

Saint Lucy and Saint Mary Magdalene

Lorenzo di Bicci

Tempera on panel

Florentine, ca. 1350–d. 1427

The Clues

Lucy: eyes in a dish or cup, dagger, neck wound, sword, lamp

Mary Magdalene: long hair, rich fabrics, pearls, alabaster jar of ointment, skull, globe

The Story

Lucy was supposedly a fourth-century Sicilian of noble birth. She secretly vows at an early age never to marry. Unaware of the oath, her mother Eutychia arranges for her to marry a pagan. Later, Eutychia contracts an incurable disease; Lucy persuades her mother to travel with her to the tomb of Saint Agatha to pray for healing. When their prayers are answered, Lucy discloses her vow. Her mother readily agrees to allow Lucy to fulfill her oath. Lucy's fiancé, however, is unwilling to release her from the promised marriage. In anger he brings her before the governor and accuses her of being a Christian. When Lucy refuses to relinquish her faith, soldiers are ordered to bind and take her to a brothel. But she remains literally immovable—even when harnessed to a yoke of oxen. Ultimately, a soldier steps forward and succeeds in killing her; in some versions of the story, he stabs her in the neck with a dagger, in others he uses a sword to behead her.

The Picture Book

- Mary Magdalene is identified by the long hair and alabaster jar of ointment reminiscent of her conversion.
- In this panel, the artist uses the cup in Lucy's hand to reference her most common attribute—eyes in a cup or on a dish. This symbol may be derived from her name, which suggests lucidity or light because of her wisdom.

Saint John and Saint Christopher

Lorenzo di Bicci

Tempera on panel

Florentine, ca. 1350–d. 1427

The Clues

John: eagle, inkwell, quill, books, red and green garments

Christopher: the child Jesus on his shoulders, a river, a flowering staff

The Story

Christopher's legend originates in the sixth century. His sole ambition is to serve the most powerful prince in the world. He meets Satan (in the guise of a knight) and travels with him into the wilderness—until they come upon a cross. Christopher sees the devil is afraid. When questioned, Satan replies, "There was a man called Christ which was hanged on a cross, and when I see His sign I am sore afraid and flee from it." Christopher replies, "Then He is greater and mightier than thou, and I will no longer serve thee but seek Christ." Christopher meets a hermit who instructs him in the gospel and sends him to assist people crossing a river swollen by rain. With the help of a palm tree, which he uproots to use as a staff, he performs his duties admirably. One night a child asks him to carry him over the river. During the crossing, the waters turn turbulent and the boy grows heavier and heavier. When they at last reach the river's bank, Christopher inquires, "Who art thou, child, that hath placed me in such extreme jeopardy?" The boy replies, "Christopher, thou hast not only born all the world upon thee, thou hast born Him that created the world. I am Jesus Christ the King." Christ then commands him to plant his staff that it may "flower" and bear fruit.

The Picture Book

- John is identified by his traditional book, quill, and red and green clothing.
- Christopher's imagery: the child Jesus, globe in hand, on Christopher's shoulders, the palm tree, and the river (signified by the fish at his feet).