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# Nativity scene display representative of artistic church

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Lance Mihm | *The Lima News* **The 125-year-old Nativity scene at St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in Glandorf.**

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GLANDORF — It has been through fires, a church leader who didn't understand its significance, and other general repairs from age.

However, after 125 years, the wood-carved Nativity scene at St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in Glandorf still stands as a representation of the small community.

The scene from the first Christmas is not the only significant piece of art in the church. The Rev. Francis Nigsch — who succeeded the Rev. Bernard Dickmann, who solicited the funds to build the current church — had an eye for art, and today's parishioners are still enjoying the results.

The crib set was carved by wood carvers Walpouer and Mahlnekt from Sankt Ulrich, Austria, which is now present day Italy. One difference that

some viewers may notice is the tint of German influence on some of the characters. The Three Kings in the Nativity are shown to have traveled from the corners of the known world.

“There is an elephant, a horse and a camel,” said parish historian Mike Leach. “The elephant represents Asia. The horse represents Europe. The camel represents Africa. These were the three known continents at the time.”

The scene was purchased by Nigsch in 1890 and a theatrical company in Chicago supplied the drop cloth. As late as the 1930s, the Sisters of the Precious Blood fashioned additional clothes for the scene. The display graced the stage of the church until the 1960s, when the Nativity scene was placed in storage. By 1968, a portion of the scene was again displayed.

A fire started by local youth caused damage to the scene and the church in 1992, which resulted in restoration work on the figures. Care was taken to keep original colors, and the faces were left untouched. The work costs \$10,000. This seemed like large amount, however total repairs for the whole church were in excess of \$1 million.

The scene is extremely fragile and requires delicate handling, Leach said. The scene was carved from balsam and pine wood, then covered with a thin layer of gesso. It was then painted and gilded.

“Today, we gaze upon the scene of our Lord's birth and our hearts are filled with gratitude to God the Father for having sent his son and to Jesus for his saying “yes” to the Father and allowing himself to come to Earth in a lowly stable to bring salvation to the world,” Leach said.

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