

People of Jesus Christ's time experienced great pain and oppression in every aspect of daily life. Joseph and Mary expecting a Child travelled a long distance to Bethlehem in order to register for a census. Tired of the journey, they searched for place to rest but could not obtain one. So only a stable was available where Mary bore her Baby and laid Him in a manger, a feeding trough for animals. Eventually, King Herod sought to kill the Baby. Warned of the impending risk, Joseph and Mary fled to Egypt, then returned home after Herod's death. Imagine how Mary felt. Traveling while pregnant would be challenging. Fleeing to another nation lest some king slay your son would not be pleasant. Yet she, Joseph, and Jesus survived the ordeal. In the midst of social and cultural challenges, the Christmas story offers us hope and encouragement toward survival, hope of new life linked to something, someone greater than oneself, Jesus. So, the Christmas story is important because it speaks of hope and survival.

May the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ bless you today and throughout the New Year 2019.



Origin of Christmas Crib: St. Francis's love for God was unique. It was an emotional love. God was not mere lip-service. He felt the presence of God as we feel for our friend, a family relative, a dear one. One occasion he had the guts to go out and shout through the woods and streets like a mad man, "Love is not loved." Meaning God who is love, is not uppermost in people's lives, he is secondary or a Sunday item. Looking at the beautiful world of trees and mountains and stars and moon, he found the beauty of triune God, as the biographer says, "In beautiful things he saw Beauty itself; in things created, he saw the Creator." Francis showed his love for fellow-human beings by working on his prejudices against the lepers. He speaks about his total turn around in his last testament which he dictated on his death-bed. Speaking of his early days of sinful behavior and attitudes, he says, "It was intolerably repulsive thing for me to see lepers. But the Lord himself led me among them." We know from his biographer that he got down from his horse and kissed a leper on the roadside and thus he overcame the prejudice that ruled his life. Having been a person of love towards God, he would willingly manifest his love for fellow-human beings in a very concrete way. At a time when a war was raging between the Muslims and the Christians in the Holy Land, he personally went to the Sultan of Egypt to speak of peace and reconciliation. He entered the enemy's camp as a friend. No wonder that a person of such a love expressed his inner disposition toward God in a memorable way – so memorable that for centuries Francis is held up as the inventor of the crib – manger-scene. It happened on the night before the birthday of Jesus. He asked his noble friend John of Valletta to construct the manger scene of Bethlehem so that he could feel for himself the inconveniences the Lord of Lords, the Lord Almighty undertook for our salvation. On the midnight of 1224, he had the manger built and live cattle were placed in around the manger. Francis who was a deacon read the Gospel at midnight. And when he had finished reading the Gospel of midnight mass, he preached on the incident of God becoming man. And when he spoke about the Child of Bethlehem, his voice was like the voice of a lamb bleating. So emotionally moved was Francis when he was narrating the story of Incarnation to all who had gathered around the manger that night. Biographers also report about the way he, after having pronounced the words "the Child of Bethlehem", licked his palate as if the words he pronounced were honey. Let the construction of a Crib in our homes be not only a decoration for the children of the house, or some kind of Christmas celebration for the kids at home, but a time to taste the sweetness of the Holy Name, the wonder of the Incarnation and the joy of having our God so near us. May our faith move us to adore Him primarily in our Sunday worship, in our understanding of the Word of Life and in our being taken up by the reality of God.

