

The triptych of the main altar at the St. Michael Archangel Church in Dębno

The Late-Gothic triptych at the church in Dębno Podhalańskie dates back to the early 16th century. It was probably created by a painter called Master of the Holy Kinship. The piece was painted with tempera on linden boards. Golden and silver foils were also used. The central section of the triptych is 172 cm high and 140 cm wide. Each of the four wing sections is 71 cm wide.

The central part of the triptych represents Mary with the baby Jesus. The people standing from the left-hand side are: Michael the Archangel, Mary with the baby Jesus in her hands and St. Katherine. Above the heads of the characters, the background of the painting is gold. What particularly draws attention is the meticulous rendition of the hair of Michael the Archangel and the holy women, as well as their wonderful clothing. Besides gold, the painting is dominated by red and lush green.

The Archangel has bright hair, which wriggles down to his shoulders in even waves. The features of the ideally smooth face captivate us with Michael's subtlety, which is quite feminine. They contrast with the right hand combatively raised above the head, with which Michael horizontally wields a long sword. From his shoulders, the coattails of his red coat flow sideways. The folded fabric flows down to the Archangel's feet. In addition, his slim body is protected by steel-grey armour. In his left hand, he holds scales. The height of the scales is the distance between the Archangel's knees and his feet. A naked man, a human soul, kneels on the lower scale. On the other scale lies a millstone. Two devils hang from it.

Dignified Mary occupies the central part of the painting. Her meticulously stylized hair encircles her round face, slender neck and goes down far below her shoulders. One can virtually feel how soft it is. Her dark eyes look into the distance. She has tiny, subtly red lips and a charmingly rounded chin. Mary is clad in a dark-blue coat fastened together with a golden buckle. Its coattails part sideways, revealing a green lining and a dark-blue dress. The naked baby Jesus turns his curly-haired head towards the Archangel and stretches his right hand towards him.

St. Katherine's hair is arranged in the same way as Mary's. She turns her slightly slimmer face towards Mary, staring at her with awe. St. Katherine is clad in a green

coat. Underneath is a red dress. In her right hand, she holds a wheel that resembles a cartwheel. In her left hand, she holds a sword. She raises it vertically. It goes as far as the top right corner of the painting. As legend has it, St. Katherine was tortured with a breaking wheel and killed with a sword.

The internal wings are horizontally divided into two sections. Each wing thus has two paintings. The upper section of the right wing features John the Evangelist. This is a young man with no facial hair, clad in a green robe and a red coat. In his left hand, he holds a golden chalice. In the lower section of the right wing is St. Stanislaus. He wears a high mitre, a piece of bishop headwear. He is clad in green and white canonicals. In his left hand, he holds a crosier that symbolizes his power. At his feet kneels a man clad in white clothes. It is Piotrowin, raised from the dead by the bishop.

In the upper section of the left wing is John the Baptist. He has long hair and a beard. His shoulders are covered in a red coat. A leather robe can be seen underneath. In his left hand, the prophet has a book and a white casket. The lower section of the wing is dedicated to St. Nicholas. His high piece of headwear and the crosier in his left hand point to his being a bishop. He is clad in a green chasuble and a white robe. With his right hand, he holds a book and three golden balls. Legend has it that he donated gold to poor damsels.

The background in the upper parts of each wing section is gold. Below, behind John the Evangelist and St. John the Baptist, stretches a painted green curtain. The background behind the bishops is a red curtain.