



2012.020  
Unidentified Artist  
*Nativity with Musical Angels*  
Peru or Bolivia  
18<sup>th</sup> century  
Oil on canvas, 21 x 16 inches

All of the elements proper to the story of the birth of Christ are found in this small painting. In the distance, the three Magi make their way to Bethlehem, guided by a star in the form of a glowing cross. The shepherds in the fields have also seen the star, and will soon also follow its lead to the manger where the newborn Messiah lies. In the heavens above, God the Father and the dove of the Holy Spirit survey the earthly scene, and angels hold aloft a banderole reading “Gloria in altissimis deo” (Glory be to God most high).

The presence of the infant Christ has not yet been seen by the Magi and the shepherds, who are the usual witnesses at the Nativity. Instead, the Holy Family is surrounded by a group of musical angels, who serenade with their voices and an array of specific instruments: lute, triangle, flute, and harp. Sensibly, the drum is left aside for this performance.

It is difficult to pinpoint the source of this painting, but the figure types and the landscape details recall paintings created in Potosí, Bolivia by Gaspar Miguel Berrío or by artists

possibly close to him now found in the Museo de Charcas, Sucre. Francisco Stastny has pointed to the long-term influence of the engravings created for the *Annotations and Meditations on the Gospel* organized by Jerome Nadal, S.J., first published in Antwerp in 1595. The bird's-eye views of outdoor scenes enable the artist to include both narrative and anecdotal details that embellish the story told in the foreground.<sup>i</sup>

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt

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<sup>i</sup>Francisco Stastny, "Grabados inspiran pinturas de Cuzco y Ayacucho. De Ámsterdam al Perú," in Francisco Stastny Mosbert, *Estudios de arte colonial*, vol. 1, Sonia V. Rose and Juan Carlos Estenssoro Fuchs, eds. (Lima: Institut Français d'Études Andines, 2013), 348.