The rood beam with the Crucifixion sculpture group in St. Leonard’s Church in Lipnica Murowana

The rood beam together with the sculpture set located beneath the vault, between the nave and the chancel, was created in the late 16th century. It consists of several elements: the beam and the wooden figures of Mary, Christ on the cross, and John the Apostle standing on it.

The beam is 5 meters long. It is massive: about 30 cm wide. It is at the height of about 3.5 meters. Precisely beneath it, on the floor, runs the wooden threshold.

There are three sculptures standing on the beam. The first one on the left is the figure of Mary. It is around 120 cm high. It has the dark-brown colour of wood. Mary is slender. She wears a simple draped robe. Her hair is covered with a vail and her face and neck are surrounded with fabric. Mary tilts her head slightly to her left, that is to the cross. Her large eyes express deep sorrow, but also her acceptance of the fate. Her hands are clasped in prayer at the height of her waist. Toes of her bare foot emerge from underneath her robe.

The figure of Christ on the cross is larger then Mary. It is around 2 meters high. The dark-brown cross is around 3 meters high. At the top of the vertical beam hangs
a tilted plaque with the letters of the abbreviation “J. N. R. J.” (j, n, r, j). Translated from Latin, it means: Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews.  The almost naked body of Jesus is nailed to the cross. It is painted with a fair pink paint of a dull shade, imitating the hue of human skin. The sculptured locks of hair and beard are black. His head is surrounded by the crown of thorns. It is slightly titled to his right shoulder, that is in the direction of Mary. Christ’s eyes are closed. His face expresses perfect serenity. He looks as if asleep. The outlines of tensed muscles and tendons are marked on his extended arms. His hands are pierced with nails in the middle. Ribs are clearly visible on his chest.  His face and torso are covered with hundreds of red scratches: flagellation marks. His hips are covered with a grey cloth, tied on the right. His legs are smooth, with no anatomical details. The right leg is slightly bent in the knee. The feet are put together and pierced with one large nail.

The dark-brown sculpture of John the Apostle is around 120 cm tall. The Apostle tilts his head slightly backwards. Locks of curled hair fall down on his neck. His face is beardless. He turns upwards in inspiration. His hands are clasped at the level of his waist. The figure is wrapped up in the folds of his robe and cloak. Bare feet emerge from underneath the garments.

The rood beam has a twofold function. It is a structural element supporting the building at the junction of the nave and chancel. It also bears a deep symbolic meaning. Its location between the nave as the place for the faithful and the chancel as the place corresponding with heaven refers to the notion of salvation. The faithful gathered in the nave look at the chancel and against its background they see the rood beam and the Crucifixion. They are thus reminded that Christ had to die on the cross so they could be saved and go to heaven. This is the covenant between God and people. Since the deluge, it was symbolized by a rainbow.