

St Francis of Assisi

Take centre "stage"

A long time ago, in the first part of 13th century, there lived a young man named Francis. He lived in Italy, in a village called Assisi. He was one of seven children. Francis was actually a nickname – it was the name his father liked to call him. Francis grew up in a wealthy household.

Put on gold cope

His father was a wealthy silk merchant. This gave the family its wealth and Francis wore bright, colourful, and rich clothing. He had lots of friends. He could play sports any time he wanted. He had money to spend on every kind of luxury.

But Francis was always a little uncomfortable with his family's riches. Francis was always aware of the poor. He was aware of the people around him who had less.

One time, when he was still just a teenager, he was working for his father, selling cloth in the marketplace. A beggar came up to him and asked him for money. Francis gave him all the money in his pockets.

Cast off cope

He cast off his father's wealth and he left the booth and he followed the beggar. This made his father very angry with him.

Pick up sword and shield

In order to support himself after this falling out with his father, Francis joined the army. He left Assisi and marched off to war.

*March to back of the church
and leave weapons*

He was held in prison and he was gone for more than a year. Some wondered if he would ever come back.

Slowly return up aisle

In time, he did come back to his home in Assisi. And he tried to reconcile with his father. But Francis was not the same young man who had brazenly set off to war. He began to spend a lot of

time on his own. He spent time away from people, in lonely places. He spent time praying to God.

Turn to face stained glass

One time, Francis was praying in an old church. He was looking at a picture of Jesus. Francis had a vision of Jesus and heard Jesus speak to him. Jesus said something like: "Francis, Francis, go and repair My House; it is falling apart."

Face congregation

He wasn't sure what to do with that vision but it stuck with him. Shortly after the vision, Francis heard a travelling preacher talking about Jesus and the Kingdom of Heaven. It was from the Gospel of Matthew. Francis heard that Christians should go to every nation and preach the Good News of Jesus. They should not take any money, or a walking stick, or even any shoes for the road.

Step out of sandals

Francis wanted to be like Jesus. He never became a priest, but he became a preacher. He preached in the streets. He preached in the country side. They say he even preached to the animals.

Flying bird

Francis would preach to anyone who would listen. They say that his preaching was so interesting, so compelling, that even the birds would come and listen.

Bird lands in hand

This is why statues and pictures of St. Francis usually have birds around him. It is also why many churches mark his day in the calendar by celebrating creation and blessing animals.

Over time, people began to follow Francis. They wanted to be preachers like him. After a while, they even went to the Pope and asked him to create a new religious order. They were friars; they were known as the lesser brothers. Eventually, they were called the Franciscan Order, named after St. Francis. And they still exist today. They have one, simple, rule of life. This is their rule: "To follow the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ and to walk in his footsteps."

Walk to nativity set

We remember Francis when we bless the animals. But not everyone knows that we also remember Francis at Christmas. He was the first person to create a nativity scene or a creche. He wanted to help the people capture the mystery and wonder of the Christmas miracles and the birth of Jesus. Maybe when you see a nativity set this year, you will think of Francis.

Return to centre

We remember St. Francis because he tried to live like Jesus. He even died like Jesus. Later in his life, he developed wounds on his hands and feet called stigmata. These holy marks were like the wounds of the cross that Jesus would have had.

We remember Francis in the fall season, because he died on October 4. But we also remember him at this time of year because it is the time of the harvest. It is a time when we remember the animals and bless them. It is the time when we celebrate the beauty and wonder of creation.

Wondering

I wonder what parts of Francis' story you liked best?

I wonder what part of the story is the most important? Is it his wealthy upbringing? Is it that he cast off his wealth and went to war? Is it his visions? His preaching? His love of animals? His teaching of the Christmas story? His desire to be just like Jesus?

I wonder. Is there any part of the story that might be about you? Do you see yourself anywhere in the story of Francis?

