Here is a famous painting by the Renaissance artist Raphael ~ and my rendition:

Raphael's work is a good example of religious symbolism. The Christ child is portrayed according to his qualities: of abundance, and with eyes fixed up the Heavens.
I felt the need to create a bond between Madonna and Child, and make it more psychologically approachable to our modern audience. We change our Icons with the passing of time~ and make them fit more to the audience that is viewing (patrons purchasing) the art.   This happens in every era. Somehow we adapt icons to the familiar, innocently perhaps, but with time this becomes "fact." The visual image is so powerful— that we come to defend the idea that Jesus was most certainly fair haired and fair skinned, and so was Mother Mary.

It is important to realize that symbolism is symbolic— not the actual fact. To paraphrase Joseph Campbell in his famous lecture: "The Way of Art": He said: "I think I have the answer here." …People mistake the connotation for the denotation. (Denotation is the literal definition. Connotation is the meaning which is suggested or implied.)

But somehow especially with Christian art— the need exists to make a very personal experience for the viewer of the art. There again— a feeling of calm is the message that is carried forward so beautifully in Raphael's Madonna. I did not change her, but because of my life-long experience in creating portraits of animals and people— I ended up creating a contented looking "Gerber Baby." (Here again… unconsciously... I was working with the desire to stimulate Mirror Neurons of calm in the viewer.)