

THE HOLY FAMILY

shepherds become the first to see the most essential thing of all: the gift of salvation. It is the humble and the poor who greet the event of the Incarnation. The shepherds respond to God who comes to meet us in the Infant Jesus by setting out to meet Him with love, gratitude and awe”.

The poor and the lowly: The presence of the poor and the lowly, is a reminder that “God became man for the sake of those who feel most in need of His love and who ask Him to draw near to them.” From the manger, “Jesus proclaims, in a meek yet powerful way, the need for sharing with the poor as the path to a more human and fraternal world in which no one is excluded or marginalized.”

Everyday holiness: “there are figures that have no apparent connection with the Gospel accounts, the shepherd to the blacksmith, from the baker to the musicians, from the women carrying jugs of water to the children at play: all this speaks of everyday holiness, the joy of doing ordinary things in an extraordinary way.”

Mary and Joseph: “Mary is a mother who contemplates her child and shows Him to every visitor. In her, we see the Mother of God who does not keep her Son only to herself, but invites everyone to obey His word and to put it into practice. Saint Joseph stands by her side, protecting the Child and His Mother. Joseph is the guardian, the just man, who entrusted himself always to God’s will.”

The Infant Jesus: But it is when we place the statue of the Infant Jesus in the manger, that the nativity scene comes alive. “It seems impossible, yet it is true: in Jesus, God was a child, and in this way He wished to reveal the greatness of His love: by smiling and opening His arms to all. The crèche allows us to see and touch this unique and unparalleled event that changed the course of history, but it also makes us reflect on how our life is part of God’s own life.”

The Three Kings: As the Feast of Epiphany approaches, we add the Three Kings to the Christmas crèche. Their presence reminds us of every Christian’s responsibility to spread the Gospel. The Magi teach us that people can come to Christ by a very long route, but returning home, they tell others of this amazing encounter with the Messiah, thus initiating the spread of the Gospel among the nations.”

Transmitting the faith: The memories of standing before the Christmas crèche when we were children should remind us “of our duty to share this same experience with our children and our grandchildren”, says Pope Francis. It does not matter how the nativity scene is arranged, “what matters is that it speaks to our lives.” The Christmas crèche is part of the precious yet demanding process of passing on the faith, concludes Pope Francis. “Beginning in childhood, and at every stage of our lives, it teaches us to contemplate Jesus, to experience God’s love for us, to feel and believe that God is with us and that we are with Him.”



SAINT NINIAN’S HIGH SCHOOL

Admirabile signum



A nativity scene in the Hermitage of Greccio Sanctuary

Please click the link below for short film with Pope Francis
<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2019-12/pope-francis-reflection-greccio-nativity-scene.html>

O Jesus through the most pure heart of Mary, I offer thee all my prayers, works, joys and sufferings of this day for all the intentions of Thy divine heart and particularly for the intentions of Our Holy Father, the Pope.

SAINT FRANCIS' CRÈCHE IN GRECCIO

Saint Francis of Assisi created the first nativity scene at the mountain village of Greccio in 1223 to commemorate the birth of Jesus. The grotto resembles the tiny cave of Bethlehem where the Virgin Mary gave birth to Jesus.

Frescoes from the 14th century adorn the cave's walls, depicting Mary breastfeeding the Christ Child and Saint Francis kneeling in adoration. On 25 December, friars and local people came together, bringing flowers and torches, writes the Pope. "When Francis arrived, he found a manger full of hay, an ox and a donkey." A priest celebrated the Eucharist over the manger, showing the bond between the Incarnation of the Son of God and the Eucharist. There the Pope signed his Apostolic Letter *Admirabile signum*, a reflection on the meaning of the nativity scene.

Pope Francis spoke to those gathered in the Shrine of the Holy Valley. "How many thoughts crowd the mind in this holy place. There is no need for words, because the scene expresses the wisdom we need in order to grasp what is essential. The crib reminds us to find moments of silence and prayer in the midst of our hectic lives. Silence, to contemplate the beauty of the face of the Child Jesus, the Son of God born in the poverty of a stable, prayer, to express our amazed "thank you" at this immense gift of love we have been given."

Pope Francis called the nativity scene a "simple and enchanting image that manifests the great mystery of our faith: God loves us to the point of sharing our humanity and our lives. He never leaves us alone. Let us be like the shepherds of Bethlehem, accept the invitation to go to the cave, to see and recognize the sign that God has given us. This will fill our hearts with joy and allow us to take that joy wherever there is sadness. We should look to the Child Jesus and identify ourselves with Mary who, with her husband Joseph, placed her Son in a manger because there was no room in a house. May His smile that lights up the night, dispel indifference, and open hearts to the joy of those who feel loved by our Heavenly Father".

The Latin title of the Letter refers to the "*enchanting image*" of the Christmas crèche, one that "never ceases to arouse amazement and wonder. The depiction of Jesus' birth is itself a simple and joyful proclamation of the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God".

A living Gospel: "The nativity scene is like a living Gospel rising up from the pages of sacred Scripture", Contemplating the Christmas story is like setting out on a spiritual journey, "drawn by the humility of the God who became man in order to encounter every man and woman." So great is His love for us, that He became one of us, so that we in turn might become one with Him."

A family tradition: To encourage the family tradition of preparing the nativity

THE GOSPEL ORIGIN OF THE CRÈCHE

scene, but also the custom of setting it up in the workplace, in schools, hospitals, prisons and town squares." Pope Francis hopes this custom will never be lost "and that, wherever it has fallen into disuse, it can be rediscovered and revived." He recalls the origin of the Christmas crèche as related in the Gospels. "Coming into this world, the Son of God was laid in the place where animals feed. Hay became the first bed of the One who would reveal Himself as 'the bread come down from heaven'. The nativity scene evokes a number of the mysteries of Jesus' life and brings them close to our own daily lives".

The start of the tradition: "With everyone gathered in joy around the cave, with no distance between the original event and those sharing in its mystery, the simplicity of that sign, Saint Francis carried out a great work of evangelization. His teaching continues to offer a simple yet authentic means of portraying the beauty of our faith."

A sign of God's tender love: The crèche shows God's tender love. From the time of its Franciscan origins, the scene has invited us to 'feel' and 'touch' the poverty that God's Son took upon Himself in the Incarnation". It asks us to meet Him and serve Him by showing mercy to those of our brothers & sisters in greatest need."

The meaning of the crèche elements: "A starry sky wrapped in the darkness and silence of night, we think of when we have experienced the darkness of night, even then, God does not abandon us. His closeness brings light where there is darkness and shows the way to those dwelling in the shadow of suffering."

The landscape: Landscapes often include ancient ruins or buildings, the visible sign of fallen humanity, of everything that inevitably falls into ruin, decays and disappoints. This scenic setting tells us that Jesus has come to heal and rebuild, to restore the world and our lives to their original splendour."

The shepherds: "Unlike so many other people, busy about many things, the



Nativity Cave in the Hermitage Shrine of Greccio erected by St Francis of Assisi.