

# Norway's oldest church - Urnes Stave Church

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## Definition:

“A stave church is a medieval wooden Christian church building once common in north-western Europe. The name derives from the building's structure of post and lintel construction, a type of timber framing where the load-bearing oak-pine posts are called *stafr* in Old Norse.” ([Wikipedia](#))



At their high point in history, Norway had more than 1000 Stave Churches. Many disappeared in the 14th -16th. centuries. Today, there are only 28 medieval stave churches left in Norway, and one in Sweden, Poland and England. Urnes Stave Church is the oldest stave church in Norway, being built ca. 1130 CE.

The Urnes stave church is not the largest stave church in Norway, but probably one of the most famous. In 1979 it was included on UNESCO's list of *World Heritage Sites*. This was due to its outstanding universal values of representing a unique artistic or aesthetic achievement. A masterpiece of the creative genius; having exerted considerable influence on developments in architecture; and because it is rare for the extent of reuse of elements originating from a stave church built about one century earlier. From its predecessor both decorative and some constructive elements are reused. (for a more comprehensive presentation of the criteria, see [Fortidsminneforeninga](#))



The ornament seen on the stamp to the right here is part of the famous north portal with a woodcarving in what is known as the Urnes style; it is dated to 1070 CE.

## Philatelic information:

**At the top:** stamps issued April 18, 1996 (*Norgeskatalogen* (NK) 1258). Shown at ca. 118%. Only issued in booklet form (NK 1258Bv and 1258BB).

**To the right:** stamp issued Jan. 23, 1969, celebrating the ornaments of Urnes stave church (NK 621). Shown at ca. 160%.

**Below:** Card containing a non-Norwegian stamp picturing Urnes stave church. Issued by UN Vienna, Austria, May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011, celebrating the church as a world heritage. Card issued by the Norwegian [‘Norvegiana club’](#) as a legitimating card for members 2011. Shown at ca. 90%.



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