

*The Interior of the Oude Kerk, Amsterdam*

by [Jen Stewart Fueston](#) in the [November 21, 2018](#) issue

*Emanuel de Witte, 1660*

In the corner, doused in light that spills  
over her bundled hair and shoulders, and the basket  
holding round loaves wrapped in linen, she nurses a child  
who looks old enough to walk, and another waits in shadows  
with a mangy dog. Who knows if this is the painter's plain  
Madonna, the middle-class Dutch version of divinity?  
She is not robed in color on the walls. Her sturdy arms and legs  
have been lifting milk-jugs and the children, and wrestling  
with that dog for kitchen scraps. And I can tell you  
she is tired, tired in the marrow of her bones, too tired  
to tarry here much longer modeling the Holy Mother  
with this homespun basket of Eucharistic bread.  
The baby's crying and no doubt there are meals to make  
beyond the one that's made of her own body. I can hear her  
scolding the painter as she sits, her head spinning  
with all the rough chores that stand between her and the moment  
she lies down on her 17th-century bed at last, unwraps  
her hair from its linen halo and finally sleeps.