

Describe and explain the religious symbolism in ONE piece of art, music or literature - 'The Annunciation, with Saint Emidius' by Carlo Crivelli

The artist Carlo Crivelli painted 'The Annunciation, with Saint Emidius' in the 15th century. Noticeably, Crivelli's portrayal of the Annunciation differs vastly to the one actually presented in Luke 1:26-38 of the Bible. For instance, Jesus' coming was said to have been announced to Mary in 'Nazareth, a town in Galilee' (Luke 1:26). However, in Crivelli's interpretation of the event, the Annunciation is set in the elaborate town of Ascoli, a town that has been portrayed to be flourishing in the opulence and aesthetics that the Renaissance had brought to Crivelli's era. However, Crivelli may have deliberately intended to use this setting to serve as an emblem of new life as the word Renaissance does mean "rebirth". Fundamentally, this new life is aimed at the fore coming baby Jesus as well as to Ascoli itself. Its connotations concerning Ascoli are that the town had been given a new start by being awarded the privilege of autonomy to govern itself away from papal rule in Rome. Pope Sixtus IV had granted this freedom to the town in 1482, which is made clearer by the existence of his coat of arms in the bottom left hand side of the painting. In addition to this, there is also a Latin phrase: 'LIBERTAS ECCLESIASTICA', which when translated means 'Freedom from the Church'. Moreover, Crivelli may have used such an extensive array of colours in his painting to celebrate Ascoli's new, free status as well as to signify the joyous coming of the Christ child.

A similarity with the actual Annunciation is the presence of the Archangel Gabriel as in the Bible, he was sent to the Virgin Mary to announce the imminent arrival of baby Jesus. However, an irregularity is still at hand as the Archangel is pictured to be walking alongside a Saint, which is a rarity in religious works of art. The saint who he is walking with is Saint Emidius, the patron saint of Ascoli. In his hands, Saint Emidius is shown to be carrying a model of his town. The model itself is dominated by a collection of towers, which are status symbols of prosperity as well as connecting the Earth to the Heavens above due to their height. The prosperity is reinforced throughout the image by the presence of all the elegant architecture.

Visually, the audience is drawn into the painting by two protruding images: an apple and a gherkin. The apple is suggestive of sin due to its obvious connections to the story of Adam and Eve and the gherkin is representative of pregnancy and fertility, which can be connected to the Annunciation that is occurring in the background as Mary is being informed about her forth coming son. The ray of light descending from the Heavens above down to Mary soon draws the attention of the audience. The light is emblematic of the fact that Mary is now connected to God. Furthermore, the light passes through a dove, a symbol of peace and the Holy Spirit. This furthers the events celestial links as does the fact that the light is golden, a colour often associated with divinity. This connection to God is carried through as a perched peacock is illustrated. Its copious amount of eyes on its feathers represents God's omniscience and the feathers themselves represent God's omnipresence. Also in the painting, Mary has been positioned behind a set of bars, which is indicative of the fact that she needs to be protected as she is carrying 'the Son of the Most High' (Luke 1:32). A delicate crystal bottle on a shelf above her head also represents the fragility of her pregnant state.

In conclusion, through the juxtaposition of politics, religion and art, Crivelli has managed to create a strong peace of symbolism.