

## THE HOLY EPIPHANY MONASTERY

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*Polotsk, one of the oldest cities in Eastern Europe and Belarus, was first mentioned in the annals of 862. The Principality of Polotsk was one of the biggest Slavic states, which became a center for the development of crafts and culture and occupied an important geographical position on the route "from the Varangians to the Greeks". However, in spite of numerous historical shocks, Polotsk was and remains one of the main cultural cities of Belarus.*

The Holy Epiphany Monastery is located in the center of Polotsk, on the right bank of the Western Dvina. It includes the Holy Epiphany Cathedral and a dwelling house [1].

In 1582 the king Stephen Bathory gave two areas for its building and exempted it from taxes. It was originally a wooden structure. The Holy Epiphany Monastery obeyed the Kiev Metropolitanate and the Patriarch of Constantinople. The Monastery was approved as an orthodox one by the diploma of Władysław IV in 1633 [2 – 3].

In June 1683 the city was on fire. As a result, the monastery suffered too. After another fire in 1757, the Holy Epiphany Cathedral was built of stone from 1761 to 1779.

Today the Holy Epiphany Church is a building having a Greek cross in its plan, one apse and two single-stage towers on the west facade (fig. 1). The Church is completed by a high light drum with a spherical dome, topped with a faceted lantern. The facade towers are topped with the same elements in smaller size, besides the northern tower was a belfry. There is a choir gallery with a forged decorative fence in the western part of the church above the entrance. The walls, the towers and the facets of the lantern are cut with high semicircular window openings. The interior is lit by two ranges of windows. In the center four massive square pillars support the arches, the brattice and bear the spherical dome with a lantern.

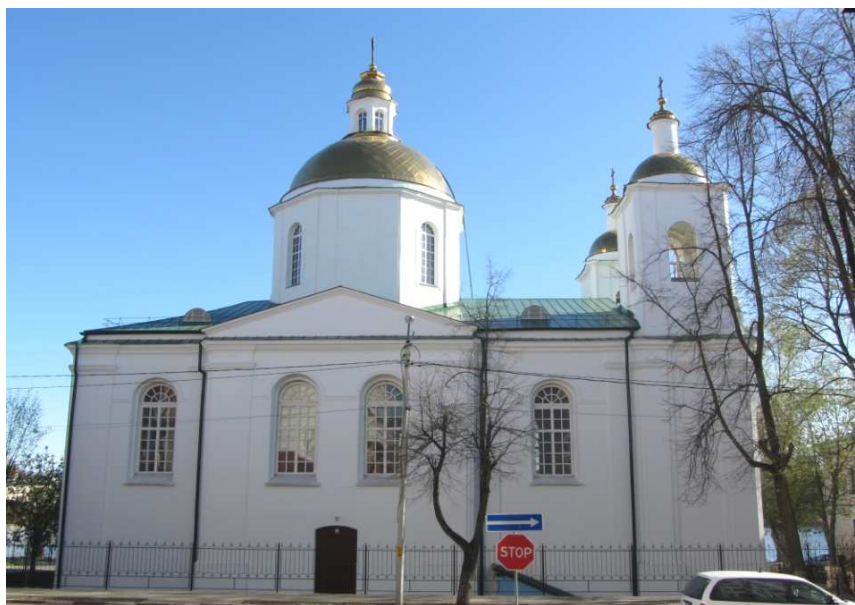


Fig. 1. The Holy Epiphany Cathedral

After her visit to Polotsk in 1780, Catherine II allocated some funds to streamline the monastery. In 1782 the famous architect Giacomo Quarenghi designed the project, according to which it was planned to arrange the composition of a group of buildings along Nizhnepokrovskaya street. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century there were 28 monks in the monastery. During the years of Soviet power there was a gym in the church. After its restoration in 1981, the Holy Epiphany Church was an art gallery for almost 10 years. In 1991, the church was handed over

to the Orthodox diocese and it is now the cathedral of the Diocese of Polotsk – Glubokoe. The Epiphany Monastery was founded in the 16th century and for many years it became a major center of Orthodoxy in Polotsk. The training and education, carried out there, were not only religious by its nature. Children of the orthodox gentry, clergy, artisans and merchants studied the Slavic, Greek and Latin languages, singing, rhetoric, arithmetic. There was a so-called school theater under the brethren's school. The Brotherhood didn't want to be inferior in anything to the Jesuit college and was trying to compete with it in the education and formation of Polotsk youth. In the second half of the XVII century Simeon of Polotsk worked as a teacher in the brethren's school under the monastery.

The monastery building is L-shaped (fig. 2). In its east wing there were the monks' cells, the Father Superior's room, in the angular part of the building there were two winter churches dedicated to St. Catherine and to St. Euphrosinya. The monastery complex is now monument of Baroque architecture with some elements of classicism. It is supposed that the project of the famous St. Petersburg architect Giacomo Quarenghi was used during its construction in the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century.



Fig. 2. Monastery building

Today this former brethren's building is now housing the Polotsk museum of Belarusian printing and the Museum-Library of Simeon of Polotsk. The museum often hosts the readers' conferences and organizes meetings with Belarusian writers [4 – 5].

The Holy Epiphany Monastery has a tragic history: has experienced countless fires, rearrangements, attacks from the Jesuits and non-believers, was rebuilt. And no matter what, even now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, The Epiphany Monastery is not only a valuable historical monument, but also a spiritual center of Polotsk and of the whole country.

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