

# The Infant Jesus of Prague



***“The more you honor me, the more I will bless you.”***

Such is the promise of the “Infant of Prague.” This promise has been kept over and over again yielding countless fruits over the centuries in every country of the Earth.

Venerating our Lord as an infant is as old as the Magi coming to lay their gifts at our dear Lord’s feet at the Manger in Bethlehem. Here, as an infant, He turned the known power structure of the Earth upside down. As C.S. Lewis asked, “Why did God enter into our human condition so quietly, as a baby born in obscurity?” His answer: “because he had to slip clandestinely, behind enemy lines.” He is a simple lovable infant, yet also truly omnipotent as the King of Kings.

“O come let us adore Him.” Like the Magi, let us lay our burdens at His feet. Not heavy packages of gold, frankincense and myrrh, but rather our most intimate personal burdens and struggles of our life. He waits for us. He longs for *these* gifts from us. And as He has promised, “The more you honor me, the more I will bless you.”

## A Brief History of The Infant of Prague

While countless statues of the Christ Child are venerated only during the Christmas season, the statue of the Infant Jesus of Prague enjoys recognition throughout the year and experiences a worldwide reputation.

Although kept in the Republic of Czech (formerly Czechoslovakia), the statue is of Spanish origin and was given to a Spanish princess by her mother as a wedding gift. It was brought to Prague by the bride, Maria Manriques de Lara, after her marriage in 1556 to Vratislav of Pernstyn, a Czech nobleman. The statue once again served as a wedding gift when it was given to Maria's daughter, Polyxena, upon her marriage to Zdenek of Lobkovice. On being widowed in 1628, she decided to make the statue available to all believers by donating it to the Carmelites of Prague and the Church of Our Lady of Victory. Her words at the time proved prophetic: "I hereby give you what I prize most highly in this world. As long as you venerate this image you will not be in want." When special devotions were instituted in honor of the Child Jesus, the community, which had been enduring hardships, soon prospered.

The Child Jesus was particularly dear to one of the novices, Cyril of the Mother of God (1590-1675), who was delivered of interior trials by means of this devotion. The future history of the statue would in all probability have suffered if it had not been for this holy Carmelite.

At the beginning of the disturbances attending the Thirty Years' War, the novitiate was removed to Germany in 1630. With the absence of the novices and Brother Cyril, devotions before the statue were gradually neglected until the prayers were abandoned altogether. Need and distress once more returned. Eventually the invading army of King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden took possession of the churches in the city, plundered the Carmelite monastery and threw the image of the Infant Jesus onto a heap of rubble behind the high altar. For the next seven years the statue lay forgotten by all. On the feast of Pentecost in 1637, Cyril of the Mother of God, now an ordained priest, returned to Prague.

Because hostile armies still overran the city, the community was in distress until Fr. Cyril remembered the prosperity and peace they had enjoyed while devotions to the Infant Jesus were observed. He searched for the lost statue and eventually found it almost buried in dust and debris. Made of wood and coated with wax, the image had miraculously suffered little from its neglect, except the statue's two hands were missing. Cyril placed the statue atop an altar in the oratory and reorganized devotions to it. One day, while praying before the statue, he distinctly heard these words: "Have pity on Me, and I will have pity on you. Give Me My hands, and I will give you peace. The more you honor Me, the more I will bless you."

When money intended for the repair of the statue was spent on a replacement, the Infant manifested His displeasure by causing the new statue to be shattered by a falling candlestick. Once again the original statue became the object of veneration, but when additional funds for the necessary repairs proved to be slow in coming, Fr. Cyril again heard the voice: "Place Me near the entrance of the sacristy, and you will receive aid." When this was done, the full cost of the repairs was promptly donated.

The needs of the community were always met through the continued devotion to the Child Jesus, and such were the favors granted that replicas of the statue were made for those who likewise wanted to benefit from the generous favors of the holy Child.

It became the traditional practice of the shrine in Prague to clothe the statue several times each year in the proper liturgical color. The most beautiful garment in the collection is an ermine cloak placed on the statue the first Sunday after Easter, which is the anniversary day of the coronation of the statue by the bishop of Prague in 1655. During the Christmas season the statue is clothed in a dark green robe made of velvet and richly decorated with golden embroidery. This was a gift of the Empress Maria Theresa on the occasion of her coronation as queen of Bohemia in 1743. The infant's wardrobe contains more than 50 dresses. Many, too, are the golden ornaments and chains, given by grateful devotees, which adorn the holy statue.

Since the time of the statue's ecclesiastical approbation in 1655, replicas always represent the royal status of the Child. Crowned and clothed in a mantle of fine fabrics, the statues hold in the left hand a sphere representing the world, while the right hand is raised in blessing.

Standing a mere 19 inches high, the statue is known throughout the world, with the word "miraculous" generally added to its title.

The original statue of the Infant Jesus is enshrined in a side chapel of the Church of Our Lady of Victory.



St. Theresa of Lisieux had a strong devotion to the Infant of Prague.