

## Francis's Onoia Tourney to "Bethlehem"



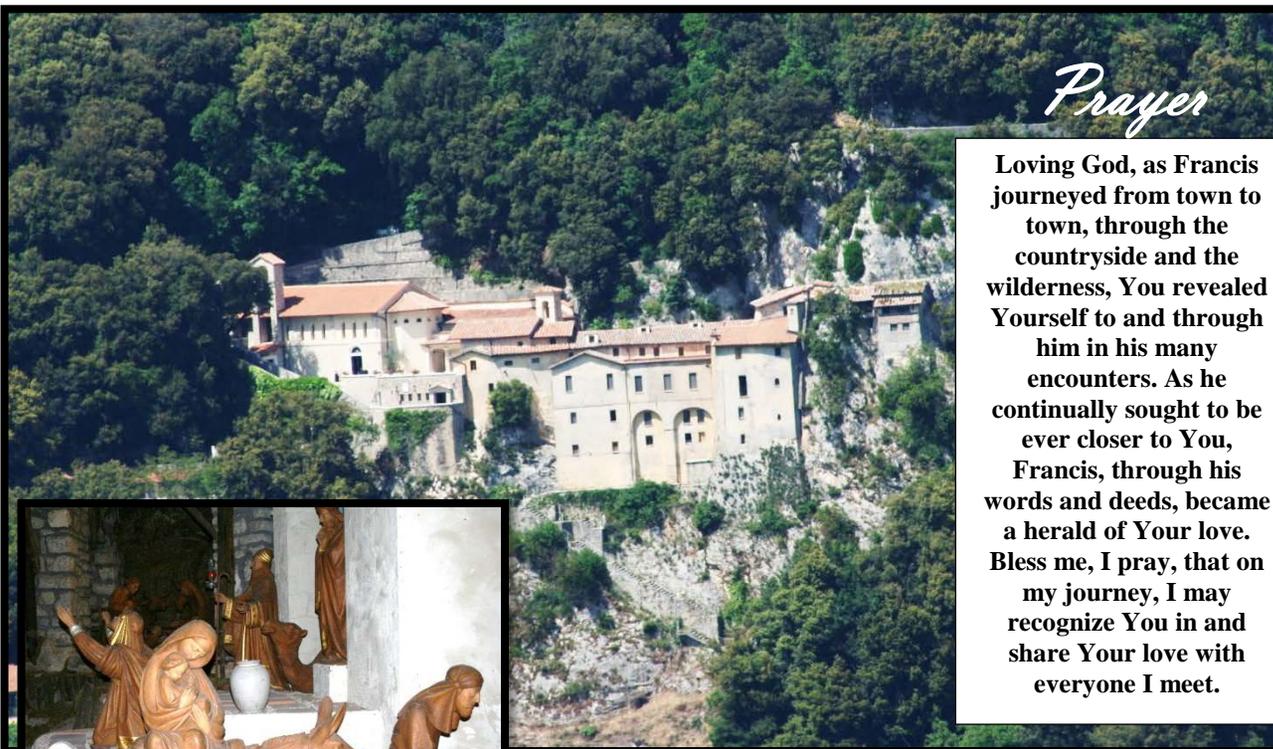
Pilgrims who have traveled in the footsteps of Saint Francis know that he was a man on the move. Whether seeking counsel from the pope in Rome, taking his Gospel message to other towns, tending to lepers in the valley below Assisi, or looking for prayerful solitude in mountainside hermitages, Francis didn't seem to stay in any one place for long. His life was a continuous physical and spiritual journey. One trip in particular, from Assisi to Greccio—site of one of Francis's favorite mountain retreats—takes modern-day pilgrims only about two hours by bus, but for Francis and his companions, it would have been days walking across difficult terrain. Greccio is called by some the "Franciscan Bethlehem" because of Francis's reenactment there of the Christ Child's birth. But it's not much of a stretch to extend the Bethlehem analogy to the journey Francis had to take to get there. Just as Mary and Joseph traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem, Francis's journey to Greccio (or anywhere he travelled for that matter) was one of expectant hope in receiving and sharing God's love. So while the Christmas manger scene remains Greccio's claim to fame, let us also not forget Francis's continuous journey, a journey which is also ours, to discover and share God's presence among us.

### Early Writings

From *The Life of Saint Francis* by Thomas of Celano

There was a certain man [in Greccio] named John who had a good reputation but an even better manner of life. Blessed Francis loved him with special affection.... Blessed Francis had John summoned to him some fifteen days prior to the birthday of the Lord. "If you desire to celebrate the coming feast of the Lord together at Greccio," he said to him, "hurry before me and carefully make ready the things I tell you. For I wish to enact the memory of that babe who was born in Bethlehem."

Regis Armstrong, Wayne Hellmann and William Short, eds., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, The Saint*, Vol. I (New York: New City Press, 1999). 254-255.



### Prayer

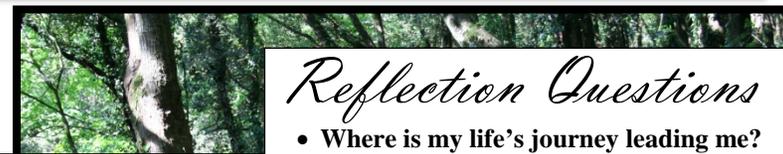
Loving God, as Francis journeyed from town to town, through the countryside and the wilderness, You revealed Yourself to and through him in his many encounters. As he continually sought to be ever closer to You, Francis, through his words and deeds, became a herald of Your love. Bless me, I pray, that on my journey, I may recognize You in and share Your love with everyone I meet.



### Scripture

They that hope in the LORD will renew their strength, they will soar on eagles' wings; They will run and not grow weary, walk and not grow faint.

Isaiah 40:31



### Reflection Questions

- Where is my life's journey leading me?
- Do I recognize God along the way?

