

22 December 2024

WORD OF THE WEEK

Crèche \kresh \

French for “crib”; popular name for the Nativity scene displayed in the Christmas season, typically with sculptural figures of Mary, Joseph, Jesus, the manger, shepherds, Magi, and farm animals. This tradition began with Saint Francis of Assisi, who celebrated Christmas in a barn with animals, as Jesus did.

Pronunciation: <https://tinyurl.com/Take5-creche>

CONTEXT

Why does the Christmas **crèche** arouse such wonder and move us so deeply? First, because it shows God's tender love: the Creator of the universe lowered himself to take up our littleness.

—Pope Francis

In the **crèche**, recognizable local characters peddle their wares, tend to livestock, and celebrate in the local tavern while angels fly overhead.

—Elizabeth Dudgeon, *Art Institute of Chicago*

WHY IT MATTERS

Saint Francis viewed a barn with animals as the perfect site for Mass at Christmas. His original **crèche** didn't include Mary and Joseph. For him, the ox and ass of Isaiah's prophecy were far more instructive: "An ox knows its owner, and an ass, its master's manger; but Israel does not know, my people has not understood" (Isaiah 1:3). This messy manger prompts us to wonder whether we know who possesses us.

From *Days of the Lord, Volume 1*: "For the veneration of the faithful, [the Church of St. Mary Major] erected a manger out of five pieces of wood, thus making a connection between the wood of the **crèche** and wood of the cross. [And] Bethlehem and the manger were very soon related to the altar of the Eucharist."

RELATED WORDS

Manger | Nativity | Homage | Devotion

QUESTION OF THE WEEK

Why don't all Christians celebrate Christmas on the same day?

The ancients told time in terms of the great sky clocks, sun and moon. Seasons were established according to the heavenly orbs and patterns of rainfall. Dating also concerned the succession of rulers. Matthew tells us of a star announcing a new king's arrival, during the present reign of King Herod. Luke acknowledges Caesar Tiberias, Pontius Pilate, and high priests Annas and Caiaphas. Details we prefer—day of the week, date of the month, the month itself—are not recorded. In addition, news traveled slowly in the ancient world. The winter solstice was already a significant observance and suited a celebration of the Light of the World. Jerusalem chose January 6 for the celebration of this Theophany, or Divine Manifestation. Western Christians called this same manifestation Epiphany, observing it in late December. In time, both traditions mingled to create a unified liturgical chain between Nativity and Epiphany.

—Alice Camille, from *Questions Catholics Ask* <http://tinyurl.com/QCA-Christmas-date>

REFLECTION OF THE WEEK

SOLEMNITY OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD, CHRISTMAS
(DECEMBER 25)

Warm reception

Saint Francis of Assisi is credited with creating the first Christmas **crèche**. What Francis did at midnight Mass in the tiny town of Greccio was assemble a few farm animals around an empty, straw-lined manger to feel the poverty and coldness of the world into which Love was born. Legend has it that in a vision Francis saw an infant in the hay who seemed lifeless until, moved with pity, Francis embraced the baby who then stirred, flush with life.

READINGS: Isaiah 52:7-10; Hebrews 1:1-6; John 1:1-18 or 1:1-5, 9-14 (16 <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/122524-Day.cfm>). "This life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness."

FAITH IN ACTION

Christmas is coming face-to-face with the chill of human fear, pain, and sorrow. It is embracing one another until we, too, are flushed with warmth and hope.