

Christmas at Grecchio

Narrator:

Introduction

Good evening, and we welcome you to our presentation of Christmas at Grecchio.

One Christmas during his lifetime, Francis wanted to help people really appreciate the true meaning of Christmas. To do this, he went to the small town of Grecchio in Italy, and prepared the first nativity scene in history. It is because of his efforts, that we now have Christmas mangers, or cribs, in our homes during this holy season.

Tonight, the story of Francis' Christmas at Grecchio will be read. This story is taken from the Holy Gospels and the memories of St. Francis. At appropriate points during the story the choir will provide musical selections to help us focus on the birth of Jesus. So, now we begin.

(Francis enters to instrumental music)

Francis:

Greetings, my friends! I am honored to be here among you.

As I was on my way here this evening, my mind went back to a certain Christmas many hundreds of years ago at Grecchio. I would like to tell you about that Christmas, so you can get away from the commercialism of Christmas that is all around us. I'd like to bring you back to the real meaning of Christmas.

I remember entering the gates of Grecchio that night so long ago, exhausted after a difficult journey on foot. I was very disappointed and discouraged, almost to the point of despair, yet this was close to Christmas and I thought of Jesus in swaddling clothes, in a foreign city, being kept warm by animals in a stable. Suddenly, the thought of this homeless baby brought me to tears as I dared compare my own situation to that of our eternal Lord made flesh.

I can remember the air was cool and damp and the narrow streets seemed to give a newfound hope as I greeted my friends in Grecchio, and decided to spend Christmas with them.

How poor by comparison was my disappointment now as I thought of the misery of humankind. I asked myself, "What can I possibly do to bring to all these poor folks a clear memory of that first Christmas night, when the heavens above Judea resounded with angelic voices as they greeted their Prince of Peace?" One by one, the stars began to pierce the night. I realized then that the stars above were the very same stars that witnessed the birth of the Prince of Peace.

Like Bethlehem, Grecchio had its own share of human misery, violence, and pain. Like thousands of other villages and towns, Grecchio was only half-heartedly looking forward to its yearly celebration of Christmas.

I suddenly had an idea of how to make this a special Christmas for the people of Grecchio. I would ask my good friend Sir John to help me prepare such a special Christmas celebration that no one would ever forget. And Sir John did help me—did everything I asked, although he must have been wondering if I had lost my mind.

The next day, the people of Grecchio gathered in front of the church. There was a kind of stable that Sir John had made at my request. There was lots of hay strewn about, and tied to the door, were an ox and a donkey peacefully eating away and, I suppose, wondering where all the food came from.

And people came: the old, the children, mothers, fathers and their babies. Everyone was wondering what was going to happen. I would like to show you what happened. O come faithful people, let us begin our journey together.

Hymn: O Come All Ye Faithful.

Narrator:

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee to a town called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David, and the virgin's name was Mary.

Angel Gabriel:

Rejoice, so highly favored! The Lord is with you.

Mary, so not be afraid, you have won God's favor. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus.

Know this too. Elizabeth in her old age is now in her sixth month. Nothing is impossible to God.

Mary:

I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let what you have said be done to me.

Narrator:

And the angel left her. Mary set out at that time, and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country in Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Elizabeth:

Of all women, you are most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

Hymn: The Magnificat

Narrator:

Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months, and then came back home.

In those days, Caesar Augustus issued a decree for a census of the whole world to be

taken. So Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, and traveled up to Judea to the town of David called Bethlehem, since he was of David's house and line. This was in order to be registered together with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

Francis:

Brothers and sisters, let us rejoice in such a census, that brought Mary, the pregnant maiden, to Bethlehem. Let us ourselves go back in time, and imagine the miraculous birth of Jesus in the little town of Bethlehem.

Hymn: O Little Town of Bethlehem

Narrator:

While they were there, the time came for Mary to have her child, and she gave birth to a son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them at the inn.

Francis:

Brothers and sisters, how beautifully the story is told. How noble the language! How sacred the thoughts! Brothers and sisters, let us find room for Him in our hearts this night, so that we may pay Him homage and be filled with His love.

Hymn: Mary's Boy Child

Narrator:

In the countryside close by, there were shepherds who lived in the fields and took turns watching their flocks during the night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

An Angel of the Lord:

Do not be afraid! Listen, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in the town of David, a saviour has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord. And here is a sign for you. You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger.

Narrator:

And suddenly, with the angel, there was a great throng of the heavenly host, praising God and singing, Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace to all who enjoy His favour.

Hymn: Gloria in Excelsis Deo

Francis:

Brothers and sisters, tonight let us sing for the world! Let us sing for all living creatures! Let us open wide our hearts! Bethlehem has come to us. Already the music is inviting us. The Prince of Peace has come for each of us.

Hymn: Gloria

Narrator:

Now when the angels had gone from them, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened that the Lord has made known to us.” So they hurried away, and found Mary and Joseph, and the Baby lying in the manger.

Hymn: Silent Night

Narrator:

After Jesus had been born at Bethlehem, some wise men came from the East searching for the Messiah. They set out, and there in front of them was the star they had seen rising. It went forward and halted over the place where the child was.

Hymn: The First Noel

Narrator:

The sight of the star filled them with delight. Entering into the stable, they saw the Child with His mother, Mary, and falling to their knees, they did Him homage. Then opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Hymn: We Three Kings

Francis:

Come forward my brothers and sisters, as we offer the gift of all we are to our Saviour. Let us also bring our gifts for those in poverty whom Jesus loved so much. What can we give Him, as poor as we are? The greatest gift of all—our love.

Hymn: The Drummer Boy

Narrator:

That night, so long ago, when the people of Greccio returned to their homes, they were filled with the love and the delight of the Christ Child. They returned home to celebrate Christmas in a true spirit of Christmas—God’s love for them. And in their hearts, they remembered Francis’ parting words to them:

Francis:

Peace be with you this night. The peace of the Infant Lord be with you. The peace of His mother be with you. The peace of that just man standing behind his spouse Mary, be with you. The peace of the angels sung to the shepherds, be with you. May the peace of bulky Brother Ox be yours, and also that of his companion, Scruffy Brother Donkey. The peace of the night with its planets and constellations be yours. Tonight, brothers and sisters, let us sing for the universe and the King of the universe. Let us sing since the Christ Child has come to our hearts again.

Hymn: Joy to the World