

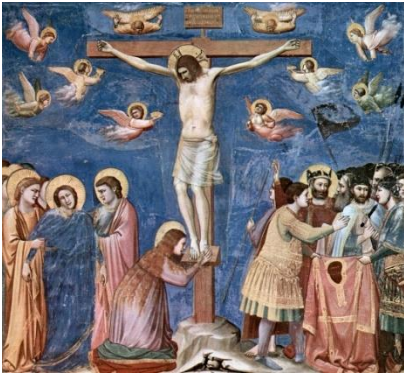
Christ Crucified

Giotto

1310

Scrovegni Chapel, Padua, Italy

This picture is one of many that depicts the story of Jesus Christ along the walls of the Scrovegni chapel in Padua Italy. This picture is a rather busy crucifixion scene but rich in symbolism that shows a deeper meaning often overlooked. In this picture we see the main subject is the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Jesus is hung on the cross low enough that Giotto could also paint Mary Magdalene kissing his feet. This alludes to the passage in the Gospel of Luke where a sinful woman showed up where Jesus was dining, stood at his feet and wept because of her sins. She then bathed his feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them. (Lk 7: 36-50) Although the woman's name is not mentioned, early tradition has her as Mary Magdalene. Giotto places her at the foot of the cross once again kissing the feet of Jesus with her tears. Off to the left is Mary, the mother of Jesus, who is distraught while St. John and another woman named Mary are consoling her. Notice the angel directly above St. John looks toward Mary with a concerned face, as if thinking, "is she going to be alright?" It's hard to see the Mother of Jesus as she blends in with the blue sky. One would think Giotto would have picked a different color for her. However, that would have gone against tradition as Mary, in this time period, was only



shown in blue. The blue paint, or rather blue mineral pigments were taken from a precious rock called Lapis Lazuli only found in Afghanistan. It was expensive and hard to get, therefore reserved for Mary. On the right side we see a crowd and some of the men holding a garment. This is the tunic of Jesus which Giotto painted similar to the current fashion of men's tunics for the 1300s which was when this fresco was made. The decision to make the tunic of Jesus and the clothes of the other people in current fashion was supposed to help the viewers understand this salvific act was not just something that happened a long time ago in a distant land but also has meaning for them in their time. Jesus died for all of us throughout time. One man is holding a knife, as they were going to divide the garment (John 19:23-24) but instead they decide to cast lots to see who gets it. The other man reaching his hand for the knife is a bit overweight. Giotto painted his side view on purpose to show us his large stomach. This is meant to show us his sins of gluttony and greed as he has one hand on the tunic while telling the other man with the knife not to tear it as it will be worth more. If you look really close there is an image of a man's face in the middle of the tunic. There is no tradition of an image of Jesus on the tunic, although there is one on Veronica's veil. This could be a reference to that relic. There is also a man with a halo in the crowd. He is the man who pieced the side of Christ in which Blood and water flowed out. You can see his right hand letting go of the lance. Tradition says this soldier is the centurion from the Gospel of Matthew who says, "truly this was the Son of God" (Mt 27:54) and the same one who in John's Gospel pierced his side. Legend says he converted to Christianity and a name given to him was Longinus. He is considered a saint, therefore gets a halo. There are angels flying around the cross, if you look closely you will see they are holding out gold bowls to catch the precious Blood of Jesus dripping from his wounds. This is a Eucharistic symbol, as we drink the Blood of Jesus out of chalices that is consecrated at the holy sacrifice of the Mass. Finally, there is a skull at the bottom of the cross. It appears the ground has cracked open to reveal this skull. Jesus was crucified on what was called the "Place of the Skull," in Hebrew, Golgotha. This skull represents the skull of Adam. There is a tradition that Adam was buried at this place, although there are no facts to support this. There was a legend during the medieval period that the skull of Adam was lifted up out of the ground after the earthquake that took place during the crucifixion. The connection of Jesus to Adam is an important one, as Jesus is the "new Adam" he makes amends for the Original Holiness that was lost due to Original Sin.

