



Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione (1609–1664)

The Nativity with God the Father,
c.1650–60

Red-brown oil paint

The Royal Collection ©
2005, Her Majesty Queen
Elizabeth II

Castiglione dealt with the subject of the Nativity many times, but this rendering is unusual due to the closeness with which God and his cherubs crowd in on the Virgin and Child.

It is also unusual in that Castiglione has replaced Joseph with God the Father. As God hovers behind the Virgin and Child, with his arms outstretched, he is protecting them when the Christ Child is most fragile. The Madonna is depicted with her cloak covering those in front of her – to protect them from earthly ills.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Castiglione was born in Genoa, spending his life moving between Genoa, Rome, Naples, and Mantua. He had many different influences, including Domenichino, Poussin, Carracci, Van Dyke, and Rubens, and he frequently appropriated motifs from them. Castiglione was a prolific painter of patriarchal journeys taken from the book of Genesis, such as Noah and Abraham.

He produced many oil drawings throughout his career, not as studies but as finished works. Oil paint drawings are rather unusual and Castiglione was a master of this form.

STUDENT FOCUS QUESTIONS

- What effect do the crowding cherubs and God figure have on this work?
- How has Castiglione achieved a supernatural effect for some of the cherub figures?
- How naturalistic are the Madonna and Child in this work? Discuss.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

<http://www.getty.edu/art/collections/bio/a921-1.html>

http://www.metmuseum.org/Works_of_Art/viewOne.asp?dep=9&viewMode=1&item=17%2E50%2E17%2D36

<http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?html/c/castigli/>