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Away from the manger: Thieves steal baby Jesus, sheep from St. Mary's nativity scene

Photos



Debra Filcman, Staff photo

Thieves stole the baby Jesus and a sheep from the manger at St. Mary of the Assumption, a Catholic church in Brookline Village.



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By Debra Filcman, Staff writer
GHS

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Brookline — Thieves and vandals have taken aim at a Brookline Village church this holiday season, stealing baby Jesus and a sheep from its manger, and trashing planters outside the church doors.

The rash of robberies began about two weeks before Christmas when a sheep was noticed missing from the nativity scene on St. Mary's of the Assumption's lawn on Dec. 14.

When the Rev. Jack Ahern, pastor of St. Mary's, left on the evening of Dec. 13, all was right at the Linden Street church, but by the next morning, the manger was missing a sheep.

The low stone wall that surrounds that elevated lawn was not enough to dissuade the robbers. "People just think it's a kids' prank," said Ahern, who reported the missing sheep to Brookline Police on Dec. 14. "An ugly prank."

Selectwoman Nancy Daly, a longtime parishioner, said the incident doesn't diminish her enjoyment of Christmas, but called the theft "mean-spirited."

"I think the meaning of Christmas is inside the church, but I can understand that this really upsets people," Daly said.

Just two weeks later, thieves struck again and stole the baby Jesus. Parishioners and staff found him missing on Dec. 29 and reported to the police.

Police suggest the same culprit could be responsible for both manger nabbings. "I would assume that it's one in the same kid or kids who did this," Police Capt. John O'Leary said. "It could just be a prank."

O'Leary noted a statewide spate of stolen baby Jesus figures at Christmastime this year, including one in West Roxbury.

"I think they see this on TV, it makes a splash in the news and they think 'Let's do that,' Daly said of the thieves. "It's really unfortunate."

Ahern said the same sheep and cherubic Christ sat cozily in the manger every Christmas since he arrived at St. Mary's 13 years ago.

"The kids are just so disappointed," Ahern said. "They usually make a big deal of it when they come out."

"Some of the kids thought maybe he was taken because it was too cold out," Ahern added with a disappointed laugh.

Parishioner Hank Hryniewicz, who first heard about the theft in an announcement at Mass, said if it was a prank, it was a "lousy" one at that.

"I think it's pretty sad that someone would stoop to such a level," Hryniewicz said. "Not that I can justify any kind of vandalism, but that's a pretty low act."

Meanwhile, two large planters outside the church doors were found "pulverized" on New Year's Day, Ahern said. Parishioners who left St. Mary's at 11:30 p.m. on New Year's Eve noticed that the planters were intact then. Like the thefts, the vandalism was reported to police.

O'Leary, who said following national headlines of stolen baby Jesus figures, police at first believed it to be a copycat incident — but now wonder why the planters were smashed.

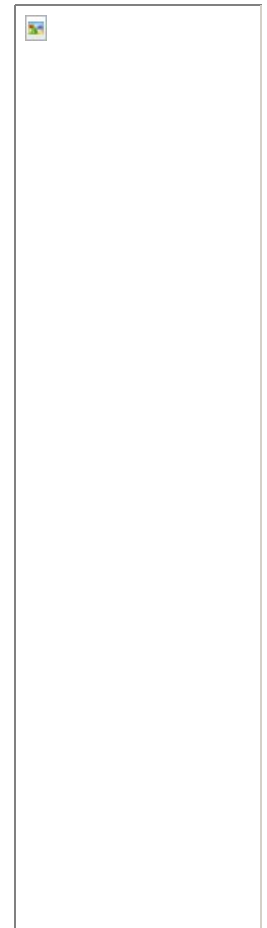
It's also not clear, O'Leary said, why St. Mary's was targeted. He's not aware of any other churches that reported thefts of

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vandalism as of late, which leaves the church wondering what happened, and whether it will occur again.

“People are just sick about it,” Ahern said.

The two missing figures cost an estimated \$200-\$250 each, and the planters run \$500 each, according to Ahern.

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