

## = Baby Jesus theft =

Baby Jesus theft is the theft of plastic or ceramic figurines of the infant Jesus from outdoor public and private nativity displays during the Christmas season . It is an " enduring ( and illegal ) practice " according to New York Times journalist Katie Rogers , " believed to be part of a yearly tradition , often carried out by bored teenagers looking for an easy prank . " The prevalence of such thefts has caused the owners of outdoor manger scenes to protect their property with GPS devices , surveillance cameras , or by other means .

## = = Incidents = =

Dozens of communities across America have suffered thefts of Baby Jesus figurines , and , in some instances , entire nativity scenes , Washington DC journalist Daniel Nasaw reports for Britain 's The Guardian . He observes that it is unclear whether such theft is on the rise , as it is not tracked by federal law enforcement .

In 2008 , a Baby Jesus was stolen from First United Methodist Church in Kittanning , Pennsylvania and replaced with a pumpkin , and , in Eureka Springs , Arkansas , a thief not only stole the Baby Jesus from a public display but absconded with the concrete block and chain that was supposed to act as a deterrent . Some communities suffer repeat Baby Jesus thefts . A Baby Jesus was stolen in December 2008 from a Stony Point town display . A town official remarked , " If someone did it as a prank , I don 't find it funny . " The nativity had been vandalized the year before , and a menorah next to it had been toppled and broken .

During some Christmases of the first decade of the 21st century , the Baby Jesus statue was often stolen from the outdoor nativity scene in Jönköping in Sweden , once thrown into the nearby lake of Vättern . This has led to the nativity scene , resembling a wooden stable , being closed by nights .

Some figurines have been defaced with profanity or Satanic symbols . In December 2008 , for example , a fiberglass Baby Jesus valued at US \$ 375 was stolen from a Eureka Springs , Arkansas park and later recovered , but had been defaced by racial slurs , a swastika , and a Hitler mustache . The eyes were also blacked out and pieces had been broken off , rendering it damaged beyond repair .

In his autobiography , The Long Hard Road Out Of Hell , Marilyn Manson admitted playing a prank in which he and a few friends stole figurines of Jesus then replaced them with hams . They sent a communique to a newspaper posing as a black radical group saying that it was a protest against " the plasticisation of the black man 's wisdom with the so @-@ called ' White Christmas ' . "

## = = Security measures = =

Some nativity display owners have taken measures to secure their property against would @-@ be thieves . Others are reluctant to exercise such vigilance . One Indiana man who suffered the loss of his Baby Jesus figurine rebuffed suggestions to secure the figurines on his porch because , " that would be like putting Jesus in jail " . Traditional security measures are not always foolproof . The Baby Jesus fastened to the National Christmas Creche at Independence Hall disappeared within days .

Some communities , churches , and citizens are employing electronic technology to protect their property . A Texas family , for example , positioned surveillance cameras in their yard and discovered a teenage girl stealing their Baby Jesus figurine , valued at nearly US \$ 500 . In 2008 , a security device distributor offered its surveillance cameras and GPS devices to 200 non @-@ profit religious institutions for a month 's use gratis . GPS protection has met with some success . In one case , after a life @-@ size ceramic nativity figurine disappeared from the lawn of a community center in Wellington , Florida , sheriff 's deputies tracked it to an apartment where it was found lying face @-@ down on a carpet . An 18 @-@ year @-@ old woman was arrested .

## = = Perspectives = =

While Baby Jesus thefts are largely regarded as pranks , they are set apart by the involvement of a religious icon . " They think it 's a prank , but it isn 't a prank to some of these people , " Pennsylvania state police Corporal Paul Romanic told The Morning Call newspaper , in regards to an incident in which ten nativity scene figures were found in a yard after being stolen from across Bucks County , Pennsylvania . " Plus , it 's just wrong to steal the baby Jesus . "

Some have wondered if an anti @-@ Christian sentiment lurks behind the thefts . Attorney Mike Johnson of the Alliance Defending Freedom ( formerly the Alliance Defense Fund ) , a Christian legal group , stated , " I suspect most of it is childish pranks . Clearly , there are adults with an agenda to remove Christ from Christmas . But they tend to occupy themselves with the courts and courtroom of public opinion . " Stephen Nissenbaum , the author of The Battle for Christmas and a retired professor , views Baby Jesus theft as neither innocent vandalism nor religious hate crimes . Nissenbaum writes that , " What it means is that it 's OK to go around violating even pretty important norms , as long as real human harm isn 't being done . It 's not exactly devaluing Christianity , but it is sort of a ritualized challenge to it . It could be Christian kids doing it ? and on January 2 they become good Christians again . "

Historian Daniel Silliman has argued that , whatever the thieves ' intention , the act puts the culture of Christmas in a different light . " Baby Jesus thieves literally take the Christ out of Christmas , " Silliman writes . " When they do , it becomes apparent that the sacred object is also a piece of property , protected by the law that protects property and this whole apparatus that defends Christmas : fences and lights , tracking devices and private security companies , patrolling police and the courts . The commercialization of Christmas is visible here in a way it might not be , otherwise . That ? s the power of the joke . "

= = In drama = =

In " The Big Little Jesus , " the December 24 , 1953 episode of the television series Dragnet , Sgts . Friday and Smith are called upon to investigate the theft of a Baby Jesus from a church nativity display on Christmas Eve . Unable to solve the crime , the officers tell the priest that Mass must be celebrated without the Baby Jesus . The figurine is restored when a boy arrives with it in a wagon . He tells the officers that he had vowed that if he got a wagon for Christmas , Baby Jesus would have the first ride . This episode was remade when Dragnet went to color ; it is not only the only episode made twice , but the only story not based on an actual police case . The episode was originally broadcast on radio on December 22 , 1953 , making it the only episode to appear on all three Jack Webb versions of the series .