

THROUGH THE AGES

- 11th - 12th century • Church of San Nicolò
- 14th century • Chapel of Saint Anthony the Abbot
- 1584 • parish church
- Late 16th century • Baptismal font
- 1828/30 • Giuseppe Bovara's project
- 1848 • coffered ceiling
- 1857 • dome, choir and apse
- 1866 • façade
- 1960-1969 • new altar
- 1990s • restoration of frescoes and stuccos



A Living History of Faith and Culture

From Early Christian Signs to the Basilica of San Nicolò

The first signs of Christian presence in Lecco trace back to the Saint Stephen hill, where a church dedicated to the first martyr once stood, later abandoned as evidenced by archaeological findings. There are no certain records regarding the foundation of the church of San Nicolò near the lake. The dedication to this saint perhaps stems from being venerated as a protector of navigators, fishermen and merchants, or due to his role as a defender of the true faith against the Arian heresy at the Council of Nicaea, which the Lombards brought to the Lecco region.

A leap into the Middle Ages

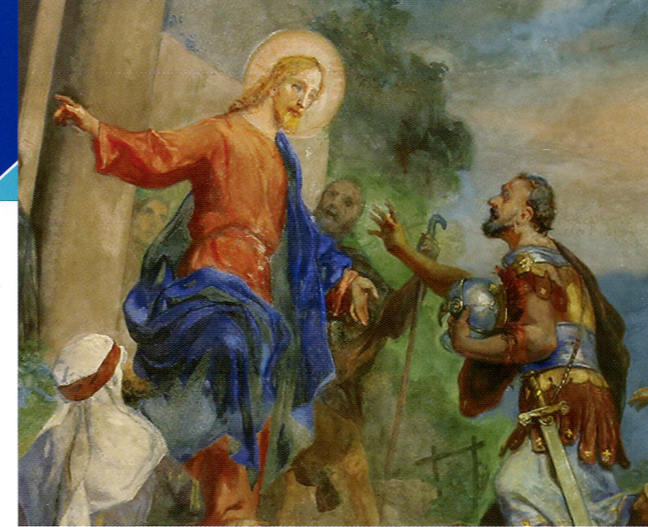
While it's not unlikely that there was a dedication to San Nicolò in the early medieval church in the Lecco village, we start having certain mention of it **towards the end of the 11th or the beginning of the 12th century** when the building was probably reconstructed. The 12th-century structure was considerably smaller than the current one, featuring the typical Romanesque architectural pattern with three aisles, the central one higher and ceilinged with painted wooden boards.

From the 14th to the 16th century

Towards the end of the 14th century, the southern transept was expanded, a desire of the wealthy Gazzari family, leading to the establishment of the noble chapel dedicated to Saint Anthony the Abbot (now the baptistery), where a remarkable cycle of paintings depicting the saint's life can still be seen. A relic of the ancient construction is the old bell turret, visible to the right of the lateral entrance of the Basilica, towards Via Mascari. The church suffered due to its proximity to the city walls, prompting the residents of Lecco to request urgent restoration from Francesco Sforza, Duke of Milan, in 1449. The repairs were necessary due to bomb attacks that had damaged the bell tower, used as an observation tower, and the church itself. Becoming the parish church in 1584, the structure underwent significant transformations in the late 16th century, including the magnificent baptismal font adorned with a wooden canopy in a temple-like structure.

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The Bovara Project

With the demolition of the walls ordered by Giuseppe II, Emperor and Duke of Milan, in 1782, Lecco began to expand and enter a period of relative prosperity. This also raised the issue of a larger church. Architect Giuseppe Bovara, who had previously designed other religious buildings in the area, was entrusted with the task and presented initial plans starting from 1828/30. The construction lasted many years, witnessing significant alterations from the original designs. The most notable change was the abandonment of the idea of creating the transept, which would have given the church a Latin cross plan. Later, the ancient columns were removed (1848), and a large coffered vault was built. From 1857, the apsidal area was enlarged with the addition of the dome, choir, and chancel. The facade was completed in 1866 following Bovara's design. In 1886, the churchyard was expanded, and the staircase improved, with further enhancements made in 1928.

The 20th Century: between Innovation and Conservation

Between 1960 and 1969, architectural renovations (by architect Bruno Bianchi) were carried out to meet the requirements emerging from the Second Vatican Council. Specifically, a new altar facing the assembly was installed, resulting in the removal of the balustrade and the canopy above the old altar. In the 1990s, further efforts were made to strengthen the structures and perform a complete restoration and cleaning of the frescoes and stuccoes.

Developed within the
framework of the project
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Basilica of San Nicolò

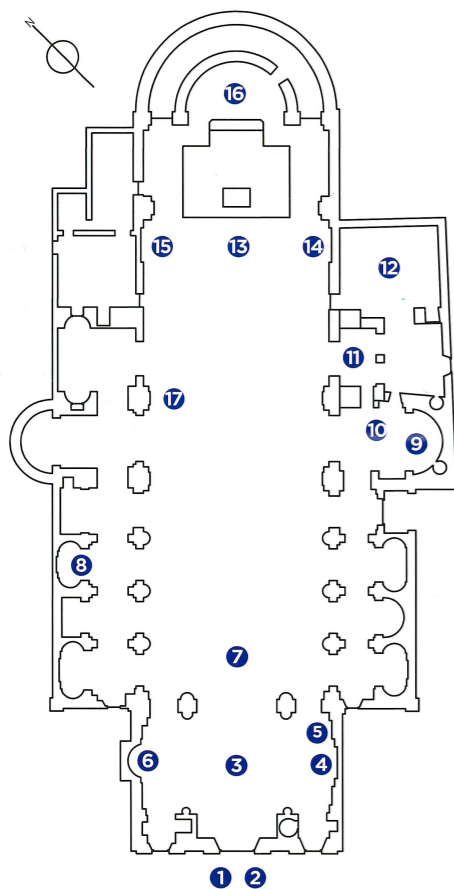


Strolling Through Faith and Culture

A WALK IN THE SURROUNDINGS



The Basilica of San Nicolò serves as a gathering place for the faithful and visitors alike, a haven for reflection and prayer. Every detail within it echoes the enduring story of faith and devotion that these walls have safeguarded across time.



The façade of Basilica ① features a gabled structure with a triangular pediment and pilasters crowned by Ionic-style capitals. On the neo-classical façade's pediment, one can read the dedication to the patron saint. The doors were replaced in bronze in 1975 by sculptor Enrico Manfrini (1917-2004) and donated by Banca Popolare di Lecco in memory of its president, Mario Bellemo. The main door ② is known as the Door of Mercy. Here, scenes from the life of Christ surround seated images of Jesus and Mary. To the left of the main door is the Door

of the Popes (John XXIII and Paul VI), featuring the coats of arms and effigies of the two pontiffs of Vatican II. To the right of the main door is the door dedicated to the Patron Saints, depicting San Nicolò and Santo Stefano.

Upon entering, one finds oneself in the expansive vestibule ③, offering a view of the grandeur of the nave. On the right side, there is a painting of the martyrdom of Pietro da Verona ④ and a statue of Saint Peter ⑤, a reproduction of the one found in the Vatican. To the left, a valuable Romanesque-era basin ⑥, dating back to the early 12th century. Above us is Luigi Morgari's (1857-1935) fresco 'The Triumph of Christ.' Christ the King is seated on a throne, with allegorical representations of the five continents at His feet. The theological virtues (Faith, Hope, Charity), and the Church are depicted in the spandrels. On the counter facade are the choir loft and the organ (constructed in 1860 but placed in that position in 1891).

Moving past the vestibule, we can admire the structure of the church ⑦. Two side aisles, which interrupt about halfway down the main nave, do not detract from the central focus on the sanctuary. On the right, the niches now hold confessionals. On the left, chapels are dedicated to the saints, San Nicolò ⑧, the Crucifix, the Madonna of the Rosary, and Saint Joseph. To the right, past the side entrance, is the Chapel of St Charles ⑨. Here, one can see large squared stones that constitute the remains of the southern transept of the medieval church ⑩, delineating the remnants of the ancient chapel dedicated to Saint Anthony ⑪, where the 16th-century baptismal font is now



positioned; here, remnants of Visconti-era frescoes depict the life of the saint.

Beyond the chapel, on the right, is the entrance to the ancient sacristy (normally not accessible), which houses an exquisite seventeenth-century carved wooden wardrobe ⑫. We are now in front of the presbytery ⑬. The new altar is made of Carrara marble; above us, in the dome, is another large fresco by Morgari depicting the glory of the Rosary. The Feast of the Madonna of the Rosary was instituted by Pope Pius V in gratitude for the victory in the Battle of Lepanto against the Turks (1571), achieved through the intercession of the Virgin. In the fresco, the enthroned Madonna appears to Pope Pius V, giving the rosary to Saint Dominic, and the Child Jesus does the same with Saint Catherine of Siena; angels bear a tapestry depicting the battle. In the sails are representations of the four evangelists. Morgari's two large frescoes on the side walls are on the right, depicting the patron saint Nicolò while, at the Council of Nicaea, defending the faith in the Trinity, represented by a brick containing fire, earth and water ⑭. On the left, the martyrdom of co-patron Saint Stephen ⑮. On the same walls of the central nave, frescoes of the Doctors of the Church follow: St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas, St. Bernard and St. Alphonsus; higher up, on the sides of the stained glass, are the Fathers of the Church: St. Jerome, St. Gregory the Great, St. Ambrose, and St. Augustine.

In the six medallions behind the altar, Saints Peter and Paul, Nicolò, Lawrence, Eufrazio and the Blessed Pagano are depicted ⑯. In the other 34 medallions on the side walls, the archbishops of Milan are portrayed, with the exception of Ambrose and Charles, represented in the stained glass of the gallery behind the altar. The medallions are the work of Casimiro Radice (1834-1908) and Giovanni Valtorta (1811-1882). The same painters authored the ten evangelical scenes on the walls of the central nave, the frescoes in the small vaults in the aisles, and the vestibule's counter-wall. Latin verses from the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles describe their content. Also noteworthy is the carved wooden pulpit from the late 18th century ⑰ and the bronze Stations of the Cross by sculptor Manfrini, installed in 1968/69 to replace the previous 19th-century paintings.

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