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## **ORDER FOR THE BLESSING OF A CHRISTMAS MANGER OR NATIVITY SCENE**



*The following short services of blessing are actually part of the official liturgy of the Roman Rite of the Catholic Church but can be led by lay men or women in their own homes. The first is the full-length version of the rite. For a more abbreviated version, scroll down. Both forms of the Nativity Scene Blessing Service are excerpted from the Book of Blessings.*

### **GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

**954** in its present form the custom of displaying figures depicting the birth of Jesus Christ owes its origin to Saint Francis of

Assisi who made the Christmas creche or manger for Christmas eve of 1223. However, as early as the fourth century representations of the nativity of the Lord were painted as wall decorations depicting not only the infancy narrative accounts of Christ's birth, but also the words of the prophets Isaiah and Habakkuk taken to mean that the Messiah would be born in the midst of animals in a manger.

**955** The blessing of the Christmas manger or nativity scene, according to pastoral circumstances, may take place on the Vigil of Christmas or at another more suitable time.

**956** The blessing may be given during a celebration of the word of God, during Mass (see complete edition, nos. 1562-1564), or even during another service, e.g., a carol service.

**957** When the manger is set up in the home, it is appropriate that it be blessed by a parent or another family member; the shorter rite may be used for this purpose.

A form of this rite is also found in *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers*.

**958** The blessing maybe given by a priest, deacon, or a lay minister.

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## **I. ORDER OF BLESSING OF THE MANGER WITHIN A CELEBRATION OF THE WORD OF GOD**

**959** The present order may be used by a priest or a deacon, and also by a layperson, who follows the rites and prayers designated for a lay minister.

### **INTRODUCTORY RITES**

**960** When the community has gathered, a suitable song may be sung. After the singing, the minister says:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
All make the sign of the cross and reply:  
Amen.

**962** A lay minister greets those present in the following words:

Praised be Jesus Christ, who dwells among us, now and for ever.  
*R. Amen*

**963** in the following or similar words, the minister prepares those present for the blessing.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ, we pause to bless this Christmas manger scene. The practice of erecting such mangers was begun by Saint Francis of Assisi as a means to set forth the message of Christmas.

When we look upon these figures, the Christmas gospel comes alive and we are moved to rejoice in the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God.

### **READING OF THE WORD OF GOD**

**964** A reader, another person present, or the minister reads a text of sacred Scripture.

Brothers and sisters, listen to the words of the holy gospel according to Luke: 2:1-8

*The birth of Jesus.*

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town. And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes And laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock.

**965 Or:**

**Isaiah 7:10-15 --Birth of Emmanuel.**

**966 As circumstances suggest, the following responsorial psalm may be sung, or some other suitable song.**

**R. For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.**

**Psalm 89**

**"I have made a covenant with my chosen one,**

**I have sworn to David my servant:**

**Forever will I confirm your posterity and establish your throne for all generations." R.**

**Happy the people who know the joyful shout;  
in the light of your countenance, O LORD, they walk.**

**At your name they rejoice all the day, and through your justice they are exalted. R.**

**"He shall say of me, 'You are my father, my God, the Rock, my savior.' R.**

**"Forever I will maintain my kindness toward him, and my covenant with him stands firm." R.**

**967 As circumstances suggest, the minister may give those present a brief explanation of the biblical text, so that they may understand through faith the meaning of the celebration.**

### **INTERCESSIONS**

**968 The intercessions are then said. The minister introduces them and an assisting minister or one of those present announces the intentions. From the following those best suited to the occasion may be used or adapted, or other intentions that apply to the particular circumstances may be composed.**

**The minister says:**

**Let us ask for God's blessing on this Christmas manger and upon ourselves, that we who reflect on the birth of Jesus may share in the salvation he accomplished.**

**R. Come, Lord, dwell with us.**

**Assisting minister:**

**For the Church of God, as we recall the circumstances surrounding the birth of Christ, that we may always proclaim his gift of new life for all people, we pray to the Lord. R.**

**Assisting minister:**

**For the world in which we live, that it may come to recognize Christ who was greeted by the angels and shepherds, we pray to the Lord. *R.***

**Assisting minister:**

**For our families and our homes, that Christ who was laid in the manger may dwell with us always, we pray to the Lord. *R.***

**Assisting minister:**

**For parents, that their love for their children may be modeled on that of the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph, we pray to the Lord. *R.***

**969 After the intercessions the minister, in the following or similar words, invites all present to sing or say the Lord's Prayer.**

**Let us pray as our Lord Jesus Christ taught us:**

**All:**

**Our Father ...**

#### **PRAYER OF BLESSING**

**970 A minister who is a priest or deacon says the prayer of blessing with hands outstretched; a lay minister says the prayer with hands joined.**

**God of every nation and people, from the very beginning of creation you have made manifest your love: when our need for a Savior was great you sent your Son to be born of the Virgin Mary. To our lives he brings joy and peace, justice, mercy, and love.**

**Lord, bless all who look upon this manger; may it remind us of the humble birth of Jesus, and raise up our thoughts to him, who is God-with-us and Savior of all, and who lives and reigns for ever and ever.**

***R. Amen.***

#### **CONCLUDING RITE**

**972 A lay minister concludes the rite by signing himself or herself with the sign of the cross and saying:**

**May Christ our God enlighten our hearts and minds, now and for ever.**

***R. Amen.***

**973 It is preferable to end the celebration with a suitable song.**

## **II. BLESSING OF MANGER OR NATIVITY SCENE - SHORTER RITE**

**974** This rite is especially appropriate for use when the blessing takes place in the home and is given by a family member.

**975** All make the sign of the cross as the minister says:  
Our help is in the name of the Lord.

All reply:  
Who made heaven and earth.

**976** One of those present or the minister reads a text of sacred Scripture, for example:

Brothers and sisters, listen to the words of the holy gospel according to Luke: 2:1-8

*The birth of Jesus.*

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town. And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock.

**977** Or:  
Isaiah 7:10-15 -- *The birth of Emmanuel*

**978** A minister who is a priest or deacon says the prayer of blessing with hands outstretched; a lay minister says the prayer with hands joined.

God of every nation and people,  
from the very beginning of creation you have made manifest your love:  
when our need for a Savior was great you sent your Son to be born of the Virgin Mary.

To our lives he brings joy and peace, justice, mercy, and love.

Lord,  
bless all who look upon this manger,  
may it remind us of the humble birth of Jesus, and raise up our thoughts to

him,  
who is God-with-us and Savior of all, and who lives and reigns for ever and  
ever.

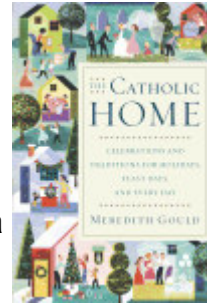
**R. Amen.**

*Excerpted from the [Shorter Book of Blessings](#) (NY: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1990).  
Approved for use in the United States by the USCCB and the Holy See. The [Shorter Book of  
Blessings](#) is an abbreviated version of the Book of Blessings, which translates the Roman Ritual  
De Benedictionibus. The [Shorter Book of Blessings](#) are available in the [Catholic Book section](#) of  
our resources by calling 800-803-0118.*

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