

Getting back to the order of the life of Christ -

For my reflection today I've chosen 2 paintings, both from the National Gallery in London. One you doubtless wouldn't want on your wall; the other is quite beautiful and quite a crowd puller.



The Adoration of the Kings by Pieter Bruegel the Elder – 1564

This picture draws attention to the humanity and vulnerability of the Christ child – there is nothing in it to suggest divinity. Even Mary's halo is just a straw hat held behind her by Joseph. The gifts are brought by unattractive men and the child draws back from the Myrrh, alluding to his own future death. And possibly in a foreshadowing of his agony in the garden are the soldiers with their cross shaped pikes.

All of the men in this picture are quite ugly, even repulsive; Jesus Christ is condemned to die by human wickedness.

No one is looking directly at the child, even including the kings offering their gifts, and one onlooker even wears thick glasses. Humanity cannot see what is really important, even when right in front of them. Christ often linked understanding with being able to see

"If you have eyes to see – then see"

We cannot know for certain but, having been painted post-reformation, it is likely the ugliness of the characters in this painting is an indictment of the established church.



Wilton Diptych (c. 1395–99) National Gallery, London.

This painting is quite rightly one of the jewels in the crown of the National Gallery, where it truly belongs as a national treasure. There is frequently a queue of people waiting to get a closer look.

It is a diptych, in other words in two parts, hinged in the middle to fold up and be transportable. It is thought to have been made for the private devotions of Richard II, near the end of his life, for reflection on his own humanity. He was born on 6th January, Epiphany and he appears himself as one of the three kings, the king kneeling. (The bible tells us they were magi but tradition quickly took over the story and they became kings)

Christ leans out towards him in blessing both him and the flag of England and St George,— which is also the symbol of the resurrection. It is held by one of the many angel's who surround him.

On the Orb at the top of the pole is a barely visible miniature of the map of England possibly alluding to Shakespeare's Richard II "This royal throne of kings this scepter'd isle"

Richard is Supported by Edward the confessor (England's Patron Saint at the time before the crusades) and St Edmund. A trio of English Kings, all being presented to Christ by John the Baptist; Richard's own patron saint.

The three Kings humble before their God.

For you have but mistook me all this while;
I live with bread like you, feel want,
Taste grief, need friends; subjected thus,
How can you say to me, I am king?
Shakespeare's Richard II. Act 3 scene 2.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,
God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty
acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous
light. *1 Peter 2 v 9*