# SAINT FRANCIS

AT GRECCIO 1223 - 2023



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2023 AT 7:00 PM ST. PATRICK-ST. ANTHONY CHURCH 285 CHURCH STREET , HARTFORD

# St. Francis and the story of the first Nativity scene

t's a well-known origin story: how the young and wealthy Francis of Assisi freely abandoned his noble patrimony to serve Christ's Church as a poor, itinerant preacher.

One of the world's most beloved saints, the founder of the Franciscan order cared deeply for God's creation. He also loved Christmas, the feast of the Nativity of Our Lord.

St. Francis' meditations on the life of Christ led him to create the first-ever Nativity scene in Greccio, Italy, in 1223.

It is believed Francis' inspiration to do a live representation of the birth of Jesus came from his time in the Holy Land in the years 1219 and 1220.

Seeing the holy sites of Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection made them feel all the more real — and he wanted to recreate that experience.

In November 1223, three years before

his death, St. Francis was in Rome to await the pope's approval of the final rule of his friars.

The friar was already very familiar with the hilltown of Greccio, about 50 miles north of Rome. He had first arrived there over a decade prior and would frequently return to preach to the people of the surrounding countryside.

Eventually, a hermitage was built for St. Francis a short distance outside the town.

Ahead of his return to the hermitage, two weeks before Christmas, Francis asked his friend, Lord of Greccio Giovanni Velita, to prepare a cave with live animals and a hay-filled manger.

The friar had, during his audience with the pope, already received permission to stage the scene of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem.

According to the first biographer of St. Francis, Brother Thomas of Celano, the friar desired to "represent the birth of that Child in Bethlehem in such a way that with our bodily eyes we may see what he suffered for lack of the necessities of a newborn babe and how he lay in manger between the ox and ass."

That was how, in December 1223, in the rocky crags a short distance outside Greccio, people flocked to see the simple scene during Christmas Mass.

According to accounts of the moment, fires lit the dark scene while crowds arrived at the spot carrying candles and torches.



Above: Pope Francis prays at the place where St. Francis created the first Nativity scene outside of Greccio, Italy, on Dec. 1, 2019.

Right: Pope Francis signs his apostolic letter Admirabile signum.

Photos: Vatican Media

An eyewitness says a miracle happened at Mass that night.

Giovanni Velita asserted that he saw a real infant appear in the empty manger and that St. Francis took the beautiful child into his arms, holding him to his chest in an embrace.

In the period that followed, other miracles were reported, brought about by touching the straw of the manger where the Child Jesus had appeared.

Miraculous healings took place after pieces of hay were placed on sick animals or laboring women in difficulty.

Pope Francis has visited Greccio, the place where St. Francis created the first Nativity scene, two times: in 2016 and then on December 1, 2019, when he signed his apostolic letter *Admirabile signum* on the meaning and importance of Nativity scenes.

"All those present" at St. Francis' Christmas Mass, Pope Francis wrote in *Admirabile signum*, "experienced a new and indescribable joy in the presence of the Christmas scene. The priest then solemnly celebrated the Eucharist over the manger, showing the bond between the Incarnation of the Son of God and the Eucharist. At Greccio there were no statues; the Nativity scene was enacted and experienced by all who were present."

"In a particular way, from the time of its Franciscan origins, the Nativity scene has invited us to 'feel' and 'touch' the poverty that God's Son took upon himself in the Incarnation. Implicitly, it summons us to follow him along the path of humility, poverty, and self-denial that leads from the manger of Bethlehem to the cross," Pope Francis wrote.

Every year at Christmas, the people of Greccio stage a live, historical reenactment of St. Francis and the first Nativity scene.





Introduction Admirabile signum, 1

#### **Processional Hymn** (Verses marked \* are Choir only)

O Come, All Ye Faithful

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
Come and behold him born the King of Angels:
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!

\* God of God, Light of Light,
Lo! he abhors not the Virgin's womb;
Very God, begotten, not created:
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!

See how the shepherds, summoned to his cradle, Leaving their flocks, draw nigh with lowly fear; We too will thither bend our joyful footsteps: O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him, \* Lo! star-led chieftains, Magi, Christ adoring, Offer him incense, gold, and myrrh; We to the Christ Child bring our hearts' oblations; O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him, O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,
Sing, all ye citizens of heav'n above;
Glory to God in the highest:
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!

Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born that happy morning,
Jesus, to thee be glory giv'n;
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing:
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
O come, let us adore him,
Christ the Lord!

Text: Adeste fideles; John F. Wade, c. 1711-1796; English tr. by Frederick Oakley, 1802-1880 Tune: ADESTE FIDELES, Irregular with refrain; John F. Wade

Reading One

Admirabile signum, 2

The Manger is presented.

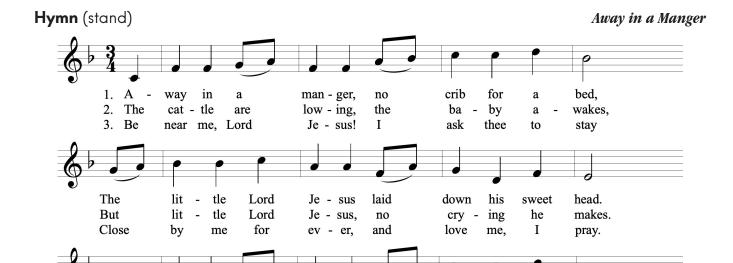
Carol Nativity Carol

Born in a stable so bare, born so long ago; Born 'neath light of star He who loved us so. Far away silent he lay, born today, your homage pay, For Christ is born for aye, born on Christmas Day.

Cradled by mother so fair, tender her lullaby; Over her son so dear angel hosts fill the sky. Far away silent he lay, born today, your homage pay, For Christ is born for aye, born on Christmas Day. Wise men from distant far land, shepherds from starry hills Worship this babe so rare, hearts with his warmth he fills. Far away silent he lay, born today, your homage pay, For Christ is born for aye, born on Christmas Day.

Love in that stable was born into our hearts to flow; Innocent dreaming babe, make me thy love to know. Far away silent he lay, born today, your homage pay, For Christ is born for aye, born on Christmas Day.

Words and Music: John Milford Rutter, CBE; b. 1945





Text: St. 1, 2, anonymous; st. 3, John T. McFarland, 1851-1913 Music: CRADLE SONG, 11 11 11 11; William J. Kirkpatrick, 1838-1921

Reading Two Admirabile signum, 2

The Donkey and Ox are presented.

#### Carol

#### Slumber Song of the Infant Jesus

#### Caroline Christopher, solo

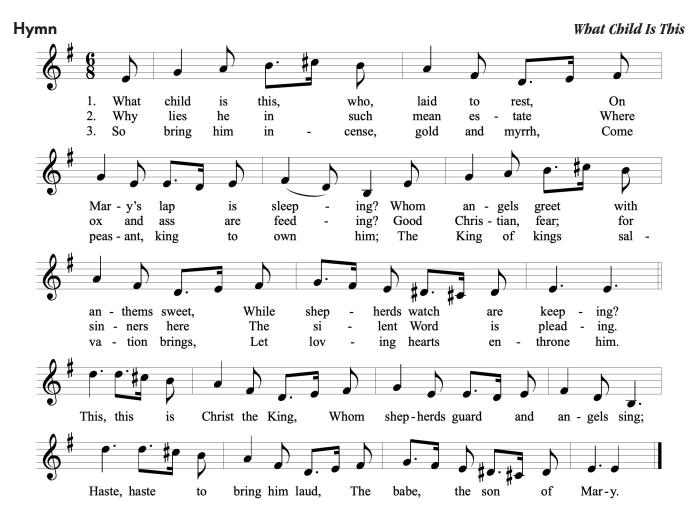
Entre le bœuf et l'âne gris Dort, dort, dort le petit fils Mille anges divins, mille séraphins Volent à l'entour de ce grand dieu d'amour.

Entre les roses et les lys Dort, dort, dort le petit fils Mille anges divins, mille séraphins Volent à l'entour de ce grand dieu d'amour.

Entre les pastoureaux jolis Dort, dort, Jésus qui sourit Mille anges divins, mille séraphins Volent à l'entour de ce grand dieu d'amour. Between the ox and the grey donkey Sleeps, sleeps, sleeps the little son, A thousand divine angels, a thousand seraphim Fly around this great God of love.

Between the roses and the lilies, Sleeps, sleeps, sleeps the little son, A thousand divine angels, a thousand seraphim Fly around this great God of love.

Amidst the gentle shepherds
Sleeps, sleeps Jesus who smiles,
A thousand divine angels, a thousand seraphim
Fly around this great God of love.



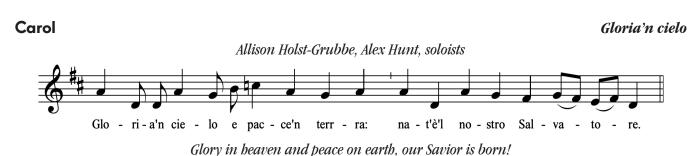
Text: William C. Dix, 1837-1898

Music: GREENSLEEVES, 8 7 8 7 with refrain; English melody, 16th C.

#### **Reading Three**

Admirabile signum, 2-3

The figure of St. Francis is presented.



- 1. Nat'è Cristo glorioso, l'alto Dio maravellioso: fact'è hom desideroso lo benigno Creatore.
- 2. De la Vergene sovrana lucente stella diana de li erranti tramontana *puer* nato de la fiore.
- 3. Pace 'n terra sia cantata gloria 'n ciel desiderata la donzella consecrata parturit'à 'l Salvatore!
- 1. Glorious Christ is born, great and wonderful God: born as a man full of love, a benevolent Creator.
- 2. From the sovereign Virgin, bright morning star guiding the erring, a child born from the flower.
- 3. Peace on earth be sung, glory in heaven be desired; the consecrated girl gave birth to the Savior!

The Angel, Male Shepherd, Sheep and Goat are presented.

#### Hymn

#### Angels We Have Heard on High

Angels we have heard on high Sweetly singing o'er the plains, And the mountains in reply Echo back their joyous strains. Gloria in excelsis Deo. Gloria in excelsis Deo.

Shepherds, why this jubilee?
Why your joyous strains prolong?
Say what may the tiding be
Which inspire your heav'nly song.
Gloria in excelsis Deo.
Gloria in excelsis Deo.

Come to Bethlehem and see
Him whose birth the angels sing;
Come, adore on bended knee
Christ the Lord, the newborn King.
Gloria in excelsis Deo.
Gloria in excelsis Deo.

See him in a manger laid
Whom the choirs of angels praise;
Mary, Joseph, lend your aid,
While our hearts in love we raise.
Gloria in excelsis Deo.
Gloria in excelsis Deo.

Text: Les anges dans nos campagnes; French carol, c. 18th C., tr. from Crown of Jesus Music, London, 1862 Music: GLORIA, 7 7 7 7 with refrain; French carol

#### **Reading Five**

Admirabile signum, 6

The Flute Player and Female Shepherd are presented.

Carol

O Come, Little Children

Oh, come, little children, oh come, one and all, Oh come to the manger in Bethlehem's stall.

And see what our Father in heaven above Has sent to us all on this earth with his love.

Oh see in the manger so meek and so mild, Oh see in the soft life the heavenly Child, In swaddling clothes folded, his beauty more sweet Than angels, whose voices his lowly birth greet.

His bed, little children, a manger with hay; His Mother and Joseph in ecstasy pray, The shepherds in wonder their glad worship bring, While chorus of angels sweet Glorias sing!

Text: Christoph von Schmid, 1768-1854; tr. Melanie Schulte, 1885-1922 Music: IHR KINDERLEIN KOMMET; Johann A. P. Schulz, 1747-1800; arr. David M. Cherwien **Reading Six** Admirabile signum, 7

The figures of Mary and Joseph are presented.

Carol Joseph's Carol

#### Michael McAvaney, solo

O child that lies softsleeping in my arms, I shall keep you safe from all that harms. I know that your life did not spring from mine; and I know that all I am is thine.

My craft is hewing, joining, making good; and now my end is shaped and made by God. A simple carpenter my chosen trade; and now my life is fixed

by powers that all things made.

Your being fulfills a promise borne of dreams: both innocence and fear shall make my destiny. By starlit night your midwife I have been. Your blood on my hands the offering seals.

O child that lies softsleeping in my arms, I shall keep you safe from all that harms. I know that your life did not spring from mine; and I know that all I am is thine.

Words: Andrew Hawes, b. 1954 Music: Patrick Hawes, b. 1958

#### Carol Mary Did You Know?

Mary, did you know that your baby boy Would one day walk on water? Mary, did you know that your baby boy Would save our sons and daughters? Did you know that your baby boy Has come to make you new? This child that you delivered, will soon deliver you?

Mary, did you know that your baby boy Will give sight to a blind man? Mary, did you know that your baby boy Will calm a storm with his hand? Did you know that your baby boy Has walked where angels trod? And when you kiss your little baby You've kissed the face of God? Mary, did you know?

The blind will see, the deaf will hear The dead will live again, The lame will leap, the dumb will speak The praises of the Lamb!

Mary, did you know that your baby boy Is Lord of all creation? Mary, did you know that your baby boy Would one day rule the nations? Did you know that your baby boy Was heaven's perfect Lamb? And the sleeping child you're holding Is the great, I AM? Oh Mary, Mary, did you know?

Words: Mark Lowry, b. 1958

Music: Buddy Greene, b. 1953; arr. Jonathan Miller, b. 1962

Reading Seven

Admirabile signum, 8

#### The figure of the Christ Child is presented.

### Carol Il est né le divin enfant

Refrain:

Il est né le divin enfant, Jouez hautbois, résonnez musettes! Il est né le divin enfant, Chantons tous son avènement!

Depuis plus de quatre mille ans, Nous le promettaient les prophètes Depuis plus de quatre mille ans, Nous attendions cet heureux temps. R/.

Ah! Qu'il est beau, qu'il est charmant! Ah! que ses grâces sont parfaites! Ah! Qu'il est beau, qu'il est charmant! Qu'il est doux ce divin enfant! R/.

Une étable est son logement Un peu de paille est sa couchette, Une étable est son logement Pour un dieu quel abaissement! R/.

O Jésus! O Roi tout-puissant Tout petit enfant que vous êtes, O Jésus! O Roi tout-puissant, Régnez sur nous entièrement! R/.

Traditional French, 19th c.; arr. Ben Parry, b. 1965

Refrain:

He is born, the Heav'nly Child, Oboes play; set bagpipes sounding. He is born, the Heav'nly Child, Let all sing His nativity.

'Tis four thousand years and more, Prophets have foretold His coming. 'Tis four thousand years and more, Have we waited this happy hour. R/.

Ah, how lovely, Ah, how fair, What perfection is His graces. Ah, how lovely, Ah, how fair, Child divine, so gentle there. R/.

In a stable lodged is He, Straw is all He has for cradle. In a stable lodged is He, Oh how great humility! R/.

Jesus Lord, O King with power, Though a little babe You come here. Jesus Lord, O King with power, Rule o'er us from this glad hour. R/.

# Hymn Stille Nacht/Silent Night

Allison Holst-Grubbe, Stephanie Scarcella, soloists

Choir only

Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht, Alles schläft; einsam wacht Nur das traute hochheilige Paar. Holder Knabe im lockigen Haar, Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh! Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh!

All:

Silent night, holy night!
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and child.
Holy Infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight;
Glories stream from heaven afar;
Heav'nly hosts sing alleluia!
Christ the Savior, is born!
Christ, the Savior, is born!

Silent night, holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

Reading Eight Admirabile signum, 9

The figures of the Wise Men are presented.

Carol We Three Kings

Choir only:

We three kings of Orient are;
 Bearing gifts we traverse afar
 field and fountain, moor and mountain,
 Following yonder star:
 O star of wonder, star of night,
 Star with royal beauty bright,
 Westward leading, still proceeding,
 Guide us to thy perfect light.

Patrick Nay, solo (Melchior):

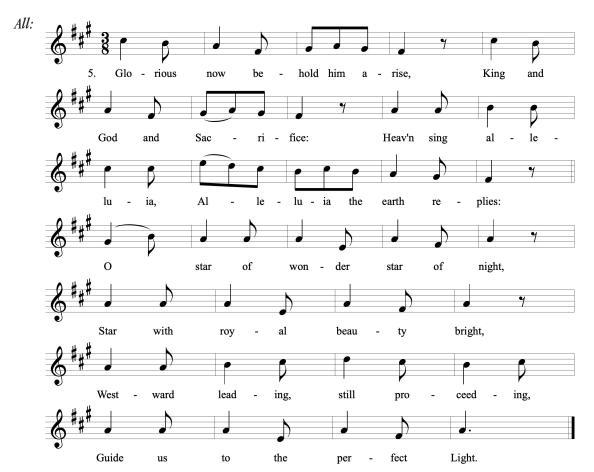
Born a king on Bethlehem plain,
 Gold I bring, to crown him again—
 King for ever, ceasing never,
 Over us all to reign:
 O star of wonder, star of night,
 Star with royal beauty bright,
 Westward leading, still proceeding,
 Guide us to thy perfect light.

Zachary Gilbert, solo (Caspar):

3. Frankincense to offer have I;
Incense owns a deity nigh;
Prayer and praising, all men raising,
Worship him, God most high:
O star of wonder, star of night,
Star with royal beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect light.

Alex Hunt, solo (Balthazar):

4. Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume
Breathes a life of gathering gloom;
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,
Sealed in the stone-cold tomb:
O star of wonder, star of night,
Star with royal beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect light.



#### **Closing Remarks**

Fr. Timothy Shreenan, O.F.M.

God Rest You All Good Christians

### **Recessional Hymn**

- God rest you all good Christians,
   Let nothing you dismay,
   For Jesus Christ our Savior
   Was born upon this day,
   To save us all from Satan's power
   When we were gone astray:
   O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy,
   O tidings of comfort and joy.
- From God our heav'nly Father
   A blessed angel came,
   And unto certain shepherds
   Brought tidings of the same,
   How that in Bethlehem was born
   The Son of God by name:
   O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy,
   O tidings of comfort and joy.

3. But when to Bethlehem they came,
Whereat this infant lay,
They found him in a manger,
Where oxen feed on hay;
His mother Mary kneeling,
Unto the Lord did pray:
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy,

O tidings of comfort and joy.

Now to the Lord sing praises,
 All you within this place,
 And with true love and charity
 Each other now embrace;
 This holy tide of Christmas
 All others doth deface:
 O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy,
 O tidings of comfort and joy.

Traditional English carol; arr. Sir David Willcocks, 1919-2015

Your free-will offering helps to support the music ministry of St. Patrick-St. Anthony Church and we thank you for your generosity. Baskets will be available at the doors of the church as you leave.

We invite you to a reception hosted by the St. Patrick-St. Anthony Open Hearts LGBTQ+ Ministry in the Franciscan Center for Urban Ministry immediately following the conclusion of this service.



The 2023 Nativity scene in St. Peter's Square which commemorates the 800th Anniversary of St. Francis at Greccio, featuring figures of St. Francis and several Friars.

### Crossbearer

Ignacio Feged Sara Feged

#### Readers

John Nowacki Jack Sheehan

## Children of the Parish Presenting the Nativity Figures

Jack Healy (Manger)	Hazel Ritz (Sheep)	Paige Crowley (Mary)
Ben Healy (Ox)	Madeline Davis (Sheep)	Brendan Crowley (Joseph)
Anthony Cultrera (Donkey)	Claire Perrault (Ewe & Lamb)	Francesca Fiala (Christ Child)
Austin Freund (St. Francis)	Dominic Santos (Goat)	Gabriella Cultrera (Wise Man)
Madeline Perrault (Angel)	Charlie Sheehan (Flute Player)	Samantha Cultrera (Wise Man)
James Davis (Male Shepherd)	Maeve Fiala (Female Shepherd)	Isabella Dominick (Wise Man)

#### **Musicians**

Gallery Choir		Treble Clef Choir	Bass Clef Choir
Beverly Boyle	Joanne Huelsman	Caroline Christopher*	Christopher Daugherty
Caroline Christopher*	Alex Hunt*	Sarah Christopher	Paul Foody
Mika Coderre*	Mark Knebel*	Mika Coderre*	Zachary Gilbert*
Leanne Cornell	Sharon Miceli	Suzanne Fournier	Andy Hac
Christopher Daugherty	Eric Miller*	Allison Holst-Grubbe*	Albert Hernandez
Sarah Davis*	Grace Mittleman*	Margaret Monos	Alex Hunt*
Paul Foody	Patrick Nay*	Michelle Ouchakof	Michael McAvaney*
Suzanne Fournier	Michelle Ouchakof	Benjamin Rauch*	Patrick Nay*
Zachary Gilbert*	Elizabeth Parada	Eileen Rausch	Martin Smith
Andy Hac	Ray Schaefer	Stephanie Scarcella*	
Albert Hernandez	KeriAnne Tisdale		
Allison Holst-Grubbe*			* denotes Section Leader

### Church Street Singers

Sylvia Borla	Michael Frewen
Anthony Bradway	Ellory Maynard-Byron
Tyler Bradway	Samantha Ocoin
Anna Christopher	Enzo Virello
Ciara Frewen	

Organ ScholarFluteMadison H. ThomsonGonzalo Cortés

HarpPercussionAmanda Evans CarabaseAndrew Thomson

**Director of Music**Dr. Gabriel Löfvall