

## The organ

The positive organ, located in the Rotunda, is composed of 6 keys, 1 pedal and 2 keyboards. It is a prototype for a transportable instrument designed by Henri Bouffard and built in 1987 in Jean-Claude Fournet-Fayard carpenter's workshop.

## The Precious Blood

Cardinal Eudes, in his letter in 1257, justified his choice of Neuvy for the relics. He said that it was the result of *“The devotional service of the congregation that, in order to have everyday in front of them the Passion and the Death of Our Lord, had founded your church in honour of the Holy Sepulchre”*. From now on, *“the similarity would be substituted for the thing herself”*. This approach of this cardinal, pope legate and councillor of Saint Louis (he carried out the consecration of the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris built to house Jesus' Crown of Thorns), was not a coincidence. All his life, this theologian tried to highlight the humanity of Christ the Redeemer.

During the French Revolution, in February 1794, the precious relics nearly disappeared. They were saved thanks to the stratagem of Jean Blondeau, the sexton who replaced in the reliquary the blood drops with pieces of baked pear. When the Revolution died down, the Precious Blood drops were returned to the clergy. Nowadays, they are shown in a reliquary produced by Poussielgue-Rusand's workshops and shown at the Universal Exhibition of Brussels. It was given to the parish in 1909 by a Belgian family.



Since then, the pilgrimage has always been celebrated in Neuvy-Saint-Sépulchre. It takes place each Easter Monday and goes in two stages. From 10.30 a.m., a great procession travels up and down the streets to hear the preacher and do a penance from the Basilica to the showground. Then, the procession takes the congregation back into the Basilica for the Eucharistic celebration. This movement draws on models from medieval customs. The congregation by its movements claims its will to follow the Christ from the shadows of death and sin towards the Light of Resurrection.

The day following Easter day, the congregation awaits you to share this time of celebration and meditation that ends the Holy week.

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*Extract from « Guide des Églises de la Vallée Noire », Gérard Guillaume, photographies d'Yvan Bernaer, Éditions La Bouinotte. 2011*

Amis de la Basilique de Neuvy-Saint-Sépulchre (36230)



**The basilica of Neuvy-Saint-Sépulchre**  
**Former collegiate church Saint Jacques (XI<sup>th</sup>-XII<sup>th</sup> centuries)**

### A rotunda built at the image of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem

Neuvy (the new town) was settled at the end of the Gallo-Roman era, around a ford of the road between Mediolanum (Châteaumeillant) and Argentomagus (Saint-Marcel near Argenton-sur-Creuse). During the Early Middle Ages, a parish was set up and worshiped to Saint Peter. Faced with the growth of the city, a second parish was established under the patronage of Saint Stephen.

During the XI<sup>th</sup> century, the construction of a new church copying the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem was decided. The plans of this church were given by Eudes de Déols a former pilgrim. Then, during the XVI<sup>th</sup> century, it was dedicated to James the Greater. Neuvy quickly took a privileged stage on the route to Santiago de Compostela from Vézelay. A chapter was founded in 1228 and the church took the title of collegiate church (i.e. served by canons). On 15 July 1257, from Italy, Cardinal Eudes de Châteauroux sent to the canons of Neuvy some drops of the Precious Blood and one fragment of the Christ's Tomb.

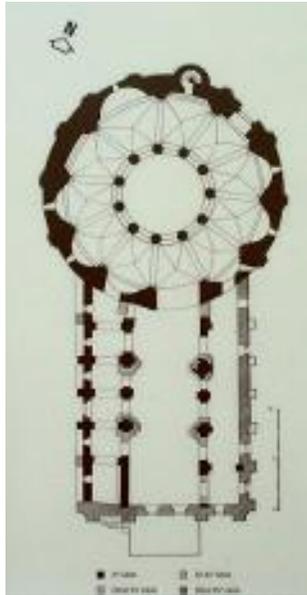
The edifice and the outbuildings were included in the enclosure of a *“castle fortified by walls and protected by a wide ditch”*. Several times, this enclosure was used as a refuge for the population. Around 1360, when the English seized the town of Sainte-Sévère (in the South-East of La Châtre), the church vaults, overloaded with furniture and perishables sheltered in the attic by refugees, largely collapsed bringing the great gable of the church down with it. In 1524, the adventurers called *“les 6000 diables”* laid siege to the enclosure where the population took refuge. They massacred *“four clergymen”*, and they broke organs and burnt the archives of the chapter. In 1621, took place the *“Great Miracle”*. Threatened by the overflowing of the next river (la Bouzanne), the inhabitants beg the canons to take out the relics. The chronicle reports that in their presence, the waters moved back... A brotherhood was set up the same year as a thanksgiving.

In 1847, it became parish church and listed as “historic monument”. A great campaign of restoration, supervised by Eugène Viollet-le-Duc and his colleague Jules de Mérimodol, was launched.

In 1923, to replace the former Church tower removed in 1899, Mr. Mayeux, an architect, built a bell-gable with three arches between the basilica and the rotunda. At the same time, the oriental dome, designed one century before by Viollet-le-Duc, was changed for the present cone-shaped roof. Given the centuries-old pilgrimages taking place there, the Holy See elevated the former collegiate church to the rank of basilica in 1910. Between 1993 and 1998, the restoration had given back to the building its primitive greatness.

### Architecture and sculpture.

The basilica in Neuvy is composed of two parts which we believe were not initially designed to be joined up.



The basilica consists of one nave with side aisles and galleries on the top (disappeared on the northern side). Different medieval architectural styles can be found: in the side-aisles, semicircular arches and groin vaults ; in the nave, pilasters that kept up the arches of the initial vault (maybe a wooden vault) and pillars carrying the diagonal ribs of the gothic vault (dating from the XII<sup>th</sup> and the early XIII<sup>th</sup> centuries and partially rebuilt during the XV<sup>th</sup>). The flat chevet choir, dating from the Gothic reconstruction, must have initially been composed of a central apse surrounded with two apse chapels. Among the traces of this architectural change a curious fresco can be noticed. It represents a one-legged man who puts his wooden leg back, above a saint face and under two fabulous animals.

Obviously, the rotunda is the main architectural part of the church. It respects the tradition of fore-nave intended to welcome pilgrims. Until 1806, there was in its centre a construction closed by an iron door representing the Holy-Sepulchre and covering an altar where was put the reliquary.

Like in Carolingian patterns, the duality of the edifice articulated the celebrations between a western pole (representing a place of darkness), likely to penitential liturgies, and an eastern pole (representing a place of Light) where was celebrated the Eucharist. The congregation understood then, thanks to their processional movements, the call to move towards Christ, who has overcome death, like the sun triumphs from the night every morning.

At the centre of the rotunda, eleven columns (the number of apostles remained faithful to the Christ at the time of his death), are linked up with each other by semicircular arches. They support the first floor equipped with an ambulatory bordered by a second circular rank of fourteen columns (2 times 7 or the 12 apostles + Saint Mary + Jesus). On the ground floor, the balance between the different architectural structures led the builders to create a very ingenious vault which begins by semicircular arches inside and ends outside by groin vaults. The hollow cylinder, formed by these two stacked colonnades, carries on upwards by a third ambulatory (a terrace now covered with the roof) then by a lantern with eight windows (symbol of Resurrection) crowned by a dome.

Two types of sculpture styles can be noticed. The first one consists of reuses that can be seen at the foot or at the top of some columns. Some of these capitals were reworked during the XIX<sup>th</sup> century (Viollet-le-Duc confirmed it in his correspondence). We can notice some of these capitals: one with low relief, another one with a centaur shooting with a bow and arrow or other bases sculpted like pre-Romanesque ones. The second style consists of the sculptures of the eleven capitals in the ground floor (dating from the early XII<sup>th</sup> century), like the architectural tradition initiated in Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire. We can notice several types of sculpture on them: Corinthian columns, fabulous animals and human faces sculpted. Among the decorative patterns several « collerettes berrichonnes » (a double rank of astragal; strip which marks the bottom of the capital; covered with acanthus leaves with the point down).

Even if there is no existing « *historiated* » program (i.e. illustrating an episode of the Holy Bible or of saint's life), these pictures can be interpreted as the usual fight between Good and Evil, Virtue and Vices, Man and Animal. So, the numerous cats represent heresy, the lie, that by fine words, attacks wise men (bearded men) or powerful men (squatting atlants). Some animals portray lust whereas others, with open mouth or their tongue sticking out, represent greed. Monsters eating reversed fleur-de-lis (impurity) are opposed to the impassive faces of women representing wisdom. The location of these terrifying faces on the capitals is a reminder that Heaven doors are well guarded and that it is formidable to cross them.

In spite of a local legend, the grave situated in the apse chapel is neither the one of Eudes de Déols nor the one of Eudes de Châteauroux, but the one of an unknown canon or prior. The second plaster recumbent statue comes from the XIX<sup>th</sup> century altar. In 2010, a polychrome statue (late XV<sup>th</sup> or early XVI<sup>th</sup> centuries), restored by Brigitte Estève, was installed on the right side of the nave, on the top of a column next to the choir. This anonymous work of art represents a figure holding the Crown of Thorn. It could be an item of a monumental set connected to the Passion.

The outside strap hinges of the rotunda portal must be pointed out. They are one of the scarce testimonies of XII<sup>th</sup> century wrought-iron work. The wrought iron strips that secure the wood of the portal represent tracteries each ending in the shape of an animal face.