

The Christmas Crib—Greccio

In 1223, St. Francis contacted his good friend John who lived in Greccio. "I wish to do something that will recall the memory of the little child who was born in Bethlehem and set before our eyes, in some way, the inconveniences of his infant needs; how he lay in a manger; how with an ox and an ass standing by, he lay upon the hay where he had been placed. " Francis gave John specific directions. John carried out his assignment to the letter...

On Christmas eve people came to the place with candles and torches. The night was lit with twinkling light. Francis was delighted with the surprise he had prepared. Simplicity and poverty were in evidence. The people sang as they came, filling the night with melody. Mass was celebrated and Francis served as deacon. He sang the gospel with delight. Then he preached about God's great love in becoming human and living on earth among us.

During the Mass, a man had a vision. He saw the child laying in the manger, lifeless. He saw Francis go to the manger and arouse the child. Then he took it in his arms and held it. The child was alive! The vision reflected reality. Francis gave the people a new sense of the reality of the presence of the living Christ.

What Francis and John created at Greccio has become a part of Christmas. Artists have designed beautiful statues for cribs around the world. Poets have written words of wonder while musicians sang songs about this silent night. What Francis wanted us to remember was the simplicity and poverty of God coming to us in a stable. God chose to accept our human limitations and give dignity to our human nature. Such unlimited love found expression in Francis' simple crib. We hope that our lives become the resting place of Jesus and make his presence felt.

Excerpt from Fr Lester Bach, *Catch Me A Rainbow*, (1990), p. 106. Published by the National Formation Commission, USA. Used with permission.