



FAMILY MANGER SCENE

In 1223, St. Francis of Assisi had the desire to inspire a new sense of wonder and understanding of the miracle of Christ's birth in the people of Greccio, Italy. He sought to recreate the scene of the first Christmas and to **help people imagine being present in that miraculous moment**. He gathered hay and animals, used a wax figure of the infant Jesus, and recruited villagers to play the role of Mary, Joseph and others mentioned in the Gospel.

The results were astounding! The sound of the joyful songs from the people, the elated, tear-filled eyes of St. Francis preaching the Gospel, and even reports of miracles...**the tradition of the manger scene was BORN**. Ever since, this meaningful practice has spread all over the world to many different Christian communities.

The **manger scene wasn't meant to be a decorative ornament** for the yard that we purchase from a big-box store. Rather, it was meant to be a moment for us to take to heart the Advent and Christmas seasons, to connect with family and community, and to prepare for the coming of Christ by prayerfully reflecting on the historical event, His coming at every Mass, and His return at the end of time.



NO ROOM FOR THEM AT THE INN

Christ is seeking a room, not just a physical space to be born into, but into our own hearts and within the lives of our family. Advent is a time where we can quiet our hearts for Christ's arrival; it is a time where our whole family can reconnect with each other and with God personally. But that isn't the common experience.

“While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”
- Luke 2:6-7

The world tells us to shop until we drop, looking for the best deals online. The world tells us our decorations tell a story about how "with it" we are. The world tells us our busyness is an indicator of our value. Though we don't intend to, we can overextend ourselves instead of slowing down to focus on deepening our relationship with God and our family.

Prayer is hard enough without the constant distractions from texts and notifications. It is so much easier to let our children hop on a video game or iPad when we have so much work to do in prepping for the influx of guests, decorations and gifts. **But just as the inn keepers in the Gospel, we too can miss the opportunity to encounter Christ during the Advent and Christmas season.**

**Prioritize Family and Values.
Delay Social Media.**

**Delay the Smartphone.
No Phones Used in Schools.**

SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED

St. Francis has already prepared a great way for us to refocus on Christ this season. By working together with our family and our community, we can recreate the miracle of Christmas in our own homes and give the best gift to our loved ones: a chance to encounter Jesus. But like many gifts, some assembly is required.



Discuss with your family when you will all take time together to create the manger scene. Then discuss what materials you will need to create the manger scene. This will look different for every family. Some may choose to find personal household items for the scene where each member is represented. You may have family members that are gifted in woodworking and decide to build a larger manger scene or some that may be gifted in making modest arts and crafts. No matter how you decide to create the manger, choose some way that each person can participate.

CREATING A SPACE FOR CHRIST

When the time comes, make sure to put away any device or other distractions. It may be helpful to do some fun family activity to prep our minds and hearts to place our focus and attention back to the Lord. Then set the stage by prayerfully reading as a family **The Nativity of Christ** (Luke 2: 1-20).

Begin assembling the manger scene. Make sure that everyone has a role in putting it all together. As you put each piece together, have your family picturing themselves as if they were preparing that space for Jesus, Mary, and Joseph over 2,000 years ago.

As your family finishes the manger, reread the passage from Luke's Gospel. Feel free to add something else that would help your family dive deeper into the Gospel, such as acting it out or singing a special hymn. Share your thoughts about the mystery of Christ's birth and what it means to you and your family. Finally, place the manger somewhere prominent so others can reflect on this great miracle whenever someone passes by.



**From all of us at Smart Families, we wish you a blessed
Advent and a very merry Christmas!**

LET US PRAY

Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and **lead us not into temptation**, but deliver us from evil.

Smart Families is partnered with your church and/or school to educate, encourage and empower your community about the importance of delaying smartphones.

To learn more, visit www.smart-families.org