



“Unto us a Child is born” (Isaiah 9:6a). Mary and Joseph are portrayed cradling baby Jesus after His birth in a Bethlehem stable.

More than 14,000 people attend the free, four-night Living Nativity event, currently in its 12th year. Horizon North County has over 1,000 volunteers who put on the event for the San Diego community. Many people have been impacted with the Gospel.

Unto us a Son is given

Horizon Christian Fellowship North County

*For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given;
and the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor,
Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

Isaiah 9:6

*Story by Margot Bass
Photos by Joe Ramirez and Dr. James W. Ochi*

Tim Lee had been a Christian for only a few weeks when he first volunteered for a small part in the Living Nativity pageant at Horizon North County in Rancho Santa Fe, CA, in 2002. In his scene, other actors portraying Jesus and a nervous Nicodemus were talking in a dark room. Costumed in first-century garb and surrounded by a crowd of visitors, Tim emotionally shouted out his brief lines: “I can see! I can see! A man named Jesus anointed my eyes!” He startled some of the visitors, who didn’t expect his outburst from the crowd.

In the meantime, his wife Jayn and their two sons were among thousands of people winding their way through long lines at the pageant. For Jayn, the graphic crucifixion scene was life-changing. The men on the crosses were cold; the mourners around them didn’t seem to be acting, she recalled: “It was so real to me.” Having a traditional religious background, Jayn did not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. At the cross, she wept. “It struck me that Jesus died for me—Jayn. I really understood why He came.” The following morning at church, she gave her life to Christ.

After his wife’s salvation and the response of others, Tim realized that his small part—and the work of the hundreds of other volunteers who had labored for months—was truly for God’s Kingdom. “I realized the importance of the play. People’s lives truly can be impacted, no matter how small your role is,” Tim said. “The Holy Spirit can use our mouths to speak God’s words, to do miracles like He did with my wife.”

That first pageant also helped Tim better understand how much God loves him. Being a new believer at the time, Tim said, “I realized that the scene in which I played wasn’t a coincidence: I was the blind guy who got saved! God had removed the scales so I could spiritually see.”

A Trip Back in Time

Visitors were taken from one area to the next on a tour depicting Jesus’ life. The first Christmas unfolded before their eyes, portrayed as authentically as reasonably possible: the stench of live camels, donkeys, and sheep; crowds paying taxes to demanding Roman soldiers in the form of foil-wrapped chocolate coins; and a busy marketplace, complete with minstrels and Mediterranean food.

Visitors walk through eight scenes, some of which vary from year to year. After visitors meet Jesus as a baby, an adult “Jesus” later becomes their tour guide. At the scene of the Last Supper, “Jesus” steps away from the crowd to join the disciples.

In the final scene, the resurrection at the tomb, “Jesus” reminds participants that He’s no longer there. Bob Botsford, senior pastor of Horizon North County, explained, “The reality is that He rose from the dead, conquered sin, and now the tomb is empty. Merry Christmas! That’s the greatest gift of all.” At the tomb, participants are urged to accept Christ as Savior. They receive free Bibles, church literature, and an opportunity to pray with a team member. The church offers spiritual follow-up and discipleship, even for those who attend another church.



Musicians entertain guests before they tour different scenes of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.



At the Last Supper, Jesus blessed and broke the bread, saying, "Take, eat; this is My body" (Matthew 26:26b).



Believers at Horizon North County, CA, reenact the Last Supper when Jesus told His disciples that one of them would betray Him.



Many visitors stay for a meal of Mediterranean food.

Diego area, Bob said. It was initially the vision of Pastor Mike MacIntosh of Horizon Christian Fellowship in urban San Diego when he asked Bob to pastor the North County church plant in 1996. Three months after the church was dedicated, North County staged its first Living Nativity. Now 14,000 people attend the free, four-night event, currently in its 12th year.

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Isaiah 9:6

The passage in Isaiah has become the focus for the Nativity. "We're sharing the story of who this Child is," according to Bob. He added, laughing, "We can't share everything about Jesus' life because the line is so long." But no one seems to mind the wait: Children ride camels and make jewelry; refreshments are served; films are shown. The intention is to "wrap the Gospel into every booth we can," Bob said. For many in the community, this has become a Christmas tradition and an evangelistic outreach tool to those who won't attend a church.

"People come in not believing any of this (the Gospel)," according to Assistant Pastor Roger Pyes, who has helped head up the program for the past four years. "But they leave saying, 'I've never had the Bible presented to me like this before.'" ✝

This year's event will be held Dec. 18-21.

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Bob believes that it was God who opened the doors for them to do the outreach in North County. "We wanted to share the true Christmas with our neighborhoods," he said, "and allow people to experience how the first Christmas looked, tasted, and smelled."

Every year, the Living Nativity grew. "There was more and more of the story to tell," Bob said. The church added scenes from the life and ministry of Jesus Christ to show "that the Baby was born for the purpose of going to the cross and dying for the sins of the world," Bob said.

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His

The Living Nativity has become a family tradition for many at the church, including the Lees. Both of their sons, now 10 and 12 years old, are Christians who actively participate. Tim has been an actor every year, and Jayn normally serves behind the scenes. "This is a matter of people's lives at stake," Tim said. "Our lives are living proof that it's not just a play."

Behind the Scenes

Pastor Bob said the pageant has been strengthened by "humble hearts and prayer closets," as believers in the fellowship spend months in prayer for the event, donate countless hours volunteering, and provide financial support. With nearly 1,000 church volunteers, the Living Nativity has grown into one of the largest of its kind in the San



Visitors see the empty tomb, showing that Christ defeated death when He rose from the dead three days later. "He is not here; for He is risen, as He said" (Matthew 28:6a).



Jesus is portrayed on the cross between two thieves at the crucifixion scene, taking the sins of the world on His shoulders. Christ is heard to say, "It is finished!" (John 19:30b).