

The nativity of Christ is one of a crucial moment in the salvation history – the point which stands in the beginning of Christ's physical presentation in the world. It is no wonder that a demand of its representation in the visual art emerged very soon. Therefore, the picture of Christ's nativity is ranked among the oldest visually processed themes which derive from the life of Christ. This long history attracted an attention of art historians as early as in the 19th century but the most significant studies came from a pen of art historians who worked during 20th century, mainly in the second part of 20th century – for example works of Gertrude Schiller or Günter Ristow. Although there are a lot of books and articles about this theme, none of them has emerged in recent years when our knowledge are enriched by an array of new information. And also a methodology was radically changed. The only one more complex modern study is Rainer Stichel's work. However, his interest is focused on the Eastern pictures. There is still an empty place. For that reason, I attempted to make "the first step" so that I could fill this lack. My "first step" became the research of the oldest well-preserved pictures with the theme of Christ's nativity. The primary subject of my work is characterization of a content side of this picture – i.e. the detailed analysis and consequent interpretation both individual motifs and complete meaning of the picture. In spite of seeming simplicity, the theme of Christ's nativity is quite complicated. Therefore, I was forced to focus my attention just on pictures which were created during the first ten centuries – i. e. on the time when the essential form of the picture of Christ's nativity stabilized. The result is the study which is devoted both the essence of meaning of the oldest pictures of Christ's nativity and how this happy event was perceived in former times. During the 4th century, there was an increasing effort to anchor Christ's physical emergence in the world in daily life of Christians. The key question of discussions about this topic was the date of Christ's nativity. There were several facts which helped to solve this problem. The most important points were a theological calculation and a solar symbolism but also an influence of heathen cult. Finally, the winter solstice was chosen.