

Dear Class Member,

On this Sunday before Christmas, we have chosen two similar stories of men who have large collections of nativity scenes. Both are small news stories, but as nativity sets encapsulate Jesus' birth story, they provide us an opportunity to think about the meaning of that birth. So that will be the topic of our next class.

If you wish to start thinking about our topic in advance, below is some introductory material.

The Wired Word invites us to contribute news story suggestions for upcoming lessons. If you have a story you'd like to suggest, post it to The Wired Word forum at <http://thewiredword.squarespace.com/>.



NY Pastor Has 570 Nativity Sets; NC Man Has 600

The Wired Word for the Week of December 20, 2015

In the News

Father Roy Herberger, a pastor in Buffalo, New York, purchased his first nativity set some 30 years ago while attending a religious convention in Baltimore.

"It got me thinking about other countries and other artists and how they would express this artistically," Herberger told ABC News. "What would Jesus look like? What would Mary and Joseph look like?"

That led Herberger to start buying other crèches online and from a shop that sells items from developing countries. As friends and parishioners learned of the pastor's growing collection, some began bringing him sets from countries they visited.

"I have a set from an artist in the Andes in Peru and everything, including the Holy Family, is made out of automobile parts," Herberger said. "I have a set from Africa and they are all made of out of Coca-Cola cans."

Today, he has 570 sets from 59 different countries. "They remind me that when Christ came into the world, as we celebrate Christmas, that he came for all people, all nationalities, all languages," Herberger said. "This allows people to identify with Christ and God no matter where they live."

Herberger displays his collection at his church throughout the Christmas season, but as he is planning to retire in 2017, next year will be the last time he will have a place to show it. He is looking for a new permanent home for the crèches.

Rodney Gore, a florist in Tabor City, North Carolina, also has a crèche collection. His numbers 600 and he used his home, carport and shed to display the nativity sets.

Gore told ABC affiliate WWAY that he considers the nativity sets an expression of his faith. "I can never show enough love because without love, I have nothing," Gore said.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[NY Pastor Seeks New Home for His 570 Nativity Sets From All Over the World. ABC News](#)
[Meet the North Carolina Man Who Has Collected 600 Nativity Scenes. ABC News](#)
[5 Things to Notice When You Read Luke's Christmas Story This Year. Crosswalk](#)

Applying the News Story

As mentioned in the introduction above, nativity sets encapsulate Jesus' birth story. They do that rounding up all of the characters mentioned in the nativity accounts in Matthew and Luke (the only two gospels that include stories of Jesus' birth), and putting them together in one place. Thus nativity sets are a way of telling or retelling the Christmas event.

And the fact is, stories gain power of their own long after the events they recount are past. Likewise, stories can provide meaning for people who never knew the individuals in the tales. For centuries, storytelling was a primary format for education, for passing on national, religious and cultural identity and even for entertainment.

So these two news stories give us an opportunity to think about the story of Jesus' birth, not only as a narrative, but also as theology, so that we can consider not only what happened at Christmas, but also what it means.

The Big Questions

Here are some of the questions we will discuss in class:

1. How important is it for God to have manifested himself as a baby to a poor couple in a backwater town, rather than to have descended on clouds from heaven, or to be born to a royal and/or wealthy family? Why did God need to manifest as human at all?
2. How would our lives be different if we were still awaiting the Messiah for the first time?
3. With whom, if anyone, in the nativity scene, do you identify? Why?
4. What purpose or purposes do you have in mind when you decorate your home for Christmas? What lessons of faith are you making your own or sharing with others? Why, besides custom, don't you leave your Christmas decorations up all year? What other, if any, Christian-themed collections do you have? Why? Do you have any religious decorations in the house the whole of the year, not just Christmas? If yes, what purpose do they serve?
5. What thoughts might come to your mind while viewing crèches from around the world?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

We will look at selected verses from these Scripture texts. You may wish to read these in advance for background:

[Matthew 2:1-6](#)

[Luke 2:1-20](#)

[Titus 2:11-14](#)

[John 1:1-14](#)

In class, we will talk about these passages and look for some insight into the big questions, as well as talk about other questions you may have about this topic. Please join us.