

The Manger Scene
Pastor Terry Hanna

“...the time came for Mary to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.”
Luke 2: 4-7 (NRSV)

Bryson City is beautiful at Christmas time. There is nothing that gets you more in the Christmas spirit than colored lights and green garlands hanging on the stores and bridge and train station. Through December our town has been alive with activity from tourists wearing pajamas to families taking their yearly Christmas card picture in front of the caboose, to crowds watching a parade.

But now it is late and the town is quiet. I want to take one last walk down Everett Street before my family comes into town for the holidays. I want to be alone to prepare spiritually for our Moravian Love Feast and worship on Christmas Eve. I look forward to hearing the story and singing carols and lifting our candles high as we welcome the new born King Jesus.

As I walk, I look around me. The wind is the only sound I hear, except for a little bell ringing in the distance. The store windows are brightly lit with trees and decorations and fake snow around door frames. I can still smell hot chocolate and sugar cookies in the air, or maybe it is just my imagination.

I walk past the stores and restaurants. I walk through the intersection with the red traffic light blinking on and off. I walk past the train station and cross the railroad tracks. And then I notice the manger scene on the front lawn of the Presbyterian Church.

The manger scene magically appears on the lawn at the first of the season and disappears after Christmas. I lift up a prayer of thanks for the good neighbor who always puts it there. I take a minute to look at Joseph, Mary and the baby. Shepherds, animals, and kings surround the creche. An angel looks down from above and a Moravian star hangs from a tree.

As I reflect on the scene, I think of Saint Francis of Assisi, who first had the idea of re-creating the scene of the poor stable in Bethlehem, including the animals. Francis said, “I want to enact the memory of the Infant who was born in Bethlehem, and how he was deprived of all the comforts babies enjoy; how he was bedded in the manger on hay, between an ass and an ox. For once I want to see all this with my own eyes.” So on Christmas Eve in 1223, near the town of Greccio, Italy, Francis along with a number of his brethren and a crowd of townspeople carrying torches and singing joyful songs, came in procession to that first manger display. *

As I move away from the manger scene and walk up the hill to my home, I am reminded of a poor couple who put their baby to bed on straw and whose visitors were scruffy shepherds and foreigners, and the beautiful message this scene bears: that the Kingdom of God will be built not of power, wealth, or fame, but of humble, self-giving love—something that is within the reach of each one of us!

But the angel said to them, *“Do not be afraid. For I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”* Luke 2: 10-12 (NIV)

Have a blessed Christmas!

*Reflections from “From Holidays to Holy Days,” by Albert Holtz, O.S.B., p. 46-49

