

ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI AND THE CRIB

L2 & L3

The first Christmas Crib dates back to St. Francis of Assisi whose Feast Day we celebrate on October 4. In 1293 Francis had an idea. He wanted to show the people of Greccio, near Assisi, what it was like when Jesus was born. He wanted to tell them the story of the first Christmas in a different way.

Francis has a very good friend called John who lived in the town of Greccio. About two weeks before Christmas he went to visit him and asked for his help. Francis told John that he wanted him to get hay, a donkey and an ox and to bring them to a place in the woods that he had chosen. John did what Francis asked. Lots of people helped John get ready and the news about what Francis was doing spread all around the neighbourhood.

On Christmas Eve all Francis' Brothers and the people of the neighbourhood gathered around the crib. They bought candles and torches to brighten the night. St. Francis arrived and saw that everything had been prepared. The crib was ready, the hay, the ox and the donkey were put in place. It was just like they were in Bethlehem. The crowds prayed and Mass was celebrated

St. Francis' idea of bringing Bethlehem to every town spread quickly all over the world and soon there were Christmas cribs in churches and homes.



This blessing prayer could be cut out to become the star for the crib this year.



Prayer to bless the Crib

We praise and thank you, O
God,
for the gift of Jesus.
Bless this Crib and bless each
one of us.
Help us to remember to share
Jesus' light and
love with all the world.
May we always be
thankful for all the gifts you
have given us. Amen

CRIB TRADITIONS

Straw for the Crib

There is a tradition that families used to put straw into the empty crib as a way of beginning to get ready to welcome Jesus on Christmas morning. Each member of the family put a piece of straw in every evening until finally there was enough straw to make the crib comfortable. Each piece of straw represented something good that they had done during the day as a way of preparing to welcome Jesus. They would then place the donkey and ox into the crib, Mary and Joseph and finally an empty manger into which the baby Jesus would be placed on Christmas morning.

Classroom Activity

All Levels

BUILDING A CRIB FOR JESUS

Place the empty crib in your Prayer Space during the first week of Advent. Using shredded paper the children could be encouraged to write or draw something good that they have done on a strip of paper each day for the first two weeks of Advent. Alternatively, you could have a bundle of shredded paper on your desk and each time a child makes a special effort you could give them a piece to put into the crib. Place the crib figures at different places in the classroom and move them closer to the crib each day as they journey towards Bethlehem.

During the third and fourth weeks the figures could gradually begin to arrive in the crib.