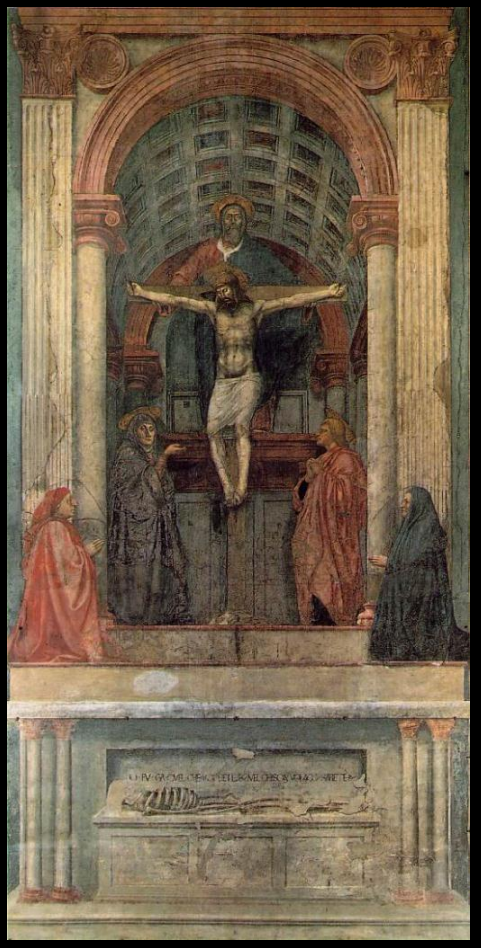

INNOVATION and EXPERIMENTATION:

LATE GOTHIC and EARLY RENAISSANCE ART

(Giotto and Masaccio)

LATE GOTHIC and EARLY RENAISSANCE ART

Online Links:

Giotto di Bondone - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Giotto di Bondone | artble.com

Giotto, Lamentation - Smarthistory

Scrovegni Chapel - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Giotto's Arena Chapel – Smarthistory

Office Site of the Scrovegni Chapel

Scrovegni Chapel Part 2 – Smarthistory

Dr. Farber's Site on the Arena Chapel

Scrovegni Chapel Audio Guide - YouTube

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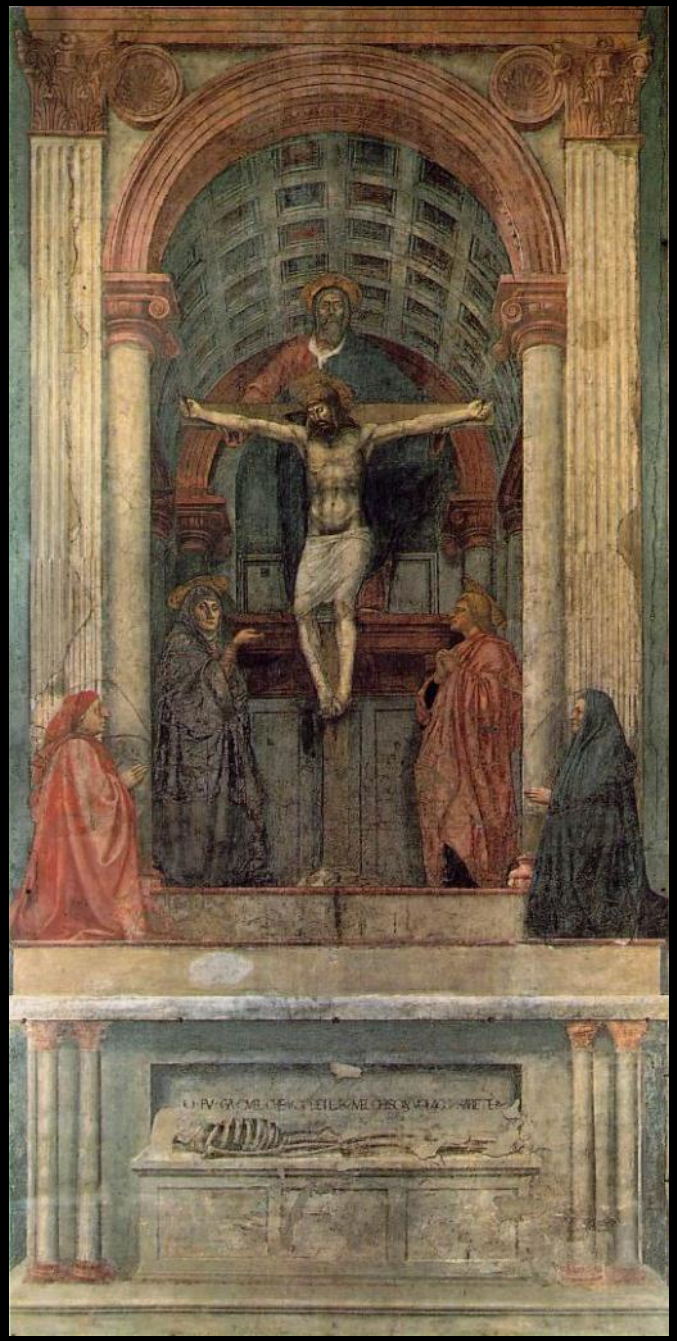
Online Links:

Ognissanti Madonna – Smarthistory

Entombment of Mary – Giotto

Rick Steves: Padova, a Haven in Veneto - YouTube



EARLY ITALIAN and NORTHERN RENAISSANCE

Online Links:

Masaccio - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Holy Trinity (Masaccio) - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Danse Macabre - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Tommaso Cassai Masaccio | artble.com

Perspective (graphical) - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Early Netherlandish painting - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Rogier van der Weyden - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Giotto. *Madonna Enthroned.* 1305-1301, tempera and gold on wood panel

Painted for the church of the Ognissanti (All Saints) in Florence, this altarpiece by Giotto (active c. 1300-1337) exhibits great spatial consistency and sculptural solidity than earlier depictions of the Madonna.

Gone are Mary's modestly inclined head and the delicate gold folds in her drapery. Light and shadow play gently across his stocky form, and her action- holding her child's leg instead of pointing him out to us- seems less contrived.

The colossal Mary overwhelms her slender Gothic tabernacle of a throne, where figures peer through openings and haloes overlap faces.

Cimabue. Virgin and Child Enthroned, c. 1280, tempera and gold on panel

According to the sixteenth-century chronicler Giorgio Vasari, Cimabue discovered a talented shepherd boy, Giotto di Bondone, and taught him to paint; "not only did the young boy equal the style of his master, but he became such an excellent imitator of nature that he completely banished that crude Greek (i.e. Byzantine) style and revived the modern and excellent art of painting, introducing good drawing from live natural models, something which had not been done for more than two hundred years."

After his training, Giotto may have collaborated on murals at the prestigious church of St. Francis in Assisi. We know he worked for the Franciscans in Florence and absorbed facets of their teaching.

Giotto. Death of St. Francis. Church of Santa Croce, Florence

St. Francis's message of simple, humble devotion, direct experience of God, and love for all creatures was gaining followers throughout western Europe, and it had a powerful impact on thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Italian literature and art. The Franciscans were a mendicant order (monks who lived off charity), renouncing all worldly goods and committed to spreading God's words, performing good deeds, and administering to the sick and dying.

Giotto (?). St. Francis feeding the Birds, from the church of St. Francis in Assisi, fresco

To his contemporaries, Francis of Assisi appeared to be a second Christ, but one whose presence was much more glowing and immediate than the ascended son of God. Such was his reputation that the visits he paid to places were commemorated in paintings.

In 1818, the tomb of St. Francis was rediscovered beneath the high altar at Assisi, after lying hidden for almost 600 years. When the coffin was opened, Francis' skeleton was found fully intact. This is very rare for such a popular medieval saint - had his relics not been hidden, bits of them almost certainly would have found their way into shrines across Europe.

Giotto. Arena Chapel (Padua) 1305-6

While working at the Church of Saint Anthony of Padua, the Italian painter Giotto di Bondone was approached by a local merchant, Enrico Scrovegni, to decorate a new family chapel. The chapel, named for a nearby ancient Roman arena, is a simple, barrel-vaulted room.

The cycle begins on the arched wall framing the altar. God the Father sits enthroned at the apex of the arch, about to begin the work of human redemption. On the left side of the arch his messenger, the Angel Gabriel, announces the impending birth of Christ to Mary, who appears to the right of the arch.

After a sojourn in Rome during the last years of the thirteenth century, Giotto was called to Padua in northern Italy soon after 1300 to paint frescos for a new chapel being constructed at the site of an ancient Roman arena- explaining why it usually referred to as the Arena Chapel. The chapel was commissioned by Enrico Scrovegni, whose family fortune was made through the practice of usury – which at this time meant charging interest when loaning money, a sin so grave that it resulted in exclusion from the Christian sacraments.

Enrico's father, Regibaldo, was a particularly egregious case (he appears in Dante's *Inferno* as the prototypical usurer), but evidence suggests that Enrico followed in his father's footsteps, and the building of the Arena Chapel next to his palatial residence seems to have been conceived at least in part as a penitential act. He was pardoned by Pope Benedict XI.

In the Virtues and Vices on the dado of the side walls, Giotto reiterates some of the principles found elsewhere in the cycle. In the opposition of *Hope* and *Despair*, for example, Giotto juxtaposes the upward movement of the Virtue with the downward pull of the hanged Vice, corresponding to the disposition of the saved and the damned in the *Last Judgment*. Awaiting *Hope* is an angel with a crown, while *Despair* is accompanied by a little demon flying downward.

Both are represented in grisaille**,** or imitation sculpture, which is formally related to the simulated marble of the dado. In being represented as stone, the Virtues and Vices having a quality of permanence, denoting the durability of the characteristics they personify. They are exemplars that persist through time, whereas the flesh-and-blood actors in the narrative scenes evoke the viewer's identification with their time and space, and, therefore, with their mortality.

The *Last Judgment*, which occupies the entire entrance wall, presents the culmination of the process of redemption begun on the altar wall of the chapel. Christ sits in majesty in the center, flanked to his left and right by choirs of angels and seated Apostles.

Below him and to his right are the elect, to whom he gestures. In the lower right quadrant of the wall is a vision of hell with a large personification of evil devouring the damned.

Just over the door of the chapel at the bottom center of the fresco Giotto has depicted Enrico Scrovegni in the kneeling pose of a donor, presenting his chapel in the metaphorical form of a model to three haloed figures.

The four rivers of Hell flow from Christ's mandorla to his left. The damned, tortured by red (signifying fire) and blue (signifying ice) devils, tumble downward. In contrast to the neat, orderly arrangement of the saved, the panic-stricken damned are disordered.

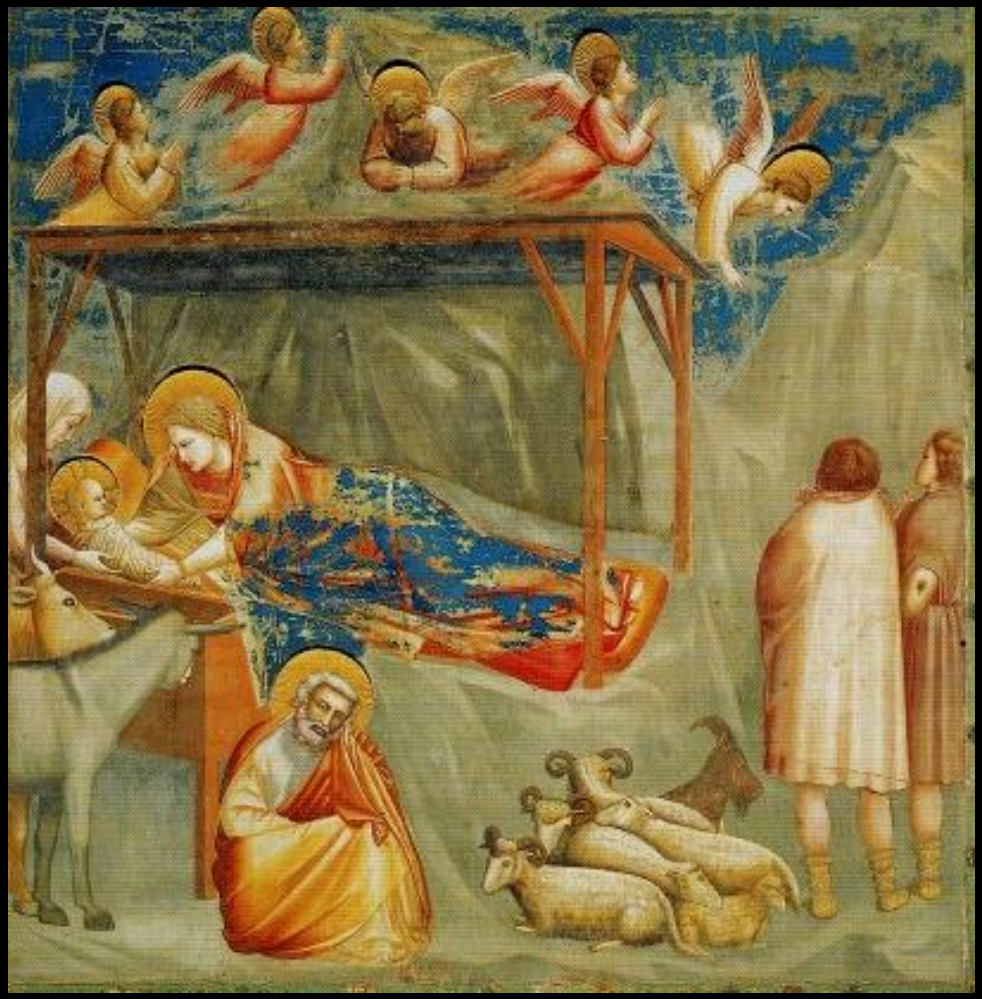
At the bottom of Hell is Satan himself, a large monster endlessly swallowing and expelling nude souls. The emphasis on hanging, a form of death that requires gravity, is consistent with the traditional view of Hell as being at the depths of the universe. Judas has hanged himself and holds the bag of silver for which he betrayed Christ.

In the *Expulsion of Joachim from the Temple*, directly to the right of the *Annunciation*, Giotto has depicted a remarkable synthesis of form, psychology, and traditional Christian typology.

Joachim, who is aged and childless, has brought a lamb to the Temple in Jerusalem as an offering in the hopes of having a child of his own. The priest, appalled at Joachim's presumption, expels him from the Temple. The thrust of the priest's gesture seems literally to have the weight and authority of the Temple behind it.

Joachim's conflicted reaction is shown by his twisted pose, as he simultaneously turns toward the priest and protects the lamb from his aggression. The dejection experienced by Joachim at being roughly rejected is symbolized by the blue void at the right. It is also a metaphor for the emptiness he feels in not having produced children.

The formal characteristics of the *Expulsion of Joachim* recur throughout the cycle. Figures are solidly sculptural; draperies are weighty and fall to the ground in obedience to the law of gravity. The blue sky and three-dimensional space reinforce the appearance of a natural setting. The stagelike quality of the architecture, which is small in comparison to the scale of the figures, recurs throughout the cycle.



Giotto reinforces his perception of the mother-child relationship in the depiction of the animals. Among the sheep, he repeats the theme of protection and physical closeness.

In the ox and ass at the manger, he plays on the Christian meaning of their glances and merges it with the emotional significance of the gaze. The ass looks down and fails to see the importance of the event before him. He thus becomes a symbol of ignorance and sin.

The ox, however, stares at the gaze of Mary and Christ, recognizing its importance in Christian terms and also replicating the role of the outsider looking in, like the viewer, on a dramatic confrontation.

It is possible that this, together with the dramatic character of Giotto's scenes, reflects the contemporary revival of Roman theater, particularly the plays of Seneca, in Padua.

As in Classical drama, Giotto's frescoes maintain a unity of place and a continuity in the formal and psychological portrayal of the figures.

Giotto.
Lamentation,
from the Arena
Chapel (Padua),
1305-6

The buon fresco process is time consuming and demanding and requires several layers of plaster. Although buon fresco methods vary, generally, the painting is built from a rough layer of lime plaster called the trullisatio (scratch coat), followed by the arriccio (brown coat), the arenato (sand coat), and, finally, the intonaco (painting coat).

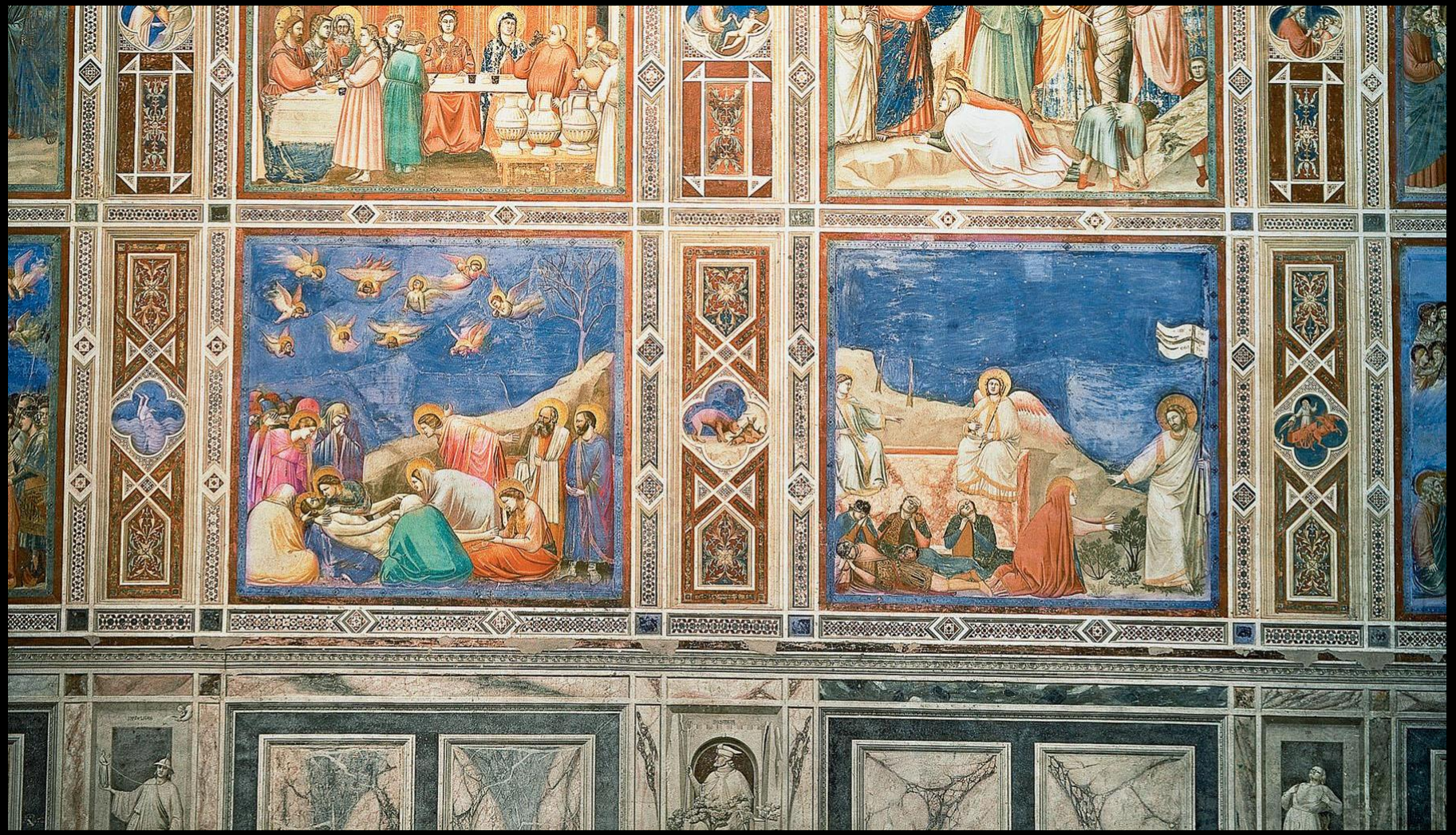
A cartoon (a full-sized preparatory drawing) of the composition is usually transferred to the wall after the arenato layer. Then, the intonaco is laid smoothly over the drawing in sections (called giornate, Italian for 'days') only as large as the artist expects to complete in that session. The artist must paint fairly quickly because once the plaster is dry, it will no longer absorb the pigment. Any areas of the intonaco that remain unpainted after a session must be cut away so that fresh plaster can be applied for the next giornata.

In the moving *Lamentation*, in the lowest register of the Arena Chapel, Giotto focused the composition for maximum emotional effect off-center on the faces of Mary and the dead Jesus. A great downward-swooping ridge- its barrenness emphasized by a single dry tree, a medieval symbol of death- carries the psychological weight of the scene to its expressive core.

Instead of symbolic sorrow, Giotto conveys real human suffering, drawing the viewer into the circle of personal grief. The direct, emotional appeal of his art, as well as its deliberate plainness, embodies Franciscan values.

Each scene is set like a narrow stage, with the picture plane functioning as the theater's fourth wall. Figures turn freely in space- Giotto was the first artist since antiquity to depict figures in back view- and act and react according to the requirements of the narrative. As a result, the viewer identifies physically and psychologically with both the form and content of the scenes.

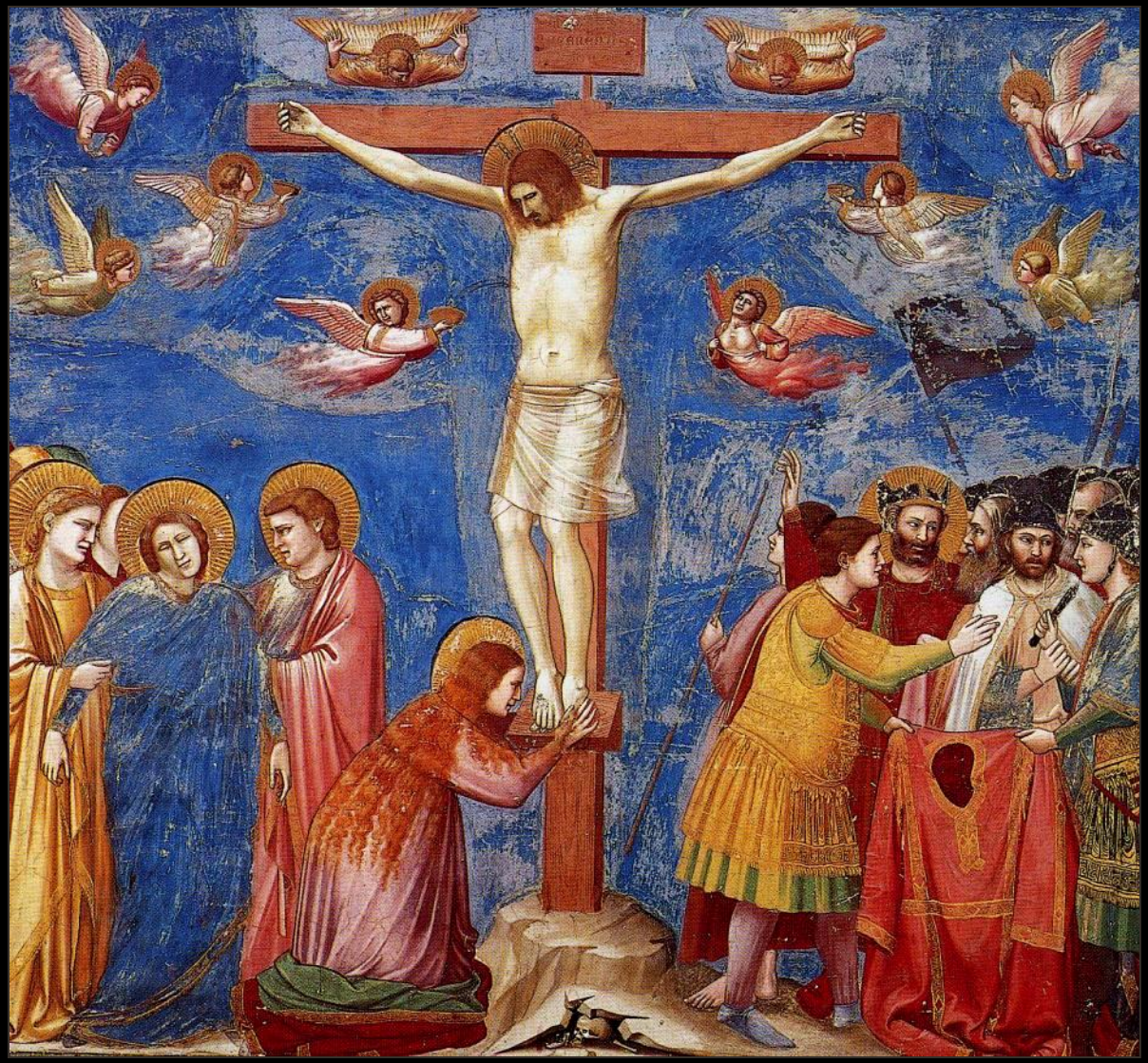
In constructing his narratives, Giotto gave them an extraordinary sense of unity through a careful use of perspective. Each scene is organized according to a unified two-point perspective scheme which orders the architecture of all levels of each side of the building and also unites both walls in a single coordinated scheme of diagonal lines. The same is true for the side walls where, for example, the architecture depicted in all the frescoes is conceived as if it were to be viewed from the center of the chapel. Thus the perspective is slightly distorted in the outer two scenes of the north wall to compensate for the viewer's angle of vision. In each frame, however, the architecture extends equally deeply in space, so that there is a consistency to the depth of the illusionistic field from one scene to another



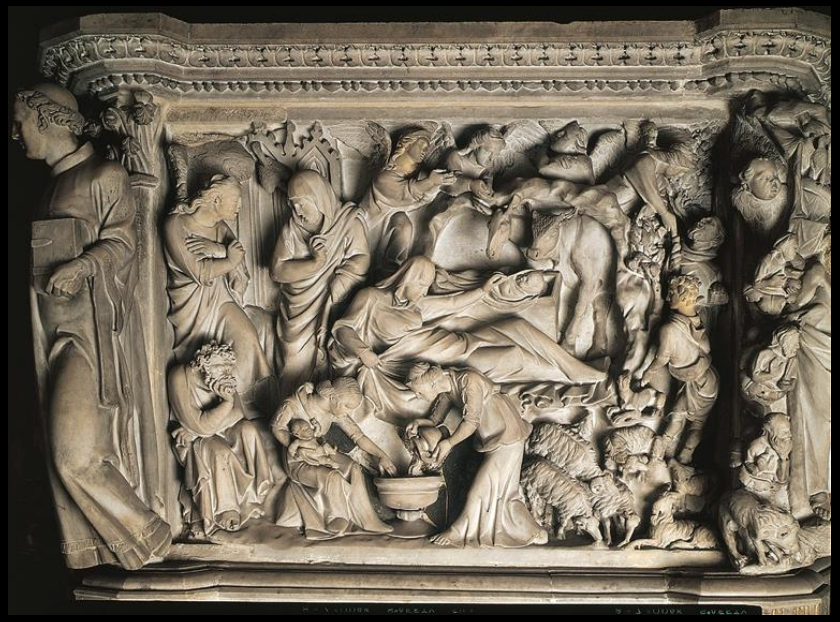
The same is true of landscape, where it appears. In the adjacent panels of the *Lamentation* and the *Noli Me Tangere* (above) the landscape also seems to continue behind the painted architectural frames and to drive the narrative forward from one panel to the next.

The *Kiss of Judas* is the dramatic climax of Giotto's narrative, and what follows is denouement. It is located on the right wall directly below the *Presentation*, to which it is related formally and psychologically. For example, the man in purple at the right points toward the center, echoing the prophetess in the *Presentation*. (The latter foreshadows Christ's death by association with the hooded executioners of medieval Europe.) In both scenes, the central confrontation arrests the action momentarily.

The dramatic character of the Arena Chapel frescoes marked a revolution in the approach to painted space. Each scene is set like a narrow stage, with the picture plane functioning as the theater's fourth wall. Figures turn freely in space- Giotto was the first artist since antiquity to depict figures in back view- and act and react according to the requirements of the narrative. As a result, the viewer identifies physically and psychologically with both the form and content of the scene.



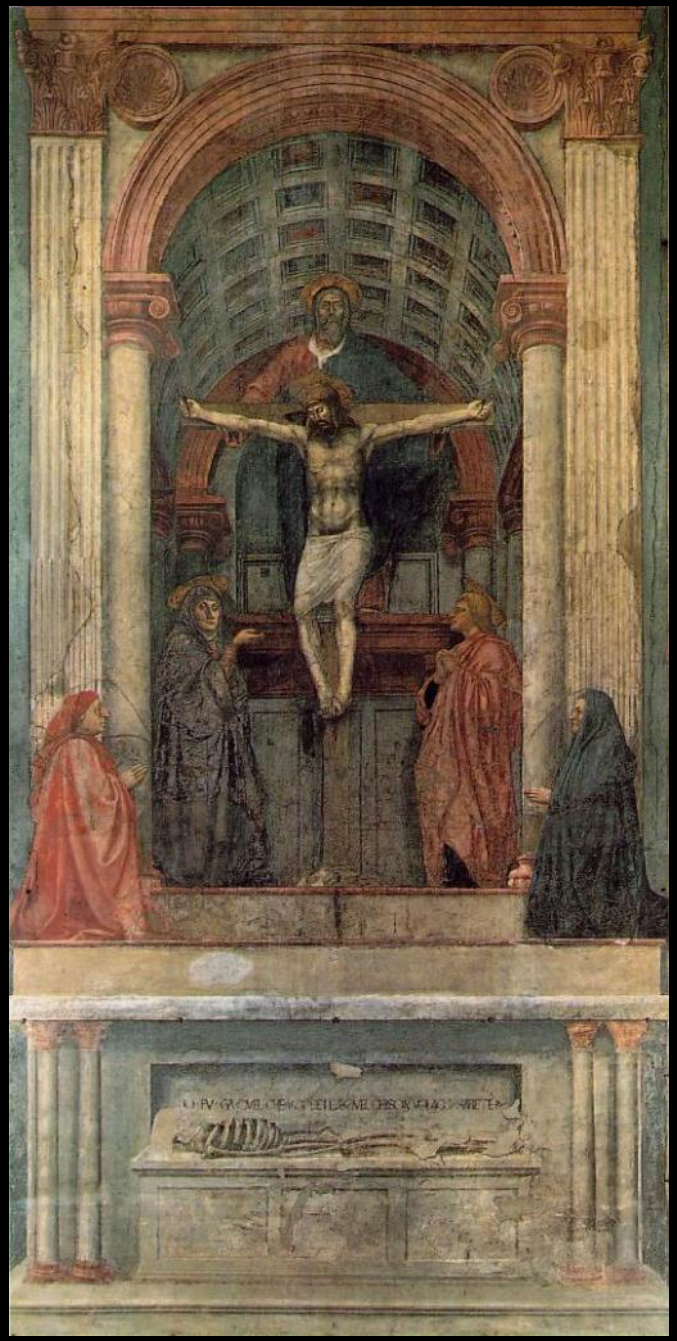
In the Crucifixion scene, in contrast to the formal and psychological link between Christ and his followers on his right (our left), there is a void immediately to the left of the Cross. The symbolic distance between Christ and his executioners is reinforced by the diagonal bulk of the Roman soldier leaning to the right.



A comparison of the Arena Chapel *Nativity* with Nicola Pisano's *Nativity* on the Pisa pulpit illustrates Giotto's reduction of form and content to its dramatic essence. In Giotto's fresco, as in Nicola's sculpture, two events are merged into a single space.

Nicola combines the *Nativity* with the *Washing of the Infant Christ*, and the shepherds arrive in Bethlehem at the upper right. Giotto combines the *Annunciation to the Shepherds* at the right with the *Nativity* at the left.

Both artists use simple, massive draperies that naturally outline human form and monumentalize the figures. But Nicola's composition is more crowded, and the dramatic relationship between the figures do not have the power of Giotto's version.

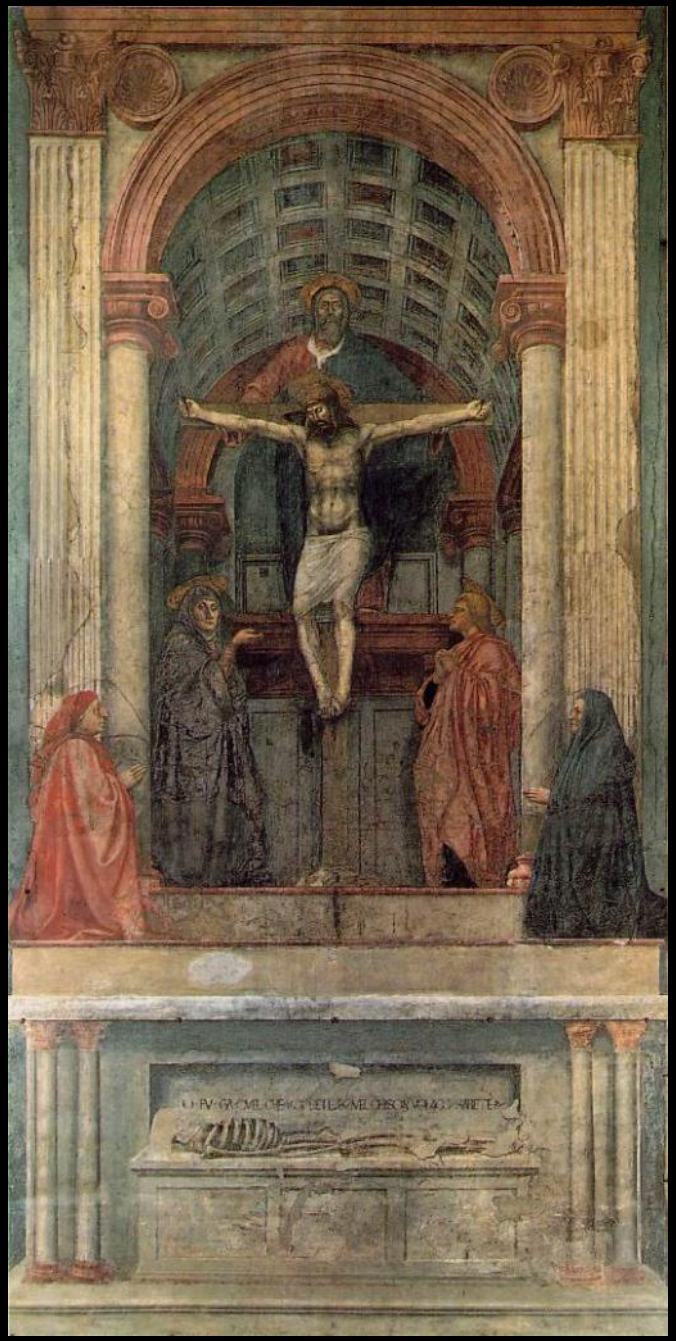


Masaccio. *The Holy Trinity*, Santa Maria Novella (Florence) 1425, fresco

This fresco by the Early Renaissance artist Masaccio represents the central mystery of Christian doctrine, the *Trinity*, in Santa Maria Novella in Florence. Domenico Lenzi died in January of 1426 and is the probably man, depicted with his wife, in Masaccio's *Trinity*. The tomb would have been related to an altar where mass could be said for the deceased, and perhaps the altar table of the Lenzi family chapel was installed in the space between the skeleton and the Trinity.

The fresco, considered by many to be Masaccio's masterwork, is the earliest surviving painting to use systematic linear perspective, possibly devised by Masaccio with the assistance of Brunelleschi himself.

The figures of the two patrons have most often been identified as members of the Lenzi family or, more recently, a member of the Berti family of the Santa Maria Novella quarter of Florence.



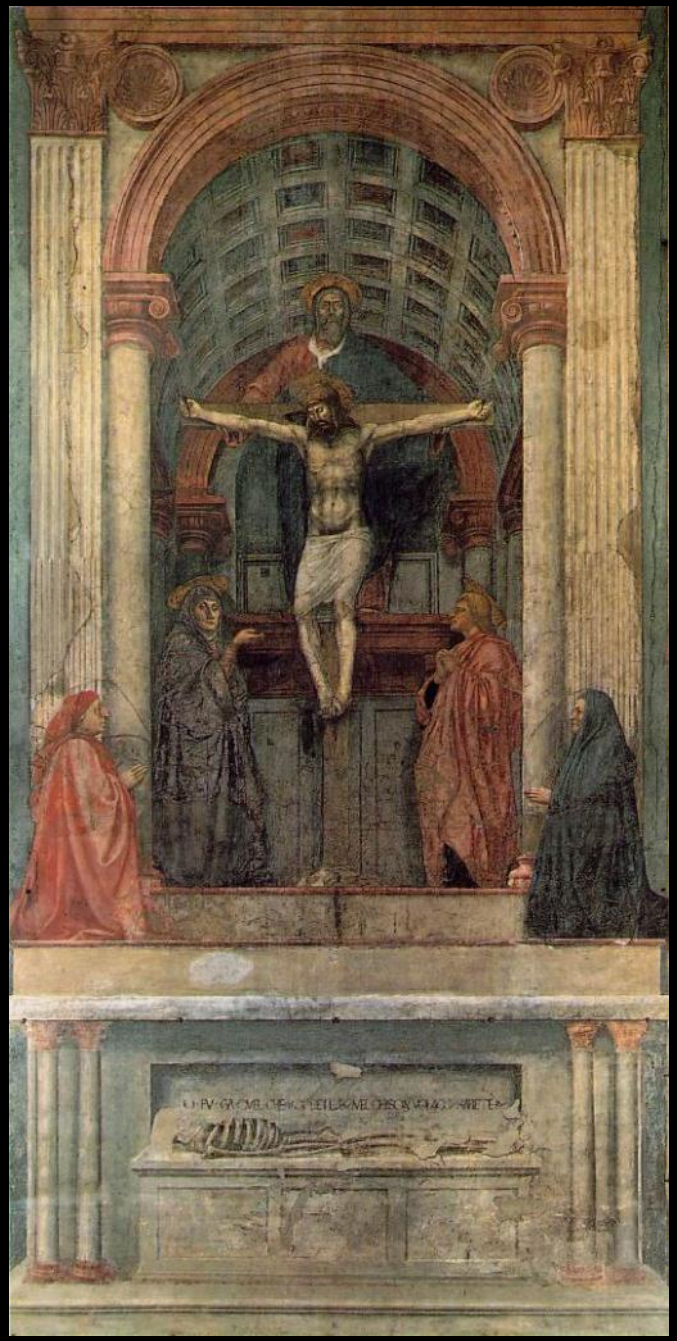
Below the illusionistic chapel that encloses the main scene is a skeleton bearing the epitaph: "*Io fu gia quell che voi siete e quell chio son voi anco sarete*" ('I was once what you are, and what I am, you also will be').

The configuration of the skeleton, the text, and the religious imagery above is obviously related to tomb iconography; beneath the floor in front of the fresco there was once a tomb for Domenico Lenzi and his family.

The skeleton is not a representation of Domenico Lenzi but rather of Adam, over whose tomb it was believed Christ had been crucified. Thus the fresco refers to both the original sin of Adam and Eve and the redemptive power of the Crucifixion of Christ.

The Dance of Death (1493) by Michael Wolgemut, from the *Liber chronicarum* by Hartmann Schedel

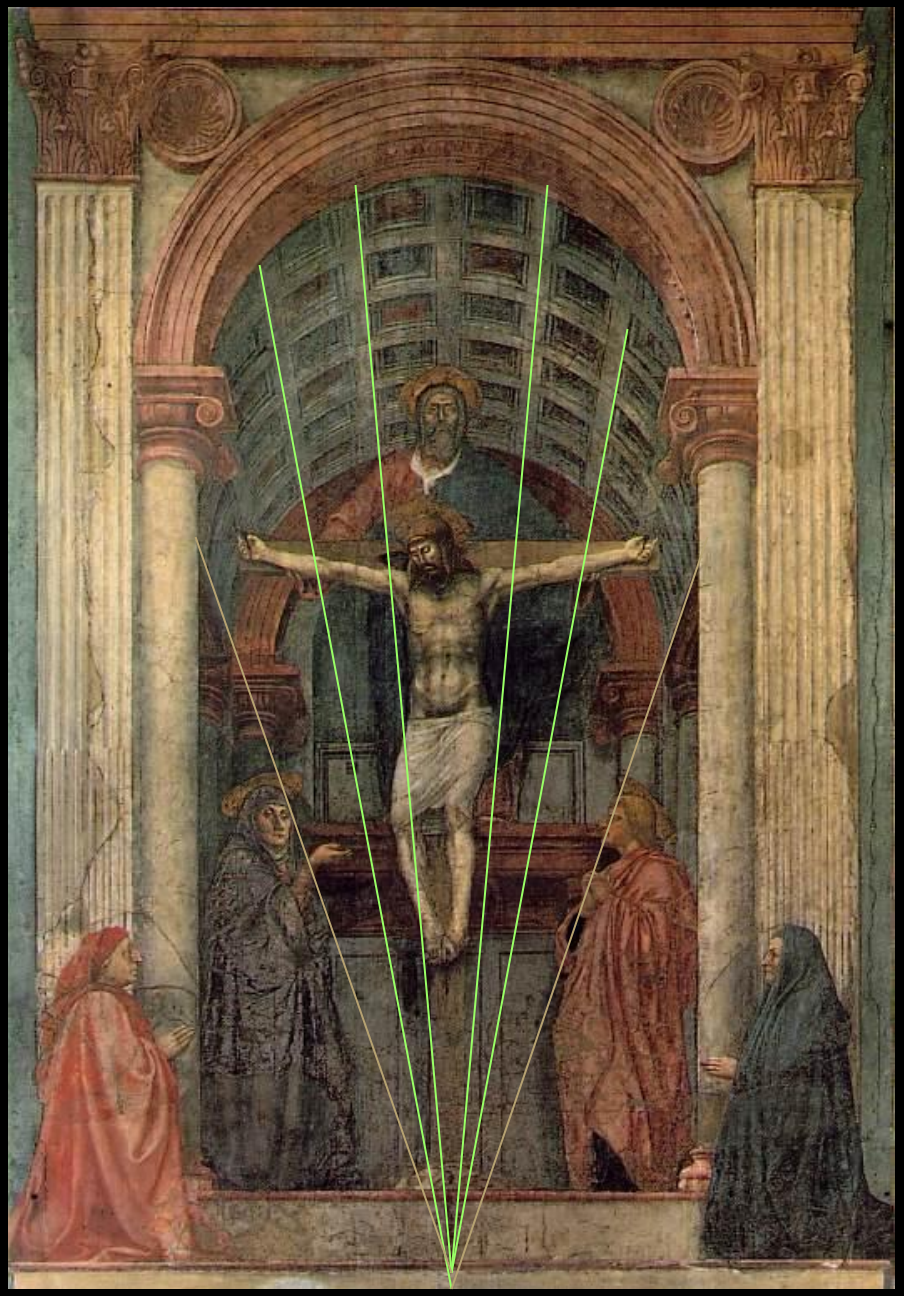
The "Dance of Death" is an artistic genre of late-medieval allegory on the universality of death: no matter one's station in life, the Dance of Death unites all. The *Danse Macabre* consists of the dead or personified Death summoning representatives from all walks of life to dance along to the grave, typically with a pope, emperor, king, child, and laborer. They were produced to remind people of the fragility of their lives and how vain were the glories of earthly life.



This memento mori underlines that the painting was intended to serve as a lesson to the viewers. At the simplest level the imagery must have suggested to the 15th-century faithful that, since they all would die, only their faith in the Trinity and Christ's sacrifice would allow them to overcome their transitory existences.

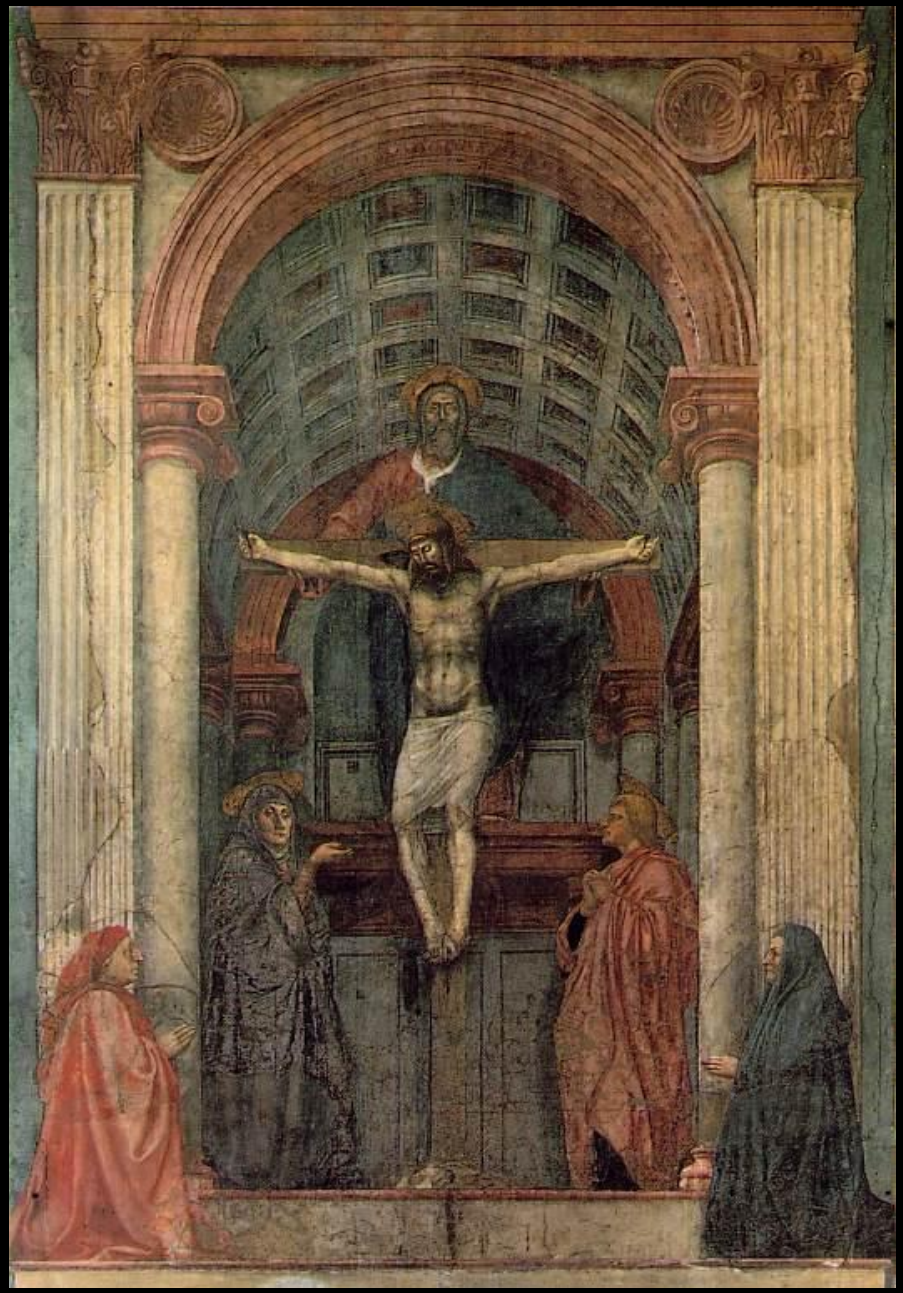
According to American art historian Mary McCarthy:

The fresco, with its terrible logic, is like a proof in philosophy or mathematics, God the Father, with His unrelenting eyes, being the axiom from which everything else irrevocably flows.



Masaccio's dissolution of the wall, following Giotto's precedent in the illusionistic chapels on the Arena Chapel's chancel arch, separates the sacred space of the holy figures from the worldly space of the viewer. Creating a transition between the two are the donors, who belong to the earthly world but aspire to salvation. The holy figures are thus linked by an orchestration of gaze and gesture that finds an echo in the tight chromatic alternations of red and blue.

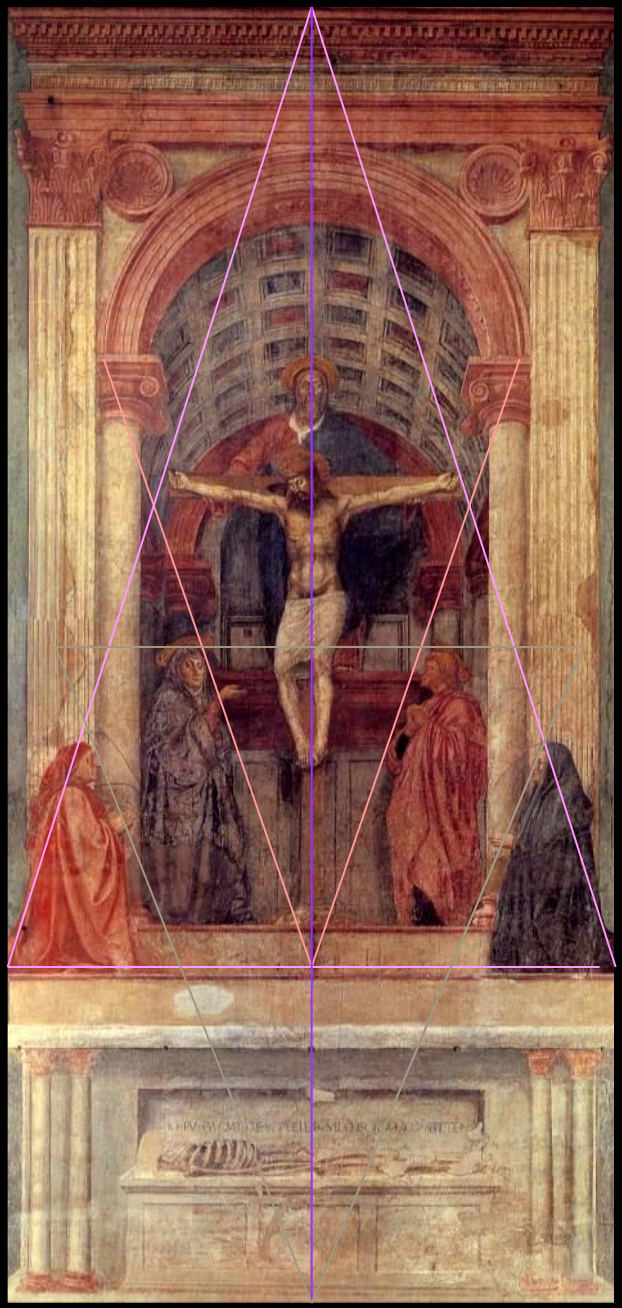
The *Trinity* was meant to give the illusion of a stone funerary monument and altar table set below a deep aedicula (framed niche) in the wall… Masaccio created the unusual trompe l'oeil ('fool the eye') effect of looking up into a barrel-vaulted niche through precisely rendered linear perspective.



The figure of Christ is a *Christus mortuus* who seems to have endured pain and is no longer suffering. The dove of the Holy Spirit flies between the heads of Father and Son.

Below the cross, Mary does not look at her Son but raises her hand to recommend him to us; she is somber and determined, with no hint of the elegant beauty with which she is sometimes endowed.

St. John seems lost in adoration before the mystery. The portraits of the kneeling man and woman are stoically calm. Here Calvary has been stripped of its terrors.



The perspective, on the other hand, converges behind the lightly painted mound of Golgotha- at exactly eye level. The ascending and descending pyramids thus created intersect in the body of Christ.

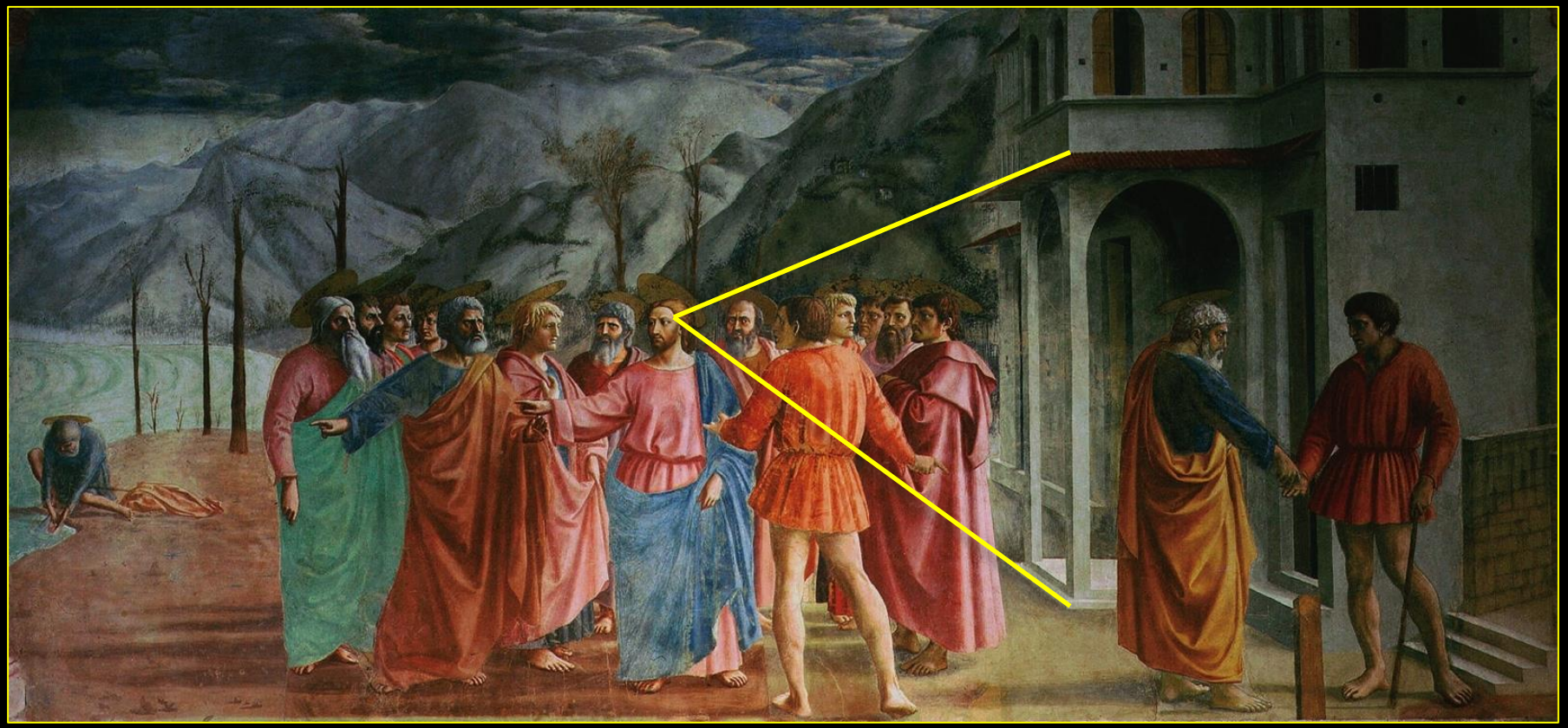
In its reduction to geometric essentials that unite figures and architecture, forms and spaces, the composition could hardly be more closely knit. Its power embodies Giannozzo Manetti's contention that the truths of the Christian religion are as clear as the axioms of mathematics. The composition suggests that the Trinity is the root of all being.

Masaccio. *Tribute Money* from the Brancacci Chapel, Florence, c. 1427, fresco

In the *Tribute Money,* Masaccio portrays an incident from the life of Jesus that highlights St. Peter, to whom this chapel was dedicated. In the central scene a tax collector (dressed in a short red tunic and seen from behind) asks Peter (in the left foreground with the short gray beard) if Jesus pays the Jewish temple tax (the "tribute money" of the title). Set against the stable backdrop of a semicircular block of apostolic observers, a masterful series of dynamic diagonals in the postures and gestures of the three main figures interlocks them in a compositional system that imbues their interaction with a sense of tension calling out for resolution.

Jesus instructs Peter to "go to the sea, drop in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up," which Peter does at the far left. In the fish's mouth is a coin, which Peter gives to the tax collector at the far right. The tribute money was especially significant for Florentines because in 1427, to raise money for defense against military aggression, the city enacted a graduated tax, based on the value of people's personal property.

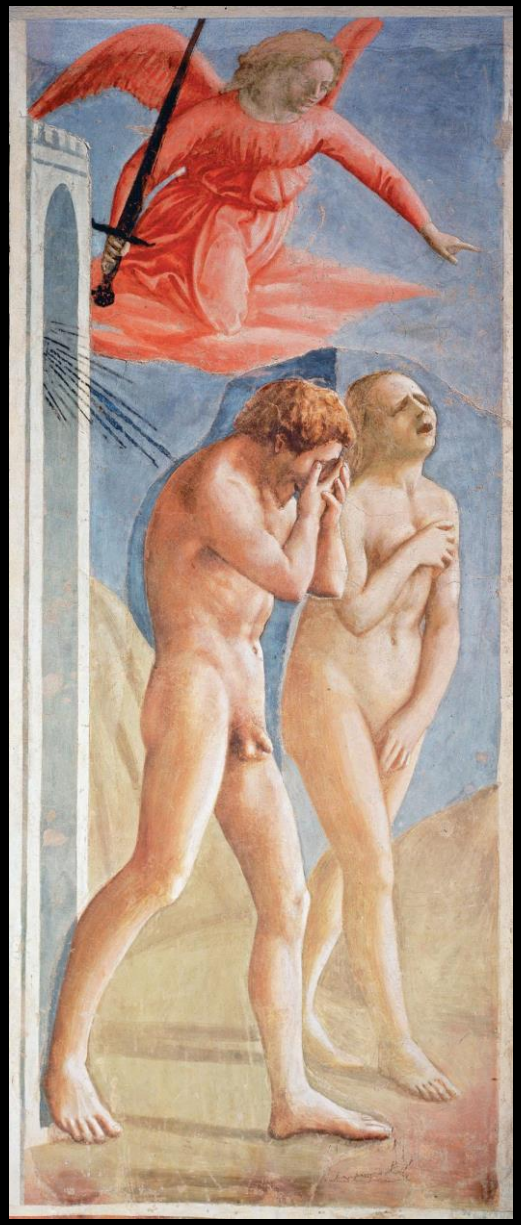
The *Tribute Money* is particularly remarkable for its early use of both linear and atmospheric perspective to integrate figures, architecture, and landscape into a consistent whole.



Jesus, and the apostles surrounding him, form a clear central focus, from which the landscape seems to recede naturally into the far distance. To foster this illusion, Masaccio used linear perspective in the depiction of the house, and then reinforced it by diminishing the sizes of the distant barren trees and reducing the size of the crouching Peter at the far left. The central vanishing point established by the orthogonals of the house corresponds with the head of Jesus. The cleaning of the painting in the 1980s also uncovered Masaccio's subtle use of color to create atmospheric perspective in the distant landscape, where mountains fade from grayish-green to grayish white.

Linear perspective satisfied the Renaissance craving for an exact and accurate description of the physical world. It also imposed a fixed relationship- both in time and space- between the image and the eye of the beholder, making the latter the exclusive point of reference within the spatial field and thus, metaphorically, placing the individual at the center of the macrocosm.

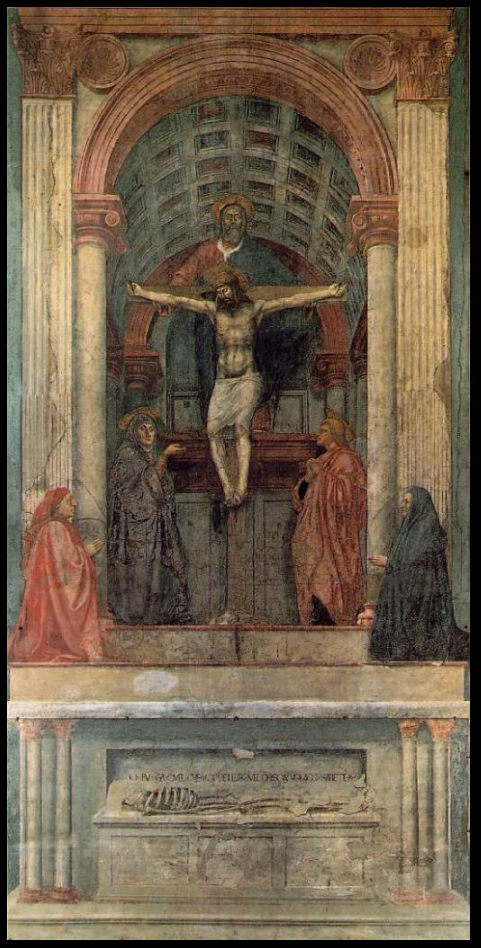
Medieval artists had little reason to simulate the world of the senses, a world they regarded as the imperfect reflection of the divine order. For Renaissance artist-scientists, however, the visible, physical world could be mastered only if it were understood.



Left: Massacio. *The Expulsion of Adam and Eve,* from the Brancacci Chapel, Florence, c. 1427, fresco

Right: Masolino. *Adam and Eve,* from the Brancacci Chapel, Florence, c. 1427, fresco

Masaccio's "revolutionary approach to the human figure can be seen by a comparison of his Adam and Eve with those of Masolino, his master under whom he worked at the Brancacci Chapel. In Masolino's *Temptation* Adam and Eve stand by the forbidden tree- here a fig tree- gazing at each other as Eve prepares to taste the fruit. Masaccio's *Expulsion*, in contrast, is fraught with expressive tension. Adam and Eve are expelled from Eden by the sword-bearing, foreshortened avenging angel above them and by God's angry voice portrayed as rays of light emanating from the gate of Paradise.



INNOVATION and EXPERIMENTATION:

LATE GOTHIC and EARLY RENAISSANCE ART

(Giotto and Masaccio) ACTIVITIES and REVIEW

PRESENTATION #1:

Who created these works? Analyze ways in which the artist treats the human figure and space in innovative or experimental ways.

PRESENTATION #2:

Who created these works? Analyze ways in which the artist treats the human figure and space in innovative or experimental ways.