



What's What

A weekly communication that provides an opportunity for our faith community to grow together in faith.

History of the Crèche

Issue 54
December 7, 2008

[Mary] gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” (Luke 2:7)

The word crèche is a French word meaning manger or crib, both come from the Latin word *cripia*. Nativity sets, Nativity scenes, and Christmas cribs all refer to what we call the crèche.

According to St. Luke, Jesus was born in a place where animals were kept and was placed in a manger, a feeding trough for animals. The earliest representation of the Nativity is found in a 2nd century fresco in the catacombs of St Pricilla, in Italy. It portrays Mother and Child, three Wise Men and Joseph, or perhaps the prophet Isaiah. Above is a star with eight points. Another early fresco from the 5th century, found in the catacombs of St Sebastian, depicts a manger with donkey and ox, but Mary and Joseph are not shown.

As time went on, the Nativity scene became a staple of the Christian life. By the time of St Francis, people would put a decorative manger in front of their local church. These gold or jeweled mangers represented what was held inside of them, the baby Jesus. This ornate custom began to concern St Francis who felt that the people were forgetting about the humble, poor birth of Jesus.

In 1223, St Francis created the first live Nativity in a small cave near the village of Greccio, Italy. According to St Bonaventure, on Christmas Eve St Francis took a

manger and filled it with hay, tied a donkey and an ox near it and with a crowd of people who had gathered, celebrated Mass in front of the crib.

St Bonaventure, in his “Life of St Francis”, gives us a glimpse into that night:

...The brethren were summoned, the people ran together, the forest resounded with their voices, and that venerable night was made glorious by many and brilliant lights and sonorous psalms of praise. The man of God [St. Francis] stood before the manger, full of devotion and piety, bathed in tears and radiant with joy; the Holy Gospel was chanted by Francis, the Levite of Christ. Then he preached to the people around the nativity of the poor King; and being unable to utter His name for the tenderness of His love, He called Him the Babe of Bethlehem. A certain valiant and veracious soldier, Master John of Grecio, who, for the love of Christ, had left the warfare of this world, and become a dear friend of this holy man, affirmed that he beheld an Infant marvelously beautiful, sleeping in the manger, Whom the blessed Father Francis embraced with both his arms, as if he would awake Him from sleep. This vision of the devout soldier is credible, not only by reason of the sanctity of him that saw it, but by reason of the miracles which afterwards confirmed its truth. For example of Francis, if it be considered by the world, is doubtless sufficient to excite all hearts which

are negligent in the faith of Christ; and the hay of that manger, being preserved by the people, miraculously cured all diseases of cattle, and many other pestilences; God thus in all things glorifying his servant, and witnessing to the great efficacy of his holy prayers by manifest prodigies and miracles.

In the early 16th century St. Gaetano of Thiene enlarged the Nativity scene by adding various figures around those of the Holy Family. By the 17th and 18th centuries, crib making had become a flourishing trade in Rome, Genoa, Sicily and especially in Naples. The Council of Trent, which ended in 1563, encouraged the use of a crèche as an expression of popular piety. The Jesuits, at that time a

new Religious Order, took hold of the tradition and used it to win back reformed Christians and to evangelize the recently discovered New World.

Early Protestantism refused to have any image of Jesus or his followers, so the crèche became solely a Catholic tradition. Nativity Scenes have become a mirror of the culture that produces them. They reflect the society of the day and aspects of daily life. We see this in the fact that the crèche is no longer only a Catholic tradition. Nearly all Christian denominations display a Nativity Scene during the Christmas Season.

Preparing the Manger

As you prepare your heart and home to celebrate the birth of Jesus, you may set up a crèche. In France there is a custom that each night a child is asked to put one straw in the manger for each act of devotion, good work or sacrifice performed. When Christmas Day arrives, the baby Jesus finds plenty of straw to keep him warm and make the manger more comfortable.

Although preparing the manger is geared toward children, this is a custom the whole family can practice. You can choose to have one large crib, in the main part of the house, or give each person their own small crib to keep in their room. Small bales of straw can be found at a craft store. Each person should add pieces of straw every day. Be sure to comment on the good work you have observed other members of your family do.

On Christmas Eve darken the house and give the family lighted candles to hold as the youngest child places the baby Jesus in the manger. Have someone read Luke 2:15-20, and together sing a carol such as “Silent Night” or “O Come All Ye Faithful”.

Adapted from: www.catholicculture.org/liturgicalyear/activities/



Saint of the Day: St. Lucy (d 304)

On Saturday, December 13, the Church will remember St Lucy.

Every little girl named Lucy must bite her tongue in disappointment when she first tries to find out what there is to know about her patron saint. The older books will have a lengthy paragraph detailing a small number of traditions. Newer books will have a lengthy paragraph showing that there is little basis in history for these traditions. The single fact survives that a disappointed suitor accused Lucy of being a Christian and she was executed in Syracuse (Sicily) in the year 304. But it is also true that her name is mentioned in the First Eucharistic Prayer, geographical places are named after her, a popular song has her name as its title and down through the centuries many thousands of little girls have been proud of the name Lucy.

One can easily imagine what a young Christian woman had to contend with in pagan Sicily in the year 300. If you have trouble imagining, just glance at today's pleasure-at-

all-costs world and the barriers it presents against leading a good Christian life.

Her friends must have wondered aloud about this hero of Lucy's, an obscure itinerant preacher in a far-off captive nation that had been destroyed more than 200 years before. Once a carpenter, he had been crucified by the Roman soldiers after his own people turned him over to the Roman authorities. Lucy believed with her whole soul that this man had risen from the dead. Heaven had put a stamp on all he said and did. To give witness to her faith she had made a vow of virginity.

What a hubbub this caused among her pagan friends! The kindlier ones just thought her a little strange. To be pure before marriage was an ancient Roman ideal, rarely found but not to be condemned. To exclude marriage altogether, however, was too much. She must have something sinister to hide, the tongues wagged.

Lucy knew of the heroism of earlier virgin

martyrs. She remained faithful to their example and to the example of the carpenter, whom she knew to be the Son of God. She is the patroness of eyesight.

Quote:

"The Gospel tells us of all that Jesus suffered, of the insults that fell upon him. But, from Bethlehem to Calvary, the brilliance that radiates from his divine purity spread more and more and won over the crowds. So great was the austerity and the enchantment of his conduct."

"So may it be with you, beloved daughters. Blessed be the discretion, the mortifications and the renuncements with which you seek to render this virtue more brilliant.... May your conduct prove to all that chastity is not only a possible virtue but a social virtue, which must be strongly defended through prayer, vigilance and the mortification of the senses" (Pope John XXIII, Letter to Women Religious)..

www.americancatholic.org/Features/SaintOfDay

What if Every Catholic in the Diocese of Rochester Read the Same Book? Project Mark

Imagine the power of having all of us read the same book: the Gospel of Mark!

Spirit Alive! invites us all to know and understand Scripture better. What better way to do that than to devote some time to reading one book of the Bible: The Gospel of Mark?

Why Mark? During this liturgical year, the whole Church will hear the Gospel of Mark. During Ordinary Time our Sunday Gospels will be from the Gospel of Mark.

The Gospel of Mark was written for early Christians who were experiencing persecution and suffering for their faith. It portrays Jesus as a man of action, a man always on the move to Spread the Word.

Things to consider as you read the Gospel of Mark.

How is Jesus' humanity revealed in this Gospel? How is His Divinity revealed?

How does Mark describe Jesus?

How would you describe what you have learned about Jesus?

What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus according to Mark?

What is the role of suffering in this Gospel?

Readings for Project Mark

Date	Read
Nov. 30:	Chapter One Reflect on Mk 1:1-8
Dec. 7:	Chapter Two Reflect on Mk. 2:1-12
Dec. 14:	Chapter Three Reflect on Mk. 3:13-19 & Mk. 3:31-34
Dec. 21 & 28	The Christmas Story
Jan. 4:	Chapter Four Reflect on Mk. 4:35-41

Go to www.Rochesterspiritallive.org for weekly reflection questions.

To be continued...

"What's What" is a publication of the Youth Ministry Department of St Mary, Canandaigua, and St Bridget, Bloomfield.

Our Youth Ministry Mission Statement:

Building on the mission of our parishes to follow the way of Christ in our thoughts, words, and deeds, and to make Christ more fully present in all who live within our community, the Youth Ministry mission is to empower young people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in the world today; to affirm the gifts of our youth and provide opportunities for young people to share their gifts with the larger community; and to meet the religious, spiritual and social needs of all youth with the committed leadership, guidance and support of our parish family, providing an opportunity for our entire faith community to grow together in Christian faith.