

# “Oh Come Let Us Adore Him”

## Interfaith Nativity Exhibit to Showcase in Peoria

By Andrea Davis

Peoria community members have a new event to look forward to this Christmas season. Local churches are coming together to create a unique Interfaith Nativity Exhibit, which will include nativities from around the world. The interfaith gathering will be centered on the theme “Oh Come Let Us Adore Him” and will bring together members from different churches in the Peoria area to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ through nativity displays and musical performances.

The nativity scene has been around since 1223, when St. Francis of Assisi was inspired by a trip to the Holy Land and used living people and animals to stage Jesus Christ’s humble beginnings. The living scene was soon recreated in other Catholic countries in the form of three-dimensional figurines, also known as a crèche, with Mary and the Christ child at the center, often surrounded by Joseph, shepherds, wise men, angels, and animals. The crèche gained popularity and has spread across cultural and political boundaries to become a traditional Christian symbol of Christ’s birth.

Julia Ghantous of the All Saints Greek Orthodox Church, who serves on the exhibit committee, said, “The exhibit will be a representation of the diversity that we have in this country and the diverse ways of presenting the birth of Jesus.”

According to Ghantous, our community can expect to see “the creativity of people in presenting the birth of Jesus, and it’s sometimes done in a conventional way and sometimes

in a very creative way. You will not see one crèche like the other. Some of them are very elaborate; some of them are very simple. Some of them depict the event through animals and with different mediums. Some will be out of paper and others out of bone china.”

The Interfaith Nativity Exhibit director, Shelly Crespo, remarked, “I attended a nativity exhibit in Texas and was deeply moved by the variety of ways that God’s children all over the earth expressed their interpretation of the birth of Jesus Christ. Christians from all sects share core beliefs in the reality of the birth of our Savior, his life and mission, and in his great atoning sacrifice. Our display provides a place for individuals and families to reflect upon the sacred event as they usher in the Christmas season.”

The free event will be open for public viewing on Friday and Saturday, December 2 and 3, from 10am–9pm at the meetinghouse of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 3700 West Reservoir Boulevard in Peoria.

Veronica Barzallo, who represents St. Vincent’s Catholic Church on the interfaith committee, commented, “For all of us to get together with the same goal to celebrate the coming of Jesus to the world is neat. I think we have to celebrate that because it unifies us.” Christian unity is one of the goals of the committee, and they hope to host the exhibit in a different Peoria church each Christmas season for many years to come.



*This set was handmade with polymer clay by Sophia Barzallo's aunt in Ecuador.*



*Sophia, 10 years old, cherishes the nativities from her parent's native country of Ecuador. Her collection include sets made from clay, pomegranate seeds, and eucalyptus.*

“It is a beautiful event that is going to serve our community in a very positive way,” said Ghantous.

If you would like to serve on the Interfaith Committee, provide nativities for display, or share musical or artistic talents (school or church groups welcome) for the event, please contact [interfaithnativitypeoria@gmail.com](mailto:interfaithnativitypeoria@gmail.com) or the committee chair, Shelly Crespo, at [shellycrespo@yahoo.com](mailto:shellycrespo@yahoo.com), 309-240-8123.

Registration information will be available on the website, [www.interfaithnativitypeoria.com](http://www.interfaithnativitypeoria.com), in September.

The Interfaith Nativity Committee invites all Peoria community members to “like” the Interfaith Nativity Exhibit Facebook page and share with friends and neighbors: [www.facebook.com/InterfaithNativityPeoria](http://www.facebook.com/InterfaithNativityPeoria).

Photo credit: Shelly Crespo