

Saint Francis of Assisi: One of the most beloved saints, Francis was born in Italy circa 1181. The son of a rich merchant, he was at first named John (Giovanni) by his mother, but when his father returned from a trip, he decided to call the boy Francis. Francis at first lived a life of pleasure, then went to war, became a prisoner of war, suffered from illness, went to war again, and finally gave his life to Christ. At the Church of San Damiano near Assisi, Francis experienced a vision wherein Christ told him to repair His house that was falling into ruins. Francis assumed Christ meant the church in which he was praying and set about repairing that building. He attempted to do just that with his father's resources, a move his father strongly opposed. Francis became a beggar, worked to restore churches in ruin, preached repentance, and gathered around himself a group of followers. He chose not to be ordained to the priesthood and lived in community with a group known as *fratres minores* (Latin for "lesser brothers"); to this day Franciscans have OFM after their name, standing for Order of Friars Minor. Francis and his followers lived a life of poverty and devoted themselves to caring for the sick and the poor. His father disinherited him, but that did not deter Francis from his mission. St. Francis is credited with building the first manger scene at Christmas, a custom that we observe to this day. Francis delighted in the natural world and loved animals, and many legends about this love appear in the *Fioretti*, a collection of stories about Francis. For example, one legend shows Francis preaching to the birds, and in another he tamed and befriended a wolf that had been ravaging a town. Around 1224 Francis wrote the *Canticle of the Sun*, a hymn praising all of nature and its creatures. The Saint Francis Window was donated by the Kerpsack families "In gratitude for God's blessings." Our Francis is dressed in the traditional brown habit of the Franciscans, and a rosary encircles his waist. Flowers and plants grow at his feet, and a white dove flutters in front of him as he holds out his left hand containing food for the bird. Perhaps the white dove represents the Holy Spirit, and Francis is feeding the Church with his preaching and his example. His feast day is October 4. Saint Francis is the patron saint of animals, of the environment, and along with Catherine of Siena, of Italy.

