

The Mystery of Da Vinci's 'Madonna of the Rocks'

by Andrew Linnell

Why did Leonardo da Vinci and his students complete over a 25 year period two paintings both called the *Madonna of the Rocks* (or the *Virgin of the Rocks*)? One can be seen at the Louvre in Paris (right, below) while the other hangs in 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 had a copy made for extra income. In this paper we will explore how two similar paintings came to be and what mysteries surround these paintings and how they together reveal Christian history and mystery.



Today it is generally agreed that the version in the Louvre (right) is the original yet some scholars continue this debateⁱ. It is further agreed by most that Leonardo is the sole artist of Louvre painting while students, primarily Ambrogio de Predis, painted the London version. But discussion on the content of the painting is surprisingly light. Few have questioned the significance of the depicted scene assuming “the paintings illustrate a popular story of the time – that of Jesus meeting an infant John the Baptist, who is in the care of the angel Uriel. Both are on the run to evade Herod's massacre of innocents.”ⁱⁱ As we shall see, this investigation reveals marvelous Christian mysteries about the original painting that were rejected by the Confraternity. To support this conclusion, we shall see how the ancient Mysteries flowed into the Florentine schools fostered by the de Medici family and from there into this exquisite da Vinci painting.

Why are there two similar paintings?

In Leonardo's time, there was of course no photography to make painting posters to sell. Masterpieces were not copied except, in rare cases, by a pupil of the master. For example, a pupil-painted copy of the Mona Lisa exists at Madrid's Museo del Prado (the original is at the Louvre in Paris).ⁱⁱⁱ Leonardo was known to carry the Mona Lisa with him. Did he carry any other paintings in his journeys? Did his

students who remained behind work on copying selected paintings from memory? Were there financial or theological reasons for a copy? This paper will explore these questions but first, we must look at the historical situation at the time and place of Leonardo da Vinci.

Historical perspective

Although the illegitimate son of a notary from the village of Vinci, Leonardo da Vinci showed such remarkable talent that by the age 12 Leonardo was enrolled in Florence's best artistic workshop, namely that of Andrea del Verrocchio where his apprentice colleagues included Sandro Botticelli, Domenico Ghirlandaio, Pietro Perugino and Lorenzo di Credi. The next generation of apprentices included Michaelangelo and Raphael. Many 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). We shall see how these students play a prominent role in helping to reveal a mystery that Leonardo wanted to depict.

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, likely revealed 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 on April 25, 1483 and the work commenced. The contract set details of the painting including coloring for the characters.^{iv} For example, it states "Our Lady is the centre: her mantle shall be of gold brocade and ultramarine blue" and "her skirt shall be of gold brocade over crimson."^v

Rather than altering the original, Leonardo employs his student, Ambrogio de Predis (and his brother Evangelista), to paint a new but slightly modified version. He sketches outlines (recently additional outlines^{vi} were found underneath the paint), periodically consults, and likely participates at times. In fact, Leonardo is listed in the contract as the "master" while Ambrogio is listed as a "painter."^{vii}

Leonardo's team was given seven months to complete the painting and Ambrogio was paid 40 Lire a month until his total payments reached the agreed upon price of 800 Lire. At this point, work must have slowed for unknown reasons but financial reasons likely played a role. Beginning in 1490 and for five years, Ambrogio and Leonardo frequently wrote to the Confraternity stating that the centre-piece needed another 1,200 Lire to complete. The Confraternity offered them only 100 Lire so Leonardo and Ambrogio requested Ludovico Sforza, the Duke of Milan, to intervene on their behalf. The Duke proposed a compromise that the altarpiece should be assessed by experts and evaluated, for the final payment. Leonardo apparently indicated that if they could not agree on a suitable price, then they might withdraw the painting. After seven years, in 1490, it may be that most of the painting had been completed but apparently the Confraternity would not accept it "as is." With the death of his brother Evangelista in 1491, Ambrogio presses for additional payment but the Confraternity has an issue with something, perhaps a depiction in the painting.

During this legal battle, the 2nd Italian War breaks out in 1499. The war had caused Leonardo to flee Milan with his other paintings; no doubt with just reason as we know the French troops destroyed Leonardo's unfinished horse sculpture using it for target practice. With Louis XII of France now in charge of Lombardy, Leonardo gets the king to intervene on his behalf on March 9, 1503. Finally, 16 years after beginning, an evaluation was done of the painting to settle the law suit. On April 27, 1506, the evaluators deemed the work to be incomplete and Leonardo himself was requested to finish it within two years. Since he was paid for this in 1507, he apparently did put the requested finishing touches on the work. These finishing touches are the halos and the St. John staff that are painted on top of Ambrogio's finishing varnish. This second painting was finally installed in the Confraternity on August 18, 1508. By October 23, 1508, Ambrogio had been paid.

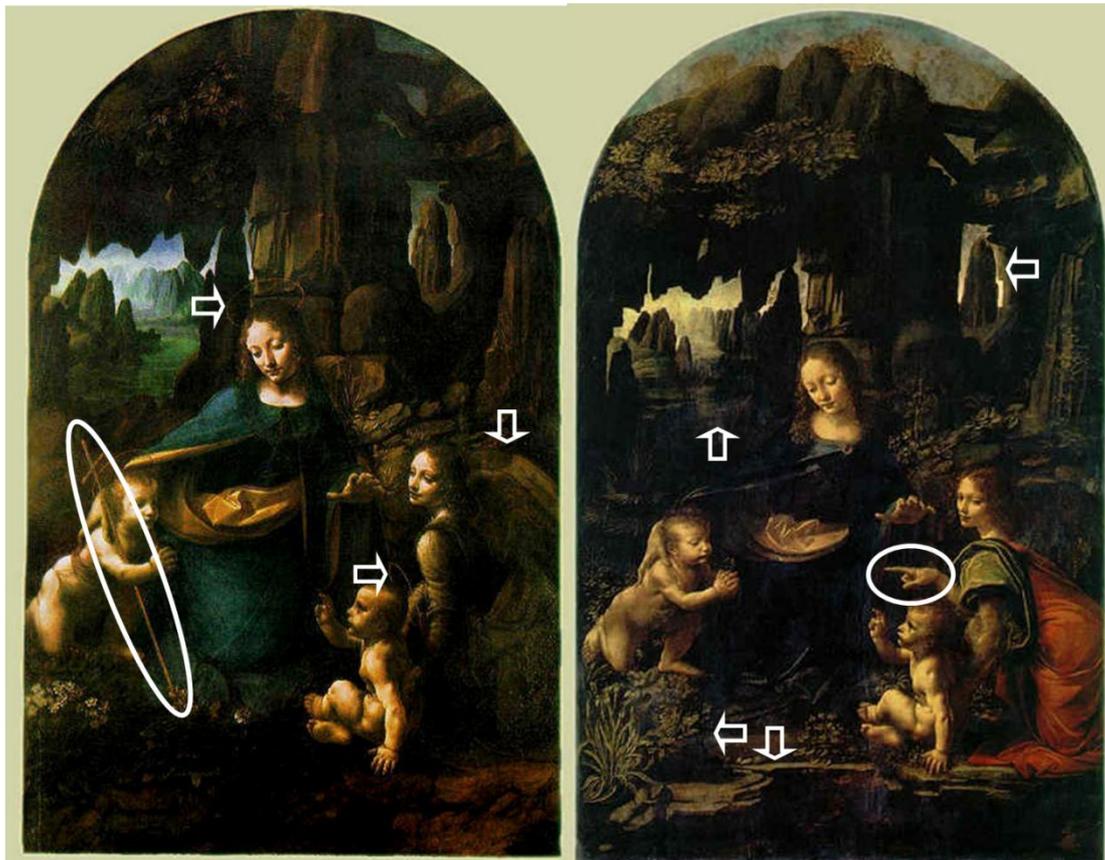
About 275 years later, Count Cicogna, the administrator of the religious body which succeeded the Confraternity at the church of San Francesco Grande in Milan, sells this second painting to a Gavin Hamilton who takes it to England. After passing through various collections, it was bought by the National 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 winged fourth character is claimed by the National Gallery to be Uriel. Our current Christian theology accepts this perspective but, as we shall see, this is not what Leonardo had intended in the original! If we compare the two paintings looking for differences between the original (right) and the copy (left), the differences reveal a profound mystery.

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 identified as Uriel? Was it in respect to a tradition of the Middle Ages where Uriel is the archangel of mid-summer (each season was thought to be 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.^{viii}



Coline Milliard of Artinfo UK wrote in an article published August 22, 2011, "It's extremely difficult to tell who is who in this painting, especially of the little boy on the left-hand side in the Louvre picture. John the Baptist has absolutely none of the normal attributes that he would have. He doesn't have a halo, he doesn't have his little scroll, he doesn't wear a camel skin tunic, and he isn't carrying a cross. He's also higher up in the picture than Christ. We are not sure as to what on earth he's doing there, or if it truly is John the Baptist. There's no mention of John the Baptist in the contract from 1493, so why he is there, and why he has been retained in the London picture is really a mystery."^{ix}

Let's re-examine the question of which child is Jesus in the National Gallery's copy. While not discussed in public documents of the National Gallery, one can see that the three halos and the "St. John's" staff in the copy are painted on top of the varnish that is used to protect the paint once a painting was completed. Since the infant on the left is identified as John the Baptist by the staff, then the process of elimination identifies the child on the right as Jesus. However, these additions most likely are the finishing touches required by the Confraternity that Leonardo applied in order to receive the commission.

We must ask are the identities in the copy the same as Leonardo intended in the original?

Da Vinci and The Mysteries

To approach these identities, we must first take a detour into what were the Mysteries and how did they relate to Christianity?

What were the Mysteries?

The sages of old speak of the Mysteries with the greatest reverence. The Mysteries were a secret wisdom in all societies everywhere. This "secret" existed side by side with the local religion. It shed light upon the highest questions.

What was concealed in them? What did they reveal? The spiritual eye allows one to see what the material eye sees, but in a higher light. Those initiated are in the position of a man who can see and who imparts his visual impressions to one born blind.

The Mysteries were seen as something dangerous. The way leading to the secrets of existence went through a world of terrors. Woe to him who tried to reach them unworthily. There was no greater crime than the "betrayal" of these secrets to the uninitiated. The "traitor" was punished with death and confiscation of property. Thus the training of an elect was conducted within the confines of a mystery center and via oral instruction. When the elect was deemed sufficiently prepared, the hierophant placed the candidate within the Holy of the Holies into a death state where they remained for 3 days during which they were free of their physical body. Then the hierophant called them back and they would resume life but wholly changed – so much so that they took on a new name.

Through initiation into the Mysteries, one could experience divine life but not for some personal curiosity rather to serve an archangelic being who led a particular group of people. From this higher vantage point, one understood Hermes Trismegistus' statement 'as above, so below.'

Cicero wrote "For among the many excellent and indeed divine institutions which your Athens has brought forth and contributed to human life, none, in my opinion, is better than its Mysteries. For by their means we have been brought out of our barbarous and savage mode of life and educated and refined to a state of civilization; and as the rites are called "initiations," so in very truth we have learned from them the beginnings of life, and have gained the power not only to live happily, but also to die with a better hope." — *Laws II, xiv, 36.*

By the time of Aristotle, the Mysteries had faded and their wisdom was in danger of being lost. We can see the mission of Alexander as one to build libraries to house what could be written down from the Mysteries. But living wisdom could only be passed on via the spoken word that arises through initiation and thereby renews the mystery. Clement's letter to his student in Alexandria describes how Mark had heard the new Christian mysteries that could not yet be written down and there was more to his gospel that was used only by those being perfected, that is, initiated into the new Mysteries.

The power of the Mysteries, although barely a shadow of what they formerly were, persisted for hundreds of years after Christ until the emperor Justinian (482 – 565 CE) destroyed their remnants. Pagan temples and shrines were gleefully destroyed by Christians and soldiers. Many of the early Christians felt that Christ had begun the New Mysteries so that the ancient Mysteries should be destroyed. Others felt the Mysteries were no longer appropriate as they supported elitism when it came to spiritual matters. They felt that Christ had brought an equality to participate in spiritual life for all. For some others, the Mysteries could lead only so far in consciousness and in spiritual heights and that faith was necessary thereafter. Thus, what was left of the Mysteries, to escape persecution, slipped into secrecy, into secret societies and brotherhoods.

Saint Paul writes often about mysteries in his letters such as 1Cr 2:7 "But we speak the wisdom of God in a **mystery**, the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world," and Eph 3:3,4 "How that by revelation he made known unto me the **mystery**; as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye

read, ye may understand my knowledge in the **mystery** of Christ,” and Eph 6:19 “that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the **mystery** of the gospel,” and lastly Col 1:26 “the **mystery** which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest.”

An active Inquisition = need for secrecy

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 would have been deemed heretical in those times. The torture and disbanding of the Knight Templar was a mere 150 years earlier. Less than 250 years before Leonardo's time, the Cathars^x had been exterminated. And the first Inquisition was still active in Italy rooting out any philosophical remains of the Cathars.

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 who accepted reincarnation among other heretical concepts while John Argyropoulos, from Constantinople, was a renowned Aristotelian scholar and alchemist.

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, Ficino, and Argyropoulos 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.”^{xi} 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 a 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 of the Florentine school attempted to paint the relationship of Greek mythology (and Greek Mysteries) 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.”^{xii} In 1480 Leonardo became “a member of the Garden of San Marcos run under the patronage of Lorenzo the Magnificent”^{xiii} where his exposure to the best minds of Europe was further enhanced.

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 on for another century or so with Giordano Bruno being burned at the stake in Rome in 1600 for his heliocentric scientific writings.^{xiv} Leonardo himself has some close calls with “the law”.

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. It is difficult for lay people and even for scholars to grasp and appreciate the conceptual influence of Plato, Aristotle, and other Greek philosophers had on 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.”^{xv} Plethon's successor, Marsilio Ficino tried to synthesize Christianity and Platonism, something Mani^{xvi} (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.”^{xvii} Despite this awakening, this Florentine Renaissance, the Church still held its

authority and right to put to death whoever could be proven to be a heretic. Did Leonardo find in his art a way to express his mystical teachings where he would not be burned for his sense of truth?

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 to the legacy of the ancient Mysteries the new Mysteries, that is, the Christian Mysteries. Although the school was essentially closed in 529 CE by the Roman Emperor Justinian (because he despised all pagan mysteries),^{xviii} 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 CE) in referring to these writings calls the author ‘an unerring beholder of divine things’.”^{xix} Emperor Justinian was effective in destroying the books and temples related to the Mysteries and permanently separating them from Christianity’s evolving theology. Leonardo’s teachers taught of the wholeness of the Mysteries. Could they foresee that theology and philosophy would follow science into materialism?

Fundamental to Greek philosophy was the relationship of the 4-fold human to the 4-foldness of Nature and its 4 elements. These are respectively:

- physical body, life body, sentient aka astral body, and body for the ego
- mineral, plant, animal, and human
- earth, water, air, and fire.

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 philosophy in his painting.

Now, with this foundation, we can approach another Mystery stream active at this time, namely the Kabbalah in which there was the expectation of two Messiahs. We shall see how in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew, this prophecy is fulfilled and how Leonardo attempts to depict this in his painting.

The Prophecy of Two Messiahs

Zohar Books

In the Jewish Kabbalistic traditions, the Zohar books contain reference to Two Messiahs. Although an oral tradition for centuries, 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 other Messiah] the Son of David, but he will be killed.” And later, “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.”

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 Essene initiates of Qumran. The time of Jesus is normally thought to be between 0 and 33 CE but historians have placed this as early as 6 BCE. 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.”^{xx} 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].

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.^{xxxi} 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 those called Heretics and upon Leonardo and his students.

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.”^{xxxi} This passage implies that two branches (sticks) will become one in the Messiah. A central concept for early Christianity is that the event on Golgotha represented the turning point in time. Whereas from Abraham came many nations, Christ Jesus reverses this process of creating new streams to begin the process of fusion, of uniting all of humanity. Thus, the two will be joined into one.

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”^{xxxi} 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).

Rudolf Steiner’s Anthroposophy

The concept of Two Messiahs rests quietly for several centuries until Rudolf Steiner brought the concept of two Messiahs to public awareness in a 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^{xxiv} 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.”^{xxv} 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 Kingly-Zoroastrian and Priestly-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 Mazdao would descend eventually to earth. Zarathustra incarnated several times including as Zarathas (or Nazarathos) who was teacher of Hermes Trismegistus (Egypt) who initiated Pythagoras (Greece)^{xxvi}. When he later incarnates as the Matthew Jesus, his parents are led to Egypt where he is able to gather his forces for his mission. Later, after Herod had died, the family returns but, still fearful, they settle in Nazareth rather than Bethlehem.^{xxvii}

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 Luke 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, also a son of David but a son who becomes a priest. Steiner discusses how the Gautama Buddha incorporates his own “Nirmanakaya” body, that is, the perfected ego 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 a union with the astral body. In the radiance of the Nirmanakaya, the angelic hosts could be revealed to the shepherds. This Luke Jesus, Steiner describes, had incarnated but once. It was the purity of Adam

before the Fall. While Adam gained access to the Tree of Knowledge, the Tree of Life was withheld. This means that a pure portion of Adam's etheric or life force was withheld, known in the Mysteries as Adam Cadmon. This Luke Jesus expresses the etheric purity of the Tree of Life.^{xxviii}

The New Testament

Only two of the four gospels contain Christmas stories. The other two, Mark and John, 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 – when is this becoming flesh? John's gospel begins with an introduction to the Logos followed by a description of the witness, John, and then the baptism. For John, the work of the Christ, the Logos, only begins after the baptism when the Logos becomes flesh and dwells among us.

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.

Historians place King Herod's death between 1 and 4BCE. Thus the Matthew story with its slaughter of the innocents must have its Jesus born before Herod's death. 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 must take place after Herod's death. Since it is stated that Jesus Christ died in 33 CE at the age of 33, then this would place the Luke Jesus birth in 1 BCE or as late as 1 CE. Thus the kingly Matthew Jesus is between one and as many as four years older than the priestly Luke Jesus.

One way to reconcile these stories is to accept both as valid. 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, these two Messiahs, are united. Leonardo left us plenty of clues for discovering this.

Merging the two Messiahs

As Ezekiel 37:17 prophesizes, "join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand," when and where does this merger occur? Leonardo does tell us when and where this merging takes place and we can thank the art historian Paulina Leonard for this discovery (see Reference 8). She found that Leonardo left it to his students to give us these clues.

Support from Leonardo's Pupils

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 now fading 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. These parents had traveled for two days from Jerusalem before they realized that they had left their 12 year old son, Jesus, behind in the city.



Bergognone is claiming that this boy from Matthew's gospel, aged 12 or more, has during these 3 to 4 days in Jerusalem, completed the merger with the other Jesus. (Rudolf Steiner states that the elder Jesus has transferred his ego and his kingly wisdom of the world to this otherwise pure and simple child. After this, the Jesus of Matthew's story will die as he no longer has within him the full 4-foldness to exist as a viable human being. The Luke Jesus, now enriched with the pure and spiritualized essences and ego of the other Jesus, surprises not only the doctors but also his biological parents with his newfound wisdom.)

At least two other students of Leonardo, namely Pinturicchio and Luini, are inspired to paint their own *Christ Among the Doctors*. Simon Cade Williams, in *New View*, Autumn 2009, has also linked these paintings to this mystery of the two messiahs.^{xxix}



Pinturicchio shows the merged child as the barefoot one with the halo surrounded by the doctors while the other child, wearing socks, is being led away. Barefeet suggests this one has his feet on the earth while the other one, in socks, is departing life. Like Bergognone, Pinturicchio's merged Jesus has his gaze on this departing Jesus. His hands seem to make clear symbolic gesture that there were two now joined as one.

Luini also uses the same hand gesture: the left hand saying



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“there were two” with the right hand saying “now we are merged as one.” Note that this hand gesture is different from the two finger gesture of the child on the right in Madonna of the Rocks. This two finger gesture was more fitting for da Vinci's contemporary theology as the dual fingers could be portraying Heaven and Earth together.

Part 2

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 [gold being the metal associated with the sun in alchemical traditions]. She can represent both Mary and a divine being at the same time. Her hands connect the two children: her right hand on the shoulder of the child on the left and her left is positioned over the head of the child on the right. The child on the right is partially within with the triangle. His left hand and his body, however, are outside the triangle meaning that they are not participating in the coming merger. Only the head and the right hand of this child are within the triangle suggesting that only 'what is above' will be received by this child. Following the indication given by Steiner and the research already indicated in this article, the child on the right will receive the ego, that is, the spirit from the child on the left as well as what that ego had perfected in his past lives. If this is so, then the child on the right has a lineage that is traced back by Luke to the purity of Adam that was withheld in 'Eden' and lacks any wisdom of a human life on Earth. Esoteric traditions have called this pre-Fall soul, 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 with the fingers pointing, along with the gold sash of the woman who is central in the composition, towards the top hand on the right; that is, to the left hand of the central woman. Her right hand draws through the back of the prayerful child on the left and bestows upon the child on the right with what her left sleeve encompasses. Her left hand, the fourth hand vertically on the right, represents the ego, or spirit, the highest and fourth principle in Man. This is transferred.

Continuing vertically, the next hand within the background of the sleeve belongs to the archangelic being next to the child on the right. She is pointing with her right hand at the other child. This is meant to be an important gesture of this painting and is notably missing in the copy. Applying the Greek model of the Human, this hand would represent the element Air or represent the astral body, the seat of consciousness, the base for the soul and its wisdom. She points to the other child whose perfected astral body will be made one with that of the child by her side.

Who is she? By comparing her to Leonardo's Gabriel, the argument that she is an archangel can be made.



It also could be argued that if the two children are the two messiahs that she could be the mother of the child next to her. But she has wings. Her gaze appears to be directed at the group's unseen reflection in the pool. Why? Perhaps because the human world mirrors the spiritual and this being can only see through the reflection of the watery element. We shall have to leave her as an unsolved

mystery for now.

Third vertically (downward) is the right hand of the child on the right. It is raised in a blessing gesture which we also see in da Vinci's cartoon, *The Virgin with St. Anne*. As mentioned, the two fingers

together can represent the combining of Heaven and Earth. It also could be symbolic that “you and I will be together.” This third hand represents, in Greek philosophy, the element water which in turn represents the life body, soma. This relates us to the plant kingdom in which life is found.

Lastly, the left hand of the child on the right rests on the earth suggesting that once the two children are combined this will be the physical body that will carry the merged two on Earth. In the Greek model, the physical body relates us to the Mineral Kingdom or the Earth element.

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 and its treasures from the child on the left will be combined with the child on the right. While this central figure could be Mary, the mother of the Matthew child, the one on the left of the picture, she, with her heavenly blue robe, more likely represents the cosmic spirit through whom the unification of the two messiahs takes place.

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. Many art historians point out that the upper right rock opening is a womb and phallic symbol. The other rock opening shows multiple 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 a being with karmic purity based on only a single life. The Mysteries, according to Rudolf Steiner, spoke of an Adam Cadmon who represents Adam's preserved purity before the fall. Thus, a 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 found in the microcosm (the human) and vice versa. (Picture shows floor tile depiction at the Cathedral of Siena). 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 feminine figure on the right is gazing over her child into this reflecting pool.

On the banks of the reflecting pool are symbolic plants. The plants in the Louvre's painting are accurate depictions from close observation of nature. But in the London painting, the plants are not accurate and likely were put there by Ambrogio without the symbolism or accuracy but merely from memory of some plants being depicted.



Conclusion

The scene of the original *Madonna of the Rocks* shows the foretold Two Messiahs. The central Madonna figure, like a high priestess, assists in this coming merger. We see depicted the two Messiahs from the books of Luke and Matthew and as foretold in the Kabbalah and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Leonardo has depicted on the right side the younger Jesus with the purity of Adam, untarnished by the Fall, described in Luke's gospel, while on the left is depicted the older Jesus whose kingly lineage from David through Solomon is described in Matthew's gospel. True to the prophecy in the Kabbalah and the Dead Sea Scrolls, this kingly Messiah will unite with the priestly Messiah later in life to complete preparations for the descent of the Logos Spirit into this body. Even later, at the Baptism, the Logos

Spirit will enter this specially prepared vehicle so that a God could become Man in order to then overcome death. We found that Leonardo inspired his pupils to paint their respective *Christ Among the Doctors* with expressive hand gestures as clues.

We find that Leonardo had likely become familiar with his theme through the schools of Ficino and Argyropoulos or through secretive schools in Florence 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 enters the 12 year old Luke Jesus, and finally, at the baptism at age 30, the Logos Spirit unites with Jesus so that God could become Man. Jesus then becomes Jesus-Christ.

After Constantine established the Roman perspective of Christianity, the so-called heresies were purged and with Justinian all forms of the ancient Mysteries were eliminated and their books destroyed. Although the Human was described by St. Paul^{xxx} as being of body, soul, and spirit, over time the human was reduced to body and soul with the eternal quality of spirit deemed to come 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 even soul as a reality. Little understanding is left of the difference between soul and spirit. The concept of the Human has been reduced to body alone. No wonder it has become so difficult to grasp 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 this theme of Two Messiahs. 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* and through the works of his students, 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 united 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. But before payment was made, Leonardo had to paint the John-the-Baptist staff and two halos on top of the varnish. Surely Leonardo laughed heartily at installing this clue.

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Endnotes

ⁱ <http://www.lairweb.org.nz/leonardo/rocks.html>

ⁱⁱ *ibid*

ⁱⁱⁱ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/24/the-isleworth-mona-lisa-c_n_1909552.html

^{iv} *The Complete Paintings of Leonardo da Vinci*, Angela Ottino della Chiesa, pp. 93

^v <http://www.lairweb.org.nz/leonardo/rocks.html>

^{vi} <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/hosted/leonardo/newsnov2005.pdf>, and

<http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/collection/news/newsitems/leonardo.htm>

^{vii} *The Complete Paintings of Leonardo da Vinci*, Angela Ottino della Chiesa, pp. 93-95

^{viii} A search through known apocryphal books did not find this scene mentioned.

^{ix} <http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/38417/analyzing-5-differences-between-da-vincis-twin-virgin-of-the-rocks-masterpieces>

^x Cathars believed in reincarnation, non-violence, non-hierarchical religious institution, and community based on loving your neighbor as your self. They developed their own path of initiation.

^{xi} http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marsilio_Ficino

^{xii} <http://www.museoscienza.org/english/leonardo/storia/>

^{xiii} *101 Things You Didn't Know about Da Vinci*, Cynthia Phillips and Shana Priwer, 2006, Adams Media, pg. 48, ISBN: 1598691015

^{xiv} <http://people.stu.ca/~hbzny/truth/feas2.htm>

^{xv} <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ficino>

^{xvi} [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mani_\(prophet\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mani_(prophet))

^{xvii} <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ficino>

^{xviii} http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Justinian_I

^{xix} http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pseudo-Dionysius_the_Areopagite

^{xx} http://www.livius.org/men-mh/messiah/messiah_14.html

^{xxi} <http://www.scribd.com/doc/3649853/Dead-Sea-Scrolls-Uncovered>

^{xxii} *Ezekiel* 37:15-17.

^{xxiii} *Numbers* 24:17

^{xxiv} People who have had near-death experiences describe seeing their whole life spread out before them like a panorama. Our life's story is recorded in our time body; that is, our life body. The Akashic Record is the book of all of these individual life records and more. It was known to ancient initiates and likely is the same as the biblical name the Book of Life.

^{xxv} *According to Luke*, Rudolf Steiner, 2001, Anthroposophic Press, pg. 101

^{xxvi} *The Eternal Hermes*, Antoine Faivre, 1995, pg. 19-20

^{xxvii} *The Gospel of St. Matthew*, Rudolf Steiner, The Rudolf Steiner Publishing Co., London, 1946

^{xxviii} *The Gospel of St. Luke*, Rudolf Steiner, The Rudolf Steiner Press, London, 1964

^{xxix} *Christ Among the Doctors*, Simon Cade Williams, New View, Autumn 2009, issue 53, pg. 37-40.

^{xxx} *1 Thessalonians* 5:23, Paul refers to human nature as consisting of soma, psyche, and pneuma; that is body, soul, and spirit respectively.

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Andrew Linnell works as a Consultant in the computer field. 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 studies led him to the discovery he has described in this paper. As a computer scientist, Andrew has been working on the effects of technology on society. He offers lectures in the Boston area on a variety of themes including the unexplored dangers of nanotechnology.

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Appendix

As an additional treat – on the left is *Holy Family with the Infant St John* is by Luini, also a pupil of Leonardo. More evidence of two messiahs? Or is this one really Jesus and John the Baptist so as to get the heresy hunters off their backs? Notice Mary's hand gestures! Look familiar? On the right is the National Gallery's Leonardo's cartoon *Virgin and Child with St Anne and St John the Baptist* (1510). Again, note the hand gestures of both Jesus' right hand as well as St. Anne's left.

