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The Flight into Egypt

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Caroline Wistar

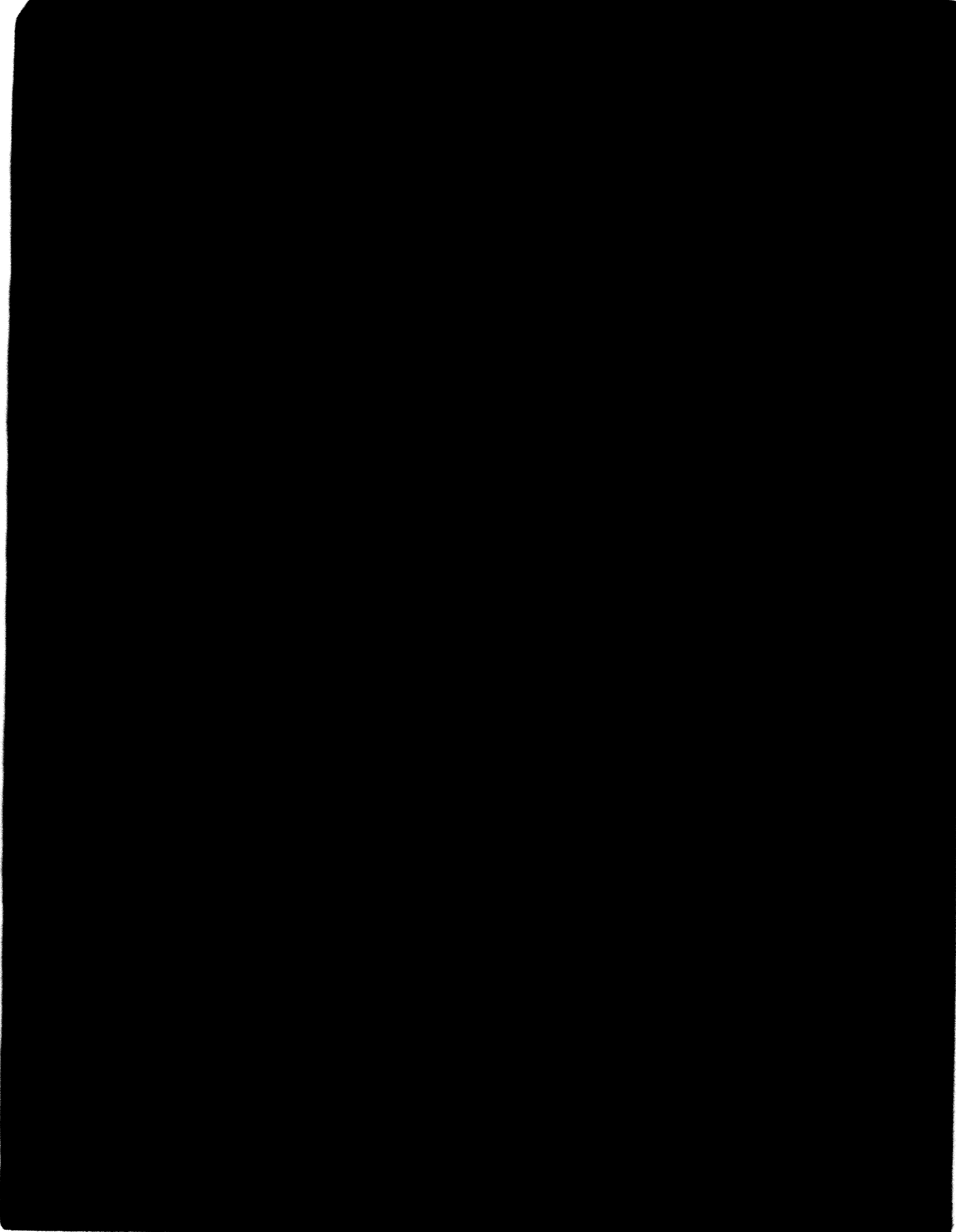
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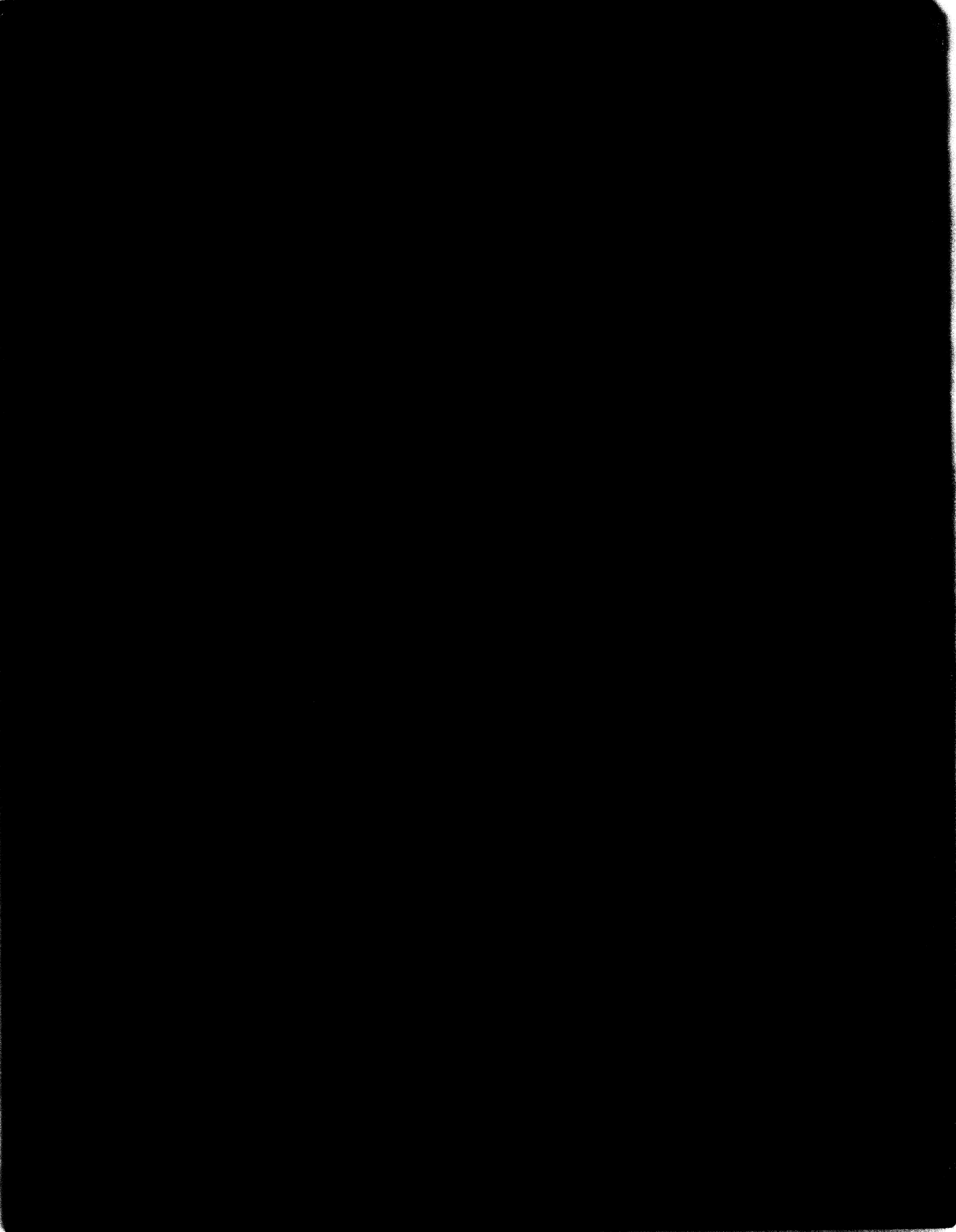
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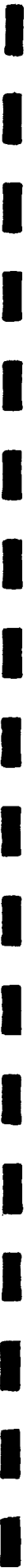


THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

La Salle University Art Museum

December 10, 1987 - January 22, 1988

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INTRODUCTION

The Biblical reference to the Flight into Egypt is brief and straightforward, appearing only in the Gospel of Matthew II: 13-15 and 19-23. The Massacre of the Holy Innocents, from which the Holy Family was fleeing, is discussed in the intervening verses, 16-18. Thus, through the ages, one has relied greatly on the artist's imagination, and his interpretation of additional Apocryphal stories¹ or later compilations like The Golden Legend to embroider and thereby enliven the Biblical text.

The four episodes which were developed pictorially were the Warning of the Angel to Joseph, the Journey and Rest on the Flight into Egypt (the scene most frequently depicted), the Life of the Holy Family in Exile and the Return from Egypt to Nazareth seven years later. The Apocryphal miracles during The Flight, which emphasize the divine power of the Christ Child, all fall within the episode of the Journey: the growth and harvesting of the wheat-fields, the fall of the pagan statues, the bending down of the palm tree branch to provide fruit, the flowing of the spring in the desert to provide water, and the frustrated attack of the brigands. All but the last miracle are represented in this exhibition.

During early Christian and medieval times (5th-13th centuries), the concern was to emphasize the triumph of Christianity over Paganism. Therefore, artists often concentrated on the arrival of the Holy Family

at a pagan temple in Egypt, at the moment the divinity of Christ was revealed to the heathens. Such compositions usually included the fall of the pagan idols from the altars or pedestals, the crushing of demons and the homage of the Egyptian governor and his retinue.

Until the second half of the fourteenth century, the Flight into Egypt was recorded in a synoptic fashion, with a number of episodes represented simultaneously in one art work. (See reproductions of Medieval Manuscript Illumination). Before the invention of printing, the visual arts were the chief source of learning for the masses. The concern, therefore, was to include as much narration as possible within a single composition. With the availability of the printed book for religious instruction, artists were encouraged to simplify the visual image, concentrating on the naturalistic rendition of a single episode related to The Flight. Therefore, from the end of the fifteenth century onwards, the Journey or the Rest on the Journey, alone, received the greatest artistic attention and development as evidenced in this exhibition. Mary and the Child on the donkey became the central figures, while Joseph, walking at the side, became a subsidiary figure. Moreover, the miracles of the Journey were now of secondary importance and were usually relegated to the background of the landscape.

During the height of the Counter-Reformation period, Baroque artists further dramatized the representation of the Journey by giving careful attention to the realistic rendition of the landscape and by simulating the motion of the Holy Family as they travelled at a

particular time of day or night. And in some cases, as seen in this exhibition, the landscape dominates the image; one has to search for the holy figures who appear diminutively at the side. Although the Bible mentions the Journey taking place by night, it was not until the seventeenth century that artists such as Rembrandt and Elsheimer, through the effective use of the chiaroscuro technique, attempted to portray the Flight in such a manner. The miracles, with the exception of the Palm Tree branch, are now eliminated, while the central figures are given greater emphasis and the whole, greater motion by the inclusion of guiding angels, seraphim and cherubim who gracefully flutter above the Holy Family on their flight (see painting by Bourdon).

Hopefully, this small exhibition will indicate the significant role Christian iconography plays in our understanding of Biblical literature and the debt we owe to the artists' vision for heightening our awareness of the miracle of the Christmas story.

Caroline P. Wistar
Curator

See, particularly,

1. Arabian Gospel of the Childhood of Christ, and Evangelium of Pseudo-Matthew.

References:

Louis Reau, Iconographie De L'Art Chretien, Volume II, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957).

Gertrud Schiller, Iconography of Christian Art, Volume I, translated by Janet Selijam, (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, Ltd., 1969).

Print Study Room

1. Jacques Callot (1592-1635), French

The Annunciation, The Visitation,
The Nativity, The Flight into Egypt,
from Life of the Virgin, Paris, 1633.

Engraving

2. Johannes Jacobsz Folkema (17th century), Dutch
After a painting by Jacopo Tintoretto (1518-1594), Italian

The Massacre of Herod of the Infants of Bethlehem

Engraving

3. Unknown (17th century)

The Holy Family Prepares for the Flight into Egypt

Engraving

4. Jan Van Scorel (1495-1562), Dutch

The Flight into Egypt

Oil on panel

A minor poet and musician, but a major artist from Scorel, Holland, Van Scorel's portraits and religious paintings often illustrate the Mannerist style in the arts which was practiced by a number of artists between the High Renaissance and and Baroque period (ca. 1525-1600). This Mannerist style developed as a reaction against the classical stability and scientific realism of the Renaissance. As seen in this painting, artists made a conscious effort to violate principles of clarity and harmony so as to produce images which suggest tension, anxiety, and even incomprehension. Here, the deliberately awkward pose and anatomy of the Madonna, the ambiguous motion of the figures and incomprehensible foreground space are evidence of such Mannerist trends. Moreover, the exact subject matter is unclear,

although the pyramid and obelisk in the naturalistic background suggest the arrival of the Holy Family in Egypt. The raised hand of Christ may refer to the Medieval image wherein a similar gesture was indicative of Christ's exorcism of the devil as he arrived in Egypt. The curious figure disappearing on the left, with the grotesque head and wings, is an additional ambiguity--perhaps a representation of an agent of the devil over which the power of Christ has just proven victorious.

5. Andrea Scacciati, The Younger (1725-1771), Italian
After Agostino Carracci (1557-1602), Italian

Rest on the Flight into Egypt

Etching and aquatint

6. Rembrandt Van Rijn (1606-1669), Dutch

Flight into Egypt: Crossing a Brook 1654

Etching and drypoint

Early Basan edition. Re-strike impression pulled around 1906 by the owners of the plate (Basan-Bernard Publishers). This impression was pulled from Rembrandt's original plate around 255 years after he executed it. By 1906, Rembrandt's original plate was so badly worn, it was necessary for the printers to re-work it to compensate for the loss of detail. This modern impression has lost some of the rich velvety ink tones; its closely hatched lines are no longer crisp, and the whole image has a somewhat dull matte-worn effect when compared to an impression pulled during Rembrandt's life.

7. Giovanni B. Castiglione (1616-1670), Italian

The Dream of St. Joseph

Etching

8. Sebastian Bourdon (1661-1671), French

The Rest on the Flight into Egypt, with an Angel

Etching

ii/ii

- ✓ 9. Sebastian Bourdon (1616-1671), French

The Return from Egypt

Etching
First state

10. Sebastian Bourdon (1616-1671), French

The Flight into Egypt

Oil on canvas

Bourdon, one of the founders of the French Academy (1648), adopted a variety of styles, but the orderly and logical composition seen in this painting points out his prominence as an artist working within the classical tradition of the Baroque style. Greatly influenced by Claude Lorrain and Nicolas Poussin, Bourdon escaped the regimentation of the court of Louis XIV in Paris, and went to Rome (1634-1637).

It is interesting to note the seventeenth century treatment of the Flight: the addition of angels and cherubim, the effect of motion brought about through the use of chiaroscuro technique, and the incorporation of the falling pagan statue into the landscape.

Traditionally, the Flight into Egypt was recorded from left to right, and the Return from right to left. Here, Bourdon reverses the direction.

11. Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo (1727-1804), Italian

The Flight into Egypt c. 1750
Plate 10 from the series

Etching
ii/ii

Purchased with funds donated by Albert J. Crawford, Jr.

12. Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo (1727-1804), Italian

The Flight into Egypt. "Arrival at the City Gate in Egypt."
Plate 27 from the series

Etching
ii/ii

Purchased with funds donated by The Art Angels

13. Jan Muller (1571-1628), Dutch
Published by Claez Visscher

Rest on The Flight into Egypt 1593

Engraving
iii/iii

14. Nicolas de Son (fl. 1625-1626), French

Flight into Egypt

Etching

Note the falling pagan statue in the niche in the tree at upper right and the Massacre of the Innocents on the far left.

15. Unknown (17th century)

The Flight into Egypt

Engraving and etching

16. Stefano Della Bella (1610-1664), Italian

The Flight into Egypt, Rest at the Spring

Etching
ii/iii

Joseph draws water from the spring which issued forth from the root of the palm tree providing water for the Holy Family as they traveled through the desert.

17. Cornelius Cort (1533/36-1578), Dutch
After Frederico Barocci (1526-1612), Italian

Rest on the Return

Engraving

18. Unknown (17th century), Dutch

The Flight into Egypt

Etching

Susan Dunleavy Collection
of Biblical Literature

Hall Cases

19. Biblia Sacra

Lugduni, Gulienus Rouilius, 1588

The Lovain edition of The Vulgate, edited by Johannus Hentenius, Lovenij, 1547

Became the authorized edition of The Vulgate until publication of the Sixtine Bible of 1590.

20. Evangelia and Epistolen

Strasbourg, Grueninger, 1513

Anonymous woodcut illustration of The Massacre of the Innocents.

The plenarium, in Germany, denotes a popular book, which gives the German translation of The Gospels and Epistles for the Sundays and festivals of the entire year, together with a short exposition.

21. Biblia Pauperum (Blockbook)

Opera Nova Contemplativa
Venice, G. A. Vavassore (ca. 1516) or earlier

Anonymous woodcut illustrations.

Celebrated as the last of the Blockbooks where the text and illustrations are cut from the same block of wood. Here The Old Testament illustration on the right page, showing David escaping from the wrath of Saul who seeks his life, parallels The New Testament illustration on the left page, showing The Holy Family as they escape the wrath of King Herod who seeks the Christ Child's life.

22. The Holy Bible Containing The Old Testament and the New,...

Birmingham, Printed by John Baskerville, 1769, 1771, 2nd edition

Engraving by J. Moreau, The Younger
(1791-1814), French

Known for his simplicity of typography, Baskerville was one of the most influential printers of the 18th century. He set a new standard of design and "modern" type face. Although "laid" paper had been used for this edition of the Bible, Baskerville was one of the first to introduce the use of "wove" paper (devoid of laid lines on the screen of the mold).

23. The Holy Gospel According to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John

Editiones Officinae Bodini, Verona. July, 1962.

The woodcuts were recut by Bruno Bramanti after the original illustrations by Bartolomeo di Giovanni for "Epistole et Evangelii et Lectioni Vulgari in lingua Toschana," 1495.

24. The Holy Bible (The Oxford Lectern Bible)

Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1935

Bruce Rogers, (1870-1957), the leading American book designer of his time, created "Centaur" type, format and typographic layout for this folio Bible. It was the first folio volume produced since John Baskerville's Bible of 1763.

25. The Gospels in Arabic and Latin

In Typographia Medicea: Rome, 1591

Interlinear Latin translation ascribed to Antonius Sionita

Woodcut illustrations attributed to Antonio Tempesta
(1555-1630), Italian

26. The Holy Bible (Authorized King James Version)
Conteyning the Old Testament, and The New...

Printed by John Bull and Christopher Barker,
London, 1669.

Engraving by Frederick-Henrik Van Den Hove,
(c. 1628-1698), Dutch.

27. A Compleat History of The Holy Bible

by Laurence Howel, London, 1718, Vol. III

Engravings by J. Sturt (1658-1730), English

28. Biblia Ad Vetustissima Exemplaria...

Nicholas Bevilaquae, Venice, 1578

The artist for the woodcut illustrations is unknown, but
it is felt they show the influence of Biblical illustrations
by Hans Holbein, Bernard Soloman and Pierre Eskrich.

29. La Sainte Bible

Contenant Le Vieil et Le Nouveau Testament...

Paris, 1703

Illustrated with engravings and etchings by Gerard Jollain
(? - d/1683), French.



