

The **Church of Our Lady**, the former parish church of Gries, dates back to the clearing activities of the Bishopric of Freising in the 8th/9th century. The accompanying settlement, referred to as "Chellar" or "Chelre" at the end of the 11th century, likely indicates a manor with a wine cellar. The name "Griaz" is traceable from 1185 and refers to the areas formed by the floods and deposits of the Talfer. It was only in the course of the 15th century that the name "Gries" became established for the entire locality.

The Marienkirche ("St Mary's Church"), documented from 1165 onwards, is partly based on foundations of a prior early Romanesque building. Around 1410, a polygonal choir in the Gothic style was added to the existing nave. However, the three-bayed, deeply profiled, and lighter rib vault in the nave was installed only after the fire of 1452.

In 1736, the late Gothic winged altar by Michael Pacher was replaced with a **late Baroque** altar by Francesco Canevale. The altar painting, composed in the Nazarene style by Anton Psenner from Völs, depicts "Jesus, Friend of Children" (1849).

The north wall of the nave bears a large scene of the Last Judgment uncovered in 1978/79. The fresco depicts Christ in the Mandorla, angels with instruments of the Passion, and a sudarium. The row of apostles dominates the central field, while below, angels playing trumpets call the dead to judgment: a dramatic and moving scene of hell with hideous demons on the right, and a procession of the saved, guided by luminous angelic figures, on the left towards the gate of heaven, where Peter awaits with the key (Late Gothic/Early Renaissance, around 1500).

In the former **hermit chapel**, there is a late Romanesque crucifix (1205), formerly owned by the Hepperger family.



Assumption and Coronation of Mary,  
Archangel Michael and St. Erasmus, martyrs

### The Altar by Michael Pacher

The Erasmus Chapel was added to the southern side of the church in 1519. Currently, the shrine and two wing reliefs of the Pacher altar are located there, while the predella, the additional wing reliefs, the shrine guardians (St. Florian and St. Sebastian), and the entire superstructure (altar top) are unfortu-



nately lost.

The citizens of Gries commissioned the renowned woodcarver and painter Michael Pacher to create a winged altar for the parish church, as evidenced by the contract of May 27, 1471: "Maister Michln Pacher, painter of Brunico," undertakes to set up a new altar within four years for 450 Bernese marks in good Meranese currency.

Of all the rich decorations of the Coronation of Mary by the Holy Trinity, only the Coronation group in the shrine with the enthroned God the Father and Son, over whom the Holy Spirit dove hovers with outspread wings, remains on site. The figures, with measured gestures, placed the crown on the head of the Mother of God, portrayed as the mediator between God and humanity. At the feet of Mary, on a lower level, two angels kneel, supporting her expansive mantle. On the vertically framing, coved, and tracery-pierced pinnacle columns of the central group, stand four cute angels playing the viola, lute, and trumpets, whose physiognomies have invited interpretations as being of the four temperaments (bottom left the melancholic, to the right the phlegmatic, top left the sanguine, to the right the choleric).

One step lower than the central shrine, on hexagonal, protruding pedestals, stand the almost life-sized figures of the Archangel Michael and St. Erasmus, emerging with statutory firmness from their niches. St. Michael, the warrior of God - a finely modeled, almost boyish figure with rich curly hair and composed features - thrusts the sword into the adversary, the devil, winding at his feet.

St. Erasmus (a much-revered helper of the people), dressed in episcopal attire and identified as a martyr, holds the terrible winch in his left hand, with which his intestines are said to have been torn from his body. This figure, with its distinctive, lifelike character head, is among the best that Michael

Pacher has created in statuary sculpture. The master's own works also include the six angels in the shrine background, carrying a brocade curtain, with "such a personal radiance that we may count them among the most intimate and highest testimonies of his art" (N. Rasmo).

On the wall to the right, the two remaining altar wing reliefs are attached: the Annunciation scene with the delicate figure of Mary, above whom the dove of the Holy Spirit hovers, while from the ceiling of the Gothic spatial structure descends the Christ child with the cross as a symbol of the impending suffering. The announcing angel in a light profile position and outstretched wings is an essential factor in unlocking the spatial depth. Unfortunately, the original painted background is lost here as well as in the next relief - the Adoration of the Magi. The dense but clearly perspicuously layered group (with Mary, the Christ child, and Joseph, as well as the gift-bearing and adoring Magi from the East) is placed in a stage space delineated by the beam architecture of the hut, above which a hovering angel guides the star.

The back of the altar shrine is adorned with 15 excellent paintings on the life of Jesus and Mary, as well as images of saints, attributed to the painter Conrad Waider from Straubing.



*Michael Pacher, a gifted woodcarver and painter in the late Middle Ages, was born in Bruneck around 1430/35, where he is first documented as a citizen and workshop owner in 1467. Michael Pacher educated himself on the great winged altar models in the region (in St. Sigmund, Vipiteno) and gained significant new experiences in the circle of Mantegna (Padua, ca. 1450) as well as later in Dutch art centers. Unlike hardly any other German artist, he succeeded in his mature works in achieving a harmonious synthesis between the exuberant variety of Gothic forms and the "revolutionary" innovations of the Renaissance with its new concept of man and space (altars in St. Wolfgang, Franciscan Church in Salzburg, and Gries-Bozen). Michael Pacher died in 1498 in Salzburg.*



Photos: private

### Opening hours - Guided tours

**From April to October**

Monday to Friday from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm

*Closed on holidays*

Inquiries for group tours  
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*Parish of St. Augustine*



## OLD PARISH CHURCH GRIES

## MICHAEL-PACHER



A brief information  
on the basis of the publication  
by Mathias Frei