



2007.050

Unidentified Artist

Peru, Cuzco

*Adoration of the Magi*

Eighteenth century

Oil on canvas, 38 x 37 inches

Paintings of the nativity of Christ (*Adoration of the Shepherds*) and the homage paid him by the three kings traveling from the East (*Adoration of the Magi*) are common subjects in the oeuvres of the Old Masters of Europe as well as the artists of the Spanish Americas. The visit of the kings to the site of Christ's birth is recorded in the gospel according to Matthew 2:9-12, an event celebrated on January 6 as the Feast of the Epiphany—the moment of the revelation of God incarnate.

The composition of this painting accords with tradition. The Virgin Mary offers the Christ Child for the eyes of the three wise men who have been drawn by a star to the place in Bethlehem where he was born. As is common in representations of this subject, the humble setting has been transformed into an impressive architectural space indicated by the arch in the background. Balthasar, Melchior, and Caspar, with clearly differentiated features, are in the foreground, offering their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The turban on the ground indicates that the magi have traveled from “the Orient,” accompanied by an armed guard, some of them wearing helmets and brandishing spears. Saint Joseph, relegated to the middle ground, is identifiable on account of his halo.

Considerable emphasis has been placed on the role of art in the dissemination of the Catholic faith and its doctrines throughout Latin America, but there is considerable testamentary evidence that the private sector collected paintings, sculptures, and the decorative arts on a large scale. A painting like this is likely to have belonged to a private collection.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt