



## ORATORY OF ST. ANTONIO

Inside the church, the ancient seat of the Brotherhood of St. Anthony, in the apsidal conch there is placed the monumental nativity scene made in polychrome terracotta composed of more than thirty statues and built between 1541 and 1546 by the abruzzian brothers James and Raffaele from Montereale. On the sides of the basin into two niches are statues of St. Anthony Abbot and St. Rocco, the patron saints of the brotherhood itself and invoked against the plague. The current location of the crib is not the original one: in fact, to enable the realisation of the choir behind the monastery, in the forties of the eighteenth century it was necessary to shorten this church and the nativity scene was disassembled and then put back in the new apsidal conch on two levels, in a similar manner to how it was originally. In the lower register the Nativity scene is displayed at the centre of the scene there are St. Joseph and the Virgin Mary kneeling and adoring the infant Jesus. On the left there is a bagpipe player and on the right two peasant women. Behind the central group there are four angels. The disparity of the quality between the figures of the Madonna, St. Joseph and the young peasant girl made by the masters and the other minor figures made by the pupils. The second register contains the Procession of the three wise men traveling to Bethlehem and is divided into two steps: on the bottom step there are the three kings on horseback bearing gifts, instead on the upper step there is a procession of six figures, partly on foot and partly on horseback, one of which even facing the interior of the representation. Four angels playing musical instruments are suspended from the ceiling on the scene. Particular is the presence of a male figure sitting on the border of the apsidal conch with his legs dangling in the air: it has been interpreted both as a young man intent to remove a thorn from his foot, Hellenistic and classical theme, and as the devil in the rabid act of tearing a foot to the birth of the Saviour.

After the recent restoration work two frescoes of the sixteenth century depicting One St. Agatha and St. Blaze and the other St. Anthony Abbot and St. Lucy, belonging to the original decoration of the Church where brought to light.