

# Resources for Celebrating the Advent Season

## How to Use the Family Advent Collection

Because of the variety included in the Family Advent Collection, families can easily tailor the advent activities to fit their schedules. Choosing from daily or weekly activities, families can weave the advent activities and traditions into their busy family lives in a way that works best for them. To make it easier for families to add these activities to their family routines we have created a schedule that can be used. Use the schedule as a guide only though and be sure to change and tailor it to be fit your family's needs. Best for kids ages 4 - 12.

**First Sunday of Advent:** Hope - Create a family advent wreath and talk about its history. Read and discuss a family devotional and solve the first Seek-and-Find Advent puzzle. Discuss how the remaining advent activities will be added throughout the rest of the week.

During the Week - At breakfast have the children open the windows of the Advent calendar and try to solve the riddles. During dinner pass around the Seek-and-Find Advent Book and try to solve the puzzles as you eat. Giving each family member a chance to try and solve the puzzle and keeping silent until all have had a chance. At bedtime, gather to read and discuss the family devotion for the day and light the Advent wreath.

**Second Sunday of Advent:** Peace - Light the Advent wreath and play a game of Chritskindl's. Get all of the family involved and develop a plan to help younger members of the family. Play the game throughout the week.

During the Week - Continue with the Advent calendar, the Seek-and-Find Advent puzzle, family devotions and lighting of the Advent wreath.

**Third Sunday of Advent:** Joy - Light the Advent wreath and make a family [Giving Box](#) (included). Discuss as a family how to collect money for the box and how it should be used.

During the Week - Continue with the Advent calendar, the Seek-and-Find Advent puzzle, family devotions and lighting of the Advent wreath.

**Fourth Sunday of Advent:** Love - Light the Advent wreath and make daily reminders using coins with the verse John 3:16 inscribed.

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## The History

These Advent family nights began in our home in response to our desire our daughters understood Christmas was more than just Santa and presents. We also wanted to create a simple, quiet Christmas tradition we could do in the comfort of our own home (we had grown increasingly tired of having to bundle them up to go out). Unfortunately with the demands of our jobs, the girls' school activities, and just the general craziness of life we were finding it hard to do this without spending a lot of time, energy, and money. Because of these frustrations, we were determined to find a simpler better way and thus began our idea for family Advent nights. We began using these activities in our own home and have also shared them with other families in our church. We combine the Advent activities with [Christmas stories](#), [Christmas songs](#), [family](#)

[Christmas rituals](#), and of course snacks. Our girls absolutely love this time we share together and look forward to it every week.

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## **Family Christmas Traditions, Rituals, and Activities**

### **Light an Advent Candle**

Find time either once a week or each night to light a candle of the advent wreath and talk about what the week of [Advent](#) represents. If you are in need of an [Advent wreath](#), [Advent Calendar](#), or are looking for ways to celebrate the weeks of Advent together then be sure to see our [Family Advent Activity Collection](#)

### **Birthday Cake for Jesus**

Bake a birthday cake and sing Happy Birthday to Jesus. This is a simple way of reminding ourselves and children why we celebrate Christmas. Remember the birthday cake doesn't have to be anything elaborate. A simple box mix or even an Easy Bake oven cake will do!

### **Blessing Book**

Start a blessing book by buying a simple journal. Keep the journal from year to year and have family members add new blessings every year. For those children that are not yet able to write, a simple picture will do.

### **Good Luck Wishes**

Try this Polish tradition on Christmas Eve. Make or buy [unleavened bread](#). Have each family member share a piece of the bread and as the bread is shared give all family members a kiss and wish of good luck. For those wanting to incorporate a true Polish tradition, substitute [Oplatek](#), a wafer, for the unleavened bread.

### **Give Gifts to Baby Jesus**

Using your Giving Box money, purchase layette sized clothing and wrap as presents for baby Jesus. Then as a family, stop by a homeless shelter or home for mothers and children to donate the gifts.

### **Manger Ritual**

As a symbol of the waiting and expectation of Jesus' birth, each night unwrap and place in the manger one piece of the nativity scene. Save baby Jesus for Christmas Day.

### **Christmas Tree Decorating Party**

Set aside a special time in December to decorate the Christmas Tree as a family. Make simple appetizers or finger foods to share and eat as you decorate the tree. Play Christmas music in the background and talk about all the fun things you will do as a family this Christmas season.

### **Cut Down a Christmas Tree**

Why not try cutting down a Christmas tree this year rather than buying one off the lot or putting up the artificial? This is truly a fun filled way to celebrate the Christmas season and one the family is sure to remember for years to come. [The National Christmas Tree Association](#) can help you find a Christmas tree farm in your area.

### Read Christmas Stories

Set aside time each night to read a different [Christmas Story](#), saving [The Night Before Christmas](#) for Christmas Eve.

### Advent Calendar

Count down the days of Christmas by purchasing or making an [Advent Calendar](#).

### Family Christmas Pajamas

I started this tradition a few years ago. On Christmas Eve the kids get to open two presents...one is their pajama's and the other is a book.

Lynn

Angel Baby Baskets--Sympathy, Remembrance, Hope™

<http://www.angelbabybaskets.com>

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### Advent History

It's November and Christmas has hit the stores and malls everywhere! Well, you wouldn't know it from all of the grumbling going on about early decorations, pre-Christmas sales, and how are we going to pay for all of these gifts? I am one of those people who just loves Christmas; I start playing the Christmas tunes and putting up my decorations in mid-November...usually to more groans and eye rolls from friends and family.

But I decided that this year, as I redo my Advent calendar here on TeachingMom, that the retailers have it RIGHT. Whoa! What did that crazy homeschooler say? Well, I don't mean that most businesses have their priorities straight about the true reason for celebration at Christmas or the right attitude towards their fellow man (and woman!) and peace on earth at half off. However, if there is one thing that we can learn from the retailers--granted, it's **one** thing--it is their attitude of *expectation and preparation*. And that is what the Advent season is all about! Preparing our hearts with joyful anticipation for the coming of our King.

### What is Advent?

Advent marks the beginning of the Christmas season and the Church year for most Western churches. The word "Advent" means "arrival" or "coming" in Latin and represents the approach of Christ's birth (and fulfillment of the prophecies about that event) *and* the awaiting of Christ's second coming. It is composed of the four Sundays before Christmas day, starting on the Sunday closest to November 30th, which is the feast day of St. Andrew the Apostle, and ending on Christmas. Because Christmas is on a different day from year to year, Advent may last anywhere from 22 to 28 days.

In the 4th and 5th centuries, Advent was the preparation for the "Epiphany" rather than Christmas. (Epiphany is celebrated in early January and focuses on various events in Jesus' life such as the visits of the magi, His baptism and miracles.) It was also a time for new Christians to be baptized and welcomed into the church, while members of the church examined their hearts and focused on penance. Religious leaders exhorted the people to prepare for the feast of Christmas by fasting. Some say that early documents show that those leaders treated Advent as a second Lent.

Sometime in 6th century Rome, the focus of Advent shifted to the second coming of Christ. In the 9th century, Pope St. Nicholas reduced the duration of Advent from six weeks to the four weeks we currently observe. And finally, sometime in the middle ages--approximately the 1500's--an additional focus on the anticipation before Christ's birth was added to that of His second coming. For a more in-depth perspective, visit [The History of Advent](#).

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### **Celebrating the Season**

For Christians, Advent is a time of reflection about the amazing gift that God gave to us in the person of His Son who came to live among us on earth. It is also an opportunity to restore Jesus to His rightful place as the center of our holiday celebrations! Advent is, appropriately, both somber and joyful!

The prevailing themes of the Advent season and the symbolism behind the activities which churches and families share are expectation and hope, preparation and peace, joy and sharing, and most of all, love. These themes are represented in the 5 candles of the Advent wreath. On each Sunday marking a new week in Advent, a candle is lit on the wreath (including candles from previous weeks) until we arrive at the snow-white center candle which stands for Christ! All Advent activities and traditions are grounded in the truth of Scripture...even though the symbolism and stories surrounding them have changed over time. The focus continues to be the great news that the Messiah was and is coming and how we **live out** our heartfelt longing for both.

The practice of lighting Advent candles began in Germany by non-Christians. They lit candles surrounded by evergreen branches in their windows on cold winter nights to signify their hope for the coming warmth and light of spring! Later, German Lutherans kept the practice alive and gradually the symbolism of the Advent wreath was added: evergreens represent everlasting life (because they do not die during winter) and Christian growth; the wreath is a symbol of God's unending love and of victory; candles represent Christ, the light of the world, and their purple or blue color signify the royalty of Jesus our King! Another tradition saying is that the four candles signify the 4000 years of waiting from Adam and Eve until, at long last, Jesus' birth.

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### **Advent Calendars and Wreaths**

<http://www.teachingmom.com/features/advent.html>

Before you can begin your Advent activities, you should try to find an Advent Calendar and/or Advent Wreath to use! These are readily available at most Christian book stores and Christianbook.com (CBD) has some as well:

[Advent Calendars](#)

[Advent Wreaths](#)

However, one of the most fun activities this season can be making your own Advent Calendar or Wreath! You can create a wreath that will last a long time and become a treasured tradition in

your home or try something new every year!

An Advent Calendar can be as simple or as ornate as you'd like. Here are some ideas:

**1.** You can use an actual calendar like the large desk calendars with space to write in. Every night, write in a new verse reference for you and your family to look up and read together the next day. Afterwards, put a Christmas sticker on the square to count down the days.

**2.** Cut out a Christmas tree shape from cardboard or posterboard. Each day, add a new ornament (either cut them out yourself or buy some die-cut shapes from a craft store) with a verse.

**3.** An alternative to a calendar is to make an Advent paper chain. Add a new link to the chain every day with either the Bible verse you read together, the people you prayed for that day or a list of what you were thankful for that day. Or, you can create the chain in advance and remove the links with verses (or names of people to pray for) listed on them.

**4.** Have an old or extra corkboard that you're not using? Transform it into an Advent calendar and post new messages and/or verses every day. You can wrap the board with wrapping paper to make it look like a present and add bow, ornament or candy shapes every day. You can hang pieces of candy each day with push pins as well.

**5.** A fairly easy traditional Advent calendar can be made with 2 pieces of cardboard or posterboard. Draw your design on one piece of cardboard. You can make little houses and churches along a winding road or a Christmas tree with ornaments or just one house with many little windows or doors. Use an exacto knife to cut the doors/windows open, leaving one side as a hinge. Then, lay the 2nd piece of cardboard underneath and line it up. Open the windows/doors and trace the shapes onto the cardboard below. Write your verses or other messages in the traced shapes and then carefully glue the cardboard under the cover piece of cardboard. Close the doors with little bits of tape to keep peeking eyes from looking ahead! (Fun foam or felt can be used, too.)

**6.** Make an Advent tree. Use a small (3-foot or so) artificial tree and each day hang a new ornament. These can be tiny gift boxes, mini stockings or mini mittens holding verses and/or candy.

**7.** Nativity figures. Instead of a calendar, you can allow your children to set out 1 nativity figure/animal each day until Christmas.

**8.** Use old Christmas cards to create a tree shape on your wall or door. Glue verses or other messages written on colored paper inside, perhaps with a note to pray for the person who sent you the card.

**9.** Sew a calendar with felt or any other fabric. Make small pockets for each day of Advent where you can put verses or candy.

**10.** Use matchboxes, small jewelry gift boxes, toilet paper tubes cut in half or small paper cups glued to a piece of cardboard to create a calendar with places to store your verses, candies or other items to be opened each day!

11. If you can find an item with the right number of pockets or drawers, you can simply decorate it and label for use as a calendar! Some options are shoe organizers, mini drawer units (for a desk or to hold small craft items), or a screw/nail/tool organizer with little drawers. Dress it up with wrapping paper and ribbon.

**Here is a list of small gifts you can give as you countdown to Advent:**

1. Quarter--A quarter! That equals 25 cents. But 25 also stands for the number of days till Christmas, when God gave us His best present. Jesus told about one woman's gift and the way she gave it. Read: Mark 12:41-44
2. Grape Gum or Candy--Grapes make jelly and juice, raisins and wine. But Jesus didn't need grapes to perform His first miracle. Read: John 2:1-10
3. Smiley Face--Here's a smile! A smile usually expresses happiness. Jesus gave us many instructions to keep us happy. Read: Matthew 5:1-12.
4. Swedish Fish candy--Well, if you were surprised to find these fish, wait till you read the story today! Others were surprised to find fish, too. Read: Luke 5:4-7.
5. Birthday Candle--As you know, we are getting ready to celebrate Jesus' birthday. However, Jesus talked about something else that is related to this candle. Light! Read: Matthew 5:14-16.
6. Small Bell--You could make some noise with this. But it would not have bothered a certain man--until he met Jesus. Read: Mark 7:31-37.
7. Goldfish Crackers--These would not go very far if you were really hungry! But Jesus could make much out of little. Surely He knew how to multiply! Read: Matthew 14:13-21.
8. Cotton Balls--These cotton balls would be helpful in a thunder storm, wouldn't they? We could use them for ear plugs to muffle the loud noises that thunder makes. But we know someone who doesn't need cotton. Jesus can control the weather. Read: Matthew 8:23-27.
9. Piece of Map--People needing to use the other parts of this map are in trouble! Don't you get lost today! Read: John 14:1-6.
10. Soap--Do you like to wash? Behind your ears? Washing turned out to be a happy time for a man who met Jesus. Read: John 9:1-7.
11. Heart Candy or Sticker--Hearts. Wordlessly, they speak of love, don't they? Jesus spoke some commands about love. Read: Matthew 25:17-41.
12. Small Cross--We use the cross as a symbol, representing Jesus. Do you know why? Read: Phillipians 2:1-11.
13. Packet of Salt--Ordinary salt. Yes, Jesus related salt to us and our behavior. He also gave us some advice. Read: Matthew 5:14 and Colossians 4:6. (Notice that He doesn't recommend pepper!).

14. Sand--Don't try to eat this! It's sand. It reminds us that Jesus knows something about architecture, about buildings--and building lives. See His instructions: Matthew 7:24-29.
15. Silk Flowers--Flowers are pretty, aren't they? Jesus used flowers to teach us a reassuring lesson. Read: Matthew 6:28-34.
16. Raisins--Raisins! Many children are given raisins instead of candy for a snack. That's because they are a health-promoting and delicious fruit. Jesus told us how we can produce good fruit. Read: John 15:1-5.
17. Seeds--Jesus told a story about seeds that man planted. Then He explained it, revealing its deep meaning. Read: Matthew 13:3-8 and Matthew 13:18-23.
18. Christmas Carol--Christmas is just about a week away. And here is an appropriate song. Sing it loudly! Read: Psalms 100.
19. Rock--A hard stone! Can you change this stone into a piece of bread? Do you think Jesus could? Jesus was asked to do just that. Do know how He handled it? Read: Matthew 4:1-4.
20. Crumpled Foil--Try to smooth out this piece of aluminum foil and use it as a mirror. It's hard to see your reflection plainly, isn't it? Many circumstances are hard to understand, but someday everything will be clear. Read: 1 Corinthians 13:12.
21. Mustard Seed (or packet of mustard)--The mustard seed is the smallest there is! When it sprouts, it grows into one of the largest plants! See what Jesus said. Read: Matthew 17:20.
22. Dove--We've learned that the cross represents Christ, but do you know what the dove stands for? Read: Matthew 3:13-17.
23. Scrap of Wool Material--The threads that compose this fabric came from the wool of a sheep. Jesus called Himself the good shepherd. Do you know who His sheep are? Read: John 10:7-18.
24. Marble--A marble! Do you know what is sometimes called the "Big Blue Marble"? The world. God made the world for us. What does God continue doing to the world? And who is the world? Read: John 3:16.
25. Picture of Baby--Isn't this baby cute? When he was born, he made a whole family happy. Jesus was born a baby, too. He came to make the whole world happy. Read: Luke 2:1-20. Enjoy your celebration today. Continue to learn about Jesus--and love Him forever!
- \*This comes from [www.daniellesplace.com](http://www.daniellesplace.com) (among other places on the web)

Advent wreaths contain 4-5 candles, one purple or pink candle for each week of Advent and a last white or rose candle to represent Christ! Here are some ideas if you'd like to make your own:

1. Use an aluminum foil pie tin and cut "X" shapes to push your candles down into. Decorate with greenery.
2. Use a styrofoam wreath shape. Press your candles in (use a small brass candle holder if you can) and decorate with artificial holly or other greenery.

3. Fill a container such as a bundt cake pan or a pretty planting container with dry cranberries or small pretty stones (or sand, pebbles, etc if you will cover with greenery) and push your candles down in.
4. Drill holes in a log which has been sanded on the bottom side to be sure it is steady and place candles in the holes. Decorate with greenery.
5. If your children are too young to take part in candle lighting, they can make a wreath with handprints made on green paper. Form a circle with the handprints and put a bow on. You can hang it or you can make pretend candles from toilet paper tubes to use on it!
6. You can make your own fresh Advent Wreath buy visiting this site: [Making an Advent Wreath](#).
7. Here is a neat idea for making a wreath with daily activities and candy canes: [Advent Wreath](#).

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### Some Fun Questions for Your Family

*How many gifts would you receive if you received ALL of the gifts in the song "The Twelve Days of Christmas"? Hint: The WHOLE song! (364)*

*Whose patron saint is St. Nicholas?*

- a. children and scholars
- b. merchants and sailors
- c. women without dowries
- d. all of the above (*answer: d. all of the above!*)

*If you could be any character in a play about the Nativity, who would you be and why?*

*What is your favorite Christmas smell?...favorite Christmas sound?*

*Who was president of the United States when the tradition of lighting the White House Christmas Tree was started? (Calvin Coolidge)*

See if you can name these famous toys::

- a. 1931, unemployed architect creates a word game originally called the Criss Cross Game
- b. 1932, 6 of these plastic building bricks can be put together in 102, 981,500 different ways!
- c. 1949, created in a search for a synthetic substitute for rubber
- d. 1951, 2 art students discover that vinyl sticks to semi-gloss paint
- e. 1974, 4 engineers create a dustless chalkboard that becomes a famous toy  
(a. Scrabble, b. Legos, c. Silly Putty, d. Colorforms, e. Magna Doodle)

When Martin Luther began to decorate a tree inside his home at Christmas, he used candles to represent Christ, the light of the world. Find an ornament on your tree or something in your home that symbolizes Christ or an important family value and explain what it means to you.

*What is your favorite Christmas carol and why?*

*How must life have been difficult for Mary after she heard from Gabriel? What about for Joseph after his messenger came?*

*If you were suddenly unable to speak like Zacharias, how would you let people know what you wanted? How would you tell people how you feel or that you love them?*

There are many examples in the Bible where God makes people wait! *Why do you think He does this? What is good about waiting?* (Have you thought about it in that way before?)

In the story "The Gift of the Magi," the main characters each sacrifice something important so that they can give to the one they love. *Is it harder to give away your money, your stuff, or your time? Why and what would make it easier?*

Finish this simple prayer: "Lord, bless our family with..."

Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown  
When Thou camest to earth for me;  
But in Bethlehem's home was there found no room  
For Thy holy nativity.  
O come to my heart, Lord Jesus—  
There is room in my heart for Thee. —Emily Elliot

*What is in your heart that could move out to make a little more room for Jesus? (anger? sadness?envy? laziness?) Don't dwell, but encourage one another in your responses! Think of a "homemade coupon" (you know, "one free hug!" or "do your chore for one week!" type of thing) that you could give to the person on your right. (What do they need or want most? What service would be of most use to him or her?) After everyone has thought of an idea, go around the group and share!*

Mary and Joseph made a difficult trip to Bethlehem and were also on a spiritual journey of faith. Being a Christian is like being on a lifelong journey! *Is there anything you'd like to do that would be a next step in your journey of faith?*

*What does your family do to prepare for special guests? If you knew that Jesus was one of your guests would you do anything differently? Would you do more or less? How could we prepare for unexpected guests?*

Jesus is known as the Prince of Peace. *What does peace mean to you? Can you share a time when you experienced peace? How can we bring peace to others, especially our family?*

In Isaiah 42, God says, "I am the Lord; that is My name! I will not give my glory to another or my praises to idols. (Explain idols to younger children if necessary.) *What are some ways that we can give glory or praise to other things at Christmas? How can we change that?*

During Advent, we saw how many prophecies about Jesus were fulfilled. *On a less serious note, what kinds of "predictions" do parents give to their children? (Example:*

*If you cross your eyes, they'll stick that way! Don't eat the watermelon seeds—you'll grow a watermelon in your tummy!)* *Kids, did you believe your parents? Have they predicted anything that you weren't sure would happen but did?*

*What should you go tell on a mountain according to the song?*  
That Jesus Christ is born!

The poem, " 'Twas the Night Before Christmas" by Clement Moore was originally known as:

- a. "Sleigh Bells in the Distance"
- b. "Visions of Sugar Plums"
- c. "A Visit From St. Nicholas"
- d. "Footsteps on My Roof-top" (answer: c.)

Boxing Day, December 26th, is the holy day of which saint? (St. Stephen)

In Tchaikovsky's ballet, "The Nutcracker," who is the Nutcracker's enemy? (The Rat or Mouse King)

*If you could make up a new Advent or Christmas tradition for your family to start, what would it be? (This can be fun or serious...maybe brainstorm together!)*

*What is your favorite Christmas activity? Decorating a tree or the house...drinking hot chocolate...shoveling snow or building snowmen...singing carols?*

As we read about the birth of Jesus, we see 3 examples of how people might respond to what God wants to do in their lives. (All 3 heard from angels!) Zacharias couldn't believe it...Joseph didn't recognize the miracle but God's angel showed him...and Mary accepted God's will right away. *Who are you most like and why? How are the circumstances of these 3 people alike and different?*

*If you lived in the time of Jesus' birth and heard about him, what gift would you bring to the manger? Why?*

After Jesus is born, Herod got very angry when the wise men didn't return and he wanted to get rid of Jesus for good! An angel warned Mary and Joseph and told them to escape to Egypt. *If your family had to leave for a new home in ONE hour, what 3 things would you take with you?*

All together, describe what it's like to have to wait for something you really want. Then, share some words that describe how you feel when that moment or thing finally arrives.

In "A Charlie Brown Christmas," Linus, as always, can be seen with his blue security blanket. But do you notice that when he recites "Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy" from Luke 2:10, he lets it go? *What is your "security blanket"?*

*Share about a time when it was hard to trust God to feel safe or strong.*

*Which are you best at, the gift of compassion, the gift of courage, the gift of service, the gift of creativity, or the gift of cheer? Why do you think so? Is there another "gift" that describes your abilities better?*

*What is the most favorite gift you've ever GIVEN? And why? How about the best one you've received?*

*If you could have any meal for Christmas every year, what would it be? The same that you usually have or something new/different?*

*What is your favorite Christmas story? Did you read a new favorite this year?*

Take turns humming a Christmas carol and see if everyone else can guess which one it is!

Jesus has many names, some we've learned this Advent. One is "Emmanuel", which means "God with us." *Do you know what your name means?* If you don't, or if the meaning of your name isn't very exciting or descriptive, make up a meaning that fits you better! Have everyone help as you think of how you describe yourself.

*How do you feel when someone breaks a promise? Do you make promises easily? Why, and do you think you should make promises less or more often?*

**A few other resources...**

<http://homeschooling.about.com/cs/unitssubjhol/a/advent125.htm>

<http://www.our.homewithgod.com/mkcathy/MerryChristmas/advent/>

<http://www.dltk-bible.com/advent/index.htm>