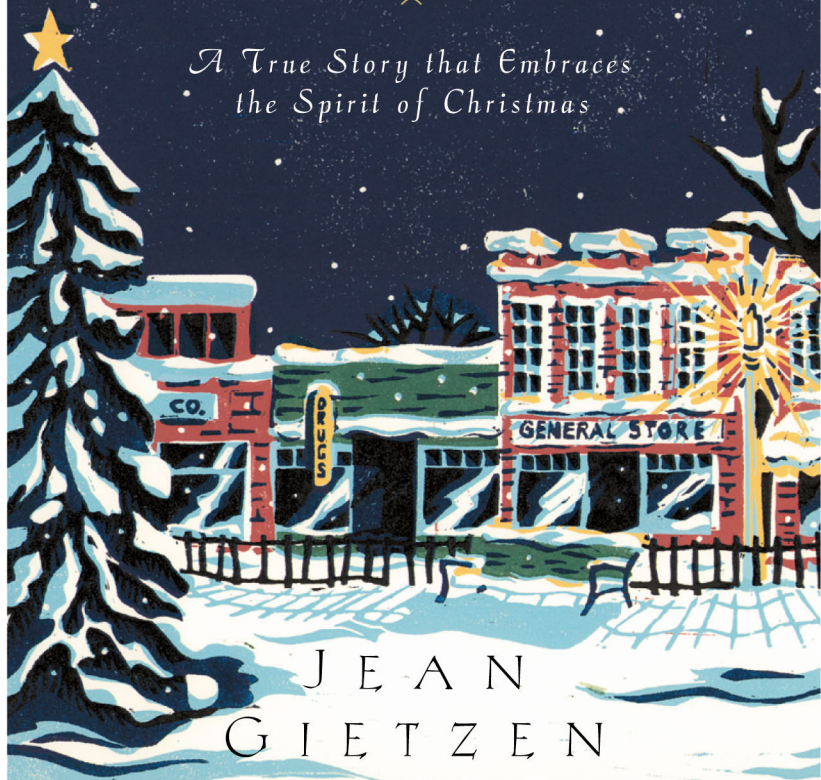


If You're Missing
BABY JESUS



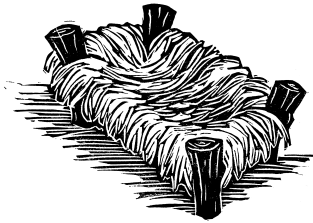
*A True Story that Embraces
the Spirit of Christmas*



J E A N
G I E T Z E N

If You're Missing
BABY JESUS

*A True Story That Embraces
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J E A N G I E T Z E N
ILLUSTRATIONS BY VICKIE SHUCK



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IN THE DEPTHS of a bitterly cold December, my mother decided it simply wouldn't do to go through the holidays without a nativity set.

It was 1943, in a small town in North Dakota. My father worked for an oil company during my growing-up years, and we'd moved around to several different parts of the state with his job. At some point between one move and another, we lost our family's little manger scene.

Happily, Mother found another at our local five and dime for only \$3.99. When my brother and I helped her unpack the set, however, we found two figurines of the baby Jesus.

Mother frowned. "Someone must have packed this wrong," she said, counting out the pieces. "We have one

Joseph, one Mary, three wise men, three shepherds, two lambs, a donkey, a cow, an angel—and two babies. Oh, dear! I suppose some set down at the store is missing a baby Jesus.”

“Hey, that’s great, Mom,” my brother said with a laugh. “Now we have twins!”

Mother wouldn’t have a bit of it. “You two run right back down to the store and tell the manager that we have an extra Jesus.”

“Ah, Mom.”

“Go on with you now. Tell him to put a sign on the remaining boxes saying that if a set is missing a baby Jesus, call 7162.”

She smiled. “I’ll give you each a penny for some candy. And don’t forget your mufflers. It’s freezing cold out there.”

The manager copied down my mother’s message, and sure enough, the next time we were in the store we saw his cardboard sign:

If you’re missing Baby Jesus, call 7162.

All week long we waited for the call to come. Surely, we thought, someone was missing that important figurine.





Dill Pickles
2/5¢

IF YOU'RE
MISSING
BABY JESUS,
CALL 7162

SOAP

OUR
10 LBS





What was a nativity set without the main attraction? Each time the phone rang, my mother would say, “I’ll bet that’s about Jesus.”

But it never was.

With increasing exasperation, my father tried to explain that the figurine could be missing from a set anywhere—Minot, Fargo, or even Walla Walla, Washington, for that matter. After all, packing errors occurred all the time. He suggested we just put the extra Jesus back in the box and forget about it.

“Back in the box!” I wailed. “What a terrible thing to do to the baby Jesus. And at Christmastime, too.”

“Someone will surely call,” my mother reasoned. “We’ll just keep the babies together in the manger until we find the owner.”

That made my brother and me happy. It was special to look into that little manger and see two Christ children, side by side, gazing up into the adoring eyes of Mary. And was that a surprised look on Joseph’s face?

But the days went by, and no one called. When we still hadn’t heard from anyone by five o’clock on