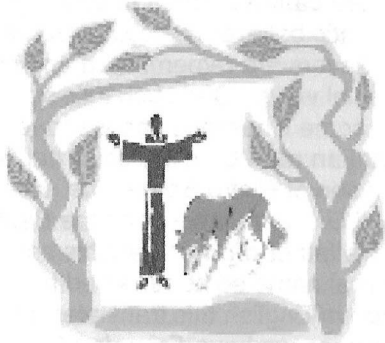


A MAN AHEAD
OF HIS TIME!



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"Berry Good News!"
by

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A MAN AHEAD OF HIS TIME!

Throughout history there have been and continue to be individuals whose lives exemplify Christlike behavior. When they die most of these individuals are forgotten. However, God's Word declares, "***Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints.***"

God's people, whether they've lived under the Old Covenant (Testament) or in the New Covenant, are **called saints**. In other words **every** authentic believer is a saint. Some few of these believers are remembered and honored in special ways. One such follower of Christ who some Christians choose to remember is **an Italian man** born in Assisi, Italy in 1182. This son of *Pietro Bernadone* was originally named *Giovanni* after John the Baptist. However, his father **did not** want his son to have a biblical name so he renamed him, **Francesco**. In English this translates into **Francis**. Hence we have **Francis of Assisi**.

Francis was born into a wealthy merchant's home. In his childhood and youth he had want for nothing. This young man exhibited considerable charisma. He was greatly loved and admired by nearly everyone who knew him. As with many young people **Francis** sowed his wild oats with wine, women and song. He loved the rich, wild life. Like his father he had developed a great love and admiration for France and for everything French. Following in his father's footsteps **Francis** became very successful in business. Because of his preoccupation with pleasure he had no time for godly living. He had a burning desire to be a knight. As a youth he went off to battle joining the soldiers of his beloved city Assisi. However, the army of Assisi was defeated by the army of a neighboring city. **Francis** was taken captive and was held in prison for ransom by the enemy. He spent a year in a dungeon and

was eventually ransomed by his father.

Following his release from prison he continued his riotous living. Seeking greater glory he enlisted in the pope's Fourth Crusade. At that point in history the Western Church had conducted a number of crusades to supposedly **reclaim the holy land**, especially Jerusalem, from the **Muslims**. These crusades were anything but holy and were not Christian in the New Testament understanding and meaning of Christian. In their **misguided 'religious' zeal** the Crusaders killed multitudes of innocent people including Jews, Muslims and even Eastern Orthodox Christians. The crusades remain **a dark blot** on Roman Catholicism to this day.

Fortunately **Francis** **did not** continue in the crusade that he had intended to be a part of. With only a day out of Assisi to join fellow crusaders **Francis** had an awe-inspiring dream which impacted and changed his life. In this dream **the LORD** dealt with him and told him that he was to return to Assisi.

Upon returning to Assisi **Francis** was looked upon as **a coward** by his peers and by his own father for not continuing with the Crusaders. This humiliated **Francis** and greatly impacted his life.

At that time in history the majority of Europeans **claimed** Christianity, however very few had an understanding of Christianity. At this point in his life **Francis** became **'religious'** but still **did not understand** authentic Christian faith. It was later that **he testified to having been 'born again.'** In his quest to know Christ better, **the LORD** spoke to **Francis** while he was praying in an abandoned church building that was in disrepair at *San Damiano*, an area located outside of Assisi. **The LORD** said to him,

"Francis, repair My church!"

It was only natural that **Francis** assumed that **GOD** was commissioning him to rebuild this tumbled down structure. He immediately began the task of repairing and rebuilding the abandoned chapel. With the help of others the building was restored. However, **Francis** **later realized** that **the LORD** was urging him to **repair (reform)** the Church, not a building, but the institutional Church which had become increasingly corrupt through the centuries. He went to Rome, had an audience with the pope challenging the him to return to simple living and to simple faith in Christ. He encouraged the pope and hierarchy **to cease living** in such grandeur and wealth and come to the aid of the poor and needy.

Francis **set the example** by literally giving away **all** of his wealth including the very clothes that had been given to him by his wealthy father. He proceeded to declare that **God alone was his Father**. For the rest of his life he wore nothing but rags and castoffs.

People began to recognize **the Christlike lifestyle** of this simple follower of Christ. People flocked around him amazed and bewildered at the humble Christlike life he was living. The religious leaders of that day were living anything but godly lives. As people gathered about **Francis** he declared,

"This is our rule: to obey the command of Jesus to the rich young man to sell all and give to the poor, to take nothing on their journey like the seventy had been told, and to take up the cross daily and follow Christ."

Francis **has become known** for the deep love and respect that he had for all of God's

creation: **for nature and for animals.** He was truly a man far ahead of his time in this love and concern for our planet earth, for creation and for all of the creatures of our God and King. **Francis** had an understanding that many conservative Christians: fundamentalists, evangelicals and charismatics, still do not have. In fact, when a Christian takes stands similar to those taken by **Francis** that person is often ridiculed, scorned and labeled as a **'liberal', God-forbid**, by conservative Christians.

Francis was **never ordained** a presbyter, yet he was indeed ordained a servant of God. He lived a life of Godlike humiliation, suffering, seasoned by prayer and devotion to his Lord and Savior, Christ. We are told that in his desire to share in our Lord's passion he received marks of the nails and wounds similar to those inflicted upon the Savior at His crucifixion. Whether or not this is fact we do not know, however we do know that **Francis** identified with our Lord's passion in a way that few Christians today can understand and fewer experience.

Many legends have risen surrounding **Francis** preaching to the animals. What is fact and what is fiction we are not sure. We do know that **he was a man of God.** We also know that he was one of those people whom the Spirit of God called out unto salvation and into servant ministry. He repented of his former way of living life and was **"born of the Spirit"** as evidenced by the fruit that his life produced.

Approaching death **Francis** became subject to intense suffering eventually going blind. He responded to this by writing his **"Canticle of the Sun"** that expresses his identification with creation in glorifying, exalting and praising God.

Francis went home to be with his **LORD**

on **October 4, 1226** at the age of 45. He is one of the outstanding saints of God that it would do well **for Christians to remember.** **Each October 4th** or a day close to it some churches hold a special service of thanksgiving by blessing nature and God's creatures. The hymn, **"All Creatures of Our God and King"** by Francis is worth noting:

*All creatures of our God and King,
Lift up your voice and with us sing
Alleluia! Alleluia!
The burning sun with golden beam,
Thou silver moon with softer gleam,
O praise Him, O praise Him! Alleluia.*

*Thou rushing wind that art so strong,
Ye clouds that sail in heav'n along,
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Thou rising morn, in praise rejoice;
Ye lights of evening, find a voide,
O praise Him, O praise Him! Alleluia.*

*And all ye men of tender heart,
Forgiving others, take your part,
O sing ye, Alleluia!
Ye who long pain and sorrow bear,
Praise God and on Him cast your care,
O praise Him, O praise Him! Alleluia*

*Let all things their Creator bless,
And worship Him in humbleness,
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,
And praise the Spirit, Three in One,
O praise Him, O praise Him! Alleluia.*

OLIVE TREE MINISTRIES

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