

Assisi

Basilica of St. Francis

Francis of Assisi on October 3, 1226. Less than two years later, plans were underway for the construction of a grand church in his honor. The basilica is made up of two levels, the upper church and the lower church, with a crypt housing the tomb of Francis beneath the lower level.

Both churches were consecrated by Pope Innocent IV in 1253. The impressive frescoes that decorate the interior were painted by Cimabue, Giotto and other prominent painters of the late 1200s and early 1300s.

The lower church was built first and houses the altar under which St. Francis was buried. The dimly-lit, crypt-like church is covered in frescoes by artists of the early Sienese school, which depict St. Francis' life in parallel with the life of Christ. The altar is a Cosmatesque work of about 1250, featuring lovely mosaic designs and delicate columns. It is topped by a marble slab that is believed to be from Constantinople. The choir stalls - 50 of them arranged in two tiers - were carved in 1471 and feature sculptures of leaves, animals and humans on the armrests.

Completed in 1280, the upper church is a striking contrast to its downstairs neighbor. The interior is a magnificent example of Italian Gothic: light-filled, airy, joyful, and alive with color. Cimabue painted the transept and apse in 1280-83 and Giotto painted the *Legend of St. Francis* in the lower register of the nave a few years later. The altar of the upper church dates from about 1253.























