

Katharinenkirche

# St Catherine's Church

The only monastery church in Lübeck



## About the Katharinenkirche (St Catherine's Church)

St Catherine's Church is the church of the former Franciscan Monastery in Lübeck and was once the centre for this order in the whole Baltic region. Built in around 1300, it is in its simple, elegant form one of the most beautiful brick churches in the city. Unglazed red bricks alternate with others glazed in black and green. The niches in the façade are especially remarkable. Ernst Barlach (in the 1930s) and Gerhard Marcks (in the 1950s) created large ceramic figures for some of these niches – a perfect interplay of Gothic architecture and modern sculpture.

From the street, visitors enter a light-flooded interior. The pale colour of the walls and pillars with a pattern of stone blocks outlined in red corresponds to the original fourteenth-century painted surface, now exposed once more.







The floor is covered in its entirety with funerary slabs, as the church was a favourite last resting place for the citizens of Lübeck until the early nineteenth century. This preference can also be seen in the highly ornate Baroque and Neo-classical funerary chapels in the south aisle.

The tall, airy nave with its large windows, together with the two-storey choir, is remarkable for an architectural feature unusual in Franciscan churches: separated by the choir screen, on which is an important triumphal rood dating from the mid-fifteenth century, lies the lower choir beneath a colonnade. Shrouded in darkness, it reminds the visitor of a crypt. In the easternmost part of the apse, there is an extraordinarily finely engraved brass tomb-slab, depicting the figure of Mayor Johann Lüneburg (d. 1468).

Above the lower choir, the brightly lit upper choir rises behind the triumphal rood. It contains choir stalls dating from the fourteenth century with paintings from the fifteenth. Originally the friars could get from their dormitory in the adjoining monastery directly to the 'upper church' in order to celebrate the liturgical offices.





Access from the nave to the upper choir was originally only possible via two narrow spiral staircases. The present staircase, to the right of the rood screen, which is decorated with paintings of scenes from the life of St Francis, dates only from the early sixteenth-century.

The high chapel on the left side of the north aisle was dedicated to Mayor Segebodo Crispin (d. 1323). The portraits of the donor family are today on display in the St Anne's Museum. The main church and the remaining chapels were used in the Middle Ages as a place of devotion by more than twenty fraternities; their altars also stood here. Among these fraternities, alongside various craft guilds and minstrel groups, was also the city's most august society, the 'Zirkelbrüder', named after their emblem, the 'Zirkel' or pair of dividers.

The monastery was dissolved in 1530 by the Reformation. The building became a civic Latin school whose name - 'Katharineum' - is a reminder of the old monastery until today. The church retained its sacred function until Lübeck was occupied by Napoleon's troops (1803-1813) and St Catherine's was deconsecrated. Since then, the building has served a variety of purposes. For example in the mid-nineteenth century numerous altars and other Lübeck 'antiquities' were assembled in the upper choir; since 1915 these have been housed and displayed in the St Anne's Museum. Later, the former church was used as a storeroom and hall for trade fairs.







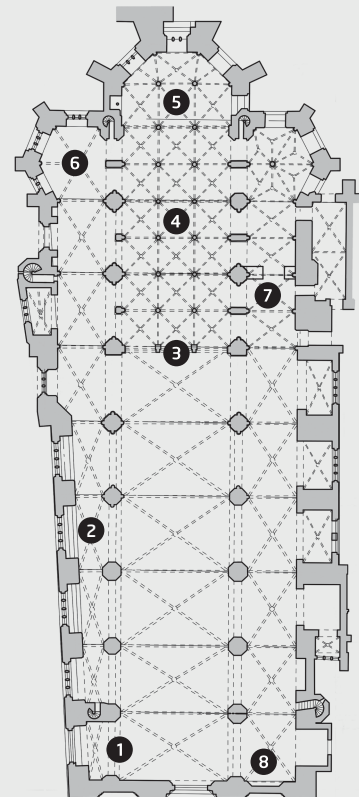
Among the most important artworks in what is now a 'museum church' is the 'Raising of Lazarus' painted in 1576 by the famous Venetian painter Jacopo Tintoretto (1518-1594). It is not known how this artwork of the highest calibre, whose presence in northern Europe can only be called improbable, came to be in Lübeck. It once served as a memorial picture in a family chapel on the west wall of the church. The arms of the de Hane und Gude families can still be discerned on the broad frame, which was made in 1578, in other words predating by two years the picture for which it was made.





The plaster casts of the great St Jürgen group by Bernd Notke to the immediate left of the entrance, of the seated Thomas of Canterbury in the Crispin chapel on the left in the front of the church, and the Crucifixion group in the south aisle all date from an exhibition in 1926. The original sculptures were all made in Lübeck.

The impressive St Jürgen group (St Jürgen is the name by which St George is known in northern Germany) shows the saint slaying the enormous dragon with his sword. Kneeling in prayer to one side is the princess whom the knight is rescuing from the monster. The original by the Lübeck artist Bernt Notke (end of the fifteenth century) can be found in the Church of St Nicholas in Stockholm.



- St George group ①
- Gustav Seitz, Käthe Kollwitz, 1958 ②
- Triumphal road, 1489 ③
- lower and upper choir ④
- tomb-slab of Mayor Lüneburg, 1468 ⑤
- Crispin chapel with St Thomas of Canterbury ⑥
- Scenes from the life of St Francis, early 16th century ⑦
- Raising of Lazarus, Jacopo Tintoretto, 1576 ⑧



# **die LÜBECKER MUSEEN**

## **Kulturstiftung Hansestadt Lübeck**

Katharinenkirche

Königstraße, corner of Glockengiesserstraße, 23552 Lübeck

The current opening hours and more information:

[www.museumskirche.de](http://www.museumskirche.de)

Adults 2 € | Children (6 - 18) 1.50 €

Guided tours can also be booked to take place outside

opening times: +49 451 122 4134 (Andrea Schwarz)

Email: [mq@luebeck.de](mailto:mq@luebeck.de)

[www.die-luebecker-museen.de](http://www.die-luebecker-museen.de) | [www.museumskirche.de](http://www.museumskirche.de)

