St. Joseph Catholic Cathedral

412 North Boulevard, Baton Rouge

The Parish of St. Joseph Catholic Church dates back to 1792, when Baton Rouge was a Spanish territory and the church belonged to the Diocese of Santiago de Cuba. (The first priest, however, was Irish.) It is the oldest parish in the Baton Rouge area. Two small churches preceded this one on the same site. In the mid-19th century, the Jesuit architect Fr. John Cambiaso, who had designed the Immaculate Conception and St. Maurice churches in New Orleans, was engaged to plan the Gothic Revival church that we seewith modificationstoday.

The cornerstone of the present building dates to 1853, making this the oldest church building in Baton Rouge. Credit for the structure goes to the Jesuits who led the church at the time. That structure had a red brick exterior and a low square tower. The 1890s saw the addition of the steeple and exterior stuccoing. In 1924 the church was doubled in size, covering the small cemetery that stood on the lawn (most remains were moved to another cemetery, but one burial remains, covered by a stone, on the left side of the church). Most of the stained glass dates to this renovation.

1961 marked the creation of the Archdiocese of Baton Rouge, and St. Josephs underwent further renovations in 1966-1968 to celebrate its elevation to a cathedral and to bring the church into compliance with Vatican II guidelines. These included the expansion of the chancel, with its bishops throne (cathedra).

In commemoration of the parish bicentennial, the church erected a choir loft and added a 45-rank organ from the Reuter Organ Company. This versatile instrument, in its French console, responds well to the many styles of music performed in the cathedral.

The 12 large stained glass windows, in classic Munich style with rich colors, abundant details and little free space, all honor either the Joseph of the Old Testament or St. Joseph. Biblical quotations explain each. The elaborate canopies are noteworthy.

Dating to the World War I era, these windows were made by the Emil Frei Art Glass Studios. This studio almost never signs its windows, but here it did several times, mentioning both locations: one in Munich and one in St. Louis. (The Munich studio has since closed.)

The smaller windows in the side chapels followed soon after (1923) and are also by Frei. High in the clerestory over the right side chapel are four of the Patristic fathers of the Western Church; on the left, the four Gospel writers.

Above the entrances to the church are windows that were behind the altar until 1966. One features St. Louis IX, King of France, patron saint of the New Orleans Archdiocese, while another presents St. Vincent de Paul, patron saint of Baton Rouge.

Other art enriches the religious experience. The powerful crucifix, from a solid piece of mahogany, was carved by the Yugoslavian sculptor Ivan Mestrovic, creator of the Prodigal Son statue in the courtyard. The 14 mosaic Stations of the Cross came from Munich in 1921.

This imposing cathedral is sunny and welcoming, surrounding its congregation with beauty in many forms.

**Windows of St. Joseph Cathedral**

Altar

Transept Clerestory Transept Clerestory

Matthew St. Gregory

Luke St. Augustine

Mark St. Jerome

John St. Ambrose

Transept Eye Level Transept Eye Level

St. Ignatius Loyola St. Anne

St. Thomas Aquinas St. Rita

St. Jean-Baptiste de la Salle St. Clare

St. Teresa

St. Catherine

Joseph, son of Jacob Triumph of St. Joseph in Heaven

Espousal of Mary and Joseph Death of St. Joseph

Nativity of Jesus Baptism of Jesus

Adoration of the Magi St. Josephs workshop in Nazareth

Presentation in the Temple Finding the Child Jesus in the Temple

Flight into Egypt Holy Family

St. Vincent de Paul St. Louis IX, King of France

Christ Blessing the Parish Church

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