

## SEEING SALVATION

My sisters and brothers,

Eight hundred years ago in the Italian village of Greccio, St Francis of Assisi decided to rekindle in the hearts of the people something that they could see. He wanted people to join the story of their lives to the story of the one he knew as 'Emmanuel', God-with-us.

Recalling a visit he had made years before to Bethlehem in the Holy Land, he resolved to create a 'living manger'.

His idea was twofold. First, to discourage would-be pilgrims from going to Bethlehem, which was under the control of foreign forces.

Second, his insight and genius for the simple recognised that people needed to 'see salvation' and how immediate and accessible it was for them.

So word went out to the people of the town. To this grotto in Greccio, they arrived carrying torches and candles. Francis brought together an ox, a donkey, a little straw, a feeder and lots of candles and torches, things close to hand, and these were enough for him to revive the spirit of Bethlehem, right there in Greccio.

At the Christmas Mass Francis stood before the crib, overwhelmed with love and filled with happiness. For Francis, the simple celebration was meant to recall the hardships Jesus suffered even as an infant, a saviour who chose to become poor for our sake.

What we now call the crib was born then and still serves as a reminder of those things - in homes and workplaces, public spaces and churches. Sadly, again this year it is not safe to venture to the Holy Land. For the peace of Jerusalem, and the whole of the Holy Land we pray.

We talk about the 'Christmas spirit' so much at this time of the year. For many people this spirit is typified by what St Francis did 800 years ago. In 2023 we still long to see God and be reassured that he has not abandoned us during the difficult times that the world faces. In an often complex world we all long for the simplicity of this scene and dare to believe that its message can be true for us.

A blessed Christmas to you and your families and loved ones. If you do not have a crib at home, might this be a good time to make one? As for Francis so for us, it only needs to be simple. God is good, good indeed.

+Patrick O'Regan

Archbishop of Adelaide