

Diocese of Prince George  
*Liturgical Notes*  
Diocesan Liturgy Commission

**CHRISTMAS CRIB**  
*(Placement in the church and blessing)*

“The name crib is given to the manger where Christ was born. The term includes the immediate area of the stable, especially as applied in the following definition.

“The fabricated representation of the manger contains statues of the Christ Child, the Blessed Mother, and St. Joseph. Tradition and custom also include figures of the Magi, shepherds, animals, and sometimes angels. The crib is erected in churches during Christmas season, from Christmas Eve until Epiphany. The practice arose in 1223 as a devotion founded by St. Francis of Assisi. Cribs may be erected in the home or elsewhere. In French, the term is crèche, which is often used in English also.<sup>1</sup>

**PLACEMENT IN THE CHURCH:** In the Book of Blessing, it says: “If the manger is set up in the church, it must not be placed in the presbyterium. A place should be chosen that is suitable for prayer and devotion and is easily accessible by the faithful.”<sup>2</sup> However, supported by the words of our Holy Father, Pope Francis in his Apostolic Letter, *Admirabile Signum (On the Meaning and Importance of the Nativity Scene)*, placing the crib in the sanctuary area may be permitted: “It does not matter how the nativity scene is arranged: it can always be the same or it can change from year to year. What matters is that it speaks to our lives. Wherever it is, and whatever form it takes, the Christmas crèche speaks to us of the love of God, the God who became a child in order to make us know how close he is to every man, woman and child, regardless of their condition.”<sup>3</sup> If therefore, the crib is placed in the sanctuary the following must be considered: (1) only if the space in the sanctuary of a particular church allows for it; (2) that it will not block the altar, the ambo, the tabernacle, and including the chair of the main celebrant of the Mass; (3) the size of the figures is not larger than the permanent sacred furnishings in the sanctuary. “The altar should occupy a place where it is truly the centre toward which the attention of the whole congregation of the faithful naturally turns.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Catholic Encyclopedia, 1976.

<sup>2</sup> Book of Blessings, CCCB. §1544.

<sup>3</sup> *Admirabile Signum*, Pope Francis. 2019, §10.

<sup>4</sup> General Instruction of the Roman Missal, §299.

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**BLESSING OF CHRISTMAS CRIB:** Close to the celebration of Christmas, after the crib has been set up in a special location, the blessing may take place.<sup>5</sup> It may also happen on the Vigil of Christmas or another suitable time.<sup>6</sup> The blessing may be given during a celebration of the Word of God, during Mass, or even during another service, e.g., a carol service.<sup>7</sup>

**VENERATION OF THE IMAGE OF THE CHILD JESUS:** In the Directory of Popular Piety and the Liturgy it says: “At Midnight Mass, an event of major liturgical significance and of strong resonance in popular piety, the following could be given prominence: [...] “at the end of Mass, the faithful could be invited to kiss the image of the Child Jesus, which is then placed in a crib erected in the church or somewhere nearby.”<sup>8</sup>

**If the blessing is to take place within the celebration of the Mass, it is to happen according to the outline laid out in the Book of Blessings:**

*At the Conclusion of the Universal Prayer, the main celebrant with hands outstretched, says the prayer of blessing:*

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.<sup>9</sup>

**R.** Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Blessings and Prayers for Home and Family, CCCB. p. 231.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Book of Blessings, USCCB. §1542.

<sup>7</sup> Book of Blessings, USCCB. §1542.

<sup>8</sup> Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy, Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. §111.

<sup>9</sup> Book of Blessings, USCCB. §1564.

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When the blessing takes place during the celebration of the Word, outside the Mass, at home, school or any other place or service, the following resources may be used:

1. A Book of Blessing, CCCB 1981 pp.207-208.
2. Blessings and Prayers for Home and Family, CCCB 2004 pp.231-234
3. Book of Blessings, USCCB 1989 §1547-1561
4. Shorter Book of Blessings, USCCB 1990 §959-978