



# JESUS CHRIST IN EVERY CULTURE

INTERNATIONAL NATIVITY ART



Art invites us to an encounter with God that has been waiting for us that we likely didn't realize was there. When we slow down and take time to gaze and ponder a work of art, we are opening ourselves up to an opportunity to enter into a deeper relationship with God. Artists, in their own way, can be theologians, committing to helping us see what was, what is, and what could be.

In this compilation, we have chosen images by artists from around the world and ones that go beyond what you might be familiar with. As news of Christ's salvation spreads across the globe, so do artists' depictions of that taking place in various cultural contexts. And we must say, it is beautiful to see! This type of art even has a name: inculturated sacred art.

While historically, Jesus was 100% culturally and ethnically Jewish, as the Savior of the World, we see time and again how He is portrayed in various cultural contexts in a way that makes His coming relatable to various peoples. As you look at the various images, consider how this picture might help someone understand that Jesus came into the world to save them, in their specific culture. How He came to the world to rescue not only Renaissance style white Europeans. How it may be able to help someone else understand the historical account of what happened.

We invite you to slow down and take time to explore these beautiful works of art from all over the world that highlight the coming of the Messiah. May this collection of inculturated sacred art draw you closer to our Savior this Advent season.

*Katie & Jessica*

FEEL FREE TO SHARE THIS DIGITAL VERSION. IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN A PRINTED SET CONTACT KATIE AT [KATIE.LARAVIA@GMAIL.COM](mailto:katie.laravia@gmail.com)

# Visio Divina



One helpful way of engaging with art with the intention of connecting with God is to do Visio Divina. Visio Divina, sacred seeing, is an ancient form of prayer that continues to be a powerful method of meditation. It invites the viewer into "divine seeing" and shares roots with the ancient practice of Lectio Divina. (Lectio Divina calls for a slow interaction with scripture through meditation and prayer, allowing a word or phrase to catch your attention.) Similarly, Visio Divina invites us to encounter God through art. Here are the steps to Visio Divina, which we would encourage you to try as you engage the collection of art [here](#).

## STEP 1

Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths to relax and focus before looking at the art.

## STEP 2

Look at the image and let your eyes stay with the very first thing that you see. Keep your attention on that one part of the image that first catches your eye. Try to keep your eyes from wandering to other parts of the picture. Breathe deeply and let yourself gaze at that part of the image for a minute or so. Meditate on the part of the picture that has drawn your attention. How is God speaking to you? Why do you think God drew your attention to this particular part? What could it mean for your life today? Do you sense God inviting you to understand, know, or do something? What emotion do you feel as you look at the picture?

## STEP 3

Now, let your eyes gaze at the whole image. Take your time and look at every part of the photograph. See it all. Reflect on the image for a minute or so. Gaze at the entire picture. Notice the shapes, the colors, and the lighting. Notice the detail of both the foreground and background. Once you have visually gotten a feel of the artwork in its entirety, note what has drawn your attention.

## STEP 4

God has been speaking to you as you meditated on this artwork, and now you can respond to Him. What is your prayer? Are there any desires within you that you want to bring to God?

## STEP 5

Spend the last moments in silence to simply rest in communion with God. Enjoy this opportunity for the stillness.





一九四二年春  
八舍陸鴻年敬繪  
於北平

Annunciation

China

John Lu Hongnian 陸鴻年 (1948)

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In the 1920's-40's a school of fine art was founded in 1925 in China for the creation and development of distinctive Christian art. They wanted to be sure to not give the impression that Christianity was merely something from the West, but that it was universal in application. Luke Chen, one of the lead painters at the time wrote, "I believe that when I paint the wonders of Christianity according to the ancient rules of Chinese art, the painted object exerts an externally new and unusual effect, so that at the same time I enrich to a marked degree, the old rules of Chinese painting." This painting was painted shortly before the Communist takeover of China. Lu Hongnian switched to purely secular painting after this time.

As is often the case with oriental art, themes of nature as well as architecture feature prominently throughout. The Virgin Mary here is shown wearing a red cloak, kneeling with bamboo trees peering through a window behind. The angel is shown holding the traditional symbol of purity and virginity, the white lily, while at her feet are what appears to be orange tiger lilies.

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What does surrendering your glory for the sake of God's glory look like right now in your life?

How does seeing this representation of the Annunciation change the way you view the story?



The Annunciation

Korea

Woonbo Kim Ki-chang (1950's)

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Like European artists, Ki-chang used Korean backdrops to frame his biblical portrayals. The result is beautiful. This artist began painting during the Korean War at a missionary's suggestion to help communicate truth to his countrymen and as a way to process the pain of war. Ki-chang portrays Biblical key moments as taking place in Korea and personified by Koreans. In *The Last Supper*, for example, Christ and his apostles are seated in a decidedly Asian architectural setting and the figures are dressed in traditional Korean robes and headwear.

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If God were to ask you to do something that in essence, would ruin your reputation for His sake, would you be willing?

How does seeing this representation of the Annunciation change the way you view the story?

WHO HAS SEEN THE TWO VINES  
PLANTED IN THE FIELD OF THE LORD,  
FROM WHOSE CLUSTERS THE WHOLE  
CREATION IS REFRESHED?

THE TWO VINES ARE

*Mary and Elizabeth.*

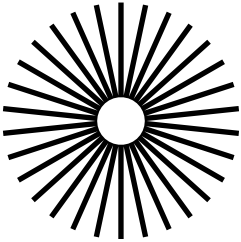
THE CLUSTERS ARE

*Christ and John.*

THE HOLY BRIDEGROOM OF THE  
CHURCH

AND THE FRIEND OF THE BRIDEGROOM.







The Glorious Visitation. Mary and Elizabeth  
India  
Lucy D'Souza-Krone (circa 1983)

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Lucy D'Souza-Krone was born in 1949 in a village in Goa on the west coast of India. She went to a school run by Missionary Sisters and then worked for several years as a member of the spiritual community of the "Khristsevikas," which is principally engaged in the education of women in rural India. Through this work, Lucy learned the situation of women in different parts of northern India.

In 1983 she joined INSCAPE (Indian School of Art for Peace), an ashram founded by the well-known Christian artist Jyoti Sahi. This Ashram, whose members live and work in community, is a meeting-house in which you encounter the culture of India and Christianity.

In this piece, Mary and Elizabeth together form a butterfly, with the child in the embryo in the center, signifying that both are pregnant. The child is in the form of a coconut (a coconut is broken and offered in the Holy places in India) which also indicates the sacrifice of Jesus and St. John. The sun in the center above points out to John's saying, "he must increase, I must decrease".

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Who has been with you on your journey this year? At the high points or low points? How have you come alongside and supported someone near to you; someone in your community; someone in another part of the world?

How does seeing this representation of the Visitation change the way you view the story?





The Visitation  
China  
He Qi (circa 1992)

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Dr. He Qi was among the many people sent to the countryside during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. As a young man, he escaped hard labor by painting pictures of chairman Mao Zedong. During those years, he once found a copy of Renaissance artist Raphael's Madonna and Child in a magazine, and was so moved by it, that he began to paint copies of it at night. He Qi is especially influenced by the simple and beautiful artwork of the people in rural China. He Qi was the first in Mainland China to earn a Ph.D. in Religious art after the Revolution. His work is a blend of Chinese folk art and traditional painting technique with the iconography of the Western Middle Ages and Modern Art.

The shame brought by Mary's pregnancy was so bad that it prompted her fiancée to decide to break off the engagement quietly – it took an angelic visit to change his mind. Mary was probably motivated to go from as well as to. So here she is, looking subdued as she arrives at Elizabeth's house. She is a young woman in need: of hospitality, of understanding, of compassion. It was by no means certain that anyone would understand or accept Mary in her pregnant, unmarried state. She was in a unique situation and couldn't expect anyone to understand. How alone she must have felt.

What a relief to receive the welcome portrayed in the painting. Elizabeth is still and attentive – eyes open, mouth shut! – and has reached out to take Mary's hand. She's holding a water jug, and given that they seem to be meeting on the street, rather than in the house, it looks like she was on her way to fill it, but has allowed herself to be interrupted to offer a kind welcome to Mary. The two women's heads are bent towards each other.

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Consider the people in your life who might have a need for compassion. How can your acceptance, welcome and love bring them light and life?

How does seeing this representation of the Visitation change the way you view the story?

THE SONG OF MARY IS THE OLDEST ADVENT HYMN.  
IT IS AT ONCE THE  
*most passionate.*  
*the wildest.*

ONE MIGHT EVEN SAY THE  
MOST REVOLUTIONARY  
ADVENT HYMN EVER SUNG.

THIS IS NOT THE  
*gentle.*  
*tender.*  
*dreamy*

MARY WHOM WE SOMETIMES SEE IN PAINTING.  
THIS SONG HAS NONE OF THE

*sweet.*  
*nostalgic.*  
*or even playful tones*

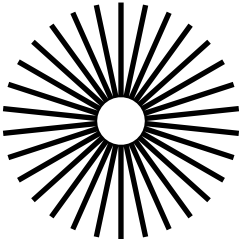
OF SOME OF OUR CHRISTMAS CAROLS.  
IT IS INSTEAD A

*hard.*  
*strong.*  
*inexorable*

SONG ABOUT THE POWER OF GOD AND THE  
POWERLESSNESS OF HUMANKIND.



BEFORE BEING EXECUTED BY THE NAZIS, GERMAN  
THEOLOGIAN BONHEOFFER WROTE THESE WORDS  
DURING ADVENT 1933





SR. CLAIR. S.M. 1.

Mary's Self Offering  
India  
Sister Claire SMMI (circa 1937)

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Sister Claire SMMI of India was born in 1937 into a high-caste Hindu family. At the age of 14 she ran away (from an about-to-be-arranged marriage) to Bangalore, and took refuge among Christian nuns who she had previously met. She joined the convent and added the initials of their particular religious order (Salesian Missionaries of Mary Immaculate - SMMI). Sister Claire has over 750 paintings, and is considered a pioneer in Indian Christian art, where she has been glad "to introduce others to the inspiring thoughts that proceed from Indian spirituality." She felt that this was her way of helping others to find God's presence within them. Her purpose in painting and in life is to introduce others to "the God who stretches out his arms in love to raise us up to Himself." She paints in solitude and silence, sensing God's presence within; a form of prayer and her chosen way of communicating the sure knowledge of God's love for humankind. (From *Prayer in Culture: meditating with the paintings of Sr. Claire SMMI* by Antony Kolencherry).

In this painting, *Mary's Self Offering*, Mary offers herself to God, symbolized by the offering of the lights. This is a Christian form of aarti, a Hindu ritual in which light from wicks soaked in ghee (purified butter) is offered to a deity in a 'circular wave offering.' Aarti also refer to the songs sung in praise of the deity when lamps are being offered - in this case, it is *Mary's Magnificat* being sung to God. Many Indians today use aarti in contextualized Christian worship.

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Write your own Magnificat to God that is specific to your season of life right now.

How does seeing this representation of *Mary's Magnificat* change the way you view the story?



Magnificat  
USA  
Ben Wildflower (2016)

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Ben grew up immersed in American Evangelicalism. He spent his middle school and high school years in Papua New Guinea where his parents were missionaries. The themes of his art are mostly Biblical and much of his work reflects on how certain passages of Scripture are emphasized in some traditions but completely overlooked in others, such as God's contempt for wealth and love for the impoverished. The Christian life demands that all the hungry be fed, whatever the cost to the ruling class. He believes Jesus invites us to betray our country and save our souls.

Although Wildflower grew up as an Evangelical reading the Bible, he never heard the song of Mary emphasized in church until he started attending an Anglican congregation. There, the Magnificat was a part of the evening prayer in the Book of Common Prayer, and Wildflower found it beautiful and profound. One day he picked up a piece of wood outside of a construction site and crafted an image of Mary that was different from all the sweet pictures of her staring up into heaven. He drew her with her fist raised to the sky, and her foot stepping on a snake.

"She's a young woman singing a song about toppling rulers from their thrones. She's a radical who exists within the confines of institutionalized religion," he said. "This is why I put her fist in the air. There are enough images out there focusing on the lowliness and meekness of Mary. I wanted to make one that highlights her holy rage and her indictment of an economic system built on idolatrous ideas about what kind of people do or don't deserve things like food and shelter. I like that Mary."

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Wildflower wrote, "Singing the song of Mary is a good way to end the day and it helps us remember that in Jesus something has been accomplished that elevates the oppressed and saves the rich from what is empty." End your day singing Mary's magnificat and considering it from this revolutionary perspective.

How does seeing this representation of Mary's Magnificat change the way you view the story?

What song do you need to defiantly sing in your life this season?



"WELL," SAYS ONE, "I HAVE ROOM FOR HIM, BUT I AM NOT WORTHY THAT HE SHOULD COME TO ME."

*Ah! I did not ask about worthiness; have you room for him?*

"OH! BUT I FEEL IT IS A PLACE NOT AT ALL FIT FOR CHRIST!"

*Nor was the manger a place fit for him, and yet there was he laid.*

"OH! BUT I HAVE BEEN SUCH A SINNER; I FEEL AS IF MY HEART HAD BEEN A DEN OF BEASTS AND DEVILS!"

*Well, the manger had been a place where beasts had fed. Have you room for him? Never mind what the past has been; he can forget and forgive. It mattereth not what even the present state may be if thou mournest it. If thou hast but room for Christ he will come and be thy guest.*

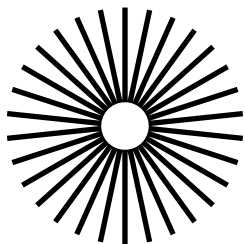
"OH!" SAITH ONE, "I HAVE ROOM FOR HIM, BUT WILL HE COME?"

*Will he come indeed!*



*Do you but set the door of your heart open, do but say, "Jesus, Master, all unworthy and unclean I look to thee; come, lodge within my heart," and he will come to thee, and he will cleanse the manger of thy heart, nay, will transform it into a golden throne, and there he will sit and reign for ever and for ever."*

CHARLES SPURGEON, FROM HIS SERMON "NO ROOM FOR CHRIST IN THE INN," PREACHED DECEMBER 21, 1862.





No Room at the Inn

China

John Lu Hongnian 陸鴻年 (1951)

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HongNian (1914-1989) was born in Beijing and trained in the Academy of Fine Arts at Fu Jen Catholic University. After converting to Catholicism, he came to be recognized as a master of religious art, especially for his Madonna imagery using traditional Chinese painting styles. Lu sought to connect Christian concepts to Chinese tradition and values. This painting was made in 1951, as Korea and China were drawn in almost as pawns in a wider geopolitical game. For Lu, the experience of a persecuted Mary and Joseph was personal and real.

Mary and Joseph were refugees, fleeing persecution. The North China context is important. No cozy "western" fantasy here. In Lu's lifetime, people all over China were refugees of some sort or another, displaced by war and suffering. No one chooses to risk their lives to become a refugee. God chose for the Messiah to be born into suffering and hardship, poverty, and as a refugee.

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How can you consider being more hospitable to, welcoming or caring for refugees this season?

How does seeing this representation of No Room at the Inn change the way you view the story?



José y Maria – A Modern Day Nativity  
USA  
Everett Patterson (circa 2014)

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Everett Patterson is a comic book artist who also does illustrations for The Bible Project.

Patterson chose a “modern setting in front of a bodega and modern clothes but framed and composed it like a medieval illustration, with halos and the stilted postures of medieval paintings.” He had fun adding “knowing winks” and allusions, like Mary sitting on a horse and the Starr beer sign.

Yet, the inspiration for the piece ran deeper still. At the time he was creating it, the Syrian refugee crisis was growing. There was an increase in xenophobia, and images of immigrants and refugees were ever-present. Patterson wanted to remind people that “Jesus was a refugee, a poor person with nowhere to lay his head.”

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Look again at the painting and pay attention to each Mary and Joseph. What do you think each of them might be feeling? Try to name the emotions they are likely experiencing.

How does seeing this representation of No Room at the Inn change the way you view the story?

*He did not wait*  
till the world was ready,  
till men and nations were at peace.

*He came*  
when the Heavens were unsteady,  
and prisoners cried out for release.

*He did not wait*  
for the perfect time.

*He came*  
when the need was deep and great.

*He dined*  
with sinners in all their grime,  
turned water into wine.

*He did not wait*  
till hearts were pure.

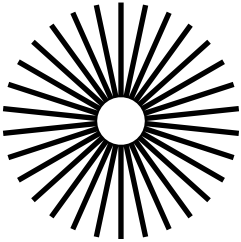
In joy he came  
to a tarnished world of sin and doubt.  
To a world like ours, of anguished shame  
he came, and his Light would not go out.

*He came*  
to a world which did not mesh,  
to heal its tangles, shield its scorn.  
In the mystery of the Word made Flesh  
the Maker of the stars was born.

*We cannot wait*  
till the world is sane  
to raise our songs with joyful voice,  
for to share our grief, to touch our pain,

*He came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!*

FIRST COMING - MADELEINE L'ENGLE







Icon of the Nativity  
Russia  
Andrei Rublev (circa early 1400's)

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Icons during this time period always refer either to scripture or to liturgical texts and express a visual version of the written word. This icon was painted directly onto a wooden board, which has allowed it to be almost perfectly preserved over the past 600 years. It is interesting that in the times of aggressive atheism, the icon was not damaged because the head of one of the museums secretly transferred it to the capital of Russia. Being in Moscow, it was hidden under a thin layer of paint, until one day, local restorers discovered it.

In the center of this religious painting, you can see the Mother of God leaning on her left forearm, with a manger of the infant Christ behind her back. Right beside the manger, you can see the heads of an ox and a donkey peeking out. The Baby is wrapped in swaddling clothes that remind one of grave cloth, and the manger is reminiscent of a small coffin and the cave references the cave in which Jesus was laid to rest after the crucifixion. The image immediately reminds the viewer that Jesus was born specifically to die for our sins.

In the upper part of the icon there are angels gathered to celebrate the birth of the Son of God. Rublev also placed two handmaidens in the lower part of the image, who are, in line with the Gospels, engaged in the bathing of a newborn baby. On the left in the middle area of the icon, below the Angels, we see the three wise men hurrying to worship the newborn King, and below that in the lowest corner sits Joseph.

The icon is divided into three horizontal zones or sections: the top is the realm of the heavenly, the central is given to the main events that connect heaven and earth, and the lowest ones are the earthly realm. The icon is also divided into zones or sections vertically with the central one being the most important.

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There is so much going on in this scene. Spend some time looking over each individual part of the gospel story. Which scene most captivates your attention?

How does seeing this representation of The Birth of Christ change the way you view the story?



Epiphany  
England and Singapore  
Richard Walker, 1942

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Walker was a prisoner of war during WWII in Singapore.

Epiphany, which Walker painted during the war, was placed behind an improvised altar for holy communion services in the prison. Epiphany, or the thirteenth day of Christmas, celebrates the magi coming to see Christ. The epiphany was a joyous event, and Walker was able to paint it under dreadful circumstances.

Notice that the wisemen are in traditional Chinese attire. Mary is portrayed as an Asian woman to symbolize the universal truth of Christianity. Even though Walker was suffering war circumstances in a foreign country, he seemed able to meditate on God's heart and love for the Chinese people. Walker did not have to write the message that God loved Chinese; this conclusion is clear in his art.

Notice the intense focus of the shepherd on the left, and the posture of worship of the one on the right.

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How can the joyous moment of Christ's birth be a hope and light to you during a difficult time in your life?

How does seeing this representation of The Birth of Christ change the way you view the story?





Opening for the Book of Genesis: In Principio  
England  
Winchester Bible (circa 1150-1175)

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The Winchester Bible is a Romanesque illuminated manuscript produced in Winchester between 1150 and 1175 for Winchester Cathedral and is the largest surviving 12th-century English Bible. The Winchester manuscript is one of the most lavish Bibles of this kind. The first page of the Bible is the Opening for the Book of Genesis.

Genesis is dominated by the words *In principio* (“In the beginning”). The “I” illuminates five key moments from the Old Testament (from top): Eve created from Adam’s side; the dove returning to Noah after the Flood; the Sacrifice of Isaac; the Granting of the Law to Moses; and the Crowning of King David. Two medallions illustrate New Testament scenes: the Nativity and the Last Judgment. The idea of announcing the start of a chapter—or a book—with a large initial was a medieval invention.

The animals depicted here hovering over the Christ child are one of the medallions on this initial page.

Animals have no mention in the New Testament story, but they do appear in Isaiah. In church art history, the presence of the ox and the donkey were representing that animals were willing to share in the joy of the incarnation, but Israel was not. Later on, the animals were depicted as being caretakers of the Christ child, in some art forms breathing on Him to keep Him warm. For us, they can be a sign that the whole of creation shares in the joy of Christ’s birth, and that one day every knee will bow before Him.

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In all the busyness of this time, one of the most beautiful gifts we can offer Jesus is a time of dedicated adoration. Reflect on how all of Creation is called to worship the Lord, signified by the Nativity animals.

In what ways have you been unwilling to worship Christ?

How does seeing this representation of The Animals change the way you view the story?

መ ኑ ፡ ዩ ኃ ለህ ለህ ፡ ለህ ህ ሱ ፡ ወ ድ ድ ፡  
 ከ መ ዝ ፡ ኑ ኢ ም ር ፡ ለ ሰ ም ክ ፡ ለ ላ ለ ም  
 ከ መ ፡ ተ ሀ በ ኒ ፡ ተ ም ኒ ት ዩ  
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 ሰ ብ ሕ ት ፡ ለ ኦ ብ ፡ ወ ወ ል ድ ፡ ወ መ ሃ ራ ሱ ት ዩ ሱ  
 ለ ላ ለ ም ፡ ወ ለ ላ ለ ም ፡ ላ ለ ም



Illumination from an Ethiopic Psalter

Ethiopia

Artist unknown (date unknown)

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This Ethiopic Psalter is a collection of 239 handmade Ethiopic manuscripts (137 bound volumes and 102 scrolls), dated between 1600 - 1960. Made from goat, sheep, or calf hides, the manuscripts reflect Ethiopia's still-flourishing culture of handmade books. They range in size from less than 2 inches to more than a foot long, and many contain ornate hand-painted illuminations. The collection consists of religious and liturgical works used in the Ethiopian Christian tradition. The majority of the texts were written in the Ge'ez script, a classical form of calligraphic lettering that is related to the Amharic language.

The great irony of Isaiah is that animals (the ox and the donkey) know their Creator and understand who He is but his own people do not. Ask the Lord for the grace to know Him better through these seasons and recognize and discern Him more clearly in the ordinary circumstances, conversations and events you will experience.

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In what ways have you failed to recognize God and what He is doing in your life this season?

How does seeing this representation of The Animals change the way you view the story?





The Birth of Jesus Christ  
Korea  
Woonbo Kim Ki-Chang (1950's)

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Ki-Chang is one of the most famous traditional ink painters. He was born in 1914 in Seoul. He became deaf and partially mute, as a result of suffering from typhoid fever when he was eight years old. His mother introduced him to art when he was 16 years old. Ki-Chang has always created folk paintings that depict the life and spirit of Koreans. In an essay he wrote in 1984, Ki-Chang said he started creating paintings based on the life of Christ in 1952, while taking refuge at his mother-in-law's house in Gusan during the Korean War (1950-1953).

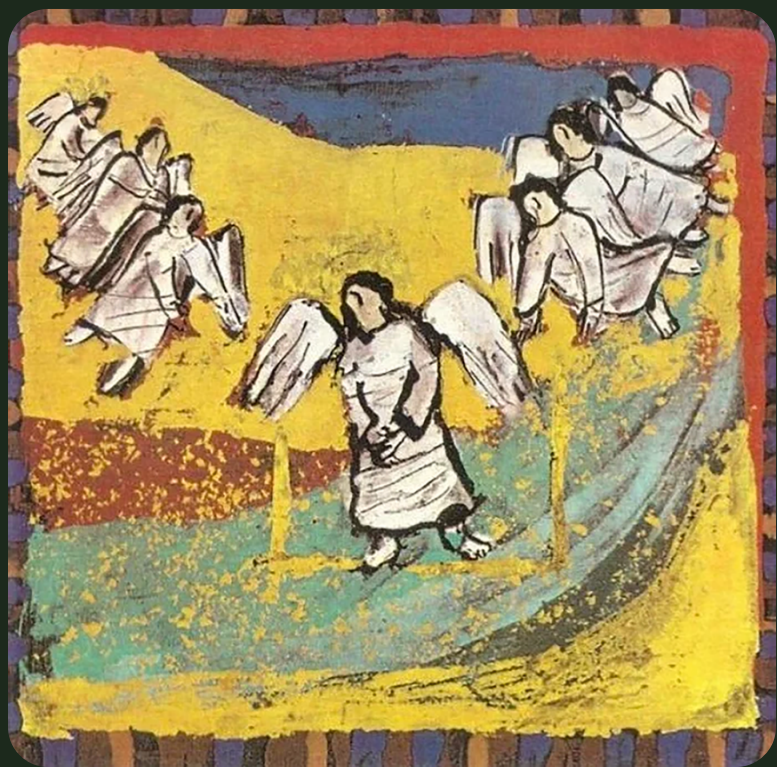
He created a set of 30 paintings over the course of these years, which start from Christ's birth to death to resurrection. These were the first sacred paintings to depict Christ in Korean setting. For example, Jesus was depicted wearing the gat, which was traditionally worn by government officials and gentleman scholars during the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910). Instead of angels, he drew Korean nymphs, and the characters wear Korean traditional outfits while the background features Korean villages and mountains.

'I took great pains to portray the likeness of Jesus. First of all, he should be a global character. Second, I had to portray a figure with the spirit of Christ whom all the people in the world can depend on spiritually beyond the countries and religious denominations and class," Ki-Chang said. 'I tried to make Koreans experience Jesus through the paintings. ... I think I portrayed the noble sacrifices and the spirit of love of Christianity successfully.'

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Notice the looming presence of the cow in the picture. Ponder the reality that our Savior was born in a barn.

How does seeing this representation of The Animals change the way you view the story?



A Multitude of the Heavenly Host  
Japan  
Yasuo Ueno (1926)

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In all his paintings Ueno used only traditional Japanese paints, which are sold as powders of minerals: blue powder of indigo copper ore, green of peacock stone, white of smashed shells. “I am fascinated by the beauty of Japanese paints,” he said, “which I believe to be the most beautiful in the world.” For background coloring he used gold leaf—“to express the glory of God and the space of infinity.” He applied these pigments to silk canvases using his fingers.

Ueno illustrated the angels’ Gloria, along with other episodes from Jesus’s birth narrative, in a Christmas storybook published in Tokyo in 1986. His illustration shows a winged and faceless choir hovering in a gold-washed sky, the annunciatory angel framed in the center. The vivid colors bring us into another dimension. While most artists depict angels as having human-like features and faces, Ueno leaves them with indistinct faces. Ueno’s painting helps us to imagine the magnificence of that momentous night on which the dark sky was showered with heaven’s light and the gospel was preached to the poor.

In Luke’s account it follows the angels’ good news that a savior has been born. This sudden revelation was revealed to a group of workers whose vocation was despised in the Jewish culture of the day. Marginalized by the social and religious elite, stereotyped as thieving and untrustworthy, shepherds were nonetheless chosen by God to receive the privilege of an angelic appearance—thousands strong—and the honor of attending the Messiah’s birth. “Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior,” the head angel said (Luke 2:11). Unto you, who have until now been ignored.

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How do these angels change the way you view angels?

Imagine thousands of angels appearing to a marginalized group of people in today’s society, worshiping God and inviting them to be the first ones to come and see the Savior. How does considering this impact the way you view marginalized people?

How does seeing this representation of The Angels change the way you view the story?



Praise of the Heavenly Host  
Mexico/USA  
Cristobal Almanza (2014)

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Almanza describes his art as highlighting the tension in the relationship between beauty and truth. His subjects feature the material body in transcendental themes with Latino vibrancy. He pays tribute to his Mexican Catholic heritage and the Texan Culture that formed him.

Almanza writes, “I am painfully cognizant that I am unable to do this scene justice, but I felt inspired to share an artistic interpretation of this moment. It is a verse that shows a great example of the role of angels in our lives. This is something I hope to continue to promote through my teaching and ministry. The Lord is generous, and the angels are good. Our guardian angels serve to protect us and never stop trying to point us to Jesus.”

“To date, this is also my largest oil painting, and it hangs prominently in our home. I intentionally avoided anything referencing cultural interpretations of Christmas because I believe the proclamation of the coming Lord can be reflected on throughout the year.”

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Have you ever considered before that angels are good, and they serve to protect you and never stop trying to point you to Jesus?

How does seeing this representation of The Angels change the way you view the story?





An Angel Summons the Shepherds  
China  
John Lu Hongnian 陸鴻年 (circa 1950)

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Lu HongNian's "An Angel Summons the Shepherds," depicting the angelic Annunciation to the shepherds of Jesus's Nativity using distinctly Chinese features, is one of eight silk scroll paintings LIFE magazine commissioned to accompany its article "The Story of Christ in Chinese Art." Printed on December 22, 1941, the article aimed to marshal wartime public opinion in support of China, now a U.S. ally, by pointing to Chinese Christian artists whose fates remained uncertain under Japanese occupation. This positive media, along with Chinese Americans' own war efforts, initiated a shift in public perception of Chinese living in the United States.

The Western missionaries who encouraged the production of Christian art in China hoped that using familiar traditional art forms to convey Biblical messages would help Christianity gain broader acceptance among the Chinese population. Chinese artists' portrayal of Biblical scenes departed from convention in that people did not usually figure prominently as subjects in traditional Chinese painting, which centered landscapes. However, to the artists, painting in their own style allowed them to interpret and express Christianity from a Chinese perspective and their works offered Chinese religious devotees alternative images to the fair-skinned Jesus of Euro-American artists.

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Notice one of the shepherds cowering in fear. How do you think you would respond to an angel coming to deliver you a message?

How does seeing this representation of The Angels change the way you view the story?





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The Three Kings

Italy

Artist unknown, Mosaic (circa 565)

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This mosaic depicts the kings bringing their gifts to the Christ child. Palm trees in this period of art represented the promised land and the paradise of Eden, a symbol of eternity. Dates are growing on the palm branches because everything is fruitful and bountiful here. The men are wearing Phrygian caps (from Turkey, as the wise men were sometimes thought to have come from there).

Notice that their stance is leaning forward, with their feet springing off the ground, full of eagerness. Their flowing cloaks indicate that they are running. Their facial hair (or lack thereof) represents three different ages; older, middle aged, and young. But they all come in a hurry to offer Christ their gifts. They are focused on the task at hand with faces set forward and are not distracted by anything to the right or to the left.

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Do we have the same eagerness in how we offer ourselves to Christ?

Consider that wise men are only wise because they seek after Christ. Would you be considered wise?

How does seeing this representation of The Journey of the Wise Men change the way you view the story?



The Magi Journeying (Les rois mages en voyage)

France

James Tissot (1886-1896)

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Tissot's artistic style typically focused on the stylish leisured class of the late-nineteenth century. His religious works of his late career, specifically illustrations of the life of Christ, are not as well known. However, at the turn of the century, these biblical images were considered his greatest achievement due, to the popularity of images from the Near East and to the sense of immediacy Tissot gave to an age-old tale through his attention to detail.

The Journey of the Magi was created after the second of three trips that Tissot made to Palestine between 1886 and 1896 to gather sketches and photographs of the people, costumes, topography and light of the region.

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Notice the topography of the journey, and the endless train of people on it. Consider the difficult nature that the journey must have been for them. Would you have been willing to go on such a journey? What are you willing to do now in regard to seeking after Christ?

How does seeing this representation of The Journey of the Wise Men change the way you view the story?





Adoration of the Magi

Italy

Andrea Mantegna (1497)

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We are drawn in close to the scene. Whereas we normally see the three kings kneeling off to the side, here we see them right with the Christ child. We are face to face with the people in the scene, invited to take part in what is happening right alongside them. Their eyes display what their hearts are feeling as they meet the child.

Even if we knew nothing of the subject and if Mantegna had not included haloes, we would sense that this is a divine child from the awed expressions of the three men gathered to see him. We begin to grasp that we are privileged spectators at a momentous event. Here we are both invited and compelled and share in a very human response to an encounter with God.

“Our closeness to Christ reveals us as we are. But Christ wants the real person, not a pretense or fraud. We are to come as we are, with all our experience of the world, lessons hard-won, skills acquired: with, Jesus said, the wisdom of serpents and the gentleness of doves.” (The Nativity of Christ, a Gallery of Reflections, by Richard Harries,)

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Do you feel that you are coming to Christ just as you are, without pretense or fraud?

How does seeing this representation of The Adoration change the way you view the story?



The Visit of the Magi  
India  
Sister Mary Claire (circa 1937)

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The Magi recognized the kingship of Christ without hesitation. From the moment of their first appearance in Jerusalem, they asked, “Where is He who has been born king of the Jews?” When they came to the home where Mary, Joseph, and Jesus were dwelling, they fell on their knees in worship, presenting Him with gifts that each reflected a different aspect of His role as Savior: gold, for His kingship, frankincense, for His deity, and myrrh to foreshadow His sacrificial death.

May we also come to Jesus with hearts ready to worship. Let us pray that He would reveal Himself to us, and that He would take our imperfect knowledge of Him and replace it with the truth of who He is.

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What gifts do you have to offer to God? Are you willing to offer them without hesitation?

How does seeing this representation of The Adoration change the way you view the story?





CHIEFS COME FROM THE EAST TO SEE JESUS AND HIS PARENTS

BACHEITTUJA AMMLASIIA KUKAA  
JESUSDAK AKSEELAK IKAALUOK

Chiefs Come from the East to See Jesus and His Parents  
Crow Nation  
Fr. John Giuliani (circa 1991)

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Fr. John Giuliani had studied art but gave it up to become a priest. Giuliani commuted to New York City to study icon painting with an Eastern Orthodox master. He learned the rules, how to prepare the wood, how to begin by tracing. During this process, he realized how American he was and how Western his spirituality was.

He prayed: "God, how can I use this discipline of iconography without depicting religious figures in a Greek or Byzantine manner?"

Giuliani's "eureka" moment came in 1990 in the frenzy of the national debate over the 500th anniversary of Columbus' arrival in the New World. "I'll depict Native Americans as the first spiritual presence on this continent," he told himself. He studied artifacts of the various tribes, Navajo, the Hopi and the Sioux. He got to know their artifacts -- their textiles, ornaments, weaving and beadwork. "I wanted to surround these religious figures with their gifts," he said.

The title of this piece reflects Giuliani's depiction of the three wise men as members of the Iroquois, Fox and Huron, tribes from the East of North America, bestowing gifts of feathers, moccasins and a beaded stole.

While the icons portray ancient stories that happened in the Judean hills, the artist spreads the mysteries across the Montana landscape of snow-covered Rockies.

Besides the joy that accompanies creating works of art that could heighten worship for generations to come, Giuliani has also experienced a deepened prayer life as a result of hours of labor over many years.

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Consider that it is those who hold the highest position of honor (chiefs) that are here to worship and bestow honor upon the Christ child. In what ways could you humble yourself more so that you could better glorify and honor God?

How does seeing this representation of The Adoration change the way you view the story?



Nativity

Japan

Sadao Watanabe (circa 1950)

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Sadao Watanabe was a Japanese printmaker famous for his Biblical prints in the folk art tradition of Japan. He was a student of a master of textile dye artist. His father died when he was 10 years old, and he dropped out of school to become an apprentice in a dyer's shop. A Christian woman in his neighborhood invited the fatherless boy to attend church with her, and he was converted at the age of 17.

He dedicated the rest of his life to "expressing Christianity within a Japanese context." His rendering of the Last Supper portrays the disciples in kimonos and on the table are bottles of sake and sushi. He wanted to emphasize the universality of the Christian message. "I owe my life to Christ and the gospel," Watanabe once explained. "My way of expressing my gratitude is to witness to my faith through the medium of biblical scenes." Watanabe once remarked that he preferred that his prints hang in the ordinary places of life "where ordinary people gather, because Jesus brought the gospel for the people."

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The shepherds were the first to receive notice of Christ's birth, and they were the ultimate example of "ordinary people". How does this idea of Jesus being brought to the ordinary resonate with you?

How does seeing this representation of The Shepherds change the way you view the story?





Nativity  
Thailand  
Sawai Chinnawong (2004)

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Sawai Chinnawong committed his life to Christ in college in 1983, and tried painting Bible stories using the style of art found covering the walls of Thai Buddhist temples and palaces. Thai art typically depicts scenes from the life of Buddha or the Thai version of the Hindu epic Ramayana. At times gilded with gold, the colorful figures are painted with curved lines in two dimensions without perspective. The size of the person and the use of empty space dictate what is important in the frame.

Mirroring this style, Chinnawong painted the story of Jesus from birth to ascension. When he showed his artwork to his pastor, he was told that it looked too Buddhist. At the time, Thai Christians used Western art techniques to distinguish it from Buddhist art.

“Many [Christian] artists will draw in a Western style for safety,” Chinnawong said. “Christians often are unnecessarily nervous when we adopt Thai culture to present Christianity.”

After the critique, Chinnawong kept painting but kept his work a secret.

Since then, Chinnawong’s body of Thai Christian art has grown and spread. He has created a path for Thai Christian artists, demonstrating that they don’t have to abandon their culture in pursuit of artistic expression of their faith.

Sawai Chinnawong writes, “My work represents influences from many styles...I believe Jesus Christ is present in every culture, and I have chosen to celebrate his presence in our lives through Thai traditional cultural forms. My belief is that Jesus did not choose just one people to hear his Word, but chose to make his home in every human heart. And just as his Word may be spoken in every language, so the visual message can be shared in the beauty of the many styles of artistry around the world.”

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How does seeing this representation of The Shepherds change the way you view the story?