



## ***The Saint Francis Xavier's Messenger - #12 - January 2016*** ***Newsletter of the Society of Saint Pius X in Sri Lanka***

### **From Holy Crib to Manger Scene**

In the Gospel of St. Luke we read about the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ: *"She brought forth a son, her first-born, whom she wrapped in his swaddling-clothes, and laid in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."*

Hence from Scripture we are told that the Infant Savior was laid in a manger, or feeding trough, and so born in a type of stable, not in a dwelling place of men, but rather of beasts. From these facts of the event of Our Lord's birth, we witness the humility and tender mercy of the King of kings.

In the Palestine region, caves were often used in ancient times to house livestock while feeding troughs were typically made of wood. Symbolically the wood of the manger connects with Our Lord's Passion which ended on the Wood of the Cross. On the other hand, the stone Cave of the Nativity perhaps alludes to Our Lord's Resurrection, which took place in the Holy Sepulcher, a burial chamber cut into solid rock.

The fact that Our Lord's birth occurred in a cave was passed down for nearly a century, but as with many of the other Holy Places, the Cave of the Nativity was not rediscovered until the 2nd century by St. Justin the Martyr, thereupon a great devotion sprung up around it. In 326, St. Helena (mother of Emperor Constantine) had a church constructed over what has become known as the Grotto of the Nativity. Emperor Justinian had the larger and present-day Basilica of the Nativity built in 531.

As with the other shrines in the Holy Land, the Church of the Nativity has an interesting history worth exploring. The Franciscan Custodians of the Holy Land have a very informative website ([www.bethlehem.custodia.org/default.asp?id=455](http://www.bethlehem.custodia.org/default.asp?id=455)) that features the history of the shrine, a virtual tour, images and even diagrams of the Basilica and the caves located below. Note though, that they have an ecumenical explanation of the shared custody of the Church of the Nativity by the Latins, and the schismatic Greek Orthodox and Armenians.

Today one can access the Grotto of the Nativity by descending some stone steps situated to side of the basilica's high altar. Upon reaching the cave, one finds the Altar of the Nativity under which is inlaid a silver star in the marble floor bearing the inscription: *"Hic de Virgine Maria Jesus Christus natus est"*: **"Here the Virgin Mary gave birth to Jesus Christ"**. To the right and a little distance from the Nativity altar is another altar shrine which marks where the Holy Mother of God laid the Divine Infant in the wooden manger.

Fragments of this Holy Crib—or *Sacra Culla*—can be venerated in Rome in the *confessio* under the high altar of St. Mary Major Basilica. There in a beautiful crib-shaped reliquary of crystal and silver, the wood pieces of the manger—called *cunabulum*—can be seen and meditated upon. This chapel was built on the orders of Pope Pius IX, who had a great devotion to the Holy Crib of Jesus, which is the reason for the marble statue of the Supreme Pontiff kneeling before the holy relic.

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Another "relic" that can be found in *Santa Maria Maggiore*—the first Roman basilica dedicated to the Mother of God—is the "Crib" of Pope Sixtus III (432-440). So in addition to St. Mary Major being known colloquially as the "Liberian Basilica" (after Pope Liberius who had the first church built), it also bears the nickname of *Sancta Maria ad Praesepe*—Holy Mary at the Manger, referring to the relics of the Holy Crib.

The Latin word *praesepe* actually refers to a type of enclosure or barricade, or a fenced-in area for keeping livestock. Later this word was applied to the ancient Roman custom of depicting the manger scene of Our Lord's holy Nativity. This devotional practice of course was done to meditate more fully on the humility and poverty of Jesus Christ, and the Holy Family's example of detachment from the things of this earth.

The ancient *praesepe* of Pope Sixtus III constructed in 432 was actually a reconstruction of the "Holy Cave of the Nativity" as in Bethlehem. During a renovation of the Marian basilica under Pope Sixtus V (1585-1590), the entire cave structure was moved as a single piece into the right-side nave, along with the figurine sculptures of Arnolfo di Cambio dating from 1288—they may still be seen in the church today.

In 1233—having previously visited the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem—St. Francis of Assisi (+1226) was inspired to erect a *praesepe* just a few days before Christmas in a cave near the town of Greccio (Italy) to depict "*how poor [Christ] chose to be for our sakes*":



**"If you want to celebrate the Feast of the Lord at Greccio,** hurry and diligently prepare what I tell you. For I wish to recall to memory the little child who was born in Bethlehem. I want to set before our bodily eyes the hardships of his infant needs, how he lay in the manger, **how with an ox and ass standing by he lay upon the hay."**

As the Little Poverello's biographer Thomas of Celano further related:

**"He would often meditate on the desolation of Christ and his holy mother with tears, and he maintained that poverty was 'the queen' of the virtues, as she had become so radiantly manifest in the King and his mother."**

This Nativity scene included a live ox and donkey (but no persons), while on a stone block covered with straw, a carved wooden statue of the Divine Babe was laid—later miraculously seen to come alive.

The Franciscan Order naturally adopted the devotion of the Christmas manger scene and through the particular efforts of the Capuchin Fathers (to which Padre Pio and Ven. Fr. Solanus Casey both belonged), the Catholic custom of erecting a crib in the home began during the 17th century; later, outdoor manger scenes became popular especially in town squares. Unfortunately today, outdoor Nativity scenes have often been the cause of municipal controversies, though some townships have continued this edifying custom.

Today's *creches* usually include the figurines of the shepherds and their sheep, while even more elaborate *praesepe*s are comprised of entire villages containing many figures, buildings and detailed landscaping. Some of these scenes date from the 18th century, when crib-making became a type of native folk art. One example of such a *praesepe* in Rome is the extensive "Neapolitan Crib" in the Franciscan-run Basilica of Sts. Cosmas and Damian.

We must of course add that today this touching devotion to the Infant Child in the manger is not complete until the expectant arrival of the Three Wise Men from the East bearing their gifts on the Feast of the Epiphany—that is, the 'manifestation' of Christ as King and Savior of the Gentiles.

The ascribed names of the Magi are Melchior, Caspar and Balthasar, who from the Parthian Empire followed the Star to Bethlehem, where tradition says its light shone into the Well of the Magi—a cistern situated near the presbytery in the Basilica of the Nativity. Their bodily remains are enshrined in the cathedral of Cologne, Germany.

Scripture tells us that the Three Kings came before the Infant King and adored Him while presenting precious gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. We too can emulate these men who were filled with True Wisdom by kneeling before the manger scene and presenting our hearts and minds to Our Divine Savior, Jesus Christ, Who came into this world as a man for our salvation and eternal happiness in Heaven.

# Some points of Catholic Doctrine on Family

Fr. François Laisney

One has been waiting in vain to hear clear doctrine from the Synod of Bishops on the Family, but rather heard very dangerously ambiguous reports. Since the faithful – and the less faithful – do need to receive from the Church the light of clear doctrine, and it behoves a good shepherd to feed his sheep with such proper doctrine, so here are some simple concise considerations that should help.

- [1/ Nature of a family, as God has established it](#)
- [2/ Virtues required for a good family](#)
- [3/ Virtues required to prepare for a good family](#)
- [4/ Vices before the marriage, that will make a good family more difficult](#)
- [5/ Vices within the marriage](#)
- [6/ Obstacles outside the family that make a good family more difficult](#)
- [7/ Helps that can be provided for families to be good](#)
- [8/ After the drama of sin, what can be done? The Mercy of God calls to penance!](#)

- Special consideration in special cases:
- [9/ Teenage pregnancy](#)
  - [10/ Abortion](#)
  - [11/ Imprudent or dysfunctional marriage](#)
  - [12/ Broken marriage](#)
  - [13/ Divorced and remarriage](#)
  - [14/ Unnatural vices](#)

- False solutions:
- [15/ “Perverse mercy”](#)
  - [16/ Marriage annulments](#)
  - [17/ False discernment](#)

## 4/ Vices before the marriage, that will make a good family more difficult

The lack of faith, so common today, leads many to have an earthly view of marriage, searching in it only self-satisfaction and pleasures, only earthly and emotional love and not supernatural self-sacrificing charity. Remedy: good catechism instruction! (And the example of parents living the faith). Sensuality: impure curiosity (TV, internet, books, pornography...), leading often to impure actions alone or worse with others, all this selfishness is the contrary of self-giving love that should be in the marriage. Remedy: strict avoidance of the occasions of sins (TV, internet...) and practice of prayer and sacrifice. The modern world, with all its vices, is a proof of the wisdom of God by its opposite: one indeed can see all the frightful consequences of departure from God's Law. Thus one sees how the evil of unbridled concupiscence leads youth to fornication, which then leads them to contraception adding a second evil to the first, which leads them to abortion (when contraception failed) thus adding a much more grievous evil to the previous ones. All this completely destroys the hearts of the mothers and fathers and all those who pushed for it (evil parents pushing their daughters to such murder!) It is not surprising that after such sins, they have a very hard time to settle in a proper marriage! One must avoid the evil road at the beginning. Don't even consider departing from the right path of the Commandments of God!

## 5/ Vices within the marriage can even destroy the family itself

The first vice is a lack of faith: then searching for happiness on earth, one tends to abuse of created goods. This lack of faith leads to the neglect of prayer and of sacrifice, hence not having the remedy any more, the situation gets worse... Second: selfishness and impurity, searching for pleasure beyond the reasonable measure, this can include pornography (which is always wrong, even for married people), and leads to contraception, which only further feeds this selfishness and impurity, and may even lead to abortion, which destroys fatherly and motherly love and can easily destroy the family itself. In many families the children's education is neglected: they are allowed to do whatever they want; their least whim is satisfied and this spoils them and destroys any root of virtue (which consists in the control of one's passions by right reason: virtue is impossible when passions are allowed to go uncontrolled). Such parents will be asked an account of the vices of their children! Much worse: in some families, vices go so far as incest, even unnatural, paedophilia and sexual abuses of children.

Remedy: a good Ignatian retreat! After this, establish a strong Catholic ethos, with family prayer, etc. (see above).

*To be continued...*

FRI 1 January	OCTAVE OF THE NATIVITY ➡ 12.00am – Sung Mass	ST. HILARY 4.50 – Rosary & Benediction 5.30 – Low Mass	THU 14 January
SAT 2 January	FIRST SATURDAY 5.30 – Low Mass	ST. PAUL, HERMIT 5.30 – Low Mass	FRI 15 January
SUN 3 January	HOLY NAME OF JESUS 8.30 – Rosary 9.00 – Sung Mass	ST. MARCELLUS I 5.30 – Sung Mass	SAT 16 January
MON 4 January	FERIA 7.15 – Low Mass 5.30 – Low Mass	2 <sup>nd</sup> SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY 8.30 – Rosary 9.00 – Sung Mass	SUN 17 January
TUE 5 January	FERIA 7.15 – Low Mass 5.30 – Low Mass	FERIA 7.15 – Low Mass	MON 18 January
WED 6 January	THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD 7.15 – Low Mass 5.30 – Sung Mass	<b>PRIESTS' RETREAT</b> No Mass	19-23 January
THU 7 January	FERIA 7.15 – Low Mass 4.50 – Rosary & Benediction 5.30 – Low Mass	SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY 8.30 – Rosary 9.00 – Sung Mass	SUN 24 January
FRI 8 January	FERIA 5.30 – Low Mass	CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL 5.30 – Low Mass	MON 25 January
SAT 9 January	OUR LADY ON SATURDAY 5.30 – Low Mass	ST. POLYCARP 7.15 – Low Mass 5.30 – Sung Mass	TUE 26 January
SUN 10 January	HOLY FAMILY 8.30 – Rosary 9.00 – Sung Mass	ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM 7.15 – Low Mass 5.30 – Low Mass	WED 27 January
MON 11 January	FERIA 5.30 – Low Mass	ST. PETER NOLASCO 7.15 – Low Mass 4.50 – Rosary & Benediction 5.30 – Low Mass	THU 28 January
TUE 12 January	FERIA 5.30 – Low Mass	ST. FRANCIS OF SALES 5.30 – Low Mass	FRI 29 January
WED 13 January	BAPTISM OF OUR LORD 11.00 – Low Mass 11.30 – Rosary & Benediction	ST. MARTINA 5.30 – Low Mass	SAT 30 January
HAPPY AND HOLY NEW YEAR!		SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY 8.30 – Rosary 9.00 – Sung Mass	SUN 31 January

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

**Priests' Presence:** Fr. Wailliez (18-22; 25/1-7/2); Fr. Noronha (4-28/1); Fr. Loschi (1-7; 18-23/1).

**18-23 JANUARY:** Priests' Retreat. Kindly keep them in your prayers.

The *Catechism in pictures* is available for LKR750.