

## **Svatá Hora**

For more than 380 years, with its superb panorama, Svatá Hora (Holy Mountain) has welcomed visitors to this pilgrimage site and to Příbram, a well-known Royal Mining Town, situated at the foot of the Brdy mountains, 60 kilometres south-west of Prague.

The surroundings of Příbram were rather inhospitable in prehistoric times and, therefore, they were not an attractive place in which our ancestors could settle. The only exception was the period, from the 13th to the 8th century BC, when peoples of the so-called Knovíz culture lived there. The oldest written document proving the existence of Příbram is dated 1216. During the reign of Charles IV (14th century), the first Archbishop of Prague, Arnošt of Pardubice, had a stone castle built on the site of the original wooden stronghold, in the central part of Příbram. The castle became the core of today's Zámeček – Ernestinum. At that time, there was a Gothic church of St James in Příbram, but Arnošt of Pardubice decided to build another one, dedicated to St John. He also established a hospital located in a suburb and surrounded the town with a wooden palisade. His name is also connected with the legend related to the origin of the wooden Statuette of the Virgin Mary, which was later brought to the chapel located in Svatá Hora. The Hussite period brought an end to the reign of Prague archbishops over the town and the manor. Příbram became royal property and was often pawned. However, after a series of claims were made on the profit seeking owners, by the citizens of Příbram, the town was elevated to the status of a Royal Mining Town. This privilege, conferred by Rudolf II, in 1597, reflected the prior economic development of the town, especially with regard to the mining of minerals and silver.

The first miracle took place in Svatá Hora in 1632 and marked the beginning of the pilgrimages. In 1647, a year before the Peace of Westphalia, a new presence enriched the region of Příbram, namely, the Jesuits, who resided in Březnice, and the Marian devotion that came with them. The chapel that overlooked Příbram and was situated at the top of the hill called Svatá Hora, was quite unknown until that time. Starting in 1653, under the care of Jesuits, it was rebuilt into a spectacular complex. A number of well-known artists contributed to its marvellous decoration. Gradually, Svatá Hora became one of the most famous Bohemian pilgrimage sites and a significant centre of Marian devotion in Europe.

The church, which is dedicated to the Assumption of Our Lady, and the side chapels, are situated on a terrace with a balustrade. There is a cloister, richly decorated with paintings and stucco, with four closed and nine open chapels in the lower part of the Baroque complex. The stairs, which were mentioned for the first time in 1685 and roofed later, link Svatá Hora with the town of Příbram. The Miraculous Statuette of the Virgin Mary, placed inside the church on the main altar, which is entirely made of silver, is the most precious jewel of Svatá Hora.

The influx of pilgrims represented a welcome source of income for the citizens of Příbram, and led to the development of special crafts: the production of rosaries, wax objects, rings, nativity sets, et cetera. Later, small industries that were related to the pilgrimages even flourished, such as the factory producing devotional objects, owned by the Weil Brothers. Nevertheless, the citizens of Příbram did not always have a good relationship with the Jesuits, since their entrepreneurial activities often came into conflict with their own plans. The most well-known confrontation was the dispute over the building of a brewery in Svatá Hora. The legal process lasted several years and was decided in favour of the Jesuits. But, in the end, they did not have the courage to build the brewery.

The solemn coronation of the Miraculous Statuette of the Virgin Mary, in 1732, represented a new impulse for pilgrimages. Since that time, what is known as the Coronation Solemnity has taken place every year. However, the reforms of Emperor Joseph II restricted pilgrimages and, in 1773, the order of the Jesuits was suppressed. As a consequence, the administration of Svatá Hora was entrusted to provosts.

In 1861, the Redemptorists, that is, the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, were invited to come to Svatá Hora. The church was reconstructed, in 1903, and its oldest part, which lacked any ornamentation until that time, was covered with stuccoed decoration. After finishing this large reconstruction, the Redemptorists asked Pope Pius X to grant the title of Minor Basilica to Svatá Hora. The Pope found their request fully justified and, therefore, issued a special papal bull “Sacris Aedibus”. In 1905, in conformity with this bull, Svatá Hora was given the title of Minor Basilica. On that occasion the celebration was grandiose, which corresponded with the importance of the title and also with the fact that Svatá Hora was the first church in the Austro-Hungarian Empire that was elevated to the rank of a Papal Basilica.

The Redemptorists had to leave Svatá Hora, in 1950, when religious life was suppressed. During the communist time Svatá Hora was administered by diocesan priests. After the Prague Spring, the Redemptorists tried to revive religious life, at least in an informal way, in Svatá Hora, from 1969 to 1973. However, the following period of so-called normalization brought these efforts to an end. Nevertheless, Svatá Hora represented a recourse against the pressure of the communist ideology. After their release, many political prisoners made their way first to Svatá Hora since they wanted to express their gratitude for God’s protection during their imprisonment. After the fall of communism, the Redemptorists were once again entrusted with the pastoral care of Svatá Hora, on 24 March 1990. Since that time, Svatá Hora became the seat of the Provincial Superior of the order in the Czech Republic, until 2017, when the Prague Province was united with the Bratislava Vice-Province. The roofed stairs connecting Svatá Hora and the centre of Příbram were nearly in ruin after the fall of communism. They were successfully reconstructed in 1993. The expenses, amounting to CZK 13,000,000, which is equivalent to about USD 590,000, were paid in just one year, thanks to donations.

Since the 1990s, retreats and other spiritual formation programs have taken place in the Retreat House, located in the immediate vicinity of the pilgrimage site. Furthermore, simple accommodation is available in the House.

After the fall of communism “Matice Svatohorská”, an association founded in 1921, could revive its activities. Its members are friends and donors who support Svatá Hora. Beside other activities, “Matice Svatohorská” has implemented various projects in Svatá Hora, such as the building of new organs and co-financing restoration and maintenance. The association publishes “Svatá Hora”, which is a magazine informing about current life and activities.

Nativity sets have been produced in Příbram for centuries. With reference to that tradition, since the 1990s, exhibitions of Christmas cribs have been held in Svatá Hora, during the Christmas season.

The celebration of the 650th anniversary of the Miraculous Statuette of the Virgin Mary took place in Svatá Hora, in 1998. Numerous pilgrimages were organized from the Czech Republic and from abroad and the jubilee was accompanied by a variety of cultural and educational events.

A year later, in August 1999, more than five thousand young Catholics from the Czech Republic gathered in Svatá Hora for a week-long meeting, which featured a very interesting program.

In the nearby park, the Stations of the Cross were restored and blessed in 2000. On that occasion, a musical piece, called “Křížová cesta svatohorská” (Svatá Hora Stations of the Cross) was composed by František Xaver Thuri and performed for the first time. Subsequently, the composition was recorded and issued as a CD. Since music of good quality has been performed in Svatá Hora for centuries, both for liturgical occasions and in concerts, this was not the only CD that was produced. Both before and after that event a number of compositions connected with Svatá Hora have been recorded.

A museum, located in the cloister, was inaugurated at Christmas 2001. A nearby shop selling devotional items, books and souvenirs was opened later on. Guided tours are offered as well.

A highly important event was celebrated in 2005, namely, the 100th anniversary of the elevation of Svatá Hora to the rank of Minor Basilica. With a large participation of the faithful, including foreign guests, a National Pilgrimage took place on 4 and 5 June. On that occasion, the church was given an extraordinary gift: it was furnished with a new altar, an ambo, a processional cross, a throne for the Miraculous Statuette, a stand for the paschal candle and other objects used in the liturgical space, all made by the academic sculptor Otmar Oliva.

In 2006, the project of the building of two new organs was begun. Both were made by the organ builder Vladimír Šlajch in his workshop in Borovany (South Bohemia) and were financed by a number of generous donors. First, a choir organ was completed and blessed in a solemn celebration on 26 December 2007. The choir organ has 11 stops and is portable. It is possible to play it both inside the church and outside in the open-air Coronation Chapel, especially in the summer, when a lot of people participate in Holy Masses and in other events, and cannot be accommodated in the church, due to its limited capacity. Another special feature consists in the fact that the choir organ may be divided into two parts, that is, two organs are available and can be played at the same time. The main organ, located in the organ loft in the church, was built from December 2008 to November 2018. The long period of ten years was due to the fact that the organ was financed mainly by small donors, while the expenses amounted to nearly CZK 20,000,000, which is equivalent to about USD 910,000. The organ was blessed solemnly on 25 November 2018. It has three manuals and a pedalboard. Among the 35 stops there are some of interest, such as the “Vox Humana” and two “Cimbelstern” (revolving stars with little bells). Both the choir and the main organ are played during Holy Masses and in concerts. With regard to the latter, organ “half hours” are popular and, since 2018, they have taken place in the afternoon, from the first Sunday in May to the first Sunday in October.

In 2015, nearly the whole pilgrimage site was under reconstruction. The expenses were covered thanks to EU resources. One of the results visible at first sight was the change in the colour of the façade, which is now light grey and yellow instead of the previous red and white. The interior of the monastery was restored and, consequently, the shop selling souvenirs was extended and an interactive permanent exhibition was installed under the cloister, in the rooms with vaulted arches. Besides the Baroque refectory, there are numerous halls inside the monastery which are now suitable for lectures, courses, workshops, concerts, receptions and other events, and they are available for rent. Moreover, visitors can also have a look at a treasury located in the monastery. The floors in the monastery, which are quite wide, and the four corner chapels, in the cloister, are appropriate for seasonal exhibitions. It is possible to visit both the bell and the clock tower.

Svatá Hora is a living place of pilgrimage where all people are most welcome.