The building of St. Leonard’s Church in Lipnica Murowana

The church was built in the 15th century. Its building material was larch wood. Charming with its simplicity, the humble shrine has only 96 square meters of usable surface. It is 16 meters long, 8 meters wide and 13 meters high.  The church is covered with a gable roof. This means that there are two roof slopes on two sides of the ridge. A ridge turret rises halfway along the roof. This little tower is around 2 meters high and crowned with a cross. The church consists of a nave and a chancel. The nave is
a space dedicated for the faithful. It measures 8 by 8 meters. It takes half of the church’s length. At the end of the nave, the building’s outline narrows by a meter symmetrically on each side. Hence the width of the chancel is 6 meters. The wall enclosing the chancel has a trilateral structure, where the middle part is perpendicular to the opposite wall and two side parts are at an obtuse angle to it. The whole church is uniformly dark-brown.

The shorter wall of the nave is the western wall. There is a massive wooden door in it (currently not in use) and a little window. The southern wall, perpendicular to it, features an entrance with a high stone threshold and a portal cut out in the shape of a leaf. There are four rectangular windows in this wall. The trilateral wall enclosing the chancel is the eastern wall. The other long wall of the building is the northern wall.

There is a little wooden skirt roof encircling the church. It covers a porch. This skirt roof is attached to the walls at the height of around 3 meters. It slopes obliquely to rest on 2-meter-high pillars. Along the bottom edge, there are semicircular gutters hewed out of wood.

The roof, three walls until the line of the porch and the skirt roof are shingled. Thin rectangular wooden slats are chiselled in such a way that they overlap each other like fish scales.  Only the western wall is coated with vertical planks. The bottom part of the walls within the porch is neither shingled nor planked. Here, 40-centimeters thick rectangular timbers are left bare. They are the main structure of the church building. They run horizontally along the whole wall. They are joined at the corners of the building by notching. One log interlocks with another without any nails. It is the so-called horizontal log construction. The flooring of the porch is made of uneven fieldstones. The porch itself is referred to as “soboty”, which means “Saturdays”. This term originates from the custom of parishioners coming for the Sunday service from far away, who used to arrive on Saturdays. They stayed the night in such a porch. The skirt roof provided the wearied faithful with a shelter from wind, rain, and snow.

The church of St. Leonard is oriented, that is the chancel with the main altar is directed to the east.  It has a symbolic meaning: in the end-times, Christ is supposed to come from the east, or from the direction of Jerusalem. The church in Lipnica is the only one among six wooden temples in Lesser Poland and Subcarpathia declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site that has been preserved in an almost unchanged shape. Therefore, bowing our heads under the low roof of the porch and leaning on the rough logs of the walls, we can feel like the erstwhile travellers seeking repose.