
Christmas Eve: Who is missing from the nativity?
Chapel in the Park United Church
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by Rev. Dr. Paul Shepherd

[image: nativity elaborate]

I have always loved nativity sets. Some are very elaborate, like this one. And some are quite simple. These scenes have been popular for over 800 years as one way of telling a story about the birth of Jesus. A story that has been passed down for 2000 years. Nativity scenes were particularly powerful when the vast majority of the population were illiterate. But even today, the visual and physical aspects of these sets can be meaningful.

[image: nativity lego]

Some nativity sets are proper works of art. But I always like the ones that we get to play with. By “play with” I mean that we can move the characters around in a way that allows us to enter into the story ourselves.

[image: nativity cat]

Cats actually do this very naturally. They understand that a nativity set is something for them to engage with. Cats literally place themselves in the story. Usually, at the centre. Because they are cats.

[image: nativity fish tank]

When I was a child, we had a basic nativity set. And my brothers and I enjoyed playing with the characters. The figures went all over the house as we put ourselves into the story. And to this day I do not understand why my mother always got annoyed when I put the characters in the fish tank. I figured - perhaps Mary liked to swim.

[image: nativity citp]

And for those of you online, here is the nativity set we have here. It belongs to St Edith Stein Roman Catholic Church who share our sanctuary.

I like nativity sets. But to me - all nativity sets seem incomplete.

[image: Costco nativity]

Consider this set from Costco. It has Mary, Joseph and Jesus. It has 3 wise men. It has a shepherd. It has farm animals. It has an angel. There is even a barn. Surely that is a complete set, right? Well sure, that is a typical nativity set. And it's from Costco - so you

know it's legit.

But I will still claim that the set is incomplete. So who is missing?

I think a lot of people are missing. If there is a donkey, there must be someone who fed the donkey, right? And I'm sure that many other people were involved. Remember, in the story, Mary and Joseph went door to door looking for a place to sleep and they got turned away because there were no available rooms. Fair enough. But those people knew that Mary was pregnant. At least some of those people would have offered to help deliver the baby, or provided food, or helped out in other ways.

[image: casserole delivery - blessed are the ones who we forgot to include ... especially the ones who brought food]

Surely someone gave Mary the 1st century equivalent of a casserole. Mary gave birth in a stable. But she did not give birth in a vacuum. Lots of other people were around and helped out. People who are not named. People who do not get immortalized in nativity sets. People who brought food, water, blankets. People who simply stayed close by for comfort. People who ran all sorts of little helpful errands.

Which brings me - finally - to who is missing from most nativity sets. The person who is missing is each of us. Not because we are special. But because stories like this only work when ordinary people like us show up.

Someone fed the animals. Someone brought food. Someone stayed close by, just in case. Someone brought the first-century equivalent of a casserole. Those people do not get statues. They do not get lines in the script. But without them, there is no story.

And that is the invitation of Christmas.

Faith isn't something we watch. It's something we step into. Our closing blessing tonight includes the line, "We will seek God, not in a long-ago stable or ancient manger, but in the people we meet and in the depths of our own hearts."

So this Christmas, may we be the ones who show up. May we be the ones who bring what we have. And may we discover - perhaps to our surprise - that God is already there.

Amen.