

Living Advent:

A four-week journey By: Kristi Quinlan



“It’s The Most Wonderful Time of the Year”

While you may agree with the song’s claim, the weeks before Christmas can also be “the most busy and stressful time of the year.” Some even feel a certain hollowness or loneliness amidst the hustle and bustle. **Living Advent as an intentional season of preparing our hearts and homes for Jesus** can help bring focus, deeper meaning, and grace to the holidays. You can do this! Tweak or create some **family Christmas traditions**, add some **prayerful reflection** and **acts of kindness**. . . and your family will be on its way to welcoming Jesus in a new and *wonderful* way this Advent-Christmas. Consider these essential elements for living Advent well.

Advent Essentials

Find this resource and others at dmdiocese.org/living-advent

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.

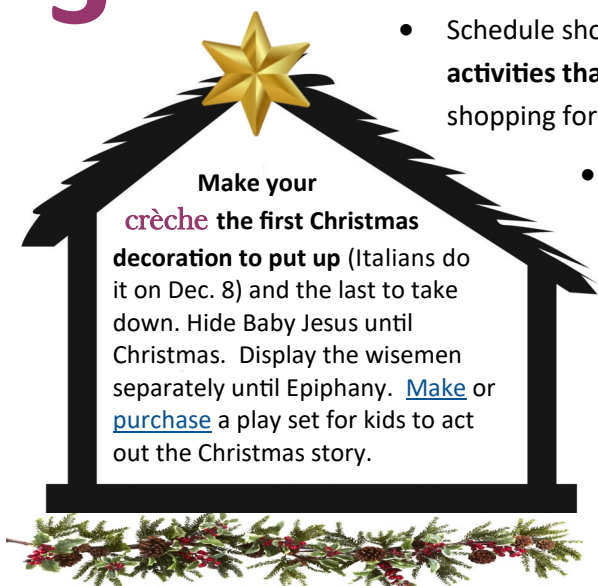
2 Pray and Talk Faith

- **Sunday Mass** is at the heart of living Catholic faith. If it isn’t part of *your* weekly routine, can you commit to participating in 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 the resource, [Advent Faith Conversations](#), 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*.

Questions about parts of the Mass? 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.

Unpack the Experience

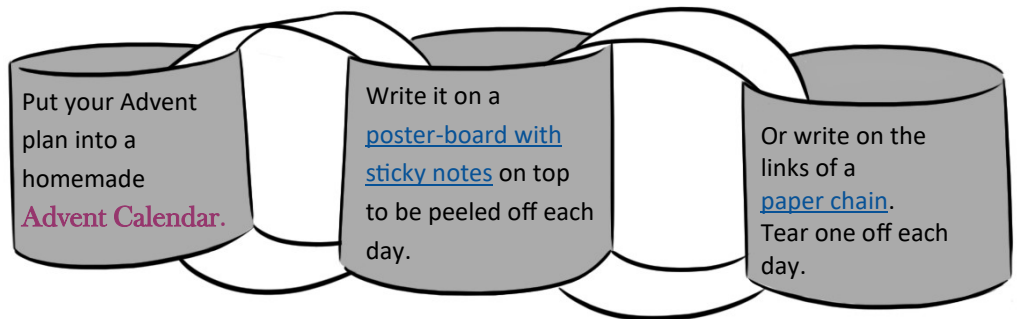
Try to take some time to informally **reflect upon your family's efforts to "share love"** beyond your family.

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 three great sites to help each week: Holy Heroes' [Mass Prep](#) (for young kids), Loyola Press' [Sunday Connection](#) (for whole family), and [The Five Loaves](#) (for adults, but family-friendly videos).
- 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, "Advent Faith Conversations," are also 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 de Paola; [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](#) (they're cheaper if you order 5 - 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:** [Loyola Press's](#) weekly meditation using sacred art, past Advent [Pope Francis](#) homilies, daily prayer prompts with the [Hallow](#) app, Ascension Presents [Rejoice!](#) weekly video & journal, many formats 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.** What outreach projects do they have this time of year? Are they collecting food/gifts for families in need? Do they have a list of elderly people you could carol to?
- While Christmas shopping on Amazon is easy, consider **supporting local businesses** by doing some of your shopping locally.
- **Homeless shelters, food banks, and nursing homes** are always in need of ongoing love and support. Check in about local needs, and be creative about getting the whole family involved.
- **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 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 parish’s list of [service projects](#).

Some Particular Advent Feast Days



December 6: *St. Nicholas Day*

- **Learn** about this 3rd 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](#).**

Another comprehensive site for finding Advent resources is: [Loyola Press](#)



Making **Jesus** Part of your Christmas Celebrations



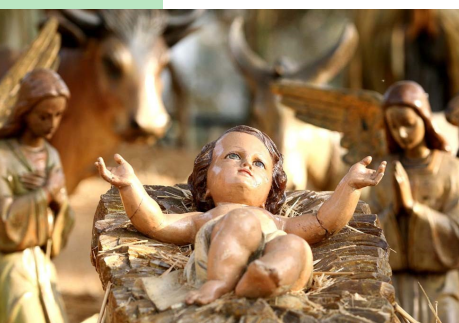
- **Go to Mass.** Invite friends, relatives, and neighbors to join you. Christmas Eve or Christmas Day – whatever works.
- **Read the Christmas story** (one version [Luke 2:1-20](#)). Kids enjoy doing their own Christmas pageant or processing with pieces from your crèche and candles. If you've hidden 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 and 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.”



- **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!”

Bake a loaf of Christmas bread and share it at your meal. (Bake Grandma’s recipe with her or 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](#). This can be a graced and memorable **link to the Eucharist at your table, which will enrich your family’s celebration at gathered Mass:** a tangible experience of thanksgiving, unity, reconciliation, and nourishment.

Remember that **Christmas is a whole season!** [Click here](#) for ideas on how to celebrate it Catholic-style: December 24-January 8th.

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

