2nd Annual
International Crèche Display
and Pilgrimage

Love Incarnate With Us Dwells

International Crèche Collection on loan from the Marian Library, International Marian Research Institute, Dayton, Ohio

November 18, 2015—January 31, 2016
Collection on display at the Eck Visitors Center, the Morris Inn, the Coleman-Morse Center, Geddes Hall, and the Main Building

**November 18, 2015—January 31, 2016**

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**Opening Lecture—November 18, 2015**

7:30 p.m. | Eck Visitors Center Auditorium

*Dwelling with Love Incarnate:*

*Living the Mystery of the Nativity in Family Life*

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**Crèche Pilgrimage—December 6, 2015**

2:30 - 4:00 p.m. | Begins at the Eck Visitors Center, stops at the Morris Inn and Coleman-Morse Center, concludes at the Main Building with a reflection by Rev. John I. Jenkins, C.S.C., and a blessing of all baby Jesus figures—remember to bring yours!
The theme of the second annual crèche exhibit and pilgrimage, **Love Incarnate With us Dwells**, is taken from Wihla Hutson’s Christmas carol *O Hearken Ye*. It corresponds well with this year’s collection of crèches, which highlights the unique lodgings artists and cultures have created for the birth of the Christ Child. The thirty-three visual representations from nineteen countries invite us into the intimacy of the home of the Holy Family, as it were, to encounter the mystery of God’s love dwelling among us as a little, helpless baby.

Throughout Advent we relive, prepare, and long for the coming of Love incarnate. God’s coming cannot be stopped, because His love wants to embrace all of us. Already in Genesis we read that God liked to dwell among His people in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:8). The Canadian nativity *Paradise Retrieved* (Coleman-Morse Center) or the French set *The Best of Two Worlds* (Eck Visitors Center) are reminiscent of this idyll.

After the fall, God’s preferred dwelling among His people was the tent (cf. Genesis 18). Yet, the Kenyan and Paraguayan crèches (Geddes Hall), as well as *Ultimate Frontier* and *Trigonometry* (Morris Inn), *Yuletide Lads* and *The Red Devil* (Main Building), remind us that the tent is not a permanent lodging; it is evocative of our existence as pilgrims.

A more permanent residence where God took up His dwelling is the temple built by human hands (I Chronicles 22: 2-5, I Kings 7:51, 14:25-26, 15:18, II Kings 11:10, 12:4). There He made Himself available to His people at any time. Crèches recalling the temple are, for example, the Polish *Szopka* (Coleman-Morse Center) or the South Korean *Bridge Builders* (Main Building). A unique variation of the temple is the *House of Bread* crèche (Morris Inn), which points to Bethlehem (House of Bread) and the Eucharist as concrete encounters with Love incarnate. Likewise, the *Painted Houses* of South Africa (Eck Visitors Center), Mexico’s *Enshrined Memories* (Geddes Hall) and the crèche made right here in South Bend, *A Gift Given* (Geddes Hall, Third Floor), are examples of Love incarnate seeking a permanent home among us.

For nine months Love incarnate made its habitat in Mary’s womb and forever in her Immaculate Heart. We ponder this mystery throughout Advent. Each of the crèches includes the figure of Mary, the human temple of the Word made flesh. St. Paul reminds the communities of Corinth
and Colossae that they are temples of God (1Cor 3:16; 2Cor 6:16). By extension, each and every one of us is a dwelling place of Love incarnate! Ultimately, each of the crèches points to this reality. The rich and the poor, young and old, people of all races and trades approach the divine child lying in a manger. They may do so with Bulging Eyes (Eck Visitors Center), or anonymously: A Face of Your Choice (Eck Visitors Center); whether they come arranged in neat and orderly Trigonometry (Morris Inn) or in their folkloric dress and musical instruments, like the Canadian Santons of Charlevoix (Main Building), one thing is for sure: All Roads lead to the Manger (Coleman-Morse Center).

Each year we celebrate Love incarnate dwelling among us! Yet, it is never the same, since we have changed during the past twelve months. Life is a Theater (Morris Inn) reminds us that we each have a role to play in this drama between darkness and light. Ultimately, as we know, this battle is fought in the deepest recesses of the heart. Two crèches highlight this reality: Angel and Devil (Coleman-Morse Center) and The Red Devil (Main Building).

We celebrate Advent and Christmas during the Extraordinary Holy Year of Mercy. God’s mercy was revealed in our world through Love incarnate, Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, true man and true God. Pope Francis tells us:

“He has entered our history; he has shared our journey. He came to free us from darkness and to grant us light. In him was revealed the grace, the mercy, and the tender love of the Father: Jesus is Love incarnate. He is the meaning of life and history, who has pitched his tent in our midst. God loves us, he so loves us that he gave us his Son to be our brother, to be light in our darkness. Do not be afraid! Our Father is patient, he loves us, he gives us Jesus to guide us on the way which leads to the Promised Land. Jesus is the light who brightens the darkness. He is mercy: our Father always forgives us. He is our peace. Amen.”

(Homily on December 24, 2013).

Let us take advantage of this special opportunity to receive the mercy of God by welcoming Love incarnate into the crèche of our heart every day of our life’s journey!

Danielle M. Peters
Research Associate, Institute for Church Life
A kayak in the skies, three wandering sled dogs roaming free, the dogs’ master pushing his sled, and two mighty polar bears nudging a tiny red fish: Where is Alaskan wintry realism in this nativity set? From the beginning, representations and descriptions of the nativity paint a world upside down, a moment of awe and wonder, nature losing its grip. In one of the first descriptions of Jesus’ birth, Joseph experiences nature, heaven and earth, animals and people, coming to a complete standstill (Protogospel of James, 18). The nativity suggests a new realism, the realism of the first marriage of heaven and earth. It must be... because not even the icicles in this nativity are real.

Alsatia is a long, narrow strip of land in eastern France, bordering Germany. Its culture is a happy combination of the proverbial “joy of life” of France, and the hardworking and efficient character of Germany. The Alsatian Santons reflect various activities and wear typical local costumes. Among the thirty-two clay figurines is the woman with the cabbage cart (sauerkraut, the national dish), the girl carrying a Gugelhupf (typical Alsatian pastry) for baby Jesus, and the proud Strasbourg belle dressed in her Sunday costume. Mary and Joseph in local attire look much like the ordinary people. Huddled together in loving respect, they contemplate with wonder the Son of God in his Alsatian cradle. Into the home of the Holy Family the Rabbi is welcomed, and he sits at their side, pondering the Scriptures.
Although of an unknown artist, this nativity set owes its existence to a famous woodcarving tradition of the southern region of Poland, where the woods are dense and the winters are long. During this period of forced immobility, many a farmer took up carving and became a master of the penknife. A thriving folk art developed. But look at the faces. Isn't there something unsettling here, which may contradict what has been said so far? The faces have bulging eyes; worse, they seem like piercing eyes X-raying the onlooker. In fact, these big eyes are a symbol of fixed and undisguised rapture. In the language of popular art, they are bulging in wonderment and are eager to pierce the mystery before them.

Eck Visitors Center

Poland
“Bulging Eyes”
Artist Unknown

Mexico and Peru
“Three Nativities”
Artists Unknown

Eastern Europe, Southern Africa, and parts of Latin America paint their houses to beautify nature. If some of these traditions may use this practice in order to hide poverty, there remains the underlying truth that great joy and sorrow, life-giving convictions and endeavors seek open manifestation. Such is the message of these homes. The noble baroque architecture of the Andes nativity and the colorfully painted ceramic nativities of Mexico are witnesses to a joy too great to be kept inside.
Switzerland
“A Face of Your Choice”
Anne-Marie Frey-Urech

There is no photo-ID to identify the Holy Family. Puzzled, the adult capitulates and creates faceless figures. Popular in religious art of the 1960s and 1970s, gesture and posture define the actor. Faces remain blank—a standing invitation to paint the eyes, nose, and mouth of your choice.

South Africa
“Painted Houses”
Ndebele Women Artisans

The strong and vivid geometric patterns of the painted house have symbolic meaning. They are used as code to express values, prayers, and emotions typical to the Ndebele people. The origin of this secret symbolic language lies in the conflict between the Ndebele and Boer farmers in the late 19th century. Harsh life and suffering, as well as horrible punishment, led to this form of secret communication among tribal groups. The two midwives in this setting emphasize the fact that Ndebele women carry on and watch over tradition. They are the main developers of Ndebele design of painted houses and complex beadwork. Like painted houses, Christmas is a code for those who cherish and share the message of God’s loving presence for this world.
This nativity set presents us with a real house made of bread. Christ was born in a House of Bread (Bethlehem), and eventually offered himself as the Bread of Life to those who hunger for justice and peace. Catherine Baillaud is an accomplished bread dough artist, and a master of delicate and inspired coloring.

Some like it neat and orderly, yielding to Pascal’s “Spirit of Geometry,” with people in labeled boxes and life on the drawing board. Pascal counterbalanced the spirit of geometry with a spirit of finesse, meaning a sense of empathy, the ability to see with the eyes of the heart, to be gifted with depth perception. This nativity scene suggests the same balance. From the carpet of little daisies to the brightly painted figures with chubby cheeks and funny hats, there is a subtle message springing from this set: There is more to Christmas than trigonometry.
Poland
“Family Portrait”
S. Apriasz

This wood carved nativity from Krakow reminds us of a family portrait: the Holy Family with kings, shepherds and animals arranged in a close-knit group under the aegis of Gloria banner and star. The plump little figures with their broad faces and red cheeks are messengers of good health and prosperity. Their gifts are plentiful: lamb and rooster well fattened, pots and coffers filled to the brim. It seems a legitimate ambition to be part of the family portrait together with Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. And if Jesus is the Savior of the whole human person, why shouldn’t we portray those who are close to him with the red cheeks of good health?

Italy
“Life is Theater”
Angela Tripi

This set wants to convey drama. Staged are the actors bowing before the divine child in reverence and submissiveness, with the ruins customary of Italian crèches in the background. The magi are clothed in flowing robes, indicating wealth and refinement, while the Holy Family and the lone shepherd wear simple, shabby clothes. In the wings are standing more actors waiting their turn to enter the scene. The backdrop colors of chiaroscuro suggest a battle between darkness and light. Light and darkness will clash frequently, but the Child in the manger will outshine them both.
Austria
“The Center of the Earth”
Robert Himmelbauer

This crèche mountain of peasant gothic style describes a downward spiraling movement ending with the care of the nativity set deep inside the bottom of the mountain. There is a joyful Christmas procession witnessing God’s saving grace in Christ. It penetrates all layers of human reality, even its darkest recesses. The joyful procession of frolicking sheep and richly painted shepherds and kings is a symbol of new creation, born again in Jesus Christ. It contrasts with the elegant but empty beauty of the smaller mountains surrounding it.

Australia
“Ultimate Frontier”
Jenny Miller

This is a typical Australian nativity set suggesting the harsh sun and down-to-earth existence of early settlers. For a moment of unique harmony, there is no separation and there are no social classes. The kangaroo has the monopoly of the shed, the aboriginal is in charge of the music, and the rice farmer with his weighty gift stands modestly in the background. Lamb and parrot seem to be of one mind, and so is the holy couple, the redhead Mary and the mustachioed Joseph. Is this the ultimate frontier we will ever reach? A moment of harmony within, and the dream of peace for the whole world.
Switzerland
“Anonymous Christmas”
Verena Hirt

Among contemporary artists crafting crèches, there are some who avoid any contact with local customs and all too human faces. Their reasoning needs to be pondered, for who knows how it really was? Who would be able to make the mystery visible? Verena Hirt’s answer is that of the beauty of the form leading the viewer to the discovery of the mystery of Christmas. The figures with their anonymous faces and their half open and windblown mantels play hide and seek with our imagination. The beautiful ceramic towers with their pointed domes and wide open doors are an invitation to explore the mystery of a God in diapers.

Poland
“Szopka”
Artist Unknown

The characteristic feature of the Szopka is a fanciful blend of the Bethlehem miracle and the atmosphere and charm of Krakow, as exhibited through its art and architecture. The meticulously detailed, imaginative structure of a church facade creates a setting fit for the presentation of the Nativity of the Son of God. The richly ornamented structure is built with a variety of lightweight materials, mainly foil and cardboard. Traditionally, the nativity is placed on the top floor, while below a combination of biblical stories, as well as Polish legend and history, is displayed.
Flat rooftops, tightly clustered houses, and narrow streets suggest a Middle Eastern location. Although steep and narrow, all roads lead to the manger. The nativity stable sits on top of the hillside, dominating the village. Not only beggars, but also kings have to climb the hill of Christ’s presence. However long the way, however many the obstacles, the goal—the manger—remains visible from all directions, and the angel is there to encourage the tardy, the lazy, and the confused.

Tilted gingerbread houses, baroque apparels, lustrous colors, faces with big eyes that both laugh and cry, not to mention majestic animals speaking with human tongues—such are some of the ingredients of a child’s nativity set imagined by adults. Heather Goldminc’s precious ceramic nativity reflects some of the typical features of contemporary Christmas tradition. It suggests an atmosphere of faraway innocence and childlikeness, of humor and sadness, of paradise lost. There also remains the silent hope of paradise retrieved.
Mexico
“Angel and Devil”
Palsied People

Carved from the soft and worm-eaten wood of the cork tree, this set has placed the nativity between angel and devil, between good and evil—the never-ending drama of human history. It leaves uninjured neither children nor the unknown artisans, palsied people, of this primitivist but moving creation.

Czech Republic
“Braving the Times”
Artist Unknown

The wood carved figures of this set by an unknown artist can be dated to the middle of the nineteenth century. They have been successfully braving the wear and tear of time, losing none of their simple and moving beauty. Set on a collage of recent newspapers, they express this unassuming but lasting truth: news comes and goes, but Christ’s reign is everlasting!
Sung June Yim is a ceramic artist from the Seoul region of South Korea who seeks artistic inspiration from early Korean history and Chinese literature. The central characters in this set are Lady Mi and warrior Jo Ja Ryong from the Chinese classic, “The Three Dynasties.” Lady Mi moves with her child through enemy territory. She is wounded. Jo Ja Ryong, the great warrior, rescues the baby but is forced to leave the mother behind. Shepherds and magi of this set are characters of the Koguryo Dynasty (37 B.C.-668 A.D.), recognizable by their dotted vestments. The bowed figures with long sleeves pay respect to the baby, and the three mounted musicians, with their woodwind and percussion instruments, welcome him with a serenade. Originally not intended as a nativity, these cultural figures are bridge builders between peoples, their history, and their religious beliefs.

Charlevoix in French speaking Canada has its own collection of terra cotta figurines depicting a typical Québécois nativity scene. Scenes of farming, logging, and shipbuilding alternate with brightly colored houses, towns, and chapels. Our nativity set presents historical personages, villages, animals, folkloric and legendary characters, and of course, a beautiful local rendering of the Nativity group.
Iceland
“Yuletide Lads”
Kristin Karolina

Kristin Karolina dressed her Yuletide lads in sheepskin and wool. Mischief is written all over the bearded faces of the “bad boys,” presented in groups of three and four. Gryla, the witch, and Ragamuff, her lazy husband, are waiting in their cave on the mountain for the return of the thirteen lads. The Christmas scene, in style and materials identical with other figures, is set apart, and highlights the deeper meaning of the Yuletide tradition.

Mexico
“The Red Devil”
Artist Unknown

This nativity set has its own charm, originality, and humor. Made of humble materials, cornhusk and wooden sticks, the many darling figures have unique roles. Just take a look at the swarm of ladies with their wide-brimmed, blooming hats, some with colorful bouquets of flowers in their hands. Aren’t they dressed and ready to ring in the joys of spring? Have you ever seen a monk gracing a nativity set? He is a Franciscan announcing the Christmas story. At the bottom of the sumptuous stairs is a red devil. He is the laughingstock of the noble ladies, for how will he ever get the rose to the manger?
Representative of the rich crèche culture of East Germany, this set’s many figures are simple and almost childlike forms, but adorned with great love of detail for both color and accessories. Angels have red wings, the camel carries baskets with manifold, colorful gifts, Joseph has a green broad-rimmed hat, and Herod looks exceedingly grim. In fact, this nativity also shows the flight into Egypt, with Herod’s regiments in pursuit of the Holy Family. The infant Messiah is adored and persecuted at the same time, still to this day.

Monasteries have for centuries been a source of inspiration and support of the nativity tradition. Created in the late 1800s, this set has a very definite feminine touch. The nativity grotto is carved into a mountain of papier-mâché. Its peaks and crevasses are sprinkled with glint and glitter glistening in colors of blue and gold. Flowers and stars, little birds holding phylacteries with imprinted prayers, tender lambs and enraptured parents hail the newborn king in his star strewn shirt. On the back of the crèche mountain, a yellow snake rears his head. Although entering into the darkest recesses of the human heart, and plunging it into the golden shimmer of his love, the Christ Child is not yet the sole master of this world. For now, the menacing head of the snake is never far away.
Ark and manger are symbols of salvation. Both are destined to hold and protect life. Both are eventually left behind. Noah’s Ark leads to the manger which holds and protects the Son of God himself. No greater gift will ever be entrusted to human hands. Noah’s Ark protects human life; the manger offers God’s own life to the world. From ark to manger, God’s love intensifies. We sometimes forget about the way of salvation. The Suffering Servant (Ecce Homo) in this set represents sum and substance of truth amid distraction.

First experiences have a lasting effect as they shape our expectations and mark our imagination. This nativity set has all the ingredients of sentimental appeal and sweet memories. It suggests a white Christmas. There is the little drummer, the tender fawn and meek donkey, the boy with the lamb, and angels of all ages. The stable is sturdy and drafty, but it presents the essential comforts of home: pots and pans, candle, and house bell, even a wicker basket filled with flowers. It all seems to be right; right as it should be, right as it was when we first experienced the Christmas event.
Ghana is called the land of drums. Many of the drums in this set are carved from *Tweneboa* wood, which translates as “drum wood” or “drum tree.” The *Tweneboa* tree has a wide umbrella-shaped crown. It is frequently planted in villages for its shade and shelter. Stained with a reddish, honey-colored finish, the village and people of this nativity set exude a special visual rhythm. It is the rhythm of life gradually turning darkness into light, of night emerging into a distant sun, of the glow from within illuminating the day to greet Christmas.

Open on two sides and covered with canvas, the humble and multi-colored dwelling of the Holy Family stands halfway between a tent and a solid structure. It does not have the trappings of a permanent residence. The tent-like abode is reminiscent of our existence as pilgrims. The tent is a symbol of faith. Movable and temporary, the tent urges its dwellers toward new challenges and the ultimate horizon. But there is always the inviting gesture of the Holy Family to accompany other pilgrims, even quarrelling animals, on roads less travelled.
No form of life in this world lives independently of the other. Each is a building block for the next, sometimes higher, form of existence. Likewise, incarnation reaches through human expression of being to all other manifestations of nature. The Lord of Redemption is also the Lord of Creation. As for the banana tree from which this set was made, we know that it grows and matures entirely for its fruit. To be harvested, the tree needs to be cut down, but no sooner cut, it rises again to new growth and new fruit. The season of life alternates with the season of death until only life eternal remains.

Recognition generates tradition, and tradition creates shrines to harbor precious memories. The treasure chest of this set is the little palace whose walls are covered with painted flowers and birds. The Christ child is no longer confined to the traditional shack, a roof set on four poles and open on all sides. He is now recognized as the “newborn king” and “Lord of new creation.” But who will be challenged by enshrined memories? Learn from the two dogs in the background. Barking in unison, they untiringly greet the newborn king.
South Bend, Indiana - United States
“A Gift Given”
Artist Unknown

This nativity set is a moving symbol of the very meaning of Christmas. It is God’s gift of self in his Son, ever received and ever shared. C. Douglas Streiter, from Indianapolis, Indiana donated this crèche to the Marian Library in 2008. In a letter he wrote:

“This nativity set was made about 50 years ago by a resident of the St. Joseph County Home [re-named “Portage Manor” in the 1970s] in South Bend, Indiana. It was given as a gift to my late Aunt Jane, who was a nurse at the facility. It is all hand carved wood and is decorated with articles found in the home. It is in good condition and is one of a kind. I am interested in it being on display somewhere where it can be enjoyed by the public.”
Crèche Locations by Country

Australia (page 9)................................................................. Morris Inn
Austria (page 9)................................................................. Morris Inn
Canada (page 11)............................................................... Coleman-Morse Center
Canada (page 13)................................................................. Main Building
Czech Republic (page 12)................................................ Coleman-Morse Center
France (page 4).................................................................... Eck Visitors Center
France (page 7).................................................................... Morris Inn
France (page 15)................................................................. Main Building
Germany (page 15).............................................................. Main Building
Ghana (page 17)................................................................... Geddes Hall
Iceland (page 14).................................................................. Main Building
Italy (page 8)......................................................................... Morris Inn
Italy (page 11)................................................................. Coleman-Morse Center
Kenya (page 17)................................................................... Geddes Hall
Mexico (page 5).................................................................... Eck Visitors Center
Mexico (page 12)................................................................. Coleman-Morse Center
Mexico (page 14).................................................................. Main Building
Mexico (page 18)................................................................... Geddes Hall
Paraguay (page 18).............................................................. Geddes Hall
Peru (page 5).......................................................................... Eck Visitors Center
Poland (page 5)....................................................................... Eck Visitors Center
Poland (page 8)..................................................................... Morris Inn
Poland (page 10)................................................................. Coleman-Morse Center
Slovakia (page 16)............................................................... Main Building
South Africa (page 6)...................................................... Eck Visitors Center
South Korea (page 13)................................................................. Main Building
Switzerland (page 6)............................................................ Eck Visitors Center
Switzerland (page 7)................................................................ Morris Inn
Switzerland (page 10)........................................................ Coleman-Morse Center
United States (page 4).................................................... Eck Visitors Center
United States (page 16)................................................................. Main Building
United States (page 19)........................................................... Geddes Hall
The Institute for Church Life wishes to thank the following organizations and individuals who helped to make this program possible: Rev. John I. Jenkins, C.S.C., and the Office of the President, Eck Visitors Center, the Morris Inn, the Coleman-Morse Center, the Main Building, and Geddes Hall.

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