

The Childhood of Christ in Art

Dates	Wednesday 2 and Thursday 3 December 2020
Times	11.00–13.00
Location	Zoom (online)
Tutor	Dr Richard Stemp
Level	All Levels



L-R (detail): Attributed to Francesco di Vannuccio, *The Virgin and Child in Majesty*, c.1370;
French, *Diptych with scenes from the Life of the Virgin*, probably 19th Century;
After Master of the Magdalen Legend, *The Virgin and Child*, c.1500-1525

Course Description

In the Christian church the beginning of December is celebrated as the start of Advent, the period leading up to Christmas, and focusses on the preparations for the birth of Jesus. What better time, then, to look at the ways in which the childhood of Christ is depicted in art at the Wallace Collection.

In this two-day online course, you will discover how the biblical narrative in art was combined with ideas from diverse sources to create the image of Christmas, which is now so familiar to us. We will distinguish the different elements of the story, explore the ways in which each was interpreted, and discuss the wider implications for art and faith. You will also discover the intricacy and subtlety of some of the Wallace Collection's smaller works of art, which are often harder to see during a visit - one of the many advantages that online learning brings.

Session One

As many Christmas services do, we will start our investigation of Jesus's childhood nine months before his birth, with the Annunciation, when the Angel Gabriel told Mary she was to be a mother. The Visitation, when Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth, pregnant with John the Baptist, and The Dream of St Joseph, when the humble carpenter learnt the nature of his fiancé's pregnancy, will lead us to the Nativity - the birth of Christ - and to the arrival of the Shepherds, the first visitors to greet the infant Christ.

At every stage we will use artworks from the Wallace Collection as our primary source, drawing on familiar paintings as well as less well-known material including sculpture, ceramics, furniture and even armour. Learning more about the Christmas narrative and the ways in which it is embodied within the traditions of Western European art will also give you a greater understanding of the richness of the collection itself.

Session Two

By today's standards, the Wise Men arrived late for Christmas: Epiphany is celebrated on 6 January, and is the reason why we have '12 Days of Christmas'. We will explore the familiar image of the Three Kings, and explain why we think of them this way, given that neither their number nor status is mentioned in the bible.

Their arrival will be the starting point for an exploration of what little is known about Christ's childhood, and about the nature of the Holy Family, the subject of so many paintings. We will end our course with two episodes which mark the end of Jesus's youth: the Baptism, and the Wedding at Cana, both of which were once celebrated, together with the Arrival of the Magi, on the Feast of the Epiphany.

Course Tutor

Dr Richard Stemp is a graduate of Clare College, University of Cambridge, where he also completed his PhD on *Sculpture in Ferrara in the Fifteenth Century*. After a year at the Academy of Live and Recorded Arts he has shared his time between art and acting. Richard was a lecturer at the National Gallery for 24 years, and has worked regularly for London's leading galleries including Tate, Buckingham Palace and the V&A. His books include *The Secret Language of the Renaissance* and *Churches and Cathedrals*; he has written and presented two series for Channel Four: *Art in the National Gallery* and *Tate Modern*.

Previous Skills, Knowledge or Experience

None required. This course is designed as an introduction to the subject.

Joining Information and Format

This course will be taught through Zoom. For more information, including instructions on how to download and use the system, please visit www.zoom.us/support.

Each course session duration is 120 minutes, including a ten-minute break and short Q&A session with the tutor.

Participants will be emailed the Zoom Meeting ID and Passcode 48 hours in advance.
