

The Holy Infancy



The Church dedicates the month of December to the Holy Infancy. It is the season of Advent, a period of prayer and fasting in preparation for Christmas, the anniversary of the Birth of Christ. This photo is of a painting by Della Notti and is from a collection in the New York Public Library. (Religious News Service Photo)

Our Lady--

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tilling this plot; she heard that he had set it aside as a suitable place for a shrine; but if there were no prospects of building any time soon, why couldn't she use it to raise food for her eight children? He had let her have it, he added, "because she is poor and because..." He looked at his wife apologetically.

Trina knew what he wanted to say: he had lent the land to the widow in Our Lady's name. She smiled as she thought, "Yes, Our Lady herself must have chosen our home. She prefers our humble loft as her statue's abode."

Years passed, and with them came poor harvests bringing in their train great need. Not even Our Lady's "home" was spared. Trina would often go to the loft and, with tears dimming her sight, tell her troubles to the beloved image. "We have given you here a place to stay," she would sob, "and even though it is a wretched one, nevertheless it is an abode. Oh, now help us who are about to lose our home!" And always hope was renewed in her heart as she again noted Our Lady's ineffable gaze above and beyond the material. Life was more bearable after a visit to the loft, but the demands of creditors became more and more insistent. Farm and home were imperiled.

"Help us in all care and sorrow, Mary, help us, help we pray," Trina pleaded. Yes, her faith was un-

wavering—Our Lady would help, but when?

Just before Christmas, when everything seemed darkest, Trina saw their pastor coming up the lane... and someone was with him—a stranger. She called to her husband, and care and worry were momentarily forgotten as they prepared to welcome their visitors.

After a greeting and blessing, the priest introduced his companion. "I have brought him here," he explained, "because of his interest in the old statue. He makes a hobby of acquiring old wood carvings."

As they climbed to the loft, the farmer apologized: "It is all I could offer Our Lady for the present, but I have always cherished the hope of erecting a shrine for the statue in my meadow." But the stranger seemed interested only in getting to the top of the stairs; and when they did, and he glimpsed the statue, he gasped—with delight, not pain. The unusual folds of the mantle! The celestial countenance which only a divinely inspired talent could have created. Here, at

last, he had come upon the work of a great German Master. With deft fingers he fondled each curve and line. He thought with gratitude of the aged book that had directed his steps to this hamlet, and he thanked God that no later touches of paint and gilt had desecrated its treasure.

Little did Trina realize why Heaven had thwarted her dreams. And the sum which the stranger offered for the statue was almost beyond her comprehension. But she did know that this would, indeed, be a happy Christmas for all—not just her family, but the whole community. Nevertheless, she wept quietly when the statue was carried away.

As for the plans of the *Wiesenhofbauer*, there would be no shrine in the meadow now... some other widow could till the plot to feed her children.

And so it was that the once discarded image of Our Lady left its humble abode in the loft—from now on a museum would be its home—but its beneficent influence still flourished... and would, perhaps, even unto eternity.

At The Christmas Crib

Little child, gazing at the Manger and the Star,
Saint Francis stands beside you,
with a smile upon his face.
Put your hand in his and ask what he will gladly share—
His love of every creature and his Lord's sweet grace.
—Naomi Reynolds Hess

Jerusalem

Jerusalem had just experienced the biggest building boom in its history when Christ was born in nearby Bethlehem. But of all the palaces and other edifices constructed by Herod the Great, not one remains today. Jerusalem, as foretold in the Scriptures, was completely demolished in 132 A. D.

Grandma

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the little child to whom the Christmas celebration is still his most thrilling experience—has greater cause for rejoicing on this day of days than the mature women to whom the revelation of the Nativity seems more wonderful every year. I say this with the realization that I am singularly favored because I usually have some of my large family with me (twice within the last decade we have all been together, converging from distant points in both North and South America), and because, last year, the birth of twin girls within the Christmas cycle has given me, their grandmother, an added cause for joy. But I also say it with the blessed knowledge that the most seemingly solitary Christmas need never be lonely for me—or for any other human being—to whom the Child of Bethlehem has become "a living bright reality."

He must have been very real to St. Anne, even if she was alone in Nazareth when He was born in Bethlehem. I do not doubt that she can make Him very real to all of us, on His birthday, if we ask for this grace with trustful and humble hearts.



Holiday Greetings

May the true spirit of the First Christmas shine brightly in the hearts of you and your family today and every day.

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To the Clergy and Laity of the Diocese,
and with grateful appreciation to those
whom we have been privileged to serve.

With Peace on Earth and Good-Will towards men,
may the Joy of Christmas be with you all through the New Year.

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Christmas

Christmas is more than "Santa and a tree"...
to all it brings a message of peace and good will...
and it is in this spirit that we extend our sincere greetings to you and your family.

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