

Praying at the Crib



"The nativity scene is part of the precious yet demanding process of passing on the faith. Beginning in childhood, and at every stage of our lives, it teaches us to contemplate Jesus, to experience God's love for us, to feel and believe that God is with us and that we are with him, his children, brothers and sisters all, thanks to that Child who is the Son of God and the Son of the Virgin Mary. And to realise that in that knowledge we find true happiness. Like Saint Francis, may we open our hearts to this simple grace, so that from our wonderment a humble prayer may arise: a prayer of thanksgiving to God, who wished to share with us his all, and thus never to leave us alone."

Pope Francis, *Admirabile Signum*

This Christmas, let us look, with fresh eyes at the mystery and majesty in this humble Crib scene.

In a Christmas meditation St. Pio describes the scene:

'Far into the night, at the coldest time of the year, in a chilly grotto, more suitable for a flock of beasts than for humans, the promised Messiah – Jesus – the saviour of mankind, comes into the world in the fullness of time. There are none who clamour around him: only an ox and an ass lending their warmth to the newborn infant; with a humble woman, and a poor and tired man, in adoration beside him'

In the poverty and simplicity of this stable in Bethlehem, the Word became flesh to live among us fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah:

'The Lord himself will give you a sign. It is this: the maiden is with child and will soon give birth to a son whom she will call Emmanuel, a name which means 'God is with us'

Here in this Crib we contemplate the wondrous mystery of God's love. The coming of Emmanuel is Good News for all people, not just the rich, the powerful, the strong, nor the poor, the weak, the powerless but for all people. Everyone was welcome at the Crib, everyone is welcome in the presence of God.

We pray:

Lord, we ask you bless this Crib and all who look upon it.

You came to us as a helpless child to share our vulnerabilities, our joys and sorrows, and to teach us your way of love. As we look upon this Crib, space of tenderness, may it open our hearts and our homes to become Bethlehem spaces, open to receive the Light and Love of God and share it with others.

May this Crib which was a home for an anxious couple in search of shelter, and for a new-born child fragile and vulnerable, remind us to open our hearts and homes: to listen for the whisper of God ; to listen for the voices of the anxious and the vulnerable in our families and communities this Christmas.

Gracious God, bless us with an extravagance of patience, insight, hope and love, as we await the birth of our Saviour.

Pour down your blessings on all our families and homes and on the broken parts of your world.

May we know the peace that the angels announced to the shepherds and may the joy of God's coming among us in Jesus, fill our hearts. Amen.

Scripture: Luke 2:1-5

Caesar Augustus issued a decree for a census of the whole world to be taken. This census – the first – took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria, and everyone went to his own town to be registered. So Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee and travelled up to Judaea, to the town of David called Bethlehem, since he was of David's House and line, in order to be registered together with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to a son, her first born. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them at the inn.

Intercessory prayers as we focus on elements of the Crib

The Animals

Lord, we remember the animals that greeted your Son's lowly birth and are part of the Christmas story: the oxen, the sheep, the tired donkey. They remind us of all the beautiful creatures sharing this planet with us. You have asked us to care for all of your creation including the animals. We ask you to change us so that we protect your world, not destroy it. Fill our hearts with love for all of your creation this Christmas and show us how to use the resources of the planet wisely.

God of Hope, Come to us.

The Shepherds

The shepherds had a special part to play in your story. Shepherds were on the margins of society and were not important people. You chose to send your angels to tell them the Good News. Lord, we remember how they were watching their sheep on the cold, dark hillside. Suddenly they were surrounded by light and they heard the song of the angels. They rushed down the hillside to find you.

We remember, this Christmas time, all those in our world who wait to hear your Good News. We ask you to help us play our part in bringing your Christmas joy and peace to those who are forgotten.

God of Hope, Come to us.

Mary and Joseph

Lord, we remember the anxious journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, their worry at finding no room at the inn and the excitement and fear at the forthcoming birth. We remember they courageously followed your plan for their lives even when they had to face great difficulty and uncertainty.

Lord God, thank you for giving us the example of Mary and Joseph's great faith. Thank you for coming into our midst and enduring the chaos of human life. Help me to know, when things are difficult, you understand what I go through, because you have lived this life too.

We remember, this Christmas time, all those who are anxious and fearful, who long for your hope and comfort to come into their lives.

God of Hope, Come to us.

The Christ-Child in the Manger

Lord, we remember your coming into our world as a fragile, tiny and helpless child.

You were born in a stable but worshipped by the angels.

We thank you for your promise of love for all on earth.

This Christmas we pray for those who, like you, flee from their homeland in the face of violence and don't have enough food, safety or shelter. Help us to give generously to those in need.

Be with all who are lonely, and with all who feel distant from celebrations.

God of Hope, Come to us.

Prayer
(based on Pope John XXIII's Prayer at the Crib)

O sweet Child of Bethlehem, grant that we may share with all our hearts in this profound mystery of Christmas.

Put into the hearts of all families - men, women, and children
this peace for which we seek so desperately and which you alone can give.
Help us to know one another better, and to live as brothers and sisters,
children of the same Father.

Reveal to us also your beauty, holiness and purity.
Awaken in our hearts love and gratitude for your infinite goodness.

Join us all together in your love.
And give us your heavenly peace.
Amen.



Away in a manger
No crib for a bed
The little Lord Jesus
Laid down His sweet head
The stars in the bright sky
Looked down where He lay
The little Lord Jesus
Asleep on the hay

The cattle are lowing
The Baby awakes
But little Lord Jesus
No crying He makes
I love You, Lord Jesus
Look down from the sky
And stay by my side
Until morning is nigh

Be near me, Lord Jesus
I ask You to stay
Close by me forever
And love me I pray
Bless all the dear children
In Your tender care
And fit us for heaven
To live with You there