

Legend has it that on that first Christmas night the temperatures dropped in Bethlehem, and the air became bitterly cold. The small fire that burned in the middle of the stable was nearly out, and Mary began to worry as the baby Jesus shivered in her arms. Joseph had gone to find firewood and, in his absence, Mary turned to the animals about her and asked for help. The strong ox lay sound asleep on the stable floor and did not hear her. Nor did the hardworking donkey, or the stately horse. Mary wondered what to do. Suddenly she heard the fluttering of wings and looking up, she saw a small, plain, brown-coloured bird fly into the stall. The bird went directly over to the dying fire and began to flap his wings hard. His tiny wings acted like little bellows, puffing air onto the embers, until they glowed bright red again. The bird continued to fan the fire, singing all the while, until the ashes began to kindle.

Then with his beak, the bird began picking up dry sticks and dropping them into the fire. As he did, a flame burst forth and burned the little bird's breast bright red. But he simply continued to feed the fire until it crackled brightly and warmed the entire stable. The Baby Jesus slept happily. Mary thanked the bird for his selfless act. Then she looked tenderly at his red breast, burned by the flame, and promised the robin that from now on his red breast would be a reminder of how he saved Jesus from the bitter cold, and a sign to the world of the hope that acts of kindness bring. The legend of the robin teaches us a valuable lesson - not to be overwhelmed by the size of the mission in front of us, or to think ourselves too small to make a difference. Rather, we must do what we can to bring hope to the world.

Soon we'll remember the beginnings of another unlikely saviour. A small baby, born in a poor stable, to unknown parents from an ordinary town, who from his birth became the greatest sign of hope the world had ever seen. Whose arrival, or advent, had been dreamed about for centuries, as revealed in this Bible reading by prophet Isaiah, written 700 years before the first Christmas.

And what about you? Will you be inspired to be a sign of hope to others?

There are so many little things that you can do, that will make a big difference to somebody else. Let's finish with a prayer, asking Christ to encourage us to fan the flame of hope and faith in our world. Our Father...