

You Can't Have Christmas Without This

It was a once-in-a-lifetime trip that had taken me a year's worth of courage to embark on. Our 10 days of Bible teaching in Kampala, Uganda, was wrapping up, and we were finishing our time in the country with a shopping trip for souvenirs.

Our hosts took us to a little market, where I did my first-ever haggling over price and was a complete failure. I could see my host behind the shopkeeper, wildly shaking his head *no* and then dismally shaking his head in despair. Probably it was because I ended up paying more money than I was originally quoted, and I don't think haggling is supposed to work that way.

In one shop I found the most beautiful ebony nativity scenes, with chiseled faces that had an African flavor. The shop owner took my generous monetary gift, arrived at via haggling, and wrapped up two of those nativities for me to take home—one for my mom and one for my mother-in-law.

So I got home and unwrapped those beautiful sets, with wise men and shepherds, sheep, Mary, Joseph and one baby Jesus.

Two nativities. One baby in a manger.

Not to be sacrilegious or anything, but I was just telling this story to my daughter and was laughing with her about the cliché, *Keep Christ in Christmas*.

"No, really," I told her. "You need the Christ child!"

Well, when I saw that I had lost a key piece to one of the sets, I was distraught, to say the least. Hmmm. Which mom would be willing to display a nativity without the baby Jesus? Maybe no one would notice?

Sigh.

I found out that a man in our church carves, and I asked him if there was any way he could possibly carve me a replacement baby. He took on that project, and when he handed his carving to me I cried. He had found wood that just matched the ebony, and I could not tell the difference between my ebony Jesus and the new carving

And now the grand lesson from this story:

People are going to notice if we don't have Jesus. I mean, come on. They're going to notice.

Paul writes this phrase to followers of Christ, and it's a great meditation as Christmas season hits:

"... Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).

Christ in you while you're baking sugar cookies.

Christ in you while you're maneuvering a cart through Target.

Christ in you when you're plugging in the tree, before everyone is awake and the house is quiet.

Christ in you when you're talking with co-workers at your office party.

Christ in you when you're wrapping presents late into the night.

We remain always mindful of the powerful, ruling presence of Christ—**keeping Him front and center in our thoughts, just like His placement in the physical nativity scene.**

How will the indwelling of Christ in your heart have an effect today?