



POSTAL NEWS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Oct. 2, 2026

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New Christmas Stamp Now Available From USPS

The image is from a 16th-century painting titled 'The Virgin and Child Enthroned'

WILLIAMSTOWN, MA — The Postal Service has released a new Christmas stamp featuring a depiction of the Madonna and Child from a painting in the collection of the [Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute](#) in Williamstown, MA. The stamp was issued today without a ceremony.

"This painting caught my eye because of the beautiful red folds in the Madonna's dress and the unusual background," said Greg Breeding, an art director for USPS. "I also love the ornate patterns behind Mary's head, and the figures and symbols in the background intrigue me. There are more detailed background and context than we sometimes see in Madonna and Child paintings, and I find it unusually interesting and beautiful."

Art history in the mail: The story behind the 16th-century painting now on a stamp

The stamp features a richly symbolic depiction of the Virgin Mary and the Christ child painted around the year 1500. Distinctive for its large central figure of Mary in red garments and an array of background details, the oil-on-panel painting, known by its modern title "[The Virgin and Child Enthroned](#)," is in the collection of the Clark Art Institute.

Mary's red garments are detailed with gold and jewels and she is wearing a jeweled band with pearls on her head — all signs of her exalted status. In her lap sits the Christ child dressed in white, resting one small hand on a decorated book of hours — a collection of prayers for different times of day.

Behind Mary is a brocade textile with gold and silver threads, dignifying her with its preciousness. Angels appear in the background to the viewer's left, while on the right side, two small human figures at a rampart behold a Dutch city with scenes of daily life — a detail typical of Netherlandish painting — and the heavenly Jerusalem far beyond it. At Mary's feet is an area rich in foliage believed to represent a walled garden.

Art historians have documented the numerous Christian symbols in this painting. The Christ child wears a necklace that includes a red carbuncle — an indicator of martyrdom — and a pearl, which symbolizes salvation. Pomegranates on the textile behind the figures suggest fertility and resurrection. According to the Clark Art Institute, other likely symbols include a small dog that stands for faith, a glimpse of plantains growing along the road to salvation, and strawberries as symbols of righteousness and good works. The walled garden has been interpreted as a symbol of Mary's virginity.

This stamp continues a tradition of U.S. stamps featuring Madonna and Child paintings that began in 1966, four years after the debut of the first Christmas stamp. Madonna and Child stamps were issued nearly every year until 2009, with occasional departures to show other traditional Christmas imagery such as angels or Nativity scenes.

The Postal Service printed 185 million Christmas stamps that will be issued in booklets of 20. As Forever stamps, they will always be equal in value to the current First-Class Mail 1-ounce price. News of the stamps is being shared with the hashtag **#MadonnaAndChildStamp**.

Postal Products

Customers may purchase these stamps and other philatelic products through [The Postal Store](https://usps.com/shopstamps) at usps.com/shopstamps, by calling 844-737-7826, by mail through [USA Philatelic](https://usa.philatellic.com), or at Post Office locations nationwide. For officially licensed stamp products, shop the [USPS Officially Licensed Collection on Amazon](https://www.amazon.com/USPS-Officially-Licensed-Collection-on-Amazon). Additional information on stamps, first-day-of-issue ceremonies and stamp-inspired products can be found at stampsforever.com.

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The Postal Service generally receives no tax dollars for operating expenses and relies on the sale of postage, products and services to fund its operations.

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