



“Advent” literally means “coming.”

Beginning four Sundays before Christmas, the season of Advent moves us toward Bethlehem as we anticipate the coming of Jesus. We remember the prophets who pointed the way. We journey along with Mary and Joseph, shepherds and sheep, angels and wise ones hoping to find the baby who is the sign of God with us.

- Mary learns about the birth of her son. (*Luke 1:26–38*)
- Mary visits with her cousin Elizabeth. (*Luke 1:5–25, 39–80*)
- Mary and Joseph go to Bethlehem. (*Luke 2:1–7*)

Where are you in the story, or what part is about you? What is your favourite part of this season’s celebrations? What you would bring to the baby Jesus?

The Advent season, with its traditions and rituals, gives us the opportunity to enrich our family life and our family’s spiritual life. The important thing is to catch a sense of how Advent can enrich your life, faith, and spirituality, and then find ways to celebrate that work for you. Advent, is meant to slowly change and transform us, so that, more and more, we not only recognise our God who loves us unceasingly, but we become the Body of Christ, living, active and changing our world with this love.

Here are some ideas your family may want to incorporate into your Advent celebration.

Make a place for prayer in your home

Make a prayer table with a Bible and candle and special symbols that mean something to your family (You can add to these as Advent progresses). Each of us could begin and end the day in prayer. Light the candle every evening with the traditional Evening Prayer acclamation: *“Jesus Christ is the light of the world. A light no darkness can overpower.”* As a family, we could pray together at least once a day. Spend a few minutes in prayer each day as a family, Try to pray grace before and after meals. Invite each one to saying thank, in their own words, for their day, for life, for blessings, for love. Say a prayer for sick relatives or friends or maybe ask for help for events that the next day will bring.



Make an Advent Wreath

The Advent wreath is a circle, which symbolizes the eternal because a circle has no ending and no beginning. It is made of evergreens, a symbol of eternal life. The candles around the wreath represent Jesus, the Light of the World. Each Sunday in Advent the family can gather around their wreath and have a little ceremony. When they do this a candle is lit to symbolise the coming of the fullness of light, so that each week an additional candle is lit.



Why not say to your wider family, friends and neighbours that you are hosting a **kick-off to the Christmas season** by lighting a traditional Advent wreath in your home and want to invite them to join you as you light the wreath for the first time and share a dessert with family neighbours and friends. Set a convenient time, and when people have arrived gather them briefly to light the candle and use the simple suggestion below to share the meaning of the candle. From there just enjoy dessert and get to know one another. You may be surprised how this simple observance of a holiday tradition will prompt further conversation. At the end tell them that you will be lighting the candle in your home each Sunday evening leading up to Christmas and let them know that they are welcome to join you. It is important to keep it simple, have a good dessert (*which they could contribute to*), and make sure people do not feel like they have to stay a long time. Even if you can’t do this on the first week, make a plan to do so with one of the weeks leading up to Christmas

The 1st Sunday of Advent symbolizes Hope with the “Prophet’s Candle” reminding us that Jesus is coming. After you light the candle...

Leader: We light this first candle to remind us of all God’s people, always preparing for Jesus to come among them. **All: He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths!**

Leader: Jesus says, “keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come”

All: Lord, help us to be ready to serve you, to follow you and to know you, so our lives will reflect your love.

The 2nd Sunday of Advent symbolizes Faith with the “Bethlehem Candle” reminding us of Mary and Joseph’s journey to Bethlehem. After you light the candles...

Leader: We light this second candle to remind us of God’s word through the prophets and in the Bible, looking to the day of Jesus’ birth. **All: We believe everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.**

Leader: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit **All: Lord, help our lives and the whole earth to be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea!**

The 3rd Sunday of Advent symbolizes Joy with the “Shepherd’s Candle” reminding us of the Joy the world experienced at the coming birth of Jesus. After you light the candles...

Leader: We light this third candle to remind us of John the Baptist, prophet of the most high God who prepared the way for Jesus to come. **All: But how will we know? What does the Scripture say?**

Leader: The Lord says, “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you” **All: Lord, help us to be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near!**

The 4th Sunday of Advent symbolizes Peace with the “Angel’s Candle” reminding us of the message of the angels: “Peace on Earth, Good Will Toward All.” After you light the candles...

Leader: We light this fourth candle to remind us of Jesus’ mother, Mary, and earthly father, Joseph, who believed God’s promise, “Mary will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus.” **All: May our hearts, too, praise the Lord and rejoice in God as our Saviour**

Leader: But the promise goes further, “what is conceived in Mary is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” **All: Lord, help us to believe that you can do great things through people like us, too. Fill us with your Holy Spirit, assure us of your love and strengthen us in your service.**

Christmas Day. The white candle, The “Christ Candle”, represents Jesus the light of the World. After all the candles are lit

Leader: We light this fifth candle to remind us of Jesus, the living word sent down to the earth! **All: How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation!**

Leader: **For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders All: And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace!**

Leader: The people walking in darkness have seen a great light – Jesus the Light of the World **All: The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out!**

Leader: **The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us All: We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth! Praise the Lord!**

The Empty Manger – works of kindness – Make a comfortable bed for Jesus on Christmas Day

Creating a family nativity scene is an event in which the whole family can share. Mary and Joseph should be far off traveling and their approach to Bethlehem can be adjusted daily. Older children can make life-size Nativity models, carve them, cut them out from cardboard, or set up pre-made figurines. The creative ideas are without limit. Make sure to place the Nativity scene where many can admire their efforts.

One small suggestion is that when create the manger leave it empty of straw. The idea is that when a family member does an act of service, sacrifice, or kindness for someone, they receive a piece of straw to put into the manger. Then, on Christmas morning, Baby Jesus is placed in the manger (which hopefully is now full of straw with all the good deeds done). Encourage your family members to make Jesus bed as comfortable as possible through their good deeds. In the process, explain that we are the ones who bring God’s love into the world and that our gifts and talents are God’s gifts to us, what we do with them are our gift to God!!



Practice the Art of Waiting

We live in a world of instant gratification. We hate to wait in line; wait for the fever to break for a sick child; wait while our computers & tablets “buffer;” wait to hear from the college of our choice; wait for our child to come home safely from the disco; wait behind slower runners or walkers at the 5k; waiting in traffic. We spend a fair amount of time waiting and losing our cool over it. We also spend a fair amount of time teaching our children how to wait (“No, you can’t have sweets just before dinner”). So, we already know that there are benefits to waiting. So, what if we changed our thinking about waiting from an annoyance into a VIRTUE? Waiting then becomes an activity, and a pretty helpful one at that. By actively waiting, we are able to reflect more carefully on what really matters during Advent. By actively waiting, we are preparing our hearts for Christ to be born anew in them. The next time you’re waiting in line at the store, take that time to be reminded that God is waiting, too. The God who loves you deeply is waiting for you to open the doors of your heart.

Note and Celebrate feast days throughout Advent

St. Nicholas Day - The feast of St. Nicholas is on Dec. 6th. It is a highlight of the Advent season in places like Germany. Each child puts out a shoe the night before St. Nicholas Day in the hope that the kind bishop with his mitre, staff, and bag of gifts will pay a visit. The current Santa Claus is modelled after St. Nicholas, but commercialism has tarnished the true story a bit. Many families give small gifts on both Dec. 6 and Christmas. Read about St. Nicholas on line



Feast of the Immaculate Conception - Some families have the custom of decorating the Christ candle with a blue veil on December 8th, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. On this great feast, others place a candle with a blue ribbon before a statue or picture of the Blessed Virgin, whose yes to God enabled our Lord's coming at Christmas. The candle is lit during meal times to serve as a delightful reminder of Mary's eager expectation of the Light of the World. It can also serve as a reminder to each family member to keep their own light of love burning as a preparation for Christ's coming.



St. Lucy cakes

The feast of St. Lucy, virgin and martyr, is on December 13th. This marks the opening of the Christmas season in Sweden. Her life story can be found in most saints books or online, as can the recipe for the traditional cakes. The symbolism is rich and her life story worthwhile reading.



Make a family blessing jar

Place an empty jar on your dining table. Each day during Advent, state one blessing for which you are thankful. Write it onto a slip of paper and put it in the jar. On Christmas Day, pour out the blessings. Read together and give thanks to God for the blessings you have enjoyed during Advent.



Family **Blessing** Jar

Sing Carols

St. Augustine said, "When we sing, we pray twice." Advent is a season of song. Use family mealtimes to listen to or sing Christmas carols.



Christmas Stories

Each year, give your family a Christmas storybook to be read together on Christmas Day. If you are able, you might also consider giving a copy of the book to your church's library so others might enjoy the book.

Here are some books to consider:

- The Best Christmas Pageant Ever by Barbara Robinson (HarperCollins, 1988)
- The Gift of the Magi by O. Henry (various editions and publishers)
- Jacob's Gift by Max Lucado (Thomas Nelson, 1998)
- The Last Straw by Frederick H. Thury (Zero to Ten Children's Books, 2004)
- A Northern Nativity by William Kurelek (Tundra, 1976)
- Room for a Little One: A Christmas Tale by Martin Waddell (Orchard, 2005)
- Silent Night: The Song from Heaven by Linda Granfield (Tundra, 2000)
- They Followed a Bright Star by Joan Alavreda (Putnam, 2002)
- Three Wise Women by Mary Hoffman (Frances Lincoln, 2002)



Visit a farm

You don't need to spend the night in a stable, but spending a day meetings a few sheep or a friendly donkey while taking in the sounds and smells of a farm can be a great way to connect with the reality of the incarnation. Jesus lived in our real world.



Dress for Advent

It's common for people to wear secular Christmas colours (red and green) throughout the month of December, so why not Advent colours? Purple and pink. Real men do, too, wear pink these days.

Have a family movie night

Gather your family and watch films that help you enter into the season of Advent, like The Nativity Story, Franco Zeffirelli's Jesus of Nazareth, The Greatest Story Ever Told, The classic "Peanuts" special "A Charlie Brown Christmas", It's a Wonderful Life, A Muppet Christmas Carol, The Santa Clause, How the Grinch Stole Christmas, ... There's many more... How does watching these films help you grow closer to the message of Christmas? How do they inspire you to live this Advent season?



Create a paper chain

Create one link for each day of the Advent season, but before linking it together, write an Advent Scripture quote or a good deed to do or the write name of a family member or friend, on each link. On each day of the Advent season, take off one link and reflect on the quote or do the good deed or as a family, pray for the person or whose name is on that strip of paper.



Plant a seed

Put a seed in a tiny container, pot, or jar in a sunny window and watch it grow throughout Advent. As you water it, pray that God's grace may water your soul, and his love and life may grow in your heart.



Gift Giving

In some families each person receives three gifts, a reminder of the three gifts the wise ones brought to Jesus. Consider giving three gifts to a Charity in your community that helps people in need.



Give books or blankets

Offer items that will contribute to the education and well-being of newborn babies in a nearby hospital. Include a note of comfort or congratulations to the child's parents

Why not try the Christmas Doorstep Challenge

Imagine how many Christmases could be brightened by a simple little kind gesture. We promise if you do it once you'll want to do it again.

The Rules:

1. Pick someone who has had a tough time or would simply benefit from some festive goodwill. It doesn't have to be someone you know well.
2. Choose a gift for them - big or small.
3. Write them an anonymous note, some kind words about why you were thinking of them.
4. Leave it all at their doorstep.
5. Knock on the door and leg it - make sure they don't see you!
6. Feel happy knowing that you have spread some Christmas cheer with no expectations of anything in return.

You and your family can be the Miracle of Christmas for someone else!!



Rethinking Gifting As a family, rethink gifting.

Instead of asking, "What do you want for Christmas?" ask, "What do you want to give for Christmas?" Or, consider "When I get something, I give something." Every time you receive a gift or buy something, you give something you already own away. Gifts. Instead of being caught up in a whirl of spending, consider giving presents that you yourself make, knit, sew, cook, draw, write or construct. Give a book that will lead a person to reflect a little more. Make a donation to a worthy cause in someone's name. Write, call or visit someone who is sick or stuck in-doors.

Penance celebrations

In preparation for Christmas, it is good to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation. A penance celebration is usually held in each parish and community to help us reflect on our life, say sorry, accept forgiveness and move on with joy knowing that we are loved. We may celebrate the sacrament at the same celebration or at a later time.

Eucharist

As well as taking part in the Sunday celebration, why not try to go to Mass more often during Advent? If someone is sick at home, arrange to have Communion brought several times during this season. Pay Attention to the Sights, Sounds and Themes of Advent during Mass Pay close attention to the Scripture readings, prayers, songs, decorations and colours, and special liturgical rites, like the lighting of the Advent wreath. Being attentive at Mass can infuse your whole life with Advent expectation.



Pick-a-Card Prayer Time

A favourite Christmas traditions is to put all the Christmas cards we receive into a basket on the dining-room table after you've read them. After Christmas, when life is less rushed, pull one card each day and take the time to truly cherish it and the message from its sender. Then we say a prayer of thanks for the person or family who sent the card. It is a way to truly cherish the gift of being remembered.



We hope you found this little resource useful.
Wishing you and your family a wonderful Advent
And every joy and blessing of the Christmas season !!