Although human beings have been present for a very long time on the island of Riez, where the Celts and the Phoenicians have left their marks, we are not certain of when Christianity has been introduced in this territory.

Saint-Hilaire, bishop of Poitiers in the 4th century, despite his faith and determination, has probably not been able to evangelise every corner of his vast diocese of Poitiers, which was attached to the island of Riez. Nevertheless, the traces of the first church mentioned on the island have been found under his patronage, on the declaration of Ramnulfe, in 1025.

In those days, Ramnulfe, lord of Rié, gave to the monastery Saint-Cyprien-de-Poitiers the church built on the island of Rié with the parish’s earnings...
Through the following centuries, the building went through multiple destructions and reconstructions, especially during the beginning of Protestantism and the wars of religion: the year 1609 engraved on the bell tower’s South buttress, bears witness of a reconstruction ordered by Richelieu, then bishop of Luçon, just before Louis XIII came, in 1622, to chase the Soubise Protestants from the Isle de Rié and Saint-Gilles. Shortly after, a first restoration is undertaken. First, the choir and the two lateral chapels receive three baroque altarpieces in the lavallois style (school of Laval, in Mayenne) in polychrome stone, built successively in:
- 1650: choir altarpiece, ornamented by a copy of the Jouvenet’s « descente de croix » (« descent from the cross »);
- 1673: North lateral altarpiece, dedicated to the Virgin and ornamented by the painting of a shipwreck;
- 1676: South lateral altarpiece, ornamented by a painting of la Cène (the Last Supper).

The first and second altarpieces were created twenty-three years apart. Different elements explain this time difference, of which, without a doubt, the violent storm that took down the tower bell’s arrow on 3rd November 1965.

From 1803 to 1830, a project to make the building safe from water is undertaken. Later, in 1863, the tower bell’s restoration is started, it will last eight years. In 1850, a bell called « Marie Jeanne Gabrielle » is acquired.

In 1875, a vast renovation campaign is undertaken; only the tower bell and altarpieces will be kept. The nave is widened thanks to side-aisles on crossings in plaster bricks and arcades are pierced in the walls [...] The choir is aslo widened by side-aisles on plaster brick rib vaults while arcades are also pierced in the vaults. At the time, the absolute model is the Middle Ages. The construction methods therefore appeal to the Roman and Gothic styles, while keeping the monumental spirit of the 19th century. This is how neo-Roman or neo-Gothic buildings are born. The Saint-Hilaire church is a good example of the neo-Gothic style with its pointed arches, its ribbed vaults, the symmetry and regularity of its brickwork...

In 1885, a new pulpit is ordered (still in place). In 1887, a new bell is delivered, named « Marie Pierre, Reine du Rosaire » (« Marie Pierre, Queen of the Rosary »).

1905 law on the separation of State and Church: the church of Saint-Hilaire is transferred to the municipality. Follows a long period of setting up of the institutions, of appeasing of the passions and of growth of a new awareness for the new owners of the heritage. During sixty years, very little care is given to maintain the building out of the water, except from a restoration of the choir’s vault, following its collapse, probably caused by water seepage and... a supersonic plane that crossed the area. This « accident » raises a flag and, since the 1970s, new restoration programmes are launched one after the other: the refurbishment of the inside and the outside primers, the renovation of both lateral altarpieces, the restoration and protection of the stained glass, the ground, the roof, the structure...

In 1980, the town decides to decorate the inside walls instead of an old-fashion reprezentation of the Stations of the Cross. Six paintings are ordered to Henry Simon, native painter of the town, for a creation agreed with priest René Bégaudeau, vicar of Saint-Hilaire (cf. notes on Henry Simon’s paintings). The six paintings, representing scenes of the New Testament, are put in place in 1982. The last restoration campaign of the inside took place in 2012-2013, after the choir vault collapsed, in December 2010. The works served to repair the vaults, including the choir vault, the nave and the woodwork. The inside walls were painted... The church opened its doors again to the believers ans the visitors in July 2013.

The town is currently renovating both lateral altarpieces. A restoration campaign of the choir altarpieces had been initiated in the years 1999-2000. (cf. notes on the altarpieces).

During the Revolution, the building is occupied by the republican troops and is used as a storage site, essentially for the horses’ fodder. The bells, broken, are taken away to be melted into canons. As a consequence, the church is declared to be in ruins at the beginning of the 19th century.