

Questions for viewing

- According to Muslim belief the Prophet Muhammad (seated) received his first revelation when the Archangel Gabriel (left) appeared and instructed him to recite God's message. What do you think this artist hoped to convey about the event?
- What appears to be happening? What do you see that makes you say that?

Look closely at the clothing, pose, facial expression, and attributes of each figure in image 1. What might they suggest about each figure? (Note: Attitudes toward figural arts in the Islamic world varied according to time and place, ranging from totally aniconic?no images of people or animals?to entirely accepting of figural imagery in secular settings. The Qur'an does not prohibit the depiction of figures, but the Sayings of the Prophet [hadith] discusses the subject several times. The objections expressed there largely focus on the exclusive role of God as creator.)

- Look at images 3-6. How do these pieces reflect Islam?
- Read an excerpt from the revelation below (translated from Arabic). What do these words mean to you (see image 3)?

Recite: In the Name of thy Lord who created,
created Man of a blood-clot.

Recite: And thy Lord is the Most Generous,
who taught by the Pen,
taught Man what he knew not.

6. The text surrounding the image 1 describes this crucial episode in the history of Islam?the first revelation and Muhammad's acceptance of his role as God's messenger. [Listen to an audio recording](#) of the section of the Qur'an corresponding to the first revelation. What do you notice about the sound of the words? How does this support or challenge your initial impressions of the scene?

7. Compare and contrast the ways in which works of art reflecting Christian and Muslim beliefs (figs.1, 2 7, 8) present a pivotal spiritual moment. Collect information about the figures (pose, facial expression, clothing and accessories), setting, and artistic choices (color, composition, and selection and application of materials) in each work. Identify similarities and differences between the works using the data you collected as an aid. Discuss how the various representations of these important moments support the religious beliefs and practices of each faith.