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**MADONNA AND CHILD ART FEATURED ON 2004 U.S. POSTAL SERVICE
CHRISTMAS POSTAGE STAMP**

NEW YORK — The beauty and serenity of the “Madonna and Child” featured on the masterpiece by Lorenzo Monaco, captures the spirit of the holiday season on this year’s Christmas stamp. The new 37-cent stamp was issued today by the U.S. Postal Service at a first-day-of-issue ceremony at the Postage Stamp Mega Show in the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, New York City. The stamp is available at the show and New York City Post Offices today and at Post Offices nationwide beginning tomorrow.



“The new Christmas stamp helps to celebrate this important Christian holiday with good tidings for families, friends and customers, who look forward to the delivery of their holiday mail,” said Robert Rider, member of the presidentially appointed U.S. Postal Service Board of Governors, who dedicated the stamp.

Joining Rider at the ceremony were Dr. Ray Ameen, Vice President, American Stamp Dealers Association, Inc. (ASDA); Don Buzney, former U.S. Marine and Vietnam Combat Veteran; and Carolyn James, Supervisor, Customer Service, Bronx Station, U.S. Postal Service.

Formerly known as Holiday Traditional stamps, the Christmas stamps adorn millions of letters, greeting cards and packages each year. The 2004 Christmas design is a tempera-on-panel “Madonna and Child.” The panel dates from 1413 and is part of the Samuel H. Kress Collection at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC.

Richard Sheaff of Scottsdale, AZ, is the stamp designer and art director for this stamp.

Lorenzo Monaco was born Piero di Giovanni around 1370, probably in Siena, Italy. In 1391, he professed vows as a monk of the Camaldolese Congregation of the Order of Saint Benedict at the monastery of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Florence, Italy. He also assumed a monastic name (Lorenzo Monaco means “Lorenzo the Monk”). Over the next few years, Lorenzo

became known as an artist of exceptional talent and skill. He did exquisite illuminated manuscripts, miniatures in choir books, paintings on panels and more.

Lorenzo moved out of the monastery in the late 1390s and established his own workshop, though he kept his connection with the monastic community and remained a monk for the rest of his life. His paintings continued to depict traditional Christian themes. By the turn of the century, Lorenzo was one of the leading artists in Florence. Today his works—notable for their graceful lines, decorative details, and rich colors—are considered some of the finest examples of late medieval European art. He died around 1425 and was buried at Santa Maria degli Angeli.

To see the Madonna and Child stamp, visit the Postal Service Website at www.usps.com/communications/news/stamps/welcome.htm.

Current U.S. stamps, as well as a free comprehensive catalog, are available by toll-free telephone order at 1 800 STAMP-24. A selection of stamps and other philatelic items are available at the online Postal Store at www.usps.com/shop. In addition, custom-framed prints of original stamp art are available at www.postalartgallery.com.

Since 1775, the U.S. Postal Service has connected friends, families, neighbors and businesses by mail. An independent federal agency, the Postal Service makes deliveries to more than 141 million addresses every day and is the only service provider to deliver to every address in the nation. The Postal Service receives no taxpayer dollars for routine operations, but derives its operating revenues solely from the sale of postage, products and services. With annual revenues of more than \$68 billion, it is the world's leading provider of mail and delivery services, offering some of the most affordable postage rates in the world. Moreover, today's postage rates will remain stable until at least 2006. The U.S. Postal Service delivers more than 46 percent of the world's mail volume—some 202 billion letters, advertisements, periodicals and packages a year—and serves seven million customers each day at its 38,000 retail locations nationwide.

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