

Press release

November 2023

Christmas & Cribs

This year's traditional Christmas & Cribs exhibition at the National Museum Zurich will look at how a large number of Magi became the three kings and why they are so important to the Christmas story.

The three kings have been a key part of nativity scenes across the globe for centuries. This year's Christmas exhibition at the National Museum Zurich shines a light on the three distinguished visitors who are not always described as kings, but sometimes as Magi or wise men. How did Magi become kings? And what part do they play in the Christmas story?

The transformation from Magi to king is just one of the many parts of the puzzle in the development of the Christian legend of the three kings. It all started in the fourth century AD and revolves around the number three, which not only symbolises the Christian Trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but also the Christian values of faith, hope and charity. This may explain why what was originally several wise men became three kings. The fact that they had travelled from the three known continents at the time – Africa, Asia and Europe – also conveyed an important message for the still young religion of Christianity in the early Middle Ages as the three gift-bearers were supposed to represent the whole of humanity. Essentially, it was as if the whole world was kneeling down before Jesus.

The traditional Christmas exhibition at the National Museum Zurich will showcase kings from nativity scenes taken from all over the world. Their journeys, their origins and also the gifts they bear highlight the powerful symbolism of these three visitors. The festive exhibition features 17 cribs, complete with a varied accompanying programme for the whole family.

For more information, please contact:

Alexander Rechsteiner | Communication | Swiss National Museum.

T. +41 44 218 65 64 | email: medien@nationalmuseum.ch