



Living ADVENT

A Four-Week Journey

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.



DIocese of DES MOINES
CULTIVATING CONNECTIONS IN CHRIST



With support from:
St. Joseph Evangelization
Center

Find this and other
resources to share at
dmdiocese.org/LivingAdvent



ADVENT ESSENTIALS

1

DISPLAY AN ADVENT WREATH

Display an advent wreath in your home in a prominent place where it will be seen daily. Don't have one? Put one together as a family using 4 candles (3 purple, 1 pink) and some evergreen. When you set up your advent wreath, be sure to explain to your children the symbolism of the wreath. We recommend ["The Meaning of the Advent Wreath"](#) activity.



2

PRAY AND TALK ABOUT YOUR 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). We recommend the resource, ["Advent Faith Conversations"](#), which provides a page per week with a simple Advent prayer and discussion question for each day. After prayer and conversation sing a verse of *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*.

3

INTENTIONAL 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. Try the ["Making Room for Jesus"](#) activity.



Make your crèche the first Christmas decoration to put up (Italians do it on Dec. 8 on the feast of the Immaculate Conception) and the last decoration to take down at the end of the Christmas season.

- Hide Baby Jesus until Christmas.
- Display the wise men separately until Epiphany.
- Make or purchase a play set for kids to act out the Christmas story.

4

LIVE LOVE AT HOME AND SHARE LOVE BEYOND HOME

- Try the ["Fostering Love at Home"](#) activity. This activity includes having family members draw 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.

Take time to informally reflect upon your family's efforts to "share love" beyond your family.

- 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 already outlined (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, including a printable [Family Advent Plan](#).

MORE IDEAS FOR PRAYER/FAITH CONVERSATIONS

FAMILY ADVENT PLAN

Create a 4-week plan on how you intend to **pray & talk about faith, prepare for Christmas, and live & share love** as family during each week of Advent.



READ & DISCUSS SUNDAY MASS READING

Read the Sunday readings (even just the Gospel) as a family and discuss. Not sure how to lead a family discussion? Here are three great resources to help: [Holy Heroes' Mass Prep](#) (for young kids), [Loyola Press' Sunday Connection](#) (for whole family), and [The Five Loaves](#) (for adults with family-friendly videos).

PRAY THE ANTIPHONS FROM DEC. 17-23

Color/cut [O Antiphon ornaments](#) to add to your wreath daily Dec. 17-23. From Dec. 17-23, the Church's nightly prayers contain brief verses begging Jesus—by symbolic names—to come. These verses begin with the invocation “O” and are called the “O Antiphons.” The various names of Jesus (based on Old Testament Scriptures) help us understand facets of Christ and his mission. The repeated request to “come!” focuses our anticipation and enkindles our hearts with longing. They are the basis of “O Come, O Come Emmanuel.”

CREATE AND DECORATE A JESSE TREE

Create and decorate a [Jesse Tree](#) (a family tree of Jesus) and use it to learn/review our salvation history.

- Read a daily Bible story.
- Place a related symbol on the tree.
- Introduce the activity by filling in a simple family tree of your own, calling grandparents as needed.

LISTEN TO ADVENT MUSIC

Mix some Advent music into your December playlists to foster reflection and anticipation.

RESOURCES FOR PERSONAL PRAYER

- **Children** - These children's stories can lead to reflective conversations: [The Night of Las Posadas](#) by Tomie de Paola, [Marin the Cobbler](#) by Leo Tolstoy, and [The Night Before Jesus](#) by Herbert Brokering
- **Teens** - [Busted Halo](#) has a 2-minute video explaining Advent. Your teen might be interested in a daily devotional book (potentially to do as a group with friends/classmates or together as a family) or could practice praying with Scripture using Lectio Divina and the daily readings.
- **Adults** - [Dynamic Catholic](#) offers daily 3-4 minute video reflections, [Loyola Press](#) has a weekly meditations using sacred art, or you could read previous Advent homilies from the Popes.



MORE IDEAS FOR SHARING LOVE

SECRET ADVENT ANGEL

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.

VOLUNTEER AT YOUR PARISH

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?

SHOP LOCAL

While Christmas shopping on Amazon is easy, consider supporting local businesses by doing some of your shopping locally. When you shop local, small, businesses more of that money stays in the community than when you shop with large national chains.

GIVE BACK TO THE COMMUNITY

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. Maybe try doing a [neighborhood food drive](#)!

SHARE YOUR FAITH

Display a Christian symbol (like the Nativity scene) 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.

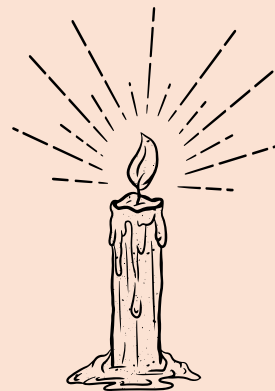
REACH OUT TO YOUR NEIGHBORS

Reach out to the neighbors on your block with a variation on the Hispanic Las Posadas tradition of re-enacting Mary and Joseph’s search for an inn, the nine days before Christmas.

BRINGING JESUS TO YOUR NEIGHBORS: A LAS POSADAS FAMILY ACTIVITY

In Mexico and other Latin American cultures, the nine days leading up to Christmas are celebrated by a nightly re-enactment of Mary and Joseph’s search for an inn or “posada.” Families process from house to house. At the final house they are welcomed in – with the way lit by candle luminaries – for a party!

- Learn about this tradition as a family.
- Prepare the gift bags (containing luminaries to be assembled) for your neighbors with a card signed by everyone in the family.
- Say a simple prayer before going out on your adventure.
- Go visit your neighbors! Knock at their door, be friendly and introduce yourselves (if you don’t know them), give them the gift/card and explain what you’re doing, and finally ask if they have a prayer intention to add to your nightly family prayers.
- Have your own family Posada party!
- On Christmas Eve, light the luminaries and take a look at your street to see who lights theirs.
- Discuss as a family what this experience was like.





Living CHRISTMAS

KEEPING JESUS IN YOUR CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS

GO TO MASS

Invite friends, relatives, and neighbors to join you. Christmas Eve or Christmas Day – whatever works. Dress up for Mass - this is a special event!

READ THE CHRISTMAS STORY

Read the Christmas story (one version can be found in 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.

MORE IDEAS TO INCORPORATE JESUS INTO YOUR CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS

- 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.”
- Bake a loaf of Christmas bread and share it at your meal. 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.
- 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. **Our list of Christmas favorites** also provides ideas for family conversation to continue the “cozy!”

REMEMBER THAT CHRISTMAS IS A WHOLE SEASON!

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

Celebrate Christmas Catholic-style from December 24th to January 11th. For ideas on how to celebrate, visit dmdiocese.org/LivingChristmas

