

He can't be tied down

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [January 27, 1999](#) issue

Many of us columnists have files stuffed with Christmas items that came to our attention too late to be used during the season but are sure to be misplaced before the next year. But I have one such clipping that's actually perfectly suited to the post-Christmas season.

According to an Associated Press story, early last December a student borrowed a baby Jesus figurine from the town square nativity display in Belleville, Illinois, and took it to Applebee's Grill and Bar. "It was a case of having a couple of cocktails in a boring town," said the student. "We were driving around and it was like 'Hey, let's take baby Jesus out for a drink.'"

Applebee's hostess Haydee Gryzmala, who retains good taste in these days of bad manners, called the police, who arrested the prankster. The AP reporter learned from the Belleville Exchange Club, which sponsors the display, that "the other figurines in the nativity scene are wired down, but that they can't really tie down the baby Jesus."

Of course they could--with ingenuity, strong wire, determination and extra twisting and wrapping. Lots of people do try to keep Jesus tied down. And they try to keep him tied down as a baby.

The infant Jesus is a sentimental favorite at Christmastime. Everyone but W. C. Fields loves babies. The helplessness of the child is a key theme in incarnational theology. The God beyond the gods is among us in weakness. People bow before this mystery. But many turn their backs when the time comes to consider Jesus as a grown-up.

We don't have to wait until Good Friday to get some effects of his grown-uppedness. But there is that death, toward which the Gospels see him marching and which an epistle describes as "the joy that was set before him," enduring the cross.

There they lifted him up. The Belleville Exchange Club person was right: "They can't really tie down the baby Jesus."