

## Feast of the Holy Family 2019

We have a beautiful nativity scene in our gathering space. It is a visual display of the Christmas story - the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem of Judea.

It was St. Francis of Assisi who created the first nativity scene in Greccio, Italy in December of 1223 (twelve-twenty-three). He lived at a time when spirituality and religious fervor were lacking. St. Francis wanted to move the hearts and minds of people to a greater appreciation for the mystery of the incarnation. He wanted people to truly appreciate the meaning of Christmas and to move their hearts to greater devotion for the Holy Family.

The Nativity scene, as beautiful as it is, does not tell the whole story. As a matter of fact, it provides an unrealistic picture of the birth of Jesus. Looking at the nativity scene, we might conclude that the birth of Jesus was without any conflict or problems. But that is far from the truth.

The birth of Jesus took place after a long and difficult journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Travel in those days was not easy. There was always the threat of robbers and wild animals. Travelers relied on the hospitality of strangers. At night most travelers slept outside. The route to Bethlehem passed through Samaria and Samaritans were not friendly to Jews.

Mary was nine months pregnant and probably rode on a donkey. Most likely she was sick the whole time. When they arrived in Bethlehem they found no room in the inns and were forced to stay in a cold, dark, and damp cave. They probably shared the cave with animals. It would have been smelly and dirty.

After Jesus was born, they were forced to flee because King Herod had ordered the execution of all Jewish males under the age of two. They were refugees and spent a few years in refugee camps in Egypt.

Life expectancy was about thirty years of age. Medical care was nonexistent. Living conditions were primitive. Life was hard. The holy family was poor and barely made enough money to survive.

On the other hand, they were part of a community of family and extended family that cared for one another and helped one another. They had a deep faith and trust in God. Their religious traditions and customs sustained and nourished them.

We need to keep in mind the real life circumstances of the holy family of Joseph, Mary and Jesus. Life was not easy for them. We need to realize the challenges they faced. When we do this we can better appreciate the courage and determination it took for them to fulfill all that God asked of them.

One of the qualities of the holy family was their obedience to God's plan despite all the challenges, hardships, and dangers they endured.

This might help us to better face all the challenges, hardships, and dangers we must endure in order to fulfill what God asks of us. It also helps us become more mindful of the sufferings of so many families in our own day who, like the holy family, are forced to leave their homes in order to seek safety in other places.

The holy family of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus was not preserved from suffering and pain. Like most of us, they had more than their share of challenges and hardships. They relied on each other and their families and friends to help and support them. They relied on their faith in God to help them endure the suffering that came their way.

May their example of obedience and trust in God help us as we, too, seek to be obedient to God's plan in our lives and to trust him when we experience suffering and challenges in our lives.