



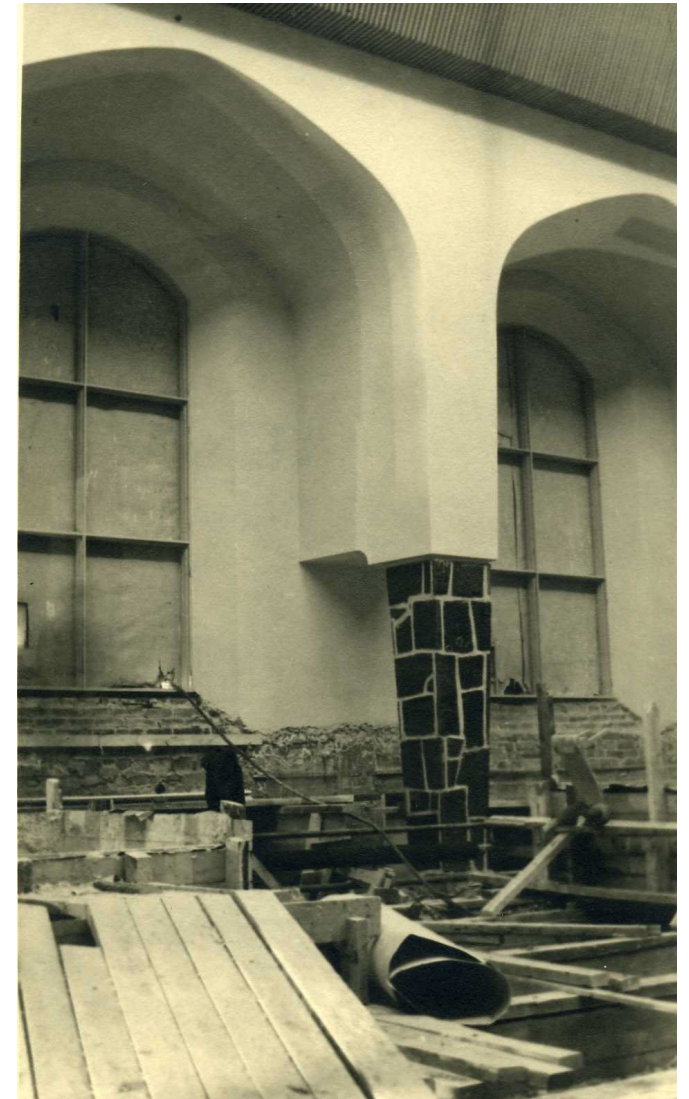
**ROVANIEMI
PARISH**

Rovaniemi church 70 years in 2020 and

“The Source of Life” fresco 70 years in 2021



The location for the current church of Rovaniemi was chosen to be next to the cemetery, north of the previous church which was destroyed during the war. The church is located in the same area as the previous church, the third wooden church of Rovaniemi, which was still standing in October 1944, until Rovaniemi was utterly destroyed in the Lapland War and only a handful of buildings were left unharmed. The work for the new church began on 21 June 1948. The laying of the cornerstone was on 3 May 1949. During the summer of 1949, work was done around the clock and so the topping out ceremony was held already on 22 August 1949. The cross was lifted onto the clock tower in the beginning of October. The winter season of 1949 to 1950 was spent on roofing and interior work.





The church inauguration was 20 August 1950. The inauguration of the church and the celebratory church service was attended by 9,000 people – those that did not fit into the church followed the celebrations through loudspeakers. Bishop **Väinö Malmivaara** conducted the inauguration of Rovaniemi church with the assistance of 14 priests and the celebrations were also attended by the Minister of Education and dean **Lennart Heljas**, Church Council administrator **Esko Kekomäki**, Doctor of the World Council of Lutheran Churches **Igor Bella**, leader **Johansson** from the Church of Sweden and pastor **Auranen** from the Lutheran Churches of America. Inside the church, some of the participants sat on chairs, because the contractor in charge of making the church benches could not finish all of the bench rows in time for the inauguration due to the lack of adequate timber.





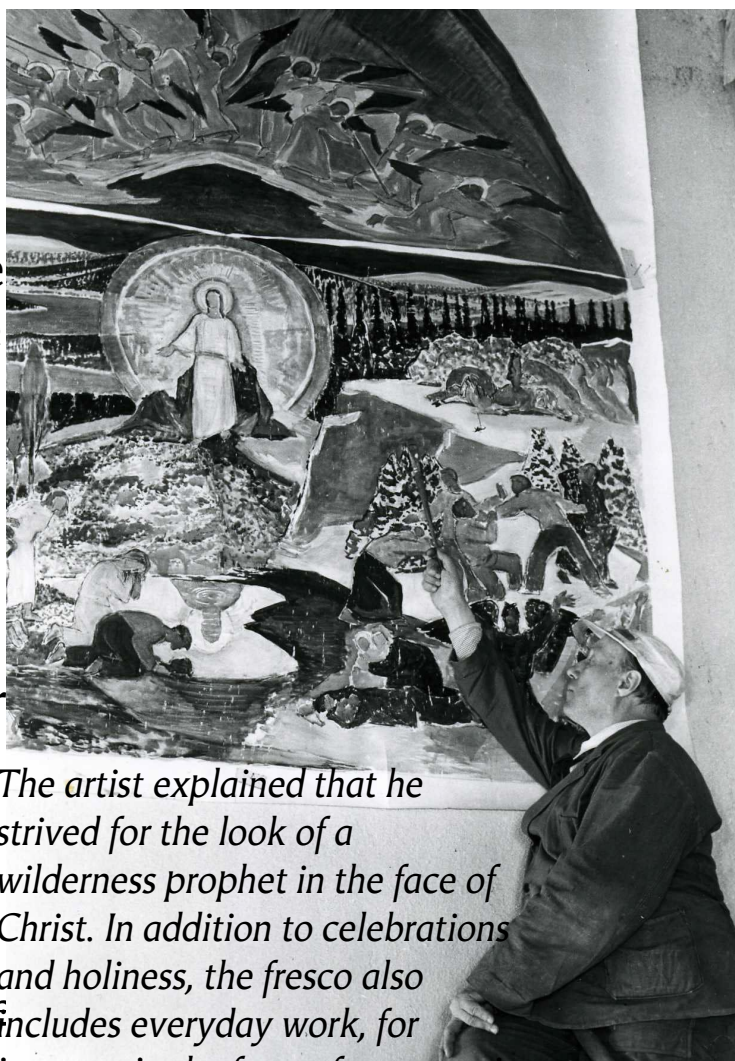
As requested by the construction committee, the church tower was made to be narrower and 5 to 6 metres higher than was originally planned. The theme of atonement is highlighted by the rare red cross, which was placed upon the over 50-metre high tower. It was lifted into place in October 1949 and was lit for the first time on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve 1949. The idea behind the cross which shines in the darkness of late evenings and polar nights was "the internal atonement and peace within the congregation". In a pamphlet for the church inauguration in 1950, the message of the red cross was described as a symbol of the blood of love and atonement on the cross as redemption of the sins of the world, which Jesus has prepared with God.



The first place in the architecture competition in 1947 was won by architect **Reku Rytöhonka** with his proposal "Good Will". However, in a reprised competition in 1948, first place was won by architect **Heikki Siren** with his proposal "Excelsior" and second place was won by architect **Bertel Liljequist** with his proposal "Rovaniemi", which ended up being the chosen proposal. According to the evaluation, Liljequist's proposal's strengths were that it was "in line with the regular church-goers views of a church and was made with such care and expertise and included traditional standards of beauty". In the original plans from 1949, the idea for the main artwork of the church was an altarpiece, but the idea of the fresco replaced it in 1950. When the finances were secured, it was artist **Antti Salmenlinna**'s task to prime the wall for the fresco to be painted in 1951. As a temporary solution, a cross was placed above the altar and this was also designed by Salmenlinna. The 14-metre tall altar fresco was painted by Professor **Lennart Segerstråle** with his assistants in 1951, and it gained the name "The Source of Life". The fresco depicts the battle between good and bad in the human heart.



The current church of Rovaniemi was fully completed on 21 October 1951, when Lennart Segerstråle's fresco "The Source of Life" was revealed. Lennart Segerstråle had travelled to Lapland in 1945, going from one destroyed village to the next and visiting the ruins of Rovaniemi. This experience made him ponder the battle between destructive and constructive forces: peace does not only mean the absence of war, but also the presence of constructive forces and working towards good objectives. In the Lapland War the brutal traces of war were visible in the most saddening way. The fresco depicts different situations in human life: atonement between two people, a couple to be wed, parents with their child to be christened. The left side of the fresco and the people in it depict the want to seek out truth and clarity.



The artist explained that he strived for the look of a wilderness prophet in the face of Christ. In addition to celebrations and holiness, the fresco also includes everyday work, for instance in the form of two men in work overalls with a shovel.

The right side of the fresco contains the negative forces in humans: arguments, ridicule, disbelief, indifference, material wants and urges. Howling wolves mauling a reindeer are also included in the evil world Nature was a strong source of inspiration for Segerstråle who also had training as a forester. Segerstråle wanted to visit a living spring when he was working in Rovaniemi, and he went to see a spring on the north side of Korkalovaara. The same place provided a view of Ounasjoki river and traces of this view have been integrated into the fresco. Segerstråle also met Quakers who had come to rebuild the city and their positive attitude to life and their happiness made a strong impression on him. The theme of the church's fresco began to become clear. Lennart Segerståle and his assistants worked in Rovaniemi in 1951 from May until October to complete the 140 square metre fresco.

Art in Rovaniemi church



When the ceiling of Rovaniemi church was completed in March 1950, the work on the decorations and paintings inside the church were started. As proposed by architect Bertel Liljequist, artist Antti Salmenlinna was put in charge of the interior decorations. The ceiling of the church has details of symbols that depict central operations of the church: the communion chalice, wings and the Holy Book. The ceiling's three images depict Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Word and the sacraments: the communion chalice = the sacrament at the altar, the open Bible with crosses above and below = the Word of God, a dove with a halo = the Holy Spirit and the sacrament of christening.

The window arch paintings

Antti Salmenlinna was responsible for the al secco paintings accompanied by Bible verses on the stone walls above the aisles on the sides of the church.

On the southern arches (photo on right) the themes include creation, the laws and commandments, a sinful woman, the sacraments, the Good Samaritan and the good shepherd.

The northern arches depict laws adapted to situations of everyday life in Lapland, including sin and crime, conscience, prayer and repentance, hope for a better life, a helpful neighbour and victory.



Creation from the atoms of the microcosm to the galaxies of the macrocosm



The window arch paintings by Antti Salmenlinna start with the first painting on the southern wall, left of the doors towards the altar with the text "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). In the painting is also a person and the planet Saturn with its rings. The hidden, benevolent God is the Creator of everything: when the Bible says that God created "the heavens and the earth" it means everything that exists.

"Love your Creator more than anything and your neighbour as yourself."

According to **Miika Ruokanen**: "Nature is good – existence is good", which encourages us to take responsibility for all of creation and to see the deep value of all beings. Our scientific view of the world is constantly changing as we gain more knowledge. Science is a gift from God through which we can investigate existence. As people created in the image of God, our most important calling is to implement the divine mission of love. Love is the meaning and content of life.

Rest of the window arch paintings and Bible quotes



"The wages of sin is death."

Moses 3:9



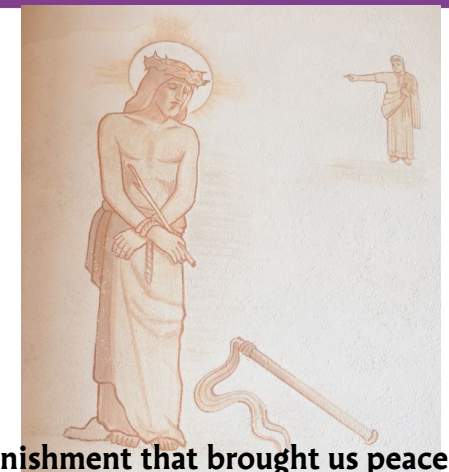
"Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin."

Romans 7:7



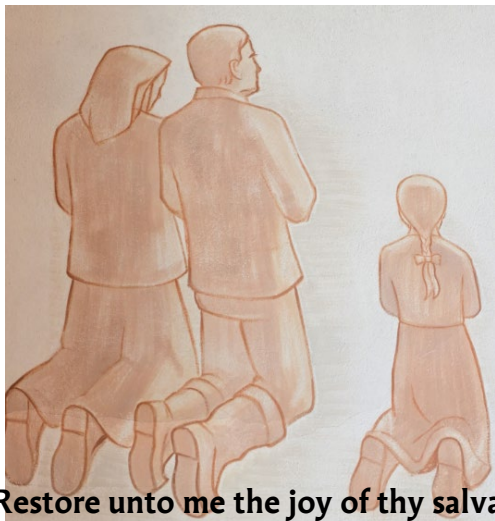
"Human where are You."

Romans 6:23



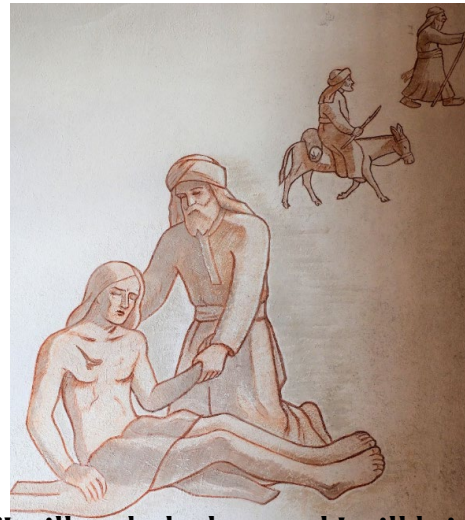
"The punishment that brought us peace was upon

Him and by His wounds we were healed." Isaias 53:5



**"Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation;
and uphold me with thy free spirit."**

Psalms 51:12



**"I will seek the lost, and I will bring back
the strayed, and I will bind up the injured."**

Ezekiel 34:6



"I will arise and go to my father."

Luke 15:18



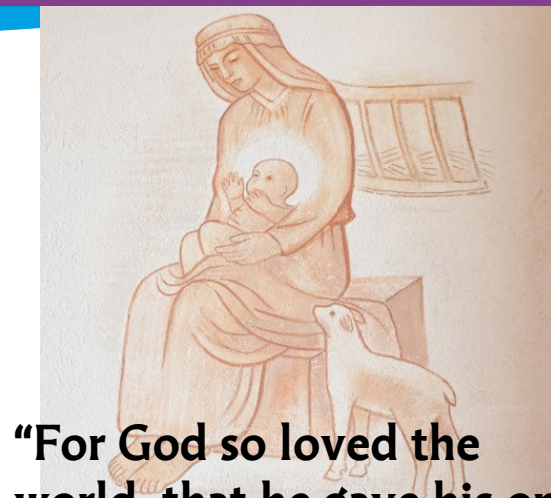
**"He gathers the lambs in his arms
and carries them."**

Isaias 40:11

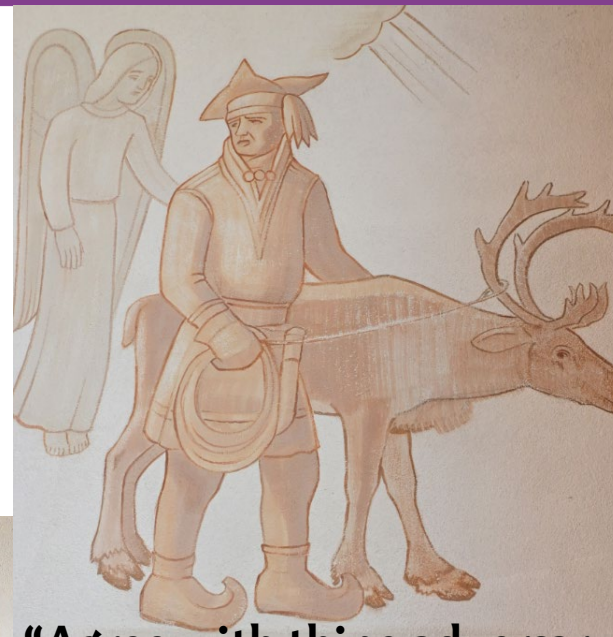
Rest of the window arch paintings and Bible quotes



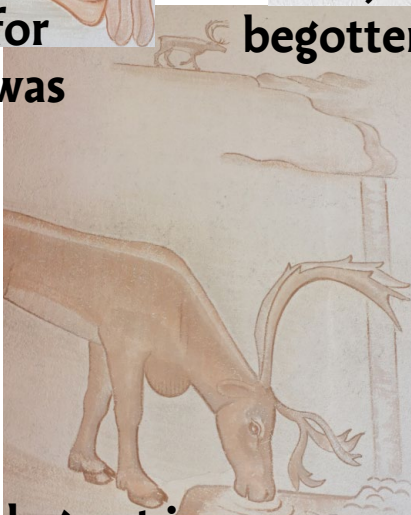
"But it was for our sins he was wounded."
Isaias 53:5



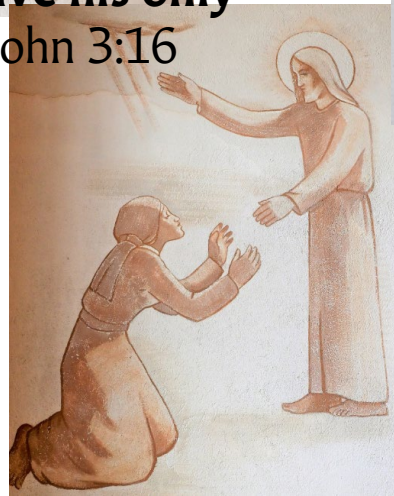
"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." John 3:16



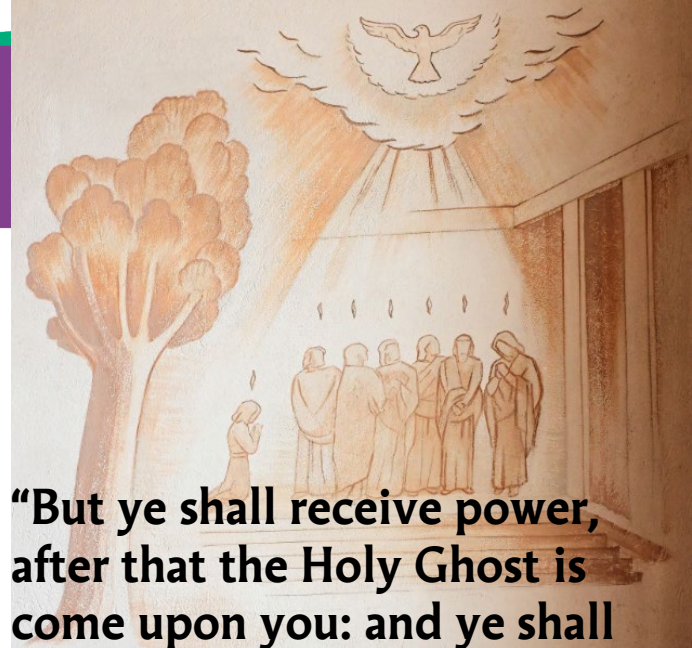
"Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him." Matthew 5:25



"With great joy, you people will get water from the well of salvation." Isaias 12:3



"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28



"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me." Acts 1:8



"And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb." Apocalypse 12:11

Rest of the window arch paintings

- “The wages of sin is death.”
- “Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin.”
- “Human where are You.” Moses 3:9
- “The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him and by His wounds we were healed.” Isaias 53:5
- “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.” Psalms 51:12
- “I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured.”
- “I will arise and go to my father.” Luke 15:18
- “He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them.” Isaias 40:11
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The Lamb of God



The artwork in Rovaniemi church provides interesting perspectives to the Holy Trinity. In the church on the top of the apsis is a relief which continues the theme of the ceiling paintings, which presents Christ in the form of a lamb. The symbolism of the lamb is many-sided and based on many factors. One central factor is John the Baptist's words about Christ as an innocent victim, a Lamb of God who will take away the sins of the world (John 1:29). The symbolism of the lamb contains absolute holiness, perfection, honour and the eternity of existence. Its white colour and gentle demeanour have also made the lamb an image of humility, innocence and purity. The lamb's head is usually surrounded by a halo meaning glory. When depicted in gold, its symbolism includes the sun of righteousness and celestial light. The glory halo also connects the lamb to eternity.

A bird with its young

Above the pulpit of the church on the wall is a wood relief with the Christian symbol of a bird feeding its young with its own blood. The bird in the relief is a northern swan, which **Pertti Selkälä** depicts as follows: "It is Christ in the form of a swan. The pure white bird with its pristine chest feathers covered in blood sharing pieces of itself for the good of others. The long winter and frozen earth does not provide nourishment or shelter. That is why the bird spreads its wings above the young as shelter and offers its heart's blood as nourishment. The bird's warmth radiates on the young." The northern swan is also connected to the atonement provided by Christ through death. Swan song also refers to Christ's last words on the cross.



These texts were compiled by Noora Hietanen, head of communications at Rovaniemi parish. Sources: Eino Mäkinen, Rovaniemi – kirkko ja seurakunta, kyrkan och församlingen (1954), Risti ja lähde – Rovaniemen kirkon juhlakirja (2000), Lapin kirkot (2005). Translated by Helena Lehti