



The year 2023 marks the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the first crib created by **St. Francis of Assisi**.

[St. Francis and the Gift of Greccio | Franciscan Media](#)

**Narrator:**

**The first nativity scene was created by Saint Francis of Assisi in a small grotto near an Italian village called Greccio.** He went to that grotto on Christmas day in the year 1223, in order to contemplate with his own eyes, the mystery that amazed him: the Incarnation of the immensity of heaven and earth in a fragile creature, in a child. To bring to memory the first Christmas, by enacting the babe that was born in Bethlehem.

### **SCENE I - Preparation of the manger**

**Francis:** *Brother Illuminato, can you please bring some hay that we may prepare a manger as a resting place, for the infant Child of God. (Br.Illuminato brings the hay and places it on the center of the mat).*

**Brother Juniper:** *Brother Francis, my kinsman has brought her baby with her, and offered him to be the baby Jesus.*

**Francis:** *Good! We will need a crib, or an unused clean trough with hay to place him in, so that that the animals do not get too close and startle him.*

**Brother Illuminato:** *There is an old crib in the other barn, I will go and prepare it with hay.*

**Francis:** *Good! I will need it by the grotto. I can already see some villagers making their way up this way, bringing their animals with them.*

*(Br. Illuminato prepares the crib with hay, and Brother Juniper places the infant in the crib)*

**Narrator**

Thomas of Celano, the first biographer of St. Francis, recounts: "The manger is prepared, the hay is carried in, and the ox and the ass are led to the spot. There simplicity is given a place of honor, poverty is exalted, humility is commended, and **out of Greccio is made a new Bethlehem**. The night is lit up like the day."

As the sun sets and all is in place, the holy man Francis kneels beside the crib, wherein lies the infant child. All is quiet, and as the sun sets, Francis prays that all gathered may make room in their hearts to welcome the infant Jesus, the Son of God.

**All sing:** **O come O Come Emmanuel**

**O Little Town of Bethlehem**

**Francis:** *For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Is.9:6)*



### Narrator

The man of God [St. Francis] stood before the manger, full of devotion and piety, bathed in tears and radiant with joy; the Holy Gospel was chanted by Francis, the Levite of Christ. Then he preached to the people around the nativity of the poor King; and being unable to utter His name for the tenderness of His love, He called Him the Babe of Bethlehem

**All sing:** Angels we have heard on High

### Narrator

At that first Christmas crèche at Greccio, St. Francis wanted to show everyone there how close God was to them, how humble God is, how like a child is God who loves us unconditionally. God is not removed in some faraway, mystical place; God is with us, and we can love him with affection and overflowing love, as God has first loved us and continues to love us. For St. Francis, a personal love of Jesus is the heart of Christian spirituality. And he himself was in constant conversation with Jesus.

**All sing:** What Child is This

### A Place of Grace

### Narrator

Greccio has its own grace: the grace of the truth of the Incarnation, that God did indeed become human and was born from the womb of Mary, a poor young woman of Nazareth. She became the womb of God and brought God into the world as a human baby who grew and matured as does any human being.

Greccio shows how precious is our humanity, a humanity that through grace is the very image of God. And we in turn can rejoice in knowing that God delights in us enough to become one of us.



[Mary Did You Know? by Danny Gokey 2015 \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

### Narrator

Thus, the first reproduction of that humble crib was made by the poor man of Assisi, whose love for the infant Jesus continues to inspire millions today, as people all over the world decorate their homes with images of that blessed night in Bethlehem. And that is the gift of Greccio as well. Through the live Christmas crèche, St. Francis makes Christ present to us in our own place and time, wherever we are when we, too, enact an image of the miracle of the Incarnation of God.

The [story of St. Francis and the Christmas Crib at Greccio](#) focuses on what was really important to Francis –**the poverty of Jesus and his mother, and the discomfort felt by the little baby**. Celano also places an emphasis on the three virtues of **simplicity, poverty, and humility**, and leads us to understand that the poverty of Francis is, in imitation of the poverty of Jesus. For Francis, the external poverty of Christ's birth at Bethlehem is representative of the **radical poverty of the Incarnation**.

### 1. Reflection question: what is the place of poverty - simplicity - humility in my life?

The narrative stresses the importance of "**memory**", which also means "ensuring that we do not forget." Celano repeats the word **memory** at the beginning and at the end of the story and writes of how Francis wished "*to enact the **memory** of that babe who was born in Bethlehem.*" This is an essential duty of our **faith**— a faith that, according to the Bible, can be summed up as "*remembering the deeds of the Lord.*"

## O Come, O Come Emmanuel

1 O come, O come, Emmanuel,  
and ransom captive Israel  
that mourns in lonely exile here  
until the Son of God appear.

### **Refrain:**

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
shall come to you, O Israel.

2 O come, O Wisdom from on high,  
who ordered all things mightily;  
to us the path of knowledge show  
and teach us in its ways to go.

### **Refrain**

3 O come, O come, great Lord of might,  
who to your tribes on Sinai's height  
in ancient times did give the law  
in cloud and majesty and awe.

### **Refrain**

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## What Child is This

What Child is this who, laid to rest,  
On Mary's lap is sleeping?  
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,  
While shepherds watch are keeping?

### **Chorus**

This, this is Christ the King,  
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing;  
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,  
The Babe, the Son of Mary. **Chorus**

Why lies He in such mean estate,  
Where ox and ass are feeding?  
Good Christians, fear, for sinners here  
The silent Word is pleading. **Chorus**  
So bring Him incense, gold, and myrrh,  
Come peasant, king to own Him;  
The King of kings salvation brings,  
Let loving hearts enthrone Him.

### **Chorus**

Raise, raise a song on high,  
The virgin sings her lullaby;  
Joy, joy for Christ is born,  
The Babe, the Son of Mary.

*Courtesy of St. Pio Fraternity, BC (2023)*

## O Little Town of Bethlehem

[Verse 1]  
O little town of Bethlehem  
How still we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep  
The silent stars go by  
Yet in the dark street shineth  
The everlasting Light  
The hopes and fears of all the years  
Are met in thee tonight

[Verse 2]  
For Christ is born of Mary  
And gathered all above  
While mortals sleep, the angels keep  
Their watch of wondering love  
O morning stars, together  
Proclaim the holy birth  
And praises sing to God, the King  
And peace to men on earth

[Verse 3]  
How silently, how silently  
The wondrous Gift is given!  
So God imparts to human hearts  
The blessings of His heaven  
No ear may hear His coming  
But in this world of sin  
Where meek souls will receive Him still  
The dear Christ enters in

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## Angels we have heard on High

Angels we have heard on high  
Sweetly singing o'er the plains  
And the mountains in reply  
Echoing their joyous strains

[Chorus]  
Gloria in excelsis Deo  
Gloria in excelsis Deo

[Verse 2]  
Shepherds, why this jubilee?  
Why your joyous strains prolong?  
Say what may the tidings be  
Which inspire your heavenly song

[Chorus]  
Gloria in excelsis Deo  
Gloria in excelsis Deo

[Verse 3]  
Come to Bethlehem and see  
Him Whose birth the angels sing  
Come, adore on bended knee  
Christ the Lord, the newborn King

## Conference of the Franciscan Family Prot. N. 31/2023

Assisi, 04 October 2023

*Solemnity of the Seraphic Father Saint Francis*

To the attention of the brothers and sisters of the Franciscan Family

### ***Plenary indulgence on the occasion of the eighth centenary of "Christmas at Greccio" as experienced by Saint Francis of Assisi***

Dear brothers and sisters,

***may the Lord give you peace!***

We write to you from Assisi, where we are gathered on the occasion of the celebrations for our Seraphic Father, to share with you the great gift and privilege that the Holy Father wanted to grant us on the occasion of the 800th anniversary of Christmas in Greccio. Here Saint Francis wanted to commemorate the birth of the Lord starting with a nativity scene, leading to the Eucharistic celebration, where Jesus Christ makes himself present in the bread and wine.

During this Centenary, on 17 April 2023, we addressed the following petition to the Holy Father: "*in order to promote the spiritual renewal of the faithful and increase the life of grace, we ask that the faithful receive a plenary indulgence under the usual conditions from 8 December 2023, the Solemnity of Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to 2 February 2024, Feast of the Presentation in the Temple of Our Lord Jesus Christ, by visiting the churches run by Franciscan families throughout the world and stopping in prayer in front of the nativity scenes set up there. Likewise, those who are sick or unable to participate physically can equally benefit from the gift of plenary indulgence, offering their sufferings to the Lord or carrying out practices of piety.*"

The Apostolic Penitentiary favorably welcomed the request, granting the right to announce it publicly.

**Therefore, in all the churches entrusted to us for pastoral care,  
it will be possible for all the faithful  
to receive a plenary indulgence, under the usual conditions,  
from 8 December 2023 to 2 February 2024.**

We ask you to share this "privilege" in all our locations which fits in well with the special relationship that was established between Saint Francis and the Church when he asked the Pope for the Indulgence for those who visited the Porziuncola; and we hope that it will be an opportunity for communion and spiritual renewal for every brother and sister in the entire Franciscan family.

May the Lord guide your steps,  
and give you his mercy!

*Your General Ministers and President*

Frances Duncan OSF  
*President IFC-TOR*

Tibor Kauser OFS  
*General Minister*

Massimo Fusarelli OFM  
*General Minister*

Roberto Genuin OFMCap  
*General Minister*

Carlos Alberto Trovarelli OFMConv  
*General Minister*

Amando Trujillo Cano TOR  
*General Minister*