

Christmas Eve
December 24, 2020

The Gloria:

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will. We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King, O God, almighty Father.
Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son, Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world, receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us.
For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Liturgy of the Word

First Reading **Isaiah 9:1-6**

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone.
You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing, as they rejoice before you as at the harvest, as people make merry when dividing spoils. For the yoke that burdened them, the pole on their shoulder, and the rod of their taskmaster you have smashed, as on the day of Midian.
For every boot that tramped in battle, every cloak rolled in blood, will be burned as fuel for flames. For a child is born to us, a son is given us; upon his shoulder dominion rests.
They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace.
His dominion is vast and forever peaceful, from David's throne, and over his kingdom, which he confirms and sustains by judgment and justice, both now and forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this!
The Word of the Lord. . . . Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm **Psalm 96**

R. Today is born our Savior, Christ the Lord.

Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all you lands. Sing to the LORD; bless his name. R.

Announce his salvation, day after day. Tell his glory among the nations; among all peoples, his wondrous deeds. R.

Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice;
let the sea and what fills it resound;
let the plains be joyful and all that is in them!
Then shall all the trees of the forest exult. R.

They shall exult before the LORD, for he comes;
for he comes to rule the earth. He shall rule the world with justice and the peoples with his constancy. R.

Second Reading: **Tim. 2: 11-14**

Beloved:

The grace of God has appeared, saving all and training us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age, as we await the blessed hope, the appearance of the glory of our great God and savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to deliver us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for himself a people as his own, eager to do what is good.

The Word of the Lord. . Thanks be to God!

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

I proclaim to you good news of great joy:
today a Savior is born for us,
Christ the Lord.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel: **Luke 2: 1-14**

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town. And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.



Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear.
The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.
For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Christ and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."
And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying:
"Glory to God in the highest
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."
The Gospel of the Lord. . . Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

The Story of Saint Francis of Assisi and the Christmas Crib

The beautiful custom of setting up mangers to commemorate the birth of the Infant Jesus was started by St. Francis of Assisi.

It was the year 1223. St. Francis went to Rome to obtain from Pope Honorius III authorisation to celebrate Christmas in a totally new way. St. Francis chose a forest in the vicinity of the village of Greccio, in the region of Umbria, not too far from Rome, where a good friend of his lived, the noble Giovanni Velita.



About 15 days before Christmas, St. Francis said to him: 'If you want to celebrate the feast of the Divine birth in Greccio make haste to prepare what I indicate to you.

'So that we can properly remember the circumstances in which the Divine Child was born and all the inconveniences he endured as he lay in the manger on straw between an ox and a ass, I would like to re-create this in a palpable way, as if I had seen it with my own eyes.'

Many religious and the residents of Greccio and the surrounding area were all invited for this special commemoration. Just before midnight, the Franciscan friars went in procession to the spot chanting the antiphons of Advent. They were accompanied by the villagers who carried flaming torches.



The wind blew strongly and the light of the torches projected their flickering shadows on the dense forest. However, in the clearance where the crib had been setup,

there reigned an ambience of sacrality and peace; Only the cold was a nuisance.

When the village bell of Greccio began to toll midnight, a priest began to celebrate Mass. The altar had been placed in front of the crib with the ox and ass on either side. A beautiful full-size statue of the Child Jesus rested on the straw.

As is well known, St. Francis never wanted to be ordained a priest out of humility. Because of this, as deacon, it was his duty to solemnly sing the Gospel of that Christmas mass.

After the reading of the Gospel, all waited attentively to hear the sermon that St. Francis himself gave on the grandeurs and mercies of the Saviour of the human race, who that night was made flesh and dwelt among us.

St. Francis spoke words with a supernatural sweetness about the poverty in which the God-man was born and about the insignificant city of Bethlehem. It is difficult to imagine the fiery love that the sweet, clear, and sonorous voice of St. Francis produced in the hearts of those privileged to hear him.

At the end of his sermon, St. Francis bent over to kiss the statue of the Divine Child.

At this moment a miracle took place that only he and Giovanni Velita saw. The statue became alive. It was as if it had been woken from a profound sleep with St. Francis's kiss, and then the Child Jesus smiled at St. Francis.



At the consecration, when the bread and wine truly become the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, St. Francis was able to contemplate the Messiah in two ways: in the form of the Holy Eucharist and laying in the manger.

At the end of the solemn midnight mass, and after having incensed the manger, the friars returned to Greccio and the villagers to their homes. Everyone was full of supernatural joy.

The veracity of this event can be certified by the sanctity of the one who experienced it, as well as by the miracles that happened afterwards. The straw from the manger was carefully kept by the people and was an efficacious remedy to miraculously cure sick animals and an antidote against many other diseases.

This devout and hitherto unknown institution of the manger was enthusiastically received by the faithful. St. Clare of Assisi, disciple of the saint, established it in her convents. Every year she setup the manger herself.

The Franciscan friars also spread this custom far and wide. Whether composed of figurines artistically carved from clay, porcelain, or wood, the crib became the very symbol of Christmas.



From the majestic cathedral to the simplest rural chapel, from the palace or mansion to the humblest abode, the Catholics of the whole world, since that time, have had the pious custom of setting up a manger. In this way they repeat the custom that Providence inspired from the seraphic St. Francis of Assisi in the remote year of 1223.