

LITURGY BYTES

The Nativity

St. Francis of Assisi is associated with creating the first nativity in the city of Greccio. The Franciscans quickly spread the practice of creating nativity scenes with live animals and actors. Living scenes remained popular. However, so the scene could remain for a longer period of time, stationary pieces were used to depict the birth of Jesus.



As this tradition spread to other regions throughout the world, the nativity scene adapted to local customs. In Francis' native Italy, the figures began to resemble folks from the local village and not biblical figures. By the 19th century Protestant churches, who initially rejected nativity scenes, began to accept them as the popularity spread through a wider Christian world.

Francis' original nativity was inspired by his trip in 1221 to the Holy Land and Jesus' traditional birthplace. He was deeply moved visiting the site where God became fully human. Hoping others would enjoy this spiritual experience, he encouraged believers to make pilgrimages to Bethlehem. When conflict among the powers vying for control of the Holy Land made the trip too dangerous, Francis decided to do the next best thing by bringing Bethlehem to the pilgrims!

The popularity of nativity scenes grew and grew and brought people to the possibility of building their own. Today, it is on display in village squares, in our homes and most especially in our houses of worship. We do this to remember and celebrate the birth of Jesus on Christmas.

Have a blessed, safe, and healthy Christmas season! ~*Michele Hahn*