

Advent

Advent Resources – Building Traditions

The Crib

Advent is a time of preparation and reflection. As you prepare your Christmas crib scene in your family home it can be a natural moment for spiritual reflection. In this year of uncertainty and lockdown, with our worship as a community affected over so many months, we are all in need of these moments more than ever before.

This year, instead of unpacking your crib and assembling it in one go, you might want to think about creating a new family tradition, especially if you have young children. The following resource can be adapted to your own situation and the crib you own. Some families place the pieces of the crib throughout the house, gradually positioning them in the crib as Christmas nears.

The resource has both adult reflections (which you can adapt as a parent) and suggestions for children. It could play itself out over the entire advent season (traditionally in churches cribs are erected on the 17th December), culminating in the placing of the Christ Child in the crib scene on Christmas Eve (traditionally at midnight Mass), and ending at the Feast of the Epiphany with the arrival of the wise men.

In 2019 Pope Francis visited Greccio, at the Shrine of the Nativity, where St Francis created the first Christmas crib scene in 1223. Pope Francis then wrote in his Apostolic letter *Admirabile Signum*

‘the enchanting image of the Christmas crèche, so dear to the Christian people, never ceases to arouse amazement and wonder. The depiction of Jesus’ birth is itself a simple and joyful proclamation of the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God. The nativity scene is like a living Gospel rising up from the pages of sacred Scripture. As we contemplate the Christmas story, we are invited to set out on a spiritual journey, drawn by the humility of the God who became man in order to encounter every man and woman. We come to realize that so great is his love for us that he became one of us, so that we in turn might become one with him.

With this Letter, I wish to encourage the beautiful family tradition of preparing the nativity scene in the days before Christmas...a simple yet authentic means of portraying the beauty of our faith.

Standing before the Christmas crèche, we are reminded of the time when we were children, eagerly waiting to set it up. These memories make us all the more conscious of the precious gift received from those who passed on the faith to us. At the same time, they remind us of our duty to share this same experience with our children and our grandchildren. Wherever it is, and whatever form it takes, the Christmas crèche speaks to us of the love of God, the God who became a child in order to make us know how close he is to every man, woman and child, regardless of their condition.

1 CRIB PIECES - Stable and Straw

LISTEN There was no place for them in the inn.
Luke 2:7

PRAY As we begin our journey towards Christmas day this Advent, we stand in awe before you, Lord, as we prepare for your coming. We are sorry for the times our homes are not welcoming. We give thanks for all we have. We ask for your blessing of our family and home.
As we begin to fill this crib with our nativity figures over the coming days we say together
Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful. Amen.

PONDER

The House of Christmas

There fared a mother driven forth
Out of an inn to roam;
In the place where she was homeless
All men are at home.
The crazy stable close at hand,
With shaking timber and shifting sand,
Grew a stronger thing to abide and stand
Than the square stones of Rome.

For men are homesick in their homes,
And strangers under the sun,
And they lay on their heads in a foreign land
Whenever the day is done.
Here we have battle and blazing eyes,
And chance and honour and high surprise,
But our homes are under miraculous skies
Where the yule tale was begun.

A Child in a foul stable,
Where the beasts feed and foam;
Only where He was homeless
Are you and I at home;
We have hands that fashion and heads that know,
But our hearts we lost - how long ago!
In a place no chart nor ship can show
Under the sky's dome.



This world is wild as an old wives' tale,
And strange the plain things are,
The earth is enough and the air is enough
For our wonder and our war;
But our rest is as far as the fire-drake swings
And our peace is put in impossible things
Where clashed and thundered unthinkable wings
Round an incredible star.

To an open house in the evening
Home shall men come,
To an older place than Eden
And a taller town than Rome.
To the end of the way of the wandering star,
To the things that cannot be and that are,
To the place where God was homeless
And all men are at home.

G K Chesterton

ACT Even if we are unable to welcome strangers into our homes during this period, we can still welcome them into our hearts, putting their needs above our own. It is also a good moment to look at our close relationships: what good deed can you do for another member of your family today? You could gather around the crib scene each night during Advent and invite each family member to place a piece of straw in the manger for each good deed done that day.

2 CRIB PIECES - Ox and Donkey

The ox and the donkey are not mentioned in any biblical passage about the nativity but have become an integral part of the nativity scene. The donkey makes sense as it no doubt carried the pregnant Mary to Bethlehem, and the ox, just because there must have been animals about (they are in a stable after all). Isaiah 1:3 points us towards the nativity scene to come.

LISTEN The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know,
Isaiah 1:3 my people do not understand.

PRAY Father, help me know you are my Lord and creator, that through the Incarnation of your Son, I am called to be in personal relationship with you, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, help me to worship you.

Say together:

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

PONDER

Do I know my master?

Do I understand that above all God, the Father created me for relationship with him, and that Jesus is my personal Lord and Saviour?

Do I recognise the working of the Holy Spirit in my life and give thanks?

How much time do I give my Lord each day?



ACT Spend some time this Advent if at all possible in the presence of our Lord, in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. All creation is made to worship God, just as the ox and the donkey adore the Christ Child, we do so to. Take your children with you to Adoration. They are capable of sitting in the presence of the Lord, to gaze in wonder, even if just for a short while.

3 CRIB PIECES - Stars and the Star of Bethlehem

LISTEN

Genesis 1: 16-18

And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.

Luke 1:79

The sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

PRAY

Leader: Jesus, be our light.

Response: Jesus, be our light.

Leader: Jesus, you are the centre of my life. Even when I turn away from the light, choosing the wrong path, I know your light will lead me home. With gratitude I ask for this family, and for myself, that you remain always our light.

All: Jesus, be our light. Amen.

PONDER

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 meaning of life. Who am I? Where do I come from? Why was I born at this time in history? Why do I love? Why do I suffer? Why will I die? It was to answer these questions that God became man. His closeness brings light where there is darkness and shows the way to those dwelling in the shadow of suffering (cf. Lk 1:79).

Pope Francis *Admirabile Signum* 4



ACT

Do I judge others harshly? We are all created in God's image, and God's creativity means we are all different. God does not make mistakes. Whom have I judged harshly in the past? When I encounter them again, in God's light, I will not judge so harshly, and humble myself before the God of light, giving thanks for all he has created.

4 CRIB PIECES - Angels

LISTEN

Luke 2:8-14

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!'

PRAY

Leader: Lord, send your angels to guide us, so that we can give you glory in our daily lives.

Response: Lord, send your angels to guide us, so that we can give you glory in our daily lives.

Leader: Lord, help our family hear when you speak to us through the scriptures, so that we too may be messengers of the good news of Jesus' birth.

Response: Amen.

PONDER

Once Upon a Christmastime

Once upon a Christmastime
The angels sang with joy,
To herald the coming
Of a precious Baby Boy.
Their shouting filled the heavens
And shook the mighty Earth,
And sent the shepherds searching
For the place of His glorious birth.
And when they found the manger
And gazed upon His face,
They knelt in adoration
In that low and holy place.
Oh, Father, fill me with the love
That filled the Earth that night,
A love that reaches throughout the world
And fills it with Your light.

Dona M. Maroney



Act

Have a conversation with someone where you speak of the good news of Jesus' birth. This might be of particular help to someone whose plans for Christmas will not be possible this year.

5 CRIB PIECES - Shepherd and Lambs

LISTEN

Luke 2:15, 20

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.' ... And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

PRAY

Leader: Jesus, we give you glory.

Response: Jesus, we give you glory.

Leader: No one, whether shepherd or wise man, can approach God here below except by kneeling before the manger at Bethlehem and adoring him hidden in the weakness of a new-born child.

All: Jesus, we give you glory. Amen.

PONDER

'Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us' (Lk 2:15). So the shepherds tell one another after the proclamation of the angels. A beautiful lesson emerges from these simple words. Unlike so many other people, busy about many things, the shepherds become the first to see the most essential thing of all: the gift of salvation. It is the humble and the poor who greet the event of the Incarnation. The shepherds respond to God who comes to meet us in the Infant Jesus by setting out to meet him with love, gratitude and awe. Thanks to Jesus, this encounter between God and his children gives birth to our religion and accounts for its unique beauty, so wonderfully evident in the nativity scene.

Pope Francis *Admirabile Signum* 6



ACT

Spend time in meditation before the crib. Together with the shepherds hear the words of the angel 'Fear not, I bring you news of great joy' (Lk 2:10). Enter the stable filled with joyful hope, fearing not. Place yourself in the presence of God who comes to meet us in the Infant Jesus.

6 CRIB PIECES - Our Family

We, too, have a place around the crib. For we are called, like the shepherds, to be among those who proclaim Christ our King. You could write your names on card, or print out a photograph of each family member and place them around the crib.

LISTEN For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and Ephesians 3:14-19 on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

PRAY A child's prayer before the Christmas crib

Baby on the soft warm hay,
I have a birthday gift for you.
I am wrapping up this while, long day,
All filled with good things I can do.

I'll help my parents in the house
and try hard to obey.

I'll do a kind deed for my friend,
And I'll be cheerful when I play.

I'll clean my plate at every meal.
I'll put my toys and games away.
I'll go to bed without a fuss
and kneel down to silently pray.

Baby on the soft warm hay,
How do you like my gift today? Amen.

Redemptorist Essential Advent & Christmas Handbook

PONDER

I open the stable door;
I kneel before the infant;
I worship with the shepherds;
I adore the Christ child.

I give my love with Mary and Joseph;
I wonder at the 'Word made flesh'.
I am aware of the love of God;
I sing glory with the angels...

I receive the living Lord;
I hold him in my hands;
I go on my way rejoicing,
Glorifying and praising God.

When I receive the living Lord in the Eucharist
at Mass, do I go on my way rejoicing,
glorifying and praising God?



Crib, Archbishop John Wilson

ACT With the reopening of our churches now is the time, with your family, to 'hurry' through the open doors. Your church family needs you as much as your immediate family does and looks forward to welcoming you back.

7 CRIB PIECE - Joseph

LISTEN

Matthew 1:20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit'.

Matthew 2:13-15 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him. And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'

PRAY

We give thanks for Saint Joseph, who provided a home for Mary and Jesus in Nazareth. We ask St Joseph to intercede for us as we prepare our home for Christmas, that our homes are filled with the spirit of self-giving and holy warmth, that they are a place of safety and refuge. We pray for all fathers, that they may follow the example of this holy man as they care for their families.

St Joseph, pray for us. Amen.

PONDER

At Mary's side, shown protecting the Child and his Mother, stands Saint Joseph. He is usually depicted with staff in hand, or holding up a lamp. Saint Joseph plays an important role in the life of Jesus and Mary. He is the guardian who tirelessly protects his family. When God warned him of Herod's threat, he did not hesitate to set out and flee to Egypt (cf. Mt 2:13-15). And once the danger had passed, he brought the family back to Nazareth, where he was to be the first teacher of Jesus as a boy and then as a young man. Joseph treasured in his heart the great mystery surrounding Jesus and Mary his spouse; as a just man, he entrusted himself always to God's will, and put it into practice.

Pope Francis *Admirabile Signum* 7



ACT

Make a list of all the jobs that have to be done now before Christmas, and share the jobs out so that they involve all the family. Acknowledge and thank family members who complete their jobs without any fuss.

8 CRIB PIECE - Mary

LISTEN

Luke 1:38, 46-49

And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."

'My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.'

PRAY

Leader: Mary, show us how to abandon ourselves in faith to God's will.

Response: Mary, show us how to abandon ourselves in faith to God's will.

Leader: Mary, we give thanks that you said 'yes', agreeing to be the mother of God. Help us this Advent to listen and say 'yes' to what God wants of us.

All: Mary, show us how to abandon ourselves in faith to God's will. Amen.

PONDER

Gradually, we come to the cave, where we find the figures of Mary and Joseph. Mary is a mother who contemplates her child and shows him to every visitor. The figure of Mary makes us reflect on the great mystery that surrounded this young woman when God knocked on the door of her immaculate heart. Mary responded in complete obedience to the message of the angel who asked her to become the Mother of God. Her words, "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (*Lk 1:38*), show all of us how to abandon ourselves in faith to God's will. By her "fiat", Mary became the mother of God's Son, not losing but, thanks to him, consecrating her virginity. In her, we see the Mother of God who does not keep her Son only to herself, but invites everyone to obey his word and to put it into practice (cf. *Jn 2:5*).

Pope Francis *Admirabile Signum* 7



Crib scene, St George's Cathedral

ACT

As a family, talk about the best and most exciting journey your family has ever made. Relate this to the journey Mary made to Bethlehem. How will you incorporate living out your faith into the next family journey you make?

9 CRIB PIECE - Jesus

LISTEN

Matthew 2: 4-7

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

PRAY

Leader: The Word was made flesh, alleluia.

Response: And dwelt among us, alleluia.

Leader: Christ has revealed himself to us.

Response: O come, and let us worship.

Leader: Let us pray. We ask you, Almighty God, bless this crib which we have prepared in honour of the new birth of Jesus, the Son of the Father, that all gathered here today, acknowledging the mystery of Jesus's Incarnation, both fully God and fully man, may be filled with the light of his glory, who lives and reigns with you forever and ever.

All: Amen.

Crib scene, St George's Cathedral



PONDER

When, at Christmas, we place the statue of the Infant Jesus in the manger, the nativity scene suddenly comes alive. God appears as a child, for us to take into our arms. Beneath weakness and frailty, he conceals his power that creates and transforms all things. It seems impossible, yet it is true: in Jesus, God was a child, and in this way he wished to reveal the greatness of his love: by smiling and opening his arms to all. The birth of a child awakens joy and wonder; it sets before us the great mystery of life. Seeing the bright eyes of a young couple gazing at their newborn child, we can understand the feelings of Mary and Joseph who, as they looked at the Infant Jesus, sensed God's presence in their lives. "Life was made manifest" (1 Jn 1: 2). In these words, the Apostle John sums up the mystery of the Incarnation. The crèche allows us to see and touch this unique and unparalleled event that changed the course of history, so that time would thereafter be reckoned either before or after the birth of Christ. God's ways are astonishing, for it seems impossible that he should forsake his glory to become a man like us. To our astonishment, we see God acting exactly as we do: he sleeps, takes milk from his mother, cries and plays like every other child! As always, God baffles us. He is unpredictable, constantly doing what we least expect. The nativity scene shows God as he came into our world, but it also makes us reflect on how our life is part of God's own life. It invites us to become his disciples if we want to attain ultimate meaning in life.

Pope Francis *Admirabile Signum* 8

ACT

In the coming year, will I accept this personal invitation to live my life as a disciple of Christ?

10 CRIB PIECES - Wise Men

As the feast of the Epiphany approaches, it is customary to place the statues of the three wise men in the Christmas crib. In my family, they begin in another room and are gradually moved closer to remind us that we are on a journey towards the Christ Child. In our churches we often pack away the shepherds when the wise men arrive bearing gifts.

LISTEN

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, Matthew 2: 1-2, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is he who has 9-11 been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.'

After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

PRAY

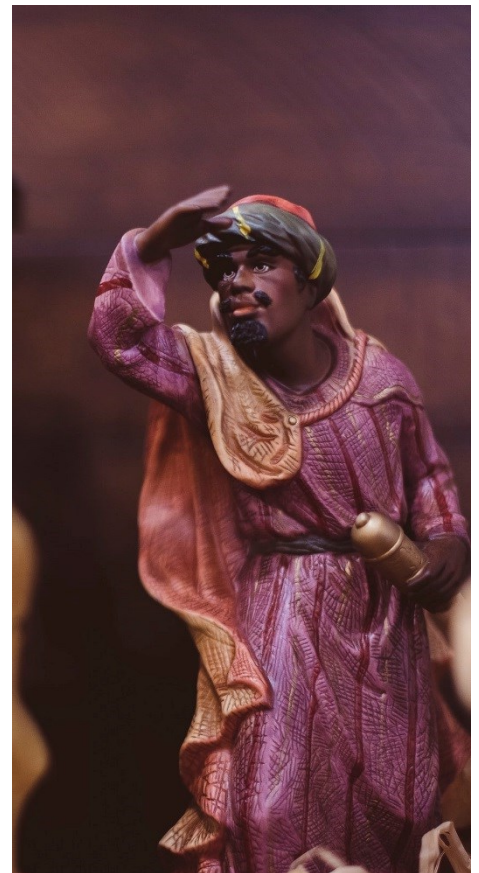
O Little Child, lying in a manger, through a star, heaven has called and led the Wise men to you. Yet, Jesus, you are the light of the world, and as you lie here in such a humble place we too pay homage to you. Glory to you, O Lord! Help me to keep my eyes fixed on you. Amen.

PONDER

As we contemplate this aspect of the nativity scene, we are called to reflect on the responsibility of every Christian to spread the Gospel. Each of us is called to bear glad tidings to all, testifying by our practical works of mercy to the joy of knowing Jesus and his love.

The Magi teach us that people can come to Christ by a very long route. Men of wealth, sages from afar, athirst for the infinite, they set out on the long and perilous journey that would lead them to Bethlehem (cf. Mt 2:1-12). Great joy comes over them in the presence of the Infant King. They are not scandalized by the poor surroundings, but immediately fall to their knees to worship him. Kneeling before him, they understand that the God who with sovereign wisdom guides the course of the stars also guides the course of history, casting down the mighty and raising up the lowly. Upon their return home, they would certainly have told others of this amazing encounter with the Messiah, thus initiating the spread of the Gospel among the nations.

Pope Francis *Admirabile Signum* 9



ACT

The wise men brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. What gifts will I bring to those in need? What gifts will I bring to those in my parish community? Gifts of time, talent, money etc.?

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shined.

For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his
shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:2, 6



Agency for Evangelisation
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