

‘No Crib For A Bed’ But a Manger to Feed the World

The children of the parish have built our crib scene here to bring to life the earth-changing events of that first Christmas and hold before our eyes for our prayer and reflection the circumstances of our Saviour’s birth because here, in this humble stable in the little town of Bethlehem, the greatest event in the history of the world took place: God took on the life of a human being so that all human beings could take on the life of God.

The crib scene is sadly less common today in our towns and public spaces. Not so in Italy where the tradition of the nativity scene is as strong as ever and villages and churches compete with each other for the best display. This year, Pope Francis visited Greccio in central Italy where his patron, St Francis, made the first live crib scene 800 years ago with real animals and a baby. The Pope said that the crib “is like a living Gospel” bringing the story of Jesus’ coming among us to our homes, schools, workplaces, town squares, hospitals, prisons and wherever the nativity scene is displayed to remind us that our “God is not a distant lord or a detached judge” but in Jesus “a real, concrete, living and breathing” human being who lives among us and shares our life.

In the baby Jesus in the stable at Bethlehem, God shares all the conditions of human life: our weakness and vulnerability, our powerlessness, our voicelessness, our dependence on others, our poverty. The circumstances of the birth show us that God comes down to share the human condition in its lowliest form, born in an animal’s shed, with no creature comforts, a donkey’s trough for a cradle and the most insanitary conditions for a baby to be born into. In the baby Jesus, our God is with us in all the circumstances of human life, even the most wretched and humble.

As a royal baby descended from King David, Jesus was not born in a palace but in a stable. As the Son of God, Jesus was not born in the holiest city on earth, Jerusalem, where God was worshipped in the Temple, but in a little, insignificant village six miles outside - Bethlehem, whose name means ‘House of Bread’. Of Bethlehem the prophet Micah wrote:

‘But you, Bethlehem ... the least of the clans of Judah, out of you will be born for me the one who is to rule over Israel...’ (Micah 5:1)

Born in a **humble** stable, in a **small** village on the **margins** of the great Jerusalem, Jesus came for the humble, the little people and those who live on the margins of society - the homeless, the street sleepers, the addict and the outcast.

Bethlehem, the name means ‘House of Bread’, and bread is the simplest and most basic of foods, supplying the daily ration of the poorest peasant working in the fields and the staple of all people. It symbolises the most basic need we humans have for survival. From the humble animal’s feeding trough Jesus becomes the bread of life that feeds the hunger of the world for God. “I am the bread of life”, says Jesus; “whoever comes to me will never be hungry; whoever believes in me will never thirst”... “whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise them up on the last day”.

But, as Jesus himself says, “Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God”. Jesus himself *is* every word that comes from the mouth of God; he is the word of God made flesh; he is everything God wants to say to humanity - he is the Love of God incarnate. In his life, in his words, in his actions we read how we should live as God’s children made in God’s image and likeness. Here in the Mass more than anywhere Jesus comes among us to show us the way to the Father. He is the word who speaks to us and teaches us through the Gospels and he is the word made flesh who feeds us through the Eucharist.

“Glory to God in the highest” for the greatest gift of His Son, His Word made flesh for our salvation whose birthday we celebrate today. May he be born in us anew and may *our* flesh become *his* word to proclaim his saving love to the world by the witness of lives radiant with the light of Christ born in our hearts today.