

# Botticelli's *Madonna of the Book*



## **What to Look For**

**Sky** - The open window provides depth to the image and symbolizes the entry of heaven into earth.

**Halo** - Notice the lace-like haloes of both figures, which is a development of the Renaissance from the solid gold haloes of previous eras.

**Veil** - Our Lady's veil is translucent, delicate, almost invisible, a sign of her as the one who is "full of grace".

**Fruit** - Almost unnoticed in the background is a bowl of fruit whose contents symbolize Christ's Blood (cherries), love of mother and child (plums), and figs (salvation or resurrection).

**Book** - The Word of God Himself seems to bless the Church's book of prayer which His mother reads and takes to heart (Lk 11:28).

**Symbols of Passion** - The holy Infant holds the symbols of His own Passion (three nails and Crown of Thorns) in his left hand.

**Faces** - The faces, especially that of Mary, are rendered with extreme delicacy and beauty as only Botticelli can.

**Garments** - Our Lady is clothed in a tunic of bright red and a cloak of royal blue, which is the standard Renaissance depiction of the Madonna.

## **Background**

Alessandro (Sandro) Botticelli (1445-1510) was an early Renaissance artist. He was apprenticed to Verrocchio, who also taught Leonardo, Perugino, and Ghirlandaio in Florence. Botticelli is known for at least 44 paintings of the Madonna and Child as well as dozens of other religious paintings. For two years (1481-82) he worked on frescoes of the Sistine Chapel. His other constant theme was Roman mythology, of which his two most famous works were *The Birth of Venus* and *Primavera* (Spring). Botticelli's delicate lines and ravishing faces make him a favorite for Christmas cards and religious publications. Botticelli actually has an asteroid belt named after him!

## **Arti-Facts**

- Date: ca. 1480
- Medium: tempera paint on wood panel
- Size: approx. 15½ in. x 23 in.
- Location: Museo Poldi Pezzoli, Milan, Italy.