

The Mystery of DaVinci's *Virgin of the Rocks*

by Andrew Linnell

Leonardo da Vinci, over a 25 year period, completed two paintings both called the *Virgin of the Rocks* (or the *Madonna of the Rocks*). One can be seen at the Louvre in Paris (right, below) while the other hangs in



National Gallery



Louvre

the National Gallery, London (left, below). While it was uncommon for Renaissance painters to copy their own works, some art historians have surmised that Leonardo made a copy for extra income. In this paper we will explore the mysteries surrounding this painting. We'll look at why there are two and what they together reveal of Christian mysteries known to Leonardo.

While scholars have debated which painting is the original, the debate on the content of the painting is surprisingly light. Today it is generally agreed that the version in the Louvre (right) is the original. Few have questioned of the significance of the depicted scene or its characters. As we shall see, such an investigation reveals marvelous mysteries about the original painting and how these mysteries flowed into the Florentine schools fostered by the de Medici family.

Why are there two similar paintings?

Historical perspective

We find young Leonardo da Vinci had been schooled in Florence. Although he was the illegitimate son of a notary from the village of Vinci, he had shown a remarkable ability for learning. By the age 12 Leonardo is enrolled in Florence's best artistic workshop, that of Andrea del Verrocchio where his student colleagues include Sandro Botticelli, Domenico Ghirlandaio, Pietro Perugino and Lorenzo di Credi. The next generation of apprentices included Michaelangelo and Raphael. Most of these painters, for example Perugino, later have their own school and often the best students studied also with Leonardo. This includes Ambrogio da Fossano Bergognone (aka Borgognone), Bernardino Luini, and Bernardino di Betto (aka Pinturicchio).

During the time Leonardo studies in Florence, he is exposed to the Medici (Lorenzo the Magnificent) household and its related schools some of which were secret due to the teachings which might have been deemed heretical in those times. Not more than 250 years earlier the Cathars had been exterminated and the first Inquisition was still active rooting out any philosophical remains of the Cathars and other heretics. Leonardo was admitted as a member of the Garden of San Marcos, a group that discussed the teachings of Marsilio Ficino and John Argyropoulos. Marsilio ran the Medici's Plato Academy at Careggi and taught not only Plato but other Greek and Egyptian philosophers while John Argyropoulos, from Constantinople, was a renowned Aristotelian scholar and alchemist. Even Marsilio, perhaps the most respected intellectual of the Florentine district, ran afoul with the church because of his writings on Hermetic Magic and Astrology. Only a strong defense acquitted him of heresy charges and a possible death sentence.

In 1480, the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception requested three paintings to be completed by December 8th, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. Giacomo del Maino was first commissioned for these three paintings that were to include a central Virgin and Child with angels and two side panels also with angels. Giacomo for some reason withdraws, unable to complete in time. With the door opened, Leonardo, who had arrived in Milan in 1482 from Florence to accept the position of court artist for the Duke of Milan, offers his original *Madonna of the Rocks* which he had begun in Florence. Apparently the Confraternity liked the painting but wanted changes. Leonardo and the monks came to some agreement for a new painting and the work commenced.

Rather than altering the original, Leonardo employs his students, the de Predis brothers, to paint a new but slightly modified version. He draws the outlines (recently additional outlines¹ were found underneath the paint), periodically consults, and likely participates at times. But, true to Leonardo's reputation, this painting takes much longer than expected to be completed. In fact, Ambrogio de Predi finally completes his portion of the work 16 years later just after the 2nd Italian War breaks out. The war had caused Leonardo to flee Milan with his other paintings. We know the French troops destroyed Leonardo's unfinished horse sculpture using it for target practice. Now a legal dispute ensues as the surviving de Predis brother Ambrogio (his brother Evangelista died in 1491) wanted payment. But the Confraternity does not want to accept the painting "as is". The dispute was finally settled on April 27th, 1506, with the requirement that Leonardo would return to Milan within two years and complete the painting. Since he was paid for this in 1507, he apparently did put the requested finishing touches on the work. These finishing touches are clear as we shall see later. This second painting was installed in the Confraternity in 1508.

About 275 years later the church of San Francesco Grande in Milan later sells the painting to a Gavin Hamilton who takes it to England. After passing through various collections, it was bought by the National Gallery in 1880. The original is not mentioned in any writings until it shows up in the French Royal collection of Fontainebleau in 1625. Why does it show up there? Like the Mona Lisa, Leonardo likely had carried this painting with him wherever he went. In 1516, he accepts a commission from the King Francois I of France to be his chief painter, engineer, and architect. After Leonardo dies at Clos Lucé, France, on May 2, 1519 at 67, his paintings then became the property of the royal family.

Why Was the Original Rejected?

Most observers of these paintings would state that the central figure of both paintings is the Virgin Mary and one of the children is Jesus. The London copy has the second child, the one on the left with a staff, identified as the infant John the Baptist. The fourth character is claimed by the National Gallery to be Uriel. Our current Christian theology accepts this perspective but is this what Leonardo had intended? If we compare the two paintings looking for differences between the original (right) and the copy (left), the differences reveal much of the mystery about the original.

The most obvious of the differences is the pointing hand of the archangel on the right in the original version at the Louvre. She has her left hand around the child next to her and with her right hand she points at the other child. This pointing hand is missing in the copy! We also notice that her red cloak and green top in the original has been transformed into a colorless garment with a dull blue cape. Her active role has been altered to a passive one. Why was this done? Why, in the copy, was this archangel seen as Uriel? Was it in respect to tradition of the Middle Ages where Uriel is the archangel of mid-summer (each season was led by an archangel) and the festival for John the Baptist was celebrated on June 25th? The National Gallery claims that its painting depicts a scene in an apocryphal story when the holy family while fleeing to Egypt meets John and Uriel in the desert. But the National Gallery fails to tell us what apocryphal story this is and if it existed in Leonardo's time. A search of known apocryphal books did not find this scene.² Although halos in the copy make it clear who is Mary and who is Jesus, we cannot reach the same conclusion about identity of the characters of the original.

Let's re-examine the question of which child is Jesus? While not discussed in public documents of the National Gallery, one can see that the two halos and the "St. John" staff in the copy are painted on top of the varnish that is used to protect the paint once a painting was completed. Assuming that the infant on the left is John the Baptist, the process of elimination identifies the child on the right as Jesus. However, these are clearly the finishing touches required by the Confraternity that Leonardo applied in order to receive his portion of the commission. We must ask "are the identities in the copy the same as Leonardo intended?"

DaVinci and The Mysteries

Obviously, given his renown as an engineer, a scientist, a painter, and a philosopher, we can conclude his schooling involved far more than learning painting techniques. Who else besides Verrocchio were his teachers? Cosimo and Lorenzo de Medici fostered various Florentine schools, funding commissions for artists and translators of mystical documents of which Leonardo da Vinci had access during his youth. The Platonic Academy was a 15th-century study group in Florence. It was sponsored by Lorenzo's father, Cosimo de' Medici, and led by Marsilio Ficino who, it is said, "was in touch with every major academic thinker and writer of his day, and the first translator of Plato's complete extant works into Latin."³ Leonardo took part in this academy and was exposed to these thinkers who included many Neo-Platonists, alchemists, and mystics.

From the National Museum of Science and Technology we read "His [Leonardo's] name appears [in 1472] in the account book of the painters' confraternity, the Company of St. Luke: this means that he is working as painter in his own." It also means that he participated in their studies of Luke's Gospel and mysticism from whence many attempted to paint the relationship of Greek mythology to Christianity. Leonard attends academies, workshops and, above all, the Medici household, where he makes the acquaintance of many mystics and learned men in addition to the philosopher Marsilio Ficino."⁴ In 1480 Leonardo became "a member of the Garden of San Marcos run under the patronage of Lorenzo the Magnificent"⁵ where his exposure to the best minds of Europe was further enhanced.

Why secrecy was necessary

Although the de'Medici family provided some insulation from the attack of heresy hunters, they still needed to be careful. Neoplatonic philosophers lectured freely for nearly 50 years. But Marsilio Ficino's translations of Plato, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Plotinus, and other Neoplatonists from Greek to Latin as well as the influential translations of Hermes Trismegistus' *Corpus Hermeticum* brought concepts the Church found dangerous. In 1492, disturbed by Ficino's teachings, especially on Hermetic magic and astrology, the heresy hunters put him on trial. Although acquitted, this shakes the foundation of the various Florentine

schools. Heresy hunting continues with Giordano Bruno being burned at the stake in Rome in 1600 for his heliocentric scientific writings.⁶

Influence of Greek philosophy on Early Christian Mysteries

Today, our scientific view of the human no longer accepts St. Paul's view of the human as being comprised of body, soul, and spirit. To take us back to Leonardo's time, we need to understand the Greek model of the members of the human being in order to grasp the meaning of the characters' hands. We have seen that Plato, Aristotle, and other Greek philosophers would have been well known to Leonardo. Neoplatonic philosopher Georgius Gemistos Plethon, "whose discourses upon Plato and the Alexandrian mystics so fascinated the learned society of Florence that they named him the second Plato."⁷ Plethon's successor, Marsilio Ficino tried to synthesize Christianity and Platonism, something Mani⁸ (210–276 AD, the founder of Manichaeism, a Gnostic-Christian religion) had tried to accomplish. As such, we find many examples of Greek mythology in Florentine art of this period. Gnostic and Zoroastrian perspectives were undoubtedly studied. Writing in 1492, Marsilio proclaimed, "This century, like a golden age, has restored to light the liberal arts, which were almost extinct: grammar, poetry, rhetoric, painting, sculpture, architecture, music... this century appears to have perfected astrology."⁹ Despite this, the Church still held its authority and right to put to death whoever could be proven to be a heretic.

It was Saint Paul who placed Dionysius the Areopagite in charge of The School of Athens where Plato and the Mysteries had been taught. Dionysius adds the Christian Mysteries to this legacy. Although the school was essentially closed in 529 AD by the Roman Emperor Justinian (because he despised all pagan mysteries),¹⁰ its writings were well respected and continued to be used. The authenticity of "the Dionysian writings and their mystical teaching were universally accepted throughout the Christian East. St. Gregory Palamas (1296-1359) in referring to these writings calls the author 'an unerring beholder of divine things'."¹¹ Emperor Justinian was effective in thoroughly destroying the books and temples related to the Mysteries and permanently separating them from Christianity's evolving theology.

Fundamental to Greek philosophy was the relationship of the 4-fold human to the 4-foldness of Nature and its 4 elements. These are [physical body, life body, sentient body, and ego], [mineral, plant, animal, and man], and [earth, water, air, and fire]. The famous philosopher Plutarch [46 - 120 AD] writes "But we have

a ridiculous fear of death, we who have already died so many deaths, and still are dying! For not only is it true, as Heraclitus used to say, that the death of *fire* is birth for *air*, and the death of *air* is birth for *water*, but the case is even more clearly to be seen in our own selves: the man in his prime passes away when the old man comes into existence, the young man passes away into the man in his prime, the child into the young man, and the babe into the child. Dead is the man of yesterday, for he is passed into the man of to-day; and the man of to-day is dying as he passes into the man of tomorrow. ... Our senses, through ignorance of reality, falsely tell us that what appears to be is.”¹²

We will see a bit later how this 4-foldness appears in the original painting. Leonardo's teachers, Ficino and Argyropoulos, would have taught that the human is a microcosm of the macrocosm and that each person is composed of Earth, Water, Air, and Fire. These elements represent the physical body, the life body, the sentient body, and the ego. We will see how Leonardo uses this in his painting. But now we must examine another Mystery stream active at this time, namely the Cabbala and the expectation of two Messiahs.

The Story of the Two Messiahs

Zohar Books

In the Jewish Cabalistic traditions, the Zohar books also contain reference to Two Messiahs. The Zohar books first appeared in Spain in the 13th century and within fifty years it was being quoted by many Kabbalists, including the early 14th Century Italian writer Menahem Recanati whose mystical work includes *Perush 'Al ha-Torah* (published in Venice in 1523) most certainly were read within the circles of the learned of Florence in Leonardo's time. In the Zohar we find "The Messiah, which is the Son of Joseph will be made one with the Son of David, but he will be killed" Similarly, elsewhere it is written "Another Messiah, the son of Joseph, will unite himself with the Messiah, the son of David. But the son of Joseph will not remain in life, he will be killed and will become alive again, when the little hill receives life upon the great hill." Some interpretations use "little Rome" and "great Rome" here. Interpretations include:

- "I do not know that we need come to any decision as to the number of Messiahs ; it does not look in the Zohar as if they can mean states of one personality, which is the opinion of the editors, for in

another place the text explains by an accident what is meant by a previous identification : it is said that the Messiah who is the Son of Joseph will be united - that is, in his mission - to the Son of David but will be slain.”¹³

- “It is said that the Messiah who is the son of Joseph will be united – that is, in his mission – to the son of David but will be slain. The one is the conqueror of the Great Rome, the other of the Little Rome – whatever the distinction between these cities may signify.” ¹⁴
- “Both [the Son of Joseph and the Son of David] are mentioned in the Talmud; but one of the “omissions” given in the first appendix to the first part of the Zohar affirms that last two are one. Certain Midrashim are said to agree, but the distinction for what it is worth remains perfectly clear in the Talmudic references, according to which the Son of Joseph will suffer a violent death and be succeeded by the Son of David. Elsewhere in the Zohar it is denied that the Son of Joseph will be killed because he is compared to an ox and evil has no hold over him. ... The fact that he will die is reaffirmed a few folios subsequently. It is said also that one of these deliverers [Messiahs] is poor and mounted on an ass, while the other is the first born of a bull. ¹⁵

Dead Sea Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls were first discovered in 1947 with more found through 1979 in eleven caves in and around the ancient Essene settlement called Qumran. The dates when the Dead Sea Scrolls were being written was ascertained to have started around 150 BCE and continued until the Roman army dispersed the Essenes in 70 CE, a period of 220 years. During those years 872 scrolls were written in Hebrew and Aramaic by the initiates of Qumran. The time of Jesus is normally thought to be between 0 and 33 CE but historians have placed this anywhere between 6 BCE and 36 CE. We know that the Great Temple of the Jews in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman army in 70 CE after a Jewish revolt. Apparently the scrolls were hidden in caves when the Essenes were warned that this army was marching to Qumran to destroy them as well.

These scrolls reveal that two messiahs had either been expected or experienced. One was to be of a priestly lineage and one of a kingly. “Its members [Essenes of Qumran] were looking forward to a 'Messiah of Israel' and a 'Messiah of David', who resemble the priestly and kingly descendants.”¹⁶ One of the

documents called the Damascus Document says "The Messiah, which is the Son of Joseph *will be made one* with the Son of David, but he will be killed..." [my italics].

In these scrolls, the term "Messiah" can change from plural to singular further suggesting that two will be united into one. Below is a list of where in these scrolls two messiahs are mentioned:

- Mention of the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel. Rules of Community 9:11-14 p.13
- Mention of the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel. Damascus 19:11 p.45
- Messiah of Aaron and Israel. Damascus 22:1 p.46
- Messiah of Aaron and Israel. Q266 frag. 18 col.13 line 12

We also find in Manuscript A, Fragment 3 of 4Q286-287 (scroll entitled "The Chariots of Glory"), that some time after the two have been made into one that "the Holy Spirit will settle upon His Messiah."¹⁷ This passage compares to Isaiah 11:2 "The Spirit of the Lord would settle on Him" and to John 1:32-33 "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him [his cousin] except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'" Keep in mind this change in Jesus' entelechy when pondering the significance that the Baptism had to the so-called Heretics.

Old Testament

These passages of the Dead Sea Scrolls reopened a debate about the meaning of this passage from Ezekiel 37, "The word of the Lord came again unto me, saying, moreover, thou Son of Man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, for Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions. Then take another stick, and write upon it, for Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and for all the house of Israel his companions. And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand."¹⁸ This passage implies that two branches (sticks) will become one in the Messiah. Unlike Abraham from whom came many nations, Jesus reverses process of creating new streams to begin the process of fusion, of uniting all of humanity.

In addition to Ezekiel, there is Balaam's prophecy from Numbers 24 "I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near. There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel"¹⁹ which many have interpreted as indicating Two Messiahs, one as a star, that is of the heavens, and one as a scepter, that is of the earth. And these two shall merge to make the proper earthly vessel for 'Him'. This passage suggests that the Messiah would have sources from the pure beginnings of Man (the star out of Jacob) and from the heights of what Man had accomplished, that is, from the kingly side (the scepter out of Israel).

Anthroposophy

The concept of Two Messiahs rests quietly for several centuries until Rudolf Steiner brought the knowledge of the two Messiahs to public awareness in the 1909 lecture cycle now published as *According to Luke*. As an introduction he says, "Today I will have to tell you something that you will not find in the Gospels. The Akashic record chronicles events whose effects and consequences are described in the Gospels, although the Evangelists could not report the events themselves. You will understand the Gospel accounts better by learning what the Akashic record reveals about them."²⁰ Steiner goes on to describe how the Gospels of Luke and of Matthew describe quite different stories of different families, one from Bethlehem (Matthew's story) and one from Nazareth (Luke's story). Each family has a child named Jesus. He reveals how in the merging of these two children later in life, a confluence of Zoroastrian and Buddhist streams is achieved. I will refer to these as the Matthew Jesus and the Luke Jesus.

The Matthew Jesus is born first. His lineage is through King Solomon to David and then back to Abraham. The Three Magi, or Zoroastrian wise men, come to honor the rebirth of their great initiate, Zarathustra. We learn in the lecture cycle that Zarathustra had revealed, during the great Persian culture epoch, the outer divinity and had pointed to the sun wherefrom the Ahura Mazda would descend eventually to earth. Zarathustra incarnated several times including as Zarathas (or Nazarathos) who was Pythagoras's teacher. Zarathustra had perfected both his astral and his etheric bodies so that he was able to offer these to Hermes Trismegistus and Moses respectively thereby affecting both Egyptian and Hebrew culture. When he later incarnates as Jesus, in order to gather his forces for his mission, his parents are led to Egypt. Later, after Herod had died, the family returns but, still fearful, they settle in Nazareth rather than Bethlehem.

Steiner points out that the Luke Jesus and John the Baptist must have been born after the Matthew Jesus since there is no Slaughter of the Innocents in Luke's story. The family is from Nazareth but must go to Bethlehem to be enrolled for taxation. At the birth, it is shepherds that, through a clairvoyant vision, experience the heavenly hosts and thus go to find and honor this child. This is a story not about outer wisdom and kings, but about inwardness and love. Luke traces this child's ancestry back to Adam through Nathan, a priest and son of David. Steiner discusses how the Gautama Buddha incorporates his own "Nirmanakaya" body, that is, the body a bodhisattva attains after enlightenment as a Buddha, with the Luke Jesus. This Nirmanakaya, according to Steiner, can "pervade" another human being especially through an astral body union. In the radiance of the Nirmanakaya, the angelic hosts could be revealed to the shepherds. This Luke Jesus, Steiner describes, had never incarnated. It was the purity of Adam before the Fall. While Adam gained access to the Tree of Knowledge, the Tree of Life was withheld. Thus, a portion of Adam's etheric was withheld. The Luke Jesus expressed this etheric purity of the Tree of Life.

The New Testament

Only two of the four gospels contain Christmas stories. The other two essentially begin at the Baptism. John, for example, follows the Logos from its spiritual beginnings with God, through the making of the world and of all things through the Logos, until finally the Logos becomes flesh. After this Prologue, John's gospel begins with a brief description of the witness, John, and then the baptism. For John, the work of the Christ, the Logos, only begins after the baptism.

If we compare the stories of Matthew and Luke we find numerous irresolvable differences. While both stories have a Mary and a Joseph, in Matthew the theme is about the kingly aspect of Jesus whereas in Luke it is about the pure and priestly. In Matthew three presumably Zoroastrian Magi or Kings are guided by a star that leads them to the birthplace of the child. In Luke it is poor shepherds who come alerted by a heavenly host. When the lineage of Jesus is traced, Matthew goes through Solomon who was son of and king after David. But Luke's lineage is through David's son Nathan who was a priest. Matthew traces the ancestors through 42 generations to Abraham while Luke reveals 77 generations back to Adam. The angel speaks to Joseph in Matthew's story while in Luke's it is to Mary. Matthew has the family living in Bethlehem while Luke has them living in Nazareth but going to Bethlehem to be enrolled for tax purposes

and while there giving birth. Mary of Luke's gospel visits Elizabeth who is six months farther along in her pregnancy with John the Baptist. Matthew does not mention this visit but does discuss how King Herod, afraid of a child king, has all children 2 years of age and younger slaughtered in the district which includes Bethlehem. Matthew's Joseph is warned and takes the family into Egypt. After Herod's death, they return but out of fear of Herod's son, the new brutal king Aschelaus, they settle in the Galilean town of Nazareth. Luke's gospel makes no mention of the slaughter of the innocents and, in his story, the family can safely return to their home in Nazareth after the birth.

One way to reconcile these stories is to accept both as valid. Historians place King Herod's death in April 4BCE. Thus the Matthew story with its slaughter of the innocents must have its Jesus born earlier in 4BCE. If the Luke story, which has no slaughter of innocents and no mention of Herod, is indeed a different story than in Matthew, then it could take place after Herod's death possibly still in 4BCE. Since it is stated that Jesus Christ died in 33 CE at the age of 33, then this would have the Luke Jesus born in 1 BCE or as late as 1 CE. Thus the kingly Matthew Jesus is between almost one and as many as four years older than the priestly Luke Jesus.

If we take these two stories to be different families, different births, then we must find the point called for by the prophetic texts where these two Jesus children are united. Leonardo left us clues for this as well.

Merging the two Messiahs

If we take these two stories to be different families, different births, then we must find the point where these two Jesus children are united as Ezekiel 37:17 states, "join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand." Leonardo left us clues for this as well and we can thank the art historian Paulina Leonard for this discovery (see Reference 8). She found that Leonardo left it to three of his students gave us those clues. And we find even more of his students participated in revealing this mystery.

Bergognone (aka Borgonone)

In his Milan workshop, studying under Leonardo was Ambrogio da Fossano Bergognone. The fresco below, now in Milan's St. Ambrogio Basilica, was completed in 1509. Recall that Leonardo needed to return to Milan in 1507 in order to finish version 2 of *Madonna of the Rocks* and thereby receive final payment from the Confraternity for his share.

Bergognone, a few months later, completes this alterpiece. Here we see the 12 year old Jesus of Luke's gospel in the center with the doctors of the temple. This boy is



radiant and placed highest of all with the arches acting as his halo. He sits in the chair of the high priest with his eyes on a second boy. This other Jesus is the kingly one whose birth is described in Matthew's gospel. He is departing wearing a similar but more faded red robe. Joseph, in the back left, is weeping. A distraught Mary reaches out to him with her left hand while her right grasps what could be interpreted as a burial shroud.

Bergognone is claiming that this boy from Matthew's gospel, perhaps at 14, has, during these 3 days in Jerusalem, completed the uniting with the other Jesus as foretold by the original *Madonna of the Rocks*! The elder Jesus has transferred with his Ego his kingly wisdom of the world to this otherwise pure and simple child. After this, the Jesus of Matthew's story will die as it no longer has within it the full 4-foldness to make it a viable human being. The Luke Jesus, now enriched with the pure and spiritualized essences and ego of the other Jesus, surprise not only the doctors but also his biological parents with his newfound wisdom.

Pinturicchio

Bernardino di Betto (1454-1513), called Pinturicchio (Little Painter due to his height) was a paid assistant of Perugino and a close acquaintance to Leonardo. Pinturicchio gets into this mystery with his version of *Christ Among the Doctors* in 1501. Here the 12 year old Jesus is in the center with a rich outfit adorned with a blue robe. The Temple doctors surround him. His hand gesture shows two fingers of his left hand raised and his right hand



points to the second finger. His bare feet firmly stand on the ground. Another very similar child is on the left with the clothes of a poor child but to show his connection to the first his outfit is the same blue color. This child is resigned to being led away by another child. Their feet no longer are in direct contact with the earth as they are covered by stockings of the same red color. Joseph and Mary have just arrived on the right in search of their child. Simon Cade Williams notes that in the Luini painting below the exact same hand gesture on Jesus as in Pinturicchio's²¹.

Luini

In addition to the painting by Leonardo's student Bergognone, we also find this interesting painting by another student, Bernardino Luini. As part of Leonardo's circle of students, Luini completes *Christ Among the Doctors* in 1515. Here we see Jesus as a teenager with the Temple doctors behind him. He holds up his left hand with two fingers



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raised and with his right hand he touches the second finger as if counting. His face could be saying “don’t you get it?” and with his hands saying “there were two.” It should also be noted that Leonardo’s signature appears on the back of this painting and that Luini had studied under Bergognone as well.

Bernardino de'Conti



Coming upon this painting "sealed the deal" for me. Bernardino was a student of Leonardo studying with him from 1470 to 1523, mostly in Milan. He was also a close friend of Ambrogio di Predis who we suspect was the chief painter of the second *Virgin of the Rocks*. His painting, *The Three Children*, is extraordinary for its similarity in positions to the original *Virgin of the Rocks*. But here, John the Baptist is clearly the child in the middle. Thus, he is revealing that neither of the other two children in the original *Virgin of the Rocks* are John the Baptist! Note the "halo" of the Jesus on the right - it is the nails used on the cross indicating that this child would be the one to hang on the cross. Why is John even depicted here? Because it will be at the baptism that the Christ spirit

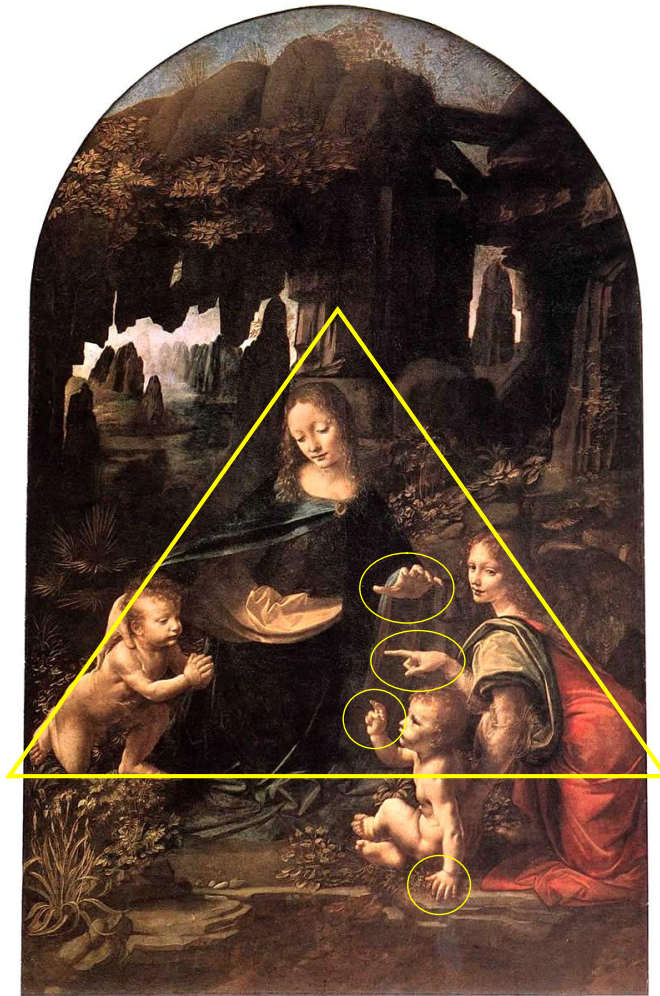
will enter Jesus of Nazareth who will already have gone through a mystery in the Temple in Jerusalem at age twelve when the two Jesus children will unite two streams of humanity.

John the Baptist



Lastly, Leonardo's own painting of St. John the Baptist completes this story. Historians claim he used his own pupil, Gian Giacomo Caprotti da Oreno, nicknamed Salai as John the Baptist.²² (This painting done c.1514 is found today at the Louvre). John points with two fingers of his left hand at his heart and with the index finger of his right hand at God. Again the face has a smirk that proclaims "I am revealing to you something you don't understand." Could the John here be implying that at the baptism, the entelechy of the merged Messiahs was changed once again with the incorporation of the Holy Spirit which descended from above? As Luke 3:22 states "This is my dearly beloved son; **today** I have begotten him." With the smirk, Leonardo seems to be directing this expression to the Church. In paintings Leonardo may have found a medium to embed the so-called heretical mysteries and yet retain deniability to avoid prosecution.

Analysis of the Original Painting



Sacred Geometry

It was a common Florentine practice to arrange the characters and the action within a central isosceles triangle. The woman in blue and gold occupies the central position of the composition. If any character is to be considered a spiritual being it would be this central character who is cloaked in the colors of the heavens, the rich deep blues with inner gold shining through. She can represent both Mary and a divine being at the same time. Her right hand receives through the shoulder of the child on the left and transfers through her heavenly means to the child on the right. The child on the right is not fully within with the

triangle. His left hand and his body are outside the triangle meaning that nothing of the physical body is part of the action. Only the head and the right hand of this child are within the triangle suggesting that only what is above will be received from the other child. The child on the right will receive the ego, that is, the spirit from the child on the left. The lineage of the child on the right is traced back by Luke to purity of Adam that was withheld in Eden and lacks kingly wisdom of earth. Rudolf Steiner calls this Adam Cadmon, within whom exists the purity of Man before the Fall.

Hand gestures

We see four hands on the right and two on the left. The child on the left has his two hands together in a prayerful gesture revealing only one hand. On the right, a fifth hand, namely the left hand of the kneeling character on the right, is mostly hidden behind the arm of child on the right. It is unlikely an archangel would be depicted as providing a gentle yet firm physical brace for the child on the right whose left hand rests on the earth just above the reflecting pool. Her gaze appears to be directed at the group's unseen reflection in the pool

Beginning with the left hand of the child on the right we see that since it rests on the earth suggesting that once the two children are combined this will be the physical body. In the Greek model, the physical body



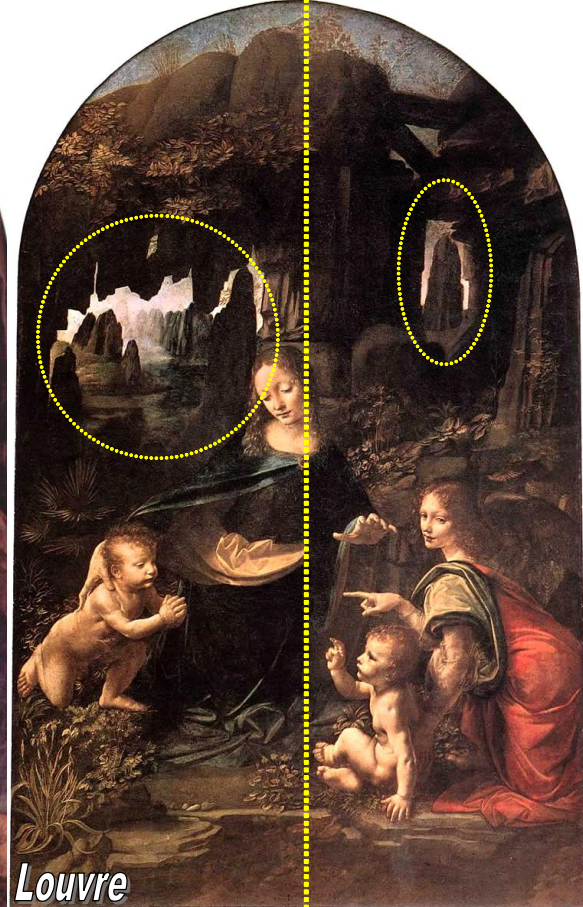
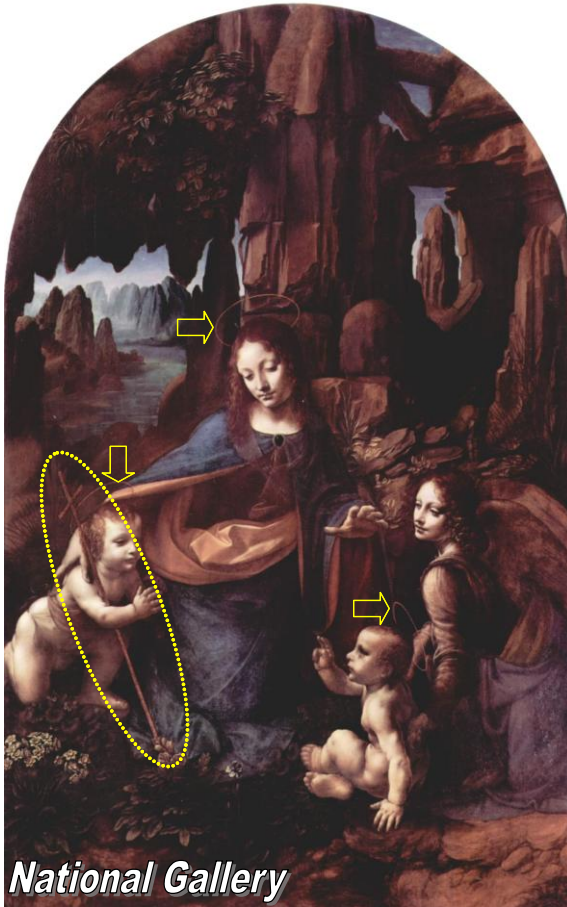
relates us to the Mineral Kingdom or the Earth element. His right hand is raised in a blessing gesture which we see in da Vinci's cartoon, *The Virgin with St. Anne*, below.

This further verifies that da Vinci did intend this younger Jesus to represent the one from Luke's Gospel. This right hand represents,

in Greek philosophy, the Life Body, Soma, which is related to the element Water or that which relates us to the plant kingdom in which life is found.

Going vertically, the next hand belongs to the archangel next to this child. She is pointing with her right hand at the other child. This is meant to be the action of this painting and is why it is central in the triangle. Applying the Greek model of the Human, this hand would represent the Astral Body which is related to the element Air and is the seat of consciousness. Just as the central female can represent the cosmic spirit, she can represent the cosmic soul. She points to the other child with whom this one will be made one.

Lastly, we come to the fourth hand, the left hand of the woman who is central in the composition. Her right hand transfers from the prayerful child on the left and bestows it to the child on the right. Its position, as the fourth element, represents the ego, or spirit, and in the Greek model relates to the element Fire. What Leonardo has portrayed here, using the Greek model of the 4-fold human, is that these two children,



although from separate births and parents, will be united. The ego from the child on the left will be merged with the child on the right.

The depictions claimed by the National Gallery place neither child with its mother. If the younger child on the right is Jesus, then why is he not with his mother? It is doubtful any renowned painter would swap the children so that its own mother's arm is not embracing it. This copy lacks the mystery wisdom depicted in the original.

What do the symbols tell us?

Symbolism was a common practice in the Florentine school and during the Renaissance. Let us examine the symbols used in the original (right), especially the foreground and background. What do these symbols tell us? We'll divide the original painting in half and ask what the symbols say about its respective half.

Both sides have openings revealing rock pillars. Assuming these backdrops are symbolic of past lives, then the child on the left has had many while the child on the right has had but one. This is consistent with Rudolf Steiner's work describing two Messiahs, or two Jesus children, where one emanates from the highest kingly line belonging to Zarathustra and the other from karmic purity of Adam Cadmon whose single rock pillar is depicted higher above the physical earth.

In the foreground of the original is a reflecting pool that is symbolic of the Hermes Trismegistus philosophy "as above, so below" where the macrocosm is to be found in the microcosm (the human) and vice versa. If we see these beings as in the spirit, then the placement of the pool just below the child's hand (which represents the physical) indicates that the Spirit finds its reflection in the physical. It appears that the archangel is gazing over the child on the right into this reflecting pool.

We notice that along the shore of the reflecting pool are some symbolic plants. The copy (National Gallery) fails to include the same symbolic plants and even the pool is not included. What do these symbolic plants suggest? The meaning of each plant that Leonardo has carefully selected and drawn is beyond the scope of this paper.

The Unsolved Mystery

We have attempted to show that the two children depicted in the original *Madonna of the Rocks* are the Two Messiahs, the kingly and the priestly ones as told in the gospels of Matthew and Luke respectively. The two feminine figures could then be the two Marys. However, the one on the right has developing wings which only archangels and higher beings have. If the blue Mary is the Cosmic Spirit, then who is the one on the right? Examining Leonardo's only other depiction of an archangel, namely Gabriel in the *Annunciation*, strongly suggests that this feminine figure is intended to be an archangel or a being becoming an archangel. While this archangel could be one of the other four key Dionysian archangels, namely Uriel, Gabriel, Michael, and Raphael, the fact that her wings are transparent and blend into the rocky background indicates that this is instead an angel who is in the process of becoming an archangel.



According to theological teachings, each human being has a guardian angel. When a human being achieves the final enlightenment, they no longer incarnate. Such was the case of the Gautama Buddha. Hence, they no longer require a guardian angel that otherwise helps the human from one incarnation to another. The Cathars, although Christian, believed in reincarnation as did the Platonists and other heretical sects. Could reincarnation be mentioned in the Bible? In the story of John the Baptist, Christ's disciples mention that Elijah was expected to come again before the Messiah. In Matthew 17:11-13 Christ answers them "Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands. Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist." If an angel, then

who is this angel? Some of the possible guardian angels include that of the Matthew Jesus, the Nathan Jesus, or even the Gautama Buddha's who Rudolf Steiner claims watched over the Nathan Jesus' birth.

If we accept Plato's view of reincarnation, as studied in the Florentine schools, then it becomes likely that the Matthew Jesus, because of its kingly lineage, would be seen as the reincarnation of the greatest of earthly kings. Which king might this be? Matthew's clue is the adoration of the Magi which implies that the spiritual lineage of this Jesus is Zoroaster or Zarathustra. Indeed, the background does suggest that the child on the left has had multiple previous incarnations.

Luke's Jesus, traced all the way back to Adam, could be said to have had no previous incarnations; thus, no karma. With the story of the Garden of Eden, the spiritual world withheld from humanity the Tree of Life



after Adam and Eve experienced the Tree of Knowledge. If this story is describing a spiritual experience, then these Trees are to be experienced in our Life body (recall the discussion on the 4 elements and water). By withholding the Tree of Life, this would mean that a part of Adam's Life body was withheld. Thus, with the Luke Jesus, we have a pure human presence, traceable back to Adam, who comes with no karma but also no knowledge of earthly ways but is full of the Tree of Life. Again, the backdrop confirms this with a single rock pillar suggesting only one prior incarnation.

Such a being would have appeared radiant, loving,

but also perhaps mentally retarded. With this about to be a singular incarnation, no guardian angel is necessary but a heavenly host watch over it. This makes the merger at the Temple even more meaningful.

It is the author's conjecture that this mysterious being is the guardian angel of the Zoroastrian-Matthew Jesus whose spirit merges with the Luke Jesus. Thus the scene of the original *Madonna of the Rocks* shows

the Two Messiahs with the kingly one being instructed by its angel of its future while the priestly one is in loving awe at what will take place. A cosmic Mary will, like a high priestess, assist in this coming merger. Then, at the Baptism, the body will be sacrificed to the Holy Spirit thereby releasing the kingly and priestly beings from further incarnation and promoting the kingly one's guardian angel to becoming an archangel..

Conclusion

We see depicted in the original version of *Madonna of the Rocks* two Messiahs from the books of Luke and Matthew. We see Leonardo has depicted on the left side the purity of Adam, untarnished by the Fall, as the Jesus of Luke's gospel. On the right is depicted the Jesus whose kingly lineage from David through Solomon is described in Matthew's gospel. As foretold in the Cabala and the Dead Sea Scrolls, this kingly Messiah will unite with the priestly Messiah of the left side later in life to complete preparations for the descent of the Holy Spirit into this body.

We find that Leonardo had likely become familiar with this theme through the schools of Ficino and Argyropoulos or through secretive schools left over from the Cathars or the Knights Templar. Leonardo may have found it unacceptable that Christianity had lost the so-called heretical understanding of what Christ was and is. To the Gnostics and other heretical sects, Christ did not enter Jesus until the baptism when the Holy Spirit descended to remain upon the bodily organization specially prepared for this event. In these heretical traditions, the human Ego that was in the Jesus of the Matthew story, then enters the Luke Jesus at age 12, and finally, at the baptism at age 30, the Holy Spirit unites so that God could become Man.

After the Roman perspective of Christianity was established by Constantine, the so-called heresies were purged and with Justinian the heretics were eliminated and their books destroyed. Although the Human was described by St. Paul²³ as being of body, soul, and spirit, over time the human was reduced to body and soul with the eternal quality of spirit coming only on Judgment Day to the righteous. Now, in our time, it has become a form of scientific heresy for a learned person to speak about spirit or soul as a reality. The concept of the Human has been reduced to body alone. No wonder it has become so difficult to see what this painting depicts!

Due to his sense of privacy and concerns for the heresy hunters, it is unlikely that one can find hard proof that Leonardo da Vinci was attempting to display an understanding of a theme of Two Messiahs that is implied in the Old Testament (*Ezekiel chapter 37*), and mentioned in the Zohar, and was later to be revealed in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Had Leonardo belonged to a secret society where such views were discussed, their membership and their knowledge was kept secret. Surely though, with access to the Florentine schools of Ficino and Argyropoulos, exposure to such themes was likely.

In the original version of *Madonna of the Rocks*, it is the author's conclusion that Leonardo da Vinci was portraying not only the Two Messiahs but also his understanding of how these two would be resolved into one person. Because of this portrayal in the original, it likely was strongly rejected by the Confraternity necessitating a second painting more acceptable to contemporary theology, especially if Leonardo was to be paid. Similarly inspired by the Mysteries, three of Leonardo's pupils depicted supporting scenes.

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Footnotes

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About the Author

Andrew Linnell is a retired veteran of the computer industry. He was CTO for OmegaBand in Austin, TX. He has MSE ('73) and BSE ('72) in Computer Engineering from the University of Michigan. His personal path has led him to deep studies of Theology, Anthroposophy, and early Christian Mysteries. His work has been published in *New View*, *Numinous*, and *Being Human*. As a computer scientist, Andrew has been working on the effects of technology on society through study of Masonic, Templar, and other so-called heretical Christian streams. His studies led him to the discovery he has described in this paper.

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