

St Leonard's Church

A Colourful Past



Key Stage 3

Learning Objectives

- To understand the significance of the Doom Painting in St Leonard's Church, Flamstead
- What can we work out about medieval life from the doom paintings that survive in churches such as St Leonard's?



What Messages are expressed in art?



5 minutes!

What kinds
of messages
can be
expressed
through art?

Discuss with
your partner
and write
down 5
ideas.

Expressions through art

People have been using art to express themselves throughout history, from the very early days of man painting on cave walls in Lascaux, France to the latest Banksy on a modern city street.

Whether the artist wants to make a political statement, tell us about the society they live in, or simply to decorate a space, art can tell a message in a very simple, direct way.

Above: [A cave painting from Lascaux, France](#). Creative Commons.
Below: [Banksy, Girl and Heart Balloon](#). Southbank, London. Creative Commons.



A past of colour

You might think of a church like St Leonard's as a quiet, serene place.

However, 500 years ago these church walls would have been completely decorated with a riot of fantastic colours and murals.



Painted murals in medieval churches

Painting murals was a way of expressing people's devotion to God.

They were a useful way to tell Bible stories to people who could not read - and that'd be most people in medieval times!



Wall paintings in St Peter and St Paul's Church, Pickering. Photo © [Christine Matthews](#) (cc-by-sa/2.0)

Painting during the life of St Leonard's

So who created the wonderful wall paintings in St Leonard's Church and how did they do it?

The murals were painted, over centuries, by monks and local people.

Many of these often elaborate and brightly coloured picture sequences were covered up with whitewash during the Reformation. This may have protected some that might otherwise have vanished.



Discovering the paintings at St Leonard's

The paintings were covered in layers of lime-wash during the Reformation.

They did not see the light of day until they were rediscovered in 1930. They are particularly interesting as their survival spans the history of St. Leonard's Church.

From their early history until the mid-16th Century, all areas of the walls would have been covered with narrative, illustrative and decorative paintings that were regularly over-painted as fashions changed.



The Doom Painting, St Leonard's Church

This painting was produced in the late 14th Century.

Paintings showing "Doomsday" became known as *doom paintings*.

It was believed that on Doomsday Christ would judge who would go to Heaven, and who would go to Hell.



A Vision of Heaven and Hell

This painting shows what many people believed Hell might look like.

Hell was believed to be a real place where demons would punish people who had sinned during their lifetimes.

The images helped people to be mindful of sinning by showing the difference between heaven and hell.



Doom paintings in Europe

Doom paintings were produced on the walls and ceilings of church buildings all over Europe.

They would have been looked at regularly by people who went to church.

In the medieval period, that was everyone!



Exploring St Leonard's Doom Painting

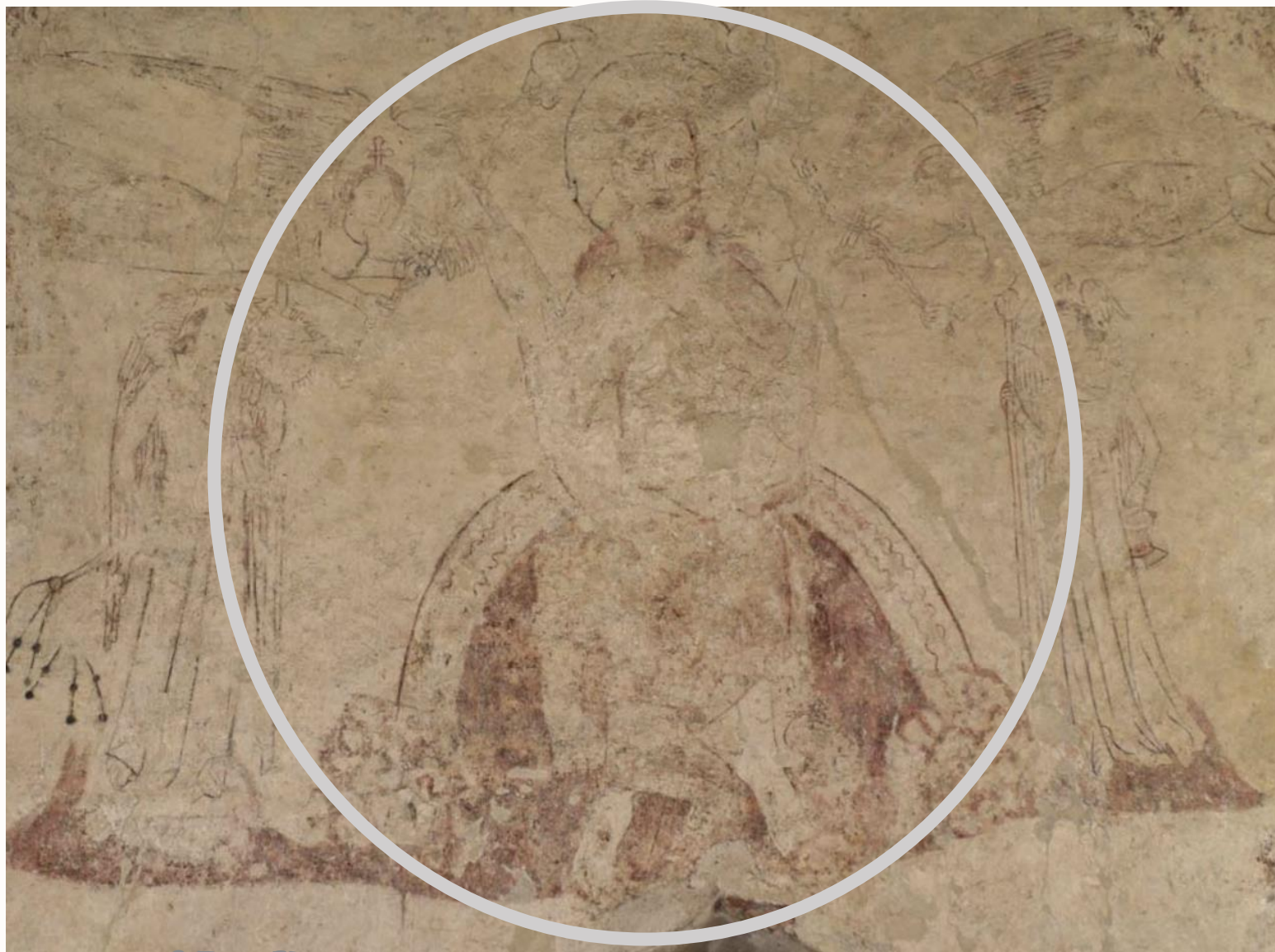
What do the different parts of the painting mean?



The Doom, in detail

This scene shows Christ, clothed in a mantle, seated on a rainbow which ends in little banks of cloud.

- Behind His Head is a nimbus (halo).
- His right hand is raised in blessing.
- His right foot is resting on an orb, representing the world He is judging.



The Angels attending Christ

On each side of Christ, angels hold emblems of His Passion.

Christ's Passion is his arrest, trial, suffering and death.



The Angel on the right, in detail

The Angel on the right is clothed in a flowing gown.



On his head is a cross, held by a diadem.

In his right hand, he holds a reed with a sponge and, in his left hand, a lantern.

The Angel on the left, in detail

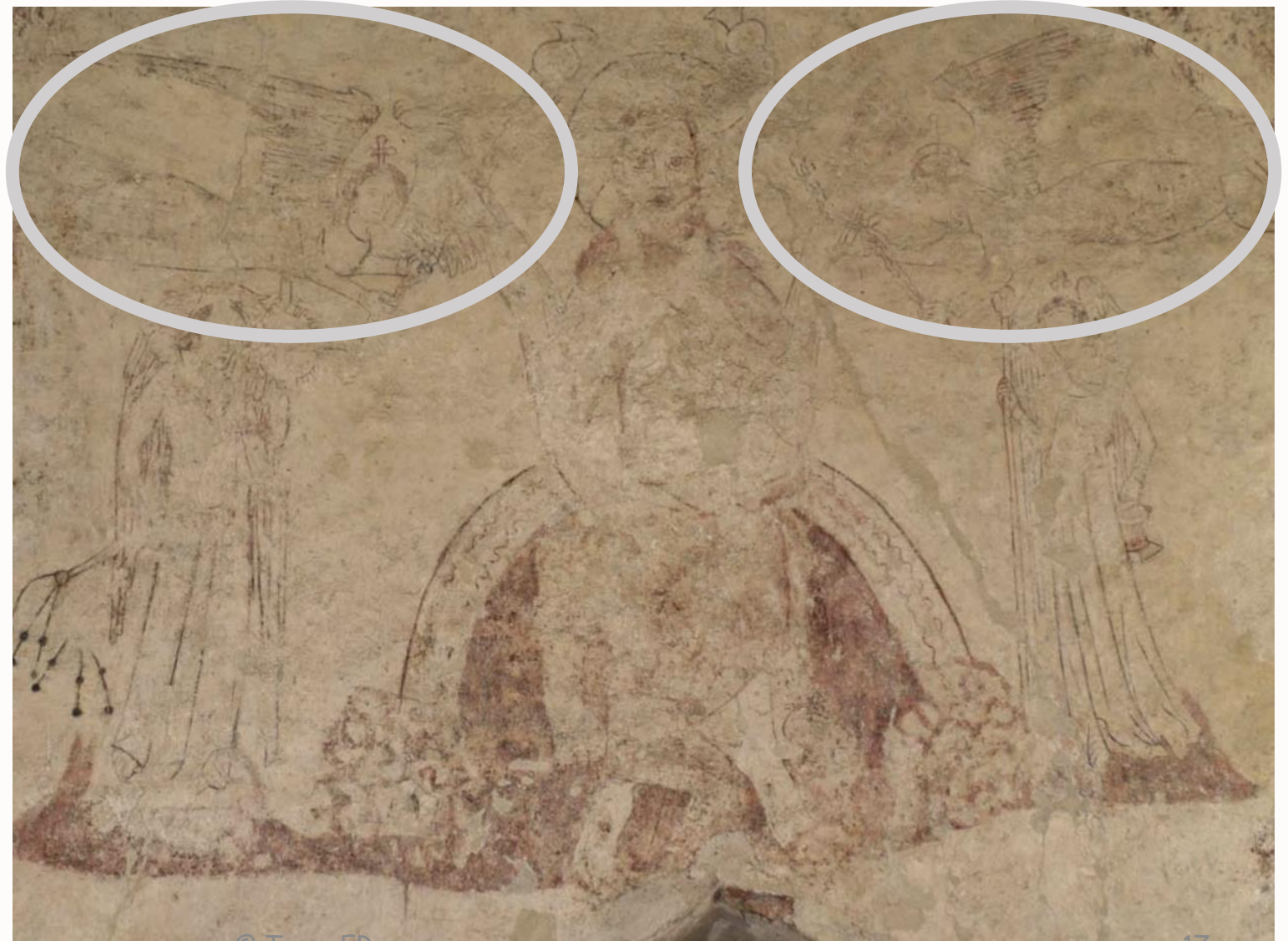
On the left, the Angel holds the scourge with knots or pellets in the thongs.



Flying Angels

Above the standing angels, two flying angels are swinging sensors, the bowls of which are seen on either side of the 'triquetra nimbus' (three interlaced arches) crowning the Christ figure.

The triquetra nimbus has pagan origins.



Additions to the Painting

In the background, the remains of another depiction of Doom or the Last Judgement is painted on plaster.

This is thought to be an addition in the 15th Century with further additions in the 18th Century.



Interpretations of the Building

Top left, there is the outline of a building.

One theory is that it is of the "many mansions that are in my Father's house".

Another theory is that it represents the Heavenly City.



The Mouth of Hell

In the bottom right corner is a large eye, indicating the head of a huge monster.

It has an open jaw belching forth flames, representing the mouth of Hell.

Figures appearing to be demons are shown above the monster.



Your Turn!

Task 1

Working with a partner, write down your answers to the following questions:

1. What kind of actions might have been called sins in medieval times?
2. Why was Hell often drawn/painted rather than written about in words?
3. How might medieval peasants have felt about these pictures?
4. How might these paintings have made the Church more powerful?

Your Turn, continued

Task 2

See if you can find **10 images** that you think tell us it is a Doom painting.

Task 3

Using the images you have found for inspiration, and your own ideas, design your own Doom picture.

Remember, make it bold and memorable, and frightening to those who see it.

It could:

- remind people of which actions would be rewarded and punished
- show what Heaven might look like too
- include labels and explanations of what is shown.