

Christmas Eve
December 24, 2011
St. Luke Sheboygan Falls
Luke 2:1-20

The Biggest, Best Nativity

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our redeemer. AMEN.

Little did Angie know when she brought a plateful of her special double chocolate chip cookies over to her new neighbors that summer that six months later she would be in an all out war. Angie and Carole bonded quickly over baking and gardening and cheering their kids on at elementary school soccer games. Their husbands, Brad and Will also became fast friends as they got into the habit of watching the Sunday games together while Angie and Carole visited.

It grew into a great friendship, until the holidays came along. After packing

away the Thanksgiving leftovers, Carole unpacked her prized possession—an outdoor nativity scene that had been built by her father. It wasn't fancy, but each of the figures was lovingly traced and cut out of plywood and painted in black silhouette. She gave Angie a call, "Come on over, I want to show you my nativity set."

Angie arrived just as Carole finished putting her nativity up in the front yard. "Hi, Angie, what do you think?" Carole said with pride as she stood up, wiping sweat from her brow.

"Nice," Angie said.

"My dad made it for my mom and she passed it down to me."

"Oh, I see why you like it then."

"There isn't another one exactly like it!" Carole declared.

Angie bit her tongue to keep herself from declaring, "Good thing!" Instead she asked Carole, "Would you like to see ours?"

"Of course I would," Carole said with all the enthusiasm she could muster.

As the women crossed the street and came upon the lawn, Brad plugged in the baby Jesus. The figures were plastic, at least three times as big as Carole's, not quite life size. They were tasteful, not garish like some, as they glowed softly in the evening dusk.

"Great work, Sweetie!" called Angie. "this set was a bargain. I got it half price a few years ago after Christmas."

"Good for you," Carole said.

Angie patted Joseph on the head. "You hardly ever find plastic so lifelike."

"Nice," said Carole, biting her tongue to keep from blurting out how tacky it is to depict the Holy Family in plastic.

Some other neighbors, Gloria and Ted wandered over to chat. "Happy Holidays! Great nativity, Angie! It really brightens up the neighborhood."

Carole quietly excused herself and went home to brood. "I don't understand it, Will. It was just cheap plastic, not handcrafted like our set. Yet the WHOLE neighborhood drooled over it."

"I like ours," said Will.

"Well, I do too, but I can't just let Angie steal my thunder," said Carole.

"Maybe it's time to get a new nativity."

Will shrugged. "Whatever you say, dear."

So Carole and Will and their twins David and Dirk headed down to the Men's

Mall (Fleet Farm) to check out nativities. They helped her haul home the perfect replacement for Grandpa's outdated model—a nativity that was easily larger than Angie's, but not plastic, oh, no! It was made in Italy of artistically molded resin (which means it was NOT hollow and thus, VERY HEAVY).

"This will teach Angie to steal my thunder!" Carole proclaimed as Will and the boys heaved and hoed the new nativity set out on the lawn. Even before it was fully assembled the neighbors came oohing and ahing. Angie and Brad soon followed with their kids Sarah and Simon in tow.

"I thought you treasured your father's old set," said Angie.

"That old thing. It was time for a change," said Carole as Will and the boys exchanged puzzled gazes.

"Brad and I have had ours for a while too, maybe it's time for a change."

Brad and the kids followed Angie home with confusion on their faces.

Once they were home, Angie was furious. "This means war! We need to make a trip to the expensive floral shop across town! Don't forget your credit card, Brad!"

"Yes, dear."

The nativity Angie found was all made of lights. The stable twinkled. The Holy Family sparkled. The animals flickered. The shepherds shimmered. The wise men blinked on and off. The angel glistened and the star shone at the tip top of everything. Angie's new set lit up the whole neighborhood. It was breath taking. And it wasn't long before everyone in the neighborhood had their breath taken away, including Carole, Will and the twins.

“Cool, Mom,” said Dirk. “Look at the blinking donkey.”

“I like how the Baby Jesus sparkles,” added David.

Carole grabbed the boys by the elbows and pushed them home.

“Nice set,” said Will as he took up the rear.

The next morning early, Angie was rapping on Carole’s door. “I can’t believe it. I know we were having a little healthy competition, but I can’t believe that you would stoop so low as to steal my donkey!”

“I can’t believe you would accuse me, a good Christian woman, of such a vile and selfish act!”

“So you refuse to confess?” asked Angie.

“Confess? I swear I didn’t do it,” insisted Carole.

“This is to show how much I believe your story!” Angie turned around and kicked one of Carole’s wise men, “Owww...These aren’t hollow like mine.”

The hard resin figure toppled over and cracked. Angie ran away (with a slight limp.)

“Will? Will? You’ll never guess what that shrew did now. She accused me of stealing her stinking, sparkling donkey and then she broke our wise man! Put on your coat, we’re going to the store!”

Dirk came around the corner dragging something, “Can I go to the store too? I wanna get a cowboy to ride my new donkey.”

“Your what?”

Sure enough, Dirk was dragging along the donkey from Angie’s nativity which wasn’t blinking because the

unplugged cord was in tow. Carole leaned back against the wall and closed her eyes. She took a deep breath and put on her boots. She couldn't resist the pull of getting the biggest, best nativity in the neighborhood.

Later that day, Angie was busy trying to replace her stolen donkey by hanging a string of Christmas lights on her old plastic donkey.

"That doesn't look right, Mom," said Simon.

"It's the best I can do, honey," said Angie. "That lying witch took the other one."

"Doesn't Jesus tell us we should love our neighbors?" asked Sarah.

"If you want I can take her out with my new bb gun," suggested Simon.

Angie stared at her son holding the gun and thought a moment. "Of course not, you know we don't use those things on people. You'll put someone's eye out."

"Ha, ha, Mom, that's right out of that Christmas movie."

"Be a good boy and go shoot at targets."

Angie went back to concentrating on her pitiful little donkey. Did Jesus' mother really ride one of these things?

Suddenly she heard a pop like a firecracker going off, a hissing sound like the air going out of a tire across the street and...

"Whaaaa! Ow, ow, ow, Mommy, Mommy, the bb bounced back and hit my face!" wailed Simon as he threw himself in her arms.

She held him at a distance and checked him over. There was a huge, red welt on his cheek, but no blood, thank God. She hugged him tightly and kissed him all over.

“I’m okay now, Mom, really.”

Carole came running outside. “What’s wrong? I heard a gunshot and then someone crying.”

When she saw Angie and Simon she zipped right over. “What happened? Is everything okay? Does he need a ride to the emergency room?”

“It was a close call, but I think he’s fine,” said Angie. “But I’m afraid your nativity is...”

Angie pointed at the inflatable set as the air hissed out of it from the tiny bb prick.

Carole hugged Angie. “Thank God Simon’s okay. A Nativity set is just a material object. I’ve been so stupid to ruin our friendship over it.”

“I agree. I’m so sorry that someone had to get hurt before we saw it. The true meaning of Christmas isn’t to have the biggest, best nativity, but to celebrate the love of God that came down to earth.”

“And to try to live out that love every day,” said Carole. “If you guys aren’t doing anything on Christmas Eve we’d like to invite you to the candlelight service at our church.”

“We’d love to. And why don’t you come over afterwards for some cocoa and cookies?”

After that every year Angie and Carole worked together with all of their neighbors to put together one nativity scene, the biggest, best nativity scene, to

share the story of Jesus' love with everyone

who saw it. AMEN.