

LITTLE WAY

Advent



AN ADVENT CALENDAR & GUIDE FOR FAMILIES

Little Way Chapel

LITTLEWAYCHAPEL.COM

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

How to use this guide

Inside these pages you'll find a user-friendly companion for your family's Advent journey. It is both a calendar and guidebook, featuring one practice per day to prepare your heart and home for the birth of Christ. Some activities take five minutes and require no preparation, others are more labor-intensive and must be planned ahead of time. I suggest looking at the week ahead on Saturday and planning for what you will need in terms of materials and time.

In the calendar portion, you'll find the activities formatted as strips to be cut out. If you have a traditional Advent calendar with pockets or doors, place these strips inside the corresponding day. If you do not have a traditional Advent calendar, these strips can be made into a paper chain, so that one link may be torn off each day. There are several blank strips in case you would like to switch out your own activity for a particular day. A short advent-themed scripture passage is also included for each day.

In the guidebook, you will find an explanation, background information, and instructions for each day. These are merely suggestions--do not be overwhelmed! It is up to you to decide what will work for your family. Remember, Advent is about getting ready for the birth of Christ, but in a slow and deliberate way -- not in a frantic and overwhelming way. This Advent guide is meant to be savored and enjoyed. It is not meant to be one more thing on your to-do list. Most of all, it is meant to help you prepare your heart and home for the birth of our Savior.



WHAT'S INSIDE

Activities for each day of Advent

- Weekly Advent wreath prayers
- St. Nicholas and St. Lucy Day celebrations
- Christmas Tree Blessing
- Recommended children's books to pair with activities
- Guided nativity meditations
- Family Christmas Eve pageant script
- Traditional Advent food suggestions and recipes
- Advent children's lessons and family liturgies
- ...And so much more!

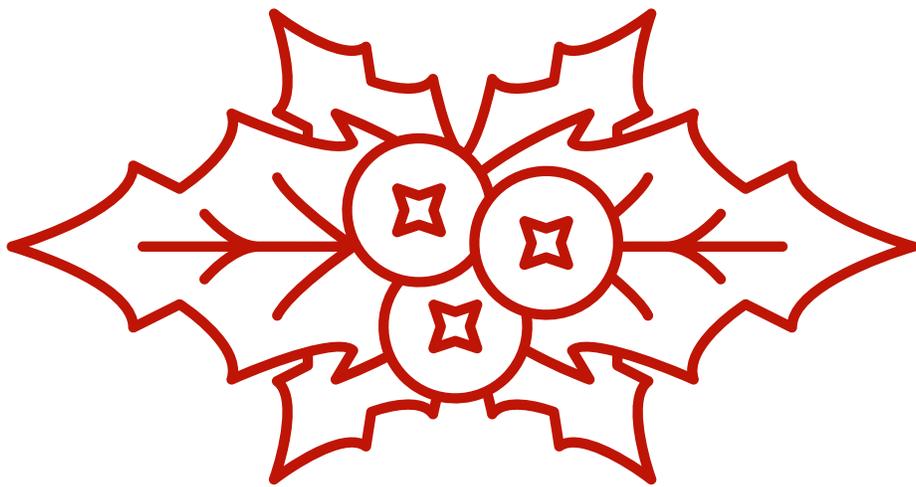
Scripture

The scripture readings in this guide are adapted from the NIV, and have been shortened and simplified for young children.

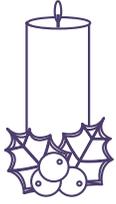
Music

For copyright licensing purposes, the sheet music and chords are not included for suggested hymns and songs, though most are likely familiar to you already!

Advent Calendar



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November 28

Today is the first day of Advent. Attend church and make your Advent wreath. Light one purple candle.

Prayer and readings are in guidebook.



November 29

Decorate your Christmas tree and pray the Christmas tree blessing around it.

Read John 1:1-5



November 30

Set up your Nativity stable and manger.

Read Jeremiah 33:14-16



December 1



Solve the mystery of Advent.

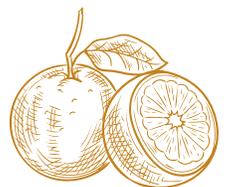
Read Luke 1:11-17



December 2

Make dried orange ornaments. Find out why oranges are a traditional Christmas fruit.

Read Luke 1:18-25



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December 3

Read your favorite Advent story by the fire or under the tree and reflect on it as a family.

Read Luke 1:26-38



December 4

Make "Blessing Bags" for the homeless.

Read Matthew 1:18-21



Attend church and light two purple Advent candles. Put your shoes or stockings out tonight for a surprise in the morning!



December 6

Today is St. Nicholas Day! Check your shoes or stockings for a surprise.

Read Matthew 1:22-25



December 7

Nativity: The animals arrive at the stable.

Read Isaiah 7:14



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December 8

"Make room" for Jesus by going through your toys and/or closet for items to donate.

Read Luke 1:39-45



December 9

Take a moment to be still and silent this evening. Sit outside with a cup of hot cocoa and look at the stars.

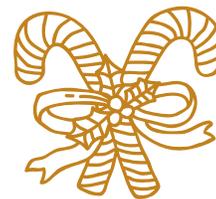
Read Luke 1:46-56



December 10

Ready, set...go hunt for candy canes!

Read Luke 1:68-69



December 11

In the spirit of St. Nicholas, be a Secret Santa today. Do something kind for someone without them knowing.

Read Luke 2:1-5



December 12

Today is *Gaudete* Sunday. Attend church and light two purple and one pink Advent candle.

Prayers and readings are in guidebook.



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December 13

Today is St. Lucia Day! Enjoy St. Lucy Buns and learn about the Saint of the Light.

Read Luke 2:6-7



December 14

Nativity: The shepherds arrive at the stable

Read Luke 2:8-12



December 15

The pink Advent candle lit this week represents joy. Celebrate by putting on your favorite tune and "dancing for joy" around the Christmas tree.

Read Luke 2:13-14



December 16

Las Posadas begins today--a festival commemorating Mary and Joseph's search for an inn. Read *The Night of Las Posadas* and drink Mexican Hot Chocolate.

Read Luke 2:15-18



December 17

Gather all the Christmas cards you have received this Advent and pray for each family by name.

Read Luke 2:19-20



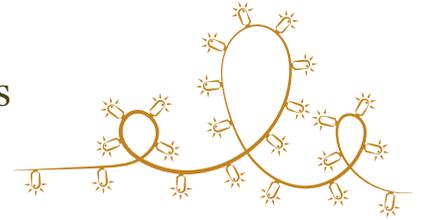
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December 18

Take a drive to look at Christmas lights in your pajamas.

Read Isaiah 9:2



December 19

Attend church and light all four Advent candles.

Prayers and readings are in guidebook.



December 20

Hark! The herald angels sing... it's time to go caroling!

Read Isaiah 52:7-9



December 21

Nativity: The angel arrives at the stable.

Read Isaiah 11:1-3



December 22

Make a birthday card for Jesus and place it under the tree.

Read John 1:1-5



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December 23

Hold a family Christmas Pageant: Act out the Christmas story from Luke 2:1-19.

Read Galatians 4:4-7



December 24

Nativity: Mary and Joseph arrive at the stable.
Bake a birthday pie or cake for Jesus.

Read Isaiah 9:6-7



December 25

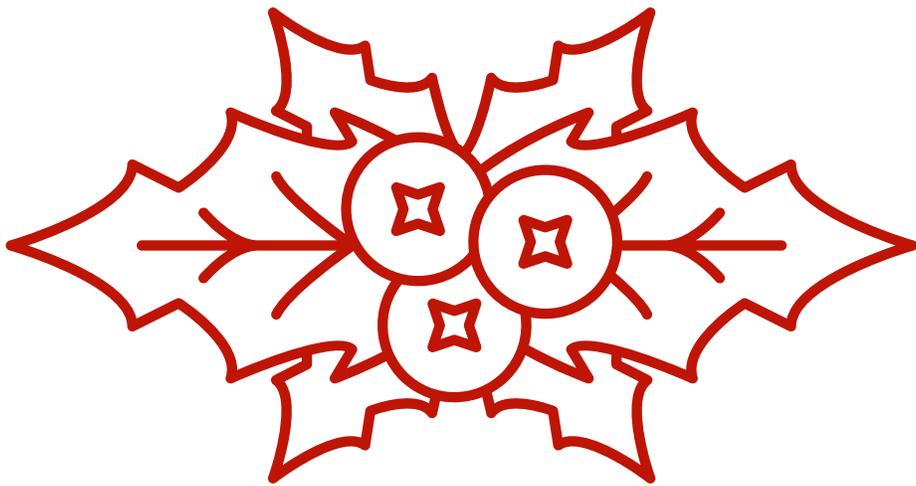
Merry Christmas! Place baby Jesus in the manger and read him your cards before opening gifts.

Read John 1:14



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Advent Guidebook





November 28

The Advent Wreath

The Advent wreath provides a way of marking time through the Advent season. As another candle is lit each week, the light grows brighter and brighter leading up to the arrival of the Light of the World. This practice creates space to slow down amid a busy season of preparation, and to spend time in prayer and reflection as a family.

Symbolism



The circle shape of the wreath represents God's infinite and unending love. The evergreen represents the everlasting life we have in Jesus Christ.



The candles represent Jesus as the Light of the World. Purple, the color of three candles, symbolizes not only penitence, but also royalty, signaling the coming of a King.



The lighter pink candle represents a lightening of the serious and somber mood of Advent and a turning towards the joy of Christmas. This candle is lit on the third Sunday of Advent, called *Gaudete* Sunday, which is Latin for "rejoice."



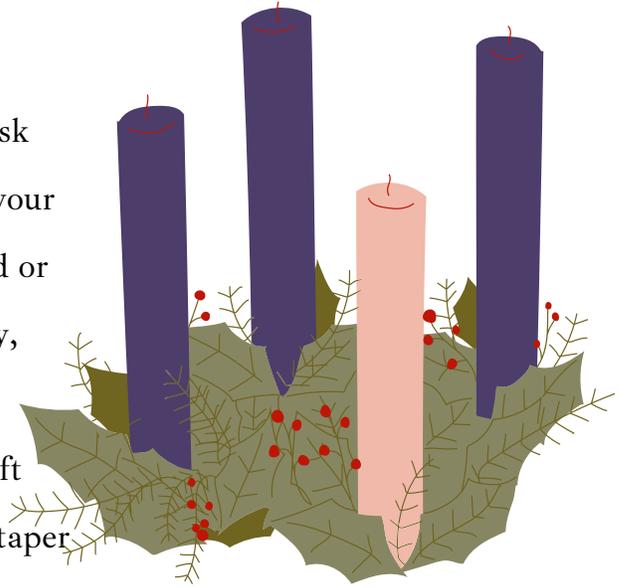
A fifth white candle--the Christ candle--may also be added and lit on Christmas day, and through Christmastide.

Making an Advent Wreath

You will need:

❄️ **Greenery:** If your family picks a live tree, ask the tree farm for your trimmings to use for your Advent wreath. Otherwise, forage your yard or neighborhood for evergreen, rosemary, holly, magnolia leaves, etc..

❄️ **Advent candles:** These are sold at most craft stores in a set of three purple and one pink taper



candles. If you would like to light your wreath every night of Advent rather than just Sundays, you will need at least 12-inch candles.

Beeswax are more expensive but they will burn slower. Making your own beeswax Advent candles is a fun activity for children, and kits are readily available online.

❄️ **Christ candle:** This large white pillar candle is optional and set in the center of the wreath. It is typically lit on Christmas day and throughout Christmastide. You may wish to keep it on your table throughout the year to be lit during dinner as an invitation for Christ to be present at your table.

❄️ **Advent wreath ring:** A circle wreath form with four holes for candles

❄️ **Garden shears**

❄️ **Floral wire**

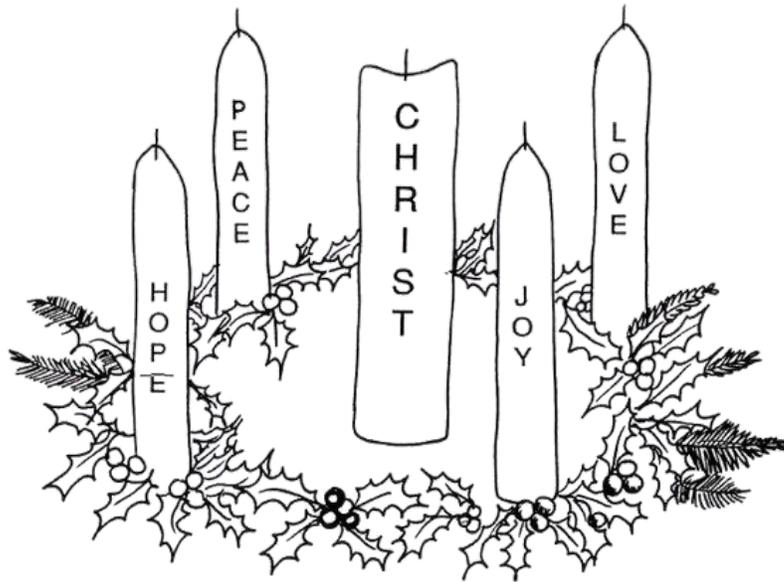
Directions:

Use floral wire to fasten greenery around the wreath ring. Spritz with water daily.

Note that holly is toxic for many animals, so if you have curious pets or children, you may want to skip the red berries all together!

Advent Wreath Prayers

Each week of Advent has an assigned theme and scripture passage from the Revised Common Lectionary (an ecumenical Bible reading plan used by most mainline churches). The first week of Advent focuses on hope, the second week on peace, the third on joy (represented by the pink candle), and the fourth on love. Reflecting on these virtues each week rather than the scripture passages may be more appropriate for very young children.



Week One: Hope

Candle: One purple

Scripture: Jeremiah 33:14-16; Psalm 15:1-10; 1 Thess 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36

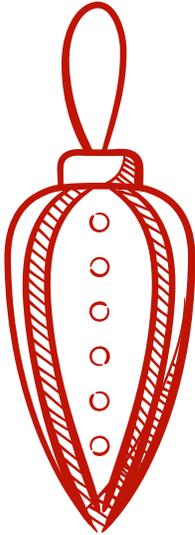
Prayer: God of hope, we light this candle as we prepare for the coming of your Son. Awaken our hearts to you this Advent season, so that when Christ arrives, we are ready to receive him with all our hearts, all our minds, and all our strength. *Amen.*

Song: Prepare the Way of the Lord (Taizé Chant)



November 29

The Christmas Tree



If you've been waiting, now is the day! Waiting until Advent to put up the Christmas tree reminds us that this is a season of waiting--difficult though it may be--and of preparation for Christmastide. In fact, traditionally, people have waited until *Christmas Eve* to put up the tree, and then kept it up for the twelve days of Christmas (through January 6). Not your cup of tea? Then, skip ahead to the Christmas Tree blessing on the next page.

Decorating the Tree

There are many ways to decorate the Christmas tree so that it intentionally reflects the slow and steady preparation of the Advent season. Taking this approach reminds us that preparing our hearts for the coming King is a process, not an event. Here are some examples:

- Keep the tree bare and wait until Christmas Eve to decorate.
- Gradually add more ornaments or lights each week.
- Decorate with purple ornaments (the color of Advent) and switch to white and/or red on Christmas Eve.
- Decorate using Jesse Tree ornaments, which tell the story of Jesus' lineage from the Old Testament prophecies to his birth.



Christmas Tree Blessing

Blessing

The Christmas tree is a symbol of God's eternal life. While the leaves outside wither and die, the evergreen springs forth as a reminder of the everlasting life we have through Christ, our Lord.

May the lights on this tree remind us that Jesus is the Light of the World who has overcome the darkness.

May the (star or angel) on top remind us of the angel's announcement: A savior is born! Peace on earth and goodwill toward all people.

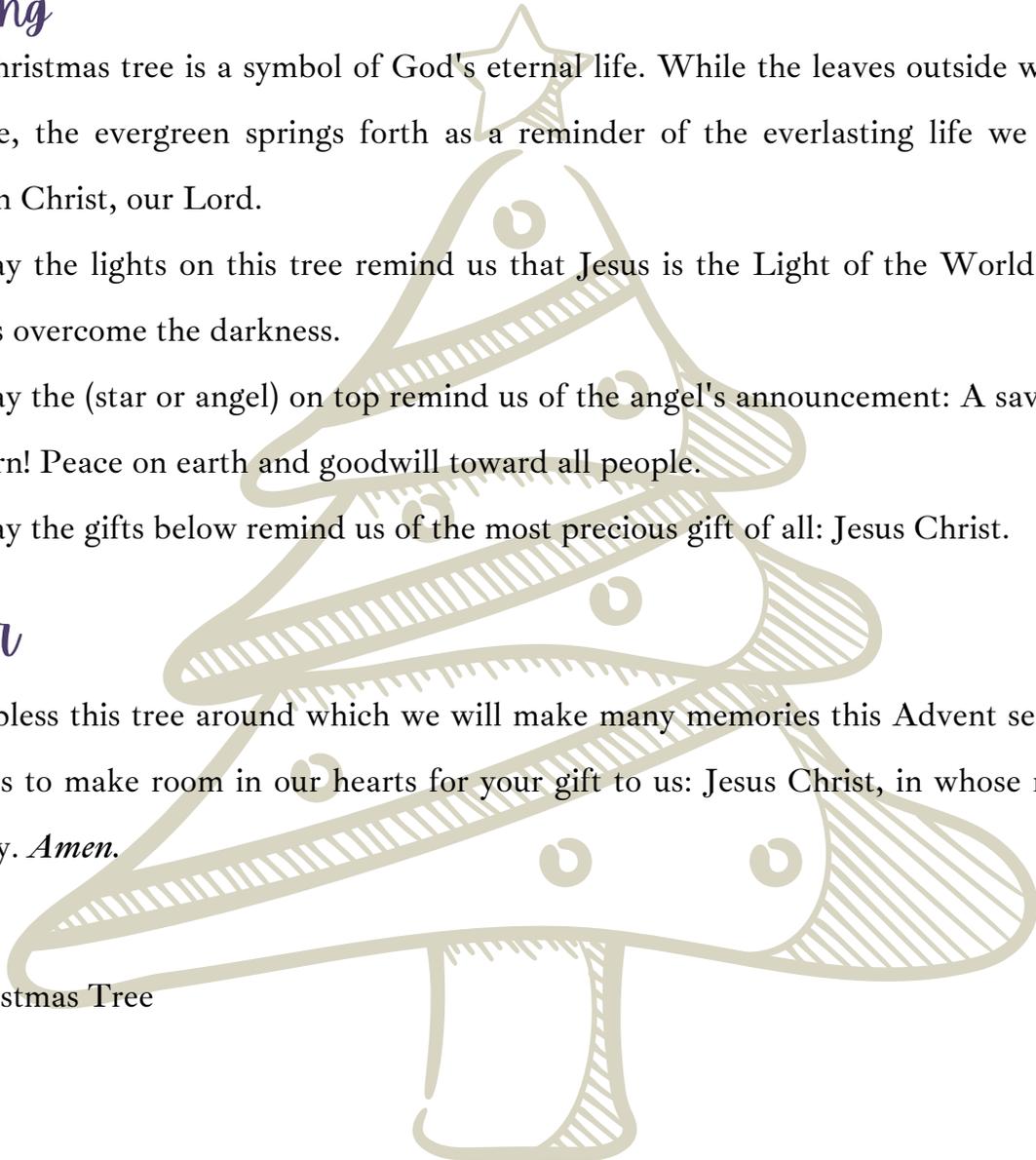
May the gifts below remind us of the most precious gift of all: Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Lord, bless this tree around which we will make many memories this Advent season. Help us to make room in our hearts for your gift to us: Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. *Amen.*

Song

O Christmas Tree





November 30

Nativity: The Manger

Another way to live into the slow and steady preparation of Advent is to gradually lay out the nativity set week by week rather than all at once. It's best to use a set that includes a stable and a baby Jesus that is detachable from the manger so it can sit empty until Christmas Eve.



To stay true to the story, the magi should not be set out until Christmas Day. They should start their journey in a different room than the Nativity set; over the twelve days of Christmas, move them around the house until they arrive at the manger on Epiphany (January 6), which is the day the church celebrates the magi's late arrival to Jesus. Kids love to wake up in the morning and see where the magi have moved to overnight!

This week, set out only the stable and the empty manger, reflecting on the fact that the son of God, the King of Kings...was born in a barn.

Scripture

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. - Luke 2:4-7

Reflection

I wonder what kind of home a king lives in?

I wonder what kind of bed a king sleeps in?

I wonder if you have ever been in a barn? I wonder what it was like?

What did you see? What did you smell?

I wonder what it would be like to sleep in a barn?

I wonder why that is where Jesus was born?

Songs

Away in a Manger

O Little Town of Bethlehem

Recommended Reading

Christmas in the Manger by Nola Buck and Felicia Bond

This is the Stable by Cynthia Cotten

The Three Trees by Angela Elwell Hunt





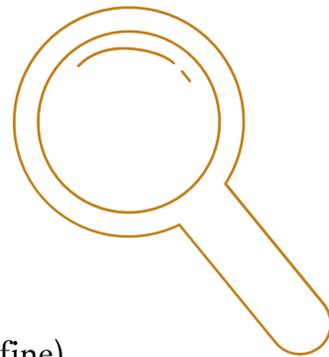
December 1

The Mystery of Advent

This lesson introduces children to the symbols of Advent, gently guiding them towards deciphering their meaning. It is most appropriate for ages 3-10.

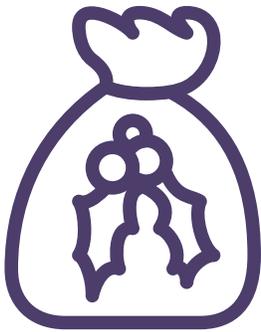
you will need

- A bag to hold all of the “clues”
- A purple cloth
- A manger (from a nativity set)
- A star (an ornament, cut out shape, or tree topper works fine)
- Greenery (if artificial, omit line about it smelling good)
- Wreath Ring
- Advent candles



Lesson

It is the beginning of Advent, a new year in the church calendar. “A new year?” You might be thinking, “But it’s still December!” But you see, the church tells time differently than everyone else. The world marks time by days and weeks and months. But the church marks time by colors and symbols and seasons. And we're at the beginning of a new season: Advent.



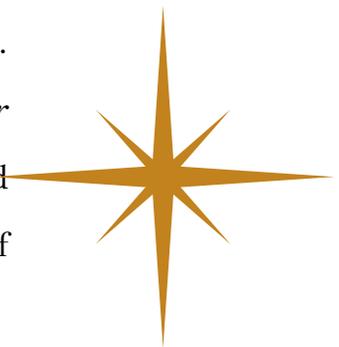
Bag: Advent is about waiting, watching, and getting ready for God to show up. This is full of mystery. And a mystery can be hard to understand. But the best way to solve a mystery is to look for clues. Advent has many clues. The church calls them symbols. And I have some of them here with me today. *[Hold up bag of clues.]*

Purple: *[Take out purple cloth and delicately lay it on table. Carefully smooth out wrinkles as you talk. This will be what you set the rest of the clues on.]* Purple is the color of royalty. A long time ago, only kings and queens could wear the color purple. Roman Citizens could wear a little stripe, but that was all. Purple is a royal color. When God shows up, God shows up as a king.



Manger: Hmm. *[Pull out the manger, turning it over and examining it with curiosity.]* What could this be? A horse trough? A manger? Ah...a cradle. *[Set manger on top of purple cloth.]* The purple tells us that God shows up as a king *[run hand over purple]*, but this cradle tells us he was a different kind of king. This king had no army, no great house, and no riches. This king was a baby who was born in a barn with a horse trough as a bed. His name is Jesus.

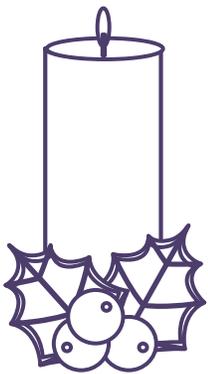
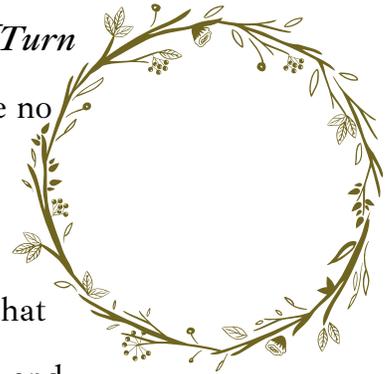
Star: Look, another clue. *[Pull out star and examine it.]* A star. This is the clue that led the magi to find the baby Jesus. *[Raise star high above head.]* It hung high in the sky above the stable and showed them the way to go. Sometimes we hang a star at the top of our Christmas tree just like it hung above the stable.





Evergreen: This clue smells wonderful. *[Smell and pass around for children to smell.]* It is so green. Alive when all the other trees outside have died. I wonder what this tells us about the mystery of Advent? Maybe that God's love never dies. It is everlasting like this evergreen. This time of year, we bring evergreen in our house to remind us of this. We have Christmas trees, and garlands, and...wreaths. *[Pull out wreath ring].*

Wreath Ring: Hmm...a circle. Circles go around and around. *[Turn ring in complete circle as if steering the wheel of a car.]* They have no end. You could trace a circle forever. *[Lay wreath ring on table and begin to place greenery on it.]* When we arrange the evergreen in a circle, it reminds us that God's love never ends, that Jesus is a king who will reign forever. His kingdom will have no end.



Candles: One final clue. *[Take candles out and put them inside the wreath ring as you talk.]* Sometimes we put candles in the middle of the circle. It tells us that Jesus is the light of the world. This time of year, it gets very dark and very cold. When Jesus arrives, he warms our hearts and brightens our way. The candles remind us that we don't have to walk in darkness.

Four candles make the advent wreath. One for each week of advent. *[Point to each candle.]* During the next four weeks of Advent, we will watch. We will wait. We will get ready for God to show up. And when God shows up, he does it in a way no one expected: As a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and laid in a manger, born to save us all.



December 2

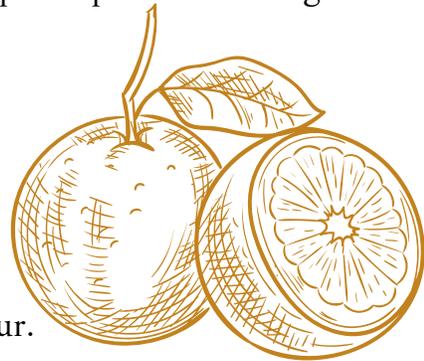
Dried Orange Ornaments

Oranges are a traditional Christmas fruit not simply because they are one of the few fruits ripe during wintertime, but also because they have come to symbolize gold coins from a popular St. Nicholas legend. According to the story, three sisters were going to be sold off into slavery because their father could not afford to pay their dowries. Upon hearing this, Saint Nicholas threw three bags of gold down their chimney, landing perfectly in their stockings drying over the fire. Over the years, it became tradition to put oranges in Christmas stockings, and to dry them for beautiful and fragrant decorations during the Advent season.

Directions

This is a simple craft that is perfect for children's participation. Blotting the excess juice off the oranges is an excellent job for them.

1. Slice oranges approximately 1/2 in. wide.
2. Blot excess juice on both sides.
3. Place on tray lined with parchment paper.
4. Bake at 250 for 3-4 hours, flipping on the hour.
5. Once cool, string to use as garland or ornaments. When placed in front of lights on the tree, they light up and look almost like stained glass.



Recommended Reading

St. Nicholas and the Nine Gold Coins by Jim Forest



December 3

Read Under the Tree

Advent need not be flashy and exciting to be memorable or meaningful for your family. This evening, pick your favorite children's Advent book and read it under the lights of the Christmas tree or snuggled up by the fire. This is such a simple and quiet activity, but one that your children will undoubtedly remember and repeat with their own children some day.

Reflection

- I wonder which part of the story you liked best?
- I wonder which part of the story you liked least?
- I wonder which part of the story is most important?
- I wonder which part of the story is about Jesus?
- I wonder which part of the story is about you?

Recommended Reading

Mortimer's Christmas Manger by Karma Wilson (Ages 3-7)

The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey by Susan Wojciechowski (Ages 5-10)

The Three Trees by Angela Elwell (Ages 3-10)





December 4

Blessing Bags

Blessing bags are disposable bags filled with non-perishable food and sanitary items for the homeless. They are a simple, yet meaningful way to serve Jesus in “the least of these” this Advent. Keep them in your car and give one away as you come across someone in need.

Content Suggestions

Be sure to include a handmade Christmas card--a great project for the kids. Other suggestions are a water bottle, granola bar, band aids, chapstick, gloves, socks, toothbrush and toothpaste, baby wipes, hard candy, \$5 gift cards, single bus passes

Reflection

Just as Advent is about the first coming of Jesus, it is also about his coming again. Read Matthew 25:31-40 as a family and discuss why serving the poor is an “Advent activity”, and how it prepares the world for Jesus’ return.

Prayer

Almighty and most merciful God, bless these bags and those who will receive them, for you know each one by name. Help us always to remember before you all poor and neglected persons whom it would be easy for us to forget: the homeless and the destitute, the refugee and the overlooked, and all who have none to care for them. Grant this, Father, for the love of your Son, who for our sake became poor, Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*



December 5

Advent Wreath

Week Two: Peace

Candle: Two purple

Scripture: Malachi 3:1-4; Luke 1:68-79; Philippians 1:3-11; Luke 3:1-6

Prayer: God of peace, during this Advent season, keep us from getting caught up in the busyness and chaos of the world around us. Help us to slow down, so that we may find rest in the Prince of Peace, your son, Jesus Christ. As we prepare for his coming, make us instruments of your peace in our homes, in our schools, in our work and in our world. *Amen.*

Song: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

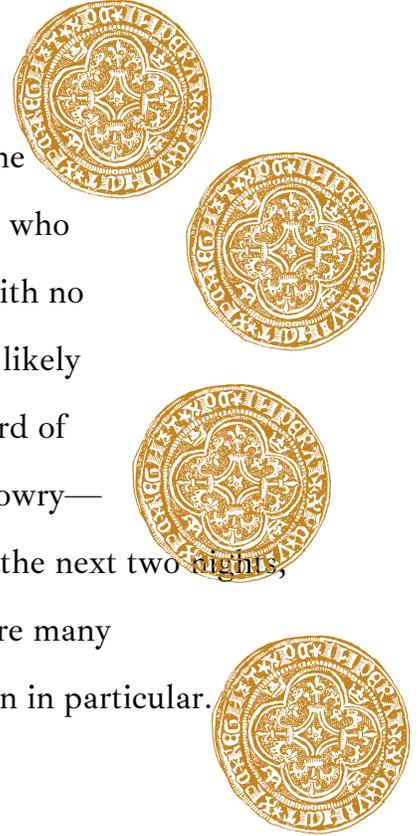
St. Nicholas Day Eve



St. Nicholas was born around 270 AD in Asia Minor, located in modern day Turkey. Though not much is known for certain about his life, his remarkable generosity is undisputed. Nicholas was born into a devout Christian family, and when his parents died, he sold off their belongings and distributed his inheritance among the poor. Nicholas became a priest, and eventually the Bishop of Myra, purportedly attending the First Council of Nicaea in 325 AD, from which the Nicene Creed (“We believe in one God, the Father Almighty....”)—recited weekly in churches around the world—comes. *Page 14*

St. Nicholas and the Gold Coins

Perhaps the most famous story about St. Nicholas is that of the “Three Sisters and the Gold Coins.” Nicholas heard of a man who had three daughters, but no money to pay for their dowry. With no prospect of a husband or employment, these girls would have likely been forced into a life of slavery or prostitution. Nicholas heard of their plight, and threw a bag of gold coins—the cost of one dowry—through their open window one night. He did the same thing the next two nights, and the three sisters were saved from a life of misery. There are many stories like this of his secret gift-giving, and his love of children in particular.



St. Nick Stockings and Shoes

Eventually, Nicholas was named a saint, and his feast day was set for December 6. On the night of December 5, children around the world set stockings and shoes by the fire place or front door for St. Nicholas to fill with treats such as:

- Bags of gold chocolate coins
- A clementine or orange (symbolizing the gold coins given in the dowry as well as the food St. Nicholas gave to those in need)
- A candy cane to symbolize his bishop’s crozier (the stick that looks like a shepherd’s staff)
- An Advent or Christmas book (a great way to build your collection!)
- Other small treats
- Our family also includes one dollar for the kids to give away to someone in need just as St. Nicholas did with his inheritance



Additional Activities

Write a letter to St. Nick: Rather than addressing a letter to the North Pole, kids can leave their letters to St. Nick by their stockings or shoes on December 5

St. Nicholas Pizza: It's unclear how this one became a tradition, but pizza is a popular celebratory dish for St. Nicholas Day eve--perhaps because it's shaped like a gold coin! A cross is often added to the middle with cheese or another topping.

Recommended Reading

The Christmas Stocking by Rick Osborne

The Legend of St. Nicholas by Anselm Grun





December 6

St. Nicholas Day

St. Nicholas morning is filled with merriment as children rush to find the surprises left for them in their stockings or shoes. Over a special breakfast or snack, read one of the recommended St. Nicholas books and offer the prayer on the next page.



St. Nicholas Pancakes

Add some cinnamon and nutmeg to your pancake mix, use chocolate chips for eyes, whipped cream for a beard, and sliced strawberries for a hat and you have festive spiced St. Nicholas pancakes for breakfast.

St. Nicholas Cookies

Traditional St. Nicholas spice cookies are called *Spekulatius*, which either comes from the Latin for "mirror (*speculum*)" (because they often have St. Nick's face on them) or the Dutch word for "spice." Recipes are readily available on the internet (visit stnicholascenter.org), and there is also one in *The Baker's Dozen: A Saint Nicholas Tale*, one of the recommended children's book listed for today.

If you do not have a St. Nicholas cookie cutter, a candy cane shape cookie can represent his Bishop's crozier, or you could cut out stockings or "gold coins". A St. Nicholas cookie cutter would be a great addition to your children's stocking so you have it to use for years to come!

Prayer

God of joy and cheer,
we thank you for your servant,
the good bishop Nicholas.
In loving the poor, he showed us your kindness;
In caring for your children, he revealed your love.
Make us thoughtful without need of reward
so that we, too, may be faithful followers of Jesus. *Amen.*



From *All Through the Day, All Through the Year: Family Prayers and Celebrations* by David B. Batchelder, illustrated by Barbara Knutson, copyright © 2000 Augsburg Fortress)

Recommended Reading

The Baker's Dozen: A Saint Nicholas Tale by Aaron Shepard

The True Story of Saint Nicholas by Foster Eich



December 7

The Nativity: Animals

This week we add the animals to the stable and marvel at what kind of scene it must have been to have the Son of God born among donkeys and cows.

Reflection

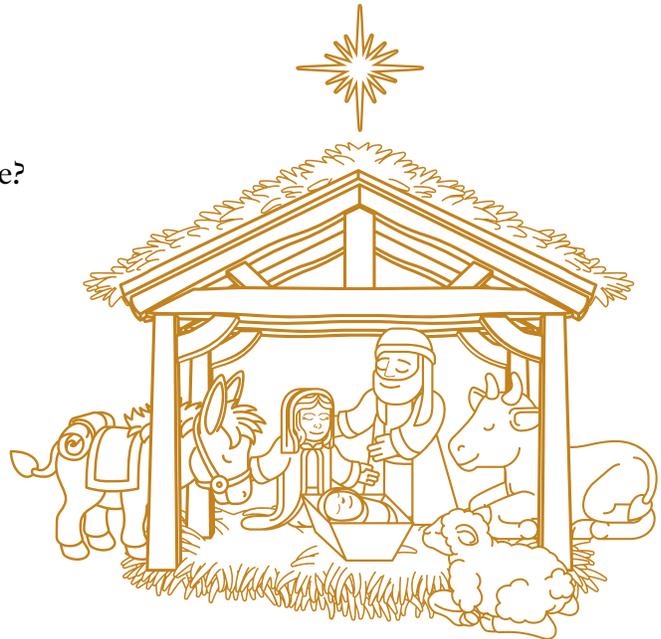
I wonder what that stable smelled like?

I wonder what it sounded like?

I wonder why God chose to include animals in the story of his birth?

Song

Away in a Manger



Recommended Reading

The Animals Christmas Carol by Helen Ward

The Friendly Beast by Tomie DePaola

Song of the Stars by Sally Lloyd-Jones

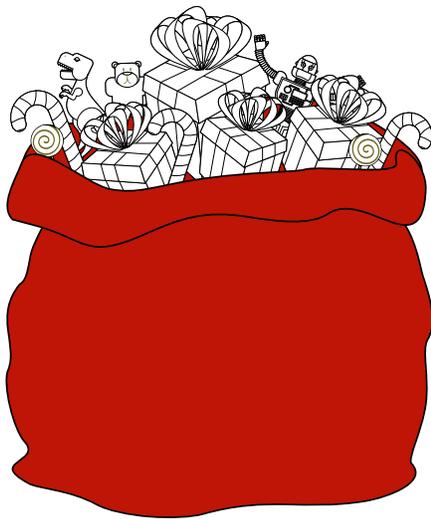
Who is Coming to Our House? by Joseph Slate



December 8

Making Room

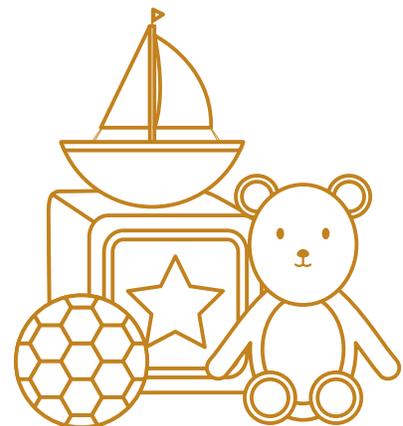
Clearing out the Closet



Help your children go through their toy boxes and closets to select items in good condition for donation. (You can do this too!) Not only does this activity make room for the gifts to come at Christmas, but more importantly, it is a reminder that just as our homes can become cluttered, so can our hearts and lives. Advent is about making room for Jesus, and to do that, sometimes we have to clear out what is broken, unnecessary, or just plain taking up too much space.

Giving away toys and clothes is also a tangible way of connecting to the true story of Saint Nicholas who you will have celebrated earlier this week. He can so easily become nothing more than a jolly old man who gives good kids toys, rather than a saint who loved and served Christ by loving and serving the downtrodden—especially children.

If you've recently cleared out closets or don't have items to donate, you can alternatively participate in an "Angel Tree" type activity, where specific items are purchased for children in need.





December 9

Silent Starry Night

Advent can quickly become a hustle and bustle. Take a moment this evening to slow down and quiet your heart. With a cup of hot cocoa in hand, take a walk, or sit outside and look up at the stars in silence. Reflect on the fact that many of these are the very stars the shepherds gazed upon as they tended their sheep outside the hills of Bethlehem, and the same stars that magi studied in the far East. After a period of silence, close with family prayer or a song.

Song

Silent Night

Prayer

Dear God, Help us to slow down this Advent season. Help us to be still. Help us to be quiet. And in the quiet, prepare our hearts for the coming of your Son, in whose name we pray. *Amen.*

The Feast of Juan Diego

December 9 is the feast day of Juan Diego, the first Catholic indigenous saint. He is celebrated by Catholics around the world, but especially in Mexico, where the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared to him in December of 1531. Tomie DePaola has a beautiful children's book called *Our Lady of Guadalupe* if you wish to learn more about this tradition.



December 10

Candy Canes

The Legend of the Candy Cane

Candy canes have long been touted for their symbolism. Christians from liturgical backgrounds note that candy canes are made in the shape of a shepherd's staff or bishop's crozier (think St. Nicholas) and in the liturgical colors of martyrdom and Christmastide. Christians from evangelical or free-church backgrounds offer a different explanation: when flipped upside down, candy canes make a "J" for Jesus, and are the colors of white to symbolize purity and red to symbolize Jesus' blood.



Candy Cane Hunt

The night before or during nap time, hide candy canes around the house for the kids to find—you might even let them use their Christmas stockings to collect (another fun way to connect the candy cane to St. Nicholas' crozier). Once they are all found and gathered, collect them in a pile and explain the symbolism or read one of the optional books below. Pray the "Candy Cane Blessing" listed on the next page over the pile, and then distribute them to friends and neighbors or hang them on the tree.

Blessing of the Candy Canes

by William Sadlier

Gracious God,

In the spirit of Saint Nicholas we turn to you
and ask for your blessing on these candy canes.

May their flavor sweeten our hearts
with compassion and kindness.

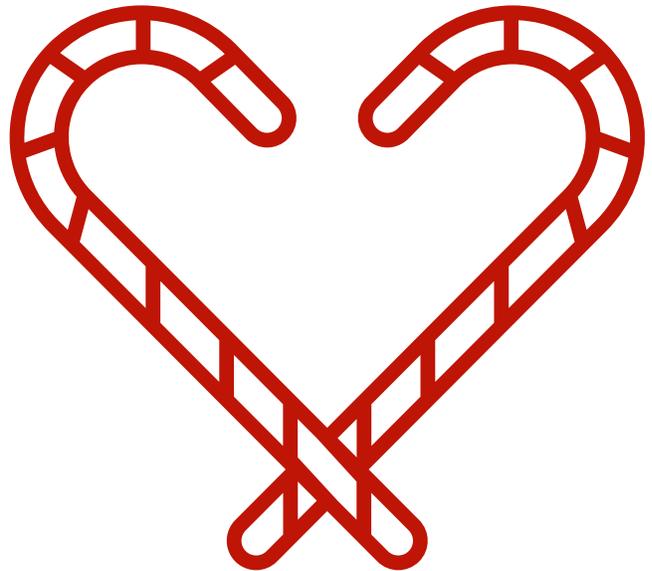
May their shape remind us
to be shepherds of grace and generosity.

May their bright colors attune us
to the delightful sights and sounds
of this sacred season.

Inspire us to be like Saint Nicholas,
who brought comfort and joy
to children and their families.

We ask this in the name of the Holy Child, Jesus
whose coming we await
with anticipation and love.

Amen.



Recommended Reading

The Legend of the Candy Cane by Lori Walburg



December 11

Secret Santa

Just as St. Nicholas did kind things for people in secret, do something for a family member or friend today without them knowing. It may be helpful to put each family member's name into a hat and choose randomly. At dinner, reflect on why we give in secret using the scripture below.

Scripture

“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” -Matt 6:1-4

Reflection

I wonder how you felt after doing something kind for someone today?

Was it difficult to keep it a secret?

I wonder why St. Nicholas didn't want people to know that he was the one giving them gifts and doing kind things?

I wonder why Jesus says to give in secret?

I wonder what happens if you give so others can see?

I wonder why Jesus says it is better to give than to receive?



December 12

Advent Wreath

The third Sunday of Advent is known as *Gaudete* Sunday--a word which means "rejoice" in Latin. This Sunday marks a turn from the solemn preparation and penitence of Advent toward joy as we anticipate the coming King. This lighter mood during this week of Advent is marked visibly by the lighter rose candle.

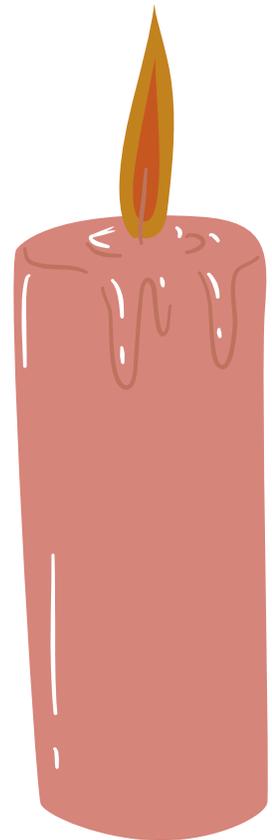
Week Three: Joy

Candle: Two purple and one pink

Scripture: Zephaniah 3:14-20; Isaiah 12:2-6; Philippians 4:4-7;
Luke 3:7-18

Prayer: God of joy, it is in your love that we find lasting joy. Keep us from seeking happiness in things that will not last. Teach us instead to find joy in the gift of your Son, who came into this world with nothing, yet gave us everything. May his joy fill our hearts and overflow to all we meet this Advent season. *Amen.*

Song: Joy to the World



St. Lucia Day Eve

Historical Background

St. Lucia, or Lucy, was born around 283 CE in Syracuse, Sicily, in a time when the Roman Emperor Diocletian was violently persecuting Christians all across the Empire. She was born into a devout noble family and from a young age pledged herself to God, choosing to remain unmarried so that she could instead give her dowry—and her life—to the poor and suffering.

Lucy's mother, however, had different plans for her and arranged for her to marry a wealthy pagan man. When Lucy refused, he reported her as a Christian to the authorities. She was martyred for refusing to recant her faith.

Even if you don't know of St. Lucy, you can likely picture how she is often depicted: a young blonde girl dressed in white robes, a red sash around her waist, and a wreath of candles adorning her head. This image comes from the legend that she would take food and aid to the Christians living in the catacombs to escape their persecutors. Under the cover of darkness, she would wear a wreath of candles on her head to light the way—her hands were full of supplies. Her white dress is a baptismal robe, the red sash, symbolic of the blood of her martyrdom, and the candles signal the light of Christ as well as the name Lucia, which means “light” in Latin.



With a name that means light, it's fitting that Lucy's feast day falls during Advent, a season when the Light of the World is born amid the darkest and longest days of the year. Lucy's feast day, December 13, was set to align with what used to be the Winter Solstice, and still falls very close to it today.



St. Lucy Day is thought to mark a turn from the penitence and solemnity of Advent toward the light and joy of Christmastide.

St. Lucy Day is celebrated around the world, but is particularly popular in Scandinavian countries. Early on the morning of December 13th, the oldest daughter, dressed in a white robe, red sash and wreath crown, rises early and delivers sweet rolls made with saffron ("Lucy buns" or *lussekatt*) to family members in bed. This is intended to be an enactment of Lucy bringing food to the hungry.



In Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland, there are processions throughout cities and churches of girls dressed as Lucy, carrying *lussekatt* and singing Christmas carols. Boys participate as "star boys"—wearing white cone hats decorated with golden stars. Sometimes these processions visit malls, schools, and assisted living facilities as well.

In preparation for St. Lucy Day tomorrow, bake *lussekatt* or another type of spiced sweet bread (cinnamon quick bread, for example) for your "St. Lucy(s)" and/or "Star Boys" to deliver the next morning. The children may deliver them to the family in bed, or perhaps they might deliver them to neighbors—a tradition which seems in keeping with the spirit of St. Lucy who brought food to others as a ministry. Of course, there is no reason why they cannot do both!

Cheater St. Lucy Buns

If you'd like to try your hand at traditional *lussekatt*, SimplyRecipes.com, has a great recipe. Otherwise, here's a quick and easy recipe for Cheater St. Lucy Buns made from canned cinnamon rolls.

Ingredients

- 1 can of cinnamon rolls with icing
- Raisins, dates or dried cranberries (optional)
- Cinnamon (preferably saffron if you have it)

Directions

- Unroll cinnamon rolls
- Shape them into an "S"
- Insert raisin or other dried fruit into the two crooks at the bottom and top of the "S"
- Lightly sprinkle with cinnamon (or saffron)
- Bake according to directions on package
- Drizzle with icing





December 13

St. Lucia Day

Celebrate St. Lucia Day either with a special St. Lucy breakfast or by "St. Lucy" serving the family *lussekatt* in bed. While the *lussekatt* are the traditional St. Lucy Day breakfast, a "Cinnamon Roll Wreath Crown" is a fun and easy breakfast treat that is reminiscent of the crown of candles Lucy wore on her head. You'll find another cheater recipe for this made from canned cinnamon rolls below.

During breakfast, your family can pray the St. Lucy Day liturgy provided on the next page and read the lesson or another book about the life of St. Lucy. If you baked a treat for your neighbors yesterday, be sure to deliver those today!

Cinnamon Roll Wreath Crown Recipe

Ingredients

1 can of cinnamon rolls with icing

Birthday candles

Directions

Unroll cinnamon rolls and make three strands

Braid the three strands

Shape the braid into a circle (now it should look like a wreath crown)

Bake according to directions on package

Drizzle with icing

Place candles in the wreath (now it looks like St. Lucy's wreath crown!)



St. Lucia Lesson & Liturgy

Blessing

Light wreath crown candles or Advent candles and say:

“May the light of Jesus shine in our hearts.”

Song

(to the tune of “Are You Sleeping (*Frère Jacques*)”)

O Saint Lucy, O Saint Lucy

Dressed in white, dressed in white

Lighting up the darkness, lighting up the darkness

Shining bright, shining bright!

[Blow out candles]

Prayer

Dear God, we thank you for this food, and for your servant, Lucy, who brought food to the hungry. May we, too, always be willing to love and serve you. *Amen.*

Lesson

There once was a girl named Lucy, not much older than yourself. She lived long time ago—around the same time as St. Nicholas—in a place called Sicily, which is very close to Italy. Lucy lived in a time when it was not easy to be a Christian. In fact, sometimes it was downright dangerous. It was against the law to believe in Jesus. Sometimes Christians were punished or even put to death by the Roman governor. But Lucy loved Jesus very much, and she loved people just like Jesus did. She loved to spend her days helping people who were sick and poor and hungry.



Some say that Lucy even brought food to the Christians hiding in dark tunnels underneath the ground. They hid there so no one would find them and punish them for believing in God. Lucy's hands were so full carrying food to them that she could not carry a candle or lantern to see her way through the dark underground tunnels. Instead, she wore a crown of candles on her head.

Lucy loved helping people so much that she decided rather than getting married and having a family, she would give her money away and devote her whole life to God, and then the church would be her family.

This made Lucy's mother very worried. She knew how dangerous it was to be a Christian. And she was scared that Lucy would not have enough money if she didn't get married. So Lucy's mother arranged for her to marry a man who was very wealthy, but did not love God. Lucy refused to marry him, and this made the man very angry. So angry that he accused her of being a Christian, which he knew would put her in danger.

When the Roman governor demanded that she give up her faith in God, Lucy was very brave. She loved Jesus, and would never turn her back on him. Lucy was put to death, and now she gets to be in Heaven with God always. Saints who died because they loved God are called martyrs, and they wear a special red sash so we know who they are. I wonder why the martyrs sash is red? Red is for the blood they shed.

We remember these saints for the sacrifice they made on special days throughout the year. Saint Lucy is celebrated today, December 13. All around the world, people



remember her with light because her name, Lucia, means light. In Scandinavia, there are big festivals where people light candles and sing songs about St. Lucy. In people's homes, girls get up early in the morning, and they put on a white gown with a red sash. Then they put a wreath of candles on their head, and bring rolls to their family in bed. This reminds everyone that Saint Lucy fed the hungry.

We celebrate Saint Lucy's special day in Advent. The candles on her head remind us of the Advent wreath, and they remind us that Jesus is the Light of the World. Let the light of Christ shine bright in us like Lucy.

Song

This Little Light of Mine

Pray

God our Father, we thank you for sending your Son to be the Light of the World, and for your servant, Lucy, who was a faithful witness to his light. Help us to follow in St. Lucy's footsteps and be a light for you always. Amen.

Recommended Reading

Kirsten's Surprise (American Girl Doll Series) by Janet Shaw

Lucia Morning in Sweden by Ewa Rydaker



December 14

Nativity: The Shepherds

This week, we add the shepherds to the nativity scene and reflect on what it might have been like to be visited by a host of angels announcing the birth of Christ. Would you be frightened? Excited? Anxious? Most importantly, would you be ready?

Scripture

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he



is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

- Luke 2:8-15

Reflection

I wonder who the shepherds were?

I wonder why the angels appeared to *them*?

I wonder why God wanted shepherds to visit baby Jesus?

I wonder what the shepherds felt when they saw the angels?

I wonder what the "glory of the Lord" looked like?

Song

Do You Hear What I Hear?

Food Suggestions

In keeping with the Shepherd theme, serve Shepherd's Pie for dinner, or lay out a blanket in front of the Christmas tree and eat a "Shepherd's meal" of cheeses, pita, meats, fruits, nuts and olives.

Recommended Reading

The Crippled Lamb by Max Lucado

The Little Shepherd's Christmas by Carol Heyer



December 15

Dance for Joy

The third Sunday of Advent is known as *Gaudete* Sunday--a word which means "rejoice" in Latin. This Sunday marks a turn from the solemn preparation and penitence of Advent toward joy as we anticipate the coming King. This lighter mood during this week of Advent is marked visibly by the lighter rose candle. What greater or more practical way to bring joy than with a quick dance party around the Christmas tree? The song suggestions below are admittedly secular, but sure to get everyone dancing!

Song Suggestions

Rocking Around the Christmas Tree

All I Want for Christmas Is You





December 16

Las Posadas

Las Posadas means "the inns" in Spanish, and is a commemoration of Mary and Joseph's painstaking journey to find lodging, and a celebration of the holy hospitality they received. It is a nine day festival observed mostly in Latin America, where one family hosts, and the "pilgrims" go door to door (planned in advance) in search of lodging as Mary and Joseph. At each door they are turned away with a traditional song, until at the final home they are invited in, where a nativity scene and party awaits.



It is important to appreciate this tradition without appropriating it. Tonight, sit down with a cup of Mexican Hot Chocolate and Tomie DePaola's lovely book, *The Night of Las Posadas*. Discuss how Las Posadas invites us to consider how in opening up our lives and doors to the stranger, the neighbor, and the refugee, we welcome Christ himself to come in and take up residence. And give thanks for the people who have cultivated this tradition and kept it alive.

Mexican Hot Chocolate

Mexican hot chocolate is a dark hot cocoa with a secret ingredient: cinnamon. Both the *Abuelita* and *Ibarra* brands are great and available at most grocery stores, but you can also make this yourself by adding cinnamon to your hot chocolate mix--and a dash of cayenne if you're feeling spicy!

Recommended Reading

The Night of Las Posadas by Tomie DePaola



December 17

Christmas Card Prayers



Around the dinner table this evening or at bedtime, gather all the Christmas cards your family has received this Advent season and place them in a pile. Read letters aloud, share special memories you have of that person, but most importantly, pray for them. If you'd like to pray for each family individually, split the cards up, and each person in your family can take a turn praying.

Prayer

Dear God,

We give you thanks for the friends and family represented by these cards. Bless each one of them this Advent season and in the coming year. May they know the love and joy that comes through your Son, our Savior, this Christmas season. *Amen.*



Recommended Reading

All the Colors of Christmas by Matthew Paul Turner



December 18

Christmas Light Drive

After dinner tonight, ignore the dishes and go for a drive to look at Christmas lights instead. Pop some popcorn for the ride, get everyone in their pajamas, and be sure to turn up the Christmas music! This is an Advent activity your family will repeat year after year, and that your kids will remember when they have children of their own



December 19

Advent Wreath

Today begins the last week of Advent--the final countdown to Christmas. Kids will be out of school, you will have errands to run, and perhaps you may be traveling. It will be easy to get lost in the hustle and bustle. Today, take time to be quiet and still as you light all four candles of the Advent wreath, and reorient yourself toward the Light of the World.

Week Four: Love

Candle: Three purple and one pink

Scripture: Micah 5:2-5a; Psalm 80:1-7; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-55

Prayer: God of love, you sent your Son, Jesus, to shine bright like the sun, lighting the way for all who walk in darkness. May the light of Christ's hope, peace, joy and love shine bright in us as we approach his coming, so that we may be ready to welcome him on Christmas day. *Amen.*

Song: Come Thou Long Expected Jesus





December 20

Christmas Caroling

After another long and difficult year, I can't think of a more joyous Advent activity than caroling. If you are uncomfortable with caroling, or your kids are too young for it, have a family sing-a-long instead featuring your favorite Christmas carols.

Christmas Carol Suggestions

Angels We Have Heard on High
Away in a Manger
Go Tell It On the Mountain
Hark! The Herald Angels Sing
Joy to the World
O Come All Ye Faithful
O Holy Night
O Little Town of Bethlehem
Silent Night
The First Noel



Non-Religious:

Deck the Halls
Frosty the Snowman
It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas
Jingle Bells
Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer
Silver Bells



December 21

Nativity: The Angels

This week, we add the angels to the nativity scene and reflect on their message:

A Savior has been born. Peace on earth, and goodwill toward all people.

Scripture

An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great



company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” - Luke 2:9-14

Reflection

I wonder why the shepherds would be afraid of the angels?

I wonder what they looked like?

I wonder if you have ever heard the words "Glory to God in the highest"?

I wonder what peace on earth looks like?

Song

The First Noel

Food Suggestion

Angel food cake

Recommended Reading

The Legend of the Poinsettia by Tomie dePaola

The Story of Holy and Ivy by Rumer Godden



December 22

Birthday Card for Jesus

Invite the children to make a birthday card for Jesus and place it under the tree. If your family lights the Advent wreath every night, this is a great activity to do while the candles are lit to create a more contemplative environment. Adults can participate, too, by writing a reflective letter using the prompts below.

Prompts for Adults

Reflect on how Jesus has shown up in your life over the last year:

Where have you have seen him work?

When have you felt his presence?

Through whom have you felt his care?

Thank him for taking on flesh as God with us.

Prompts for Children

Happy birthday, Jesus!...

Thank you for...

I'm glad you were born because...

This year, I want to serve you by...





December 23

Christmas Pageant

As a family, act out the story of Christmas using the script provided below. At minimum, you will need a Narrator, Joseph, Mary, and an innkeeper/shepherd. For smaller groups, the narrator can read the angel's lines and one person can play both the inn keeper and shepherd. For larger groups, different people can play the parts of the innkeeper and shepherd, and you can also add the angel(s) and animal(s).

Script

Narrator: In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

(Mary and Joseph walk into the center of the room)

Narrator: Mary and Joseph came to the inn and knocked.

(Joseph knocks on the door.)

Narrator: The Inn Keeper told them there was no room for them.

(Inn keeper shakes his head.)

Narrator: But there was room in the stable out back.

(Innkeeper walks Mary and Joseph across the room to where the animals are resting.)

Narrator: While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and Mary gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in swaddling cloths and placed him in a manger.

(Mary wraps baby Jesus in a cloth and places him in a manger or cradles him.)

Narrator: Out in the hills of Bethlehem, there were shepherds keeping watch over their flocks at night.

(Shepherds walk into the center of the room.)

Narrator: An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

(Angel walks into the center of the room. Shepherds tremble in fear.)

Narrator: But the angel said to them,

Angel: “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Narrator: Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

Angel(s): “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

Narrator: When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

(Shepherds run to Mary and Joseph.)

Narrator: So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

Everyone Sing: Go Tell It On The Mountain



December 24

Nativity: Mary and Joseph

This evening before bed time, add Mary and Joseph to the nativity scene.

Scripture

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them...And Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. -Luke 2:6-7, 19

Reflection

I wonder how Mary and Joseph must have felt when they were told there was no room in the inn?

I wonder what it was like for Mary to hold the Son of God in her arms?

I wonder how we can ponder this story in our hearts?

Song

Silent Night

Recommended Reading

The Night Before Christmas

The Story of Christmas by Pamela Dalton

Bake a Birthday Pie

Bake a birthday pie or cake to eat tomorrow. Don't forget to put candles in it and sing him "Happy Birthday" or "Joy to the World"!



December 25
Christmas Day

Merry Christmas!

God is with us! Before opening gifts, place baby Jesus in the manger and read him his birthday cards as a tangible reminder that Christmas is about just one very precious gift: Jesus Christ.



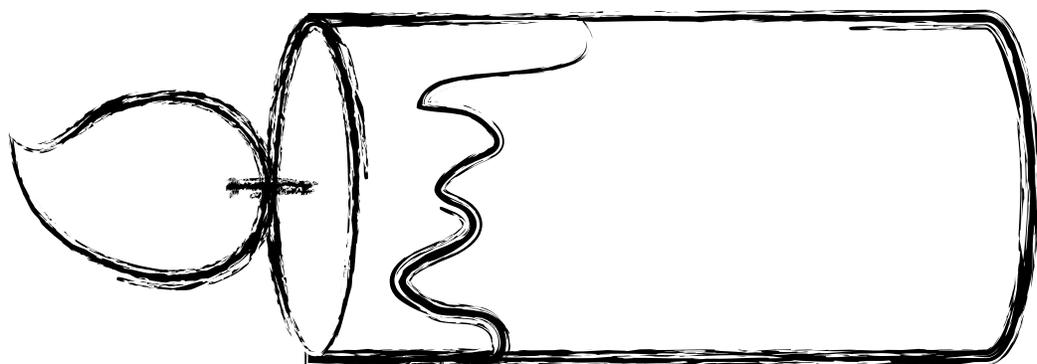
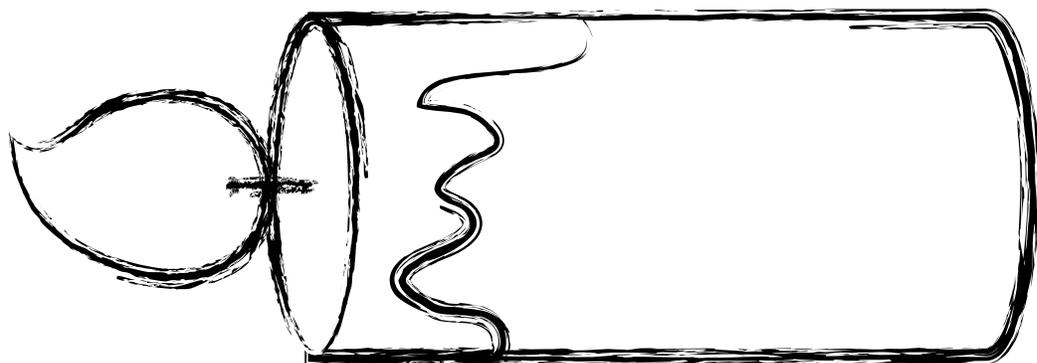
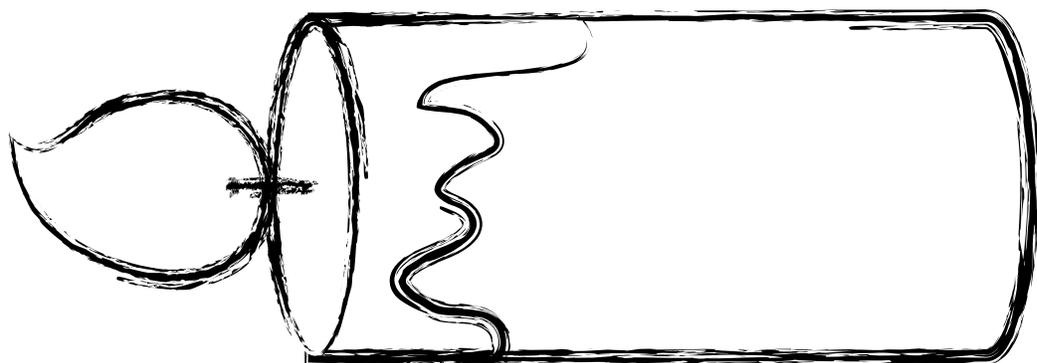
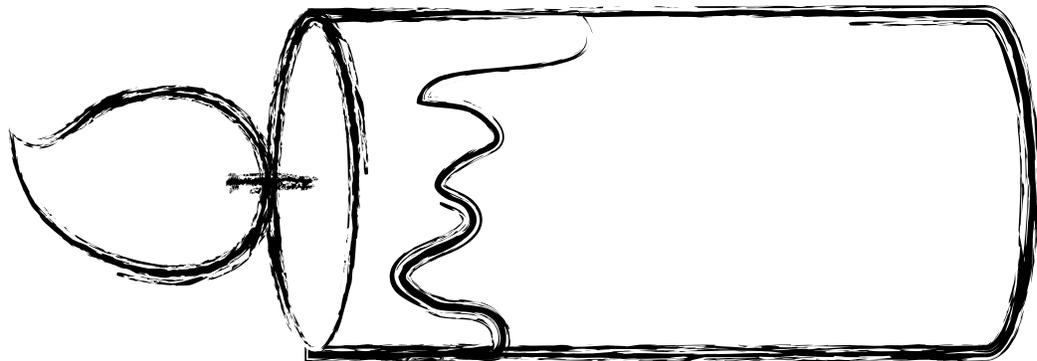
Prayer for Christmas Day

Almighty God, you have given your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and to be born this day of a virgin: Grant that we, who have been born again and made your children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit; through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with you and the same Spirit be honor and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.* - Book of Common Prayer

Song

Joy to the World

Color the candle each week!



TWELVE DAYS

of

Christmas



with

LITTLE WAY
CHAPEL



KEEPING CHRISTMASTIDE



The Twelve Days of Christmas, also called Christmastide, begins on December 25 and ends with Twelfth Night on January 5. This night marks the transition from Christmas to Epiphany on January 6, which commemorates the arrival of the Magi to the Christ child (which perhaps didn't happen until Jesus was a toddler!). So how do we continue to celebrate the good news of God with us once everyone else has already moved on to New Year's?

This guide contains one ornament for each of the twelve days of Christmastide, along with an accompanying explanation, scripture reading, Christmas carol, and prayer. The ornaments are formatted to be printed two-sided with the symbol on one side and corresponding number on the other. It is recommended to print on card stock, hole punch at the top, and string with twine. They can be placed on the Christmas tree each day, a small Jesse tree, or hung as garland.



12 Ways to celebrate the 12 Days

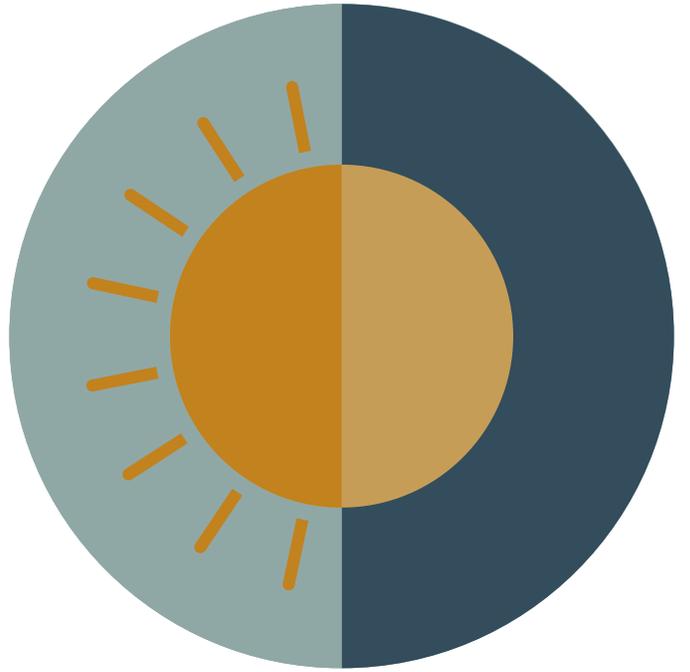
- 1 Keep up those Christmas decorations. In fact, add to them. That is where this guide comes in. Each day, add the appointed ornament to the tree and follow the accompanying prayer guide.
- 2 Bake Christmas cookies. Stars are perfect to represent the star the magi are following during Christmastide.
- 3 Traveling wise men: The magi can make a slow journey from one side of the house to the nativity scene. Each night, they move and the kids get a kick out of finding them in the morning.
- 4 Watch Christmas movies in your Christmas pajamas—guilt free, because it's still Christmas and you're allowed to.
- 5 Leave some gifts under the tree to open during the twelve days.
- 6 Keep saying "Merry Christmas." This may seem silly on the face of it, but the words we speak matter. After all, God *spoke* creation into being. When we greet one another with "Merry Christmas" throughout Christmastide, it helps us live into the reality that church's time looks different than the world's time.



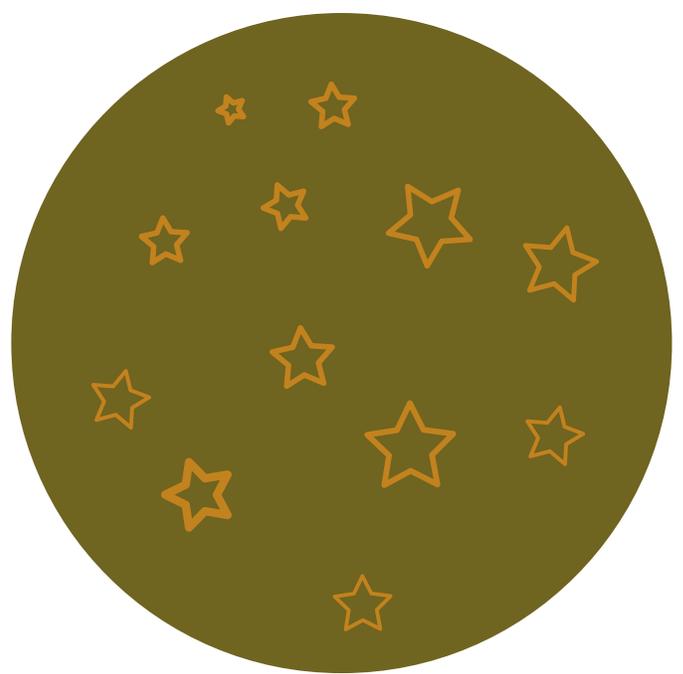
- 1 In years when we are not in the middle of a global pandemic, host a Christmas with friends and neighbors *after* Christmas day once the travel and rush has died down.
- 8 Transform your Advent wreath into a Christmas wreath by replacing the purple and pink with all white, and lighting them each night of Christmas. Or replace it with a single white pillar candle as your “Christ candle.”
- 9 Take a drive to look at Christmas lights—just make sure to do it before New Year’s, or you’ll miss a lot of them!
- 10 Play Christmas music throughout the twelve days. If you have the will-power, it is wonderful to stick to Advent music (e.g. "O Come, O Come Emmanuel") until Christmas Eve, and then play the distinctively Christmas songs (e.g. "Joy to the World") through Christmastide.
- 11 Learn about Christmas traditions around the world—for example, Three Kings Day in Latin America and Boxing Day in England.
- 12 Have a Twelfth Night celebration. On January 5, take down the Christmas tree and have a big bonfire with one last chance to sing Christmas carols. Serve King’s cake to celebrate the arrival of the three kings.















One Lord. Jesus Christ

On Christmas Day, we give thanks for the single greatest gift of all: Jesus Christ. And we remember, with the author of Ephesians, that there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all."

Read: Isaiah 9:6-7

Sing: Joy to the World

Pray: Dear God, thank you for giving us the gift of your son, our savior, Jesus Christ. As we begin these twelve days of Christmas, help us to celebrate and honor him not only with our lips, but with our lives. *Amen.*



Two Natures of Jesus

On the second day of Christmas, we remember Jesus' two natures: one person, fully God and fully man. He is not half man, half God, or simply God inside a body. Jesus is *Immanuel*, "God with us." The image on this ornament depicts Jesus as a man symbolizing his human nature, with a halo symbolizing his divine nature.

Read: Philippians 2:5-8

Sing: Hark! The Herald Angels Sing or Good King Wenceslas (for the feast of St. Stephen today)

Pray: Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are not simply *for* us, but you are also *with* us in your son, *Immanuel*. In his humanity, he empathizes with our suffering, and in his divinity, he redeems our sinfulness. Grant that we may share in the divine life of Jesus who humbled himself to share our humanity. *Amen.*

3 Three Gifts of the Magi

On the third day of Christmas, we remember the three gifts of the Magi: gold, frankincense and myrrh. While our nativity sets and Christmas pageants would lead us to believe there were indisputably three Magi, the Gospels never actually specify this, only that there were three gifts. Gold, a precious metal, represents Jesus' kingship. Frankincense, an incense, represents his priestly office. And myrrh, an embalming (burial) oil, symbolizes his death. Although Scripture does not list the number or names of the magi, tradition has given them the names of Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar (who traditionally has darker skin).



Read: Matthew 2:1-11

Sing: We Three Kings

Pray: O God, by the leading of a star you made yourself known to the Magi. Lead us now, so that we may faithfully serve you this Christmastide. Grant that we, like the Magi, may offer you our gifts, talents, and all that we are now and always.
Amen.



Four Gospels

On the fourth day of Christmas, we look at the four Gospel writers: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Each Gospel has its own symbol in the Christian tradition taken from the four living beings found in Revelation 4 and Ezekiel 1. Matthew is symbolized by a winged man, because his Gospel begins with Jesus' genealogy, highlighting that he is both human and divine. Mark's gospel is symbolized by a winged lion, an emblem of royalty. Luke is symbolized by a winged ox, an animal used for sacrifices, as his gospel begins with Zechariah in the Temple. Finally, John's Gospel is symbolized by an eagle, an animal that soars in the sky, as John's gospel is set apart by its high and lofty theological language.



Read: Matthew 1:18-24

Sing: O Little Town of Bethlehem

Pray: Almighty God, you have poured upon us the light of your incarnate Word, Jesus. Grant that his light, burning in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives this Christmas and always. Amen. (Adapted from the BCP)



Five Books of the Pentateuch

On the fifth day of Christmas, we remember the first five books of the Bible, called the *Pentateuch*: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. The word *Pentateuch* comes from two Greek words: penta meaning "five" and teuchos meaning "tool" or "book." Judaism refers to these books as the Torah, meaning "law."

Read: Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Sing: The First Noel

Pray: Heavenly Father, we thank you for giving Israel the Law and for giving us the fulfillment of the law in your Son. Help us to know and love your word, and above all, to love your Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. *Amen.*



Six Days of Creation

On the sixth day of Christmas, we remember the six days of creation. On the first day, God created light and dark. On the second day, God made the sea and sky. On the third day, he created the dry ground and plants. The sun, moon, and stars were made on the fourth day. On the fifth day, God created the birds of the air and animals of the sea. On the sixth day, God created animals of the land and human beings.

Read: Genesis 1

Sing: Silent Night

Pray: Creator God, on this sixth day of Christmas, we marvel at all that you have made. We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. *Amen.*
(Adapted from the BCP)



Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit

On the seventh day of Christmas, we remember the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. First appearing in the book of Isaiah, foretelling the coming of the Messiah, these gifts are: wisdom, understanding, counsel (advice), fortitude (bravery), knowledge, piety (holiness), fear of the Lord.

Read: Isaiah 11:1-2

Sing: O Holy Night

Pray: Giver of all good gifts, there is nothing greater we could receive this Christmas than the gift of your Spirit. Increase in us all wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord, we pray. *Amen.*



Eight Beatitudes

On the eighth day of Christmas, we remember the eight beatitudes given by Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount. Beatitude simply means "blessed," and Jesus' description of the blessed is about as topsy-turvy as the King of kings being born in a barn. The symbol for today is of Jesus' hand making a gesture of blessing as he is often depicted in sacred art.

Read: Matthew 5:3-10

Sing: Away in a Manger

Pray: O Lord Jesus Christ, you became poor for our sake, that we might be made rich through your poverty. We remember before you all poor and neglected persons whom it would be easy for us to forget: the homeless and the destitute, the old and the sick, and all who have none to care for them. Help us to heal those who are broken in body or spirit, and to turn their sorrow into joy. We ask this in your holy name. *Amen.* (Adapted from the BCP)



Nine Fruits of the Spirit

On the ninth day of Christmas, we remember the nine fruits of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Read: Galatians 5:22-23

Sing: Joy to the World

Pray: Heavenly Father, on this ninth day of Christmas, send your Spirit to dwell in us richly that we may bear good fruit for all the world to see and give you praise. *Amen.*



Ten Commandments

On the tenth day of Christmas, we remember the Ten Commandments that God gave to Israel: "1. You will have no other Gods before me. 2. Do not make idols. 3. Do not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. 4. Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. 6. Honor your father and mother. 6. Do not murder. 7. Do not commit adultery. 8. Do not steal. 9. Do not bear false witness against your neighbor. 10. Do not covet." The tablets pictured on this ornament contain the beginning of each commandment written in Hebrew characters, the original language of the Old Testament.

Read: Exodus 20:1-17

Sing: Go Tell It on a Mountain

Pray: God of our forefathers, you gave Israel these commandments not to hold them in bondage, but to free them to love and serve you. We can do no good apart from you. Give us your grace to keep your commandments so that we may honor you with our whole lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*



Eleven Faithful Apostles

On the eleventh day of Christmas, we remember the eleven faithful apostles of Jesus: Simon Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James, Simon, and Judas son of James. Judas Iscariot, who betrays Jesus, is replaced by Matthias in Acts 1. The symbol on this ornament depicts DaVinci's painting of the Last Supper where Jesus gathers his disciples in the upper room and reveals that one of them will betray him. The prayer below is an ancient statement of faith known as the Apostles Creed. It was written by the early church--reportedly, one article by each faithful apostle--and is widely used by many Christian denominations today. The word "catholic" used to describe the Church means "universal."

Read: Luke 6:12-16

Sing: O Come All Ye Faithful

Pray: I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of the saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. *Amen.*



Twelve Tribes of Israel

On the twelfth day of Christmas, we remember the twelve tribes of Israel, God's chosen people: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Benjamin, and Joseph (split between his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh). These twelve tribes come from the twelve sons of Jacob, who received the name of Israel after he wrestled with an angel of the Lord. The symbol on the twelfth's day ornament is the star of David, representing all of Israel.

Read: Genesis 49:1-28

Sing: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (Though more of an Advent hymn, it speaks to Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament's promises of redemption for Israel.)

Pray: Almighty God, we thank you for the election of the twelve tribes of Israel to be a kingdom of priests among the nations. You gave them your Law and Prophets, you dwelt with them in your Temple, and, in the fullness of time, you chose one among them, the Virgin Mary, to be the mother of your Son. As we come to the end of Christmastide, grant that Christ might make his dwelling within us as well.