



POSTAL NEWS

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“The Madonna of the Carnation” Featured on 2007 Christmas Stamp



To obtain a 300 dpi image of the stamp, visit:

<http://www.usps.com/communications/newsroom/2007stamps/downloadcenter.htm>

WASHINGTON, DC — The beauty and serenity of “The Madonna of the Carnation” featured on the masterpiece by Milanese Renaissance painter Bernardino Luini will represent the spirit of Christmas during the 2007 winter mailing season.

The U.S. Postal Service issued the 41-cent stamp today at a ceremony at the 2007 Mega Stamp Show at Madison Square Garden, New York City.

“The new Christmas stamp helps to celebrate this important holiday, conveying good tidings for families, friends and customers, who look forward to the delivery of their holiday mail,” said Katherine Tobin, member, Board of Governors, U.S. Postal Service, who dedicated the stamp.

Formerly known as Holiday Traditional stamps, the Christmas stamps adorn millions of letters, greeting cards and packages each year. Since 1978, the theme of these stamps has been the Madonna and Child, and the stamps have attracted a devoted following over the years. The 2007 design features Bernardino Luini’s oil-on-panel, “The Madonna of the Carnation,” which dates to around 1515 and is now part of the collection of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. The stamp art is a detail of the work, as the image was slightly cropped on all four sides to fit the stamp format.

In painting the “Madonna,” Luini used oil paints, then a relatively new medium, to great advantage. He enhanced his typically warm palette with the technique known as *sfumato* — an Italian word meaning “smoky” — in which softened color gradations and blended tones create an illusion of depth, volume and contour. Positioned against a plain, dark background and bathed in glowing light, the painting’s figures seem alive and humanly accessible, filling the picture and inviting the viewer’s attention.

Clothed in a red dress and an orange-lined blue cloak, the Virgin Mary cradles her baby on her lap. The Christ Child is turned toward a green and white vase of flowers, focusing his attention on the carnation in his right hand.

In addition to "The Madonna of the Carnation" stamp, four additional stamps from the Holiday Celebration series will be available nationwide. The Holiday Knits stamp series was also issued today, while a stamp commemorating the Muslim holiday of Eid was issued Sept. 28. Stamps recognizing Kwanzaa and Hanukkah will be issued Oct. 26.

The Christmas stamp is available at the show and can be purchased online at usps.com/shop, by calling 800-STAMP-24, at philatelic centers nationwide and at local Post Offices.

The Postal Service produced 1.87 billion Holiday Knits stamps, 700 million Christmas stamps, 50 million Kwanzaa stamps, 50 million Hanukkah stamps and 40 million Eid stamps.

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An independent federal agency, the U.S. Postal Service is the only delivery service that visits every address in the nation, 146 million homes and businesses, six days a week. It has 37,000 retail locations and relies on the sale of postage, products and services to pay for operating expenses, not tax dollars. The Postal Service has annual revenues of \$75 billion and delivers nearly half the world's mail.

The Madonna of the Carnation Philatelic Fact Sheet

Philatelic Products

There are three philatelic products available for this stamp issue:

- 676261 — First-Day Cover \$0.79
- 676291 — Ceremony Program, \$6.95
- 676293 — First-Day Cover Keepsake, \$8.99

How to Order First-Day Covers

Stamp Fulfillment Services also offers first-day covers for new stamp issues and Postal Service stationery items postmarked with the official first-day-of issue cancellation. Each item has an individual catalog number and is offered in the quarterly *USA Philatelic* catalog. Customers may request a free catalog by calling 800-STAMP-24 or by writing to:

Information Fulfillment
Dept. 6270
U.S. Postal Service
P.O. Box 219014
Kansas City, MO 64121-9014

How to Order the First-Day-of-Issue Postmark

Customers have 60 days to obtain the first-day-of-issue postmark by mail. They may purchase new stamps at their local Post Office, by calling 800-STAMP-24, or at the Postal Store website at usps.com/shop. They should affix the stamps to envelopes of their choice, address the envelopes to themselves or others, and place them in a larger envelope addressed to:

The Madonna of the Carnation Stamp
Postmaster
421 Eighth Ave. Rm. 2029B
New York, NY 10199-9998

After applying the first-day-of issue postmark, the Postal Service will return the envelopes through the mail. There is no charge for the postmark. All orders must be postmarked by Dec. 24, 2007.

The Madonna of the Carnation Backgrounder

The U.S. Postal Service continues its custom of issuing traditional Christmas stamps. Since 1978, the theme of these stamps has been the Madonna and Child, and these holiday stamps have attracted a devoted following over the years.

The 2007 Christmas stamp features an oil-on-panel painting titled “The Madonna of the Carnation” by Milanese Renaissance painter Bernardino Luini. Dating to around 1515, the painting is now part of the Samuel H. Kress Collection at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. The stamp art is a detail of the painting, as the original image was slightly cropped on all four sides to fit the stamp format.

In painting “The Madonna of the Carnation,” Luini used oil paints (then a relatively new medium) to great advantage. He enhanced his typically warm palette with the technique known as *sfumato* (an Italian word meaning “smoky”), in which softened color gradations and blended tones create the illusion of depth, volume and contour. Positioned against a plain, dark background and bathed in glowing light, Luini’s sacred figures seem alive and humanly accessible, filling the picture and inviting the viewer’s attention.

Clothed in a red dress and an orange-lined blue cloak, the Virgin Mary cradles her baby on her lap. The Christ Child is turned toward a green and white vase of flowers, focusing his attention on the carnation in his right hand.

During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, carnations were symbolic of both the crucifixion and the Virgin's pure love. Thus the pensive expressions on the faces of Luini's exquisitely modeled figures would have conveyed to Renaissance viewers the Virgin's foreknowledge and Christ's acceptance of his future death on the cross.

Bernardino Luini (circa 1480-1532) was an important member of the Lombard School, founded in Milan and powerfully influenced by Leonardo da Vinci. Few details are known about Luini's life, but his artistic legacy — several of his paintings were erroneously attributed to Leonardo — ensures his place in history as one of the world's master painters.