

“The Traveling Nativity” St. Mary Parish- Mt. Angel, Oregon

This is the third Advent Season that St. Mary Parish has had a life-size Nativity. This is no ordinary Nativity scene, as it travels through Mt. Angel until coming to its home on the lawn of St. Mary's, just in front of the Parish Office building. This year Mary, Joseph and their donkey began the trek at the base of Mt. Angel Abbey hill. The three kings and 2 large camels followed at a distance, throughout the four weeks leading up to Christmas. This colorful display is befitting the grandeur of St. Mary's beautiful historic Church.



After travelling all through Advent, the Kings have finally found the Christ Child and can see him in the manger.

Each year the entourage goes the same direction, coming from the east, but they visit different homes along the way.



Harold Dieker and Fran Piatz help set up Mary and Joseph on their way to the manger at St. Mary Church.

Last year Brother Cyril Drnjevic from Mt. Angel Abbey suggested that it would be nice if they could start their journey up at the Abbey, “after all, wise men come from the Abbey”. Br. Cyril got permission for the magi to camp on Abbey property and the rest is history

On the first Sunday of Advent the Wise men appeared high on the hill, and moved every two or three days in spite of freezing weather for many of those days! Every time we set out to move the figures, people who were taking a walk up the hill just pitched in and helped. I met Seminarians from the Abbey, Carmelite monks, people on retreat from the Benedictine Sisters, and friends from town who always asked if we needed any help. There was always a helping hand right when I needed it. It was always a joy to see who would show up.

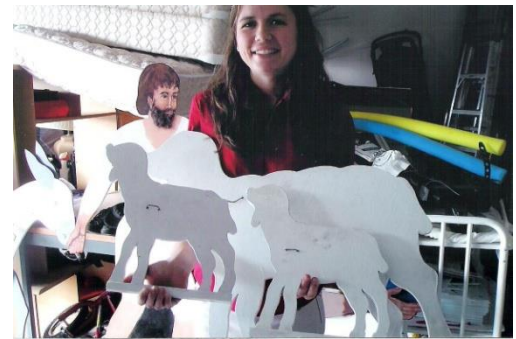
It has proven to be one of my most meaningful Advent activities. I can't tell you all the positive comments that I've heard about this. Most every home that hosted the travelers has commented that they really enjoyed being a part of it. Some families even took pictures of their children sitting on the camel.

The idea to have an outside nativity came in response to frustration that the public school's “Winter Program” had become devoid of traditional Christmas songs and pageants. Realizing that it was not the responsibility of the school to teach

these things, but rather the Church's, the idea was born.

The Men's Group was approached one Sunday evening and asked if they could take on the project. No one jumped at the idea. Next, the Women's Bible Study Group was asked and they said “Yes.” Ed Douglas had been missing from the Men's Group on Sunday, and when he later heard about the idea, he jumped right on it! He and Marilyn Hall, the leader of the Women's Bible Study, joined efforts.

Ed was retired and had incredible carpentry skills and time! Marilyn's Aunt and Uncle, John and Gerry Beyer, had an incredible 30 year old Nativity set that the new set would be patterned after. Another neighbor had created and displayed this in his front yard along Old Mt. Angel Highway amid rolling farmland just outside Mt. Angel. After he passed away, the Beyer became the new owners. These were unique in the fact that they were life-size, with painted faces, real hair and beards, and dressed in clothing. The donkey was covered in gray carpet with a leather halter and Joseph was leading him with a rope.



Nicole Morris covered our 3 sheep with soft fleece.



it was their project to find clothes and whatever was needed to complete their character.

Another crew of mostly retired folks set- up and take- down the heavy manger each year.



For the camels, Marilyn raided her sons' toys and cut their plastic softball for the ridges of the nose and eyes, with another smaller ball inserted for the eyeball. She cut a plastic milk jug for the ears and plastic apple juice bottles for the feet. "It was really fun trying to figure out how to make it work with what I had at home."



"It was such a wonderful surprise to see how beautifully adorned all the characters were as each one was completed. When they were all put together it was just amazing! Our baby Jesus is just the most precious doll all wrapped in swaddling clothes with his little toes peeking out, "said Marilyn Hall. "

For me, designing the camels faces was a creative challenge, but it was so satisfying.

Some of the challenges were to get the camels, sheep and donkey to get a three dimensional look with the right "bulges".

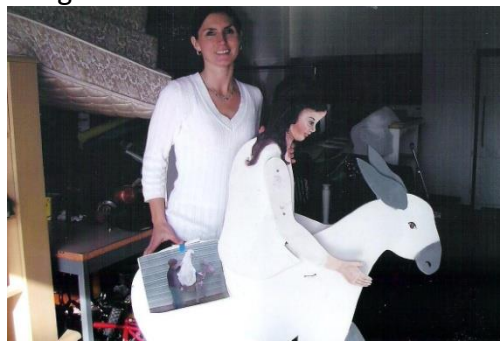
For our Parish, the entire process has been wonderful. It was a multi-generational project from start to finish and continues to bring new life to the Christmas story with every move through the neighborhoods. We work together and all delight in the way it has given us a creative new way to teach the real truths of Christmas.



Lisa Bartholmew adopted this King, and dressed him like royalty complete with gold chest filled with treasures. Lisa's King, dressed in royal robes really impresses everyone, especially his crown, bracelet and rings.

Copying the Beyers' display, Ed Douglas and his wife Virginia transferred each figure onto wood, cut out and waterproofed them. Virginia is an iconographer and used her talents to paint the faces and added hair and beards. The Douglasses also built the large manger.

Each figure was adopted by a different person from St. Mary's and



Laura Miller had a double challenge to dress Mary and make a realistic donkey