



Maurice DENIS

Painter (1870-1943)



The healing of the
Ploumanach blind man (1925)

Maurice DENIS (1870-1943) was born in Granville (Normandy). If he resided mostly in Saint-Germain-en Laye, the artist travelled many times to Italy and Brittany. His encounter with SERUSIER, the example of GAUGUIN made Maurice DENIS become a member of the Nabis group, among whom he was regarded as their theorist. He was nicknamed the “Beautiful Icon Nabi”.

Inspired by Symbolism from the start of his career to his death, Maurice DENIS’ work as a painter denoted great coherence, as he strived his whole life to conciliate the decorative atmosphere and the content, always taking a new form, in his creation.

This became apparent after 1919 when he established the “Sacred Art Workshops” with Georges DESVALLIERES, at the same moment his long-suffering wife Marthe died.

In his Saint-Germain-en Laye priory, he decorated the chapel centred on the theme of Saint Martha (frescoes, furniture, stained-glass windows).

He was active in many religious buildings and his involvement with Saint-Nicaise happened on two occasions.

The side-chapels

In 1925, he executed the marouflaged canvasses in the side-chapels.

- 1. In the left side-chapel (North), he executed the Annunciation, with a Tuscany inspired backdrop.
- 2. In the right side-chapel (South), the Holy Family is represented, in a Mediterranean setting once more. From left to right, Saint Anne, Saint Joseph holding the infant Jesus, Mary holding one of his hands, Elizabeth keeping John the Baptist close to her knees. Maurice DENIS put on his canvas Jeanne CHATELIN (G. CHARBONNEAUX’s daughter) and her four children in the background, to pay tribute to the family. The work was completed and put up in July 1926.



side-chapel (North)



side-chapel (South)

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Some years later, in 1933, soon after Georges CHARBONNEAUX's death, Marguerite, his widow, commissioned Maurice DENIS to decorate the baptistery.

He was delighted to work on the small baptistery, "this little intimate room, this sacred nursery ought to be in a delicate and inviting finish". This would be a break for the artist from the austere pictures of his Pentecost, in reference to the work in preparation for the Saint-Esprit church in Paris.

The architecture of the place enabled the artist to compose an elaboration on the history of water in the Bible, by pursuing the themes of the baptismal water blessing. He executed six paintings from October 15 and November 13, 1933.

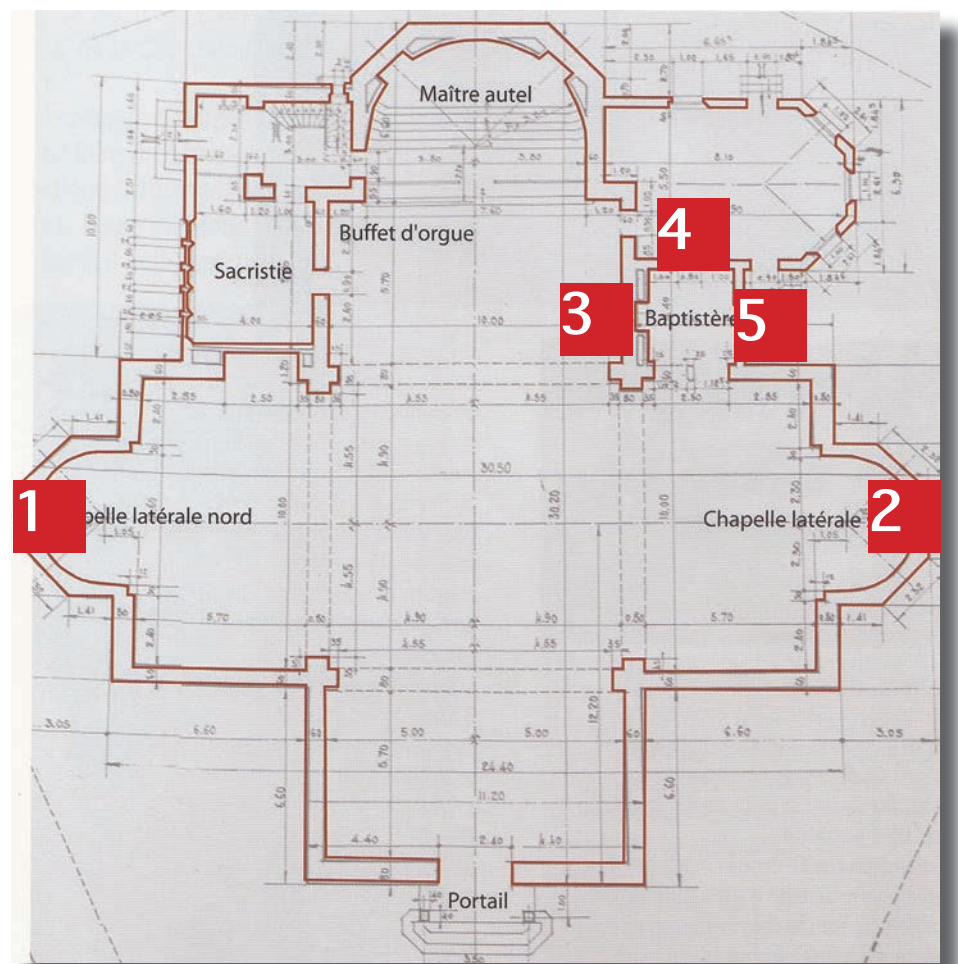
The entire paintings were completed with stick B, glue paint, a traditional technique back in fashion at the time. The artist had already used it in 1927 for the Saint-Louis church in Vincennes.

Upon entering the baptistery, one is struck by the ubiquitous reference to water. Moving from left to right, an explanatory frieze in Latin painted in gold on a red field is placed over three successive panels:

-3. On the left wall, the Garden of Eden, with its four rivers, Adam and Eve and the serpent, encompassing a semi circular niche: the Baptism of Christ and that of young women. Psalm 41 accompanies it: "As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God".

- 4. At the top of the far wall, the dove of the Holy Spirit is hovering over the waters (Genesis), and around the door leading to the disused catechism room, Maurice DENIS expanded on the Deluge theme.

- 5. Finally, on the right wall, scenes from the Old and New Testaments are depicted: Moses striking the rock bringing a flow of water in the desert to allow the women of Israel and their offspring to drink, Christ sending out his disciples to baptise all nations, and the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch by Philip, as accounted in the Acts of the Apostles.



Place of Maurice DENIS's work



The Deluge and Noah's Ark



Moses making the water spring - Jesus preaching at Tiberias - The Baptism of the Eunuch



Genesis and the Baptism of Christ