

Tissot's *Satan Tempts Jesus*

Angels are creatures of power and glory, but we cannot see purely spiritual beings, so we rely on artists to reveal their natures to us. The best angel art is that which gives us a view into their spiritual capacity for good or evil.

James Tissot (1836-1902) was a popular French painter in his day and featured angels in many of his works. He experienced a reversion to his Catholic faith in 1885 and afterward traveled to the Middle East three times to create a series of 350 watercolors about the life of Christ. These paintings are remarkable for their highly realistic depictions of biblical people and places.

What to Look For

The frightening image of Christ's Temptation shows an angelic being, Satan, transporting Jesus to the Parapet of the Temple (Luke 4:9). Tissot depicts the Evil One as transparent and shadowy against the background. He is hideous in appearance to accentuate his wicked nature and appears much larger than Jesus to emphasize his power over weak, flesh-bound human beings. The devil's dark face is full of anger in contrast to the deep serenity that radiates from Christ in prayer. Satan is depicted as a winged creature hovering effortlessly in the air with a man in his grip indicating that he is a fallen angel of a superior status who is able to come and go in this world as he wills.



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Why This is Good Angel Art

Tissot's Temptation scene exhorts us never to underestimate a fallen angel's ability to seduce human beings with the things of this world. Satan wields immense malicious power, intelligence, and mobility against which all humans are powerless. God gives each of us a guardian angel for spiritual protection against that angel who is capable of tempting even God Himself.

Arti-Facts

- **Medium:** Watercolor over graphite on gray wove paper
- **Date:** 1886-1894
- **Size:** 8 ¾ in. x 6 ¼ in.
- **Location:** Brooklyn Museum, New York.