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The Infant Christ In Art



Saint Anthony of Padua with
the Infant Christ - Murillo

At no season of the year does human thought so circle around the Christ Child as at Christmastide, when the angelic chorus sings again the heavenly message, "Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace, good will to men." Of course all lovers of art bow before the pictures which represent the life of Christ from the time of his birth to his crucifixion and resurrection and ascension.

One writer says: "There was an element in Christian art that classic art never admitted—that is, suffering. The one central figure that in the splendor of his divine beauty has consecrated art forever, was it not that of the Master?"

It is to the pictures of the Christ Child rather than as man that he attention is especially directed at this season. The holy night, the Nativity, when as a babe he was cradled in a manger; the adoration of the shepherds, the visit of the wise men, the flight into Egypt, the presentation in the temple, besides the holy family and the Madonna, have been subjects of the masterpieces of the world's greatest artists.

These subjects of course have won and held the imagination of a long line of artists whose names would constitute a veritable roll of honor. At random one recalls the names of Giotto, Hans Memling, Mantegna, Ghirlandajo, Durer, Tintoretto, Titian, Rubens, Van Dyck, Botticelli, Rembrandt, Murillo, Correggio, Fra Angelico and El Greco.

In modern art the gospel story no longer holds its old place, perhaps, save among the very devout. But on a secondary artistic level the sculpture and paintings sold for use in churches show that the events attending the infancy of Christ have, next to those of the crucifixion, the widest currency in representation. Many of the plaster figures, too, bought for home decoration represent scenes about the manger in Bethlehem, and so it is also with colored prints, paintings and lithographs.

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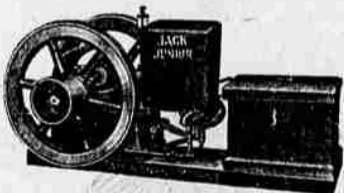
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