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400 Years of the Basilica of Saint Peter

Located in the heart of Vatican City and built by Bramante, Michelangelo and Bernini, Saint Peter's Basilica is the centre of Christianity and one of the crowning achievements of the Renaissance. The Holy See has recently held several events to commemorate the 400th anniversary of its dedication.

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There can be no denying that Saint Peter's Basilica is a work of both art and faith. Its construction, spanning more than a century (1506-1626), represents the transition and culmination of Renaissance and Baroque styles.

In 1626, the great basilica built over the tomb of the apostle Peter was officially consecrated. Four centuries later, in 2026, Saint Peter's Basilica celebrates 400 years as one of the most influential buildings in the history of Western architecture.

From Bramante to Bernini: a legacy for modern architecture

The present basilica replaced the ancient Constantinian church of the fourth century. The project officially began in 1506 at the initiative of Pope Julius II, who commissioned the design from Donato Bramante.

Throughout more than a century of construction, the building passed through the hands of decisive architects: Michelangelo, who redefined the dome and gave the whole its definitive monumentality; Carlo Maderno, responsible for the present façade and the longitudinal extension that transformed the temple into a Latin cross; and Gian Lorenzo Bernini, creator of the imposing bronze baldachin beneath the dome and designer of the elliptical piazza that embraces pilgrims.

The consecration took place on 18 November 1626. Since then, St Peter's has been the setting for papal coronations, great public celebrations, historic funerals and key moments in contemporary history.

Explore the history online

The Vatican has prepared a variety of digital resources for getting to know Saint Peter's and the history of the basilica on its 400th anniversary:

The [official historical website](#)

The [interactive virtual tour](#)

♂ The [history and life of St Peter](#)

A living museum: art, space and experience

The Basilica is a compendium of European art from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Michelangelo's dome, which is 136 metres high, became the model for countless subsequent churches.

Bernini's baldachin introduced a Baroque language that dialogues with the colossal scale of the building. The side chapels house

sculptures, mosaics and funerary monuments that span five centuries of history.

To mark the anniversary, the programme presented in February 2026 includes an exhibition dedicated to the design and construction phases of the temple, from Bramante's first sketches to its completion in the seventeenth century. The aim is to show the creative process behind a work that, more than a building, was a continuous architectural experiment for over a hundred years.

Furthermore, a new Stations of the Cross by Swiss artist Manuel Dürr was incorporated on 20 February, integrating contemporary creation within a historic space, something that has occurred periodically throughout the centuries.

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