

## UPPER TOWN CHURCH



VIEW OF THE "UPPER TOWN" FROM AN OLD ENGRAVING

### HISTORICAL

In the Middle Ages (first part of the 13th century), having left the plain and the surroundings of the Notre-Dame de Nazareth cathedral subject to looting and various invasions, the inhabitants of Vaison took refuge on the other side of the Ouvèze, on the hill dominated by the count's castle and protected by an enclosure and its gates. The cathedral, however, remains on the plain, but it is assumed that the castle chapel was used for services, unless a parish church was erected on the site of the current church.

In the 15th century, the cathedral chapter and the community of Vaison decided to build a cathedral church in the upper town. A lump sum contract was passed on April 30, 1464 during the episcopate of Pons de SADE, with Raymond ARMAND, master mason in Valence. This construction implies the ecclesiastical desire to transfer part of the cathedral functions to the city within the city walls, but not the abandonment of the religious buildings on the plain since, on the same day, the clergy ordered some repairs on the Notre-Dame-de-Nazareth cathedral and the cloister.

According to the contract, the new cathedral was to measure 22 m long and would include:

- a pentagonal rib-vaulted choir, 9 m long and 7 m wide, lit by three windows (this choir no longer exists) ;

- a nave of three bays 13 m long and 9 m wide, covered with a framework supported by two diaphragm arches (only the walls of the second and third bays remain in the present building).

The whole building would be blocked, except for the arches, ribs, bays and corner copings in cut stone, and covered with round tiles. The stone would either be recovered on site or brought from the ruins of the Saint-Laurent chapel in Villasse area.

The church being completed, the community ordered the bell tower from the mason Artaud GARNIER (lump sum contract on June 29, 1470, A.D. ref: 3E 70/883, F°80 V°- 82). The present bell tower does not match the contract description. However, we know from the archives of the Consuls that the bell tower was in danger of being ruined in 1557, and that on June 13, 1557 the council decided to borrow money from the Notre-Dame-des-Champs congregation for its repair.

On August 19, 1599, the City Council having accepted the project formed by Bishop Guillaume de Cheysolme and the chapter to enlarge the cathedral church, which was too cramped to contain the entire population, decided to borrow a sum of money and to accept donations to pay the master masons who worked on the expansion. On September 11 the council appointed a commission to supervise the work (ref: A.C. BB 12 F°13V°, F° 14V°, F°18). On July 1, 1599, a lump sum contract was concluded in the presence of the bishop, between the community of Vaison and the masons Jacques FURET and Antoine CUCHET (ref: A.D. 3E 70/233 F° 240.242 V°).



The expansion work consists of the demolition of the choir in 1464, its replacement with a fourth bay in the nave, the construction of a new choir (this is the present choir) based on the model of the previous one, but of the same width as the nave. To the west of the old choir was a newly built chapel for Bishop Guillaume Cheysolme. This is the current fourth west side chapel. In the new construction, opposite this chapel, a similar chapel will be built (current fourth east side chapel).

On December 12, 1599, the Council of the Community decided to vault the nave and build the buttresses (A.C. BB12, F°25). The church was completed in January 1601 and on the 17th of that month (A.C. BB12, F°81, V°) experts were appointed to accept the work.

The bishop personally participated in the expenses and had the stalls, the organ, the pulpit and the baptismal font built at his own expense.

The cathedral was solemnly consecrated on November 25, 1601, in honour of God, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, of all the saints and particularly Saint-Quenin, patron of the city and the diocese. The godfather is André de Seguins, Lord of Flesc and Saint-Roman, first consul of Vaison, the godmother Claire de Tholon.

In 1606, a chapel dedicated to Sainte Rusticule, with a dome, was built by Nicolas GRANIER, sacristan canon.



*Sainte Rusticule (détail)*

Monseigneur de Cheysolme also had a small episcopal palace built, on the site of small houses he had purchased. His successors occupied this palace until the end of the 18th century (previously the residence of the bishops of

Vaison was in the neighbouring village of Crestet). In 1615, he built inside the church, a chapel dedicated to Saint-Blaise and intended to accommodate his tomb.

Under the episcopate of Joseph François de Gualtéri, 78th bishop of Vaison (1703-1723) the church has been decorated with paintings. Also, an oval bay was opened in the centre of the choir, it was closed by a stained glass window.



*Marie-Madeleine*

Various maintenance works were carried out in the church throughout the 17th and 18th centuries; they did not involve any spectacular alterations. However, on November 27, 1774 (A.C. BB20 f°225 V°) under Monseigneur de Péliissier, the consuls having found "that the door of the cathedral and the facade of the cathedral" were not "suitable" they had commissioned a project for an enlargement of the facade and the tribune from Mr. TEISSIER, architect in Carpentras. The estimate seemed too expensive, and it was not until two years later, on February 25, 1776 (A.C. BB30 F°238) that the decision was taken to carry out the project after an order from the pro-legate dated February 17.

The lump sum contract has not been found but the consular archives (A.C. BB30 F°2/38 et seq.) provide us with information about the progress of the project: on March 17, 1776, it was decided to look for competent masons to price the expansion. On May 27, 1776, the consuls

authorized the construction of a partition to allow the smooth running of offices during the works.

On June 30, 1776, the facade was almost finished, the council was concerned with the design of the wooden door, of the drum of the gallery on the reverse side of the facade and of the iron balustrade of this gallery (which no longer exists). On July 21, the contract for the doors was given to François JOUSSON and Gens PLANTEVIN, carpenters, and the contract of the balustrade to Louis FONTON, locksmith.

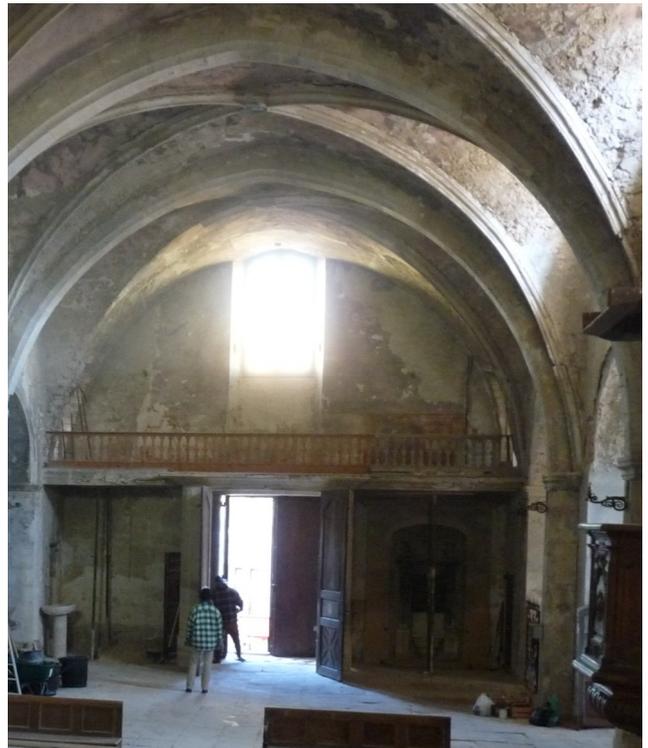
On December 1, the doors were finished and on February 25, 1777, the balustrade was completed.

After the French revolution, on October 1, 1790 (A.C. BB31 F°220 V°), the council decided to force the inhabitants, brotherhoods, and even the chapter, to remove their particular pews which were in the church.

The bishopric was suppressed on March 6, 1791. Worship was also abandoned. In 1794, fire and looting devastated the building.

On 25 “Vendemiaire Year V” (1796), in execution of the law dated “7 Vendemiaire Year IV”, some inhabitants of the upper town informed the municipality that they had chosen the cathedral church as their place of worship. Those from the suburbs, the countryside and Saint-Marcellin

choose the old church and its cloister (Notre Dame-de-Nazareth). By decree of “3 Nivôse year XI”, the old cathedral became the official church. Notre Dame-de-Nazareth becomes a spare chapel.



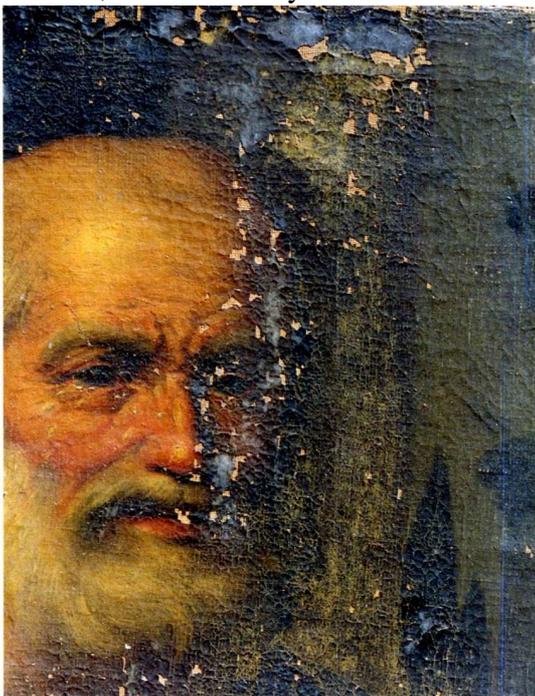
*Vue de l'entrée principale depuis l'intérieur, tribune et tambour*

In 1846 (A.D. 2 O 137) the entrance door and the paving of the drum were rebuilt in Caromb stone.

In 1855, works were carried out on the facade on the rampart side, as well as on the sacristy walls. The walls and roofs of the side chapels were also repaired.

Finally, in 1878 the factory council requested the transfer of the parish to the old Notre-Dame-de-Nazareth church, in the suburb, which had been developed and where all the civil institutions were located now.

In 1897, the parish was transferred to the plain.



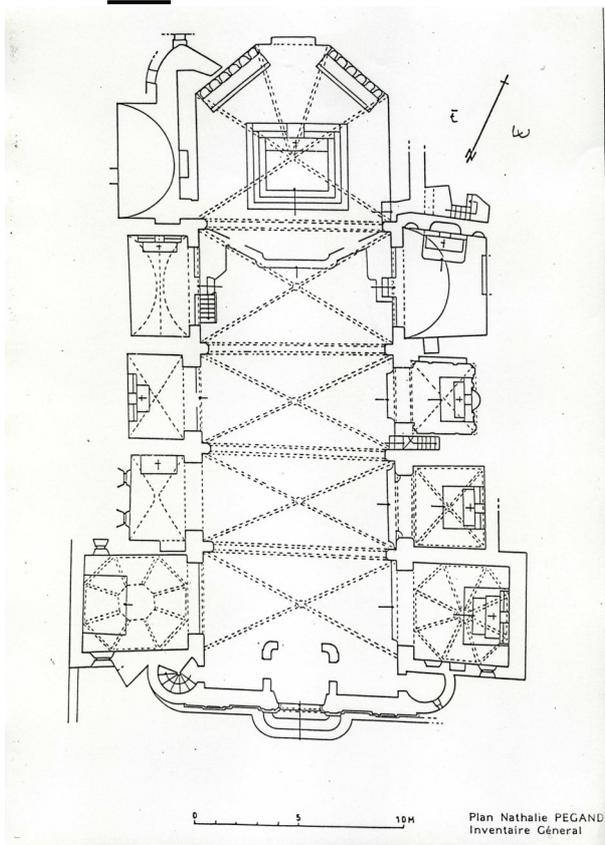
*Saint Pierre (original au Service Patrimoine, Vaison la Romaine)*

## Location of the building

The church, oriented North-South, is at the eastern end of the village, on the edge of the cliff.

The old cathedral church of Vaison is located in the upper town dominated by the old castle of the Counts of Toulouse, a medieval fortress protecting the medieval town surrounded by ramparts. It is located to the east of the rocky escarpment. Oriented North-South (apse to the South), it is anchored on the rock and includes the old rampart at its base.

## Plan



The building consists of a nave of four bays of unequal length with ribbed vaults and a pentagonal choir covered with a sexpartite ribbed vault. Four differently vaulted side chapels open to the East and West in each bay of the nave. A platform supported by a drum is attached to the back of the facade. A sacristy covered with a semi-circular vault communicates to the east with the choir and with a ruined reduction room to the west. A square bell tower rises above the third west side chapel.

## L'élévation intérieure

### A – Nave



*View of the choir after the second cleaning*

We enter the building, whose floor is paved, from the north through a rectangular entrance drum with rounded south corners, made of matched stone with sharp joints. Note the stereotomy of the flat vault. This drum supports the tribune that can be accessed by a spiral staircase made under the tribune in the east wall. A small room of similar size is located on to the West. Under the gallery, on the left, in a niche covered with a basket-handle vault, framed by two pilasters and topped horizontally by a moulded cornice, are the baptismal fountains.

The facade, the drum, the baptismal fountains, and the gallery date from the enlargement of the church in 1776. However, the vault of this first bay is from the beginning of the 17th century.

The ribs of the plaster vaults of the nave, profiled with a torus between two cavettos, rest to the East and West on small corner bases ; but in the first bay, due to the decline of the facade in the 18th century, the lower part of the rib is disappears into the floor of the gallery.

The double arches are slightly broken, in matched stones, chamfered. They fall on rectangular piers, via moulded transoms.

## B - Choir

A step separates the nave from the choir. This one, which dates from the expansion of 1599, is closed by an elegant iron gate from the 18th century. (offered by Monseigneur de Gualtiéri 1724-1748). It is covered with a vault of ribs radiating from the key stone, with the same profile as the ribs of the nave. A wooden stand is attached to the wall

## C - East side chapels

They open onto the nave through large semi-circular arches. In the first and third bays, the intrados of the arch retains remains of “trompe l'oeil” paintings representing boxes punctuated with rosettes.

The first chapel, first quarter of the 17th century, is covered with a dome on ribbed octagonal squinches, with a blind lantern. The squinches are decorated with a large stucco shell carried by winged and draped busts of women, unfortunately in fairly poor condition. The east wall retains a niche surrounded by fluted pilasters supporting a triangular stucco entablature.

The second side chapel is groin vaulted.

The third side chapel is covered with a vault with penetrations. It must have been entirely panelled, like the one facing it, and still has a fragment of an altarpiece with a decoration of panels with moulded frames and fluted pilasters. A niche contains a statue of Saint John the Baptist above a marble altar.



*Saint Jean-Baptiste (photo prise par le service du Patrimoine)*

The fourth chapel (early 16th century), slightly raised with three steps from the nave - is closed by a masonry balustrade. It is covered with a groined vault on a barlong plan.

## D - West side chapels

They open onto the nave through large semi-circular or pointed arch arcades.



*First west chapel (photo from the Heritage Department)*

The first chapel, preceded by a semicircular arcade is, like the one facing it, covered with a dome on, octagonal and ribbed squinches. The dome is painted blue, the ribs are painted pink ochre as the walls must have been. The trunks are decorated with large stucco shells, one of which is missing. The altar is still in place, it is bearing the statue of Saint Joseph as well as a wooden panel remaining from a set panelling the chapel.

The second chapel opens onto the nave through a large broken arcade, garnished with a torus between cavettos standing on prismatic bases. It is covered with a vault of profiled ribs with a small torus between two cavettoes.

The fourth chapel, which slightly predates the enlargement of 1599, opens onto the nave through a

round arched arcade resting on moulded transoms. Three steps give access to the chapel which, like the one facing it, is closed by a masonry balustrade. The north wall contains cut stones, bearing workman's marks, coming either from the Saint-Laurent chapel, in the plain, or from the previous church. The semi-circular vault presents the remains of a painted decoration (in particular a coronation of the Virgin). A masonry and painted altar is attached to the south wall, above is an empty niche with a stucco frame.

### **Les élévations extérieures**

#### A – North façade.

A monumental, narrower façade has been placed on the north wall of the church. On both sides, the old construction appears.

The new facade contrasts with

triangular pediment bearing a cross at the top, and two stone fire pots on the side. Two half-turrets, stopping horizontally halfway up the second level, complete the facade. They contain to the east the staircase leading to the stand and, to the west, a small room. The front door, with moulded wooden panels, is preceded by a flight of three steps. It forms an arc segment, stapled to the key stone (RF in the cartridge). The frame is moulded, the doorframe has brackets. An entablature surrounds the door. It stands on two jaws placed on framing pilasters. These stand on a net of bossed devices. This same device frames the first and second levels of the facade. Two pilasters rise from the base to the pediment of which they support the moulded entablature. Two small fins frame the second part of the second level.



*Facade redone in the 18th century (photo from the book by J. Sautel)*

its very regular medium structure in fine limestone. It shows two levels separated by cornices and crowned by a triangular pediment flanked by two fins.

Text credit: Vaison la Romaine Heritage Service

The north facade is made of paired stone. It dates from 1776. It shows two levels, softened by a