

= Nativity scene =

A nativity scene or crèche (/ kr?? / or / kre?? / ; also known as a manger scene , or crib , in Italian presepio or presepe) is the special exhibition , particularly during the Christmas season , of art objects representing the scene of the birth of Jesus . While the term " nativity scene " may be used of any representation of the very common subject of the Nativity of Jesus in art , it has a more specialized sense referring to seasonal displays , either using model figures in a setting or enactments called " living nativity scenes " in which real humans and animals participate . Nativity scenes exhibit figures representing the infant Jesus , his mother Mary , and Joseph . Other characters from the nativity story such as shepherds and sheep , and angels may be displayed near the manger in a barn (or cave) intended to accommodate farm animals , as described in the gospels of Luke . A donkey and an ox are typically depicted in the scene , as well as the Magi and camels belonging to the Magi described in the Matthew . Several cultures add other characters and objects that may be Biblical or not .

Saint Francis of Assisi is credited with creating the first live nativity scene in 1223 (a " living " one) intending thereby to cultivate the worship of Christ , having been inspired by his recent visit to the Holy Land where he had been shown Jesus 's traditional birthplace . The scene 's popularity inspired communities throughout Catholic countries to stage similar pantomimes .

Distinctive nativity scenes and traditions have been created around the world and are displayed during the Christmas season in churches , homes , shopping malls , and other venues , and occasionally on public lands and in public buildings . In the United States , the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City and the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh annually display Neapolitan Baroque nativity scenes , both of which originated from the collection of Eugenio Catello .

Nativity scenes have not escaped controversy . In the United States , nativity scenes on public lands and in public buildings have provoked court challenges .

= = Birth of Jesus = =

A nativity scene takes its inspiration from the accounts of the birth of Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke . Luke 's narrative describes an angel announcing the birth of Jesus to shepherds who then visit the humble site where Jesus is found lying in a manger , a trough for cattle feed . (Luke 2 : 8 @-@ 20) Matthew 's narrative tells of " wise men " (grk.????? magoi) who follow a star to the house where Jesus dwelt , and indicates that the Magi found Jesus some time later , less than two years after his birth , rather than on the exact day . (Mat.2 : 1 @-@ 23) Matthew 's account does not mention the angels and shepherds , while Luke 's narrative is silent on the Magi and the star . The Magi and the angels are often displayed in a nativity scene with the Holy Family and the shepherds although there is no scriptural basis for their presence . (Luke 2 : 7 ; 2 : 12 ; 2 : 17)

= = Origins and early history = =

St. Francis of Assisi is credited with creating the first nativity scene in 1223 at Greccio , central Italy , in an attempt to place the emphasis of Christmas upon the worship of Christ rather than upon secular materialism and gift giving . The nativity scene created by St. Francis is described by St Bonaventure in his Life of Saint Francis of Assisi written around 1260 . Staged in a cave near Greccio , St. Francis ' nativity scene was a living one with humans and animals cast in the Biblical roles . Pope Honorius III gave his blessing to the exhibit . Such pantomimes became hugely popular and spread throughout Christendom . Within a hundred years every church in Italy was expected to have a nativity scene at Christmastime . Eventually , statues replaced human and animal participants , and static scenes grew to elaborate affairs with richly robed figurines placed in intricate landscape settings . Charles III , King of the Two Sicilies , collected such elaborate scenes , and his enthusiasm encouraged others to do the same .

The scene 's popularity inspired much imitation in Catholic countries , and in the Early modern

period sculpted cribs were set up in Catholic churches and homes , often exported from Italy . These elaborate scenes reached their artistic apogee in Papal state , Emilia , Kingdom of Naples , Genoa that had an important tradition , notably those of Anton Maria Maragliano . By the end of the 19th century nativity scenes became popular beyond Catholic settings , and many versions of various sizes and in various materials such as terracotta , paper , wood , wax and ivory were marketed , often with a backdrop setting in the stable .

Different traditions of nativity scenes emerged in different countries . Hand @-@ painted santons are popular in Provence . In southern Germany , Austria and Trentino @-@ Alto Adige the figurines are handcut in wood . Colorful szopka are typical in Poland .

A tradition in England , involved baking a mince pie in the shape of a manger to hold the Christ child until dinnertime when the pie was eaten . When the Puritans banned Christmas celebrations in the 17th century , they also passed specific legislation to outlaw such pies , calling them " Idolaterie in crust " .

Distinctive nativity scenes and traditions have been created around the world and are displayed during the Christmas season in churches , homes , shopping malls , and other venues , and occasionally on public lands and in public buildings . The Vatican has displayed a scene in St. Peter 's Square near its Christmas tree since 1982 and the Pope has for many years blessed the mangers of children assembled in St. Peter 's Square for a special ceremony . In the United States , the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City annually displays a Neapolitan Baroque nativity scene before a 20 feet (6 @.@ 1 m) blue spruce .

Nativity scenes have not escaped controversy . A life @-@ sized scene in the United Kingdom featuring waxworks celebrities provoked outrage in 2004 , and , in Spain , a city council forbade the exhibition of a traditional toilet humor character in a public nativity scene . People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) indicates that animals in living displays lack proper care and suffer abuse . In the United States , nativity scenes on public lands and in public buildings have provoked court challenges , and the prankish theft of ceramic or plastic nativity figurines from outdoor displays has become commonplace .

= = Components = =

= = = Static nativity scenes = = =

A static nativity scene may be erected indoors or outdoors during the Christmas season , and is composed of figurines depicting the infant Jesus resting in a manger , Mary , and Joseph . Other figures in the scene may include angels , shepherds , and various animals . The figures may be made of any material , and arranged in a stable or grotto . The Magi may also appear , and are sometimes not placed in the scene until the week following Christmas to account for their travel time to Bethlehem . While most home nativity scenes are packed away at Christmas or shortly thereafter , nativity scenes in churches usually remain on display until the feast of the Baptism of the Lord .

The nativity scene may not accurately reflect gospel events . With no basis in the gospels , for example , the shepherds , the Magi , and the ox and ass may be displayed together at the manger . Some traditions bring other scriptural characters to the nativity scene such as Adam and Eve and the serpent , Noah and his animals , the twelve sons of Jacob , the twelve prophets and the twelve apostles . Mundane activities such as Mary washing diapers in the River Jordan , or a dove descending on the newborn infant may be depicted . The art form can be traced back to eighteenth @-@ century Naples , Italy . Neapolitan nativity scenes do not represent Palestine at the time of Jesus but the life of the Naples of 1700 , during the Bourbon period . Families competed with each other to produce the most elegant and elaborate scenes and so , next to the Child Jesus , to the Holy Family and the shepherds , were placed ladies and gentlemen of the nobility , representatives of the bourgeoisie of the time , vendors with their banks and miniatures of cheese , bread , sheep , pigs , ducks or grape , and typical figures of the time like gypsy predicting the future , people playing cards , housewives doing shopping , dogs , cats and chickens .

Regional variants on the standard nativity scene are many . The putz of Pennsylvania Dutch Americans evolved into elaborate decorative Christmas villages in the twentieth century . In Colombia , the pesebre may feature a town and its surrounding countryside with shepherds and animals . Mary and Joseph are often depicted as rural Boyacá people with Mary clad in a countrywoman 's shawl and fedora hat , and Joseph garbed in a poncho . The infant Jesus is depicted as European with Italianate features . Visitors bringing gifts to the Christ child are depicted as Colombian natives . After World War I , large , lighted manger scenes in churches and public buildings grew in popularity , and , by the 1950s , many companies were selling lawn ornaments of non @-@ fading , long @-@ lasting , weather resistant materials telling the nativity story .

= = = Living nativity scenes = = =

Pantomimes similar to the scene staged by St. Francis at Greccio became an annual event throughout Christendom . Abuses and exaggerations in the presentation of mystery plays during the Middle Ages , however , forced the church to prohibit performances during the 15th century . The plays survived outside church walls , however , and three hundred years after the prohibition , German immigrants brought simple forms of the nativity play to America . Some features of the dramas became part of both Catholic and Protestant Christmas services with children often taking the parts of characters in the nativity story . Nativity plays and pageants , culminating in living nativity scenes , eventually entered public schools . Such exhibitions have been challenged on the grounds of separation of church and state .

In some countries , the nativity scene took to the streets with human performers costumed as Joseph and Mary traveling from house to house seeking shelter and being told by the houses ' occupants to move on . The couple 's journey culminated in an outdoor tableau at a designated place with the shepherds and the Magi then traveling the streets in parade fashion looking for the Christ child .

Living nativity scenes are not without their problems . In 2008 , for example , vandals destroyed all eight scenes and backdrops at Mount Carmel Christian Church 's drive @-@ through living nativity scene in Georgia . About 120 of the church 's 500 members were involved in the construction of the scenes or playing roles in the production . The damage was estimated at more than US \$ 2 @,@ 000 . Additionally , the use of real animals in living nativity scenes has provoked complaint .

In southern Italy living nativity scenes (called presepe vivente in Italian) , are extremely popular , and are rather elaborate affairs , which feature the classic nativity scene as well as a mock rural 19th @-@ century village , complete with artisans in traditional costumes working at their particular trades . These attract many visitors and have been televised by Italy 's national station RAI . In 2010 , the old city of Matera in Basilicata hosted the world 's largest living nativity scene of the time , which was performed in the historic center Sassi .

= = = Animals in nativity scenes = = =

A donkey (or ass) and an ox typically appear in nativity scenes . Besides the necessity of animals for a manger , this is an allusion to Isaiah : " the ox knoweth his owner , and the ass his master 's crib ; but Israel doth not know , my people doth not consider " Isaiah 1 : 3 . The Gospels do not mention an ox and donkey Another source for the tradition may be the extracanonical text , the Gospel of Pseudo @-@ Matthew of the 7th century . (The translation in this text of Habakkuk 3 : 2 is not taken from the Septuagint .) :

" And on the third day after the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ , Mary went out of the cave , and , entering a stable , placed the child in a manger , and an ox and an ass adored him . Then was fulfilled that which was said by the prophet Isaiah , " The ox knows his owner , and the ass his master 's crib . " Therefore , the animals , the ox and the ass , with him in their midst incessantly adored him . Then was fulfilled that which was said by Habakkuk the prophet , saying , " Between two animals you are made manifest . "

The ox traditionally represents patience , the nation of Israel , and Old Testament sacrificial worship

while the ass represents humility , readiness to serve , and the Gentiles .

The ox and the ass , as well as other animals , became a part of nativity scene tradition . In a 1415 , Corpus Christi celebration , the Ordo paginarum notes that Jesus was lying between an ox and an ass . Other animals introduced to nativity scenes include elephants and camels .

By the 1970s , churches and community organizations increasingly included animals in nativity pageants . Since then , automobile @-@ accessible " drive @-@ through " scenes with sheep and donkeys have become popular .

= = Selection of distinctive scenes = =

= = = At the Vatican = = =

In 1982 , Pope John Paul II inaugurated the annual tradition of placing a nativity scene on display in the Vatican City in the Piazza San Pietro before the Christmas Tree .

In 2006 , the nativity scene featured seventeen new figures of spruce on loan to the Vatican from sculptors and wood sawyers of the town of Tesero , Italy in the Italian Alps . The figures included peasants , a flutist , a bagpipe player and a shepherd named Titaoca . Twelve nativity scenes created before 1800 from Tesero were put on display in the Vatican audience hall .

The Vatican nativity scene for 2007 placed the birth of Jesus in Joseph 's house , based upon an interpretation of the Gospel of Matthew . Mary was shown with the newborn infant Jesus in a room in Joseph 's house . To the left of the room was Joseph 's workshop while to the right was a busy inn ? a comment on materialism versus spirituality . The Vatican 's written description of the diorama said , " The scene for this year 's Nativity recalls the painting style of the Flemish School of the 1500s . " The scene was unveiled on December 24 and remained in place until February 2 , 2008 for The Feast of the Presentation of the Lord . Ten new figures were exhibited with seven on loan from the town of Tesero and three ? a baker , a woman , and a child ? donated to the Vatican . The decision for the atypical setting was believed to be part of a crackdown on fanciful scenes erected in various cities around Italy . In Naples , Italy , for example , Elvis Presley and Prime Minister of Italy Silvio Berlusconi , were depicted among the shepherds and angels worshipping at the manger .

In 2008 , the province of Trento , Italy provided sculpted wooden figures and animals as well as utensils to create depictions of daily life . The scene featured seventeen figures with nine depicting the Holy Family , the Magi , and the shepherds . The nine figures were originally donated by Saint Vincent Pallotti for the nativity at Rome 's Church of Sant 'Andrea della Valle in 1842 and eventually found their way to the Vatican . They are dressed anew each year for the scene . The 2008 scene was set in Bethlehem with a fountain and a hearth representing regeneration and light . The same year , the Paul VI Audience Hall exhibited a nativity designed by Mexican artists .

Since 1968 , the Pope has officiated at a special ceremony in St. Peter 's Square on Gaudete Sunday that involves blessing hundreds of mangers and Babies Jesus for the children of Rome . In 1978 , 50 @, @ 000 schoolchildren attended the ceremony .

= = = Santons = = =

A santon (Provençal : " little saint ") is a small hand @-@ painted , terracotta nativity scene figurine produced in the Provence region of southeastern France . In a traditional Provençal crèche , the santons represent various characters from Provençal village life such as the scissors grinder , the fishwife , and the chestnut seller . The figurines were first created during the French Revolution when churches were forcibly closed and large nativity scenes prohibited . Today , their production is a family affair passed from parents to children . During the Christmas season , santon makers gather in Marseille and other locales in southeastern France to display and sell their wares .

= = = Kraków szopka = = =

Szopka are traditional Polish nativity scenes dating to 19th century Kraków , Poland . Their modern construction incorporates elements of Kraków 's historic architecture including Gothic spires , Renaissance facades , and Baroque domes , and utilizes everyday materials such as colored tinfoils , cardboard , and wood . Some are mechanized . Prizes are awarded for the most elaborately designed and decorated pieces in an annual competition held in Kraków 's main square beside the statue of Adam Mickiewicz . Some of the best are then displayed in Kraków 's Museum of History . Szopka were traditionally carried from door @-@ to @-@ door in the nativity plays (Jase?ka) by performing groups .

A similar tradition , called " betlehemezés " and involving schoolchildren carrying portable folk @-@ art nativity scenes door @-@ to @-@ door , chanting traditional texts , is part of Hungarian folk culture , and has enjoyed a renaissance in recent years . An example of such a portable wooden nativity scene is on display at the Nativity Museum in Bethlehem .

= = = In the Czech lands = = =

The Czech Republic , and the cultures represented in the lands of former Bohemia and Czechoslovakia have a long tradition regarding betlémy , crèches . The tradition of home Nativity scenes is often traced to the 1782 ban of church and institutional crèches by emperor Joseph II , officially responding to public disturbances and the resulting " loss of dignity " of such displays . As this followed the Edict of Toleration proclaimed the previous year , it reduced State support of the Catholic church in this multi @-@ confessional land .

The issue of cost arose , and paper @-@ cut crèches , papirový betlém , " the crèche of the poor " , became one major expression . , as well as wood @-@ carved ones , some of them spectacular as they grew in complexity and detail . Many among the major Czech artists , sculptors and illustrators have as a significant part of their legacy the crèches that they created .

The following people are known for creating Czech paper crèches :

Mikolá? Ale? (1852 @-@ 1913) , famed for his murals of the National Theater .

Marie Fischerova @-@ Kvechova , illustrator of a large number of children books .

Josef Lada (1887 @-@ 1957) , known for his work in Schvejk .

Josef Wenig (1885 @-@ 1939) , theater decorator and playwright .

= = = Krýza 's crèche = = =

Tomá? Krýza (1838 - 1918) built in a period of over 60 years a nativity scene covering 60 m ² (length 17 m , size and height 2 m) which contains 1389 figures of humans and animals , of which 133 are moveable . It is on display in Jind?ich?v Hradec , Czech Republic . Since 1998 , it figures as the largest mechanical nativity scene in the world in the Guinness Book of World Records .

= = = In the United States = = =

In 2005 , President of the United States of America , George W. Bush and his wife , First Lady of the United States , Laura Bush displayed an 18th @-@ century Italian presepio in the East Room of the White House , Washington , D.C. , United States . The presepio was donated to the White House in the last decades of the 20th century .

On her Christmas Day 2007 television show , Martha Stewart exhibited the nativity scene she made in pottery classes at the Alderson Federal Prison Camp in Alderson , West Virginia while serving a 2005 sentence . She remarked , " Even though every inmate was only allowed to do one a month , and I was only there for five months , I begged because I said I was an expert potter ? ceramicist actually ? and could I please make the entire nativity scene . " She supplemented her nativity figurines on the show with tiny artificial palm trees imported from Germany .

Perhaps the best known nativity scene in America is the Neapolitan Baroque Crèche displayed annually in the Medieval Sculpture Hall of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City . Its backdrop is a 1763 choir screen from the Cathedral of Valladolid and a twenty @-@ foot blue

spruce decorated with a host of 18th @-@ century angels . The nativity figures are placed at the tree 's base . The crèche was the gift of Loretta Hines Howard in 1964 , and the choir screen was the gift of The William Randolph Hearst Foundation in 1956 . Both this presepio and the one displayed in Pittsburgh originated from the collection of Eugenio Catello .

A life @-@ size nativity scene has been displayed annually at Temple Square in Salt Lake City , Utah for several decades as part of the large outdoor Christmas displays sponsored by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter @-@ day Saints .

Each holiday season , from Light Up Night in November through Epiphany in January , the Pittsburgh Crèche delights visitors to downtown Pittsburgh , Pennsylvania . The Pittsburgh Creche , a larger @-@ than @-@ life nativity scene , is the world ? s only authorized replica of the Vatican ? s Christmas crèche on display in St. Peter ? s Square in Rome . Pittsburgh 's Carnegie Museum of Art also displays a Neapolitan presepio . Handcrafted between 1700 and 1830 , the presepio has lifelike figures and colorful details that re @-@ create the Nativity within a vibrant and detailed panorama of 18th @-@ century Italian village life . More than 100 superbly modeled human and angelic figures , along with animals , accessories , and architectural elements , cover 250 square feet and create a memorable depiction of the Nativity as seen through the eyes of Neapolitan artisans and collectors .

= = = In Australia = = =

Christmas is celebrated by Australians in a number of ways . Due to its multiculturalism and diversity , the immigrants have influenced the way Christmas is celebrated around the country . In Australia , it ? s summer season and is very hot during Christmas time .

During the Christmas time , locals and visitors visit places around their towns and suburbs to view the outdoor and indoor displays . All over the towns , the places are lit with colorful and modern spectacular lighting displays . The displays of nativity scenes with Aussie featured native animals like kangaroos and koalas are also evident .

In Melbourne , a traditional and authentic Nativity Scene is becoming very popular at St. Elizabeth ? s Parish , Dandenong North . This annual Australian Nativity Scene creator and artist Wilson Fernandez has been building and creating the traditional nativity scenes since 2004 at St. Elizabeth ? s Parish .

To mark this special event , Most Reverend Denis Hart Archbishop of Melbourne celebrated the Vigil Mass and blessed the Nativity Scene on Saturday , 14 December 2013 .

= = = In Canada = = =

Bethlehem Live is an all @-@ volunteer living nativity produced by Gateway Christian Community Church in Winnipeg , Manitoba , Canada . The production includes a reconstruction of the ancient town of Bethlehem and seven individual vignettes .

= = Associations and notable collections = =

The Universalis Foederatio Praeseptica , World association of Friends of Cribs was founded in 1952 , counting today 20 national associations dedicated to this subject . Central office is in Austria .

In the United States and Canada Friends of the Creche has over 200 members , with a major conference every two years . FotC maintains a list of permanent exhibits of Nativity scenes in the United States and a list of permanent exhibits of Nativity scenes in other parts of the world .

The Bavarian National Museum displays a notable collection of Nativity scenes from the fifteenth through nineteenth centuries .

Every year in Lanciano , Abruzzo (Italy) , a Nativity Scene exhibition (called in Italian " Riscopriamo il presepe ") takes place at Auditorium Diocleziano , usually until the 6th of January . An average of one hundred Nativity scenes are shown , coming from every region of Italy . There

are also many Nativity scenes made by local kindergarten , primary , secondary and high school . The event is organised by Associazione Amici di Lancianovecchia
Museums dedicated specifically to paper Nativity scenes exist in Peřky , Zábrdí .

= = Controversies = =

= = = United States of America = = =

Nativity scenes have been involved in controversies and lawsuits .

In 1969 , the American Civil Liberties Union (representing three clergymen , an atheist , and a leader of the American Ethical Society) , tried to block the construction of a nativity scene on the Ellipse in Washington , D.C. When the ACLU claimed the government sponsorship of a distinctly Christian symbol violated separation of church and state , the sponsors of the fifty @-@ year @-@ old Christmas celebration , Pageant of Peace , who had an exclusive permit from the Interior Department for all events on the Ellipse , responded that the nativity scene was a reminder of America 's spiritual heritage . The United States Court of Appeals ruled on December 12 , 1969 , that the crèche be allowed that year . The case continued until September 26 , 1973 , when the court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs and found the involvement of the Interior Department and the National Park Service in the Pageant of Peace amounted to government support for religion . The court opined that the nativity scene should be dropped from the pageant or the government end its participation in the event in order to avoid " excessive entanglements " between government and religion . In 1973 , the nativity scene vanished .

In 1985 , the United States Supreme Court ruled in ACLU v. Scarsdale , New York that nativity scenes on public lands violate separation of church and state statutes unless they comply with " The Reindeer Rule " ? a regulation calling for equal opportunity for non @-@ religious symbols , such as reindeer . This principle was further clarified in 1989 , when the Supreme Court in County of Allegheny v. ACLU ruled that a crèche placed on the grand staircase of the Allegheny County Courthouse in Pittsburgh , PA violated the Establishment Clause , because the " principal or primary effect " of the display was to advance religion .

In 1994 , at Christmas , the Park Board of San Jose , California , removed a statue of the infant Jesus from Plaza de Cesar Chavez Park and replaced it with a statue of the plumed Aztec god , Quetzalcoatl , commissioned with US \$ 500 @,@ 000 of public funds . In response , protestors staged a living nativity scene in the park .

In 2006 , a lawsuit by the Alliance Defense Fund , a conservative Christian group in the United States , was brought against the state of Washington when it permitted a public display of a holiday tree and a menorah but not a nativity scene . Because of the lawsuit , the decision was made to permit a nativity scene to be displayed in the rotunda of the state Capitol , in Olympia , as long as other symbols of the season were included .

In 2013 , Gov. Rick Perry signed into Texas law the Merry Christmas bill which would allow school districts in Texas to display nativity scenes .

= = = = Baby Jesus theft = = = =

In the United States , nativity figurines are sometimes stolen from outdoor public and private displays during the Christmas season in an act that is generally called Baby Jesus theft . The thefts are usually pranks with figurines recovered within a few hours or days of their disappearances . Some have been damaged beyond repair or defaced with profanity , antisemitic epithets , or Satanic symbols . It is unclear if Baby Jesus theft is on the rise as United States federal law enforcement officials do not track such theft . Some communities protect outdoor nativity scenes with surveillance cameras or GPS devices concealed within the figurines .

= = = United Kingdom = = =

In December 2004 , Madame Tussaud 's London , England , United Kingdom nativity scene featured waxwork models of soccer star David Beckham and his wife Victoria Beckham as Joseph and Mary , and Kylie Minogue as the Angel . Tony Blair , George W. Bush , and the Duke of Edinburgh were cast as the Magi while actors Hugh Grant , Samuel L. Jackson , and comedian Graham Norton were cast as shepherds . The celebrities were chosen for the roles by 300 people who visited the Madame Tussaud 's in October 2004 and voted on the display . The Archbishop of Canterbury was not impressed , and a Vatican spokesperson said the display was in very poor taste . Other officials reacted angrily , with one noting it was " a nativity stunt too far " . " We 're sorry if we have offended people , " said Diane Moon , a spokesperson for the museum . She said the display was intended in the spirit of fun .

= = Gallery = =