

SAINT
POPE **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

It'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.

Article by Hannah Brockhaus, accessed from Catholic News Agency website, December 23, 2022



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, Christ the Lord!

** 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

Hymn (stand)

Away in a Manger



1. A - way in a man - ger, no crib for a bed,
2. The cat - tle are low - ing, the ba - by a - wakes,
3. Be near me, Lord Je - sus! I ask thee to stay

The lit - tle Lord Je - sus laid down his sweet head.
But lit - tle Lord Je - sus, no cry - ing he makes.
Close by me for ev - er, and love me, I pray.

The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay,
I love thee, Lord Je - sus! look down from the sky,
Bless all the dear chil - dren in your ten - der care,

The lit - tle Lord Je - sus, a - sleep on the hay.
And stay by my side un - til morn - ing is nigh.
And fit us for heav - en, to live with thee there.

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.

*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.*

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.

*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.*

Entre les pastoureaux jolis
Dort, dort, Jésus qui sourit
Mille anges divins, mille séraphins
Volent à l'entour de ce grand dieu d'amour.

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

Words: Traditional French

Music: François-Auguste Gevaert, 1828-1908; arr. Clarence Dickinson, 1873-1969

Hymn

What Child Is This

1. What child is this, who, laid to rest, On
2. Why lies he in such mean es - tate Where
3. So bring him in - cense, gold and myrrh, Come
Mar - y's lap is sleep - ing? Whom an - gels greet with
ox and ass are feed - ing? Good Chris - tian, fear; for
peas - ant, king to own him; The King of kings sal -
an - thems sweet, While shep - herds watch are keep - ing?
sin - ners here The si - lent Word is plead - ing.
va - tion brings, Let lov - ing hearts en - throne him.
This, this is Christ the King, Whom shep - herds guard and an - gels sing;
Haste, haste to bring him laud, The babe, the son of Mar - y.

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.

Carol

Gloria'n cielo

Allison Holst-Grubbe, Alex Hunt, soloists

Glo - ri - a'n cie - lo e pac - ce'n terr - ra: na - t'è'l no - stro Sal - va - to - re.

Glory in heaven and peace on earth, our Savior is born!

1. Nat'è Cristo glorioso, l'alto Dio marvellioso:
fact'è hom desideroso lo benigno Creatore.

1. *Glorious Christ is born, great and wonderful God:
born as a man full of love, a benevolent Creator.*

2. De la Vergene sovrana lucente stella diana
de li erranti tramontana *puer* nato de la fiore.

2. *From the sovereign Virgin, bright morning star
guiding the erring, a child born from the flower.*

3. Pace 'n terra sia cantata gloria 'n ciel desiderata
la donzella consecrata parturit'à 'l Salvatore!

3. *Peace on earth be sung, glory in heaven be desired;
the consecrated girl gave birth to the Savior!*

Laudario di Cortona, Ms. 91; 13th C. Italian

Reading Four

Admirabile signum, 5-6

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.

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.

Shepherds, why this jubilee?
Why your joyous strains prolong?
Say what may the tidings be
Which inspire your heav'nly song.
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

The figures of Mary and Joseph are presented.

Carol

Joseph's Carol

Michael McAvaney, solo

O child that lies soft-
sleeping 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 soft-
sleeping 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

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!

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.

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

'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 ! 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/.

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

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

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

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

Hymn

Stille Nacht/Silent Night

Allison Holst-Grubbe, Stephanie Scarcella, soloists

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

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!

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!
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.

Words: Joseph Mohr, 1792-1848; English tr. by John F. Young, 1820-1885
Music: Franz X. Gruber, 1787-1863

The figures of the Wise Men are presented.

Carol

We Three Kings

Choir only:

1. 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.

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.

Patrick Nay, solo (Melchior):

2. 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.

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.

All:

5. Glo - rious now be - hold him a - rise, King and
 God and Sac - ri - fice: Heav'n sing al - le -
 lu - ia, Al - le - lu - ia the earth re - plies:
 O star of won - der star of night,
 Star with roy - al beau - ty bright,
 West - ward lead - ing, still pro - ceed - ing,
 Guide us to the per - fect Light.

Reading Nine

Admirabile signum, 10

Closing Remarks

Fr. Timothy Shreenan, O.F.M.

Recessional Hymn

God Rest You All Good Christians

1. 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.
2. 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.
4. 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

Beverly Boyle	Joanne Huelsman
Caroline Christopher*	Alex Hunt*
Mika Coderre*	Mark Knebel*
Leanne Cornell	Sharon Miceli
Christopher Daugherty	Eric Miller*
Sarah Davis*	Grace Mittleman*
Paul Foody	Patrick Nay*
Suzanne Fournier	Michelle Ouchakof
Zachary Gilbert*	Elizabeth Parada
Andy Hac	Ray Schaefer
Albert Hernandez	KeriAnne Tisdale
Allison Holst-Grubbe*	

Treble Clef Choir

Caroline Christopher*
Sarah Christopher
Mika Coderre*
Suzanne Fournier
Allison Holst-Grubbe*
Margaret Monos
Michelle Ouchakof
Benjamin Rauch*
Eileen Rausch
Stephanie Scarcella*

Bass Clef Choir

Christopher Daugherty
Paul Foody
Zachary Gilbert*
Andy Hac
Albert Hernandez
Alex Hunt*
Michael McAvaney*
Patrick Nay*
Martin Smith

* 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 Scholar

Madison H. Thomson

Flute

Gonzalo Cortés

Harp

Amanda Evans Carabase

Percussion

Andrew Thomson

Director of Music

Dr. Gabriel Löfvall