

## PICTURE OF THE WEEK

18<sup>th</sup> April 2020

Rachel Green



This picture of the Virgin and the Immaculate Conception by Carlo Crivelli is one of my favourites. The picture was painted in 1492 for the church of San Francesco, Pergola, central Italy and was bought by the National Gallery in 1874. It now hangs in the Gallery; room 57, with a smaller copy in our sitting room at home!

Carlo Crivelli (1430 -1495) was an Italian Renaissance painter and was born in Venice. Very little is known about his personal life, apart from the fact that he spent 6 months in prison, having been sentenced for adultery! He was a very successful painter of altarpieces even though he only ever used tempera (pigments dispersed in egg yolk), despite the increasing popularity of oil painting during his lifetime. This in itself I find remarkable; that he used paint that was so difficult and variable to manipulate, as well as time consuming to make. It is even more surprising when you realise that his pictures are renowned for being in a good state of preservation after more than 600 years. The picture on your screen doesn't do the original justice, as the colours in real life are vibrant, the images are clear and definite in contour with marked attention to detail. At the top of the picture, two angels crown the Virgin at the command of God the Father and the Holy Spirit. The white lily to Mary's left is her special flower, symbolising purity and the transparent glass is another symbol; this time of her purity and virginity.

Now why am I, the wife of a good, non-conformist minister, so in awe of this rather controversial image? Well the Immaculate Conception is not a subject that is too important to me with my set of faith values. The Pope only gave his approval to the doctrine 17 years before this artist painted the picture. In fact, Crivelli's Virgin of the Immaculate Conception may have

been the first painting where an artist tried to communicate this rather abstract doctrine. I think I like this picture not because of the subject or the sentiments it represents, but because of the picture's vibrancy, its beauty and its attention to detail. The very act of painting it, reflects the God-given talent and the love of the artist; an artist who, like us, was certainly not perfect, but who enabled onlookers to worship God and His creation.