The Adoration of the Magi (Slide #5)
Attributed to Raffaello Botticini
Tempera on panel
Italy
c. 1490
Mr. and Mrs. Martin A. Ryerson Collection
1937.997

Renaissance means rebirth. Five hundred years ago, European scholars and thinkers took part in a brilliant rebirth of the classical civilization of the ancient Greeks and Romans. The goal of Renaissance man was to develop abilities in many fields of learning, including science, mathematics, politics, music, poetry, and art. It was also a period of great adventure and discovery. New ideas and inventions were developed rapidly. People’s concepts of the world changed radically after Nicolas Copernicus proved that the earth revolved around the sun. The invention of the compass helped Christopher Columbus on his famous voyage to the Americas. William Caxton’s printing press and the development of cheap paper furthered the exchange of new ideas.

*The Adoration of the Magi* was painted in Florence, Italy, where the Italian Renaissance began. Florence was a prosperous city of merchants and bankers, and the arts flourished with the support of church officials and prosperous families like the Medici.

In Florence, the family was very important, and marriages and childbirth were extravagantly celebrated. When a baby was born, wealthy families would present gifts to the new mother on a round platter called a birth tray. Stories were often painted on these trays. *Tondo* means “round painting,” and it is believed that artists got the idea for round paintings from the birth tray.
Perspective:
Scientific discoveries during the Renaissance affected the way the world was understood, just as the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century and the computer revolution of today changed people’s lives. With the introduction of linear perspective, a pattern of lines coming together at a point in the distance, artists could create the illusion of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional flat plane.

Parallel lines appear to come together at a single point that is called the vanishing point.