



Dear Church,

I bought this painting many years ago while on a seminary study trip to China. The artist was part of a group of rural folk artists who sold their work out of a cooperative. I was drawn to its bold colors and unique style. When I got home from that trip, I gifted it to my wife as a way to mark the occasion of our engagement, and to honor the role of faith in our relationship. It's since been hung on the wall of every place we've lived.

The painting depicts an abstract version of the Christmas nativity, filled with all the requisite animals, characters, angels, and stars. The manger itself rests on a heart, with the gathered visitors facing the Christ child. It's apparent that the artist drew from surrounding images, for she painted Asian animals, plants, and people with Asian features. She painted what she knew.



One of the wonderful things about Christmas is the variety of expression in its celebration around the globe. There are as many different traditions as there are people! Whether it's Christollen bread from Germany or Tamales de Navidad from Brazil, Kransekaka from Norway or Swedish meatballs from Minnesota (not to mention the variety of music, gift-giving, church services, clothing, shopping, and cultural events), everyone celebrates these holy days within their own contexts and in their own style.

What's equally wonderful, however, is that despite these differences we all find our unity in Christ! The particulars of Christmas celebrations may change, but our devotion to the Incarnate One remains the same. Our globally shared faith is unified by God's love for us, a love so profound that it is beyond our comprehension. In this love, Jesus came to help us fulfill the great commission - that we are to go out into the world to make disciples of all nations. Indeed, we are a global church, the Body of Christ in the world.

Since we are still in the 12-day season of Christmas, let us remember that we are a part of something bigger than ourselves. We are part of a global movement of faith that has been growing and diversifying for over 2000 years! Through the Holy Spirit, this faith continues to find new ways of expression. Let us give thanks to God for this diversity of faith. And may we keep our global brothers and sisters in our prayers as we celebrate Christmas together.

In Jesus,

Pastor Christoph