



CNN photo of creche with Baby Jesus missing

Just last month I heard the term “Stolen Baby Jesus Syndrome” for the first time. Turns out, people like to steal Baby Jesus from outdoor creche scenes. There’s a growing epidemic of Baby Jesus thefts each year, all round the country. Maybe you noticed the article about this in this Sunday’s *Washington Post*?

I have news for all would-be Baby Jesus thieves: You don’t have to steal the Baby. He will come home with you, willingly, for free, for all time. All you need do is invite him into your life. No theft required!

I wonder if Mary and Joseph could have imagined that idealized depictions of that night would abound over 2,000 years later. They did the best they could for the child: they wrapped him in some cloth and laid him in a manger.

Everyone who saw the child on the night he was born had been told he was The One, the Christ Child, God-Come-Among-Us.

Joseph knew, knew he wasn't the child's father but accepted that he was responsible for feeding and clothing him, for raising him until he was able to fulfill his purpose as revealed by his angel visitation: to "save his people from their sins."

Mary knew who the baby was, as well. This almost-naked child, she had been told by the angel Gabriel, was "Son of the Most High God" and heir of King David's throne, whose kingdom would last forever.

The shepherds who came to see the newborn Christ Child knew who he was. The angels told them, the brand-new Baby was "a Savior, ... the Messiah, the Lord." Even the wise men who were on their way (currently they are in the Parlor where we will be having brunch after this service) were coming to worship the "King of the Jews."

I doubt that either Joseph or Mary worried THAT NIGHT about someone stealing the Baby Jesus—either in person or by proxy. He was a newborn infant, and a rather poor one at that. Who would take a baby such as this?

So, I did some research. I discovered that there are many different motives for stealing Baby Jesus. Some people don't believe in God, so they don't think there should be a visible sign of belief anywhere. Others are angry at God and want to punish God by taking his Son.

This reminds me of a boy who was praying he would get a smartphone for Christmas. And he was remembering all the times that year he had been bad, figuring his chances of getting any present were slim. So, he got up off his knees, went into the living room, and took the "Mary" figure from his family's creche scene. Then he went back to praying. "I've got your mother," the boy told Jesus, "and if you ever want to see her again, give me a smartphone for Christmas."

Maybe THIS is why some people steal Jesus from manger scenes: some kind of skewed sense of power for bargaining with God. Or maybe for control of God.



My mother gave me “pets” one year for Christmas. A cat and a dog. Robots. With sophisticated artificial intelligence programming, but also with an on/off switch. I can play with them for a while, but then turn them off when they want things from me, like attention or artificial food.

Maybe those who steal Baby Jesus from creche scenes want this kind of God: “Bring me gifts but allow me no pain, and don’t ask anything of me!”

Of course, some Baby Jesus stealers are probably just mentally ill. They want something to cuddle. And who better to nurture than the biggest overachiever ever born?

██████████ knows that people steal Baby Jesus from creches. THEY locked up the Christ figure in their safe in the sacristy. (Think of the optics of THAT!) I’m happy to report that the Child is now where he belongs—in the manger, right over there—and you can visit him after the service.

For whatever reason, people steal Baby Jesus. The irony, of course, is that the Christ Child is totally free for the taking, all year long. The real Christ Child, not inanimate depictions of him. The best reason to not settle for a fake Jesus is that the real Christ Child is life-changing. He opens us up to love, love from God, love of ourselves, and love of others.

Joseph and Mary learned that this child was pure gift. However he came to be, they recognized he was no mere human. The shepherds were transformed by their encounter with the living God, as we ourselves can testify.

No one need steal THIS Baby; he is forever available, a life-force vital beyond his human life. He cannot be bribed, controlled, manipulated, or stolen. We can’t turn him on or off. This Baby is totally alive, and he wants us to be fully present to life also. This

Child knows the secret of happiness, which is to help others. This Child teaches us we are as content in life as we make others content.

This Christ Child is sleeping peacefully, no doubt, in our food-bowl. He is getting ready to be the savior of the world, getting ready first to be our meal, served right here this day at this altar.

I don't worry about people who steal Baby Jesus. Whatever impulse stirs them to this theft, at least the Christ Child is not irrelevant in their lives. I think God is using such folks to teach us something important: an unattended manger scene is no manger scene at all. An unattended manger scene is a historical statement, like a statue is a historical statement, calling our attention to something that happened long ago. What Baby Jesus stealers are trying to tell us is, if we are serious about our faith in a living God, we need to show up in person. Because WE are the living, breathing expression of the Christ Child born among us. WE are the manger (I heard that somewhere last night). And, if the Christ Child isn't born today in us, the Christ Child might as well be a lifeless mannikin, an inanimate object to be viewed and ignored and stolen in anger or for pranks or for cuddling.

Let me say that again, "if the Christ Child isn't born in us today, he's born no where at all."

Alleluia! Unto us a child is born.

O come, let us adore him!