
"The most beautiful story" - The story of Christmas in the Uffizi Gallery

We invite you to take a tour in the famous Florentine Gallery, discovering an itinerary who is entirely dedicated to the birth of Jesus!

We'll see five paintings starting from the Announcement by the archangel Gabriel to Mary about the upcoming birth of the Saviour, because they could help us to understand how the subject of Nativity has inspired artists of all times, and how using their creativity they have been able to add motifs and variations of great beauty and interest.

The many curiosities that will be awakened by this itinerary could be satisfied not only by reading this booklet but above all by asking the Gallery staff, those kind and prepared people wearing the pin "UffiziKids" who will be happy to answer all your questions.

Good visit and Merry Christmas!

Annunciation by Simone Martini



Simone Martini is the author of this painting and he chose to represent the moment when the angel suddenly appears to Mary: which details reveal that the angel has just arrived?

Look carefully: what was Mary doing at that moment? ... Look what she's holding in her hand...

Thanks to his outstanding skill, the painter is able to convey the mood of the young girl, who seems to be upset and scared: which is the gesture that makes us aware of that?

A writing made up of golden letters in relief is coming out from the angel's mouth: that's his greeting to Mary! Can you read it? These are words that sound "ancient": "Ave Gratia Plena Dominus Tecum"

✓ The painting is signed and dated: can you decipher the inscription in the lower part and read the date? Ask the Gallery staff for help!

Adoration of the Magi by Gentile da Fabriano



This picture was painted for the Strozzi chapel, that's to say a room owned by one of the richest and most powerful Florentine families that is located inside the church of Santa Trinita.

It tells all the stories about Jesus' childhood, beginning with the prophets who announce his birth and the Announcement by the Angel to Mary. Can you find these figures?

The central part of the work, the largest and most crowded, tells us about the journey of the Magi and their homage to the Child Jesus.

The narration begins from the upper lunettes with the episodes of the sighting of the star by the Magi, their journey and the arrival in Jerusalem.

The lower half of the central scene depicts the colourful procession that arrives in the presence of the Holy Family.

Which is the detail that makes the Magi recognizable from the other characters?

Gentile da Fabriano is the great artist who made this painting and he used gold not only for the sky and for halos of the protagonists of the sacred history, but also in many other details as a sign of wealth and glory!

The Magi came from the East and the painter included in the procession some exotic animals that perhaps he had seen in the entourage of famous people or ambassadors coming from distant countries. Look carefully at the background of the procession...Which animals can you recognize?

Are you sure you identified them all?? Ask for help to the Gallery staff!



What a beauty are the dresses the three Magi wear! But what is the young man dressed in blue doing, while he's kneeling at the feet of the youngest king?

Behind him we can notice a character standing who represents Palla Strozzi, the "client", in other words the one who requested the realization of this work and paid for it. He wears a turban and keeps a falcon in his hand; he is together with his son Lorenzo, the boy with the red hat.

In the lower part of the painting there is the "predella" where you can find other stories related to the birth and childhood of Jesus.

- ✓ Do you know what a "predella" is? Ask the staff working in that room!

Adoration of the Shepherds (Portinari Triptych) by Hugo van der Goes



This large "triptych" (that's the word used to define a work consisting of a central table and two side doors, sometimes closable on the central panel) was made in Flanders, with precision in the city of Bruges, by a local artist named Hugo van der Goes. However the client was the Florentine Tommaso Portinari, who worked in Bruges for the Medici family.

Portinari wanted this work to be done for the Florentine church of Sant'Egidio in the Hospital of Santa Maria Nuova. But how did he get such a large painting to Florence?

It was an adventurous journey aboard a sailing ship that took this table first to the North Sea, then crossing the Atlantic Ocean, passing through the Strait of Gibraltar and circumnavigating western Sicily, going up the Tyrrhenian coast until it got Pisa, where the ship started to ascend the Arno river in order to arrive in the city of Florence.

There were 16 men ready for work waiting for the landing in Porta San Frediano, May 28th in 1483!

It was the greatest work ever exhibited from Flanders... imagine how much wonder it aroused in the Florentine people who could admire it!

The painter depicted all the events related to the Nativity of Jesus, from the Announcement of his birth to the Arrival of the Magi... but where is the Annunciation represented??? Try to look carefully at the work in all its sides!

Can you find Mary and Joseph on their way to Bethlehem before the birth of Jesus? And the Announcement to the Shepherds? And the journey of the Magi?

In the central panel there's the naked Child who is adored by Mary, Joseph, the Shepherds and numerous Angels: can you count them? How many are there? Ask the Gallery staff the right answer!

Now look at them carefully, how do the Angels look like? Are they elegant? Which are the elements that make them particularly refined?

Look now at the group of Shepherds: clothes, hands, faces... All these details help us to understand that they are men who worked and lived always outdoors, with difficulty.

In the foreground the painter has represented a beautiful "still life" composed of two vases of flowers and a bundle of wheat: they are all elements that allude to the death and resurrection of Jesus! Look how the painter managed to paint the water in the flower pot! It looks real!

There is a curious object in front of Saint Joseph: a hoof! It should make us understand that the place where these characters are is Sacred and that it should be honoured by entering barefoot.

The two side tables depict the Portinari family and behind them the patron saints whose family members bore the name. Only the youngest child, who was named Pigello, did not have his patron saint. The other members of the family were named Tommaso and Antonio, Margherita and Maria Maddalena.

All the Saints holds in their hand or close to themselves some objects or things in relation to their life or their martyrdom, so that the viewers could identify them.

There's a Saint in particular who tramples a monster with her feet! She is Saint Margherita! Are you curious to know her story? Or do you have any other questions and curiosities about this great painting? Ask the Gallery staff!

Adoration of the Magi by Domenico Ghirlandaio



The theme of the Adoration of the Magi is represented by the Florentine fifteenth century painter Domenico Ghirlandaio in a peculiar setting.

Look at the background: can you locate the "little hut" where Jesus was born? It is set inside majestic buildings that however appear in ruins. This image helped to remind the passage from the pagan world to the Christian one.

Mary and the Child are in the center of the painting. Can you recognize Joseph? He's a bit distant, he silently observes the scene.

In front of Jesus we can notice The Magi kings kneeling: what can make us aware of their identity? Look at the youngest of the Three Kings: what is his servant doing? Why? The colour of the servant's skin helps us to understand that the Magi came from distant countries.

The procession of people is arranged in a sort of semicircle around Mary and the Child, in order to fit with the circular shape of the work, because this was a feature of this kind of paintings (the so-called "Tondos") made for "private devotion". In other words, they were meant to be hung inside the most important and wealthy families homes, and they were often given on the occasion of weddings or birth of a son. It seems that this work was made for the Tornabuoni family of Florence.

Indeed, the subject depicted and the date written by Ghirlandaio suggest that the painting may have been executed on the occasion of the birth in 1487 of Giovanni Tornabuoni, the oldest son of Lorenzo Tornabuoni and Giovanna degli Albizi. Can you find the date in the

painting?

The portrait of the head of the family Lorenzo could be recognizable in the black-haired man kneeling to the right.

Finally, look at the knights' glittering armours, at the beautiful flowered lawn in the foreground and at the objects that together with the marble block create a sort of "still life": what kind of objects are they? According to you, which is their meaning?

Do you have any other questions? Couldn't you find the date? Ask the Gallery staff!

Adoration of the Magi by Leonardo da Vinci



Leonardo da Vinci was working on this picture in Florence, when he was called to Milan. Then he left it "non finita", or unfinished. Observe carefully: how can you understand that Leonardo had not finished his work?

Leonardo had been commissioned to carry out this work for the Augustinian friars. The chosen topic was the Adoration of the Magi: can you identify the three Magi? What makes them different from other people? Do you know what are they bringing as a gift to Jesus?

There are many figures around Mary and the Child: how are they arranged? Which emotions do they express? Are they calm or agitated? Relaxed or tense? Their gestures and their expressions underline the wonder of being in the presence of the Child Jesus.

In the background Leonardo has painted a scenario in which disputes of horses and riders alternate with buildings in ruins, alluding to the ancient pagan world that gives way to the new one, that's to say the Christian era.

✓ In this same room you can find another work by Leonardo that depicts a theme that we met at the beginning of our journey: the Annunciation.

Observe it and try to compare it with Simone Martini's one: the gold background has disappeared and so the scene is no longer in an abstract space, but in a garden with a flowery meadow; Maria doesn't seem to be frightened, she is serene while receiving the Announcement by the Angel... And what about the wings of the Angel? What do they remind you? They look like real wings of a bird!

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