



Crib scenes now so familiar at Christmas were originated by St. Francis of Assisi.

Saint Invented World's First Christmas Crib

By FATHER JAMES L. TUCEK

Greccio, Italy — (NC) — The heart of the Catholic world is attracted during the days before Christmas toward a little hermitage in the Valley of Rieti where the first Christmas crib scene the world ever knew blossomed like a winter flower 734 years ago.

On Christmas Eve in 1223 Greccio became the "Bethlehem of Italy." From a tiny monastery, perched like an eagle's nest on the rocky top of a mountain here, the pastoral poetry of the Christmas creche was to spread throughout the world.

Its "inventor," St. Francis of Assisi, had longed all his life to make a pilgrimage to the country of Jesus.

After organizing his company of the Little Friars, he wanted all the more to go there and leave some of his followers in the Holy Land as a guard of honor.

His ambition was realized, and while visiting Bethlehem and saying his devout prayers in the grotto of the Nativity, he conceived an original plan that would speak with force and dramatic power to men of all times and places.

He decided that men should see with their bodily eyes "The want which the Son of God suffered, through the lack of all things necessary to a newborn, and the manner in which he was placed in a manger and lay on hay between the ox and the donkey."

He later chose the place for his scheme with great intention.

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MUCH OF THE ill repute connected with the shepherds could be traced to their life in the wilderness. Here life often meant the survival of the fittest. Shepherds had to be ready for any long, ready day and night to face unexpected danger.

Beside them as they slept they carried clubs ready for use against wolves preying on their flocks or for dealing with suspicious strangers. You need not be surprised if these shepherds could boast of killing with only their bare hands a lion or bear near as King David had done. Hence it is still a shepherd boy in these same pastures around Bethlehem.

These shepherds were tough men. They had to be. And as usually is the case in matters of class prejudice, they were not all as blue as their critics painted them. In the ranks of the shepherds were honest and humble men. Among them were many devoted to the one true God and faithfully waiting for the coming of the Messiah.

AS THEY WAITED for the Messiah and watched over their flocks these shepherds could look on nearby Bethlehem and remember the days of ancient glory.

Here a thousand years before God took a shepherd boy of Bethlehem and raised him to the throne of Israel. This was King David who had received his royal anointment from the prophet Samuel here in Bethlehem.

Here in these pastures around Bethlehem, the shepherd youth David, "ruddy and beautiful to behold and of a comely face," had left his sheep when he went forth to slay Goliath and led the armies of Israel in victory over the Philistines.

This shepherd king whom God called from the fields of Bethlehem was prefigure of the Messiah upon whose advent all Israel waited. God had promised, moreover, that the Messiah would be a blood descendant of David. Bethlehem's most famous shepherd.

The Messiah king would be the shepherd king's son, and God promised David, "I will establish his throne forever."

THIS ASSOCIATION of the



They All Came To Bethlehem...

memory of the shepherd king with the destiny of the Messiah was a source of joy to the shepherds of Bethlehem.

They took pride, too, in the picture which the inspired prophets had drawn of the Christ as a good Shepherd who would lay down his life for his flock. The shepherds of Bethlehem could not forget this messianic vision of the prophet Isaiah: "I will be to the Lord God shall come... He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather together the lambs with his arm and shall take them up in his bosom..." (Isaiah 40:11)

And if these proud memories and divine promises were not enough, the shepherds could point to the tradition which said that the Christ would be born here in Bethlehem, the town where David, the shepherd king, was born.

Almost eight centuries before, speaking through the prophet Micah, God had named the town of David as the Redeemer's birthplace:

"AND THOU BETHLEHEM, EPHRATA, art a little one among the thousands of Juda; out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be the ruler in Israel..." (Micah 5:2)

THESE WERE the dreams and hopes of the shepherds camped near Bethlehem on the first Christmas night, the night that Mary's Son was born.

As the shepherds kept the night watches over their flocks and huddled near their camp fires, something strange happened, strange even for men who were ready to expect almost anything.

Suddenly "an angel of the Lord stood by them and the glory of God shone round about them." This dramatic appearance of the angel struck terror into the hearts of these fearless plainmen. Although they looked for anything to happen in the desert wilderness, they were not looking for a heavenly visitor.

Quickly the angel quieted the frightened men:

"Do not be afraid," the angel said to them, "for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which shall be to all the people;

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BOOK SHELF

I'd Do It Again

Sr. Margaret Teresa, Nazareth College

"For there has been born to you today in the town of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

"And this shall be a sign to you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."

As the shepherds listened to the angel's message, he was joined by a host of other angels praising God and singing:

"Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth among men of good will."

THE VISION was soon over and when the angels had departed into heaven, the shepherds had a chance to gather their wits. They understood the angel's message, all right. The Savior had come at last. The shepherds were surprised at the news, surprised too that God would bother to tell them about it.

The shepherds had no difficulty, however, in believing the good news. They had no difficulty in believing that the Savior was born in the lowly town of nearby Bethlehem. This was the way, after all, that the shepherds had always dreamed that it would be that the Christ would appear first in the town of the ancient shepherd boy David.

The shepherds lost no time. "Let us go over to Bethlehem," they said, "and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us."

They hurried. They knew the way to Bethlehem, even out of the wilderness. The angel had given them a sign: "an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."

The shepherds found the angel's sign in a cave at the edge of the town. There in a shepherd's fold, the shepherds found Mary and Joseph and the swaddled infant.

As they knelt, the first to find and adore the infant Christ, the shepherds understood the message of the angel: "there has been born to you in the town of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

The dirty faces of the shepherds broke into smiles of joy and understanding as they stared into the face of the Divine Infant. They saw the Son

I'D DO IT AGAIN by former Mayor and Massachusetts Governor Curley (a Prentice-Hall book) is the answer to a challenge that Curley would not dare offset the romance of Edwin O'Connor's THE LAST HURRAH with his beloved hero Skeffington, by publishing the truth.

THOUGH MARRIED through-out by one repeated epithet that Webster does not print and that Curley's mother would have washed his mouth for (and in retaining it his editors showed poor judgment, since this man would have "come through" even if his every word were given in Zulu or baby-talk)—this book presents a great mayor, a fighter, a builder, a far-sighted benefactor of his city. We hope his campaign methods are past history;

of God lying on the floor of the world, born in a cave like the son of any poor shepherd.

At last the Lord God had come "like a shepherd" to gather the Lambs and "take them up into his bosom."

HERE IN BETHLEHEM on the first Christmas night, the despised shepherds came into their own. Here in a cave the outcast shepherds found the Good Shepherd who was also destined to an outcast from the world. "I am the good shepherd." He would tell the world, "The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep." (John 10:11)

When the shepherds left the cave they vanished into the night, but not without telling everyone they met the wonderful things which they had seen and heard.

Back in the cave Mary hugged her Child to her breast and stored in her heart the story of the shepherds, the story of the good shepherds who had come to Bethlehem.

and that his type of government, of ability to keep a big city solvent in depression, his type of charity will often be seen again. That charity covers a multitude of sins is not a church law nor a state law, but God's law.

The laughter that fills the book, the chuckleworthy events, as Curley calls them (such as the arrival at one point of a congratulatory telegram from Houdini, as from one artist to another), the political scurrillages, 51 per cent hilarity if 49 per cent seriousness—should not be missed. The score between Cabots and Lowells (one of whom, a University president, invited Curley to dinner seeking patronage for a protegee, and walked out on his guest when refused) and Curleys, ought to be known.

NO SIR, the Jesuit who has James Curley for father needn't be ashamed of him—and must love him to death. Curley is Skeffington, and something more.

Cardinal College Has 13 Vacancies

Valdun City — (NC) — The death of Cardinal Piazza, 73, Secretary of the Sacred Consistorial Congregation, reduces to 57 the members of the Sacred College of Cardinals. The traditional complement is 70.

Cardinal Piazza in the 18th Cardinal to die since Pope Pius XII brought the college up to full strength in January, 1953. Cardinal Piazza died on November 30th.

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Your membership offerings are stringless gifts to God for the Missions. Living and deceased enrolled \$1 yearly, \$20 perpetually for individuals; \$5 yearly and \$100 perpetually for families. Members share in 15,000 Masses yearly by our missionaries and in the prayers and sacrifices of thousands of priests and Sisters.

ARRANGE NOW FOR GREGORIAN MASSES AFTER DEATH. ASK ABOUT OUR SUSPENSE CARD.

EARTHQUAKE RUINS PARISH CHURCH IN LEBANON.
In the village of KOUH, in the southern part of Lebanon we have a parish church in ruins, due to severe earthquakes in that area. The faithful of the Parish are poor farmers and cannot possibly rebuild the church by themselves. We will try to raise \$5,000 for them so that they will once again have a church in which to pray. Any little gift would be greatly appreciated.

HUNGRY AT CHRISTMAS?
Won't you sacrifice a little from your Christmas dinner to help Father King, who is trying to feed some of the 900,000 homeless Palestine refugees in the Holy Land? He tries to feed, clothe and provide schooling and medical care for these unfortunate people. \$10 will buy a FOOD PACKAGE which will feed an entire family for a week. In gratitude we will send you a lovely OLIVE SEED ROSARY FROM THE HOLY LAND.

JACOB AND XAVIER—FUTURE APOSTLES?
During Advent the Church in her liturgy has us waiting for the coming of the Savior, just as the Patriarchs of the Old Testament, like Jacob, did. We have two young seminarians in India, the names Jacob and the other Xavier, anxiously waiting to hear that we have found a kind sponsor who will send us the \$100 needed each year during his six years' training for the Priesthood. Won't you? You can send it in any installments.

YOUR "STRINGLESS GIFTS" ARE THE LIFELINE THE HOLY FATHER USES FOR MISSION EMERGENCIES. CAN YOU SEND HIM A CHRISTMAS MITE TODAY?

SISTER LOREN CE AND SISTER BENJAMIN are begging!
Would you like to have a heart full of gratitude paying for you every day? SISTER LORENCE and SISTER BENJAMIN in India will never forget the friends who help them in their present difficulty. Each needs \$150 each year for two years' training before they labor for souls on the Missions. Their poor families cannot help. Won't you? God will bless you abundantly.

REMEMBER THE LORD AT CHRISTMAS! We give gifts to our friends and relatives—why not a little gift to God? The Mission chapels are in dire-need of the following articles:
Altar \$75
Candles \$40
Mass bell 5
Picturs 18
Statue 20
Pyx 25
Vestments 50
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