

ERSATZ NATIVITY SETS

When people talk about the commercialization of Christmas, they usually mean the extent to which material indulgence has overwhelmed the celebration of a sacred event. But there is a secularizing trend going on that is, on many counts, even more offensive than the empty-headed pursuit of profit: the introduction of ersatz nativity sets.

It used to be that a nativity set included baby Jesus, Mary, Joseph, the Three Wise Men, an angel, and perhaps shepherds and animals. Now all we see are the animals.

The fall edition of the catalog, Celebration Fantastic, has for sale a nativity set that features two bears, a donkey, a rabbit and a rodent. The Apple Whimseys Collectors set sells for \$899; there is no gift box available. The latest Cotton Gin catalog is selling a nativity set that includes 15 animals, most of which are mice, and it goes for a mere \$135. Then there is the Holiday edition of Casual Living: it's advertising a nativity set made up of four snowmen. You can have the Snowman Nativity Set for 60 bucks; two pine trees connected by a wire thread and star are thrown in for good measure.

Write to Celebration Fantastic at 1620 Montgomery Street, Ste. 250, San Francisco, CA 94111 (1-800-CELEBRATE). Contact Gin at P.O. Box 414, Jarvisburg, NC 27947 (1-800-637-2446). Casual Living can be reached at 5401 Hangar Court, P.O. Box 31273, Tampa, FL 33631 (1-800-843-1881).

It is not just catalogs that are doing this, many store windows are doing the same. Just check out the malls. If you can, find out the name of the person who is in charge of the mall, and/or the store owner, and register your complaint.