

# Living *This* Advent:

*A four-week journey* By: Kristi Quinlan



## 2020 – A Different Kind of Christmas

It's a wonderful, busy time of year. . . though maybe a little less so, this year. The *busy* part, I mean. The *wonderful* part is still a real possibility! See this as a chance to adjust the focus of your holidays to what is important. **Living Advent as a season of preparing our hearts and homes for Jesus' coming** can help us do that. Tweak or create some **family Christmas traditions**, add some **prayerful reflection** and **acts of kindness**, and *voilà*: your family will be **living *this* Advent** to welcome Jesus in a different, more meaningful, and WONDERFUL way this Christmas. Here are what I consider the essential elements of living *this* Advent intentionally.

## Advent Essentials

### 1 Display an Advent Wreath in a Prominent Place

- If you don't have one, [put together](#) any four candles with elements of purple, pink, and evergreens.
- This page explains the [symbolism of the wreath and provides a blessing](#) prayed the first Sunday of Advent.

### 2 Pray and Talk Faith

- **Sunday Mass** is at the heart of Advent. If it isn't part of *your* weekly routine due to Covid, start this new liturgical year fresh by watching/streaming Mass each Sunday of Advent.
- **Have a time of daily prayer and conversation around your wreath** – maybe it's part of a mealtime or before bed (evening darkness makes the symbolism of the candles come to life). I recommend **this [daily prayer resource](#) which provides a page per week** with a simple Advent prayer and discussion question for each day. Sing a verse of *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*.

Hit "pause" to **explain parts of the Mass** to your kids. They'll be better prepared to return to gathered Mass when you are able. Here's a [cheat-sheet](#) to help.


### 3 Make your Christmas Preparations

- Schedule shopping, decorating, baking, etc. with a mind to making them **fun family activities that bring joy and peace**. **Simplify: do less better.** ("Draw names" instead of shopping for everyone, 2 types of cookies instead of 10 etc.)
- **Add meaning and focus** by pausing together before starting each activity. Use this [printable prayer tri-fold](#) or pray from your heart. (Print one for a friend!)

### 4 Live Love at Home and Share Love beyond Home

- This idea has family members drawing papers with [acts of love](#) for **each other**, doing them, and then placing the papers in a **gift box** to give Jesus at Christmas or an empty [manger](#) to soften his bed.

- **Assign a person or group of people to each week of Advent for whom you'll pray.** (A relative out of work, a friend who's lost a loved one, the homeless in your community, etc.) **Reach out** to them that week with a card, a call, a meal delivered to their doorstep, etc.



Make your **crèche** the first Christmas decoration to **put up** (Italians do it on Dec. 8) and the last to take down. Hide Baby Jesus until Christmas. Display the wisemen separately until Epiphany. [Make](#) or [purchase](#) a play set for kids to act out the Christmas story.



## Unpack the Experience

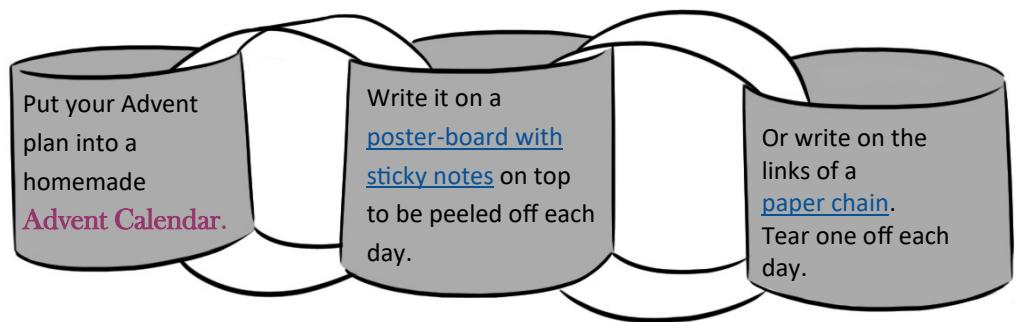
Try to take some time to informally **reflect upon your family's efforts to "share love"** beyond your family.

Discuss:

- *What did you learn about/from the person/people we helped? Can you identify with them? How do you think Jesus sees them?*
- *How do you think our act of love made them feel? What makes you think so?*
- *How did it make you feel? What do you think Jesus wants to say to us about what we did?*
- *How will this experience affect how you think, speak, act, or reach out to others in the future?*

*If you're looking for super simple,* just stick with the basics outlined above (but don't miss the Christmas ideas on the last page!) If you're looking for some **creative add-on's or swap-out's**, the following pages provide ideas. Here is a printable format you can use to personalize your **family Advent plan**.

## More Ideas for Prayer and Faith Conversations



- **Read the [Sunday readings](#)** (even just the Gospel) as a family and discuss. (Face-time with a friend if you're alone!) Here are some **5 minute "watch ahead" videos to empower parents to lead their own family Gospel reflection**.  
[Nov. 29](#) [Dec. 6](#) [Dec. 13](#) [Dec. 20](#)

- Color/cut these [O Antiphon ornaments](#) to add to your wreath daily Dec. 17-23. These ancient titles for Jesus, included in the daily prayer resource, are sung in *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*.
- **Create and decorate a Jesse Tree** (a family tree of Jesus) and learn/review our salvation history. Learn more [here](#). Read a daily Bible story (straight out of the Bible, [using this guide](#) – or for smaller children, using a corresponding [children's Bible book](#)). Place a related symbol on the tree. Introduce the activity by **filling in a simple family tree of your own**, calling grandparents as needed.
- **Mix some [Advent music](#) into your December playlists**, fostering reflection and anticipation.

## Resources for personal prayer

- **Children:** 3 children's stories that can lead to reflective conversations. [The Night of Las Posadas](#), by Tomie dePaola; [Martin the Cobbler](#), by Leo Tolstoy; [The Night Before Jesus](#), by Herbert Brokering.
- **Teens:** Busted Halo's [2 minute video](#) explaining Advent, a [daily devotional book](#) (you have to order at least 3 -\$2 per- so share with friends/classmates), not particularly Advent, these 3 minute videos ([boy/ girl](#)) explain how to pray with Scripture, and this [6 page pdf](#) gives some Scripture passages to get them started .
- **Adults:** [Dynamic Catholic's](#) daily 3-4 min. videos, [Loyola Press's](#) weekly meditation using sacred art, previous Advent homilies by [Pope Francis](#), or a wide array of formats shared by [Creighton](#).

# More Ideas for Sharing Love



- For families big enough to make this fun, draw names for a “**Secret Advent Angel**” – do hidden acts of love for that family member throughout Advent. Reveal who had who on Christmas.
- **Check in with your parish.** Are they collecting food/gifts for families in need? Do they have a list of elderly people you could carol to? (Safety precautions: call ahead, stand outside at a distance, etc.) Don’t forget your parish itself needs continued monetary support even now.
- While Christmas shopping on Amazon is easy, consider **supporting local businesses** that are struggling by exploring what safe shopping/delivery services they have available.
- **Homeless shelters, food banks, nursing homes, and medical personnel** are all groups that could use some extra support this year. I’ll leave that to your family’s creativity!
- **Display a Christian symbol in your front yard** or window to share faith with your neighbors.
- Intentionally share a message of the hope and joy you find in Jesus in your **Christmas cards**.
- **Reach out to the neighbors on your block** with [this Covid-variation on the Hispanic \*Las Posadas\* tradition](#) of re-enacting Mary and Joseph’s search for an inn, the nine days before Christmas.
- For more outreach ideas, take a look at this resource by [St. Mary’s Press](#).

## Some Particular Advent Feast Days



### December 6: *St. Nicholas Day*

- Learn about this 3<sup>rd</sup> Century bishop at [The St. Nicholas Center](#).
- Have kids put out their **shoes** the night before. Fill them with candy, fruit, nuts or gifts.



### December 8: *The Feast of the Immaculate Conception*

- [Review this teaching](#) of our faith and explain it to your kids.
- **Clean your house together**, reflecting on Mary’s clean heart ready to receive Jesus.



### December 12: *Our Lady of Guadalupe*

- Learn the [story](#) of Mary’s apparition to St. Juan Diego in Mexico in the 16th century.
- **Place an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe** in a prominent place for the day.



### December 13: *St. Lucy*

- [Learn](#) about St. Lucy and the traditions associated with her feast day.
- **Serve sweet rolls for breakfast, purchased or [homemade](#).**

Two comprehensive sites for finding other Advent resources are: [Loyola Press](#), and [Strong Catholic Family Faith](#)

# Making **Jesus** Part of your Christmas Celebrations



- **Go to Mass or watch it on TV.** Invite friends, relatives, and neighbors to watch too, maybe at the same time, as a way of being united. Christmas Eve or Christmas Day – whatever works.
- **Read the Christmas story** (one version [Luke 2:1-20](#)). Kids enjoy doing their own Christmas pageant or processing with pieces from your crèche and candles. If you've hidden Baby Jesus, bring him out and place him in the manger! If Christmas morning is crazy, do this Christmas Eve, – **making Jesus primary**. Sing him a lullaby before you go to bed.

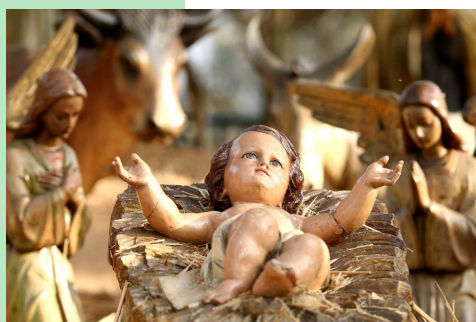


- After the Christmas story or grace before a meal, pass around or file by **an image of Baby Jesus, giving him a kiss** to show your love and gratitude. Sing *O Come All Ye Faithful*.
- An old Irish tradition is to **place a lit candle in the largest window** all through Christmas Eve to welcome Mary and Joseph.



- **Have a Christmas [carol sing-along](#)** around the tree. **Include religious carols** in your background music **playlist**.
- **Dress up** for Mass or dinner – Jesus, the long-awaited Guest, is coming to your house today! **Trim the dining room table**, use your best china.
- **Start your gift exchange thanking God**, especially for the gift of Jesus. Give Jesus the “first gift” – your family’s Advent efforts, recalled simply or [presented symbolically](#). Live the exchange with joy and gratitude. Take turns. Teach children to say “thank you.”

**Bake a loaf of Christmas bread and share it** at your meal. (Bake Grandma’s recipe “with” her via Face-time.) **A beautiful Polish tradition** is the breaking and sharing of a **Communion-like-wafer called oplatki**. Read about this [ritual](#), maybe order your own [oplatki](#). **Especially in the absence of being able to go to Mass**, this can be a graced and memorable link to the Eucharist: a tangible experience of thanksgiving, unity, reconciliation, and nourishment.



- **Make a [birthday cake for Jesus](#)** and sing “Happy Birthday” to him.
- **Light a fire in the fireplace, sip some cocoa, and snuggle on the couch for a classic Christmas movie.** [This list of favorites](#) also provides ideas for family conversation to continue the “cozy!”

Remember that **Christmas is a whole season!** [Click here](#) for ideas on how to celebrate it Catholic-style: December 24-January 10<sup>th</sup>.

*Don't stop now, after four weeks of **preparing**, the **celebrating** has just begun!*

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