

*The Nativity*, stained glass, Chartres Cathedral, France, 1194–1260

Art selection and commentary by [Heidi J. Hornik](#) and [Mikeal C. Parsons](#)

This artwork appears in the [January 2, 2019](#) issue.



A section of the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Chartres, France, contains 30 stained-glass scenes of the infancy of Christ, including this one of the Nativity. The odd-shaped pieces of the scene required the hand of a master to assemble them into something decorous and useful to the worshiper. The Chartres windows were created to teach biblical stories and convey spiritual messages at a time when most parishioners were illiterate. Mary lies on a bed while Joseph, with eyes closed, sits at her feet. The Christ Child, swaddled in a blue cloth that matches his mother's garb, is in a cradle, which is simultaneously an altar, foreshadowing Christ's sacrificial offering on the cross.