

Pope Francis' Prayer Intention for December

The Future of the Very Young

That every country take the measures necessary to prioritize the future of the very young, especially those who are suffering.



How the Christmas Creche Devotion Began

Submitted by Mattie Ward, OFS, with lots of help from St. Bonaventure and Jack Wintz, OFM.

The year – 1223. The place – a cave in Greccio, Italy.

St. Francis had been staying at a hermitage at Fonte Columbo in Riete, Italy. Christmas was 15 days away. He wanted to celebrate the feast, but how? He had recalled his visit to Bethlehem in the Holy Land and thought, why not set up a kind of replica of the Nativity? He had a good friend, Giovanni (John) Vellita, whom he had met while preaching in the area. John was a military man, lord of Greccio, which was just two miles away from the hermitage. St. Francis sent word to his friend that he wanted to do

something that *would recall the memory of that Child who was born in Bethlehem, to see with bodily eyes the inconveniences of his infancy, how he lay in the manger, and how the ox and ass stood by.*



St. Francis wanted to realize and to help people realize exactly what God had done for his people, and “how poor he chose to be for our sakes.” St. Francis himself had chosen the bitter poverty of being on the margin of society, with no resources or security. He saw the Son of God placing himself, as it were, on the margin of divinity. He saw a truly human Jesus, not a divine being hiding behind a deceptive physical facade. The humility of the

Incarnation and of the Cross was his constant preoccupation. He wanted to think of nothing else—Bethlehem and Calvary. It is also said that he was inspired to recreate the original nativity scene to overcome the rampant greed and materialism prevalent at that time in Italy.

John immediately responded to his friend's request. An empty manger (the feeding trough of farm animals which served as Jesus' crib) was set up inside a cave, including a live ox and donkey beside the manger just as it was believed to have happened on that first Christmas night. People prepared torches and candles to light up the night.

This simple celebration was not the first time the birth of Jesus was celebrated in a dramatic way, but St. Francis brought to the scene a vision that saw more than the pleasant tableau we now have. He wanted to show the hardships Jesus suffered already as an infant. To paraphrase St. Paul, St. Francis saw the emptying of the glory of the Son of God, born of a gentle mother but still thrown upon a stony and resisting world. Before St. Francis' time, as early as the fifth century, the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome had a small oratory built like the cave of Bethlehem. The basilica's second title was "St. Mary at the Crib." The pope's first Mass of Christmas was offered there. Christmas plays, imitating those of Easter, probably grew up in the 11th century. And in the century before St. Francis lived, ecclesiastics dressed up as the midwives, Magi, shepherds and other persons of the Christmas story, as well as live animals, are already recorded in descriptions of the liturgical drama, the *Spectacula Theatralia*, as participants in Christmas celebration.

After St. Francis' death in 1226, the custom of having the crib at Christmas spread widely through Europe. He would smile at our nice varnished cribs, though he would bless any home that has one. Most likely, he would prefer those set up outdoors with live animals. And if he were to stand by one and preach today, he might say something like this:

Look deeper than this pleasant scene. See your God become your food for eternity in a feeding place for animals. See the simple bands wound around the helpless baby, not the embroidered dress. See a man and woman wearing the clothes of the poor. See and smell the animals. Feel the cold and dirt of the cave, lighted only by a little fire. And adore your God, who took a human heart that could know the greatest love and the sharpest pain, arms that could embrace the sinners, the neurotics, the lepers, and hands that could touch cheeks running with tears, and be pierced with nails. Adore your poor and humble God.



**Holy Trinity celebrates
advent with a Jesse tree!**

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| 1 The Jesse Tree | Stump/tree/etc |
| 2 Creation | Earth/etc |
| 3 Fall/Sin | Apple w/ snake/etc |
| 4 Noah's Ark | Ark/Rainbow/Dove/etc |
| 5 Promise to Abraham | Stars/etc |
| 6 Offering of Isaac | Ram/etc |
| 7 Jacob's ladder | ladder/etc |
| 8 Joseph and the Coat | Coat/etc |
| 9 Moses and Passover | blood/doorpost/etc |
| 10 Moses and 10 commands | tablets/etc |
| 11 Joshua and Jerico | Jerico/Rahab/etc |
| 12 Ruth and Boaz | Wheat/etc |
| 13 Samuel anoints David | Heart/oil/etc |
| 14 King David | Crown/harp/etc |
| 15 Isaiah and the Prophecies | light/Sun/cross/etc |
| 16 Elijah and the Big Fire | Fire/etc |
| 17 Daniel and the Lions | Lion/etc |
| 18 Jonah and Whale | Whale |
| 19 Esther | Crown/jewels/etc |
| 20 Minor Prophets | seeds of hope, black |
| 21 John the Baptist | baptism/etc |
| 22 Mary and Joseph | angels/etc |
| 23 Bethlehem | skyline/etc |
| 24 Christ is born | baby/manger/etc |
| 25 Gods Big Announcement | star/angels/etc |
| 26 Three Wise Men | wise men/gifts/etc |