

The Blessed Virgin Mary

Carol: The Angel Gabriel / Away in a Manger

Read Luke 1:26-56

On December 8th we celebrate the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary who was preserved from the sin of Adam (original sin) from the first moment of her conception. The prime example of 'prevenient' grace. Our Lady free from sin, was nevertheless invited to become the Mother of God, a vocation that she freely accepted. In doing so she became the first believer, the first disciple of her Son and loved him with a mother's love. She was to accompany him through her faith from His birth, to His death, and eventually to join Him in heaven.

Pray: Let us pray for mothers and the great vocation of motherhood. Let us also rejoice that Jesus has entrusted us to Our Lady's maternal care and protection.

The Shepherds

Carol: The First Nowell

Read: Luke 2:8-11

God shows a preference for the poor. As we look at the shepherds we reflect on how God so often chooses the least promising like the shepherd-boy David (least - in the eyes of the world - of the sons of Jesse who became a great King). Similarly, the shepherds are part of the '*anawim*' i.e. the poor on the margins of society. Yet it is the shepherds who are first chosen to hear the news of the Saviour's birth and they are the first to visit Jesus.

Pray: Let us pray for all those who are poor and on the margins of our communities and let us ask for the grace to see the world through 'God's eyes'.

A Blessing for a Crib

O God, out of your love for us you sent your dearly beloved Son to become man. You willed that he be born in a humble stable in order to give us an example of humility. We ask you to bless this crib, a representation of the scene of his birth; may it draw us closer to him. By imitating his humility may we become a worthy dwelling place for his rebirth, Jesus Christ, thy Son our Lord.

A Prayer before the Crib

God of every nation and people, from the very beginning of creation you have made manifest your love: When our need for a Saviour was great you sent your Son to be born of the Virgin Mary. To our lives he brings joy and peace, justice, mercy, and love. Lord, as I look upon this manger, may it remind me of the humble birth of Jesus, and raise up my thoughts to Him, who is God-with-us and Saviour of all. May I keep Him with me in my heart this day, and always, who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

A Child's Prayer before the Crib

God, our Father, you so loved us even to the point of sending us your only son Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, to save us and bring us to you. We ask that you bless this image of Jesus, who will soon come among us, as a sign of your presence and of your love in our homes. Good Father, bless us as well, and our parents, our families, and our friends. Open our hearts so that we might know how to receive Jesus with joy, doing always what He asks, and seeing Him in all those who are in need of our love. We ask you in the name of Jesus, your beloved Son, who came to bring peace to the world. He lives and reigns with you forever and ever. Amen. (Pope Benedict XVI)

Making a Place for Christ



Devotions for our Home Nativity Scenes (Cribs)



DIOCESE OF
SHREWSBURY

Compiled by Canon Jonathan Mitchell

Pope Francis writes...

Last year Pope Francis wrote an Apostolic Letter *Admirabile Signum, The Meaning & Importance of the Nativity Scene*. In this letter Pope Francis recalls the tradition of the crib came from Saint Francis of Assisi who:

“fifteen days before Christmas asked a local man named John to help him realise the desire “to bring to life the memory of that babe born in Bethlehem, to see as much as possible with my own bodily eyes the discomfort of his infant needs, how he lay in a manger, and how, with an ox and an ass standing by, he was laid upon the hay”.... On 25 December, friars came to Greccio from various parts, together with people from the farmsteads in the area, who brought flowers and torches to light up the holy night....All those present experienced a new and indescribable joy in the presence of the Christmas scene.” (page 10)

Cribs have become part of the Christmas landscape in our churches and homes, but in the public sphere they are becoming a rare sight. Pope Francis in his apostolic letter *Admirabile Signum* encourages us in:

“the beautiful tradition of preparing the nativity scene in the days before Christmas, but also the custom of setting it up in the workplace, in schools, hospitals, prisons and town squares... It is my hope that this custom will never be lost and that, wherever it has fallen into disuse, it can be rediscovered and revived.” (page 8)

In the light of Pope Francis' words and as we face this 'Covid Christmas' together, let us make a particular effort to build our cribs, and perhaps where possible display them in our windows.

As part of our Advent spiritual preparations why not set up your Christmas Crib (without the baby Jesus) on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception as they customarily do in France? It can then become a source of prayerful contemplation as other more secular preparations get underway.

Some Reflections on the Nativity

Bethlehem

Carol: O little town of Bethlehem

Read: Micah 5:2 & Luke 2:4

As you start to set up your crib, meditate on how God often chooses the small and the humble for his purposes. Christ is born not in the great city of Jerusalem, rather in the small town of Bethlehem. Also reflect on the fact that God always keeps his promises.

Pray: Thanking God for his goodness this advent.

The Stable

Carol: Once In Royal David's City

Read: Luke 2:6-7

With the stable we can meditate on how there was no room for the soon to be born Son of God and the Holy Family. How much space do we make in our lives for God? Think also of those families struggling to provide for their children: the poor and the refugees. Can we offer something to help?

Pray: For all families in need this coming Christmas.

The Ox and Ass

Carol: In the Bleak Mid Winter

Read: Isaiah 1:3, Exodus 24:5-8 & John 12:12-15

As we look on the Ox and the Ass let us consider that Jesus is Lord of all creation not just humanity. We can also reflect that the Ox and the Ass point also to Jesus' sacrifice, which brings the New and Eternal Covenant with God.

Pray: To recognize the creation God declared to be 'good'.

Saint Joseph

Hymn/Carol: Dear guardian of Mary, dear nurse of her child!

Read Matthew 1:1-25 or 1:18-25

Saint Joseph of all men was entrusted to care, protect and provide for the Beloved Son of the Eternal Father and his most blessed mother. He was a just or righteous man - a man completely at rights with God - a holy man. He is also a silent man, we hear no words from his mouth, but putting aside his own will, he did what was asked of him by God. Of all the saints after Our Lady, surely Saint Joseph is the closest to the heart of Jesus as his adopted father. The family tree /genealogy reminds us that Jesus was born into a family line (and according to God's promise) stretching back to the first covenant with Abraham, and the line of King David - a family where we find both saints and sinners.

Pray: As we look upon the figure of Saint Joseph let us think of our own families and pray for them. We especially remember the vocation of fatherhood - whether spiritual or natural.