



Architecture and art: St Catherine's church through the centuries

Christianity has been preached in the area of the Parish of St. Catherine for at least nine hundred years. The original settlements in the area were in the villages of Nummi and Kairinen. Archaeological findings from the old cemetery on the church hill indicate that the area has been influenced by Christianity in one way or another since the 11th century. Ecclesiastical activities in the area have been documented since the 13th century.

The exact founding date of the Parish of St. Catherine, also known as the Parish of Nummi, is unknown, but it is believed to date back to the 13th century, when other parishes were established in connection with the founding of the episcopal seat. The Dominican Order may have played a significant role in the early stages of the church. The church was dedicated to the martyr St. Catherine of Alexandria presumably at the founding of the parish. The wooden statue of St. Catherine of Alexandria on the altarpiece wall, dating back to the 14th century, is the oldest artifact in the church and has endured much – even surviving a fire in the church, which darkened its surface. Today, the church is also named after Catherine of Siena, who lived in the 14th century and is depicted in a mural north of the choir window.

The first written mention of the parish is from 1309. At that time, a wooden church stood on the site of St. Catherine's. According to legend, the old church faced destruction in 1396 when German pirates known as the Victual Brothers looted and burned it. However, based on current knowledge, the attack by the Victual Brothers on St. Catherine's Church is only a legend.

In the mid-15th century, the church was rebuilt in stone. The church was originally planned as a two-aisled design, with only one row of pillars in the center and two windows at the east end. However, the plans changed during construction, and the church was ultimately built with three aisles, following the style of other churches in the diocese. This is indicated, among other things, by the closing of the priest's door, located on the "wrong" side of the church, which has been converted into a closet.

The current pulpit dates back to 1654, and its wood carvings are the work of Turku-based Matthias Reiman. The 12-part mural on the organ balcony, depicting evangelists and apostles, is the work of church painter Jonas Bergman from 1759-60. He also painted the former altarpiece on the north wall of the church, depicting the institution of the Lord's Supper.



In 1804, a bishop's inspection was held in the Parish of Kaarina, focusing on the condition of the church. According to contemporary accounts, the church was then quite dim, even "horribly dark." In 1806-1807, numerous repairs and construction work were carried out in the church, including the addition of a new window in the north wall, allowing light to dispel the darkness. However, by the end of the 19th century, the church was once again in need of restoration, and renovations planned by architect J. Stenbäck were carried out around the turn of the century. The medieval paintings in the choir vault and the east wall, which had been painted over, were revealed and restored, though somewhat heavy-handedly.

In 1990, the Parish of Kaarina was divided into two parishes along the border between Kaarina and the City of Turku. The part remaining within the territory of the City of Turku was named the Parish of St. Catherine, and its church, the old stone church of Kaarina, became known as St. Catherine's Church.