

35. Depictions of the Virgin and Child

The Virgin and Child panel from the Ten Commandments window at Boppard shows Mary handing a bright red apple to an eager Jesus, reaching out for it with both hands. As mentioned earlier, the apple is associated with the original sin in the Garden of Eden, and refers to Christ's role as the future redeemer. Traditionally the apple is symbolic of the temptation in the Garden of Eden, but depending on the context it can also represent love, purity and redemption.

In the Boppard panel the apple is in the hand of Mary, particularly emphasising her designation as the second Eve – the original Eve linked to the fall of man, Mary to the redemption of man. I am always impressed by how baby-like Jesus is in this panel, as he is often shown as a little man, especially in the art of Northern Europe.

This can be seen in a similar depiction of the Virgin and Child in stained glass in the Burrell Collection (below). This is a French 14th century stained glass panel, with a detail of Mary handing an apple to Jesus.



BOPPARD TEN COMMANDMENTS WINDOW
DETAIL OF THE VIRGIN AND CHILD ABOVE



BURRELL COLLECTION VIRGIN AND
CHILD – FRENCH 14TH CENTURY
STAINED GLASS

DETAIL ON THE RIGHT



There are many other depictions of the Virgin and Child in other media throughout the Burrell Collection, some of which are shown with an apple like these panels. One such example, on the right, is a very stylized Virgin and Child from a 15th century English monumental brass.

There are also objects in which Jesus holds the apple indicating that He saved mankind from the original sin of Adam. In the hands of Adam, the apple signifies sin, whereas in the hands of Jesus it signifies redemption. Rupert of Deutz, an influential 12th century Benedictine theologian, interpreted Jesus' acceptance of the apple as his acceptance of his fate, and thus as a sign of his obedience to God. The example below is a limestone sculpture from the Ile de France, dating to 1325 - 1350.



BURRELL COLLECTION – MONUMENTAL
BRASS VIRGIN AND CHILD 15C ENGLISH

Jesus is also often seen holding an orb, and it is easy to mistake this for an apple. The orb may be used to represent the world. Below is a South Netherlandish sculpture in alabaster dating to 1475-1500 with traces of paint and gilding still present.



BURRELL COLLECTION – VIRGIN AND CHILD SCULPTURE IN LIMESTONE
FROM THE ILE DE FRANCE, DATING TO 1325 – 1350

The orb often shown with a cross on top (the globus cruciger), as in this sculpture, symbolises Christ's dominion over the world, and in the hands of Jesus, it is known as Salvator Mundi ("Saviour of the World"). It is a very old symbol, dating back to the 4th or 5th centuries.

ON THE RIGHT—BURRELL COLLECTION
VIRGIN AND CHILD SCULPTURE
SOUTH NETHERLANDISH ALABASTER 1475-1500

