

How did the Nativity scene start?

Francis was born into a wealthy merchant family in the Umbrian town of Assisi around 1181. He rejected his family wealth, and dedicated himself to serve the needs of the poor, and founded the Franciscan order of monks. He was made a saint after his death, and is now known as St Francis of Assisi.

In 1223, so exactly 800 years ago, Francis wanted to do something to help people look forward to and celebrate the birth of Jesus. As part of this, in a small town nearby called Greccio, he made a manger with hay, and an ox and an ass, and put a carved doll in the manger. After Francis died, nativity scenes were put up in churches all over Italy, and in time life size and even living nativity scenes were staged, and people began to place scenes in their houses too.



Greccio

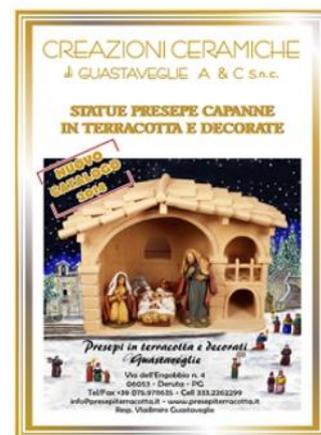


Life size Nativity in Assisi

Over the years we have collected figures to make the Nativity you see in school. In Umbria a town called Deruta is famous for the production of ceramics, and one workshop only makes nativity figures. In Italy the Nativity scene is called a Presepe. First of all we got Mary and Joseph, and we made a manger out of scraps of wood. We found our baby Jesus in Spain, and our Granddaughter always puts Jesus in the manger on Christmas morning. The following year we got one of the Wise Men, and a donkey of the right size (but he came from Deans). The year after that we got two more Wise Men from the east, and a shepherdess. This year we were very pleased to be able to buy the ox and the ass to place in the stable.



The town of Deruta



Where we bought the Presepe figures

