

The painting, “The Vision of Isaiah”, depicts the moment when a seraph touches Isaiah’s lips with a burning coal. The powerful passage of scripture lends itself well to the medium of painting because a single image tells the story, yet tells more than *just* the story. The heavenly bright being descending to Isaiah conveys the truth that every good thing, including salvation, comes from above, from something stronger than mortals. The story acts as a powerful metaphor of the gospel. Commentaries on the passage say that the burning coal and smoke-filled temple would have been signs of condemnation and judgment. Instead, the burning coal touches Isaiah’s lips and he is cleansed.

Although the painting as a whole is from the artist’s imagination, many parts are based on painting studies done from life. The temple with its massive pillars rising out of deep grass is based on the ruins of the Greek temple at Paestum in southern Italy. The mountain landscape is from studies near the artist’s home in North Carolina. The distant islands are based on paintings of the rocky coast of California.

The great curtains at the temple entrance represent the spirit of God. They lovingly envelope Isaiah and flow through the temple, filling it like the train of God’s robe in the biblical text. They are also a reminder of the curtain at the entrance of the holy of holies, rent in two at the crucifixion, a symbol of humanity’s unmerited access to God by the sacrifice of his Son. At the far end of the temple, they part to reveal the throne and altar of God, who is symbolized by the setting sun, placed just above the throne.

Angels have been depicted in paintings throughout art history. In Isaiah’s vision, they are not the fairy-like or cherubic angels of popular depiction. They are the four seraphim, traditionally the highest order of celestial beings. The word “seraphim” has connotations of “fire” or even “serpents”. Their singing shakes the great temple. Two sets of wings cover their face and feet, and one set is outspread in flight. The artist pictures them with heads tilted back almost impossibly with only the wide-open mouths showing. The wings themselves are based on drawings from high-speed photographs of song birds in flight.

The biblical text which wraps around the painting is hand-carved into the frame and was conceived from the beginning as a necessary element of the work, which took over a year to complete.

Luke Allsbrook received a BFA in Painting from Indiana University (Bloomington) and an MFA (cum laude) from The New York Academy of Art. His work has been exhibited in galleries and museums throughout the US and is included in the Forbes collection, Mercedes Benz, The US Department of State, and in the collection of His Royal Highness, The Prince of Wales. Mr. Allsbrook served as official tour artist for Prince Charles on his 2005 state tour of the United States. The recipient of the Elizabeth Greenshields Foundations Grant and two-time Posey Scholar, he has taught drawing and painting at the New York Academy of Art, The Lyme Academy of Art, William Paterson University, UNC-Asheville, and in Italy with the University of Georgia Cortona Program. He resides with his wife and four children in the mountains of Western North Carolina. His works may be viewed at [www.lukeallsbrook.com](http://www.lukeallsbrook.com)