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Legend, more than fact, has St Roch born in Montpellier in the south of France either at the end of the 13th century or midway through the 14th century to a childless couple who prayed to God for a child. When this boy was born he came with a distinctive red birthmark on his chest in the form of a cross.

His parents died when he was a young man leaving him very wealthy but like Francis before him, he gave away his wealth and took the habit of a 3rd Order Franciscan and began his journey to Rome where he wanted to visit the tombs of the apostles and saints of the early Church.

As he entered Italian territory, he encountered a people in the grip of a pandemic and began his ministry caring for those sick and dying from the plague of that era. It is a part of his legend that he blessed people and could heal some by touching them with his hand.

He contracted the disease and isolated himself in a small hut he built with leaves and branches in the forest to keep from infecting others where, as the legend goes God did not want him to be sick and die alone, so he was taken care of by a kind dog who brought him bread and licked his wounds and dug with his paws a miraculous spring to give him water.

Eventually, he made his way back to Montpellier, still sick, in the midst of a kind of civil war where he was unrecognized because of his illness and thought to be a spy so he was imprisoned and died only to have his body identified by his uncle, now the mayor of Montpellier.

He became a very popular saint all over Europe given the predictable patterns of plague and anyplace that Spanish missionaries worked his legend was used to get money from poor people looking for miracles.

He is additionally a patron saint of dogs, invalids, of falsely accused people, [bachelors](#).

I tell you about him not because of any of the above but the Parish of Saint Roch is located on the very exclusive street in Paris, rue Saint-Honoré, although like everywhere else in Paris that street, the hotels, and the expensive shops are all empty as is the church. However, it was in that church after

Christmas years ago that I got the idea for having the kids make our Christmas manger each year.

It is a custom in Paris that the nativity scenes in each parish church be created new each year and that they reflect something unique about the parish or the parish members. The church of Saint Roch is very near the Paris Opera and the Paris Opera in Paris is bigger than the Bears, the Cubs, the White Sox, the Bulls, and the Blackhawks all put together in every way.

So not only are there singers and dancers and musicians but set designers, lighting designers, costume makers, and all kinds of other creative and engaged people and while not a whole lot of people go to Mass anymore in Paris, they still love their parish churches and a visit to your parish church during Christmas is a very popular and important custom.

I can hardly wait to see what our parish nativity scene will look like next Christmas.

It would be nice to have a Saint Roch taking care of the sick people, especially those that are dying alone but that is not the case. The saints performing miracles are called nurses and doctors and cleaners and by all kinds of other names that will get lost in history, mostly, but not in the heart of Christ or so I believe, their names leave fingerprints all over the Sacred Heart.