



2025.58

Unidentified artist

Dedication of the Infant Virgin Mary to the Holy Trinity

Cuzco, 18th century

Oil on canvas

25 ¼ x 34 7/8 (64 x 88.5 cm)

This Cuzco School painting depicts *The Presentation of the Child Virgin by the Angels*, an iconographic rarity within Marian imagery. Executed in oil on canvas, the work presents the birth of the Virgin Mary in an interior defined by classical columns and arches. Saint Anne reclines in bed after childbirth, her headboard richly carved and gilded with *brocataeado*, while angels cradle the newborn's crib at her feet. At the left, Saint Joachim kneels in prayer. Throughout the scene, textiles, such as a finely woven carpet and silks adorned with gold brocade, emphasize the sumptuous setting (Fig. 1)



Fig. 1. Unidentified artist, *The Presentation of the Child Virgin by the Angels* (detail). Cuzco, 18th century. Oil on canvas, 25 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 34 $\frac{7}{8}$ (64 x 88.5 cm)

Above, the composition shifts to the celestial. The Holy Trinity appears amid radiant clouds: God the Father with flowing white beard, the Son bearing the Cross, and the Holy Spirit as a dove. They gaze down upon the Virgin Child, who, swaddled in cloths, is borne heavenward by angels and putti (Fig. 2). This vertical axis uniting earth and heaven proclaims Mary's divine election from birth. In doctrinal terms, the Virgin was conceived *in mente Dei ante omnia*, or "in the mind of God before all things," affirming that her predestination to be Jesus mother preceded

her earthly existence.¹ Her parents release her physically into the world, yet her trajectory is immediately subsumed with the divine economy of salvation, here visualized in her ascension toward the Trinity. In the left background, the *hortus conclusus* motif reinforces this theme: the enclosed garden from the *Song of Songs* (4:12), widely adopted in Marian imagery, functions as a symbol of her purity and, simultaneously, as her role as the new paradise (Fig. 3).²



Fig. 2. Unidentified artist, *The Presentation of the Child Virgin by the Angels* (detail). Cuzco, 18th century. Oil on canvas, 25 ¼ x 34 7/8 (64 x 88.5 cm)



Fig. 3. Unidentified artist, *The Presentation of the Child Virgin by the Angels* (detail). Cuzco, 18th century. Oil on canvas, 25 ¼ x 34 7/8 (64 x 88.5 cm)

¹ Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt, personal communication, October 18, 2025.

² Carlos Ponce Ponte, "The Presentation of the Child Virgin by the Angels," in Jaime Eguiguren Art & Antiques, 2025.

The painting's iconography draws on apocryphal sources and Counter-Reformation spirituality. While the *Protoevangelium of James* narrates Mary's presentation to the Temple at age three, this scene imaginatively depicts her offering from the moment of birth.³ By replacing her parents with angelic intermediaries, the composition emphasizes her exceptional nature: a child consecrated directly to God. Doctrinally, this reflects the belief that the Virgin was conceived "in the mind of God before all things," her destiny being predetermined in the divine plan. This reading aligns with post-Tridentine strategies of using tender, affective imagery to inspire devotion and counter Protestant iconoclasm.

As Carlos Ponce Ponte has argued, it's possible to trace the painting's sources to the engravings by Léonard Gaultier's *Birth of the Virgin* (Fig. 4) and Philip Fruytiers' *Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Fig. 5), which show how narrative depictions of Anne's motherhood and allegorical presentations of Mary as a child could be reinterpreted.⁴ The inscription in one of the prints confirms the image's orthodoxy, as it states that it was commissioned by the Jesuits in Antwerp.⁵ In the Thoma painting, domestic and theological motifs converge: the miraculous birth, the symbolic offering, and the substitution of human parents with heavenly figures. The result is a Cuzco School canvas of notable originality within the Marian repertoire: an eloquent example of how Andean painters adapted European models to create richly symbolic and locally resonant images.

Verónica Muñoz-Nájar

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ I am grateful to Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt for drawing my attention to this detail.

