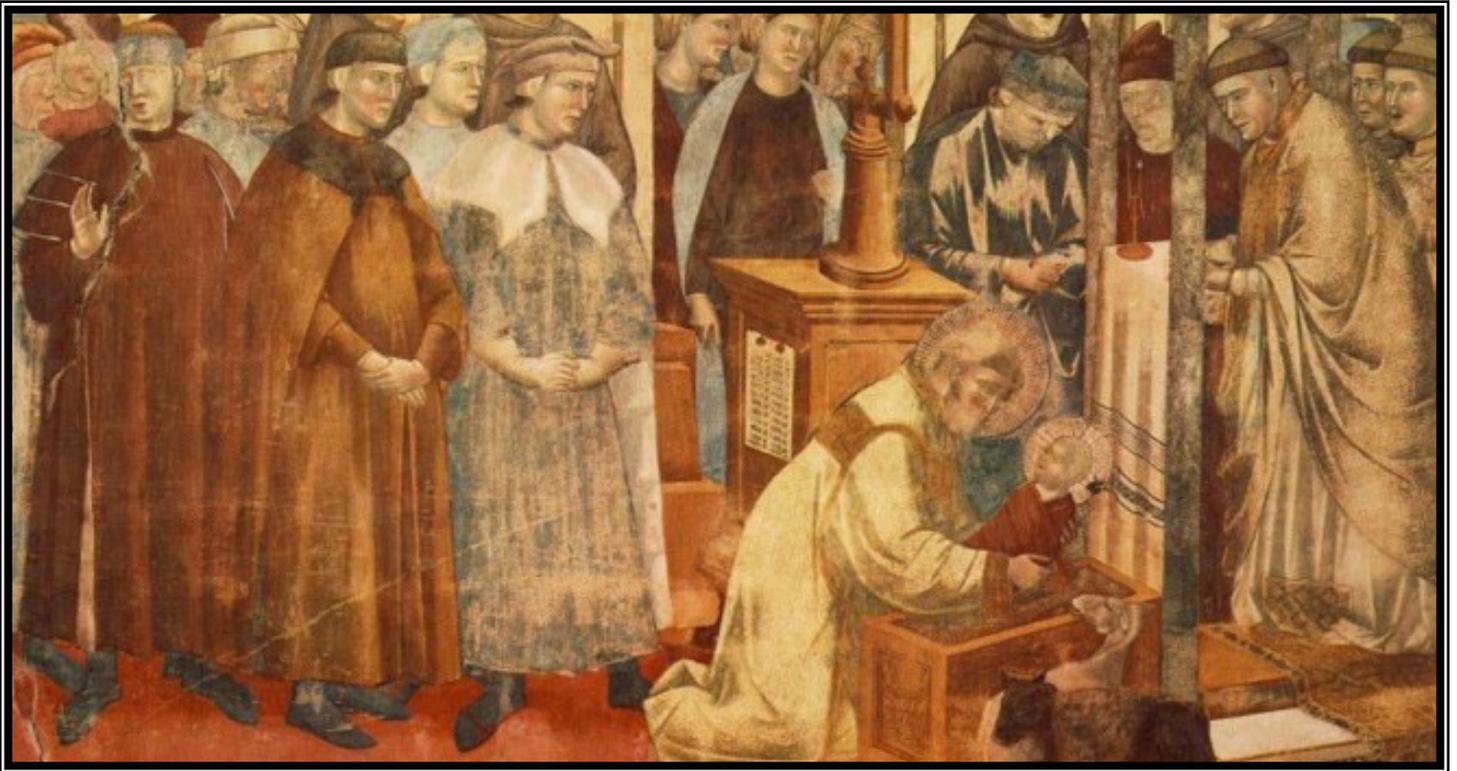
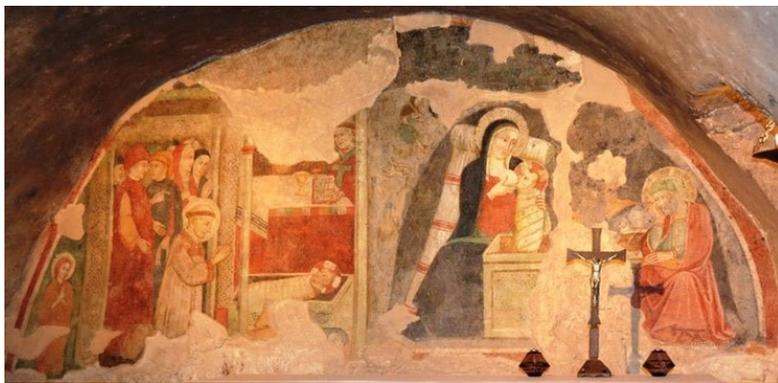


Christmas at Greccio



The Christmas celebration in the forest of Greccio | Giotto di Bondone | Fresco in the Upper Church of Saint Francis, Assisi | photo by The Yorck Project



The narrative below of Francis' creche is drawn from the writings of his first biographer, Thomas of Celano. "It was mid December of the year 1223. Christmas was coming and the monk, Francis, wanted all people to share in the wonder of the miracle of the birth of Christ. He sent a message to his friend, Giovanni Velita, a nobleman from the nearby town of Greccio: "If you want us to celebrate the present feast of our Lord at Greccio, go with haste and diligently prepare what I tell you. For I wish to do something that will recall to

memory the little Child who was born in Bethlehem and set before our bodily eyes in some way the inconveniences of his infant needs, how he lay in a manger, how, with an ox and an ass standing by, he lay upon the hay where he had been placed."

On Christmas eve, people from all over the countryside came to Greccio to see and hear Brother Francis assist in the Mass. Francis had prepared a manger filled with hay. Alongside were an ox and an ass. As the service began, the good brothers sang songs of praise for God. Then Francis spoke about the Nativity and the Child of Bethlehem, and placed the infant in the manger. At the end of the "solemn night of celebration," the people left and "each one returned to his home with holy joy." It was claimed that many wonderful things happened that night. One of the onlookers said he saw a little child lying in the manger lifeless, and then Francis went up to it and "roused the child as if from a deep sleep."

