

LA CHAPELLE SAINT-MARTIN DE LIMEUIL

A guide for visitors

1. The Dedication Stone

The **Dedication Stone** is set in the west wall as you enter the Chapel. Such a Dedication Stone is very rare, by virtue of its size, the richness of information provided, and the quality of its characters. It influenced the classification of the church as a historic monument.

The Latin text is in Roman Uncial characters with a French translation on its right. The stone has a crack caused when it was taken back to its rightful place in St. Martin's Chapel from St. Catherine's church in upper Limeuil in 1856. The Stone gives us the following precise details:

- The date of consecration of the building, in 1194.
- The saints to whom the chapel is dedicated, among them Thomas à Becket, the martyred archbishop of Canterbury (at that time Limeuil was under English rule).
- The religious authorities present on that day, who included Ademar Bishop of Périgueux, and Ebrard de Vilars, first Deacon of the church whose sepulchre is beneath the pillar at the right of the entrance.
- The important people of the time. In their feudal order, they were:

Pope Celestine III,

Philippe Auguste, King of France,

Richard Coeur de Lion (Richard Lion-Heart), King of England and Duke of Aquitaine,

Hélie Talleyrand, Count of Périgord.

2. The Nave.

Impressive by virtue of its height and its length of 14 metres, the Nave has an air of serene austerity.

The roof was probably formerly vaulted with stone, (perhaps with three cupolas), standing on buttresses which can still be seen. The vault, which probably collapsed in the 17th Century, was replaced by a framework covered in stone roofing slabs, known as *lauzes*, then flat tiles and panelled on the interior.

The floor is of *pizé*, comprising polished pyramid-shaped stones. It is lower than the surrounding cemetery. The level of the cemetery has been raised considerably over the centuries by the earth taken out for the purpose of burials. Paving stones have replaced the funerary monuments of noble families buried beneath their coats of arms.

The axes of the Nave and the Transept and Apse differ by 6°.

The bell-tower is reached by a wooden ladder and a spiral staircase. This staircase is entirely within the thickness of the 1.8m. west wall. It commences at a height of three m. from the floor, so that the ladder could be pulled up in times of danger, providing a bell-tower refuge.

3. The Crossing

The Crossing is covered in a cupola which supports the bell-tower, containing the biggest bell in the region. Cast in 1780, it was believed to have with miraculous powers to drive away thunder and hailstorms.

4. The Transepts

The **South Transept** on the right disappeared during the late 17C., and the gap was walled up. The **North Transept** has a cradle vault and is roofed in typical Périgord Noir *lauzes*, or stone slabs.

5. The Choir

The Apse is semi-circular, typically Romanesque, and is pierced by niches. It faces east towards Jerusalem.

6. The Exterior

The façade is very plain, with the doorway formed by four semi-circular arches. On the 3rd arch we can read the word PAX (peace), the Benedictine motto. Various little

ornaments are carved into the stone on the capital frieze, including a chequered design, a cross, and a lion chasing a gazelle.

At the base of the doorway on the right is the second sculptured stone of the chapel, (classified in 1905), the epitaph of Ebrard de Vilars. He has lain beside 'his church' since 1230.

The south wall shows traces of the old South Transept and the Sacristy Chapel, probably destroyed by fire in the 17C.

The Choir is roofed in *lauzes* like the North Transept. It is decorated with sculptured figurines representing the builders of the chapel, a bird and a bullock.

The Nave and the Bell-tower were raised in the 18C, and are covered in flat tiles.

The Stained Glass Windows

In 2,000, the Association of the Friends of St. Martin commissioned a series of contemporary windows from Gerard Hermet of Chartres, an artist in stained glass windows. These were an important stage in the restoration of the Chapel. M. Hermet worked with Alfred Manessier, a highly-regarded abstract painter, on the theme of joy. The glass is largely coloured by a blowing technique, then set in lead and mastic. The windows are as follows:

0-1-2 (Choir).

'Joy of the Rising Sun'

Bright blue and gold colours highlight the frescos.

3. (North Transept).

'Transfiguration of Christ'

The state of glory in which Christ appeared to his disciples.

4 (North Transept)

'The divided cloak of St. Martin'

Above, the cloak of the Roman officer, St. Martin. In the centre, the sword slash divides the cloak and half is given to a beggar (St. Martin could not give away the other half, which belonged to the Roman Empire). Below, the colours of Christ, gold and blue.

5. (Wall of the South Transept)

‘Alleluiah’

Song of Triumph and of acts of Grace.

Ascending towards the sky. Bright blue colours, the symbol of the Virgin.

6. (Nave, South Wall).

‘Magnificat’

The hymn of recognition of the Virgin when the Angel Gabriel appears.

(Nave, North Wall)

‘I am the light of the world’.

The quality of light of this window never changes as a result of the time, the weather or the seasons, and represents the permanence of Christ’s word and of eternity.

7. (Lower window of west wall)

‘Song of Joy’

Here the glory of colour is celebrated

8. Upper window of west wall)

The Martyrdom of Thomas à Becket.

The assassination of the Chapel’s patron saint is represented by a red patch on the ground, projected by the setting sun.

The Wall paintings.

These polychrome frescos, rare in Périgord, were discovered about 1960 under old plaster and other coatings. Formerly covering the entire church, they were superimposed one on top of the other, from the oldest (15C) to the most recent (18C).

Painted bands: 50mm wide, these bands of varying periods ran around the entire upper perimeter of the church. They bear the Coats of Arms of the Noble families who protected Limeuil and who are, without doubt, buried under their Coats of Arms. These were the families of the La Tour d ‘Auvergne, de Boulogne, de Turenne and de Bouillon.

The Angel: (window in the North Transept). The angel holds an amulet, inscribed with sacred texts.

The Bishop and the Monk. (pillar in front of the Choir). The Bishop, possibly Ademar, holds a carpenter’s hammer. The monk, perhaps Ebrard de Vilars, holds a bottle of wine.

Biblical scenes (in the Apse of the Choir).

High on the left, Adoration of the three kings.

The kings kneeling under the star give their presents to Jesus, who is held in the arms of the seated Virgin.

Below on the left, the flight to Egypt (Joseph and the donkey).

Jesus being presented in the Temple by his parents and the priest.

High on the right, Christ on the Cross.

John on the right is under the sun and Mary on the left is under the moon.

Lower right, Descent from the Cross (Jesus, John, Mary and Mary Magdelene).

This is the only scene with a bright background, (denoting the resurrection), with mourners dressed in black.