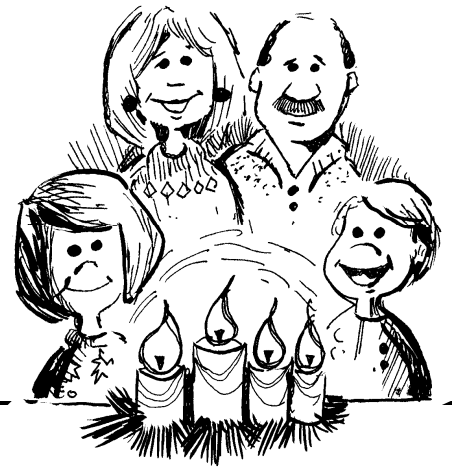


Advent for families

Waiting in joyful hope



Advent, the season of hope, is one of the most exciting times of the year for Catholics. Not only does the first Sunday of Advent start a new liturgical year in the Catholic Church (this is year B), it heralds the fulfillment of God's amazing promise of a savior. Advent helps us to anticipate the real gifts of Christmas – justice, peace, and freedom. Here are some ways to celebrate this special time as a family.

Light an Advent Wreath. The wreath is an ancient symbol of victory, in this case paying tribute to Christ's victory over sin. The three purple candles represent penance, sorrow, and longing expectation. The rose candle that is lit the third week of Advent represents hope and the coming joy.



Light one candle each night during the first week, two candles the second week, etc. Say a few prayers and read a passage from the gospel according to St. Luke to tell the scriptural story of the nativity.

If hectic holiday schedules keep you from gathering as a family each night, be flexible about when you light the wreath. Try breakfast time, after school, or whenever you are all in one place at the same time.

Decorate with prayers. Make an Advent prayer chain. Each night before going to bed, hand everyone a strip of colored paper. Pause a few moments for prayer and then ask each one to write on the strip of paper the name of a person or an intention for which he or she just prayed. Staple, tape, or glue the strips together to form a chain that grows throughout Advent.



Clean house. Spruce up for your Christmas guest. Gather each member of the family together and clean your home. Dust, vacuum, scrub, and shine with everyone working together. Play holiday music or sing Christmas carols to get into the spirit. Make the family home shine for the visitor to come.

Celebrate St. Nicholas. The feast of St. Nicholas is on Dec. 6th. In memory of this saint's generosity, children put out their shoes the night before St. Nicholas Day in the hope that the kind bishop — with his miter, staff, and bag of gifts — will pay a visit. On St. Nicholas Day, perform a special act of kindness in secret for someone else.



Make a "Mary Candle." Take a white candle and tie a blue ribbon around it. Decorate it with symbols of Mary, such as a rose or lily of the valley, or pictures of her that you glue or etch into the candle. Light the candle on December 8th, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. On this great feast, remember that Mary's "yes" to God enabled our Lord's coming at Christmas. (*Never leave a burning candle unattended.*)

Put on a tilma. To remember St. Juan Diego on December 9th or Our Lady of Guadalupe on December 12th, make a tilma (cloak) to hang in your home. Use a brown grocery bag or piece of brown craft paper and draw a picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Make it as bright and pretty as you can. Hang it on the wall to commemorate St. Juan Diego's tilma that hangs in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City with its miraculous image.



Take a journey. One day each week, add a piece or two to your family Nativity scene. Start Mary and Joseph across the room. Add straw or grass to the manger to make it comfortable for the baby. The angels and shepherds go last, building momentum for the birth on Christmas.

Give the best gifts to Jesus. Encourage children to perform a good deed for someone else every day. It can be as simple as doing a chore without being asked, smiling at someone who needs cheering, or being nice to someone who is hard to get along with. Make a list of these good deeds and present them as gifts to the newborn King on Christmas Day.



Confess and celebrate. To make more room for love in your hearts at Christmas, go to Confession as a family. Celebrate God's forgiveness afterwards with an ice cream or cookie treat.

Give special praise to God. Say, pray, or sing the Divine Praises together:

Blessed be God.

Blessed be His Holy Name.

Blessed be Jesus Christ, true God and true man.

Blessed be the name of Jesus.

Blessed be His Most Sacred Heart.

Blessed be Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar.

Blessed be the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete.

Blessed be the great Mother of God, Mary most holy.

Blessed be her holy and Immaculate Conception.

Blessed be her glorious Assumption.

Blessed be the name of Mary, Virgin and Mother.

Blessed be Saint Joseph, her most chaste spouse.

Blessed be God in His angels and in His Saints.

May the heart of Jesus, in the Most Blessed Sacrament, be praised, adored, and loved with grateful affection, at every moment, in all the tabernacles of the world, even to the end of time. Amen.

Bless the tree. Blessing the family Christmas tree helps children remember that the tree has origins in our faith. One involves St. Boniface. In the eighth century he gave the balsam fir tree to the Druids to replace the oak tree, the symbol of their pagan god. He used the tree and its triangular shape to teach them about the Holy Trinity and told them the story of the Nativity. Many were converted to Christianity as a result.



Welcome strangers. Someone in your neighborhood, apartment building, or parish may be grateful to share your table. Be ready to add an extra chair.

Light a Christ candle. Any large white candle can be used for the Christ candle. Decorate it with glitter, holly, etc. Light it on Christmas Eve to show that the Light of the World has arrived. Then continue to light the Christ candle throughout the year at Sunday dinner to remind your family that we still wait for Christ to come again. *(Never leave a burning candle unattended.)*



Make peace. This is a time to make peace with one another and take real steps to forgive or ask for forgiveness. Try to avoid quarreling and pray for an extra measure of patience.

Pray the wait. Take a moment after Mass on Sunday to pray together and prepare each heart to receive Christ this Christmas.

Watch for wonder and surprise. Nothing could be more surprising than the messages Mary and her cousin, Elizabeth, got from the angel. Surprise each other with thoughtful acts every day and talk about the ways God surprises us, too.

No matter how you wait with your family, remember this: The Messiah is already among us. His presence is affirmed through our good works when we share from our riches or our poverty.

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:1-2, 6).

