



DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Christmas 2021

To the People of God of the Diocese of Rockville Centre:

On December 1, 2019, Our Holy Father Pope Francis issued *Admirabile Signum*, an Apostolic Letter *On the Meaning and Importance of the Nativity Scene*. It is a beautiful reflection that I draw on every Christmas season and one which I urge you to read and pray.¹

In it, the Holy Father reminds us that the simple act of arranging our Nativity set links us to the past, opens questions for the present, and orients the future. It is an act that has an existential impact.

Pope Francis says: “Setting up the Christmas creche in our homes helps us to relive the history of what took place in Bethlehem. Naturally, the Gospels remain our source for understanding and reflecting on the event. At the same time, its portrayal in the creche helps us to imagine the scene. It touches our hearts and makes us enter into salvation history as contemporaries of an event that is living and real in a broad gamut of historical and cultural contexts.”

The beautiful scene of parents and grandparents setting up creches together with children and grandchildren is a powerful multi-dimensional experience of catechesis – the teaching and passing on of our Catholic faith and our belief in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ to the next generation.

Parents and grandparents have that wisdom of teaching children and grandchildren how to assemble and situate the creche, but at the same time, they also have the catechetical and relational sensitivity to let children and grandchildren make choices about where the shepherds, the sheep, the three kings are to be placed.

Children are encouraged to place the Holy Family – Mary, Joseph and the Prince of Peace – with their own hands into the center of the creche. How often children then enjoy, sometimes on their own and sometimes with brothers and sisters and family members, moving and interacting with the figurines. How often their biblical imaginations and souls are set on fire with God’s love as they play with their family Nativity sets.

The Holy Father continues: “I would like now to reflect on the various elements of the nativity scene in order to appreciate their deeper meaning. First, there is the background of a starry sky wrapped in the darkness and silence of night. We represent this not only out of fidelity to the Gospel accounts, but also for its symbolic value. We can think of all those times in our lives when we have experienced the darkness of night. Yet even then, God does not abandon us, but is there to answer our crucial questions about the

¹ https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco-lettera-ap_20191201_admirabile-signum.html