

Jesus Stolen! That was the headline in *La Nación* newspaper in San José, Costa Rica recently.

It seems that thieves stole an 80-year old statue of the baby Jesus that was part of a manger scene outside of the National Theater downtown.

While church leaders aren't sure who originally carved the statue, it has historic value to the country. It belonged to a Roman Catholic seminary for many years and was donated to the theater 30 years ago for its annual display.

The police say that they have no clue about who stole it, though they said they were afraid that it would be sold in an international market for stolen art work.

The theft evidently occurred in the early evening as crowds of people were gathered at the theater to see the manger scene. The thief probably mingled in the crowd and simply took the statue of the baby Jesus.

It can happen that easily, can't it? As we are busy with so many things at this Christmas time, the true meaning of the celebration of Jesus' birth can be stolen right in front of us and we never notice it.

Our preoccupation with all of the activities, our emphasis on the secular, our obsession with the commercial can rob us of the meaning and enjoyment of the celebration of the Messiah, the son of God, the savior of the world.

In fact, slowly but surely, right in front of our eyes, Christ has been stolen from us for many years. In addition to the creeping secularization of Christmas to the point that in some places one can't even speak the greeting "Merry Christmas" without fear of being chastised, ridiculed or fired, we have seen the gradual pushing of Jesus Christ to the sidelines of society and our lives.

- We have fallen victim to the stealing of Christ by those who say that our faith must be restricted to the church and home and never allowed into the marketplace of work, study or recreation.
- We have fallen victim to the stealing of Christ by those who wish to push Him to the end of the line, after the parade of false theologies and ideologies which have promised success and happiness but fail miserably to do so.
- We have fallen victim to the stealing of Christ by those who ridicule his call for peace in the world, his demonstration of a way of living that is God's will for us, and his promise that those who know Him will know His Father who sent Him.
- We have fallen victim to the stealing of Christ by those who put wealth and power and pleasure ahead of Christ's way of service and love and forgiveness.



At this Christmas season, as authorities in Costa Rica are looking for the stolen statue of the baby Jesus, let us look for the recovery of the meaning of this season...that in Jesus Christ, God came to us, forgiving our sins, reconciling us to Him, and offering us eternal life in His kingdom that has no end. Let us recapture the season of peace and good will, of joy and sharing, of the celebration of the glorious gift of almighty God in Jesus, the simple baby born in Bethlehem.

May you have a meaningful and joyous Christmas.

From Ken & Polly MacHarg
San José, Costa Rica, 2005