



Adoration of the Magi, by Sadao Watanabe, hand-colored kappazuri stencil print on momigami wrinkled paper, 22 x 18 in., 1968.

Mary's eyes, staring straight ahead while three strange and impressive travelers bring astounding gifts to her baby, express the bewilderment and inadequacy she must feel in this new role that has been thrust upon her. Yet she is "the handmaiden of the Lord" whose faith in the message sent to her and confirmed by her cousin Elizabeth has carried her through months of uncertainty and change. As the central figure in the print and the only figure facing the viewer, Mary's stiff posture--knees together, feet braced, arms protectively clutching the infant Jesus—expresses her discomfort with the role she must assume. The profusion of circles—her knees, her eyes, her breasts, the face of the baby Jesus, His halo--signify both the perfect fulfillment of God's promises embodied in this birth and its ever-widening effects. Certainly, a visit from distinguished travelers to worship her child ranks as intimidating, but is it more amazing than shepherds and animals led mysteriously by angels to witness a birth that will bring a new world order?

The Wise Men, the Magi from the East, on the other hand, focus entirely on their acts of devotion, kneeling with bowed heads to offer their gifts. Their somber expressions and ritually raised hands undergird the solemnity of the moment. They have traveled far without any inkling of what they might actually find, or indeed even when and where they might come to the end of their journey. This moment of fulfillment deserves all their attention and devotion.

The infant Jesus turns slightly away from the viewer towards the Magi with a complacent and peaceful expression. The Byzantine halo with three groups of three lines echoes the Trinity and certainly designates the infant's divinity, yet the relaxed curves of his blanket binding, the softly rounded cheek, and his peacefully closed eyes remind us that this baby king has come into his own—no uncertainty, no embarrassment, no awkwardness.

-Claudia Springer