

**Evensong Homily**  
**St James' Anglican Church**  
**Rev'd Murray Wills**  
**9 July 2023**

**Reading:** (Genesis 2:7-8)

**Topic: The Creation of Adam – by Michelangelo**

Who here has visited Florence and Rome?

Who has seen the statue of David, and who has seen the Sistine Chapel?

Today we are going to talk about the genius who gave the world both treasures, and more.

Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni, c1475-1564 also known as Michelangelo, was an Italian sculptor, painter, and architect.

He was born in Caprese, but his family moved to Florence several months after he was born.

His mother died when he was six and he lived with a nanny and her husband, a stonecutter, and it was here that he “gained his love of marble”.

Michelangelo achieved fame early; two of his best-known works, Pietà and David, were sculpted before he was thirty.

By 1490 he was producing art for Lorenzo di Medici and a few years later he began his work for the Papacy<sup>1</sup>. He was often persuaded to accept huge commissions which often went unfinished or took years. The sculptures in the Tomb of Julius II for instance took 40 years.<sup>2</sup>

Although he saw himself as a Sculptor, Michelangelo was originally commissioned to paint the Twelve Apostles on the triangular pendentives that supported the ceiling, and to paint the center of the ceiling with ornament.

Michelangelo was a devout Roman Catholic whose faith deepened at the end of his life, and he persuaded Pope Julius II, the commissioner of the fresco, to let him paint a more complex scene on the ceiling. This expanded to include fresco on “the Creation”, “the Fall of Man”, “the Promise of Salvation through the prophets”, and “the genealogy of Christ”. It took 4 years to paint.

Afterwards, Michelangelo also painted the Last Judgement on the alter wall.

One of the scenes from Genesis is our topic today – the Creation of Adam.

From our reading today:

*then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life;*

---

<sup>1</sup> 2002. Art: An A-Z guide to the World's greatest artists and their paintings: W.H.Smith. p.353.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.353

*and the man became a living being. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. (Genesis 2:7-8)*

You will often see depictions of the moment of the creation of Adam by God where God is seen breathing life into Adam's nostrils, but Michelangelo took a different approach.

### **Looking at the of the Creation of Adam**

It is a painting of God creating Man in his image.

God's right arm is outstretched to impart the spark of life from his own finger into that of Adam, whose left arm is extended in a pose mirroring God's, a reminder that God said, "*Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness*" (Gen. 1:26).

Adam's arm seems weak, resting on his knee, as if the fresco depicts that moment before an impulse of energy is received from God.

There are a couple of views that art critics and religious scholars take on this painting.

#### **The first view is that of Birth.**

1. That the painting depicts the process of birth. The red cloth around God is in the shape of a human uterus, and the hanging green scarf represents a newly cut umbilical cord.
  - a. What can you notice that is unusual about Adam in the painting?

#### **i. Adam has a naval**

Some speculation that Eve is also in the painting, the figure at God's left hand. Notice also that this figure is glancing at Adam.

That poses some problems for us and for the Catholic Church, remembering that Michelangelo was a devout Catholic and this was a Papal Commission. The Preexistence of souls is regarded as heretical, Consequently, all the characters are often referred to as Angels.

Adam is also portrayed as having an extra rib on his right-hand side. This is believed to represent Eve too. (Lilian, 2020).

Remember that Michelangelo had an in-depth knowledge of human anatomy, and very few other people did.

Deivis Campos suggests that this extra rib inclusion was a way for Michelangelo to represent Adam and Eve being created side by side, which differs from the Catholic tradition that states Eve was created after Adam.

There is significant evidence that Michelangelo radically disagreed with many Catholic traditions and had a difficult relationship with Pope Julius II.

Campos suggests that the rib inclusion was an intentional way to slight Pope Julius II and the Catholic Church, without having to admit fault, as very few people knew anything about human anatomy at the time and could challenge the piece (Anon, 2023).

**The second view is that the painting on the right of the fresco represents the Brain.**

In 1990 physician Frank Lynn Meshberger published an article in the Journal of the American Medical Association in which he suggested that the shapes portrayed behind the painting of God appeared to be an anatomically correct picture of the human brain<sup>3</sup>.

Michelangelo attributed his successes to the creative power of his mind, and he famously stated that divine guidance came through the intellect, as it was the gift of God.

Meshberger concluded that the hidden message within genius Michelangelo's painting is that "God is bestowing Adam with the gift of the intellect and that it is by using this great gift that man may reach his highest potential and bring all things his mind develops into creation"<sup>4</sup>.

Whatever theory or view you believe, Michelangelo certainly had gifts.

He also most likely had Autism or Asperger's according to several studies, which highlight his single-minded work routine, unusual lifestyle, limited interests, poor social and communication skills. He joins several other likely candidates who have used God's gifts for the benefit of all of us., including:

Albert Einstein, Temple Grandin, Sir Isaac Newton, Susan Boyle, Sir Anthony Hopkins, Charles Darwin.

---

<sup>3</sup> Anon. (2023, July 7). *The Secrets of Michelangelo's "Creation of Adam"*. Retrieved from Rome Private Guides:

Through his fresco, which I regard as an act of discipleship, Michelangelo has not just disciplined people of his time, but generations of people since 1511.

One of the reasons I put forward the idea of a homily series on art for our Evensong is the richness of uncovering the story behind the art and the artist, and the influence of the Holy Spirit on the artist and on the process of art formation, but on us as a viewer.

God bless those who use their gifts, whatever they may be to spread the Gospel as you have asked us to do Lord.

#### **Let us pray.**

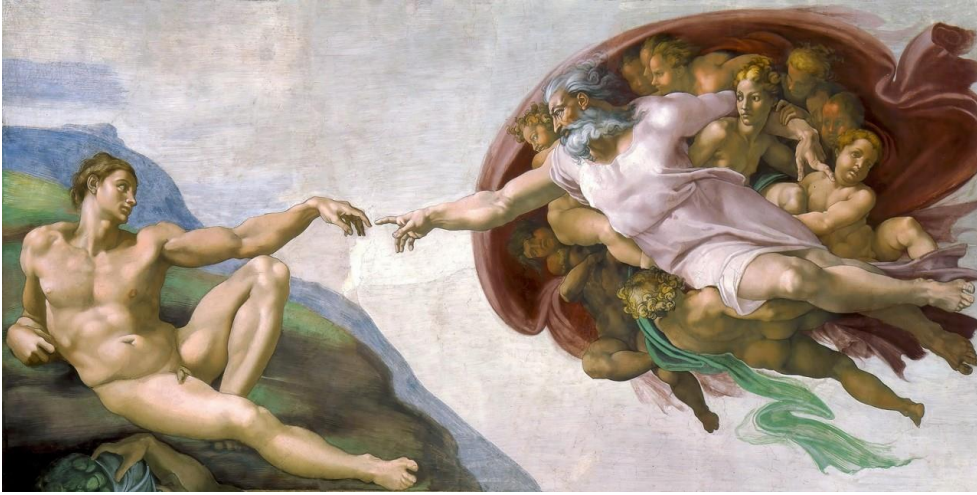
Creator God, you built the whole world and everything in it. When you created man and woman, you knew it was very good.

When you created us, you made us in your own image.

Be with all of us today, so that everyone we come into contact with sees our attitude, actions, and character in such a way that reflects glory on you who created me. Amen.

<https://www.romeprivateguides.com/en/blog/about-vatican/michelangelo-sistine-chapel-brain.html>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



## Bibliography

Anon. (2023, July 7). *The Creation of Adam*. Retrieved from Wikipedia:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Creation\\_of\\_Adam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Creation_of_Adam)

Anon. (2023, July 7). *The Secrets of Michelangelo's "Creation of Adam"*. Retrieved from Rome Private Guides:  
<https://www.romeprivateguides.com/en/blog/about-vatican/michelangelo-sistine-chapel-brain.html>

*Art: An A-Z guide to the world's greatest artists and their paintings*. (2002). Swindon: W.H. Smith.

Lilian. (2020, September 21). *Discover Walks Blog*. Retrieved from  
<https://www.discoverwalks.com/blog/rome/top-10-facts-about-the-creation-of-adam-by-michelangelo/>:  
<https://www.discoverwalks.com/blog/rome/top-10-facts-about-the-creation-of-adam-by-michelangelo/>