

## *The Rest on the Flight into Egypt with St. John the Baptist*

Fra Bartolommeo  
Italian, Florence, about 1509  
Oil on panel  
51 x 42 in.  
96.PB.15

### Background Information

The Virgin Mary and Joseph convey a sense of calm as they rest on a golden late summer afternoon, watching as the Christ Child grasps the infant John the Baptist's reed cross. Fra Bartolommeo evokes Christ's Passion (the events that led up to Jesus' trial and crucifixion) in a variety of ways in this painting. The palm tree on the left suggests the palm fronds that would pave Christ's final entry into Jerusalem, while the pomegranate, lying on the ground in front of Mary, is a symbol of his Resurrection (Jesus' rebirth three days after his crucifixion). In the background on the right, Fra Bartolommeo represented the family fleeing Bethlehem to avoid King Herod's army.



### About the Artist

Fra Bartolommeo  
b. 1472 Florence, Italy, d. 1517 Florence, Italy  
painter; draftsman  
Italian

Fra Bartolommeo's art reflects the development of Florentine art from the detailed realism of the 1400s to the idealized grandeur, compositional simplicity, and rhythmic movement of the High Renaissance style of the 1500s. The purity of lines and volumes in one of his paintings inspired the young Raphael.

A mule driver's son, the young artist born as Baccio della Porta studied with a local painter, then worked with Ghirlandaio's conservative workshop. In 1498, when he saw Florence's convent of San Marco stormed and its strict, charismatic prior Savonarola dragged to prison, Baccio vowed to become a monk; he became Fra Bartolommeo in 1500. Seeing no distinction between life

## ***The Rest on the Flight into Egypt with St. John the Baptist,* Fra Bartolommeo**

and art, he allegedly burned his non-religious works and depictions of nudes, considering them sinful. In 1504, like Fra Angelico years before him, Fra Bartolommeo ran the San Marco monastery workshop. He incorporated Leonardo da Vinci's smooth harmonies, spiritual feeling, and *sfumato* (a smokelike haziness used to soften outlines) into his work. To stress the gulf between the divine and the earthly, Bartolommeo was among the first artists to replace contemporary costume with nondescript drapery. By 1508 he was the foremost artist of the Florentine school. Eager to stay abreast of his contemporaries artistic advances, he visited Venice that year and Rome around 1514. Bartolommeo's influence spread through his lively drawings, but the San Marco workshop closed soon after his death.

### **Questions for Teaching**

Describe the characters in the painting. Do you recognize any of the figures? If so, how? (They represent Joseph, Mary and baby Jesus—known as the Holy Family in Christianity. The other figure is John the Baptist, an important religious figure who baptized Jesus.)

Look at the setting around the figures. How would you describe it?

Where else do you see the figures? What do you think they are doing?

How does the placement of the figures throughout the painting help tell a story?