
- 10) Michelozzo (1396-1472)
Temple of the Holy Sacrament
Luca della Robbia (ca. 1399-1485)
Crucifixion
Saint John the Baptist and a bishop saint (St. Zanobius? St. Romulus?)
Angels and ceiling decorations in polychrome terracotta
Antependium in silver (16th-17th century)
- 11) Workshop of Benedetto da Maiano
Madonna and Child, marble bas-relief (15th century)
- 12) Florentine school
Antonio degli Agli's tomb in marble (15th century)
- 13) Pietro Tacca (1577-1640), formerly attributed to Giambologna (1529-1608)
Bronze Crucifix
- 14) Pietro Santi Bambocci
Procession of the Sacred Effigy in Florence, oil on canvas (ca. 1720)
- 15) Domenico Cresti called "il Passignano" (1559-1635)
Birth of the Virgin, oil on canvas (1602)
- 16) Pietro Santi Bambocci
Recovery of the Sacred Effigy, oil on canvas (ca. 1720)
- 17) formerly attributed to Cristofano Allori (1577-1621)
Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence, oil on canvas
- 18) attributed to Giandonienico Ferretti (1692-1768)
End of a long rain, oil on canvas (ca. 1720)
- 19) Choir screen (18th century) and organ (16th century)
- 20) attributed to Pietro Pertichi (ca. 1675-1756)
Battle Scene, oil on canvas (ca. 1720)
- 21) Chapel of Saints Sebastian and Fabian
Giovanni Bilivert (1576-1644)
Madonna and Child with Sts. Rocco and Sebastian, oil on canvas
attributed to Giovanni Camillo Sagrestani (1660-1731)
Saints Fabian and Sebastian, fresco

The Basilica of Saint Mary in Impruneta

a brief guide to



*His mother saith unto the servants,
Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.*

(John 2,5 - King James Bible - 1611)

A brief history of the Basilica-Sanctuary of Santa Maria all'Impruneta (Saint Mary in Impruneta)

The **Basilica of Santa Maria all'Impruneta** is one of Tuscany's three best-known Marian sanctuaries. Its fame rests on the cult of a much-venerated effigy and on the traditional history of its loss and subsequent miraculous recovery.

Tradition has it that a sacred image of the Virgin painted by the apostle Luke was brought to Tuscany in the third century by Saint Romulus and his acolytes, but then hidden underground for fear of persecution. The legend of its recovery was first recorded in writing by a 14th-century priest named Stefano Buondelmonti and in marble by an as yet unidentified 15th-century Tuscan sculptor in the form of an antependium for the Saint Mary altar, now exhibited in the sanctuary Treasury. Sometime in the fourth century, so the legend goes, it was decided to build a chapel dedicated to Mary on nearby Marymount (Tuscany and most of Europe was then still covered by dense primaeval forests), but this venture failed when walls built during the day invariably crumbled of their own accord during the night. A 'divine judgement' is said to have been proposed by a saintly hermit: two untamed bulls were made to drag a cart laden with building stones to wherever they would rush in their wildness. Suddenly they stopped and knelt down, and no earthly power could make them rise. Quickly pickaxes went to work, but stopped when a plaintive female voice came from underground, whereupon careful excavation brought to light Saint Luke's painting. Thus the legend.

But reliable facts about the basilica's foundation, at first as a simple parish church, only go back to the eleventh century. The oldest surviving document is the marble plaque built into the wall near the main portal that commemorates consecration on 3rd January 1060 by Cardinal Umberto di Selva Candida and Pope Nicolas II, ex-bishop of Florence. In the course of clean-up work after the destruction caused by aerial bombs in August 1944 (see below) the Romanesque foundations came to light, confirming the plaque's date. The present crypt under the centre of the presbytery goes back to then, as does the massive crenellated bell tower.

Gradually throughout the fourteenth century the edifice was transformed from parish church into a sanctuary centred on the cult of the miraculous effigy, which was being carried to Florence ever more frequently to be borne aloft in processions in times of plague, famine, flood and war, to bestow blessings on peace treaties, and to beseech cures of ailments in ruling families. Florentines became devoted to this Marian shelter-out-side-the-walls, though it competed among the faithful with the grander Marian sanctuary of Santissima Annunziata in the city proper. In time it was adapted and re-adapted along the always rational lines of Tuscan convent churches, with large interior spaces for sheltering pilgrims.

The large main cloister and the priest's residence go back to Stefano Buondelmonti's days in the mid-1300's. Bishop Antonio degli Agli, a widely celebrated humanist and the parish priest from 1439 until his death in 1477, began the Renaissance updating. He also surrounded the church with a seemingly impregnable fortress-like rectangular compound (now gone) having a tower at each corner, added the second cloister, and, inside the church, constructed two little temples on the model of Michelozzo di Bartolommeo's temple in Santissima Annunziata.

Addition of a polygonal apse in 1522 was financed by a wealthy maecenas, the Florentine merchant Andrea Buondelmonti. Toward the end of the 1500's were added two chapels at the ends of the transept and four grey sandstone altars surmounted by tympanum windows.

When in 1633 the end of an outbreak of bubonic plague was attributed to the miraculous effect of the effigy brought from Impruneta, the popularity of the sanctuary grew in leaps and bounds. The ruling de' Medici family, too, paid devout homage, and soon the Madonna was engulfed by scores of precious ex-voto gifts of gratitude, many of them now on display in the Treasury. The portico in front of the facade by Gherardo Silvani was built in 1634, also as an ex-voto, entirely at the expense of the members of Florence's Company of the Stigmata of Saint Francis.

The most spectacular-ever procession of the effigy took place in Florence from 20th May to 3rd June, 1711, in front of the grand-ducal residence in Palazzo Pitti, where crown prince Ferdinando Maria de' Medici lay dying of syphilis. The Medici dynasty was about to become extinct. Gorgeous were the banners, resonant the music, stupendous the gifts, these including the superb silver altar antependium by court artist Giovan Battista Foggini on commission from Grand Duke Cosimo III. But the prince died.

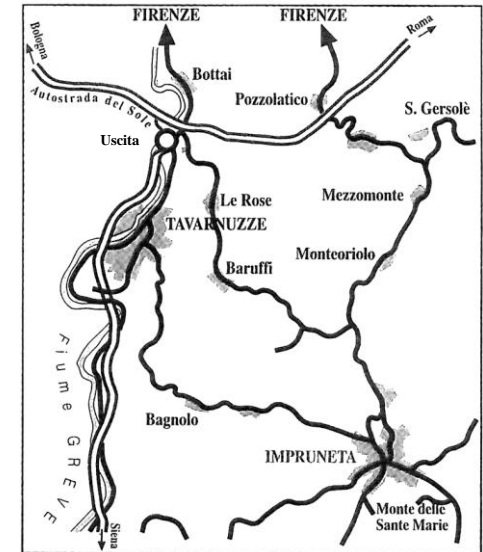
The most far-reaching structural changes to the basilica were begun in 1714 by the incumbent parish priest Giovanni Battista Casotti. The interior was rebuilt on the model of Santissima Annunziata by architect Alessandro Saller, who installed an opulent carved, painted, gilded and coffered wooden ceiling, finished in 1717. All the 16th-century windows of the nave were replaced in the baroque taste. Huge canvases in rich gilded frame depicting the miracles wrought by the Madonna were hung in the central nave. The 16th-century organ was moved to another side to make room for a magnificent choir in sandstone. But upon the death in 1737 of the last Medici, Gian Gastone, the dynasty became extinct. The new rulers, the Lothringen-Lorena, sharply curtailed the cult of Maria and the effigy, and the last-ever procession took place in Florence in 1740.

The title Lesser Basilica became official in 1925. The useless and mindless aerial bombing of 27th and 28th July 1944 destroyed a large part of the buildings and destroyed or severely damaged many works of art. Only the effigy itself was unscathed. Taken to Florence in 1944, it was returned in 1947 in the manner tradition prescribed: in a wagon drawn by two oxen (not bulls), and accompanied by a great crowd of believers.

Useful Information

HOW TO GET TO IMPRUNETA

From the toll booth of the Autostrada del Sole (A1) at "Firenze Impruneta" follow the signs to Tavarnuzze, about 2km. From Tavarnuzze follow the signs to Impruneta, about 6km. Once in Impruneta you can't miss the basilica



ADDRESS

Basilica Santuario di S. Maria all'Impruneta
Piazza Buondelmonti, 50023 IMPRUNETA (FI)
Parish phone: 055 2011072
Website: www.basilicaimpruneta.org

OPENING TIME

Workdays: 7,30 a.m. / 11,30 a.m. – 4,30 p.m. / 6,30 p.m.
(the Basilica is closed on Wednesday afternoon)
Sundays & holidays: 7,30 a.m. / 12,00 p.m. – 4,30 p.m. / 7,00 p.m.

MASSES

Workdays: 8,00 a.m. – 6,00 p.m.
Wednesday: 10,00 a.m. (celebrated at the Madonna's altar)
Saturday: 6,00 p.m.
Sundays & holidays: 8,00 a.m. – 10,30 a.m. – 6,00 p.m.

The **Venerable Effigy of Saint Mary** is unveiled every Wednesday morning during the 10,00 a.m. Mass, on the main feasts of the liturgical year, on Sundays in the months of May and October and for pilgrimages.

Organisers of pilgrimages are strongly urged to make arrangements with the parish in ample time before the planned arrival.