



## Candles & Carols

A Celebration of the Birth of Christ  
With St. Francis of Assisi



## Reader 1: An Account of Christmas in Greccio

It was the year 1223 in the village of Greccio, Italy, where Saint Francis of Assisi created the first live nativity scene. Thomas of Celano describes the beautiful event in his *Life of St. Francis of Assisi*.

"...If you desire to celebrate the coming feast of the Lord together at Greccio he said to him, "hurry before me and *carefully make ready* <sup>Prv 24:27</sup> the things I tell you. I wish to enact the memory of that babe *who was born in Bethlehem*: to see as much as is possible with my own bodily eyes the discomfort of his infant needs, how he *lay in a manger*, <sup>Lk 2:7</sup> and how, with an ox and an ass standing by, he rested on hay." Once the good and faithful man had heard Francis's words, *he ran quickly* <sup>Jn 20:4</sup> and prepared in that place all the things that the holy man had requested.

<sup>85</sup> Finally, *the day of joy* has drawn near, *the time* of exultation *has come*. From many different places the brethren have been called. As they could, the men and women of that land with exultant hearts prepare candles and torches to light up that night whose shining star has enlightened every day and year. Finally, the holy man of God comes and, finding all things prepared, *he saw them and was glad*. <sup>Jn 8:56</sup>

Indeed, the manger is prepared, the hay is carried in, 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 day*, <sup>Ps 139:12 [Vulgate, Ps 138:12]</sup>  
delighting both man and beast.

The people arrive, ecstatic at this new mystery of new joy.

The forest amplifies the cries

and the boulders echo back the joyful crowd.

The brothers sing, giving God due praise,

and the whole night abounds with jubilation.

*The holy man of God* <sup>Mk 1:24</sup> stands before the manger,  
filled with heartfelt sighs,..." (FA:ED, vol. 1, 255 )



(*Light Candles*)

***Process to Nativity***



**Sing: "The First Noel"**

The First Noel, the Angels did say  
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay  
In fields where they lay keeping their sheep  
On a cold winter's night that was so deep.

Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel  
Born is the King of Israel!

They looked up and saw a star  
Shining in the East beyond them far  
And to the earth it gave great light  
And so it continued both day and night.

Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel  
Born is the King of Israel!

This star drew nigh to the northwest  
O'er Bethlehem it took its rest  
And there it did both Pause and stay  
Right o'er the place where Jesus lay

Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel  
Born is the King of Israel!

## **Reader 2: Luke's Account of the Birth of Jesus Christ**

Now at this time, Caesar Augustus issued a decree for a census of the whole world to be taken. This census, the first, took place when Quirinius was governor of Syria and everyone went to his own town to be registered.

So, Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee and traveled up to Judea, to the town of David called Bethlehem, since he was of David's House and line, in order to be registered together with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

While they were there the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to a son, her first-born. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them at the inn.

In the countryside close by there were shepherds who lived in the fields and took turns to watch their flocks during the night. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone round them.

They were terrified, but the angel said, "Do not be afraid. Listen, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in the town of David a savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.

And here is a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

And suddenly with the angel there was a great throng of the heavenly host, praising God and singing; "Glory to God in the highest heaven, And peace to all people who enjoy God's favor."

Now when the angels had gone from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us," So they hurried away and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger.

When they saw the child, they repeated what they had been told about him, and everyone who heard it was astonished at what the shepherds had to say.

As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds went back glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen; it was exactly as they had been told.



**Sing: “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.

Gloria in excelsis Deo.  
Gloria in excelsis Deo.

Shepherds, why this jubilee?  
Why your joyous strains prolong?  
What the gladsome tidings 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.

**Reader 3: Pope Francis; The Meaning of the Nativity**

*(Apostolic Letter, ADMIRABILE SIGNUM Of The Holy Father Francis on 1 December in the year 2019, Excerpt )*

“...Dear brothers and sisters, the Christmas crèche is part of the precious yet demanding process of passing on the faith. 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, his children, brothers and sisters all, thanks to that Child who is the Son of God and the Son of the Virgin Mary. And to realize that in that knowledge we find true happiness. Like Saint Francis, may we open our hearts to this simple grace, so that from our wonderment a humble prayer may arise: a prayer of thanksgiving to God, who wished to share with us his all, and thus never to leave us alone...”

#### **Reader 4: St. Clare's 4th Letter to Agnes**

Clare, bowed down in contemplating the Infant of Bethlehem, exhorts us: Since this vision "is the splendour of eternal glory, the brilliance of eternal light and the mirror without blemish, gaze upon that mirror each day.... Look at... the poverty of him who was placed in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes. O marvelous humility! O astonishing poverty! The King of angels, the Lord of heaven and earth, is laid in a manger" (4LAg 14, 19-21).



#### **Sing: Away in a Manger**

Away in a manger  
No crib for a bed  
The little Lord Jesus  
Laid down His sweet head  
  
The stars in the bright sky  
Looked down where He lay  
The little Lord Jesus  
Asleep on the hay  
  
The cattle are lowing  
The Baby awakes  
But little Lord Jesus  
No crying He makes  
  
I love You, Lord Jesus  
Look down from the sky  
And stay by my side  
Until morning is nigh

#### **Reader 5: Let us acclaim Christ the Lord**

**Response: *We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you!***

O Wisdom of God, you are our wisdom: **R/**  
O Lord of lords, you are our wisdom: **R/**  
O Root of Jesse, you are the vine and we the branches: **R/**  
O Key of David, you are the key to the gates of heaven: **R/**  
O Dayspring, you are the light of the world: **R/**  
O Ruler of the world, you are the Lord of lords: **R/**  
O Emmanuel, you are God-with-us: **R/**



**Sing: "O Come, Emmanuel"**

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.

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*

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*

O come, O Branch of Jesse's stem,  
unto your own and rescue them!  
From depths of hell your people save,  
and give them victory o'er the grave. *Refrain*

O come, O Key of David, come  
and open wide our heavenly home.  
Make safe for us the heavenward road  
and bar the way to death's abode. *Refrain*

O come, O Bright and Morning Star,  
and bring us comfort from afar!  
Dispel the shadows of the night  
and turn our darkness into light. *Refrain*

**All: Grant, we pray, almighty God,  
that, as we are bathed in the new radiance  
of your Incarnate Word,  
the light of faith,  
which illumines our minds,  
may also shine through in our deeds.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.**

