

Jeppo Church



In 1548 the village called Epu had 26 farmers and was taxed for 189 inhabitants. Three hundred years later, in 1859, when the question of building a church was raised, the village had 1170 inhabitants, or about the same as today. In 1890 the parish had 2492 members, the highest number ever. Today less than a thousand members are registered.

For quite a long period of time Jeppo was part of the Pedersöre parish. In 1607 Nykarleby was separated from Pedersöre. From Jeppo the distance to church was cut in half. Even so the 20 km journey was considered too long. The people in Jeppo started to plan for a church of their own. Repeated efforts were made to separate Jeppo from Nykarleby and finally the Imperial Senate granted Jeppo the right to build a house of prayer with an adjoining graveyard under the auspices of the parish of Nykarleby.

Their dream of a church in Jeppo would after all gradually come true. Not a single line of written documentation has been saved regarding the building stage of the church. Only oral tradition is available. Certainly there were drawings, but they were destroyed together with all other possible information when the parsonage burned down in 1886. In the winter of 1859-1860 the homesteads were taxed to fell timber after their size. In the summer of 1860 the foundations were laid and the walls were raised. In 1861 the church was finished. A tower was built on top of the middle section of the church, but the carrying construction proved itself too weak, and the tower had to be removed. A new bell tower was built in 1878 in front of the western cross wing.

In 1863 the Senate granted Jeppo the right to employ a chaplain of their own. Their first priest was Jakob Simelius, who moved from the neighbouring Alahärmä. Starting from 1867 Jeppo became a chapelry under Nykarleby.

Only for a short time the people of Jeppo were content with the situation. They soon started to demand a parish of their own. Finally after six attempts the cathedral chapter granted the application on March 7, 1906 and the parish of Jeppo was born. On July 3, 1906 the Imperial Senate confirmed the decision.

For the first services there was no church bell. A small bell on loan from Keppo mansion was used instead. Already during the first year the present small bell was purchased. It was cast in Helsinki having the following inscription: *"Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming...."* (Math.24:42).

In 1880 the big bell was purchased from Bros Friis mechanical workshop in Yxpila. The inscription reads: *"Let everything that has breath praise the Lord, Hallelujah."* (Ps 150:6).





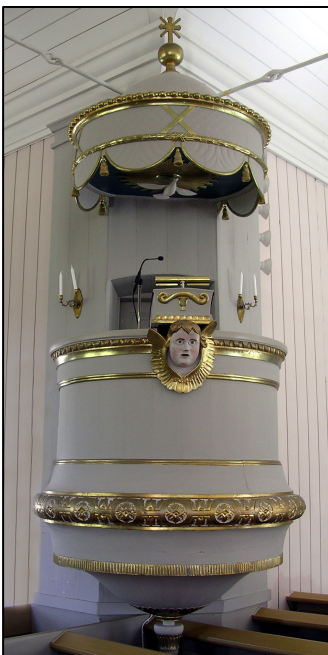
The church is in possession of an old organ which is a real rarity. Many opinions have been expressed about the age and history of the organ. According to the dissertation by Juhani Martikainen regarding organs built in Finland between the years 1600 and 1800, this 8-pitch organ was built for Pedersöre church in 1685 by the two brothers Christian and Johan Bejer. Probably only the organ cabinet dates back to that time. In 1714, during the Great Nordic War, "this Queen of Instruments" was desecrated and very badly damaged. She was allowed to remain in the gallery of Pedersöre church to be rebuilt in 1774 for use in Pedersöre.

In 1888 the organ was sold to Jeppo. The organ has three wooden sculptured ornaments. Originally the oldest and biggest one presented St George standing on a dragon and is probably a late-medieval work from the 15th century. In the 18th century it was remodelled to portray King David. The two other sculptures, the flute player and the violinist originate from 1774.



When in 1963 the faithful servant had sounded almost for three hundred years in our churches a new 14-pitch organ was purchased from Gebrüder Jehmlich in Dresden.

The first altarpiece of the church measured 60 x 70 centimetres and depicted The Lord's Supper. The painting is now located in the sacristy. In 1907 the church received its present and beautiful altarpiece showing the resurrected Jesus together with Mary Magdalene at the grave. It is painted by Alexandra Sältin and donated by Jeppo emigrants in South Africa.



The pulpit was crafted by the Jeppo carpenter Anders Johan Rönqvist and so was the "poor man" at the main entrance to the church.

The big chandelier in the middle of the church is the oldest one and was bought in the decade of 1870 or 1880. The other chandeliers have been donated by Finnish emigrants to America and by local voluntary organizations around 1900.

The church has been refurbished, painted and beautified many times in the years passed. An extensive interior renovation was performed in 1967-1968.

Near to the church are the graveyard, the parish centre, housing also the pastors office and children's day care facilities. On the church hill one can also find an old grain storage.

By the main gate to the graveyard there is a memorial raised to the three soldiers that fell in the war of independence in 1918. Inside the stone wall to the south of the church there is a beautiful monument commemorating the 33 young men that fell in the war 1939-1944. The monument is a work of the artist Rufus Hill.

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