

# The Rapture!

A digital painting by [Steve McRoberts](#), ©2020.



Full resolution image at: [https://smmcroberts.net/art/rapture/TheRapture\\_pg.jpg](https://smmcroberts.net/art/rapture/TheRapture_pg.jpg)

The topic of this painting is the Christian doctrine of “[the rapture](#)”: an “end-time” event when all Christian believers will float up into the clouds, to meet Jesus in the air.

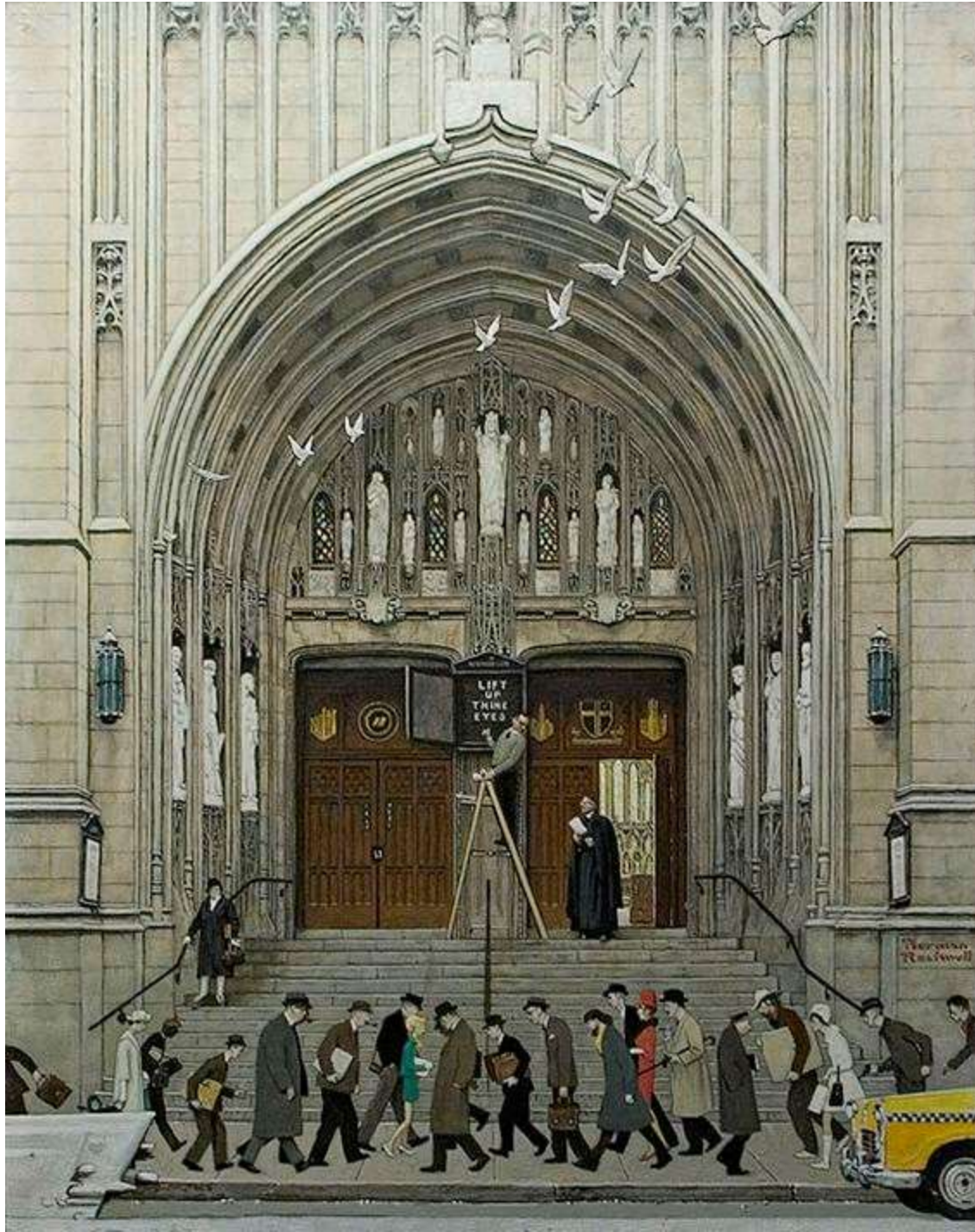
Though it is based on [1 Thessalonians 4:16-17](#), the idea of a literal rapture is not found in historic Christianity, but is a relatively recent doctrine of Evangelical Protestantism, popularized in a series of “*Left Behind*” novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins.

Personally, I am not a believer. But the concept of the rapture provided a perfect setting for illustrating how society is so glued to their cellphones that they would not take notice of even such a dramatic event as this. In most paintings of the rapture, people are depicted as flying up to the clouds to join Jesus. But in my painting everyone – even a Catholic priest strolling near St. Peter’s Cathedral in Vatican City -- stays earthbound; transfixed before their phones.

The only thing joining Jesus and his trumpeting angel in the clouds is a cloud-server.

Ironically, we can see the ubiquitous message on one of the cellphones asking “What’s up?” A street sign also points up. But no one looks up.

One inspiration for this painting was Norman Rockwell’s 1957 painting *Lift Up Thine Eyes*:



*Lift Up Thine Eyes*, 1957, Norman Rockwell

My other inspiration came from all of those classic paintings of the “Last Judgement,” such as this one by Jacob de Backer the Younger (whose red-clad trumpeting angel has been copied bodily and boldly into my work):



*Last Judgment*, c. 1583, Jacob de Backer the Younger

Since I can't help myself from satirizing as many topics as possible in a single work, we have a business-suited portly gentleman holding his cellphone the wrong way, as he is about to take an unseen step down, stumbling off his platform. U.S. residents in 2020 may recognize in him a certain politician who is known to be challenged in walking and in holding Bibles the right way around. Whoever is texting him is impatiently demanding, "r u there???" [Another ubiquitous message in our cellphone-obsessed society.]

## The R-Rated Version

I have created another version of *The Rapture!*, which may prove too intense or offensive for some Christians. There will be a link to it at the *end* of this document. It is placed *there* because I would like people to read the rationale behind it before viewing it.

Long before Christianity, Islam, Judaism, or even Hinduism, most people around the world worshipped a goddess. The goddess was known by many names, but most of them had their root in Ma, or Mama: typically the first sound an infant speaks, and which, understandably, originally came to refer to a

mother's breasts, and then to the mother herself. Maya, Mari, Mary – these are all derivatives of Mama, and all of these names came to be associated with a goddess.

Throughout the world the maternal principle was worshipped as the source of life, love, and the cycle of life and death. Though there were many local variations, the basics could be boiled down to a triune goddess in three manifestations: virgin, mother, and crone (the destroyer).

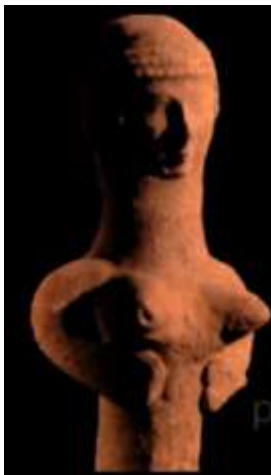
In her virginal aspect, the goddess mated with her male consort, giving birth to a male god. With his mother's help, this "son of god" then sacrificed his father, mated with his mother, and another male god was born (who then sacrificed the father, mated with the mother... and the cycle continued forever). The goddess thus fulfilled the roles of blessed virgin, mother of god, and destroyer.

This drama was replicated on earth by queens and kings. When a king became weak or impotent, a usurper would rise up and "sacrifice" him. This usurper was called a "son" of the king regardless of any family ties. The queen would then accept the usurper as the new king, and welcome him to her bed.

Eventually kings wised up and began appointing "sons" to act in their stead in the ritual. These "sons" would be dressed in kingly robes and addressed as "king" for a period of time, and then be sacrificed in place of the real king. The blood would be sprinkled on the ground to ensure good crops. Anyone who ate the flesh or drank the blood of the corpse would gain a ticket to either rebirth or immortality in the afterlife (magically sharing in the "rebirth" of the king, based on the power of the sacrifice).

As society became more civilized, the sacrifice became symbolic. The eating of the victim's flesh and drinking of their blood was substituted by bread and wine, which was believed to miraculously become real flesh and blood when the ritualistic sacrifice was symbolically reenacted (as it still is in the Catholic Mass of today).

Then men took over religion. Matriarchy became patriarchy. Women lost their property rights as matrilineal descent became patrilineal. Worship of a loving, generous, life-sustaining goddess became worship of a war-mongering, hard-to-appease, vengeful male god, whose worshippers were unworthy of the life he begrudgingly granted them if they followed his rules and praised him continuously.



*Ashtoreth pole*

In Judaism this change meant destroying the statues of Ashtoreth: [Yahweh's wife](#), who was worshiped right next to Yahweh's altar in the temple. ([2 Ki. 21:7](#).) Her worship had been so prevalent among the Jews that the writer of Deuteronomy found it necessary to explicitly forbid putting her symbol (a pole with large breasts, surmounted by the likeness of a woman's head) next to Yahweh's altar for worship ([Deuteronomy 16:21](#)). The Bible tells us that Ashtoreth was even worshipped by King Solomon ([1 Kings 11:5](#)). But male priests demanded exclusive devotion to her male consort, and Ashtoreth's priestesses were subsequently dubbed "witches" who were not permitted to live. ([2 Kings 23:13](#); [Exodus 22:18](#)).

In Christian times, pagan temples built to the goddess were taken over by Catholics and renamed as churches to "Mary." Many local versions of the goddess – whose worship people refused to relinquish – were reinterpreted by the Church as either demons or saints (often accompanied by fictitious biographies which now read as amusingly absurd). Some of these goddesses even lost their gender; becoming *male* demons or saints!

Ashtoreth, the "queen of heaven," was also known as *Astarte*, which name became corrupted into "Easter": a word used by Christians (ignorant of its history) in their celebration of their son-god's resurrection, replete with the symbol of the goddess: the "Easter" lily.

Despite all this, Mary tenaciously remained. In her, people continued the ancient goddess-worship under a new name [and with a rather corrupted theology, which the common people had little concern for or awareness of]. In Mary, Christianity retained at least two of the three manifestations of the goddess: virginity and motherhood. She is still known, unabashedly, as "the virgin Mary" and as "the mother of god." In addition, her destructive aspect is at least hinted at with the presence of three Marys standing by and watching as the "son of god" is sacrificed ([John 19:25](#)).

Mary's symbol is a white lily [named after the Sumero-Babylonian goddess *Lilith*, who was also Astarte]. This has been the symbol of the white goddess's virginity long before the Christian era. Some Christian "authorities" claimed that the lily in Gabriel's hand filtered god's semen, which entered Mary's body through her ear! The Romans also believed that the virgin goddess Juno conceived her savior-son, Mars, with her own magic lily. In 656 CE, the Church adopted the pagan feast-day of Juno's conception, renaming it the "Festival of the Mother of God" or "Lady Day." They declared that it commemorated Mary's conception of Jesus via the aid of a lily.



Gabriel offers Mary a lily in Da Vinci's *Annunciation* / *Mary holding a lily*

The other aspects of the goddess also had symbols: a red rose for motherhood [relating to menstrual blood] and black for the destructive aspect.

The destructive aspect of the goddess was not viewed in a negative light. Rather, it was seen as a necessary part of the cycle of life.

In the R-rated version of my painting I have sought to depict these facts by having three representations of Mary surrounding Jesus.

First, the virgin, dressed in white, holding a white lily, which, understandably, slips from her open palm. In the Christian story, Gabriel “came in unto” Mary and impregnated her with the “word” – the annunciation – from god ([Luke 1:28](#)). “Coming in unto” is Bible-speak for having sexual intercourse ([Genesis 6:4](#)). It’s interesting to note that Gabriel was also the one to “give the word” that Elizabeth would become pregnant and give birth to John the Baptist ([Luke 1:5-19](#)). The “Word” is famously associated with Jesus in [John 1:1](#).

My skeptical nature has a simpler explanation, though. Maybe Gabriel was no angel, but rather a ladies’ man and a smooth talker: able to sweet-talk women into bed, and convince their husbands that a tale about angelic intervention was less embarrassing in the long run than being labeled a cuckold.

No matter who the real father was, according to Christianity, Mary became pregnant somehow by the male deity. In mainstream Christianity Jesus is God. Therefore, by suggestive positioning, I have implied Jesus “coming in unto” Mary.

The second manifestation of Mary is as the mother figure. I have placed her above Jesus, in the spot normally reserved for “god the father.” This is because the goddess was held to be the mother of *all* gods, and so was primordial. She wears the blue shawl traditionally associated with paintings of Mary. She holds her son, and her large breasts protrude on either side of his head.

The goddess was typically pictured with enormous or multitudinous breasts, since this part of the female anatomy is closely tied to motherhood and nurturing.



Prehistoric goddess with prominent breasts

Though I have covered Mary's breasts in my painting, there have been [many classic paintings showing Mary's breast as she nurses her son](#). In one medieval illustration, Mary is actually shown squirting milk from her breast into the waiting mouth of St. Bernard, as the infant Jesus looks on!



*The Nursing Madonna* by unknown master from Bruges, 16th century / *Bernard Receiving Milk from the Breast of the Virgin Mary in 1146 at Speyer Cathedral*, artist unknown.

Lastly, we come to the crone: the destroyer aspect of the goddess. This has largely been ignored or suppressed in Christianity. Since the Bible states that Jesus' form of sacrifice was crucifixion [a form common to [many sacrificed gods before him](#)], I have depicted Mary actively engaged in hammering in one of the nails. She wears a black tunic, and holds a black rose: the color associated with the destroyer aspect of the goddess.

In the R-rated version of my painting we see society's beliefs / obsessions from the very ancient to the very modern. We may wonder: What parts are progress, and what parts are loss?

The link to the R-rated version of *The Rapture!*: [https://smmcroberts.net/art/rapture/TheRapture\\_r.jpg](https://smmcroberts.net/art/rapture/TheRapture_r.jpg)

## Bibliography

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[When God Was a Woman](#) by Merlin Stone

[The White Goddess](#) by Robert Graves

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