Masaccio's Holy Trinity
Masaccio, *Holy Trinity*, c. 1427, Fresco, 667 x 317 cm, Santa Maria Novella, Florence

Masaccio was the first painter in the Renaissance to incorporate Brunelleschi's discovery in his art. He did this in his fresco called *The Holy Trinity*, in Santa Maria Novella, in Florence.

Have a close look at the painting and at this perspective diagram. Can you see the orthogonals (look for diagonal lines that appear to recede into the distance)? Because Masaccio painted from a low viewpoint --
as though we were looking up at Christ, we see the orthogonals in the ceiling, and if we traced all of the orthogonals the vanishing point would be below the base of the cross.

![Image of fresco](image)

My favorite part of this fresco is God's feet. Actually, you can only really see one of them. Why, you may ask, do I have a thing for God's feet (or foot)? Well, think about it for a minute. God is standing in this painting. Doesn't that strike you as odd just a little bit? This may not strike you all that much when you first think about it because our idea of God, our picture of him in our minds eye -- as an old man with a beard, is very much based on Renaissance images of God. So, here Masaccio imagines God as a man. Not a force or a power, or something abstract like that, but as a man. A man who stands -- his feet are foreshortened, and he weighs something and walks, and, I suppose, even has toenails! In medieval art, God was often represented by a hand, just a hand, as though God was an abstract force or power in our lives, but here he seems so much like a flesh and blood man! This is a good indication of Humanism in the Renaissance.

Masaccio's contemporaries were struck by the palpable realism of this fresco, as was Vasari who lived over one hundred years later. Vasari wrote that "the most beautiful thing, apart from the figures, is the barrel-vaulted ceiling drawn in perspective and divided into square compartments containing rosettes foreshortened and made to recede so skillfully that the surface looks as if it is indented."

The Architecture
One of the other amazing things about this painting is the use of **classical architecture** (from ancient Greece and Rome). Masaccio borrowed much of what we see from ancient Roman architecture, and may have been helped by Brunelleschi. Study the diagram below and make sure you can identify the different architectural elements. If you want to read more about these terms look in the glossary in the back of your book.

**Coffers** - the indented squares that decorate the ceiling  
**Column** - a round, supporting element in architecture. In this painting we see an attached column.  
**Pilasters** - a shallow, flattened out columns attached to a wall -- it is only decorative, and has no supporting function  
**Barrel Vault** - vault means ceiling, and a barrel vault is a ceiling in the shape of a round arch  
**Ionic and Corinthian Capitals** - a capital is the decorated top of a column or pilaster. An **ionic** capital has a scroll shape (like the ones on the attached columns in the painting), and a **Corinthian** capital has leaf shapes.  
**Fluting** - the vertical, indented lines or grooves that decorated the pilasters in the painting. Fluting could also be used on a column