

Manger Madness

Long Beach Alliance Church • December 8, 2013 • Pastor Chris Lankford

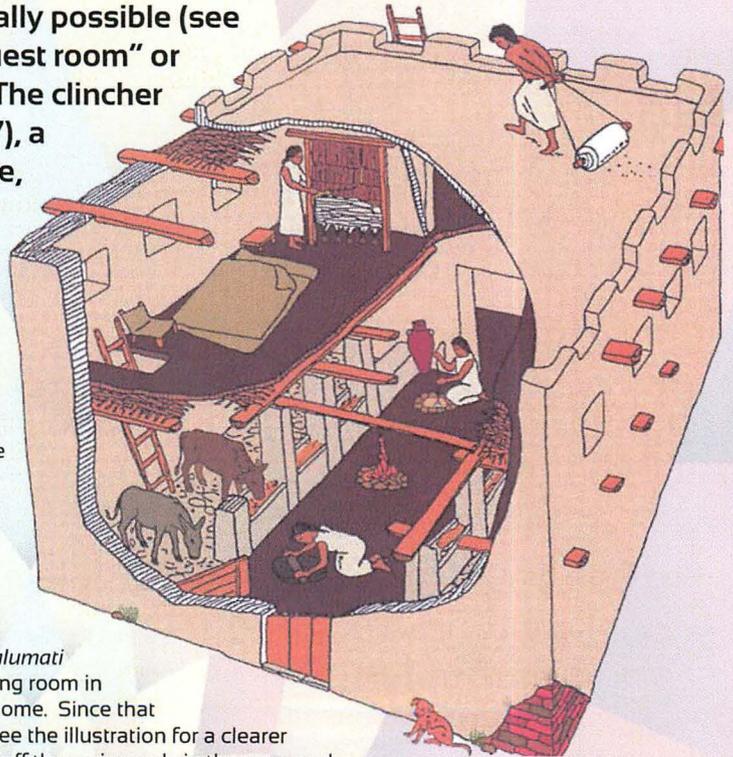
Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

~Isaiah 7:14 (ESV)

1) The Homecoming Of A Ben-Beth-Lechem

- A) Jesus Christ's miraculous birth is beautifully recorded in Luke 2:1-20. Jesus' arrival reveals the prophetic mystery of Immanuel. Jesus is 'God with Us' (Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23).
- B) The virgin birth of Christ in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2, cf. Matthew 2:1, John 7:42) fulfilled prophecies God had made to the Jews (Genesis 3:15, 12:1-3, 17:1-8), but will be "for all the people" (Luke 2:10). Jesus fulfills God's promises and provides life to all people everywhere!
- C) The census decree from Caesar Augustus (see note) draws Joseph to his birthplace with his pregnant fiancé, Mary (2:1-5). Joseph and Mary travel South (elevating) from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the famed birthplace of King David (1 Samuel 17:12).
- D) Joseph returns to Bethlehem because he is a royal descendent of King David (2:4). Joseph's homecoming with a pregnant Mary would have been both celebrated and embraced because of his royal heritage as a "son of Bethlehem."
- E) The purpose of the census was to make an assessment for taxes (Israel was under the authority of Roman rulership), and for Roman citizens, to assure registration for military service (which did not include the Jews). The Romans allowed for local customs (e.g., returning to one's ancestral birthplace) in fulfilling the requirements of the census (2:3).
- F) During the time after Joseph and Mary arrive in Bethlehem, Mary's pregnancy comes to full-term, and she delivers baby Jesus (2:6). While the text does not imply any urgency as to the timing of Mary's delivery, it has an unadorned beauty and simplicity (2:7, cf. Ezekiel 16:4).
- A significant historical issue is found in Luke 2:1-7. The inclusion of a census taken during the governorship of Quirinius in Syria is widely debated. The historical record shows no evidence of a census ever being conducted during the time of Caesar Augustus. In fact, the only census recorded during Quirinius' reign was in A.D. 6. This census is well documented because it caused widespread revolt. Further, a Roman census during Jesus' time would not require Joseph to go to Bethlehem, as Roman census' never required this kind of "hometown travel." Records show that Quirinius was not a governor in Syria during the time when Jesus was born. Answers for these types of objections are important, but would be rather lengthy to explore in this footnote. Thankfully, Baker Publishing has extended permission to print an excursus (a deeper discussion of a controversial or popular aspect of a text which extends beyond normative textual notations) by Darrell L. Bock, "The Census of Quirinius" from their New Testament Commentary series. Copies of this selection are available in the lobby, please take a copy and dive into some deeper understanding and study about this interesting issue. In his excursus, Dr. Bock notes, "it is clear that the relegation of Luke 2:2 to the category of historical error is premature and erroneous." While this conclusion may seem obvious to the casual reader, the route to this conclusion is fraught with numerous pitfalls and intellectual challenges. In a world which so much desires deeper answers to deeper questions, exploring this issue is increasingly essential. Enjoy!

- G) While the reference to "inn" (2:7) is lexically possible (see note), it is much more sensible that a "guest room" or "living room" is in mind (cf., Luke 22:11). The clincher is the mention of a nearby "manger" (2:7), a common feature of the homes at the time, but not of an "inn," or "public shelter." The illustration captures the typical home, complete with feeding troughs located in the lower area of the home for family livestock.



The passage tells us that Joseph and Mary were there because there was no room at the "inn" (*katalumati*, public shelter). The use of the word *katalumati* suggests that a formal inn is not in view here though, but rather (as in Luke 22:11), a guest room in a home (a legitimate translation within the lexical scope of the word and the contextual setting). Supporting this is Luke 10:34, which uses the more specific term of *pandocheion* to describe a formal public shelter, or inn. The traditional Christmas stories of an inn and hostile innkeeper, authored and made popular hundreds of years after Christ, do not reflect the language of Luke's text. Rather, *katalumati* seems to refer to either some type of reception room or guest/dining room in a private home or an area of general shelter attached to a private home. Since that location was full, the stable (shelter for the animals) was utilized. See the illustration for a clearer "picture." It is also notable that Bethlehem was a very small village off the main roads in the area, and lacked overnight travelers. In addition, Bethlehem was in close proximity to Jerusalem, making it a very unlikely location for a public inn. Rather, the private family home with an attached stable is the most historically accurate picture of the first Christmas. Summarized from numerous sources, and am forever indebted to Associate Professor of Greek at Talbot School of Theology, Dr. Ben Shin, who invited me to explore these matters during my time as his student -- his passion continues to inspire and propel my study of God's Word.

- F) Jesus came into the world in the most humble of circumstances, driven by the decree of a distant ruler, and born to two teenagers, traveling together because of the scandal which had become of their relationship, and no doubt, were very scared at being away from home.

2) The Worst Marketing Campaign In History

- A) By modern standards, the "birth announcement" to shepherds (Luke 2:8-14) was a marketing disaster! While having good aspects (very flashy, lots of music, talented vocalists, keeps your attention, finishes really big), market penetration was limited (small target audience, low income, uneducated, hygenically challenged)!
- B) The shepherds listen and respond to the news about Jesus Christ, finding the baby wrapped in "cloths," lying in a manger (2:12). This strange sight made for an easier discovery for the shepherds.
- C) The whole story is highlighted by, "Glory to God in the highest..." The scene on the Bethlehem hillside is over-consistent with the view from Heaven! This news of Jesus' birth traveled fast (2:17-18), but the fullness of what is happening is not understood at this time, even by Jesus' own mother, Mary (2:19). Like all new birth, the treasure of Jesus will not be fully understood until maturity.



A stylized illustration of a nativity scene at night. A bright yellow star with a long tail shines in a dark blue sky filled with smaller white stars. Below, a town with domes and minarets is visible, with a small thatched-roof house glowing from within. In the foreground, silhouettes of camels, a person, and sheep are shown against a dark landscape with palm trees.

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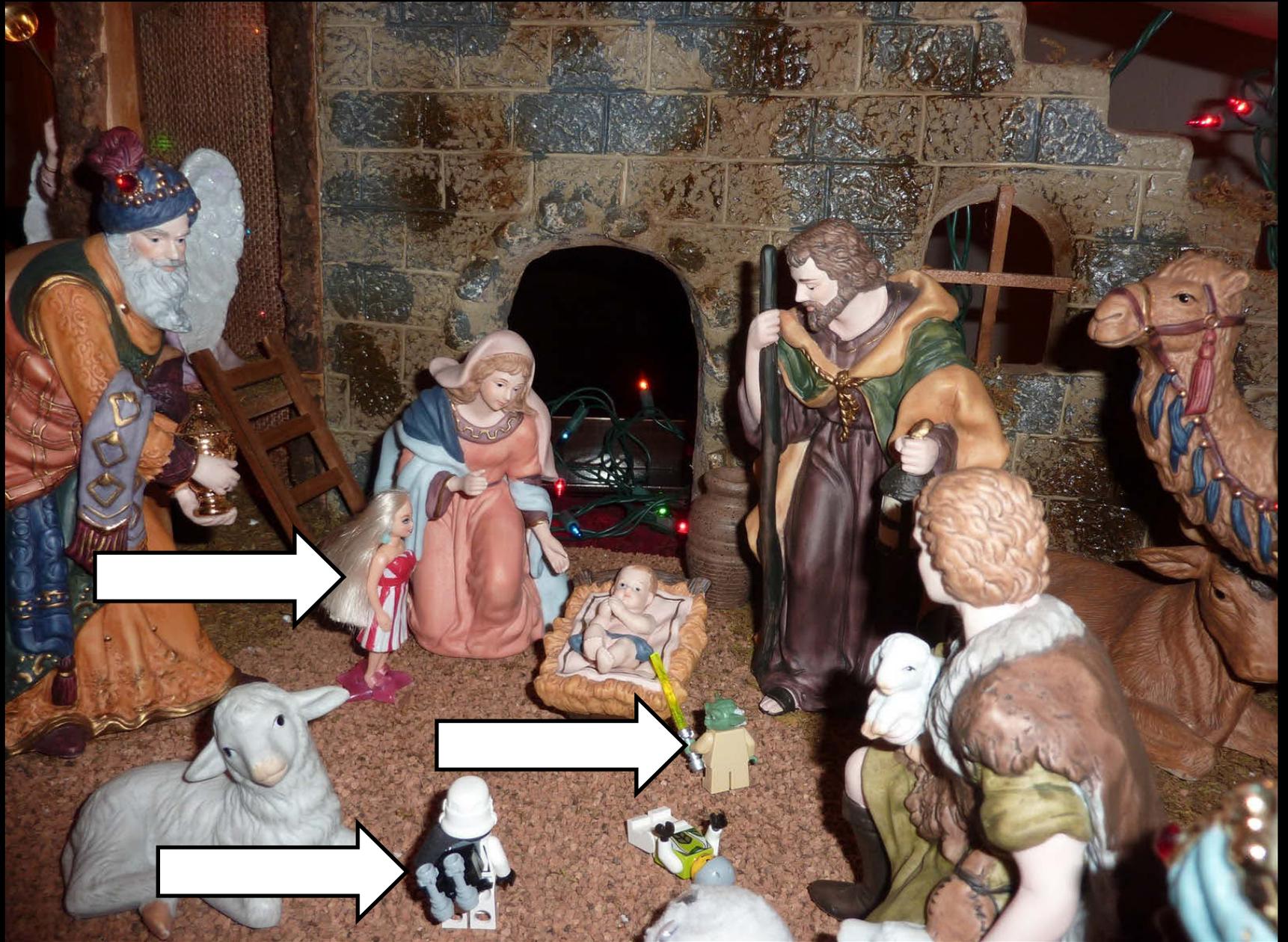




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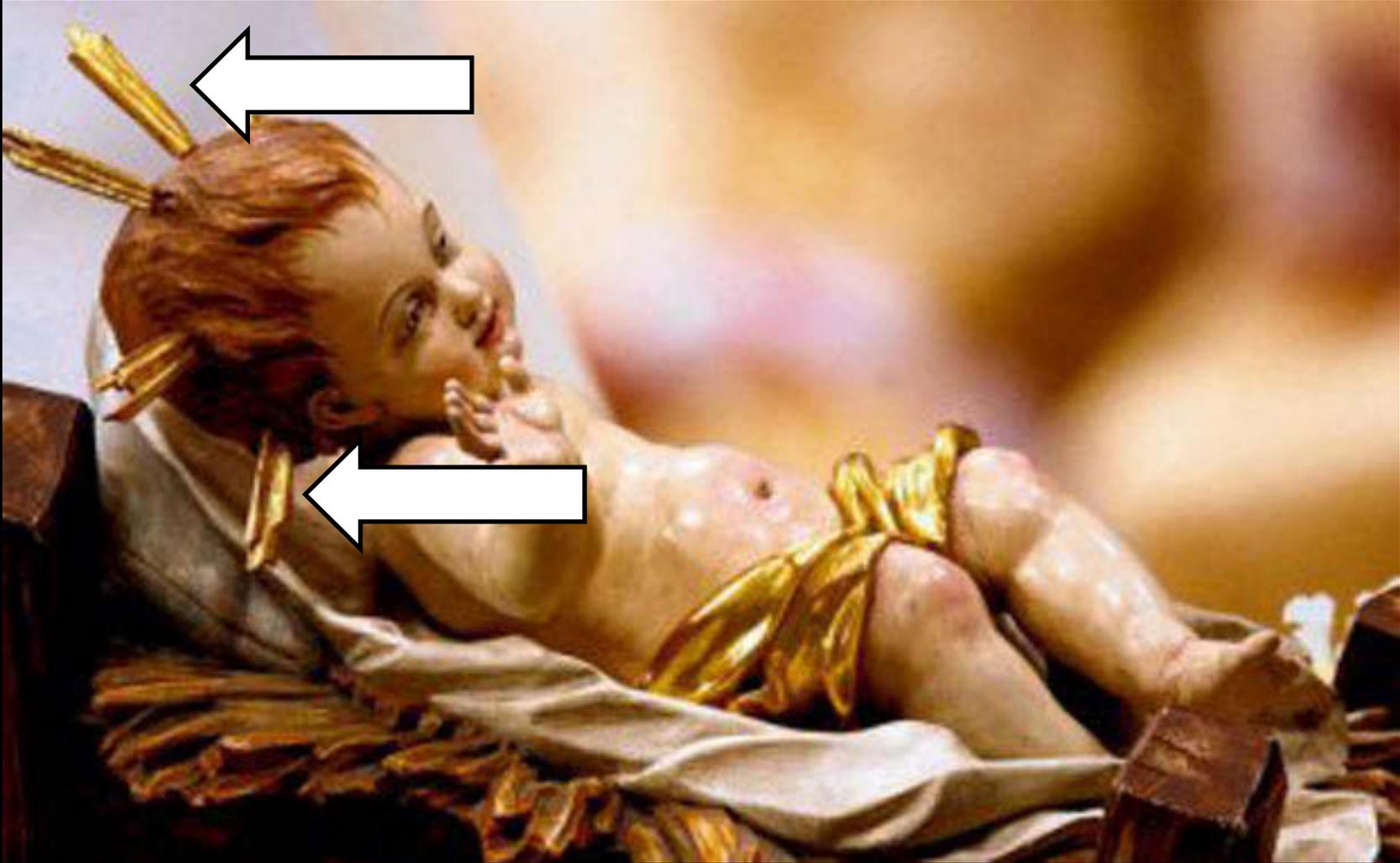




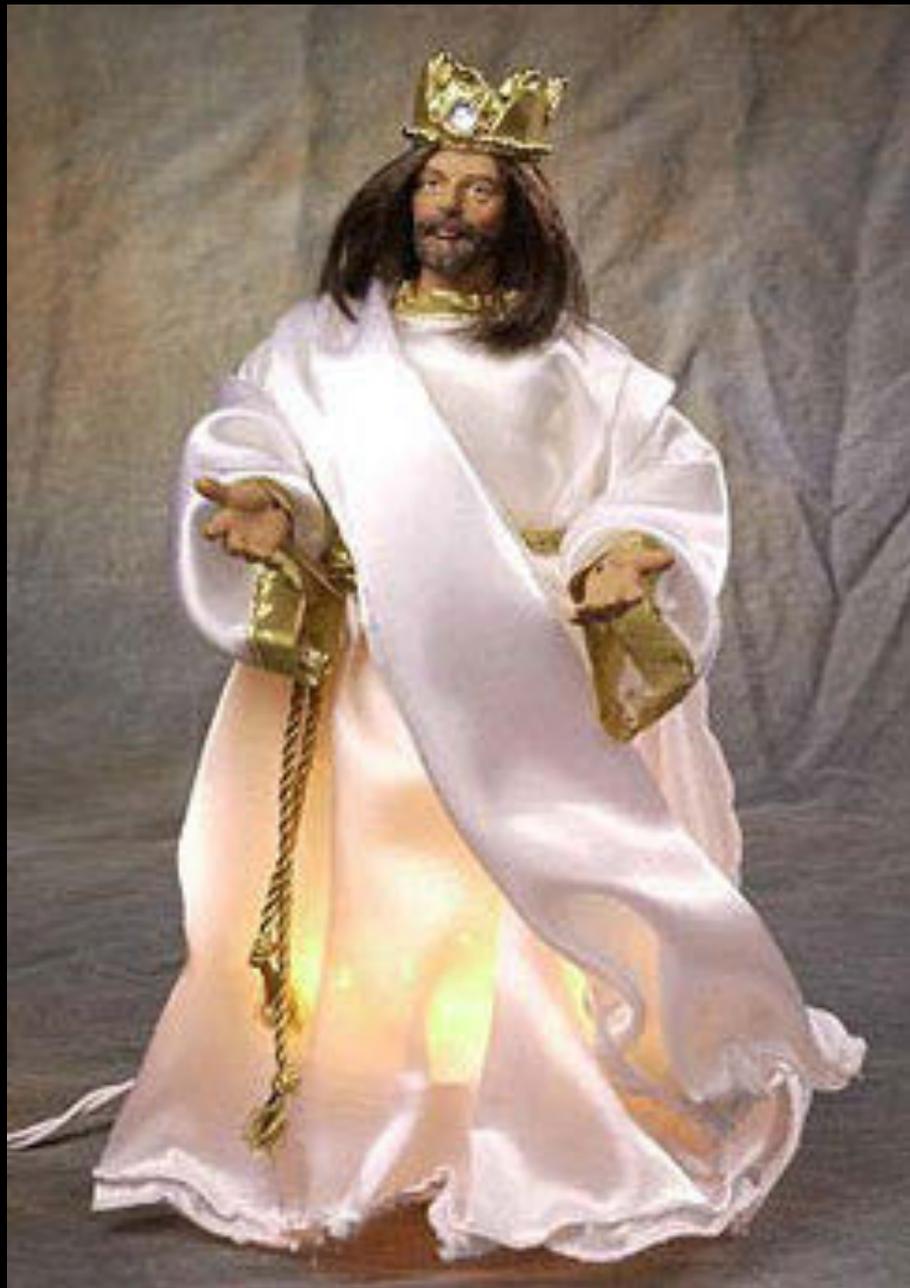




























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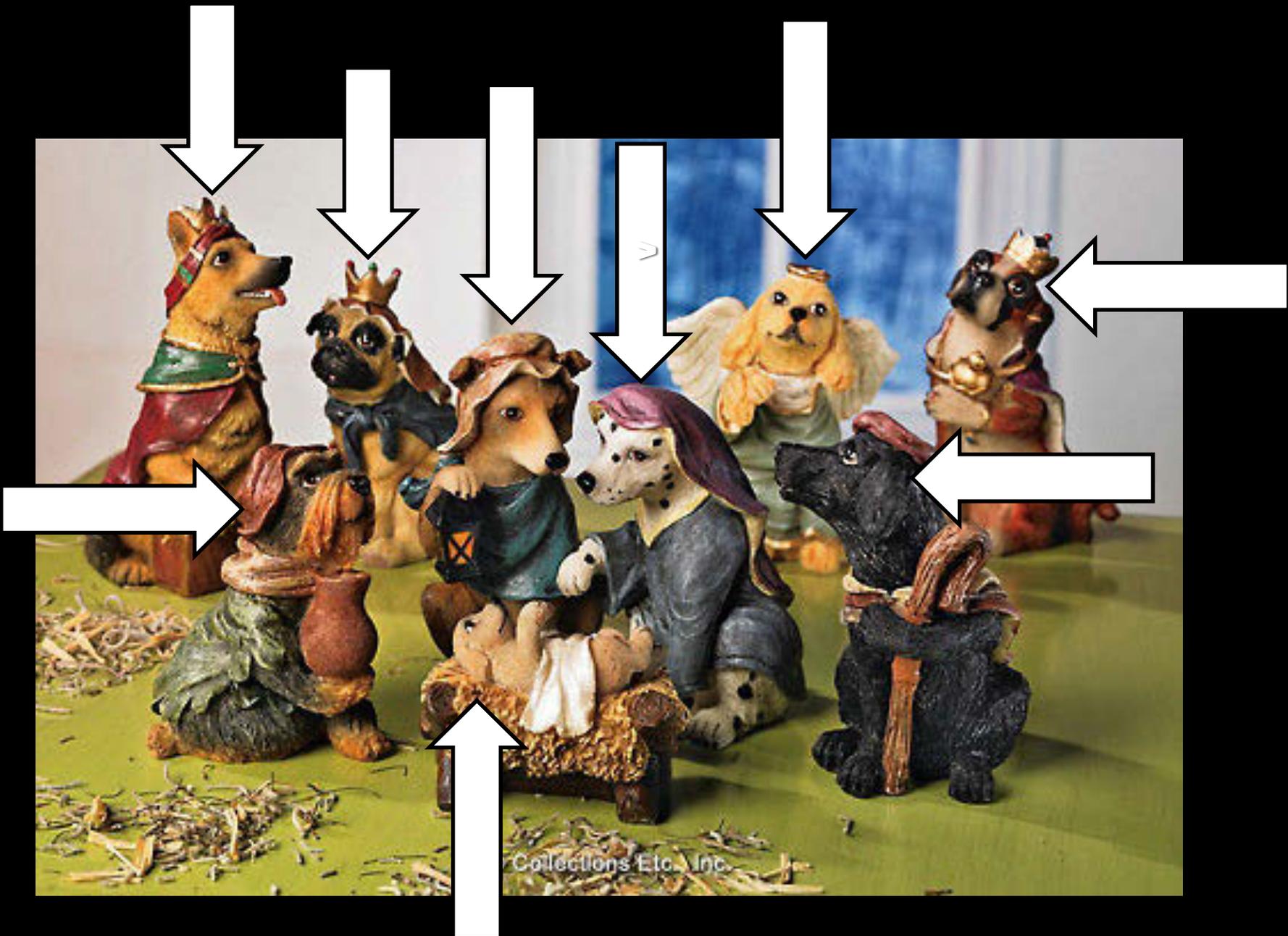
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