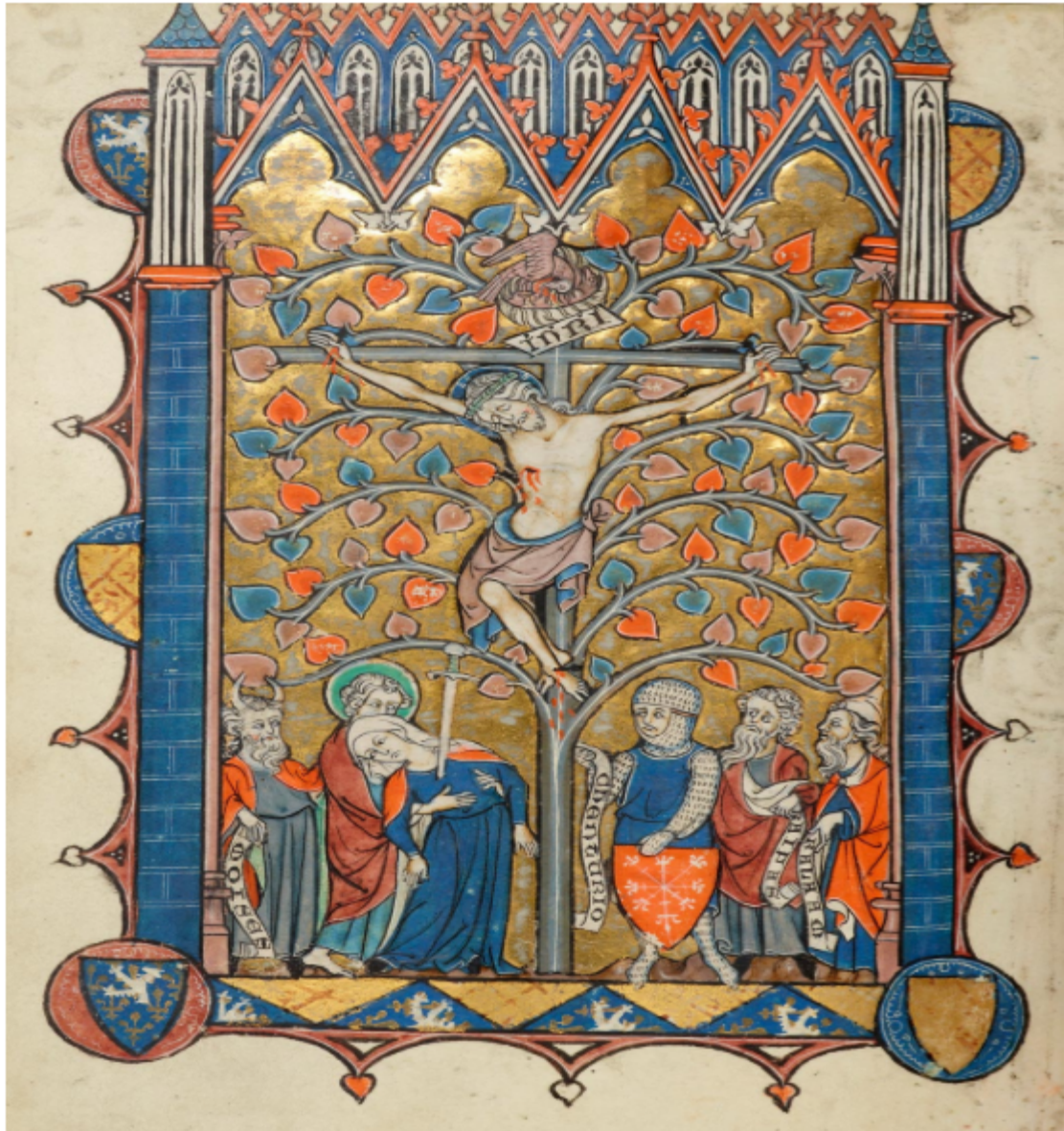


Write a commentary on the following image, drawing attention to features of style, content, and symbolism. What scene or narrative is the artist representing here?
How is s/he representing it?



The 'Tree of Life' or 'Crucifixion' is one of thirty-nine surviving miniatures that adorn a four-hundred and thirty-four page¹ liturgical manuscript, crafted in Amiens, France, some-time between the years of 1280 and 1299². 'The Psalter and Hours of Yolande of Soissons' as it is academically known, was a personal book of psalms produced for 'Yolande, of Nesle-Soissons, Countess of the Table, and Lady of Ham'. Yolande was born

¹ A. Stones, *Psalter-Hours of Yolande de Soissons*, < <https://bit.ly/2QLITBV> > [Accessed 12th Oct. 2018].

² The Morgan Library & Museum, *Medieval & Renaissance Manuscripts* < <https://www.themorgan.org/manuscript/128492> > [Accessed 12th Oct. 2018].

in 1255, and was married in 1271 to 'Bernard V, Lord of Moreuil'³. Her life was likely one of aristocratic prestige throughout, hence the sumptuousness and extravagance of her own personal hymn-book. Her Father, Raoul IV of the Coeuvres family was a Crusader Knight who married Queen Alix of Cyprus, daughter of Henry II, King of Jerusalem⁴, whilst her husband would later become 'Marshal of France'⁵ - an honorary title, once awarded to French generals of exceptional military merit.⁶ Yolande also conceived three children, the youngest of whom, was killed at the famous battle of Crecy in 1346⁷. It is important to highlight the eminence of her genealogy so that we may best understand the style, content, symbolism and artistic narrative represented in this here image, "for one does not get far in understanding them by looking at the miniatures alone."⁸

The scene itself is a portrayal of the crucifixion of Christ, who is splayed across the trunk of a twelve branch tree, representative of the twelve stages of the passion and/or suffering of Jesus, whose name is bannered under the nest of a bleeding pelican above, "a symbol of the suffering of christ, underscoring the idea of his death for the salvation of his 'spiritual offspring' i.e. christian believers"⁹. 'Twelve' can be seen in repetition, also along the top of the piece in the form of spires, further concretizing the message of 'sacrifice' the reader. The inscription 'INRI' is the abbreviation for a Latin phrase which translates to 'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. This was the notice that Pontius Pilate nailed over Jesus which signifies that a true christian lies here, whilst at the base of the image, six figures of biblical distinction; Moses, John, Virgin Mary, Centurion, Caiphaz and Balaam,¹⁰ four of which are carrying scrolls with their names-on, stand idly by.

The outer figures provide the prophetic link between Christs life and the Old Testament. Moses, on the left, testifies to the Tree of Life, and on the other side, Balaam testifies to Christ. The four figures closest to the tree represent New Testament witnesses to Christ as the son of God. On the left, John supports the Virgin in her moment of deepest grief, symbolised by the sword of Symeons prophecy. On the right, the centurion symbolises his recognition of Christ. Beside him Caiphaz, the high priest who brought charges against Jesus before Pilate, represents his prophecy that Jesus was to die not for the Jewish nation only, but also to gather together the scattered children of God. Caiphaz parallels the centurions position as a person of authority who took part in Christs trial and crucifixion but recognised the spiritual purpose of the event. This miniature states concisely Gods

³ Geneanet, < <https://bit.ly/2QRisdd> > [Accessed 12th Oct. 2018].

⁴ Gould, K. *The Psalter and Hours of Yolande of Soissons* (Cambridge: Mass Mediaeval Academy of America, 1978) p. 5.

⁵ Geneanet, < <https://bit.ly/2QRisdd> > [Accessed 12th Oct. 2018].

⁶ Wikipedia, < https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Marshals_of_France > [Accessed 12th Oct. 2018].

⁷ Gould, *The Psalter and Hours of Yolande of Soissons*, p. 7.

⁸ Harthan, *Books of Hours*, p. 31.

⁹ The British Library, Bonaventura, *The Tree of Life* < <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/illmanus/harlmanucoll/b/011hrl000005234u00005000.html> > [Accessed 12th Oct. 2018].

¹⁰ Gould, *The Psalter and Hours of Yolande of Soissons*, pp. 101-102.

plan for human salvation and encourages the viewer through meditation on this image, to participate spiritually in this event.¹¹

Such manuscripts “were not for monks or university libraries, but for ordinary people”¹², and although not necessarily a reflection of reality, “the owner of a book of hours was meant to stop eight times a day and read the appropriate text”¹³. It was even from the book of hours that children were often taught to read¹⁴, therefore each image was interlaced with symbolism of both family and national values to ensure their minds were shaped in the “correct and proper” manner. The Crucifixion as a prominent biblical tale was thus integral to any psalter, not only as a dedication to faith but also for the purpose of education. The pictorial beauty of the miniatures would have no-doubt stimulated the audience, encouraging further and returning reads, and therefore a greater understanding of christianity and the mentality to which they were expected to subscribe.

However, although in-part a book of religious ritual, psalters of this calibre also acted as tools for social power; as a representation of class and cast for dignitaries and the nobility, much in the same way that today’s “flash” purchases are exhibited, such as a yacht or jet; it was “illumination, the art of decorating books with colours and metals, usually gold”¹⁵, that was a luxurious undertaking, and “was often a joint enterprise in which several craftsman might collaborate”¹⁶.

The standard and degree of ornamentation depended to a large extent on what the owner was prepared to pay; religious texts were always thought worthy of as much *de luxe* presentation as the owner could afford.¹⁷

The artist(s) were instructed to embellish the pages with heraldry, so that the founders legacy may live-on throughout the passage of time. Two coat-of-arms may be seen around the border of the miniature, repeated three times a’ piece. The blue shield is the crest of the ‘Moreuil family, Counts of Soissons’, whilst the other was Yolandes personal coat of arms, thus enforcing the personal attributes seen throughout the psalter¹⁸. The former crest also forms the base border, adding extra emphasis to the family name. Other examples of personalisation have been noted elsewhere, for instance ‘folio 104v’ is the teaching of a ‘woman taken in adultery’, whilst miniature ‘M729’ represents the prayer books owner at her devotions, also laden in her own personal heraldic design.¹⁹”The makers of

¹¹ Gould, *The Psalter and Hours of Yolande of Soissons*, pp. 101-102.

¹² De Hamel, C. *A History of Illuminated Manuscripts* (Oxford: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1986) p. 159.

¹³ De Hamel, *A History of Illuminated Manuscripts*, p. 160.

¹⁴ De Hamel, *A History of Illuminated Manuscripts*, p. 164.

¹⁵ Harthan, *Books of Hours*, p. 19.

¹⁶ Harthan, *Books of Hours*, p. 19.

¹⁷ Harthan, J. *Books of Hours* (Golborne: Filmset by Keyspools Ltd., 1978) p. 23-24.

¹⁸ Gould, *The Psalter and Hours of Yolande of Soissons*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁹ Gould, *The Psalter and Hours of Yolande of Soissons*, p. 4.

books-of-hours added what was required by the customer rather than by some church authority”²⁰ hence why there are rarely two psalters that are identical.

To conclude, it is evident that this piece was commissioned with the utmost care and attention; a viewpoint aligning to the grandeur of the workmanship, which is incomparable to most other psalters of the same era. The profoundness of gold-emboss, blues and reds, is a vibrancy that was highly expensive to attain; thus showing us that such was in-itself a symbolic narrative intent on highlighting their kins power through devotion to God whilst simultaneously inciting through repetition the importance of sacrifice through devotion to Yolande, it's owner. Such was therefore created as a powerful tool for instruction.

The British Library, *Bonaventura, The Tree of Life* < <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/illmanus/harimanucoll/b/011hrl000005234u00005000.html> > [Accessed 12th Oct. 2018].

De Hamel, C. *A History of Illuminated Manuscripts* (Oxford: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1986).

Geneanet, < <https://bit.ly/2QRisdd> > [Accessed 12th Oct. 2018].

Gould, K. *The Psalter and Hours of Yolande of Soissons* (Cambridge: Mass Mediaeval Academy of America, 1978).

Harthan, J. *Books of Hours* (Golborne: Filmset by Keypools Ltd., 1978).

Stones, A. *Psalter-Hours of Yolande de Soissons*, < <https://bit.ly/2QLITBV> > [Accessed 12th Oct. 2018].

The Morgan Library & Museum, *Medieval & Renaissance Manuscripts* < <https://www.themorgan.org/manuscript/128492> > [Accessed 12th Oct. 2018].

Wikipedia, < https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Marshals_of_France > [Accessed 12th Oct. 2018].

²⁰ De Hamel, *A History of Illuminated Manuscripts*, p. 164.