

## Wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger

invented for another 1300 years. Animals got troughs of spoiled vegetables and other vegetation that were not fit for human food.

There are non-Biblical traditions [see box for one of them] of the ox and the donkey. The donkey served as transportation for the pregnant Mary while the ox in another legend was to be sold so that

### **The Infancy Gospel of Pseudo Matthew, c. 2nd century**

*Much of the art and stories about the birth of Jesus come from the Apocryphal books of the New Testament. Some, like this one, were mixed with selections from the Bible. Pseudo Matthew also includes details of Mary's birth.*

CHAP. 14. [1] And on the third day after the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, the most blessed Mary went forth out of the cave, and entering a stable, placed the child in the stall, and the ox and the ass adored Him. Then was fulfilled that which was said by Isaiah the prophet, saying: The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib. [2] The very animals, therefore, the ox and the ass, having Him in their midst, incessantly adored Him. Then was fulfilled that which was said by Habakkuk the prophet, saying: [3] Between two animals you are made manifest. In the same place Joseph remained with Mary three days.

Joseph could pay his taxes. *The animals are even said to be devout* (!) as in verses [1] and [2].

We usually feel sorry for the Holy Family's inadequate housing but, in truth, a cave was usually more wholesome than a hotel. First century inns were very often dens of vice.

### **Christmas Season Blessing**

May almighty God, who sent his Son to take our nature upon him, bless you in this holy season, scatter the darkness of sin, and brighten your heart with the light of his holiness. Amen.

May God, who sent his angels to proclaim the glad news of the Savior's birth, fill you with joy, and make you heralds of the Gospel. Amen.

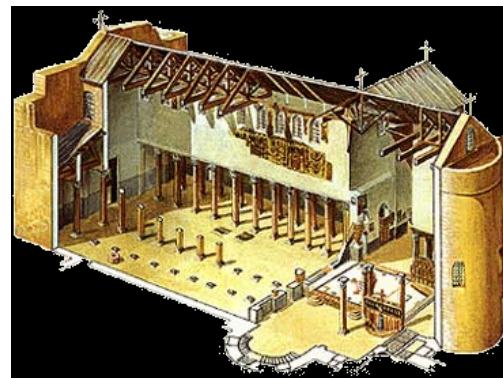
May God, who in the Word made flesh joined heaven to earth and earth to heaven, give you his peace and favor. Amen.

And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you for ever. Amen.

Next Sunday is January 1, Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus.

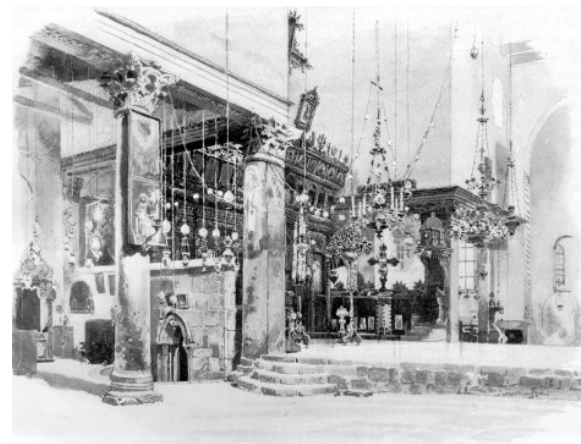
Please prepare Luke 2:15-21.

## The Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ



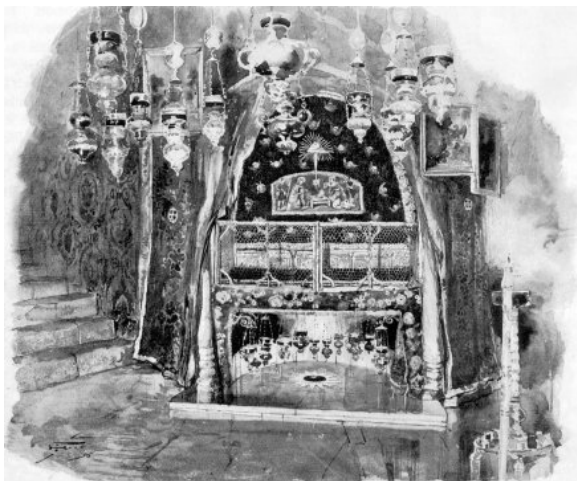
### **Model of the Church of the Holy Nativity, Jerusalem**

**Constructed at the order of Emperor Constantine, c. 330.  
Rebuilt c. 550 and many times thereafter. The cross decorated  
Corinthian columns in the nave stand 19 feet tall.**



**Chancel of the Church of the Holy Nativity  
with the entrance to the Grotto of the Nativity.  
(Originally published in St. Nicholas Magazine, December, 1896)**

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### **The Grotto of the Holy Nativity**

(Originally published in *St. Nicholas Magazine*, December, 1896)

### **Today's Gospel**

*Please note that there are several alternative Gospel selections for Christmas. They are either St. John 1: 1-14 or all or parts of St. Luke 2: 1-20.*

**St. Luke 2:1-20** [Year A,B,C Christmas]

✠ IN THOSE DAYS A DECREE WENT OUT FROM EMPEROR AUGUSTUS THAT ALL the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you

## **The Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ**

is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. [© NRSV]

OR

**St. John 1:1-14** [Year A,B,C Christmas]

✠ IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD, AND THE WORD WAS WITH GOD, AND THE Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. [© NRSV]

### **The Cave Barn**

According to some archeologists the inn at Bethlehem was originally built on a small hill over a limestone deposit. The barn was a cave that lay under the hotel. The hill no longer exists. It was leveled when the church was built, but the cave, either natural or man made, still exists. A pit would have been cut into the cave floor to serve as a manger for animal food. We like to think of *The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay*, but in reality, hay was not to be