

THE BABY JESUS

One of my favorite Christmas ornaments is a slightly chipped ceramic Baby Jesus. I found Jesus in a thrift store, all by himself. No Mary, Joseph, Wise Men, or stable animals to be found. I was appalled that the poor Baby lay there alone. Appalled that somehow, someone disposed of the Baby so haphazardly that He was separated from his family. I suppose that some credit should at least be given that an attempt was made to rehome, rather than toss Him in the trash. His plight so touched me that I bought Him. I saved Baby Jesus.

The Baby Jesus is actually woven deeply into my Christmas traditions and memories. I have a photo of my Grandfather and myself, at age 2, crouching in front of a manger in my grandparents' living room. It appears to be a special, private moment and though I have no recollection, I have always had the sense that he was explaining the scene to me.

Another interesting childhood memory involves the arrival of the Baby Jesus. When my Grandmother set up her manger every year at Christmas, the Baby Jesus was never put into the manger. Somehow, by some magical feat, He arrived at midnight on Christmas Eve, and not a moment before. This event continued to amaze me for many years running, as I stood guard diligently awaiting, hoping to witness the blessed event. Without fail, year after year, Christmas came and went without having actually fulfilled my curiosity. As far as I know, it is by divine intervention that the Baby Jesus lands softly on the straw, welcomed by His mother, father and a few stray farm animals.

For several years after my divorce, and my son having moved on to a family of his own, I lacked the motivation to put out any Christmas decorations, except the manger. I purchased my ceramic manger figurines in 1983. When my son was a child, he and his father built me a three-sided wooden manger to complete my ensemble. Each year, as I carefully set out the manger, the animals, the shepherd boy, Mary and Joseph, I omit placement of the Baby Jesus. In keeping with the tradition passed down from my Grandmother, the Baby is not presented until midnight on Christmas Eve.

Almost everyone that puts out a manger includes the Baby Jesus in the set up, even if it is not Christmas yet. Outside of my own family, I know of no one else that keeps this special midnight-on-Christmas-Eve tradition. But then, that is why family traditions are so special. I would truly love this magic to be passed on down through my son's family. Unfortunately, that will not likely be the case, as he does not "believe", and that's okay because I have enough belief for us both.

Make peace with your broken pieces.

Smudge