



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** Paul VI Audience Hall

Wednesday, 18 December 2019 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good Morning!

It will be Christmas in one week. During these days as we rush to prepare for the feast day we can ask ourselves: “How am I preparing for the Birth of the celebrated One?”. A simple, yet effective way to prepare oneself is to *set up a nativity scene*. I too followed this path this year: [I went to Greccio](#) where Saint Francis created the first nativity scene with the local people. And [I wrote a Letter](#) to mark the significance of this tradition, what the nativity scene means during the Christmas period.

Indeed, the nativity scene is “like a living Gospel” (Apostolic Letter [Admirabile Signum](#), n. 1). It brings the Gospel to the places where people live: in homes, schools, work and meeting places, hospitals, retirement homes, prisons and in the squares. And in those places where we live, it reminds us of an essential thing: that God did not remain invisible in Heaven, but rather came to earth, became man, a child. To make a nativity scene is *to celebrate God’s closeness*. God has always been close to his people but when he became incarnate and was born, he was very close, extremely close. To make a nativity scene is to celebrate God’s closeness; to rediscover that God is real, concrete, alive and vibrant. God is not a distant lord or a detached judge but rather humble Love that descended upon us. The Child in the nativity scene transmits his tenderness to us. Some small figurines portray the “*Bambinello*” with open arms to tell us that God came to embrace our humanity. It is beautiful then to stand before the nativity scene and to confide our lives to the Lord, to speak to him of the people and situations that we have in our heart, to take stock with him of the year that is ending, to share our expectations and apprehensions.

We can see Mary and Joseph beside Jesus. We can guess the thoughts and feelings they had as the Babe was being born in poverty: joy but also dismay. And we can also invite the Holy Family into our homes where there are joys and worries, where we wake up each day, we eat and sleep close to the people who are dearest to us. The nativity scene is a “*domestic Gospel*”. The word “*presepe*” (nativity scene in Italian) literally means “manger” whereas Bethlehem, the town of the

nativity scene, means “house of bread”. Manger and house of bread: the nativity scene we set up at home where we share food and affection reminds us that Jesus is the nourishment, the bread of life (cf. Jn 6:34). He is the One who sustains our love. He is the One who gives our families the strength to carry on and forgive one another.

The nativity scene offers us another life lesson. In today’s at times frenetic pace, it is *an invitation to contemplation*. It reminds us of the importance of pausing. Because only when we know how to recollect ourselves can we welcome what truly matters in life. Only if we leave the din of the world outside our home can we open ourselves to listen to God who speaks in silence. The nativity scene is current, it is the newness of each family. Yesterday I was given a small image of a special nativity scene, very small, which was called: “Let us let Mum rest”. There was Our Lady asleep and Joseph putting the Babe to sleep. How many of you husbands and wives have to take turns during the night because the baby is crying, crying, crying. “Let Mum rest” is the tenderness of a family, of a marriage.

The nativity scene is more timely now than ever, when every day, throughout the world, so many weapons and violent images that penetrate our eyes and hearts are being produced. The nativity scene instead is an *artisanal image of peace*. This is why it is a living Gospel.

Dear brothers and sisters, from the nativity scene we can grasp a teaching on the very meaning of life. We see everyday scenes: shepherds with their sheep, blacksmiths forging iron, millers making bread. Sometimes there are landscapes and circumstances from our areas. It is right because the nativity scene reminds us that Jesus comes into our concrete lives. And this is important. Always make a small nativity scene at home because it is a reminder that God came to us; he was born among us, he accompanies us throughout our lives. He is man like we are. He became man like us. In everyday life, we are no longer alone. He abides in us. He does not magically change things but if we welcome Him, everything can change. I hope that setting up the nativity scene will be for you all an opportunity to invite Jesus into your lives. When we make the nativity scene at home it is like opening a door and saying: “Come in, Jesus!”. It is making this closeness concrete, this invitation to Jesus to come into our lives. Because if he abides in our lives, life is reborn. And if life is reborn, it is truly Christmas. Happy Christmas to everyone!

Special Greetings

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, especially the groups from Canada and the United States of America. I wish all of you a very blessed Christmas, and I ask you to pray for the Church, as you are already doing, and for peace this Christmas. Thank you.

Lastly, I greet *young people, the elderly, the sick and newlyweds*. Only a few days remain until the

Holy Christmas of the Lord Jesus. Following the example of the Holy Family, let us prepare ourselves to joyfully welcome him, letting our hearts be invaded by his love for each of us. I wish you all a Happy Christmas.