

## *The Protestant Reformation Revolutionized Art*

Martin Luther's Reformation ended a period of dominance and unity in Europe under the Roman Catholic Church. This unity lasted for more than 1,000 years. The Protestant reformers influenced artists who became inspired by the new ideas of faith, forgiveness, a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and the powerful stories in the *Holy Bible*.



**Lamentation Over the Dead Christ With Saints (Botticelli, 1490)**

Depicted here is the scene just after the death of Jesus, when he is taken down from the cross and placed in the tomb before sundown. He lies in the lap of his mother Mary, who is wearing the black clothing of mourning. She is fainting and leaning on the shoulders of Jesus' favorite apostle, John. Surrounding them are the apostles Peter and Paul, as well as St. Jerome who holds a stone, alluding to his role as a founder of the early Western Church. (St. Jerome was popular in Renaissance culture because of his translation of the Bible into Latin.) Peter holds a key, a symbol of knowledge, forgiveness and his control over the gates of Heaven. Paul holds a sword, a symbol of power as well as the weapon by which he would be executed. Of course, Paul was not present at the crucifixion or resurrection. In fact he persecuted and killed Christians for believing in Jesus as their Savior. His conversion is about three years after the resurrection of Jesus.

Holding Jesus' feet is Mary Magdalene, a friend and one of His most devoted followers. She laments over the nail holes in His feet. After the Sabbath, she will visit the tomb at sunrise on Sunday and find it empty. An angel will explain Jesus' resurrection and tell her to relay the message to the disciples.

Supporting Jesus' head is His mother's sister, also called Mary, and the wife of Clopas. (It may seem strange that two sisters would have the same name, but in Hebrew there are several variations, such as Miriam and Maria. In addition, they could have been half- or step-sisters. Mary's husband Clopas was the brother of Jesus' mother Mary's husband Joseph.) In the background is the cave and the tomb in which Jesus will be buried. The arch of the cave entrance starts the path of the viewer's eye from the top left corner and goes around the oval shape in which the mourners are gathered. Red is a unifying color throughout the painting, taking the eye from the top left corner across to the bottom right.

Botticelli was a well known and talented Florentine artist during his time. Perhaps his most famous work is "*The Birth of Venus*," painted around 1485.

*“The Lamentation over the Dead Christ with Saints”* is from later in his career, a time when Florence was under the influence of a friar named Girolamo Savonarola, who advocated for strict moral reform among the city’s inhabitants. Savonarola started the “bonfires of the vanities,” urging people to destroy the costly possessions which had made them greedy and selfish. The humbling effects of these reforms emerged as humanism in Botticelli’s works. His paintings show the simplicity of his illustration of people as he captures their emotion.

The painting originally hung in the Church of San Paolino in Florence. In 1813 it was purchased by the King of Bavaria after being restored in the Galleria degli Uffizi.

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