



..... *5th Annual*

INTERNATIONAL CRÈCHE
EXHIBIT AND PILGRIMAGE

CHRIST IS BORN FOR EACH AND ALL

CRÈCHES FROM EASTERN EUROPE



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

NOVEMBER 28, 2018 –
JANUARY 27, 2019

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Introductory and descriptive texts by Carolyn Pirtle,
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"Creator of the Stars of Night" verse 1 text *Conditor alme siderum*, Latin, 9th c., tr. in *The Hymnal* 1982, ©1985, The Church Pension Fund. All rights reserved. Reprinted under OneLicense #A-702875. All rights reserved.

THE CRÈCHES WILL BE DISPLAYED
NOVEMBER 28, 2018 – JANUARY 27, 2019
IN THESE LOCATIONS:

Eck Visitors Center
Morris Inn
Coleman-Morse Center
Main Building
Geddes Hall
Hesburgh Library



CRÈCHE PILGRIMAGE
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2018 - 2:00PM

Join us as we journey through campus to view the crèches. We will begin at the Eck Visitors Center, then walk to the Morris Inn, Coleman-Morse Center, and conclude at the Main Building, where we will have a blessing of the baby Jesus figures—remember to bring yours from home! Families are welcome, and children are encouraged to dress as a figure from the Nativity story: animals, shepherds, angels, magi, or the Holy Family. A reception and raffle will follow the pilgrimage.

INTRODUCTION



This year's crèche exhibit highlights the artistic traditions of Eastern Europe, a region whose history has often been marked by conflict—leaders of nations striving to assert themselves over and against others by conquering and claiming land and people for their own. Of course, this narrative is by no means unique to the Eastern European region; indeed, it is the well-worn history of the entire world, one that continues in our own time and place, where division between “us and them” is often the order of the day, oppression the means to an end, and power the only viable currency. All the while, the innocent suffer and the downtrodden long for deliverance.

It was into such a world that Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, was born more than 2000 years ago. It is in such a world that he continues to dwell today through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus came into the world, not as a political leader or powerful member of society, but as a poor carpenter from the backwater town of Nazareth. He came to reconcile, not to estrange; he came to serve, not to be served; he came to love unto the end.

In the beauty and poverty of the Nativity, we see that it is only the power of self-giving love that can topple the powers of the world. Only the strength of sacrifice can defeat the force of violence. These crèches hold up to our gaze the paradox of the Gospel: power perfected in weakness, love of God and neighbor before love of self, new life born out of death. In each crèche, the artist incarnates this paradox differently, according to the artistic and cultural heritage of his or her particular country, and yet, more than anything else, it is the universality of the narrative that shines forth in these works of art. Regardless of whether the crèche originated from Poland or Russia or the Czech Republic, each of them tells the story of Christ. Regardless of the state of the relationships among nations throughout the world, it is Christ who unites where human beings often seek to divide.

In light of this, let us make the prayer of Christ our own this Advent, this Christmas, and throughout the new year—that, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, all people may be one in Christ, as Christ is one with the Father.

DZISIAJ W BETLEJEM (TODAY IN BETHLEHEM)

Dzisiaj w Betlejem, dzisiaj w Betlejem
Today in Bethlehem, today in Bethlehem

Wesoła nowina
Glad tidings!

Że Panna czysta, że Panna czysta
To the Virgin, to the Virgin

Porodziła Syna
a Son has been born.

Chrystus się rodzi, nas oswobodzi
Christ our Savior is born tonight.

Anieli grają, Króle witają,
Angels are rejoicing, kings are greeting,

Pasterze śpiewają, bydłęta kłękają
Shepherds are singing, cattle are kneeling

Cuda, cuda ogłaszają
Proclaiming the wonder, the wonder.

He Always Comes Our Way



Martin and Alena Raboch (Czech Republic)

The great Irish writer James Joyce wrote in *Finnegan's Wake*, "Catholic means, 'Here comes everybody.'" In this delightfully crowded crèche, we get a sense of this great community, this Body, the Church, of which Christ is the Head. Present here are men and women, rich and poor, saint and sinner, and all are centered around Jesus, who "draws all people to [himself]" (cf. John 12:32) and leads us his followers through our earthly pilgrimage to the Kingdom of "[his] Father and our Father, [his] God and our God" (cf. John 20:17).

Beneath Golden Domes



Russian Artists' Cooperative (Russia)

The simplicity of the Nativity in the foreground provides a stark contrast to the opulence of the five onion domes in the background. In the midst of richly decorated buildings, the Christ-Child comes in poverty. Visitors to the University of Notre Dame often marvel at the Golden Dome atop the Main Building, but during this season, when (as Charles Dickens wrote), "Want is keenly felt and Abundance rejoices," we would do well to look to Our Lady—on the Dome and in this crèche—as an example of selflessness and generous love who teaches us to see the face of her Son in the faces of the poor.

Incarnation for All the Nations



Artists unknown (Hungary)

These two crèches show the scope of the Christ-event: in the lower crèche, Jesus is adored by the shepherds; in the upper crèche, he is revered by magi from far-flung nations. In his public ministry, Jesus focused primarily on preaching the Good News the people of Israel, but after his Resurrection, he commissioned his disciples, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:20). Here we see the first flowering of God's design to reconcile all things in Christ as people from all corners of the world gather together to worship the newborn King.

A Sense of Humor and Joy



Adam Wydra (Poland)

The bright colors and expressive faces lend this crèche an unmistakable air of Christmas joy. The angel duo serenades the infant Jesus with a lute and an accordion, the artist's nod to his Polish heritage. Looking at the smiles on their faces, one gets the sense that the music they're playing is no soft lullaby, but rather a boisterous dance, perhaps even a polka. The entire cosmos rejoices with the angels, singing "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests" (Luke 2:14).

Three Nativity Icons



Artists Unknown (Ukraine, Bulgaria, Greece)

The iconographic tradition is exceptionally important in the East. These images are understood to be more than just works of art: they are windows into the divine. Through the earthly materials of the icon, the viewer is drawn into the contemplation of heavenly realities. Gazing upon an icon (or any great work of sacred art, for that matter) encourages a self-emptying: as we gaze more and more intently on the image, we focus less and less on ourselves. In so doing, we make room in our hearts for God—a home where God can come and dwell within us as he came to dwell on earth in the Incarnation.

Betlém



Mila Kaňková (Czech Republic)

Paper crèches are immensely popular in the Czech Republic. In the early-to mid-nineteenth century, Czechoslovakian architect and artist Vojtěch Kubašta (master of pop-up illustration) created elaborate scenes of Jesus' birth using stand-up paper figures. These paper crèches were affordable for parents and appealing for children, who could help cut out the figures, then arrange and re-arrange them to their hearts' content. This twenty-first century design by Mila Kaňková draws from Kubašta's flair for style and detail with its beautiful colors and imaginative characters.

Wide-Eyed Wonder



Artist unknown (Poland)

Polish folk artists have long employed the medium of woodcarving in their craft. Overall, the figures here are carved with a charming simplicity, but the detail that stands out most are their bright, wide eyes. The shepherds and magi approach the manger with a gaze of bewilderment, while Mary and Joseph gaze out directly at the viewer, smiling from ear to ear. As the first witnesses to the Incarnation—God taking on flesh in Jesus—Mary and Joseph share their joy with us so that we might learn that this Child, this Savior, has been born for each and every person. Their radiant faces tell us, "Christ is born! For you!"

Szopka Krakowska



Stanislaw Jaworski (Poland)

Instead of the traditional stable, crèches from Krakow often place the scene of Jesus' birth in an ornate building that incorporates the traditional architecture of the city. While this might seem an odd or anachronistic juxtaposition, the artist's message is clear: the birth of Jesus cannot be relegated to an isolated event that took place 2000 years ago in Bethlehem. Christ must be born in the hearts of all, welcomed in every place, in every time. Only then will our cities and towns be transformed by "the love of God [that] has been poured out into our hearts" (Romans 5:5).

The Camel's Head



Laszlo Urban (Hungary)

Animals often figure into the Nativity scene: the humble donkey who bore Mary to Bethlehem, the patient cow who lent her manger to the Christ-Child, the lamb who already recognizes the Good Shepherd. Here, the camel, who carried the magi on the long journey from the East, is given the highest place. Perhaps this is a reminder that Christ came to save *all* peoples, or perhaps elevating the last animal on the scene is the artist's way of saying that "the last will be first, and the first will be last" (Matthew 20:16). Or, perhaps the artist lifts up the camel because he saw him as St. Augustine did—as a symbol of Jesus himself, who lovingly carried the burden of our sins in his Cross.

Princely Canopy



Teréz Patona (Hungary)

The crèche often invites the viewer to consider the relationship between riches and poverty, to ponder what constitutes true wealth. Here, the structure protecting the figures is rough and humble, but the figures themselves are clothed in richly colored and elaborately decorated garments. To the eyes of the world, Jesus was a nobody—born into poverty and raised in a town no one cared about (cf. John 1:46). But to those with eyes of faith, he is the Prince of Peace, the King of kings and Lord of lords, and the only treasure in the world worth possessing (cf. Matthew 13:44–46; Philippians 3:8–9).

New Creation



Zakopane Artisan (Poland)

The birth of Jesus fulfills Isaiah's prophecy: "See, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" (Isaiah 43:19). In the Incarnation, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus, new life springs forth, and all who are baptized share in his new life. As St. Paul says, "Whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). In this crèche, the figures' carved features emerge from rough birch branches: their encounter with the Incarnate Word transforms them into new creations. Christ longs to transform us, too, to make us new creations in himself, if we but open our hearts to him.

Against the Blues



Artist unknown (Hungary)

The minimalist style here seems to create a sense of separation or isolation among the figures. Each one seems lost in his or her own thoughts, yet all are drawn together around the manger as the Blessed Mother smiles out at each person who approaches her Son. The Christian life is both individual and communal. As each one of us draws close to Jesus, we discover that we do not do so alone, but rather alongside our brothers and sisters as members of the Body of Christ. We will each encounter Jesus in our own unique way, but as he draws us closer to himself, he also draws us closer to one another so that we might express our love for him in our love for our neighbor.

What Goes Around



Seiffener Ateliers (Germany)

In this music box crèche, angels sing and play instruments for the infant Jesus as the Virgin Mary looks on. Similar scenes have been represented in visual art over the centuries: the angelic host sings praise to the Incarnate Word, the One through whom they were created (cf. Colossians 1:16). In reality, the angels are *constantly* singing their praises in heaven around the throne of God (cf. Revelation 5:11–13), and in every celebration of the Mass, we are invited to join in this song of the angels and saints, stepping into the eternal liturgy to sing their hymn of praise to God: “Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God of hosts!”

Mouths Agape in Awe



Seiffener Ateliers (Germany)

This crèche was crafted in Seiffen, a small town in the Erzgebirge region known as the Christmas craft capital of Germany, where many folk artists embrace an endearing style of childlike simplicity. The figures here are dressed in a manner reminiscent of the pious country folk of the region, and each of their mouths is open in a rounded gasp of surprise and delight that they have been chosen to witness the fulfillment of God’s promise to send the long-awaited Messiah. What generations of people before Christ longed to see, they—and we—are privileged to encounter. Glory to the newborn King!

MAIN BUILDING

Braving the Times



Artist unknown (Czech Republic)

This crèche beautifully shows the intimate connection between the liturgy and daily life. The church building and the home—the domestic church—are nestled against one another and almost appear to be connected. The women in the foreground are dressed in the clothes of workaday life, as are the shepherd men in the background. In the midst of their busy lives, however, they allow themselves to be interrupted by Christ's transforming presence so that he might make the ordinary into something extraordinary, something holy. His presence will sustain them—and us—in every joy and every difficulty of daily life.

Bakers in the House of Bread



Artist unknown (Czech Republic)

This unique glass crèche features the Holy Family and the magi in more modern dress. Joseph is a rotund worker with his apron, and Mary is in a peasant's jacket and shawl. The magi truly stand out, with their white robes and their tall hats adorned with crosses. While there is something almost liturgical about these garments, the magi's headpieces also resemble chefs' hats, causing us to wonder what gifts they bring to Jesus. Perhaps they've brought bread to Bethlehem (which means "house of bread")—an appropriate gift for the One who is himself the "bread of life" (John 6:35, 48).

MAIN BUILDING

Illumination in Wood



Jan Rejmen (Czech Republic)

This carved wooden crèche boasts numerous details that make it a unique artistic rendering of the Nativity. The cow and donkey's heads emerge from the back of the stable as they peer at the infant Jesus. The shepherd's dog seems to be intrigued by something up in the sky—perhaps he sees the angelic host hovering overhead. Most unusual, however, is the artist's choice to dress one of the magi in a business suit, which serves as an invitation to the modern viewer to place himself or herself in the scene and adore the Christ-Child right alongside those who were present on that first Christmas night.

The Nativity of the Pauper, 1



Pavel Körber (Czech Republic)

This massive paper crèche contains 165 pieces displayed in two cases. Crafted by Pavel Körber, its images were first published in 1933 by the Umelecky Ustav Litograficky in Prague. The artistic style continues the tradition of the popular biblical illustrations by French artists James Tissot (1836–1902) and Gustave Doré (1832–1883). In this first case, one has to search for the Holy Family; without the help of the stable and the star, they would be practically indistinguishable from the crowd. Yet, this is the point: Christ comes in obscurity, unrecognizable to the world, except to those who seek God with eyes of faith.

Star-Flung Nativity



Jerzy Zandarowski (Poland)

In this simple and lovely little crèche, the stars are the unifying feature: they appear in the background behind Mary and Joseph, on their mantles and the angel's robe, on the blanket covering Jesus, even on the branches of the evergreen tree. The presence of these stars and the prominence of the Christmas star overhead signal that the significance of Jesus' birth is not simply restricted to Earth; it has impacted the entire cosmos. The Word through whom the universe was created has become the Word-made-flesh, through whom it will be redeemed. "Creator of the stars of night, your people's everlasting light, O Christ, redeemer of us all, we pray you hear us when we call."

A Labor of Love



Peter Palka (Slovakia)

This crèche received first prize at the 1994 International Crèche Festival in Bellingham, Washington, and was featured on the Slovakian Christmas stamp in 1995. Artist Peter Palka painstakingly crafted it from corn husks, wood, straw, and reeds, achieving great detail in a difficult medium. The curly wool of the sheep adds a particularly charming touch. One wonders if the sheep draw near to the manger because they're curious to see the Infant, or because they want to sneak a bite of the tasty grass that pokes through the open sides. Whatever our reason for drawing near to Jesus, he will always welcome us with open arms and open heart, and in the Eucharist especially, he will always offer to nourish us with the gift of himself.

The Vaults of Heaven Ring with Praise



Artist unknown (Germany)

The tradition of folk art from Erzgebirge often reflects the mining culture of the region. Here, the arch symbolizes not only the dome of the sky—the vault of heaven, but it also represents the arch-shaped entrance to the mine—the mouth of earth. Light becomes critically important in the depths of a mine; thus, this crèche is also a candelabra. It provides light in the literal sense as its glowing candles illuminate a room, and its figures enlighten the heart in their portrayal of the night when Jesus, the “light of the world” (John 8:12), pierced through the dark night of sin by his birth.

Giorgio's House



Giorgio Giorgione (Albania)

The red-orange clay used in sculpting this crèche gives it an earthy beauty, while the sheen of the glaze lends it a heavenly luminosity. The figures are simple in their lines and appearance, and instead of a stable, the artist has chosen to construct a house for the Holy Family. Not just any house—his own house. In titling this work “Giorgio’s House,” artist Giorgio Giorgione has literally sought to make his own house a dwelling place for Jesus. By doing so, he reminds his viewers that each and every one of us is called to do the same this season by readying our homes and our hearts to welcome Christ.

Drawn Toward Love



Ulmik (Germany)

While the figures in this crèche may feature a relatively simple construction, the positioning of their bodies speaks volumes. Lying in his manger bed, Jesus raises his arms high; already he reaches out to embrace the entire world. The other figures seem irresistibly drawn to this Infant's loving gesture—shepherds, townspeople, and magi are all oriented toward Christ. Even one of the guards in the background stands with spear in hand, facing the direction of the Holy Family, wondering what all of the fuss is about. This curiosity drew the shepherds and the magi to the manger and it is often the first step on the road to faith for many people today. Come and see.

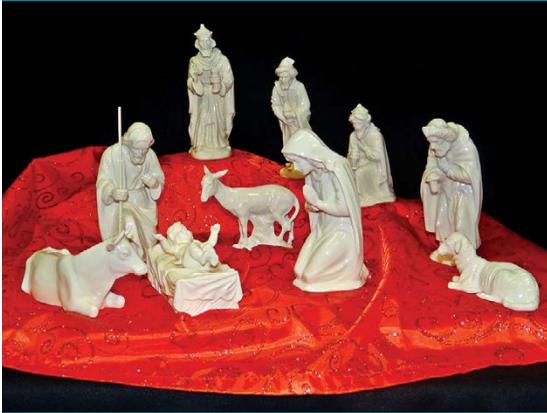
The Message of the Star



Jan Skora (Poland)

A fine example of the Polish woodcarving tradition, this crèche is crafted from a single piece of wood. The wide eyes of the figures convey their unabashed awe at the birth of Jesus, and the six points of the star symbolize the six days of creation. The central orb of the star represents Christ himself, the Word through whom all things were made (John 1:3), who holds all of creation together in himself (Colossians 1:17), and whose life, Death, and Resurrection will make all things new (Revelation 21:5). "What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:4–5).

Silent Adoration



Artist unknown (Germany)

The utter lack of colored decoration bestows an air of simplicity on this crèche, while the subtle sheen of the glazed porcelain infuses it with a quiet radiance. The figures seem to be almost lit from within as they gaze in adoration on the Christ-Child. There is a contemplative quality to this crèche, a stillness that invites the viewer to pause instead of glossing over these figures in favor of something more colorful or eye-catching. When the color and glitter of the season are stripped away, we are left with the heart of the mystery: God has taken on flesh in Jesus Christ. He has come to save us from sin and death. O come, let us adore him!

Silent Animation



Etela Novotná (Slovakia)

While the garments of these ceramic figures have been sculpted in an intentionally rough, unfinished style, their faces and poses convey a sophisticated, expressive dynamism. The Blessed Mother's rapt face is turned toward heaven, her hands crossed over her heart in a gesture of love and surrender. Joseph gazes wide-eyed at the newborn Messiah. Two shepherds huddle close to one another, tentatively approaching the manger, and the sheep face every which way (as sheep are wont to do). The angel, however, gazes directly out at the viewer, inviting us wayward sheep to turn, to come close, and to share in the joy of Mary and Joseph at the birth of Jesus.

Guardian of the Message



Artist unknown (Russia)

The *matryoshka* or nesting doll is arguably the most famous form of folk art to come out of Russia. *Matryoshka* literally means “little matron,” thus the dolls are painted to look like a matriarch, who guards a secret hidden inside. The Nativity is painted on the largest doll, and subsequent dolls reveal more of the Christian narrative. The final scene—the Baptism of Jesus—while obviously not the final scene in the life of Christ, is meant to be a reminder for all the baptized to imitate Christ. Seeing this image on a *matryoshka* can also remind us that the Church is our matron, our Mother, our guide on the pilgrimage of faith.

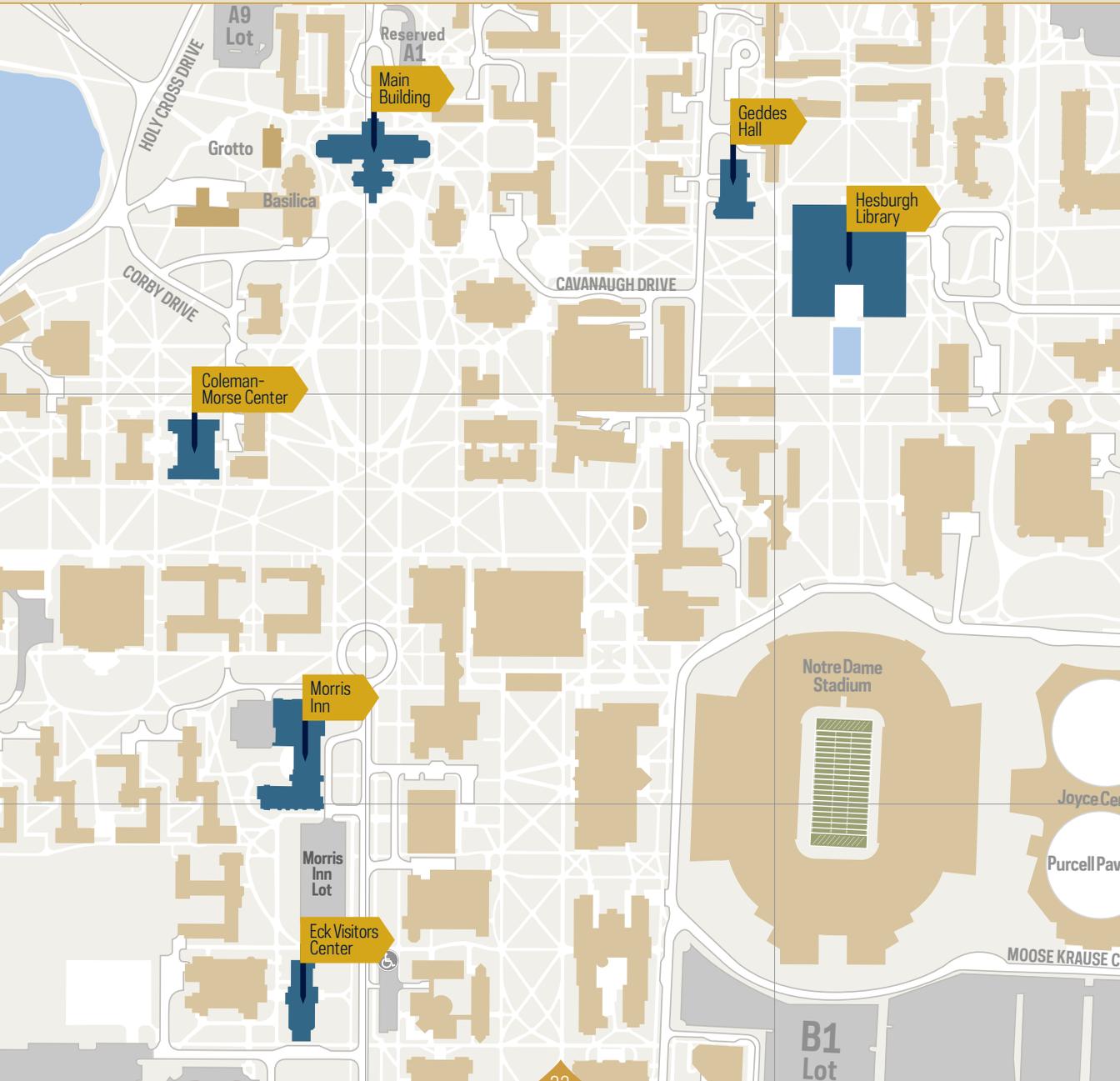
Promise of Heaven



Artist unknown (Slovakia)

Many of the corn husk figures in this crèche are wearing vibrant blue fabric. In iconography, blue symbolizes heaven, which is why the Virgin Mary—she who is “full of grace”—is almost always clothed in blue in visual art. Yet not all of the figures in the crèche are clothed this way. Why? Perhaps the artist is saying that only those who have opened their hearts to Christ will be robed in heavenly light. Perhaps we are meant to see ourselves in the figures not yet dressed in blue. This Christmas, let us humbly approach the manger and offer our lives and hearts to the Christ-Child, asking him to transform us and teach us to live life on earth with eyes fixed on heaven.

CRÈCHE LOCATION MAP



CRÈCHE LOCATIONS BY COUNTRY

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