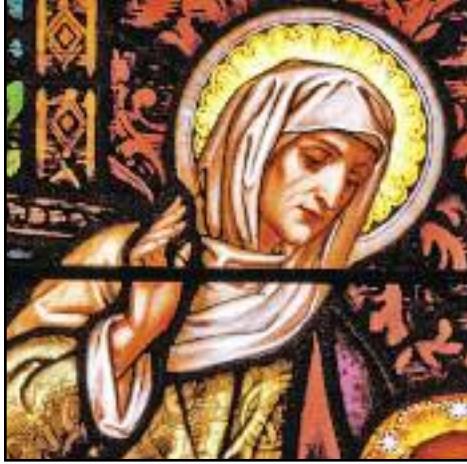


*St. Mary Parish  
Our History – Our Church*







In March, 1867 Mobile was recovering from the Civil War and Bishop John Quinlan recognized the need for a parish in the “outlying western section of Mobile.” He appointed Father David O’Meara (1867-1877) to establish the parish. Initially, the infirmary of the old Catholic Boys’ Home on Lafayette Street was used as a chapel. The original white frame St. Mary’s Church, on donated land on the corner of Lafayette Street and Old Shell Road was dedicated November 29, 1868.

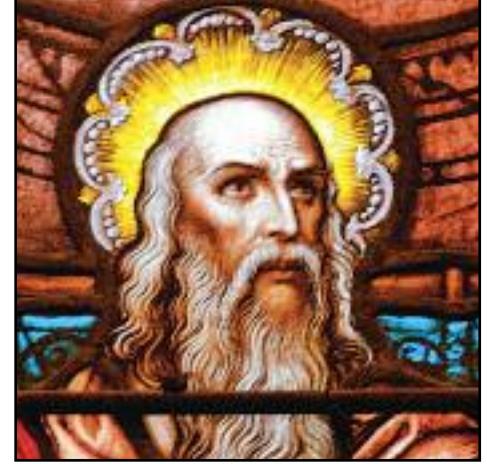
In 1871, a parish school was begun, staffed by volunteer lay teachers until the Sisters of Mercy arrived from Ireland. The hall at the rear of the sacristy was converted into two classrooms. Seven pupils enrolled in the first class: five Zimlichs and two Keegans. By 1910 a brick school and convent were built at a cost of \$20,000.

One poem of Father Abram Ryan, the famous poet-priest and St. Mary’s pastor (1877-1882) was a tribute to St. Mary’s. Father Thomas Eaton (1907-1929)

oversaw many changes and tremendous growth. In 1914, St. Catherine of Siena Church in Crichton was formed in west Mobile from St. Mary’s territory. In 1920 another portion of St. Mary’s became St. Joan of Arc Parish.

Construction of the present church began in 1926 with John J. Carey as supervising architect. St. Mary’s Church was dedicated February 5, 1928, and the old church was converted to a parish hall.

Msgr. John O’Donoghue (1929-1962)



paid off the construction debt in 1945. On May 4, 1948, ground was broken for the present fourteen classroom/gymnasium school building. The school, costing \$250,000 was dedicated in 1949.

Msgr. Thomas Cullen (1962-1972) renovated the sanctuary following Vatican Council II. He was succeeded by Msgr. Daniel Harnett (1972-1982), Father John Aherne (1982-1993), and Msgr. Kenneth Klepac (1993-1997) who established the first development program for a parish in the Archdiocese

of Mobile, to unite the church and school as a parish, and to involve people in the mission and vision of the parish's future.

During the pastorate of Msgr. Peter Cunningham (1999-2011), St. Mary Parish launched the "Celebrating the Past...Building the Future" Campaign in 2000, raising \$1.4 million for renovations including: St. Mary's historic church organ and choir loft, a completely upgraded electrical system and improved lighting, and a new church

roof. St. Mary Catholic School gained a new state of the art science lab, a completely renovated kitchen with new equipment, and a new administrative suite and reception area. The shining glory of the capital campaign was the restoration of the Sisters of Mercy 1909 Building. The building was in great disrepair as its use dwindled after the new school was built in 1949. The campaign allowed for the bottom floor to become the new preschool for three- and four-year-old students. The



second floor was renovated to include three glorious reception rooms and administrative offices for the parish. The renovated buildings were blessed by Archbishop Oscar Lipscomb on November 16, 2003.

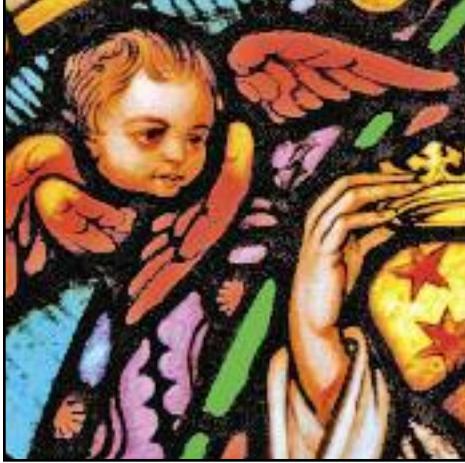
As the parish continued to grow, so did St. Mary Catholic School as it moved quickly from one classroom per grade to two. The parish realized it faced a pivotal point in its history. Without additional classrooms, families would be turned away. With great

leadership by the parish council, the school board, and a development advisory board, the parish decided to renovate the top floor of the Sisters of Mercy Building as the new home for St. Mary's Middle School. The renovations, completed in 2006 brought the school back to its glory days. Currently, St. Mary Catholic School has an enrollment of more than 500 students from preschool through eighth grade.

In the fall of 2009, St. Mary Parish launched the "Our Faith, Our Hope,

Our Future" Capital Campaign. This campaign, with a goal of \$1.8 million, was to restore our historic church including restoration of the precious stained-glass windows, kneelers and church ceiling, and the installation of new sound, HVAC and fire alarm systems. The campaign will also pay down the \$700,000 debt incurred in campus improvements to the school buildings.

In February, 2011, Msgr. G. Warren Wall was named St. Mary's pastor, and he has continued the projects of the



campaign. The Church Bell Tower and Cross were added as projects to the church restorations.

### **The History of St. Mary Church**

**T**he exterior of St. Mary Church is Spanish Renaissance Style. The interior is a process design patented by John J. Earley, an architectural sculptor from Washington, D.C.

In the sanctuary, the story of the Incarnation is told symbolically. At the highest point is the Trinity, three

interlacing circles of equal size and hue. The central medallion depicts the Incarnation, Annunciation, and the overall shadowing of the Holy Spirit. Superimposed on these is a red circle, surmounted by a Cross representing the hypostatic union of Christ with God and the mystery of blood by which we are also partakers with Him. The Apse represents the inner life of the church and the faces of the arch its outer life. At the top of the Apse is heaven, a radial design representing

the order which proceeds from God and in which are found the supernatural virtues, Faith, Hope and Charity, ecclesiastical authority represented by the mitre, and the nourishment by the ciborium. Below, in the border of heaven and represented by plant-like growths, are the fruits of grace. The central medallion depicts the Incarnation, the Annunciation of the Angel and the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit.

Below, in the frieze band of the dome is represented a litany of praise for her



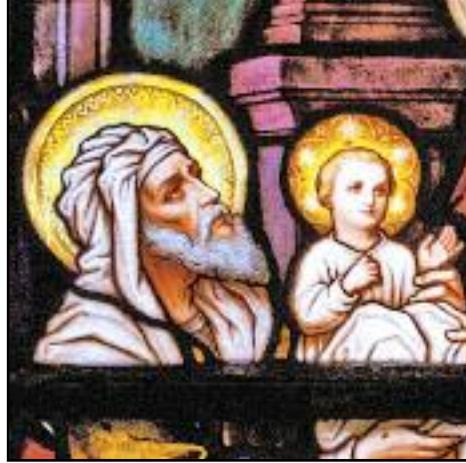
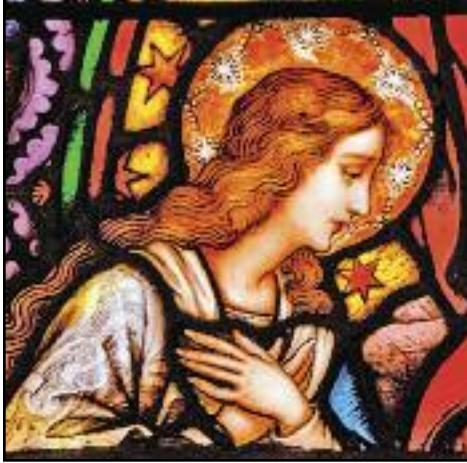
who was so honored “Vessel of Honor, Mystical Rose, Morning Star, Gate of Heaven, Arch of the Covenant, Tower of David, Tower of Ivory, Queen of Angels, and Queen of Patriarchs.” Below again are little turning medallions taken from early Christian signet rings which are signs of faith.

Returning to the face of the arch we see the two great apostles Peter and Paul who preached the faith, and above them, often repeated to signify the Catholicity of the Church, is a ship

representing each Christian on the sea of life. It’s sail is signed with the sign of faith. Its course is guided by a dove, the Holy Spirit. Beside this is an anchor, the sign of Hope. The top of the anchor forms a Chi Rho for our hope in Christ, and on the anchor is a book with a fish imprinted on its pages, for our hope comes to us through the scriptures which tell of Christ.

Elsewhere in the church the symbolism is usual. In the transepts above the springline of the vault are the four

Evangelists: St. Matthew represented by the man because he wrote of Christ’s humanity; St. Mark a lion because he wrote of the power of Christ (“a voice of one crying out in the dessert”); St. Luke an ox because he wrote of Christ’s Nativity, born in a manger; St. John the eagle because he soared to the heights of mystic theology. The medallions on the walls represent the twelve apostles. The name is on each medallion, and they represent some character of each apostle’s life or else the instrument of



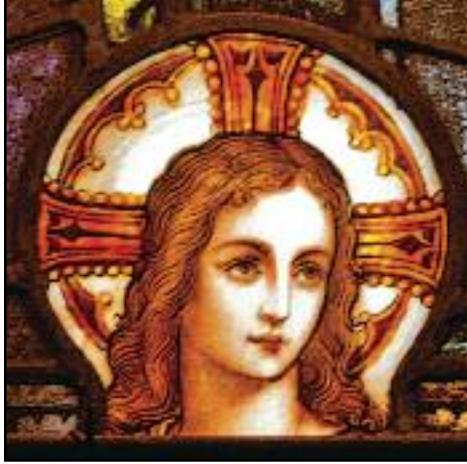
this death. They are in the order given in the “Acts of the Apostles” and arranged as if seated at table with the tabernacle in the center. With the signs of the apostles are four medallions bearing a nondescript geometrical design representing the order which their preachings brought to the disorder of Paganism.

The medallions on the walls represent the twelve apostles. In the transepts are the four evangelists. The windows are a biography of Mary in tableau form.

The twelfth window of the crowning of Mary was dedicated April 29, 1929 at the Ryan Memorial. The poet priest of the South was the second Pastor of St. Mary.

All the marble on the altars is from Alabama. In accordance with Vatican II a table was introduced into the church. The renovation of the altars using the original marble was completed in 1967. Windows above the main altar represent 6 sacraments: Baptism-Confirmation-Penance-Sacrament of the Sick- Holy Orders-Matrimony. The tabernacle

holds the Holy Eucharist, the seventh sacrament. In recent years with church restorations surrounding the “Celebrating the Past... Building the Future” Capital Campaign, much of the original altar was restored to its original state with the exception of the communion railings which have not yet been returned.



## The History of the Stained Glass Windows

The stained glass windows in the body of the Church contain a biography of Mary in Tableau form. Standing at the altar facing the congregation, and looking to the right we see (1) the birth of Mary, daughter of Joachim and Anne.

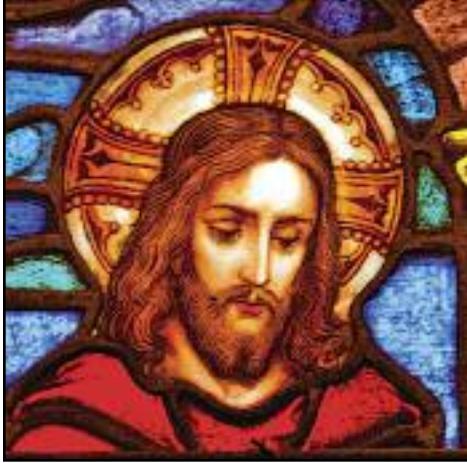
As Mary grew, her mother Ann, (2) instructed her in the knowledge of God and scripture. From these instructions Mary's love of god matured and at an early age (3) Mary is presented to the

Temple for service to the Lord. We then see (4) the Betrothal and Marriage of Mary and Joseph, from the House of David, when Mary was about 15 years of age.

Immediately after the Annunciation, Mary (5) visited her cousin in Judea to rejoice with her on the coming birth of John the Baptizer. Elizabeth recognized Mary as the Mother of God; from this meeting we have the words of the great Magnificat and the opening phrase of the Hail Mary.

Then we have (6) the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, when Mary, the instrument of God, presented the long awaited Messiah to the Jewish people and the world.

We now look to our left at the entrance of the church and work our way back to the altar (7) we have the presentation of Jesus in the temple forty days after his birth where Simeon and Anna prophesy, "The Child will be a sign of contradiction for many and a sword will pierce the soul of the Mother."



In the next window (8) Jesus is initiated into the Jewish adult society at the age of twelve by His presence in the Temple. We often refer to this incident as Jesus lost and found in the Temple. Jesus knew where He was; it was Mary and Joseph who were lost without his presence.

Next (9) we have the Holy Family. He sanctified family life and gave it true worth by His presence and His obedience to Joseph and Mary. Then follows (10) the Wedding Feast at

Cana where Christ worked His first public miracle at the suggestion of Mary. Assumption (11). Because of the privilege of her Immaculate Conception, Mary is now in heaven with her Son, both body and soul.

The last tableau (12) is the Crowning of Mary, Queen of Heaven. It was her "Yes" to the Angel that led her to her exalted position. This was dedicated April 25, 1929 as the Ryan Memorial Window.

St. Mary Catholic Church  
1453 Old Shell Road  
(Corner of Old Shell and Lafayette)  
Mobile, Alabama 36604

[www.stmarymobile.org](http://www.stmarymobile.org)

