

# Early Christian

(Late Antique Rome)

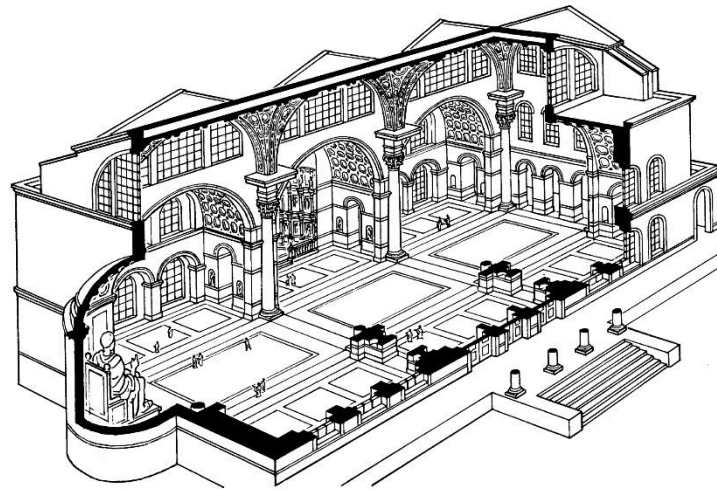
# Key Point #1

The iconography of the life of Jesus is developed

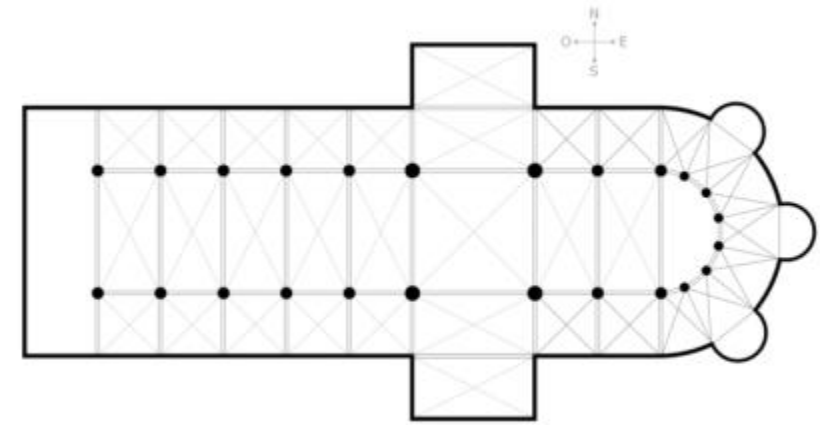


# Key Point #2

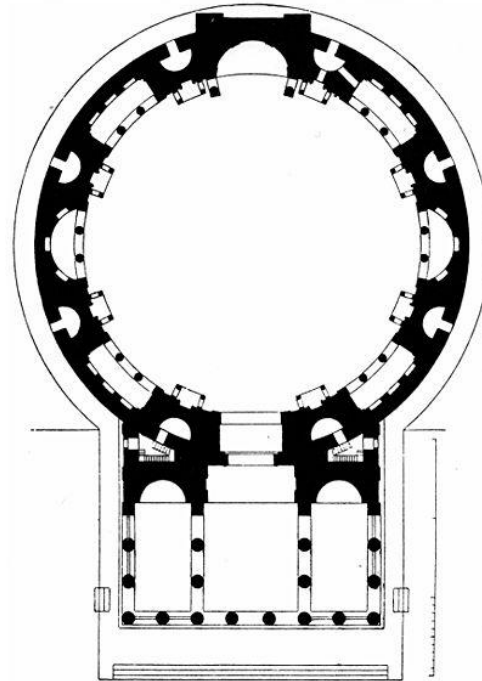
- **With the legalization of Christianity, Christian buildings were needed,** leading to a huge building campaign to rival the pagan buildings of Rome.
- Christians used both the axially planned Roman basilicas and the centrally planned Roman temple forms as architectural templates.



Roman Basilica

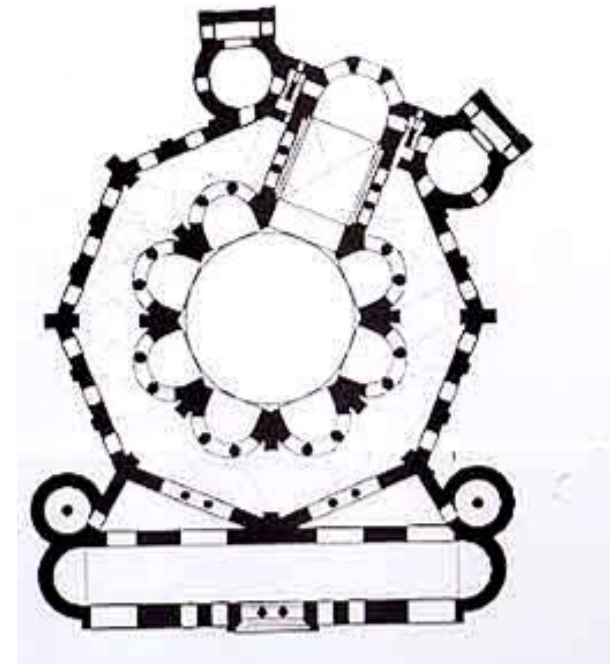


Basilica style church



12. ROM: PANTHEON.

Pantheon



Centrally planned church

## Key Point #3

Early Christian Art is a transitional time; it evolves out of the Classical past, while using Classical symbolism in their art.



# Christianity=Contextual Information

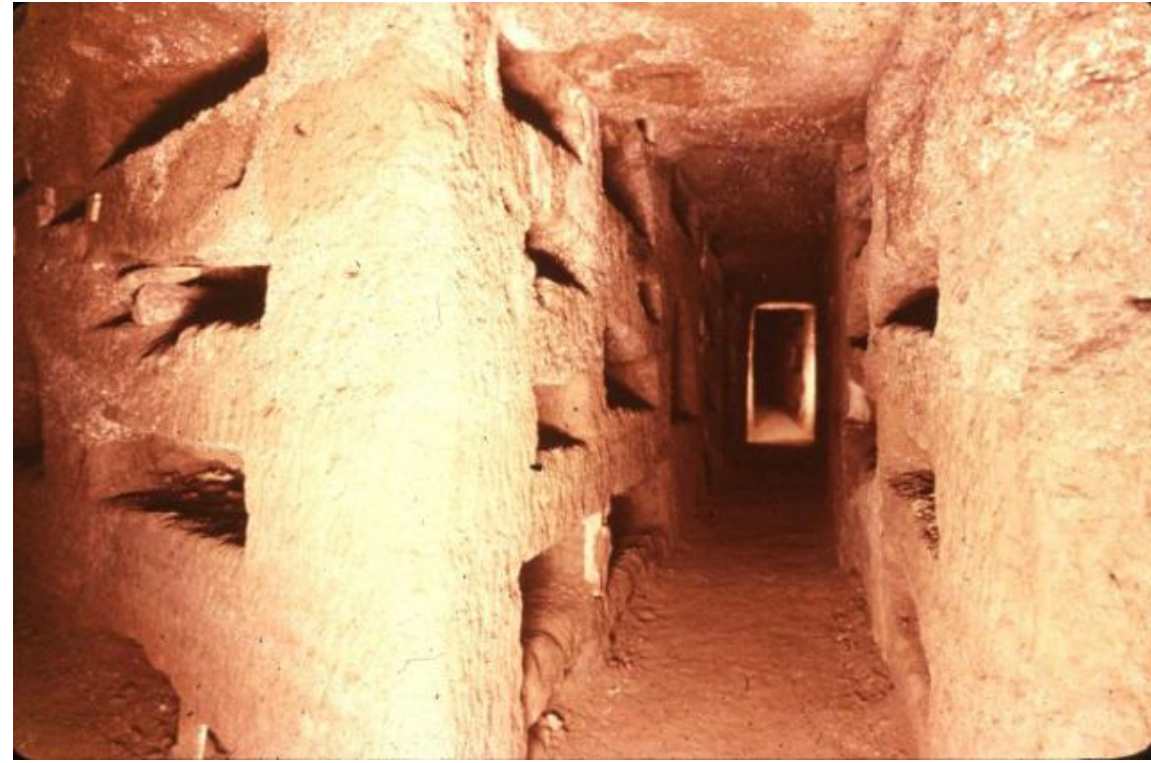
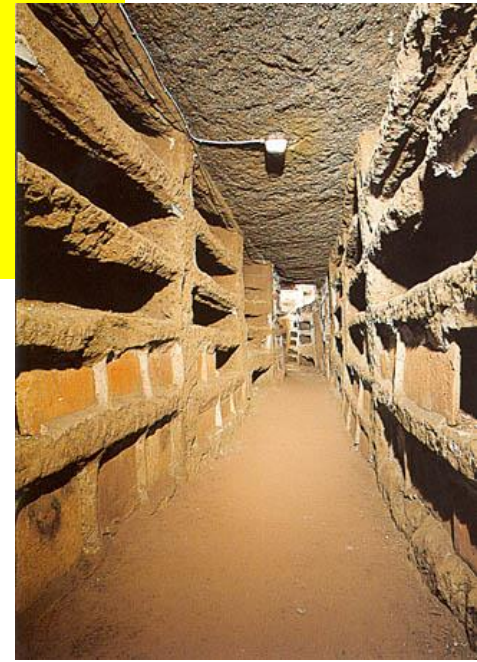
- Christians believe:
  - That Jesus Christ is the son of God and that Jesus Christ came to Earth from Heaven (through the immaculate conception of Mary) to redeem humankind of its sins.
  - His death through **crucifixion** and resurrection allows humans to be forgiven for their sins and enter Heaven.
  - He will return on Judgment Day to send souls to either Heaven or Hell.
  - Followers can reach Heaven by following the 10 commandments.
  - That God took human form as Jesus Christ and that God is present today through the work of the Holy Spirit and evident in the actions of believers.
  - Communication with God is done through prayer.
  - That practice should take place in a church with a priest (and later ministers) leading the mass/service/group prayer.
  - That there is only one true god (and is therefore monotheistic).
- God is represented in human form as Jesus Christ and his presence is felt through the Holy Spirit. God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit comprise what is known as the Trinity.
- **The Bible** is the text used to tell the story of the religion.
  - The Old Testament is the first half of the Bible with stories from creation to the year 0 (it is shared with Judaism).
  - The New Testament is the second half with stories from the birth of Christ to Judgment Day.

# In the beginning . . . .

- “Early Christian Art” refers to the earliest preserved works with Christian subjects NOT the art of Christians at the time of Jesus.
- **Pagan** is the term used by Christianity to refer to the people who don't its beliefs.
- The big difference between Roman (pagan) and Early Christian art is the **message**; Late Antique Jewish and Christian works of art do not differ from contemporaneous Roman artworks in style or technique, only in subject.
- In 325ce Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire.

# Catacombs

- A **catacomb** is an underground network of passageways and chambers designed as cemeteries.
- Catacombs developed because of the high cost of land in Rome.
- Carved out of rock, like the Etruscans; they were less elaborate than the Etruscans but they were more extensive, spreading up to 90 miles.
- In the 2-4<sup>th</sup> centuries the catacombs were used constantly and housed up to 4 million bodies.
- Churches were eventually built on top of these sites.
- [Smart History video](#)



# Catacomb of Priscilla, Orant Fresco

Late Antique Europe, 200-400 CE, tufa and fresco

## Content

- An **Orant** is a praying figure, depicted with arms wide and serving as a symbol of faith or of the church itself.
- This orant is female.
- Includes both **New** and **Old Testament** scenes.
- The realistic tradition of Roman art is combined with signs and metaphors that suggest life goes beyond the earthly realm.



Figure on the right is a woman nursing a baby – maybe the earliest depiction of Mary and baby Jesus?



# Catacomb of Priscilla, Orant Fresco

Late Antique Europe, 200-400 CE, tufa and fresco

## Context

- Named after a woman who let the Christians use her property.
- Used for Christian burials.
- Emphasis on the teachings of Christ.
- **Invention of Christian iconography**
- Has possibly the earliest known depiction of the Madonna and Child.

## Visual

- the images are often framed in **lunettes**, or semicircular frames.



# Catacomb of Priscilla, Greek Chapel

Late Antique Europe, 200-400 CE, tufa and fresco

## Content

- Square shape space with an arch.
- Old and New Testament images.
- Above the apse it depicts the Last Judgment.

## Context

- Catacombs originated in Rome between the end of the second and the beginning of the third centuries.
- Created to welcome the whole community in only one necropolis.
- Stresses the fact that for Christians, burial is just a temporary moment while they wait for the final resurrection.



Long bench was for people to sit on during funeral banquets held in honor of the dead

# Christ as the Good Shepherd

- Christ represented as a young, beardless, Roman.
- Youthful and loyal protector of the Christian flock.
- “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep.”
  - Sheep = sinner who has been saved
- Roman influence, one of the last that adheres to naturalism rather than symbolism.



# Catacomb of Priscilla, Good Shepherd Fresco

## Late Antique Europe, 200-400 CE, tufa and fresco

### Content

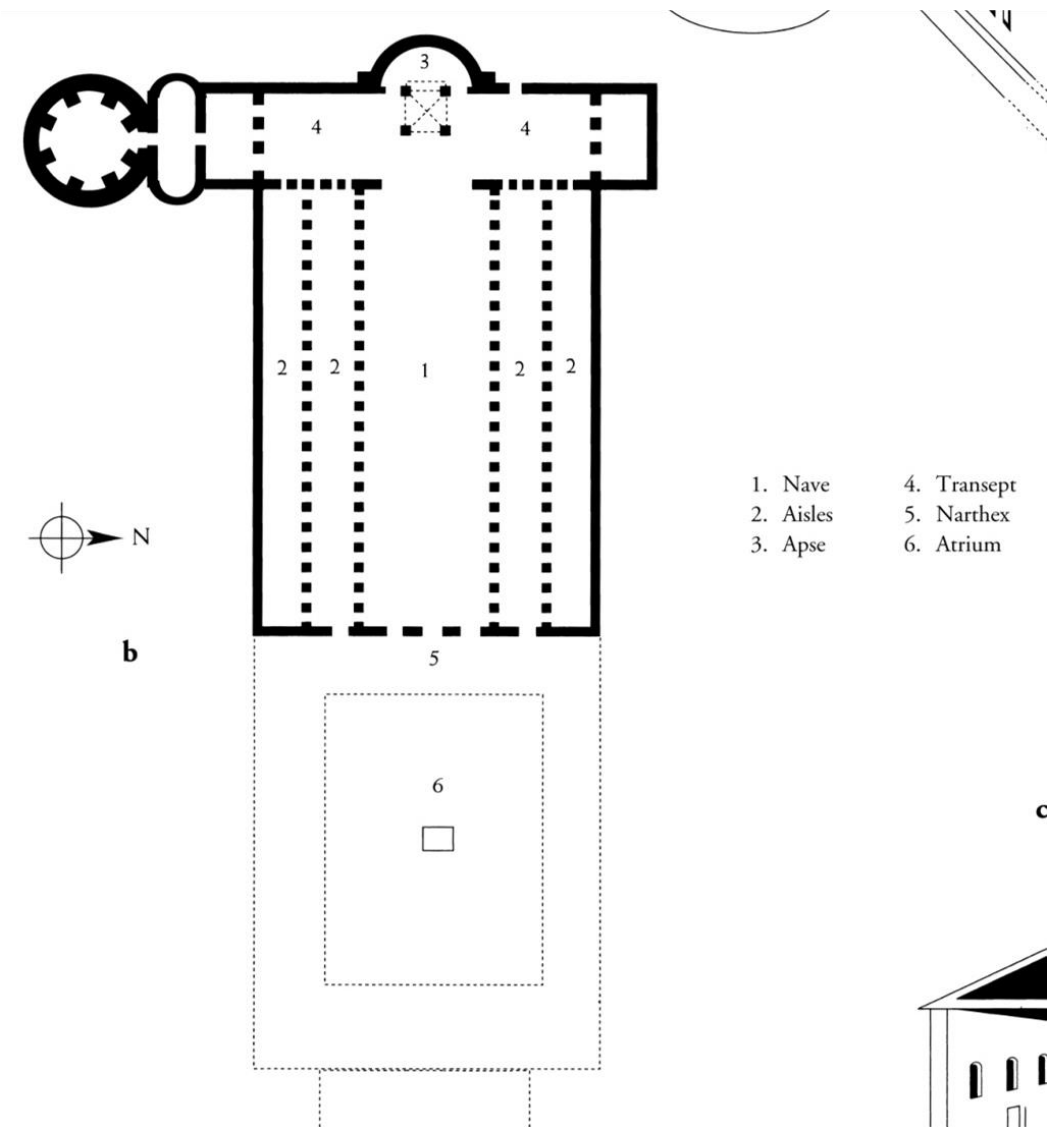
- Uses pagan (Roman) iconography to tell a new story:
  - Contrapposto
  - Toga
  - Symmetry
  - Young Roman male
- Story of Jonah is depicted in the **lunettes**; it is an Old Testament story.
  - Jonah serves as the **Prefiguration** of Christ. A prefiguration is an Old Testament element that essentially foreshadows something to come in the New Testament (Jonah is in the whale's stomach for three nights and days before he is brought out like Christ is in his tomb for three nights and days before he is resurrected).
  - Reinforces the idea of faith in Jesus leads to salvation and the idea of Christ's Resurrection.
  - Perfect story for a room that holds the dead, who the Christians believe are temporarily gone only to be resurrected.



Central medallion shows Christ as the Good Shepherd, whose powers of salvation the painter underscored by placing the four episodes of the Jonah story around him.

# Christian Architecture vocabulary you MUST know

- **Nave** – center aisle.
- **Aisles** – walkways along nave.
- **Apse** – rounded end, vaulted.
- **Atrium** – courtyard in front.
- **Narthex** – an architectural buffer between the divine and the profane/
- **Triumphal arch** – into apse.
- **Transept** – a perpendicular aisle to the nave, clergy originally stood here.
  - held relics.
  - Only became a standard element when it came to also symbolize the cross.



# Santa Sabina

Late Antique Europe, 430 ce, Brick and stone

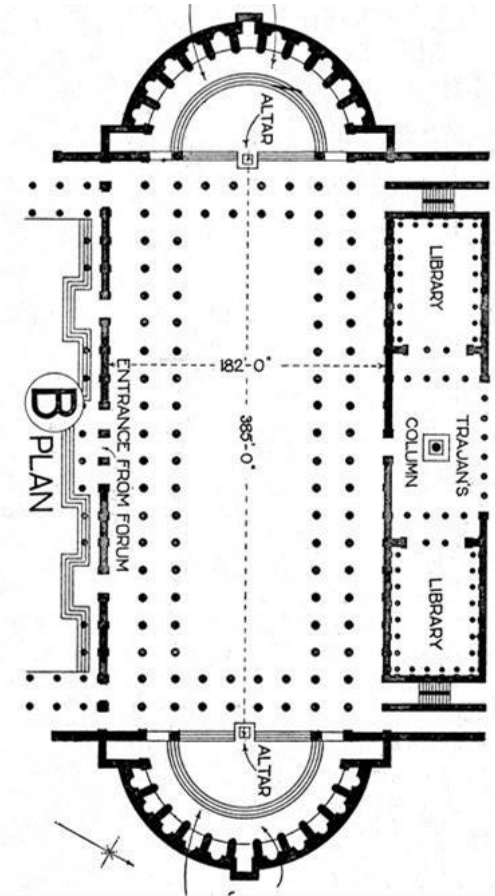
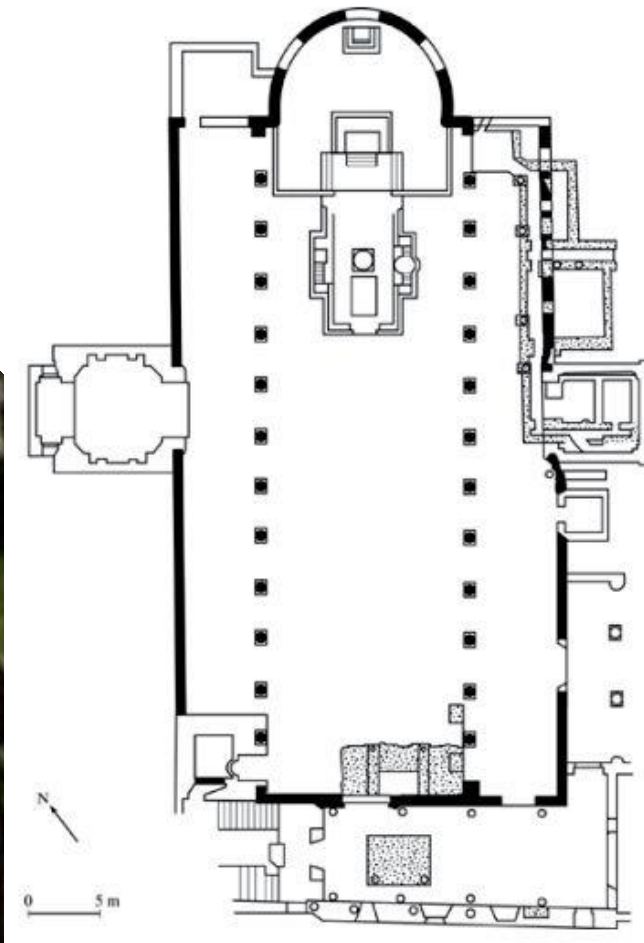
- On site of Temple of Juno – used many of the materials in the creation of Santa Sabina; these re-used materials are known as spolia (the columns in the nave arcade are from the Temple of Juno).
- On a hilltop in Rome to show the importance of Christianity.
- Expansion of a Roman house-church (*titulus*) owned by a woman named Sabina.
- It was common in ancient Rome, the church preserved the name of the title holder by simply adding "Saint" onto her name.



Plain exterior and architectural simplicity and elaborate interior  
= the Christian belief that the human interior, the soul, is more important than the human exterior, the body.

# Santa Sabina

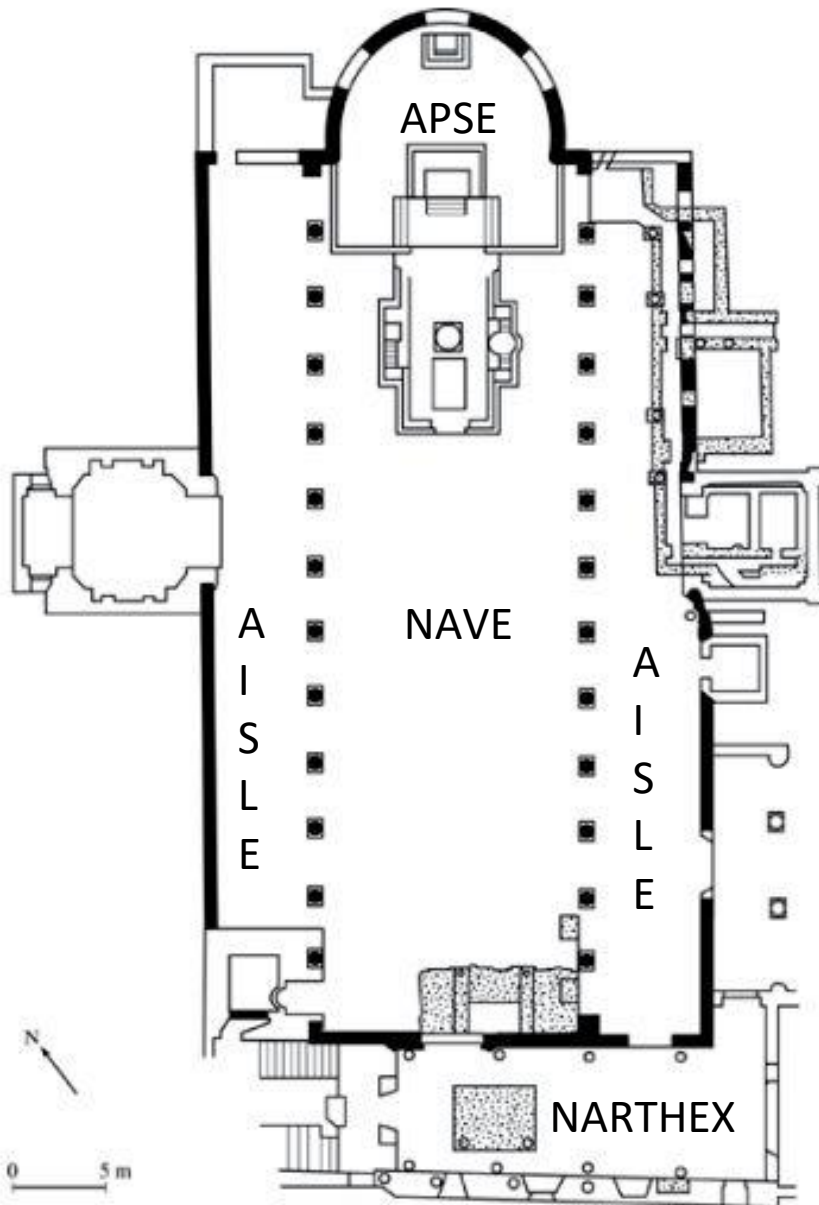
Late Antique Europe, 430 ce, Brick and stone



- Churches resemble a basilica (law court).
  - Both have naves, apse, and side aisles.
- Suggests the authority or judgment of Christ.

# Santa Sabina

Late Antique Europe, 430 ce, Brick and stone



- Typical in plan and proportion the new Roman church building derived from basilicas.
- **Nave** – center aisle for processions.
- **Aisles** – side aisles.
- **Apse** – rounded east end of church where the altar is.
- **Narthex** – foyer – creates a separation between the sacred and the profane.
  - Connection ??? **Where else have we seen a this barrier?**
- **Spatial clarity and simplicity** is typical of western Christianity with an emphasis on doctrine and symbolism.
- **AXIAL PLAN**
  - aka **STRAIGHT AXIS**
  - aka **LONGITUDINAL PLAN**



# Santa Sabina

Late Antique Europe, 430 ce, Brick and stone

- Huge wooden carved doors for entering the **narthex**.
- Depicts bible stories.
- **Crucifixion scene** is the earliest known depiction in the world.



# Santa Sabina

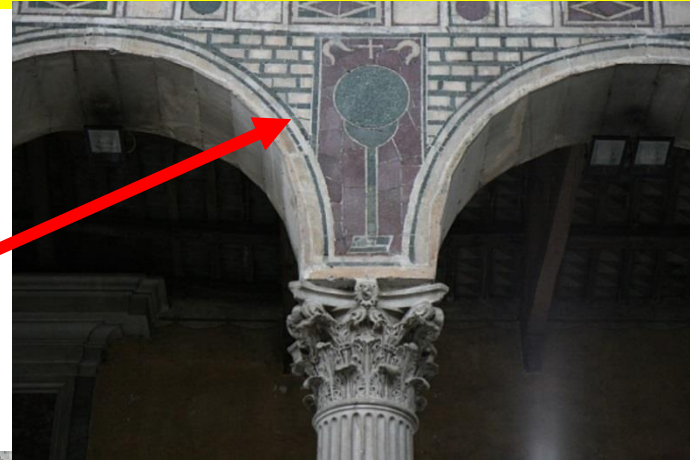
Late Antique Europe, 430 ce, Brick and stone

- **Clerestory**

- Windows were made of clear stone.

- **Nave arcade**

- **Arcade:** a row of arches.
- **Spandrels** have inlaid marble designs in green and purple, depicting chalices and patens to represent the Eucharist.

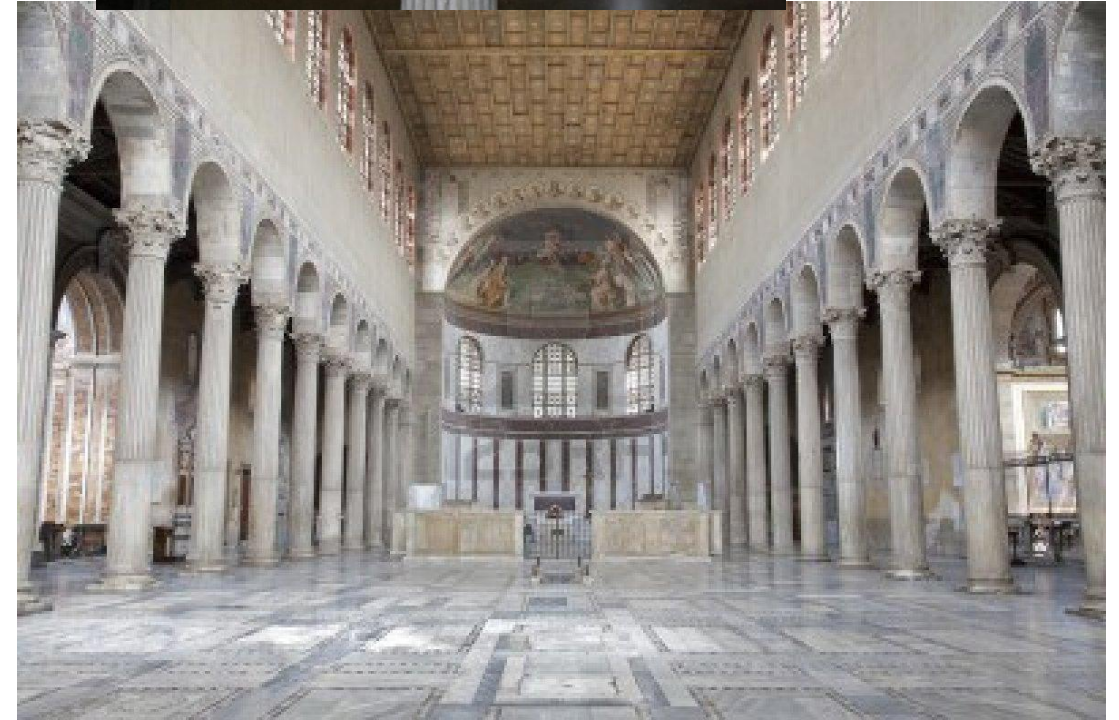


- **Triumphant arch** into apse to show the triumph of Christ over pagans.

- Originally covered in lush **mosaics** (gold, bright, and reflective) that are now gone.

- Very luxuriously decorated with gold, bright colors, reflective surfaces.

- The inside represents the inner spirituality and that is why it was more decorated than the plain exterior.



# Santa Sabina

Late Antique Europe, 430 ce, Brick and stone

- It is very bright inside:
  - Because of the clerestory.
  - Clear light through the glass windows.
  - Symbol of divine presence.
- **Mosaics** decorate the interior.
- Nave is separated from aisles by **nave arcade**, a row of arches springing from tops of columns.
- Space was modified from the original basilica to accommodate Christian rituals; for example, the entrance was moved to end so the apse and altar are the focal point, framed by the triumphant arch.



# Santa Sabina

Late Antique Europe, 430 ce, Brick and stone



- Apse Mosaic

- Two female figures who personify the Church of the Jews and the Church of the Gentiles.
- Included Latin inscriptions.



# Santa Sabina: Tradition and Change

Late Antique Europe, 430 ce, Brick and stone



• Basilica Ulpia



Santa Sabina