

With the eyes of a child, gaze upon the Nativity



Every Christmas since I can remember, the National Gingerbread Competition has been hosted at the Grove Park Inn resort in my hometown of Asheville, North Carolina. Growing up, it was an annual family tradition to walk through the old historic building and look at the magnificent creations on display. The majority of each structure must be made out of gingerbread, and all the elements must be edible. It is fascinating to gaze at each piece, contemplate how it was created and wonder at the vision and creativity that was involved in the design and execution.

I was reminded of this competition when I read about the fourth annual “100 Nativity Scenes at the Vatican” taking place this year, as [reported on](#) by our friends at Aleteia. Among the 126 crèches on display is a 220-pound Nativity scene made completely out of chocolate, designed by the *Il Cioccolato dei Trappisti* (Trappist Chocolate) company. All of the Nativities must be handcrafted and, like the gingerbread competition, there is a wide variance between “professional” and “amateur” entries.

But while the gingerbread entries come solely from the United States, the Nativity scenes came from around the world. The display depicts the universal wonder of the Incarnation – a truth that extends beyond borders, language, age, class or race – and each entry brought with it its own style, culture and creative approach. Looking at the photos of several different scenes, I found myself scrutinizing them with the same wonder and awe that I have when I look at the gingerbread structures, trying to see how they were made, and what the artists were trying to convey through the creation.

In our own home, Nativity scenes have become a further source of wonder and awe because of our young children. Our 2-year-old daughter, especially, likes to put together our Little People Nativity and take it apart again with admirable regularity. She also likes to lie on her stomach next to the Christmas tree (under which it is displayed) and look at each character. You can see the wheels turning as she determines who should be where in the scene that is already so familiar to her little brain.

In the 2019 apostolic letter *Admirabile Signum*, the Holy Father explores the meaning and importance of the Nativity scene, examining each element and its significance. It offers a contemplative experience of a Christian icon that has become so familiar – helping to restore the wonder and awe that can come from contemplating it anew.

“Why does the Christmas crèche arouse such wonder and move us so deeply?” Pope Francis asks. “First, because it shows God’s tender love: the Creator of the universe lowered himself to take up our littleness. The gift of life, in all its mystery, becomes all the more wondrous as we realize that the Son of Mary is the source and sustenance of all life. In Jesus, the Father has given us a brother who comes to seek us out whenever we are confused or lost, a loyal friend ever at our side. He gave us his Son who forgives us and frees us from our sins.”

As we enter into the joyful season of Christmas, we would do well to gaze more at our Nativity scenes, wondering at the vision that was involved in our loving Father’s design and execution. We would do well to look at them through the eyes of a child, imagining the lives of those characters so remarkable and yet still so human. And rightly so. The story they tell is of Jesus Christ entering the world so that we might live forever with him. It is the story of our salvation. What could be better to wonder at than that?

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