

*Baptism of Christ*, by Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378–1455)

Art selection and commentary by [Heidi J. Hornik](#) and [Mikeal C. Parsons](#).

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In 1401, Lorenzo Ghiberti won the competition held by the Arte di Calimala, the guild of importers and finishers of woolen cloth, to decorate the north doors of the baptistery in Florence. *Baptism of Christ* was one of 28 panels depicting scenes from the life of Christ. The baptistery was an especially important building for the Florentines, because the patron saint of the city was John the Baptist. Ghiberti's

bronze panel, although still in a medieval quatrefoil shape, is considered one of the earliest examples of Italian Renaissance art. Ghiberti selected the moment in the narrative when Christ is praying, the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit descended like a dove (Luke 3:21-22). Ghiberti portrayed the dove emerging out of the panel toward the viewer. This feature, along with the placement of Christ's feet in the river believably covered by the water, is evidence of the advancements Italian Renaissance artists were making in depicting nature. Christ is posed in a stance used by classical Greek sculptors.