

THE CLOSED ALTARPIECE

The upper register shows the announcement of the birth of Jesus to Mary.

The lower register depicts the donors, J. Vyd and E. Borluut, kneeling in front of statues of John the Baptist and John the Evangelist.

I The prophet Zechariah and the archangel Gabriel

'Hail, most highly favoured lady, the Lord is with you'. With these words the archangel Gabriel tells Mary that she will be the mother of the Son of God. The lily in the angel's hand symbolises Mary's virginity.

II The Eritrean sibyl and the view of the city

The Eritrean sibyl is a pagan prophetess who had predicted the coming of a saviour. The two arched windows offer a view over a street in 15th century Ghent.

III The Cumaean sibyl and the washing alcove

The Cumaean sibyl is a pagan prophetess who had likewise predicted the coming of a saviour. We can also see an alcove with washing utensils.

IV The prophet Micah and Mary

In response to Gabriel's message, Mary answers affirmatively: 'Behold the handmaiden of the Lord'. Her words are written in mirror image, so that they can be read from heaven.

V and VIII Joos Vyd and Elisabeth Borluut

The commissioners and donors of the

altarpiece: Joos Vyd and Elisabeth Borluut. He was a leading member of the Ghent city council. She came from one of the most influential Ghent families.

VI John the Baptist

The patron saint of St. John's Church, which was later re-dedicated to St. Bavo. He holds the Lamb of God in his arms, pointing to it with his finger.



VII John the Evangelist

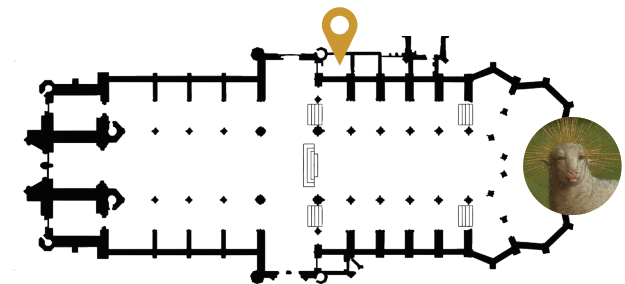
The chalice with writhing serpents refers to a legend that John once drank from a poisoned cup but survived. He was the author of the Book of Revelation, an important source of inspiration for the altarpiece.



SINT-BAAFS LAM GODS

Summary of the panels

To find the Lamb of God:
Take the stairs to level +2 or the lift (=floor +2). Go to the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament, indicated by the head of a lamb on the plan below.



Opening of the panels: 10.25

Closing of the panels: 16.55

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Lamb of God is one of the great masterpieces of European art. The altarpiece was painted by the van Eyck brothers, who belong to Flemish Primitive school of painting. Inaugurated in 1432, it is 3.4m high and 4.4m wide, and consists of twenty panels. The wings are painted on both sides. It was commissioned by Joos Vyd and his wife for the Vyd Chapel in this cathedral. The altarpiece was usually closed and was only opened on Sundays and religious feast days.

THE OPENED ALTARPIECE

Amidst the colourful majesty of heaven, the Lamb (representing Christ) dominates the central panel, surrounded by angels and the faithful. Further worshippers can be seen on the lower panels of the wings.

IX and XV Adam and Eve

The absence of a blue sky in the background distinguishes Adam and Eve from the heavenly figures. They are people, sinful but redeemed by the coming of Christ. This is why they are included on the altarpiece's interior.

X The singing angels

Even though they have no wings, this is a heavenly choir of angels. Their harmonic singing reflects the polyphonic music that was popular during the Burgundian period.

XI Mary

A modest Mary reads her prayer book. The four different flowers in her crown are traditional Marian symbols referring to purity, humility, love and suffering.



XII Central figure

The text on the throne of the central figure proclaims: 'This is Almighty God in all his divine majesty'. This figure can refer to both God the Father and Christ the Son.

XIII John the Baptist

John was the first to recognise Jesus as the redeemer and called him 'the Lamb of God'. Again he points to the Messiah.

XIV The music-making angels

The ermine-fringed robe of the organist testifies to the technical mastery of the artist.

XVI The Just Judges

These representatives of worldly power exercise the Christian virtue of justice. The original panel was stolen in 1934. Jef Van der Veken painted this copy in 1939.

XVII The Soldiers of Christ

They represent the forces that defend the Church. Behind them we can see crowned princes.

XVIII The adoration of the Lamb of God

The blood of the Lamb flows into a chalice. This is a reference to the foundation of the Christian faith: the Messiah gives his life to save humankind. At the front we can see the fountain of eternal life, around which the elect -apostles, martyrs, prophets, holy men and women, church fathers, etc. -have gathered from near and far to worship Jesus the Lamb.

XIX The hermits

They renounced all earthly things to focus on a life of spirituality.

XX The pilgrims

They are led by St. Christopher. Like the hermits, they walk through a glorious landscape.