

## *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*.



**Isenheim Altarpiece: The Resurrection, (Matthias Grunewald, 1512)**

This painting illustrates the Ascension and Resurrection as one event with Christ emerging from the tomb and ascending into Heaven bathed in light. Grunewald may have painted three soldiers to remind us of the three wise men. The contrast of light and dark colors enhances the drama of this historic event on the victory of life over death. The soldiers have fallen and their swords have no power. A stunning "world cup" defeat!

Think of the impact of this masterpiece of art as a means for teaching people in the troubled world of the 16<sup>th</sup> century that Jesus Christ has power over armed soldiers, personal conflicts, and death. One can see how Matthias Grunewald thinks deeply about spiritual things and his faith. He cannot read the *Holy Bible* in his own language (yet) and he understands the importance of the mystery of faith and the Resurrection clearly in his heart, mind, and eyes. The paintings on the Isenheim altar suggest that common people understood God and Jesus Christ in a very personal way before Luther's posting of the 95 Theses and debates with the clergy. I wonder what the ordinary merchant or farmer thought as they viewed these illustrations of the birth of Jesus, John the Baptist, crucifixion, and resurrection. It had to be that they knew God loves them....and then they walked into the marketplace to invest their savings in the purchase of an indulgence. How would you react?

I do not think that we see art, pictures, and movies in the same context as people living in Luther's time - even though we are visual thinkers. Anyone who saw this painting would understand that God is changing history through Jesus Christ!

The Isenheim altarpiece was remembered for its 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2012 by the Unterlinden Museum in Comar, Alsace, France. The altarpiece was painted for St. Anthony's Monastery in Comar, which is known for its hospital work and service to the people.

Below is a full view of the altarpiece with the side panels open. The Resurrection is in the second row.



[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isenheim\\_Altarpiece](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isenheim_Altarpiece)