



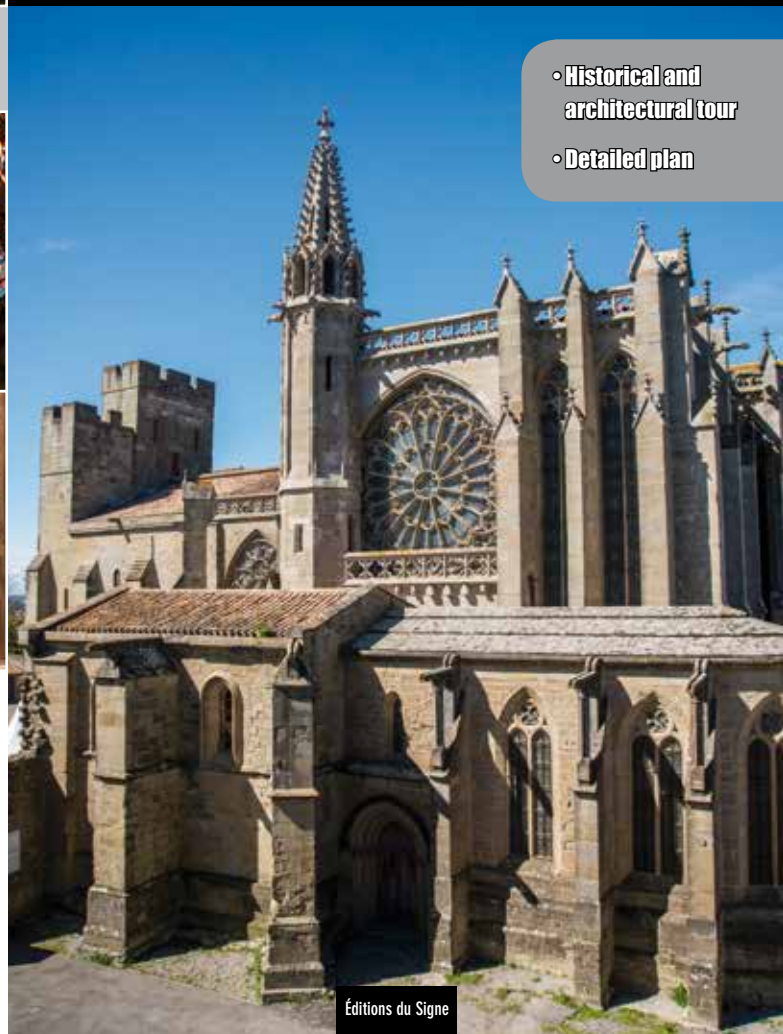
# The Basilica of Sts Nazarius and Celsus

➤ Former Cathedral Church of Carcassonne

The jewel of the medieval City



- Historical and architectural tour
- Detailed plan



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# Introduction



## Dear Visitors

**The Basilica of Sts Nazarius and Celsus** is one of the most impressive churches in the south of France given its central position in **the medieval city of Carcassonne**. It provides a sacred space in the heart of historic Carcassonne, a vertical link between heaven and earth.

People look at a church with very different eyes: those of a **believer**, a **historian**, a **poet**, a **politician**... Someone in charge of heritage will detect a **masterpiece of architecture** and it is the case that in certain periods the Church was able to mobilise artists to create such masterpieces.

Christians believe that a church has a basic task: that of pointing to **the presence of Christ in the heart of the world**, by gathering together the people of God in all its diversity.

We hope that this little brochure will make you want to get to know our beautiful basilica better and to take in all the spiritual wealth that it reveals. May the play of light from the stained-glass windows illuminate your visit!

*The Carcassonne Tourism Ministry Team*





# Construction



**The first Romanesque cathedral** was built from **1096** onwards, the date when Pope Urban II blessed its building materials. **King Louis IX** wanted to build a Gothic church but the work was done by his successors, **Philip III, the Bold** (1270-1285), and **Philip IV, the Fair** (1285-1314). The construction was completed under the episcopates of **Pierre de Rochefort** (1300-1321) and **Pierre Rodier** (1323-1330).

A cathedral until **1803**, it lost this title in that year to the parish church of St Michel in the lower town. **Classified as a historical monument in 1840**, it was restored by Viollet-le-Duc who repaired the outrageous damage done during the Revolution. It would be honoured in 1898 by receiving the distinction of **"minor basilica"**.



**Mass is celebrated each Sunday at:**

- **9.30am** (extraordinary form of the Roman Rite)
- **11am.**

## DIMENSIONS

**The Basilica of Sts Nazarius and Celsus** is a mid-sized church. Inside it measures **59 metres** in total length, **16 metres** for the width of its main section and **36 metres** for the length of its transept. It is built in local sandstone, the main material used for the enclosure and chateau of the City.

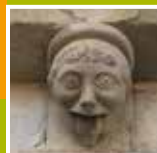
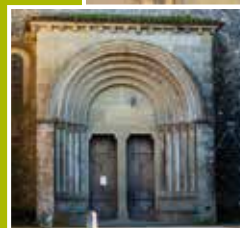
# Exterior



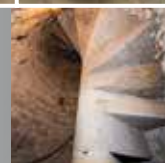
**The north façade:** the door, which opens there with its five receding arches resting on small sculpted columns with capitals and surmounted by a row of modillions that are also sculpted, has been completely restored.

**The east façade** is not accessible; however, it is possible to see it from the rampart if you take the guided tour of the City. It consists of a smooth fortress façade, as is often the case with medieval Languedoc churches.

**The exteriors of the transept and the chevet** display the usual Gothic characteristics: slender buttresses surmounted here by small bell towers, a pierced balustrade with a garland of leaves, gargoyles and protruding heads along with a tower and a small belfry.



# Interior



The main points of interest of the basilica are revealed inside. We find ourselves plunged into the darkness and coolness of a Romanesque church with three naves after the fashion of the **"hall church"** that probably originated in Catalonia. So it is lit only by the windows of the side walls, hence the darkness and coolness which is welcomed in sunny areas but is also an insurance against fire, an obsession of the Middle Ages.

Its **Romanesque** architecture is bare, as is often the case in Languedoc-Roussillon, but it is very well fitted out, skilful and robust. It exudes peace and serenity.

# The Romanesque capitals

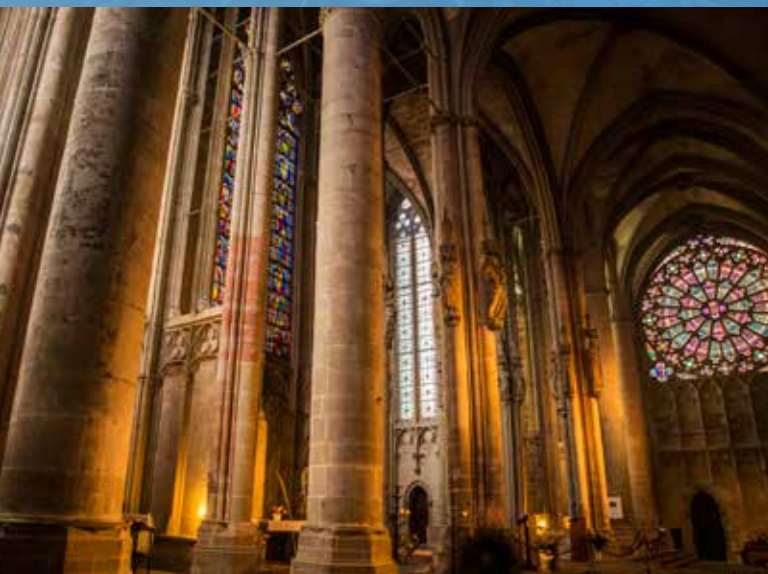


The **capitals**, of which there are **52**, are sculpted with a great variety of extremely rich leaf motifs that are linked to the central rose windows and the finely carved curved shapes at the side; only one of them has a monster's head.

# The transept and Gothic choir



When you move towards the **choir** everything gushes with light. The supports are slender and give the impression of a glass roof.



# The stained-glass windows



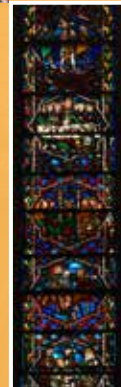
They make up one of the most beautiful sets of **medieval stained-glass windows** in the south of France.



Take some binoculars to make it easier for you to see the detail.

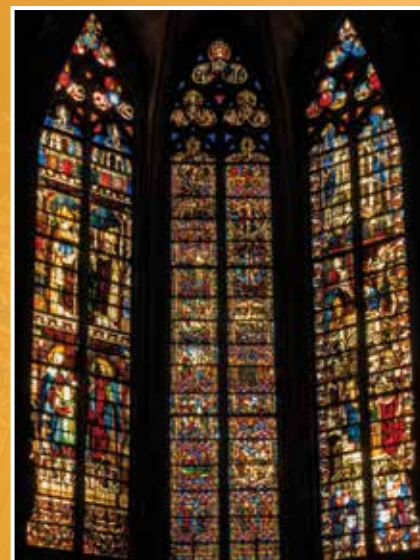
In the **choir**, the central window dates from **1280** and forms part of the oldest Gothic stained-glass windows in the south of France. It features the life of Christ in 16 medallions. Reading from left to right and from bottom to top:

- ✦ The Descent from the Cross - The Placing in the Tomb
- ✦ The Carrying of the Cross - The Crucifixion
- ✦ The Arrest of Jesus - The Scourging
- ✦ The Entry into Jerusalem - The Last Supper
- ✦ The Massacre of the Innocents - Christ among the Doctors
- ✦ The Presentation in the Temple - The Flight into Egypt
- ✦ The Nativity - The Adoration of the Magi
- ✦ The Annunciation - The Visitation



Added to these are the **Resurrection of Christ** and the **Resurrection of the Dead**, in the three upper trefoils.

The two nearby windows date from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The one on the left represents: at the bottom, **St Celsus** being presented by his mother to **St Nazarius**; at the top, **St Hilary** in the company of **St Gimer**, who was the bishop of Carcassonne from 903 to 932. The window on the right features: at the top, **the Nativity of the Virgin Mary**; at the bottom, her **Presentation in the Temple** by her parents Joachim and Anne.







Moving away from the **axial window**, we discover two 14<sup>th</sup>-century windows. The one on the left represents **the lives of St Peter and St Paul**. The scenes from bottom to top are:

Life of St Peter on the left:

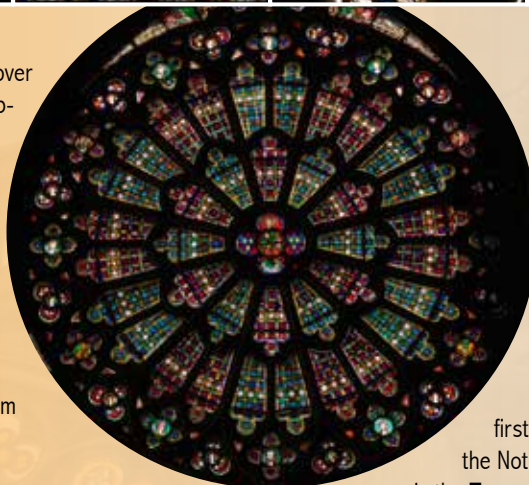
- ✦ Crucifixion upside down
- ✦ Peter appears in Rome before Nero
- ✦ Peter's miraculous deliverance
- ✦ Arrest of Peter
- ✦ Peter sends Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem
- ✦ Peter cures a paralytic
- ✦ Peter receives the Keys of the Kingdom
- ✦ Jesus calls Simon Peter and his brother Andrew.

Life of St Paul on the right:

- ✦ Paul is martyred in Rome
- ✦ Paul preaches before the Areopagos
- ✦ Paul embarks for Greece
- ✦ Paul writes one of his letters
- ✦ Paul enjoys the vision of the Holy Trinity
- ✦ Paul receives his baptism
- ✦ Paul enters blind into Damascus
- ✦ Paul on the road to Damascus: his conversion.

The **symmetrical right window** features the lives of **St Nazarius** and **St Celsus** in eight double scenes. Again from left to right and bottom to top they are:

- ✦ St Ambrose has the bodies of the two martyrs laid in the Holy Apostles Basilica
- ✦ The two saints are beheaded, and St Ambrose discovers their bodies
- ✦ The Prefect of Trier has the two saints thrown into the River Moselle, they escape drowning and return to Milan
- ✦ Out of prison in Cimiez, the two saints set off for Trier where they are arrested



- ✦ Having taken Celsus as his companion, presented by his mother, Nazarius baptises him and the two are immediately imprisoned
- ✦ St Nazarius proclaims the gospel and visits Sts Gervais and Protas in prison (martyrs who were buried in Milan)
- ✦ St Nazarius, baptised by St Linus, takes leave of family and friends.

We find two windows from the 14<sup>th</sup> century in the first chapels of the two transept arms. On the left, in the Notre-Dame Chapel, is the **Jesse Tree**; on the right, is the **Tree of Life**.

The **two rose windows of the transept** conclude the series.

The one at the north comes from the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and features the Crowning of the Virgin Mary, surrounded by angels, prophets and saints.

The south window, also from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, celebrates Christ in majesty; in the corners at the bottom Sts Peter and Paul can be seen.

The windows of the third and fourth chapels of each transept arm are from the 19<sup>th</sup> century.





# WHO ARE ST NAZARIUS AND ST CELSUS?

**Nazarius** was a young Roman, son of an officer of the empire. Converted by his mother, **Perpetua**, he went off preaching across Italy accompanied by another young man, **Celsus**.

Both of them were arrested and imprisoned in Milan. They escaped and reached Trier where they were arrested once again and thrown into the River Moselle. They managed not to drown and went back to Milan where they were finally beheaded in 68 under Nero.

The great archbishop, **Ambrose**, exhumed their bodies in 395 and placed their relics in the Holy Apostles Church which he had just had built.

Their life story is told by Jacobus de Voragine in *The Golden Legend* (13<sup>th</sup> century).

The two martyrs were **canonised** and they are celebrated together **on July 28<sup>th</sup>**.

## Did you know

St Dominic preached the Lenten sermons in this former cathedral in 1213. This man whose only arms were his evangelical gentleness and his preaching died 13 years before the Inquisition was set up. In Aude, go and have a look at the Dominicans' holy places in Fanjeaux and at Prouilhe Monastery, below the village.

## The Gothic sculpture

The choir's **22 Gothic statues** are distinguished by their being cut into the body of their supports:

1<sup>st</sup> pillar: Virgin and Child, St Joseph, St Nazarius, St Celsus

2<sup>nd</sup> pillar: Virgin of the Annunciation, Archangel Gabriel, St Bartholomew

3<sup>rd</sup> pillar: St John

4<sup>th</sup> pillar: St James the Great

5<sup>th</sup> pillar: St Philip

6<sup>th</sup> pillar: St Peter

7<sup>th</sup> pillar: St Paul

8<sup>th</sup> pillar: St Thomas

9<sup>th</sup> pillar: St James the Less

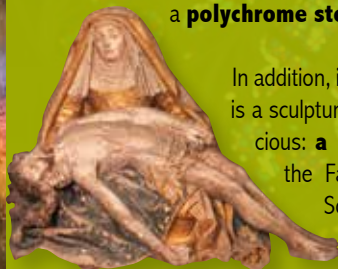
10<sup>th</sup> pillar: St Matthew

11<sup>th</sup> pillar: St Andrew, St Helen, St Simon (or St Jude)

12<sup>th</sup> pillar: The Angel of the Passion, St Jude (or St Simon), Christ, St Gimer.



One of the pearls of the sculpture in the Basilica of Sts Nazarius and Celsus is located at the end of the north arm of the transept: a **polychrome stone Pieta** dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

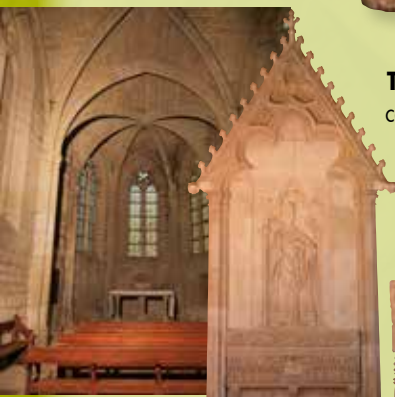


In addition, in the first **south chapel**, there is a sculpture whose rarity makes it precious: a **16<sup>th</sup>-century Trinity** (God the Father seated with God the Son on the cross between his knees, and God the Holy Spirit in the form of a mutilated dove coming out of the Father's mouth and resting on the Son's cross).



# Things to note:

A sarcophagus fragment featuring a tangle of fighters: the **siege of Muret** by Simon de Montfort.



**The Radulphe Chapel**, not accessible to the public, adjoining the south transept, contains the tomb of Bishop **Guillaume Radulphe** (1255-1266).



At the north, **the St Peter** (or St John) **Chapel** houses the tomb of Bishop **Pierre de Rochefort**; it is surmounted by a sculpted monument consisting of three niches underneath carved gables which contain the statues of **the bishop** in full dress, surrounded on the right by his principal archdeacon **Pons de Castillon**, and on the left by his minor archdeacon **Gasc de Rochefort**, overlooking a procession of canons and other clergy.



## Nave furnishing



A Romanesque sandstone holy water font dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> century can be seen.



## The great organ



**Crespin Verniole** was responsible for first constructing it from 1637 to 1639 and it was rebuilt by **Jean de Joyeuse** from 1680 to 1687. **Jean-Pierre Cavaillé** enlarged it from 1772 to 1775. Various restorations took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1962 the Friends of the Organ Society was formed with a view to promoting concerts and financing the instrument's restoration, one that was undertaken in 1982 by Bartolomeo Formentelli and completed in 1985.

Every Sunday during the summer an organ festival enriches the cultural and liturgical life of the basilica.







# Plan

## Basilica of Sts Nazarius and Celsus, Carcassonne

1. Pieta (16<sup>th</sup> cent.)
2. Virgin Mary and St Anne
3. Virgin Mary
4. Tomb of Gérard du Puy, Archbishop of Narbonne (1415-1420): recumbent in alabaster (15<sup>th</sup> cent.)
5. 22 statues (14<sup>th</sup> cent.): Christ, Virgin Mary, 12 apostles, 6 saints, 2 angels
6. Trinity (14<sup>th</sup> cent.)
7. St Roch (17<sup>th</sup> cent.)
8. Our Lady of Health
9. Siege stone (13<sup>th</sup> cent.)
10. St Peter
11. St Paul (14<sup>th</sup> cent.)
12. Tomb of Pierre de Rochefort: bishop (1300-1321): the bishop and two deacons
13. Jesse Tree: Jesse among 16 prophets.  
Top: Last Judgement (14<sup>th</sup> cent.)
14. Grisaille (17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> cent.)
15. Right: Life of St Paul (14<sup>th</sup> cent.);  
Left: Life of St Peter (14<sup>th</sup> cent.)
16. St Celsus being introduced to St Nazarius by his mother; Top: St Saturninus and St Gimer (16<sup>th</sup> cent.)
17. Life of Jesus Christ in 16 medallions, from bottom to top and from left to right (14<sup>th</sup> cent.)
18. Top: Nativity of the Virgin Mary;  
Bottom: Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple (16<sup>th</sup> cent.)
19. Life of Sts Nazarius and Celsus in 16 scenes, from bottom to top and left to right (14<sup>th</sup> cent.)
20. Grisaille (18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> cent.)
21. Tree of life of St Bonaventure;  
Bottom: Adam and Eve (14<sup>th</sup> cent.)
22. South rose window: Christ in Majesty (14<sup>th</sup> cent.)
23. North rose window: Kingdom of Heaven (late 13<sup>th</sup> cent.)
24. Sans Morlane epitaph
25. Headstone
26. Epitaph (15<sup>th</sup> cent.)
27. Pulpit (19<sup>th</sup> cent.)
28. Stoup (12<sup>th</sup> cent.)
29. Baptismal font (1430)
30. Organ (1522 to 17<sup>th</sup> cent. and 1772 to late 19<sup>th</sup> cent.)

