

Press release

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Christmas & Cribs

This year's traditional exhibition of cribs focuses on the setting surrounding the Holy Family. The crib scenes show the baby Jesus in grottos and caves, ruins, stables, houses and even a cathedral.

A nativity scene has the Holy Family at its centre. Who and what surrounds them has strong symbolic significance – as does the accommodation found for the baby Jesus. The Bible does not associate the birth of Jesus with a specific place, it merely refers to Mary laying the newborn Jesus down in a manger, “because there was no room for them in the inn”. This scope for interpretation has inspired artists and crib builders to create all kinds of different settings for the Christmas story over the centuries.

The crib exhibition focuses on the diversity of settings and buildings surrounding the Holy Family: grottos and caves, ruins, different types of stables, houses, churches and even a winter forest. Each crib tells its own story of cultural influences and craft traditions of the time as well as the birth of Jesus. Works from Europe, South America, Africa and Asia show us how the Christian faith was brought to life using local materials, symbols and artistic forms of expression. A crib from Peru dating from between 1960 and 1980 is a particularly salient example, showing the birth of Jesus in a stone cave. A spiritual healer can be seen on the cave roof invoking the spirits. In other words, the indigenous and Christian faiths exist side by side and are not mutually exclusive.

The traditional crib exhibition at the National Museum Zurich presents 18 cribs from all over the world and offers a varied accompanying programme for the whole family.

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