

### The Crib

The story goes that St. Francis of Assisi created the first nativity scene in 1223 at Greccio, Central Italy

A man named Giovanni Velitta lived in that small village and was a good friend of the local Franciscan monastery. St. Francis called Giovanni about two weeks before Christmas and told him he wanted to re-enact the nativity scene described in the Bible. He set to work and got all the local parishioners to come on Christmas Eve. They brought candles and torches to brighten the night. St. Francis arrived and saw that everything had been prepared. The crib was ready, hay was brought, and the ox and the donkey were led to the spot. The crowds gathered and the first Christmas crib was created.

801 years later, we still celebrate Christmas each year with a crib. There was a Limerick tradition that had people visit all the cribs of the city over the Christmas period, and the nativity scenes in all the churches are wonderful. The Redemptorists boast larger than life figures, the Augustinians have a simple crib as do the Dominicans.

I am biased but I think the St John's crib is Limerick's most beautiful depiction of the scene at Bethlehem. Each Christmas when I see it, I am transported back to the first Christmases that I remember, wrapped up warm with my mam and dad and four siblings going to Mass on Christmas morning with the wonder of newly departed Santa Claus and the promise of the turkey and ham and treats to come. I know I'm not alone each year when I stand and wonder at the crib and think of all the people who made those Christmases so special. I guess Christmas is a time for remembering, for memories and for emotions. My parents are now gone, as are most of their contemporaries in the parish whose prayer and devotion made St John's a unique place. As I grew older and began to serve Mass and get involved in Parish activities, the practicalities of making the Cathedral into that special place came into focus.

St John's has been blessed in my time by the involvement of wonderful people who give of their time to ensuring that the tradition that has existed in the parish since the building of the cathedral and that first Christmas in the new building in 1862, are continued. I remember with fondness Danny Clancy and Conor McKernan, Albie Hourigan and Margie Doran, Paddy O'Connell and John Fitzpatrick who all served in the sacristy and parish over the years before Kieran Loughran and his wonderful assistants today. But the Christmas crib in St John's will be forever associated in my mind with Peter Kennedy and Tony and Brendan O'Sullivan who each year brought their amazing woodworking talents to making the Cathedral crib the most authentic in Limerick.

### Split the Pot

Congratulations to  
**Lily Sheehan**  
winner of last weekends draw.  
Envelopes are available at the  
back of the church.  
All proceeds go toward maintenance  
of the Cathedral.  
Thank you for your continued  
support.

### Priests of the Parish

Canon Gerard Garrett  
Fr Leo McDonnell  
Canon John Daly  
Fr Peter Claver Emeke Eze  
Fr Daniel Tomasik

### Parish Office

061 414624

### Mass Times

Mon—Fri 10am, 5.45pm  
Sat 10am & 6pm Vigil  
Sun 8am, 10.30am, 12 noon

### Holy Days

Vigil Weekdays 5.45pm  
Weekdays 10am, 5.45pm

### Confessions

Saturday 10.30am

### Baptisms

Saturday 4.30pm

### Eucharistic Adoration

Takes place Friday's  
from 4pm to 5.30pm in  
the Adoration Chapel.

All are welcome.

### Recently Deceased

We pray for the happy  
repose of the soul of  
Joan Lipper who's funeral  
mass took place here in the  
Cathedral.

We prayed for all our loved  
ones who have gone before us.

Originally, I remember the crib being in the Tower door opposite the pulpit. Somehow, they managed to recreate the first crib in Greccio, which was in a small cave, in that room and I can recall being in awe of the beautiful painted village scene which acted as a backdrop. The smell of fresh straw and the arrival of the baby in the manger had the whole parish straining to see in on Christmas morning. The crib was then moved during one of the refurbishments to the space that now hosts the shop, and Peter, Tony and Brendan adapted the structure to fit the larger space. On one famous Christmas night I remember nearly being responsible for burning the Cathedral down when as a candle bearer for the blessing of crib at midnight mass I stood next to Bishop Newman as he went inside to bless it. It was a Christmas miracle that the straw didn't take light!!.

We are told in the history of the cathedral that the original crib was located where the main doors at the back to the building are now. In the early days when construction was being finished and before the Tower was built, parishioners used to use the side doors of the cathedral to enter and leave and that the crib was where the two main doors are now.

In the past 20 years or so the crib has found a new home on Our Lady's Altar, Peter, Tony and Brendan creatively and lovingly built yet another frame and crib, even giving the manger a hay loft and placing it on the top step so that all can view it. Over the years others have come and helped and now the crib has thatched roof. Anyone that was privileged enough to know Peter, Tony and Brendan and be involved with them in the work will attest to the fun and laughter that always accompanied the building and preparation of the crib and cathedral. That joviality belied a unique set of skills and wonderful craftsmanship, and that fun and skill still occur each year when the crib is being built. Anthony, Kieran, John, Cian, Bobby, Barry, Mike Gerry and Tommy the Thatcher that comes in from Foynes each year stand on the shoulders of the great men that came before them.

So as the Christmas carols ring out and we gaze in wonder at the child Jesus in the manger this Christmas let's remember and pay tribute to those that worked so hard to create the memories both today and over the years for the wonderful community in St John's Cathedral and Parish and the broader Diocese

George Lee