

Lighting the Way

Every December season, Branson, Mo., hosts its Adoration Parade. Featuring faith-themed floats, the observance includes the lighting of a nativity scene on the mountain overlooking the southwestern Missouri town. This year, organizers will illuminate the crèche nightly for nearly three weeks.

Part of the Ozark Mountain Christmas celebration, the theme of this year's observance is "Keeping Christ in Christmas"—the same theme used since 1949, when two residents suggested erecting a nativity with 30-foot-high figures.

To say locals support the project is an understatement. Five years after it started, Everett and Rebecca Gloyd, who owned the property that hosted the crèche, deeded it to the Branson/Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce to ensure its place in perpetuity. When a tornado slammed the area last year, insurance quickly paid for replacements.

But sometimes it takes tougher resolve.

In 2009, Warren, Mich., resident John Satawa went to court after being ordered to remove a manger scene—which his family had erected every year since 1945—from a public roadway. In the fall of 2012, a federal appeals court ruled in Satawa's favor.

Last December, an atheist who had sued the city of Athens, Texas, over a nativity scene on the Henderson County Courthouse lawn dropped the case after the state attorney general intervened.

Branson resident Brad Thomas says grass-roots action is a way believers can influence the public and keep Christ at the center of the holidays. Too often, Christians offer excuses about what they can't do instead of doing what they can, he says.

“For these communities that complain about not being able to put nativities on public property, go find private property,” he says. “Go find the most visible land you can get, buy it, keep it privately held and put the nativity up.

“Privately held businesses can do things and talk about our faith. That’s why Hobby Lobby is successful. That’s why Chick-fil-A is so successful.”

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