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Unidentified Artist
Peru, Cuzco
Christ Teaching the Doctors
Eighteenth century
Oil on canvas, 41 3/8 x 57 1/4 inches

After their return from Egypt, Mary and Joseph went every year with the Christ Child to visit the holy temple in Jerusalem:

The child being now attained to twelve years of age, and his parents coming with him to the temple, according to their custom, they returned, and the blessed child strayed, they not perceiving it: so that they were three days in search of him, weeping and lamenting: in the end they found him in the temple among the sages and doctors, demanding questions of them, and answering theirs. His blessed mother seeing him there, said to him, my son, why hast thou done so to me? Behold thy father and I sorrowing did seek thee. And he said to them: what is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be about those things which are my father's?ⁱ

In the Thoma painting, Saint Joseph (identified by the flowering rod) and the Virgin Mary appear at the upper right of the composition, just come upon their missing son, who gestures wisely to a rapt audience wearing vaguely Middle Eastern garb. The Child is sitting on a throne atop a series of steps carpeted in a close-fitting paisley design. At the upper left is a small version of the landscape setting so beloved by members of the Cuzco school, with blue-green trees rising above a tile-roofed Jerusalem and two colorful birds.

The compositional source was one of the most widely spread images based on the engravings in Jerome Nadal's *Annotations and Meditations on the Gospels* (fig. 1). The series of

engravings, first published in 1595, continued to provide a rich iconographical source for artists and patrons in the Viceroyalty of Peru well into the eighteenth century.



Fig 1. Hieronymus Wierix, engraving illustrating the first Sunday after Epiphany (Cum doctoribus disputat Iesus) in Jerome Nadal, *Annotations and Meditations on the Gospels*, first published in Antwerp 1595, again the following year, and in a third edition in 1607.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt

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ⁱ Pedro de Ribadeneira, *The Life and Death of the Most Glorious Virgin Mary, Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ . . .* (Montreal: T. Maguire, 1835), 16-17.