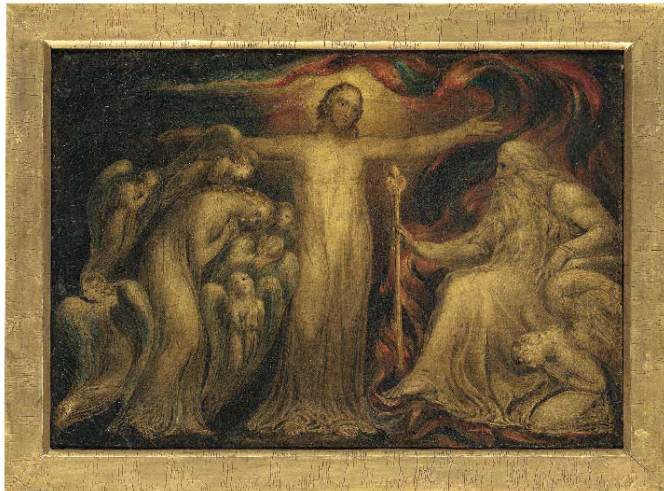


## For Immediate Release

22 February 2005

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### **RARE WORK BY VISIONARY BRITISH ARTIST SHINES AT CHRISTIE'S** **William Blake tempera to be sold in Important British Art sale in June**



**Important British Art**  
**14 June 2005**  
**Christie's King Street**

**London** – A rare and important biblical illustration in tempera by the visionary artist and poet William Blake (1757-1827) is a highlight of Christie's Important British Art sale on 14 June 2005. *Christ the Mediator: Christ pleading before the Father for St Mary Magdalene*, executed in 1799-1800, is estimated to realise £500,000-800,000 in the sale at King Street. A work in tempera, the preferred medium of this influential British artist, has not been seen on the market for 25 years.

“This tempera picture is one of the most exciting and important works that I have handled during my career at Christie's,” says Harriet Drummond, Director British and Irish art.

The composition is dominated by the figure of Christ whose outstretched arms echo the crucifixion, as he mediates between Mary Magdalene (representing mankind) and the seated figure of God. The flames surrounding the seated figure of The Father, and the subservient angel, contrast with the bowed figure of Mary supported by angels, suggesting Blake's sympathies lie with mankind.

Blake painted 148 illustrations of The Bible for Thomas Butts, the artist's most important patron over a period of 30 years. The first were executed in tempera, Blake's preferred medium, and the rest in watercolour. Of the group of 148 works, only a handful of works in tempera remain in private hands. This important work was until recently on loan at Tate Britain.

William Blake was a visionary poet and painter, as well as a great technical innovator. This work combines pen and ink with tempera on canvas. Blake's objections to oil painting were that the picture, after it was painted, sunk so much that it ceased to retain the brilliancy and luxury he intended. Blake's way of preparing his ground, and mixing his colours were those practiced by the earliest fresco painters, whose works often remained vivid and permanently fresh. Modern research has confirmed that Blake prepared his canvases with animal glue which reflected the light back through the transparent layers of the tempera. After colours had been applied, Blake would re-inforce the outline in black ink to provide a final clarification to the picture.

After *Christ the Mediator* left the collection of Thomas Butts, it entered the collection of Graham Robertson, the greatest collector of Blake's work in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Robertson owned 90 works by Blake, which he acquired at a time of increasing appreciation of the artist's work. Robertson donated a number of works to Tate Britain, which formed the nucleus of the Museum's Blake collection. Many hoped the rest of the collection would be bequeathed to the nation but Robertson wanted private collectors like himself to enjoy the possibility of acquiring a work by Blake. It was at Robertson's sale, probably the greatest sale of Blake's work, on 22 July 1949, that George Goyder, C.B.E., the celebrated Blake scholar, collector, and founder with Sir Geoffrey Keynes of The Blake Trust (1948) purchased *Christ the Mediator*. It has remained in Goyder's family ever since.

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*Images available on request*

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## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

Christie's London has been privileged to handle a number of Drawings and Watercolours from the Goyder Collection including Ruskin's *Bellinzona, Switzerland, looking North towards the St Gotthard's Pass*, which achieved £264,050, a world auction record for the artist.