

Nicholas Leysen of
Twilight of the Gods

For my mom, Sharyn Leeper.

AMDG

With gratitude to those who made this work possible:

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TWILIGHT OF THE IDOLS

“Little children, keep yourselves from idols.”

– 1 John 5:21

An idol isn't an object; it's an outlook. Yet iconoclasts of every age believe idols are images. In ours, they denounce the Golden Calf that charges down Wall Street. Others condemn the commercials of *Mad Men* and their brands that have replaced Mammon and Baal. For them, ads are anathema. The iconoclasts believe in smashing these pictures and replacing them with portraits of Jesus and Mary, yet this doesn't solve the problem. Religious art can become an idol just as easily as a commercial can become an icon, a window into heaven. Destroying depictions doesn't change hearts. Idols and icons are not illustrated but imagined.

The twilight of the idols will arrive only at the dawn of their transfiguration. Idolatry is conquered not by might but by sight. Sacred art is less about looks and more about looking. Its holiness is not found in what it resembles but in how it reveals. Idols become icons not by changing their appearance, but by changing how they appear to us. For anything, whether an advertisement or an altarpiece, can disclose the divine. Just as Jesus, a carpenter from a no-name town, is revealed to be the Image of God at His Transfiguration, perhaps these profane pictures that grace TV screens can broadcast real grace. What if advertisements that shape our desires could illuminate our deepest desire? What if commercials that insist on consumption offer us Communion? What if promotions that push products can introduce us to a Person?



SANTA ABRAHAM (THE THREE STRANGERS)

2025 | Acrylic, Ink, and Gold Leaf on Linen Panel | 30" x 20"

“Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels.” Hebrews 13:2

In Genesis 18, three strangers appear and Abraham and his wife, Sarah, welcome them with generous hospitality. As a result, one of the men say that Sarah will miraculously bear a son in the near future. Once Isaac is born, God’s promise to Abraham that his descendants will be as many as the stars begins to now seem possible.



JUDITH BEHEADING HOLOFERNES

2025 | Acrylic, Ink, and Gold Leaf on Linen Panel | 18" x 18"

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; They will strike at your head, while you strike at their heel." Genesis 3:15

The Assyrian army, led by General Holofernes, threatens to destroy the Jewish people. Judith, a widow, enters his camp and gains his trust. When he is drunk and asleep, she cuts off his head, saving Israel from destruction.



THE ANNUNCIATION

2026 | Acrylic, Ink, and Gold Leaf on Linen Panel | 24" x 24"

"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." John 1:14

In the Gospel of Luke, the angel Gabriel appears to Mary and tells her that she will give birth to Jesus. This message not only changes the course of her life, but of all of human history. Mary is free to accept or refuse, and she gives a simple "yes" in response to this call.



THE VISITATION

2025 | Acrylic, Ink, and Gold Leaf on Linen Panel | 23" x 23"

“When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, “Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” Luke 1:41-42

After receiving the angel’s message, Mary visits her relative Elizabeth, who is also unexpectedly pregnant. When they meet, Elizabeth recognizes that Mary is carrying the Messiah. The moment is marked by immediate joy and recognition, even before anything is explained.



MADONNA DEL PARTO (ONCE UPON A TIME...IN BETHLEHEM)
2026 | Acrylic, Ink, and Gold Leaf on Linen Panel | 36" x 24"

“A voice was heard in Ramah, sobbing and loud lamentation; Rachel weeping for her children, and she would not be consoled, since they were no more.”
Matthew 2:18

This type of image shows Mary pregnant with Jesus, a subject that was more common in earlier periods of Christian art. Here, she is depicted in a moment of quiet transition, holding new life while also facing uncertainty about what is to come. Drawn from an image of Sharon Tate, Mary lingers in this moment while descending a staircase between new life and impending loss.



MADONNA AND CHILD (PUREST PROTECTION)

2026 | Acrylic, Ink, and Gold Leaf on Linen Panel | 11.75" x 11.75"

“Does not the dew give relief from the scorching heat? So a word can be better than a gift.” Sirach 18:16

In traditional religious art, objects are often used to symbolize deeper meanings about a figure's identity. In this image, the product held by the child functions in a similar way, pointing to ideas of care, protection, and healing. It suggests that what Christ offers will heal us where we are most vulnerable.



OUR LADY, HELP OF CHRISTIANS (THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT)
2026 | Acrylic, Ink, and Gold Leaf on Linen Panel | 36" x 24"

“When they had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him.” Matthew 2:13

Mary is invoked as Help of Christians, a title given to her as protector and intercessor for the faithful. But before she was imagined as a heavenly protector, she is someone in need of it herself. Shortly after the birth of Jesus, this young mother is forced to flee with her child and husband into Egypt to escape Herod who seeks to kill the Christ child.



MADONNA AND CHILD (OUR LADY OF SORROWS)

2026 | Acrylic, Ink, and Gold and Silver Leaf on Linen Panel | 19.75" x 13.75"

"And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted and you yourself a sword will pierce so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." Luke 2:35

Our Lady of Sorrows is a title for Jesus's mother, Mary that emphasizes her participation in Christ's Passion. She is often shown with seven swords a pierced heart, which Simeon in the Temple prophesied about her in Luke 2. The seven blades represent seven painful moments for her as she stood witness to her Son's suffering and death.



THE CALL OF LEVI (MAD MAN)

2026 | Acrylic, Ink, and Gold Leaf on Linen Panel | 24" x 24"

"After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him." Luke 5:27-28

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus calls Levi (or Matthew), a tax collector, to follow him. Tax collectors were often seen as dishonest and socially rejected by their peers, yet the future apostle immediately leaves his work behind and follows Jesus.



ST. PHOTINE (CHRIST SPEAKS WITH THE SAMARITAN WOMAN AT THE WELL)
2026 | Acrylic, Ink, and Gold Leaf on Linen Panel | 24" x 24"

"But whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." John 4:14

In the Gospel of John, Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at a well and asks her for a drink. Their conversation reveals that he knows her past and offers her something he calls "living water," a source of life that does not run out. She leaves her water jar behind and goes to tell others about him.



MADONNA AND CHILD (TOMATOKOS)

2026 | Acrylic, Ink, and Gold and Silver Leaf on Linen Panel | 11.75" x 11.75"

"For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him." John 6:55-56

This image draws on the tradition of Mary holding the Christ Child, where an object reveals who he is, much like bread and wine in the Eucharist. Something ordinary can point to something sacred. Bread and wine are consecrated pointing to a future where all matter will carry God's full presence.



THE CRUCIFIXION (KISS IT BETTER WITH BAND-AID)

2026 | Acrylic, Ink, and Gold Leaf on Linen Panel | 24" x 24"

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” John 3:14

The Crucifixion refers to the death of Jesus, who was executed by being nailed to a cross. In the Gospel of John, Jesus compares his death to an earlier story in which a bronze serpent was lifted up on a pole so that people could look at it and be healed. In this image, the bandage suggests both a wound and its remedy, pointing to the idea that what causes suffering can also become the means of healing.



MARY MAGDALENE (A SECOND EVE)

2026 | Acrylic, Ink, and Gold Leaf on Linen Panel | 24" x 24"

"The Lord God gave the man this order: You are free to eat from any of the trees of the garden except the tree of knowledge of good and evil. From that tree you shall not eat; when you eat from it you shall die." Genesis 2:16-17

In the Gospel of John, Mary Magdalene encounters the risen Jesus but does not recognize him at first. She mistakes him for a gardener until he calls her by name. This moment marks her as the first witness to the Resurrection and reverses the story of Eden where the first Eve takes and eats and the New Eve drinks, facilitating New Life.



ST. CATHERINE OF ALEXANDRIA

2026 | Acrylic, Ink, and Gold Leaf on Linen Panel | 36" x 24"

"Remain faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." Revelation 2:10

Saint Catherine of Alexandria is remembered as a Christian martyr who refused to renounce her faith. According to tradition, she debated scholars sent to challenge her and convinced them instead. After surviving an attempted execution by a spiked wheel, she was ultimately killed for her beliefs.

CHURCH OF ST. FRANCIS XAVIER

A JESUIT APOSTOLATE IN NEW YORK CITY

About Xavier High School

Founded in 1847, Xavier High School is a Catholic, Jesuit, college preparatory school in New York City. The school expanded its campus in 2016 with a 36,000 square-foot addition featuring dedicated arts facilities, including a theater, recording studio, and visual arts spaces, offering 24 courses across drama, music, visual art, and film. Xavier forms young men of diverse backgrounds and means to take responsibility for their lives, lead with integrity, act justly in service of others, pursue excellence, and deepen their relationship with God — ultimately sending them forth to transform the world for God's greater glory.

xavierhs.org

About The Church of St. Francis Xavier

The Church of St. Francis Xavier is a Roman Catholic parish in the Jesuit tradition located in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood. For over 175 years, the parish has built a collection of sacred art that engages questions of justice, inclusion, and the divine — from its 19th-century murals and stained glass to contemporary commissions including Patricia Brintle's BIPOC saints portraits and John Nava's civil rights tapestries honoring Fannie Lou Hamer, Martin Luther King Jr., and Harry Belafonte. The parish has long championed social justice and LGBTQ+ inclusion, creating space where difficult questions are welcomed.

sfxavier.org

About Nicholas Leeper, SJ

Nicholas Leeper, SJ (b. 1992) is a Jesuit artist and teacher based in New York. He teaches art, Scripture, and ethics at Xavier High School and writes on art and faith for America, the 117-year-old Jesuit review of faith and culture. His most recent work was selected and exhibited at the Biennale d'Art Contemporain Sacré in Menton, France. His work is held in private collections and has been exhibited in the United States, Peru, the United Kingdom, and France.

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