

St. Margaret, Queen of Scotland Church

Our Local Tradition

A long-time parishioner told Father Jamin about a Christmas tradition at St. Margaret from her childhood whereby everyone was invited to the sanctuary to take a piece of straw from the manger and to present a gift to the Baby Jesus. This piece of hay was to serve throughout the coming year as a reminder of Jesus and his many blessings.

After Christmas Mass, please come to the sanctuary for a piece of straw from the manger and leave your gift for Baby Jesus!



Origin of Taking a Piece of Straw from the Christmas Manger

(as told by Thomas of Celano and paraphrased by Dawn Rusinko, OFS, CLEM)

Did you know that putting the manger under the tree at Christmas was started by St. Francis of Assisi? Did you also know that the reason people take a piece of straw from the church manger on Christmas has to do with St. Francis of Assisi too? If not, here is the story of these two great traditions.

It started with a man named John who lived in the town of Greccio, Italy. Fifteen days before Christmas St. Francis told John to go and prepare the things needed to recreate the events that took place that special evening in Bethlehem. He wanted others to know the inconveniences of the baby Jesus - how he lay in a manger surrounded by oxen and asses laying on hay. John prepared all that he needed to recreate the birth as instructed by St. Francis.

Men, women and children gathered together with open hearts bringing with them candles and torches to light the night like the gleaming star. When St. Francis arrived and saw everything prepared as he wished and the town of Greccio turned into the stable at Bethlehem, he was filled with joy.

God's blessings multiplied that night, and a miraculous vision was given to a virtuous man. He saw the baby Jesus lying in the manger lifeless, and he saw St. Francis wake the baby from a deep sound slumber. This vision was a true representation of the deep sleeping baby Jesus, who was forgotten in the hearts of so many. By the Grace of God, he was brought back to life again by St. Francis, who reawakened their memory.

The hay placed in the manger was saved so that God would multiply His blessings and save the animals through His mercy because there were illnesses around the region killing large numbers of animals. When the animals ate of this hay they were cured and sustained. When hay was placed on laboring women in pain, they stopped laboring and delivered safely. Births increased in Greccio and those suffering from various illnesses obtained health.

So, the next time you gaze upon the Nativity scene think about the events created by St. Francis that inspired the tradition of bringing the stable at Bethlehem into your homes. When you recall the story, also recall, the necessity to arouse the deep sleeping baby Jesus within your heart and don't forget to pick out a piece of straw from the manger at Christmas.