

# St. Mary's Catholic Church

## Altus, Arkansas



The sandstone structure was dedicated in 1902, during the pastorate of Rev. Placidus Oechsle, OSB. Built along the lines of a basilica of native sandstone quarried from the hill on which it stands, the church is famous for its original paintings by a German artist, its stained glass windows, its bells and pipe organ. The church is listed on the National Register of Historic Places; Franklin County's first church to be so listed.

The parish of St. Mary's (Our Lady of Perpetual Help or Our Lady Help of Christians) celebrated its centennial on Thanksgiving Day 1979. It officially began on Nov. 21, 1879, with the wedding of August Reiman and Magdalena Huber. However, the founding father, Rev. Beatus Maria Ziswyler, had probably been saying Mass in Altus for some time previously.

The murals with gold leaf on the walls were done by German artist Fridolin Fuchs during World War I under the direction of Father Placidus. Altus residents served as models for many of the religious paintings. Containing 29 stained glass windows, the church has four large bells hanging in its 120-foot tower. They weigh a total of 6,393 pounds. All were donated by parishioners.

Exterior: on the west wall above the windows:

**DOM** = To the Most Great and Good God

**BMV** = To Blessed Mary, Virgin

### The organ

The organ was built in 1897 by J G Pfeffer and originally installed in St. Francis de Sales oratory in St. Louis. St. Mary's bought it used for \$500 in 1925. It was fully restored to its former glory by Redman Pipe Organs of Dallas Texas in 1986. The restoration cost over \$100,000. The 'prow' on the choir loft had to be added to accommodate its size.

The organ is a reverse tracker instrument built so that the organist can face the front of the church. It has two manuals (keyboards) and 14 stops, along with pedals for the skilled organist. It has 15 ranks of pipes, as well as two mixtures added in the restoration. And while it now runs off of self-contained blowers, it can still be pumped by hand. Unfortunately, its extreme value forces us to keep the choir loft locked during the week. Those interested in seeing the organ up close or playing it should contact choir director Amy Sexton (479) 667-7218. If she is available, she will be happy to accommodate your request.

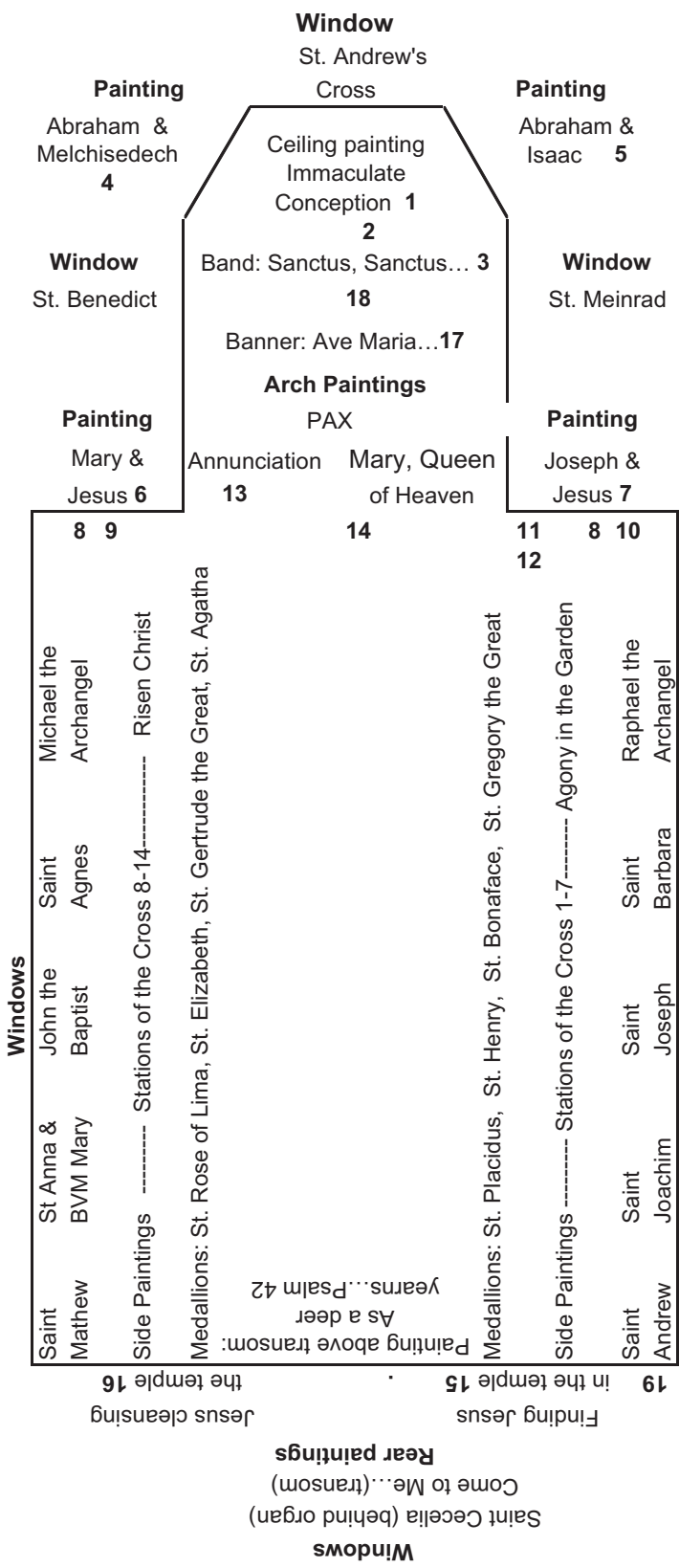


### The bells

St. Mary's has four large bells hanging in its tower. They were paid for by generous donations from parishioners. They were cast by Stuckstede Brothers of St. Louis, MO and dedicated on Thanksgiving Day 1902. They were mounted in the tower soon thereafter. They are:

Name	Weight	Note
1) Holy Angels	750 pounds	A
2) Holy Apostles	1,180 pounds	G
3) Mary Magdalene	1,750 pounds	F
4) Regina Coeli	2,713 pounds	D

Unfortunately, the stairs up the bell tower are quite dirty and not particularly safe, so we are unable to grant requests to see them. To hear their wonderful sound should suffice us all.



- 1 The hand of God, working through the Holy Spirit keeps Mary from the sin of Adam & Eve
- 2 High Altar. Crucified Christ mourned by Angels  
Four Evangelists: Mathew, Mark, Luke & John  
Tabernacle: Home of the Body of Christ
- 3 Sanctus: Holy, Holy, Holy, God of Power and Might
- 4 Melchizedek offers Abraham bread & wine precursor to the Eucharist
- 5 Abraham is willing to sacrifice Isaac precursor to God's sacrifice of his Son
- 6 Mary & Jesus; Symbolizing authority: Pope Benedict XV  
Bishop John B. Morris, Abbot Ignatius Conrad  
Father Placidus Oeschle, pastor; Emporer Franz Joseph  
Model of the church
- 7 Joseph & Jesus: Symbolizes Labor / Crafts  
Parishioners served as models. Floor Plan of the Church.
- 8 Side Altars. Urban Sprug, builder. Made of Cedar, Walnut  
White Holly, White Oak, Honduras Mahogany, Prima Vera Cuba
- 9 Statues: Sacred Heart of Mary or Our Lady of Fatima
- 10 Statue: St. Joseph
- 11, 12 Statues: Sacred Heart of Jesus or Risen Christ (seasonal)
- 13 Pulpit: Built by parishioner Andrew Buerkler
- 14 Communion rail built by parishioner Andrew Buerklar  
Central Altar rests on communion rail doors.
- 15 The finding of Jesus in the temple
- 16 Jesus cleanses the temple of the money lenders. Many local models in 15 & 16.. Artist Fridolen Fuchs in lower right of 16.
- 17 Banner: Ave Maria... Hail Mary, full of grace...
- 18 Hanging candle, indicative of the eternal presence
- 19 Statue: St Benedict