



## POSTAL NEWS

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### **A New Face in an Age-long Tradition *Young John the Baptist Featured on Stamp***



To obtain high-resolution images of the stamp, e-mail [roy.a.betts@usps.gov](mailto:roy.a.betts@usps.gov)

NEW YORK — The tender relationship between mother and child and a prayerful gesture by a young boy will help deliver the joy of Christmas this season. Featured on the 2008 Christmas stamp is the *Virgin and Child with the Young John the Baptist* painting by Italian master Sandro Botticelli.

The U.S. Postal Service issues the 42-cent stamp today at a ceremony at the 2008 Fall Postage Stamp Mega Event at Madison Square Garden in New York City.

“The new Christmas stamp symbolizes the spirit of the season — joy and giving,” said Susan M. Brownell, vice president, Supply Management, for the United States Postal Service, who dedicated the stamp. “We are proud that this stamp, depicting the loving relationship between mother and child, will decorate billions of greeting cards, letters and packages this holiday season.”

Since 1978, the theme of the Christmas stamp has been the Madonna and Child, and the stamps have attracted a devoted following over the years. The 2008 design feature has an added twist with the additional figure of John the Baptist. The painting, tempera and oil on wood, by Botticelli dates to around 1490 and is now part of the world-renowned collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art. Although cropped to fit the stamp format, *Virgin and Child with the Young John the Baptist*

is painted within a round format, or tondo, a popular shape in Italy in the 1400s and 1500s.

“The Cleveland Museum of Art is known around the world for its encyclopedic collection of celebrated art,” said C. Griffith Mann, chief curator, The Cleveland Museum of Art. “The Cleveland Museum of Art is committed to sharing its resources and knowledge of art for the benefit of all and hopes this cooperation will touch and inspire many during this time of reflection and charity.”

The painting presents one of the most common figural groups in religious art. Botticelli's work suggests Mary's foreknowledge of Christ's fate. The facial expression of John the Baptist, seen standing to the side in a prayerful gesture, also suggests this heightened awareness.

The Virgin's robes, particularly her left arm and the yellow lining of the sleeve, have been restored. Her face is both the best-preserved portion of the painting and the area most certainly painted by Botticelli; it is believed that assistants in his workshop probably were responsible for at least some other sections.

In addition to the *Virgin and Child with the Young John the Baptist* stamp, four additional holiday stamps will be available nationwide as well: *Holiday Nutcrackers* stamps were also issued today; *Eid*, the Muslim holiday stamp was issued Sept. 23; *Kwanzaa*, the celebration of family, community and culture; and *Hanukkah*, the Jewish Festival of Lights, stamps will be issued Oct. 24.

The Postal Service printed 2.171 billion holiday stamps: 1.486 billion *Holiday Nutcracker*, 600 million *Virgin and Child with the Young John the Baptist*, 25 million *Eid*, 35 million *Kwanzaa* and 25 million *Hanukkah*.

The *Virgin and Child with the Young John the Baptist* stamp goes on sale nationwide today and also can be purchased online at [usps.com](http://usps.com).

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An independent federal agency, the U.S. Postal Service is the only delivery service that reaches 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, not tax dollars, to pay for operating expenses. The Postal Service has annual revenue of \$75 billion and delivers nearly half the world's mail.

## ***Virgin and Child with the Young John the Baptist* Philatelic Fact Sheet**

### **Philatelic Products**

There are three philatelic products available for this stamp issue:

- 677961, First-Day Cover, \$0.80
- 677991, Ceremony Program, \$6.95
- 677993, First-Day Cover Keepsake, \$9.20

### **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, or at The Postal Store web site at [www.usps.com/shop](http://www.usps.com/shop), or

by calling 800-STAMP-24. 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:

Christmas: Virgin and Child With  
the Young John the Baptist 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, 2008.

### **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 writing to:

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