

Media Release of 22 March 2018

A new permanent exhibition in the choir of the Barfüsserkirche: from 23 March 2018  
**Medieval Worlds of Faith**

**The new presentation of medieval art at the Historisches Museum Basel offers a fascinating glimpse of a time when the Christian faith was omnipresent. Installed in the choir of the Barfüsserkirche, the exquisite works of art from the 11th to the 16th century unfold a remarkable beauty and spiritual potency, enabling a key part of Basel's cultural heritage to be experienced in a new way.**

The new permanent exhibition in the choir of the former Franciscan church is the first part of a larger project to update the presentation of the collection housed in the Barfüsserkirche.

The selection of medieval monuments presented in the choir is impressive indeed. The works from Basel, the Upper Rhine region, Switzerland, and Southern Germany visualize medieval worlds of faith in which the church was all-pervasive. They provide persuasive testimony both to the piety of ordinary people and to the cult of the saints. As high-calibre works of art, they offer us an insight into the interiors and iconography of medieval churches, as well as referencing aspects of liturgical practice and religious concepts. Important tropes of medieval art such as the crucifix and images of the Virgin are highlighted to reveal not just the loves, sufferings, and hopes, but also the glories and miseries of a long-gone era. The show thus turns the spotlight on religious associations and values that have perhaps become alien to us in our predominantly secular society.

Numerous objects that have long languished in the vaults of the Historisches Museum Basel have been brought back into the limelight and are exhibited here alongside selected loans from collections both public and private. The fragment of a 13th-century Jewish tombstone, moreover, serves as a reminder that not just Christians lived in medieval Basel.

The presentation is grouped around five themes:

- I. Christ and the Cross: The Centre and Symbol of a Religion
- II. Mary: Virgin, Mother of God, Queen of Heaven
- III. Saints for Every Eventuality: Role models, Intermediaries, Helpers in Times of Need
- IV. Giving and Remembering: Hopes of Paradise
- V. Carved in Stone: Baptism, Communion, Eternal Remembrance

These five themes open a window on the world of medieval Christianity, its key protagonists, their life stories, and the story of their veneration. The presentation thus sheds light on a central pillar of European culture.

The individual sculptures are arranged freely and flexibly to open up new ways of seeing and scope for the kind of variation that current visitor behaviour calls for. In addition, two animated films have been produced to bring to life the monumental Calanca Altarpiece from Santa Maria in Calanca, Ticino, of 1512, which is the second largest polyptych to have been preserved in Switzerland. Thanks to these films, the complex content of this work has been rendered entertainingly accessible to a much wider audience.

As more and more people leave the church, so alternative worlds of faith are emerging to fill the void (faith in football, or in technology, for example). Yet our calendar is still punctuated by religious holidays, just as many people still have a St. Christopher amulet hanging inside their car. On the other hand, familiarity with Bible stories and the legends of the saints can no longer be taken for granted. The new presentation at the Historisches Museum Basel is thus an invitation to visitors to learn about the Christian faith outside the precincts of the cult itself. Being in possession of an impressive collection of sacred art and centrally located, it is ideally placed to stage such a show of medieval sculpture. And what could be a more fitting backdrop than the 14th-century Franciscan church? The new presentation *Medieval Worlds of Faith* thus promises to become a platform for engagement with questions of faith and how we as individuals relate to God and other “higher beings.”

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Historisches Museum Basel – Barfüsserkirche

Barfüsserplatz 7, 4051 Basel

Opening hours: Tue–Sun 10 am–5 pm

Closed: 30 March 2018 (Good Friday), 1 May 2018

[www.hmb.ch](http://www.hmb.ch)

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