

# A Jewel in Wood

## The Altar of St. James



in the Castle Church of Winnenden

- English -



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# The Figures on the Altar

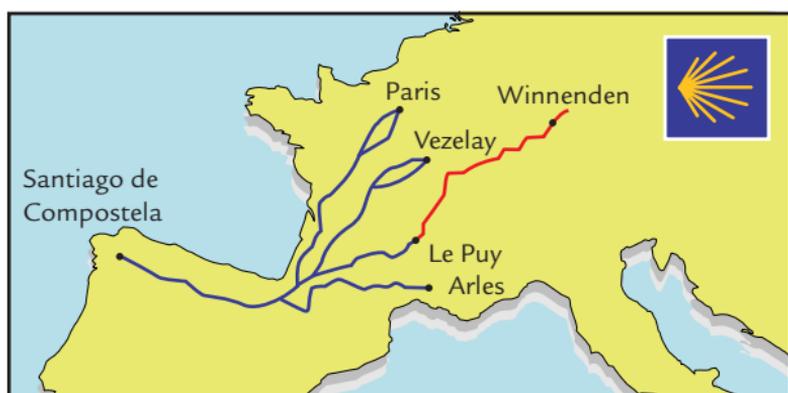
1. Angel
2. Angel
3. Man of Pain
4. Adoration
5. Isaiah
6. Christopher
7. Sermon
8. Burning of Books
9. James
10. Execution
11. Shipment
12. Jodokus
13. Paul
14. Jesus
15. Peter
16. Wendelin
17. Evening Meal
18. Departure
19. Miracle of the Gallows
20. Miracle of the Hen
21. Guardian of the Shrine
22. Augustine
23. Ambrose
24. Gregory
25. Jerome

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# The Way of St. James



The Schlosskirche St. Jakobus (Castle Church of St. James) is the parish church of the Protestant parish of Winnenden. In the Middle Ages it served as a station for Christian pilgrims on their way to Santiago de Compostela. The destination of their pilgrimage was the shrine of the apostle James on the west coast of Spain. Close to the Schlosskirche was a pilgrim's hostel. Knights of the Teutonic Order in Winnental watched over the pilgrims' safety and security. For medieval man, Santiago lay at the end of the world, and the pilgrims praying in front of this altar had another 2000 km to travel.

Their route would lead them through foreign lands, dangerous rivers and wild mountains. The message carved in wood on this altar was one of encouragement and comfort to the pilgrims. The Way of St. James has been rediscovered by modern-day pilgrims. Since St. James Day in 2004 it has been marked by the blue and yellow symbol of the scallop shell (St. James' shell) and leads pilgrims via Esslingen, Tübingen and the Kinzig Valley to the old paths in France and finally to their destination in Santiago de Compostela. (Further information can be found on the internet at: [www.occa.de](http://www.occa.de)).

## The Altar



St. James is depicted sitting in the middle. James and his brother John were among the twelve apostles of Jesus. As the leader of the first Christian congregation, James was beheaded by King Herod in about 44 AD. According to legend, friends in Palestine put his body in a boat, which after seven days landed on the shores of Galicia near Iria Flavia. In 825 the city of Santiago de Compostela was founded on this site. St. James, as the patron saint of the Schlosskirche, is given a central position and is depicted with a pilgrim's bag and a scallop shell on his pilgrim hat, blessing the benefactors of the altar, the small figures at his feet. These are probably the Commander of the Teutonic Order's castle, Heinrich von Neuneck (on the left), and his father Johann von Neuneck zu Glatt (on the right). To his left, the apostle Peter is depicted with a key, and next to him, with a shepherd's crook and a sheepdog, St. Wendelin, the patron saint of shepherds. Due to the similarity of the names, he is venerated as the patron saint of the town of Winnenden. To St. James' right are St. Paul, with a sword, and St. Jodokus († 668),

the son of a Breton duke, who gave up the crown (which can be seen lying at his feet) and set off on pilgrimage.



Above Peter and Wendelin, St. Christopher can be seen standing with a child on his shoulder.

According to legend, he carried the Infant Jesus across a raging torrent. It was in this way, after a long search, he finally found the mightiest ruler of the world. Even today St. Christopher is considered a holy helper, giving protection against accidents and sudden death.

The identity of the figure on the other side has not yet been established: it might be Joseph (the lily), Isaiah (the book) or Jesus' beloved disciple, John.

The altar is constructed in the shape of a cross. The scenes shown on the vertical axis are taken from the life of Jesus Christ; those on the horizontal axis are related to pilgrimage. The two axes are connected through the figure of James, who followed Jesus in sacrificing his life for others.



The figures in the lower part of the altar represent four Doctors of the Church, upon whose belief and doctrines Christian tradition is based. In the niche on the left are Augustine and Ambrose, in the niche on the right Pope Gregory the Great and Jerome.

**Augustine** (354-430) was bishop of Hippo in North Africa; he is considered one of the most important figures in Christian history. **Ambrose** was Bishop of Milan. He composed many hymns and texts for the early church. After his election he immediately gave his money to the poor.

**Pope Gregory the Great** was Bishop of Rome; Gregorian chant was named in his honour.

**Jerome** (347-420) translated the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into Latin and thus created the Vulgate, still an important biblical text of the Roman Catholic Church.

Above the Doctors of the Church, at the bottom of the vertical axis of the cross, the risen Christ greets and blesses the pilgrims with his hand raised. Further up, the apostle St. James gives his blessing. In the upper part of the altar the nativity and the adoration of the Magi are depicted, surmounted by Jesus represented as the man of pain or "Schmerzensmann", of whom Isaiah says, "Surely he hath borne our griefs... and with his stripes we are healed." The message of the vertical axis of the altar can be summarised in the words of the ri-

sen Christ, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending".

The theme of the horizontal axis of the altar is the following of Christ on pilgrimage. This is depicted on the two wings adjoining the Saints to the right and to the left of Saint James.

## The Wings

The pictures in the upper row of the horizontal axis show scenes from the life of St. James. Those in the lower row illustrate the "miraculous story of the chicken" in Domingo de la Calzada (Spain).

Upper row, from left to right:

Picture 1: James preaching from the pulpit. The congregation at his feet: the regular churchgoer (with a stool), a bored youth and a rather critical listener.

Picture 2: Hermogenes, a sorcerer, who had challenged James, undergoes conversion to Christianity. His books are burnt (compare book burnings during the reformation!)

Picture 3: The execution of James by King Herod in 44 AD.

Picture 4: The dead body is laid in the boat.



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Lower row, from left to right:

Picture 1: A German pilgrim family stops at an inn on the Way of St. James.

Picture 2: When they prepare to leave the following morning, the landlord slips a goblet into the father's knapsack. In the background the police are seen discovering the theft.

People on pilgrimage accused of theft face death by hanging. The son turns himself in for his father.

Picture 3: The parents rush to the grave of St. James and pray for help. When they return after 36 days, they find their son still hanging at the gallows, but still alive. The Saint has come and is supporting his feet.

Picture 4: The parents bring charges against the innkeeper, but the judge does not believe them. "Your son is as dead as this chicken on the grill." At this very moment the chicken comes alive again, grows feathers and flies off. The son is released from prison and the innkeeper is hanged in his place.



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## The Figure at the Side of the Left Wing



To this day, we cannot be absolutely sure who this figure represents. All the evidence seems to indicate that it is St. Maurice. He is said to have been the leader of the Roman Theban Legion, who suffered martyrdom under Emperor Maximian in 302/303, because they refused to use violence against fellow Christians. According to legend, he carried the Holy Lance into battle. The lance carried by the soldier at the side of our high altar hints at St. Maurice and resembles other depictions of this patron saint. As the church in the neighbouring town

of Schwaikheim is named in his honour, it can be assumed that this saint was also venerated in the area of Winnenden.

## The History of the Altar

The carver of the altar is not known. The similarities between the figures in the middle part of the altar and the stone apostle figures in the Frauenkirche (Cathedral of Our Blessed Lady) in Esslingen may indicate a connection with Jörg Töber from Haguenau in Alsace. The side panels are stylistically independent from the middle part; Veit Wagner or rather his Strassburg School have been put forward as possible sources. The busts of the

Doctors of the Church take their inspiration from similar works in the high altar of the Kilianskirche in Heilbronn.

The inscription under the seated figure of St. James reads, "The altar was erected in 1520, dismantled in 1540 (during the Reformation) and reassembled in 1549 (during the counter-reformation)."



## Key to Photo Overleaf

1. Retable
2. Pinnacle Decoration
3. Wing
4. Shrine
5. Wing
6. Predella
7. Mensa
8. Stipes
9. Steps to Altar
10. Altar



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