

## The north wall paintings at Capel



### At a glance

The two lengthy stories on the north wall at Capel are arranged from left to right. However; there are no painted divisions between the scenes and the divisions in the upper and lower tiers do not correspond.

In some places, particularly around the lower border and the table in the Last Supper, it appears these schemes followed the divisions established in the earlier decorative scheme. A later alteration to the roof supports and a merging of earlier and later paintings has made the schemes harder to interpret.

### The Passion

The lower tier contains the largest and best preserved series of scenes, which tells the story of Christ's Passion.

The identifiable scenes, from left to right, are:

- Christ's entry into Jerusalem: sporting a cruciform halo He faces the open gate of the walled and towered city with figures laying their cloaks in the path of the procession.
- The Last Supper: we can see servants and a wine jar beneath the window and Jesus and his disciples seated at a long table – you can make out their feet below the roof support
- The Betrayal and Arrest: this painting combines several 'moments' from the story. Christ is embraced by Judas while he reaches down his right hand to heal the ear of the High Priest's servant, shown as a bowed figure with a halo. The right hand part of this scene was destroyed by the insertion of a later window.

### Death of the Virgin

The upper tier has a more fragmentary cycle of the Death of the Virgin.

From left to right we can see:

- The remains of figures in long robes which may represent the Virgin's neighbours gathering before her death - as in the 14th-century cycle at Chalgrove, Oxfordshire.
- The Virgin's deathbed: an area of fabric with a diamond pattern with the disciples gathered at her bedside, identifiable by their bare feet
- The funeral procession: this is a large scene divided by a roof support. On the left the disciples carry the bier - the leg of a small figure suspended in the air represents the legend of some angry Jews trying to disrupt the funeral procession and becoming stuck to the bier. On the right a striding figure leads the way, possibly holding a basin for sprinkling holy water.

### Cain & Abel

On the window splay there is the story of Cain and Abel. On the left splay Cain kills his brother Abel with the jawbone of an Ass. On the right God places a mark on Cain's forehead, making him an outcast.

This is a rare depiction of an Old Testament subject in a Medieval parish church. Tristram suggested that the subject was chosen because it was understood as a 'type or anticipatory symbol' of the Crucifixion and so complemented the Passion scenes.

### The Annunciation

This scene of two standing figures at the east end of the north aisle was formerly believed to show the Resurrection as a conclusion to the Passion cycle, but the gestures of the figures make it more likely to be an Annunciation. The figure of the Archangel Gabriel on the left may be holding a scroll inscribed 'ave'. The Virgin Mary stands on the right, apparently extending her right hand in greeting and holding a book in her left. This painting may have accompanied a side altar dedicated to the Virgin.

