

Santa Maria dell'Archetto



Santa Maria dell'Archetto is a 19th century devotional church in the rione Trevi. The church is also known as **Santa Maria Causa Nostrae Laetitiae** (“Cause of Our Joy”) and is dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

History

The church is the smallest which is in use in Rome. It was designed by Virginio Vespagnani in a purist Neo-Classical style, and completed in 1851. The church was built to commemorate a miraculous event. In 1690, the marquis Muti Papazzurri had a maiolica (white tin-glazed earthenware decorated with metallic colours) by Domenico Antonio Muratori with an image of the Blessed Virgin set up in the street. On 9 July 1796 the image, by then known as *Maria Santissima Causa Nostrae Laetitiae*, was observed to have blinked. Many pilgrims came to the street. A small chapel was erected, and then replaced with the tiny church. It was inaugurated on 31 May 1851, but not opened to the public until 1859. (1)

The former chapel on this site was a favourite place of prayer for Henry, Cardinal Duke of York (later King Henry IX and I) who was accustomed to say the Rosary here each evening. In 1721, the Prince of Wales (later King Charles III) was baptised here. (1)

In 1870, the Jesuits took over the church. It is now in the care of the Primaria Società Cattolica Promotrice di Buone Opere (*Primary Catholic Society for Promotion of Good Works*). It is usually kept closed behind wrought-iron gates, but a caretaker will unlock it. (1)

Exterior

The church is incorporated into a larger building, and only has an exterior identity at the entrance. The alley has high walls on either side, and the little façade is fitted in between these. A pair of Doric pilasters, cut by the side walls, supports an entablature fragment with modillions (little brackets) on its cornice. Into the rectangle thus created is inserted an arch springing from Doric impost, and with its tympanum embellished with wrought iron work displaying the monogram AM for Ave Maria. (1)

Above the entablature is a tablet with an epigraph composed by the Jesuit archaeologist Giuseppe Marchi, which reads:

Mariae Dominae Nostrae, Alexander Mutius, de Pappaciurris March[esus], antea Savorellius Comes, cellula ampliata, tholo superstructo, a fund[amentis] refecit, exornavit an[no] a[ct]ionis] p[artus] V[irginis] MDCCCLI.

"To Mary our Lady, Alexander Muti, Marquis of Pappazzurri formerly Count Savorelli, the little shrine having been extended and a dome built on top, restored and decorated it from the foundations in the year since the Virgin gave birth 1851."

The church's campanile is absolute minimalism, since the bells are simply hung from the cornice.

Interior

Nave

The church has a little single nave, of four bays. The two middle bays are consolidated, and here are two wide arched side niches, one on each side. The entrance and far bays each have a pair of statues in arched niches in their side walls, depicting caryatids holding flower vases. These, and the others in the sanctuary, were executed by **Luigi Simonetti**.

The ceiling is barrel-vaulted, in three sections with the wider central one over the double bays. It has gilded stucco decorations, with angels, putti and symbols of the Blessed Virgin as well as the coat-of-arms of the Savorelli family.

The floor is laid in polychrome marble.

Sanctuary

The sanctuary is a little circular space, with a crowning dome on four diagonal piers each of which contains a niche with another caryatid statue by Simonetti. The polychrome floor here is very good.

The dome by **Constantino Brumidi** is interesting, historically, architecturally and because of its images of the Blessed Virgin. The frescoes on the pendentives depict allegories of the virtues of Our Lady: *Prudence, Wisdom, Strength* and *Innocence*. The coffered interior of the dome has eight sectors, with four oculi (circular windows, two of them blind) in the larger sectors and beautiful small frescoes of winged angels in the others. In the centre is an image of the *Immaculate Conception*.

Brumidi is obscure in Italy, but in the USA he is well-known for the fresco work that he executed in the Capitol at Washington DC. Amazingly, he executed the work in this church while awaiting trial

for looting church property during the Roman Republic. The republic had been set up when Pope Pius IX had been overthrown as temporal ruler in Rome in 1848, and was suppressed by the French in 1850. Apparently Brumidi avoided prosecution on the understanding that he emigrate, so he went to the USA and spent the rest of his life frescoing the Capitol then under construction (he died in 1880, with the work incomplete).

The fresco panels in the nave vault and the side arch intradoses are also by him. He used a wax encaustic technique, which unfortunately has not endured well in places -as the visitor can see.

Altar

The altar is in a little apse, with a further two caryatids in side niches. It has two Doric columns in alabaster, on the capitals of which are a pair of posts with exaggerated cornices supporting a semi-circular molded archivolt. This shelters a gilded arched shrine containing the icon, the tympanum of which has the Ave Maria monogram in a glory.

Access

The church is open from 18:00 to 20:00 daily.

The only access to the church is from the Via di San Marcello, not from the Via dell'Archetto. Look for an alley on the east side, with an iron railing gate which is kept locked when the church is closed. The church is at the end of the alley.

In the Via dell'Archetto, you will find a gap in the street frontage guarded by some wrought iron railings erected when the church was built.

Liturgy

The evening opening of the church is for the recitation of the Rosary on ordinary days, but there is Mass at 19:00 on Sundays and Solemnities.

A feast celebrating the miracle is celebrated on the second Sunday in July. Another important feast in the church is the Birth of Our Lady on 8 September.

Artists and Architects:

Virginio [Vespagnani](#) (1808-1882), Italian architect
 Domenico Maria [Muratori](#) (1661-1744), Italian painter of the Baroque period
 Luigi Simonetti (19th cent), Italian sculptor
 Constantino [Brumidi](#) (1805-1880), Italian American painter

Location:

Via di San Marcello 41, 00187 Roma
 Coordinates: [41°53'56"N 12°28'58"E](#)

Info:

Mon-Sat. 6pm-8pm recital of the rosary
 Open 18:00-19:30
 Sunday Mass at 7pm

Links:

1. http://romanchurches.wikia.com/wiki/Santa_Maria_dell%27Archetto

2. <http://www.jacobite.ca/gazetteer/Rome/CappellaMadonnaArchetto.htm>
3. <http://www.romasegreta.it/trevi/madonna-dell-archetto.html>
4. http://64.233.161.132/translate_c?hl=en&sl=it&u=http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cappella_della_Madonna_dell%27Archetto
5. <http://www.060608.it/en/cultura-e-svago/luoghi-di-culto-di-interesse-storico-artistico/cattolici/santa-maria-dell-archetto.html>
6. http://www.info.roma.it/monumenti_dettaglio.asp?ID_schede=320
7. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tDzUNkhcPUY>
8. <https://it-it.facebook.com/SantuarioDellaMadonnaDellArchetto>