

Family Advent Traditions

By John & Sue Bogdan

Below is a summary of some ideas we presented at a former parish on family Advent traditions. Years ago, when the kids were very small, we searched for a way to make Christmas a celebration of faith rather than toys. With a group of friends from church, we decided to celebrate Advent when the church does, and Christmas from Christmas Eve until Epiphany. Since this did not fit most of the world or our extended family, we wanted to come up with things to make the wait a joyful one as well as one that would prepare our hearts for Jesus. Now we all look forward to Advent and our Christmas celebration.

We don't do all this Advent stuff each year! It changes as the kids grow older. Maybe some of the ideas will suit someone.

John & Sue Bogdan

Celebrating Advent

Advent is a time of preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ – a time of waiting. But it's hard to wait, especially in today's culture. We celebrate Advent with a variety of things to learn to wait and appreciate the wait, and to prepare ourselves for the joy of Christmas.

1. The Jesse Tree

Make a tree from a dead stick with lots of branches. (Or you can make a felt tree or any kind of tree you want, but you should start with bare branches.) Make ornaments to represent Jesus' ancestors. You can also place symbols for people who have waited and prepared for the coming of the Messiah on it, who are not ancestors. Use any material you want for the ornaments. We have used construction paper, clay, and felt.

Make the ornaments over the weeks of Advent as you read about each ancestor or have one big activity day with your family, friends, or church. Pick a song about waiting to sing as part of your project time.

The genealogy of Jesus is found in Matthew 1 and Luke 3.

Some ideas for symbols are:

Apple for Adam

Tablet for Moses

Rainbow or ark for Noah

Harp for David

Whip for Rehoboam

Tent for Sarah

Camel or lots of stars for Abraham

Ladder for Jacob

Crown for Solomon

Trumpet for Joshua
Well for Rebecca
Ram for Isaac
Lion for Daniel
Hammer or saw for Joseph
Ark of the Covenant for Mary
Wheat for Ruth

2. The Advent Wreath

The advent wreath is a green, circular wreath with three purple candles and one pink candle. We light a new candle on Sunday of each week of Advent as we pray a prayer of preparation. The pink candle is lit on the third Sunday to anticipate the joy of the birth of Christ. We've been told the candles represent the 4000 years the world waited for a Savior.

You can buy a wreath or make one with your family. Greenery reminds us that Christ lives forever and comes to give us the opportunity for eternal life. The circle of the wreath reminds us of God's eternal love for us. The lighting of the candles each week causes the light to grow brighter as the birth of Christ approaches.

An Advent wreath blessing: (from Family Prayer for Family Times by Kathleen Chesto)

Leader: Just as the world waited in darkness for the Messiah, the light of the world, we wait in the ever-darkening days of winter for the feast of his birth and for the day when he will come again. (Light the candle)

Reader: Isaiah 9:2-3

Leader: Lord, bless our Advent prayer. Remind us daily of all who wait in darkness for your coming. Give each of us the courage to make your life shine forth in the world.

Sing an Advent song (e.g., O come, O come Emmanuel)

3. Advent Calendar

Make a calendar to mark off the passage of days until Christmas. One way is to make a cardboard house with four windows, one for each Sunday of Advent, and a door for Christmas. Make shutters for the windows and a door for the doorway. Write a prayer on each . Each member of the family is responsible for an opening or openings. Have them put a surprise picture or verse under the shutters to be revealed when that Sunday arrives and you open the shutters. Hang it against a window and let the light increase as you open more windows.

4. The Manger/ Nativity Scene

Place an empty manger in a prominent place in your home. Each family member can secretly add a straw or piece of yarn to the manger for each kindness shown another to

prepare the bed (and their hearts) for Jesus.

Put up your nativity set as you read the Christmas story. If you have a keepsake Nativity set, also put one out that children can handle.

Have each family member pick a creature from the nativity scene and tell the story of the birth from that point of view. This is fun to do on Christmas Eve.

5. "Prepare the Highway" Advent banner

Make a big banner (ours is burlap with felt pieces). Cut a simple nativity scene from felt and glue it at the top of the banner: cave or barn and figures for Mary, Joseph, and the infant Jesus. Outline a path with felt rocks and plants (glue them on) from the bottom of the banner up to the nativity scene. Cut lots of rocks, sticks, etc, from felt and put Velcro (hooked side) on the back of each. Cover the path with the obstacles. Secretly remove them to the side of the path each time you do something pleasing to Jesus. "Make straight in the desert a highway for our God" Isaiah 40:3

Listen to *The Messiah* as you make cookies when you have cleared the path.

6. Celebrate St. Nicholas Day (December 6)

Read the story of St. Nicholas. Dramatize some of the legends of St. Nicholas. Do secret good deeds. Make St. Nicholas cookies. Put a shoe outside your bedroom door on the evening of Dec. 5th for a small treat from St. Nicholas.

7. Celebrate Santa Lucia Day (December 13)

Traditionally, the oldest daughter, wearing a wreath of lighted candles, wakes the family with music and a special breakfast. Saint Lucy, or Santa Lucia, rolls are traditional. If you don't wish to set your daughter on fire, try a special breakfast with music from an Advent passage of the Messiah or other Advent music you like.

8. Mom and Dad Night

Dedicate one night in Advent to each child individually. Have a special treat together and help that child prepare gifts and surprises for other family members.

9. Story Time

Wrap up books you would like to read during this season and place them in a basket in your family room. Let the children take turns picking and unwrapping one for the night's reading time. We have also enjoyed Arnold Ytreeide's books (*Jotham's Journey* and its sequels) for story time. (These are not Catholic.)