

Morning Star Telegram

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Gift idea comes from Holy Land

Looking for the perfect Christmas gift? A gift that not only has meaning for the person who receives it, but also captures the true meaning of Christmas?

The Nativity Stones Collection — a variety of gold and silver cross pendant necklaces and ornaments each designed to hold a small stone from the Cave of the Nativity — provides such a gift. They originate from the Cave of the Nativity — the site Christians have officially recognized and celebrated as the birthplace of Jesus Christ since 325 A.D.

The Christmas tree ornament from the Nativity Stones Collection embodies the true meaning of Christmas with the Star of Bethlehem and a Nativity Stone embedded in the center. This year's date is also inscribed on the ornament. Each year, the ornament will continue to be part of the Nativity Stones Collection for as long as the stones last. The cost of the

ornament, finished with 22K gold, is \$40.

Cross-pendant necklaces from the collection are available in sterling silver, 14K solid gold and 22K gold finish and in two sizes: classic (1½ inches high) and petite (1¼ inches high). Each cross comes with a numbered certificate of authenticity and a video that tells the story of the Nativity Stones. Prices for the crosses range from \$60 for a petite cross in 22K gold finish to \$295 for a classic cross in 14K gold. The 1996-97 collection also offers a rosary, angel pin and Madonna and child.

Nativity Stones were brought to the United States in 1964 through the efforts of Stanley Slotkin, a Los Angeles businessman, philanthropist and amateur archaeologist. While visiting the Cave of the Nativity during its only excavation, Slotkin expressed an interest in the stones that were being removed. Mayor Elias Bandak of

Bethlehem, Slotkin's host, had no plans for the stones and offered them to him. Mayor Bandak also oversaw the shipment of the stones to the U. S.

For years, Slotkin gave the stones to charitable foundations including the American Heart Association, Cystic Fibrosis Foundation and American Lung Association to be used at their discretion. Often the stones were auctioned for fundraising purposes. He also visited the sick and terminally ill in hospitals all over the United States to give them stones to provide comfort and a way to reinforce their faith in Christ.

It was not until the 1990s that Slotkin and his daughter decided to explore ways to make the stones available to all who wanted them. The result of that exploration is the Nativity Stones Collection of crosses, ornaments and pins, created by Paul Dimitriu, an internationally renowned jewelry designer.

Although few have questioned the stones' authenticity, Slotkin has gone to great lengths to prove their historic heritage. Not only did he receive letters confirming the shipment of the stones from Mayor Bandak of Bethlehem and the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, he also commissioned two geological surveys that showed the stones are consistent with the limestone that provides the foundation for the Cave of the Nativity.

A percentage of the proceeds from the sale of Nativity Stones is sent to Bethlehem each year for the upkeep and maintenance of the cave and the Basilica that stands above the Cave of the Nativity.

For a free catalogue and more information, write to Nativity Stones at P.O. Box 4525, Dept. 800, Pacoima, CA 91333-4525. All orders received by Dec. 15 will be assured a Christmas delivery.