

ADVENT

PREPARING THE WAY FOR JESUS



Preparing the way for Jesus (Manger)

Find or create an empty manger for your family. Take ½ inch strips of paper representing the straw needed to comfort Jesus resting place after his birth. For good deed you do, or each time you go out of your way to be Jesus to someone cut a piece of the paper and add it to your empty manger to act as cushion or comfort for our Lord Jesus as to make the manger he is to lie in not so hard. It is a reminder of what we should do in preparation for the coming of Jesus, we have to make a comfortable place for him. We can also look at it as birthday gifts or wishes for Jesus as well.

We need to remember that Jesus is actually present in all of us, the people we like to be around and the people we don't care to be around. He is in our friends and he is also in our enemies and we must treat everyone as if they were Jesus no matter how hard it is to do sometimes. That is what John the Baptist tells us Advent is all about. The church also invites us to remember that just as Christ grew in his mother's womb some 2000 years ago, today we must allow him to grow in our hearts. Advent looks to both the past (Christ's birth in the town of Bethlehem) and the future (the unknown time when Christ will come again).



Advent Wreath (Directions)

Advent wreath: Most Christian homes and communities practice this custom which has German origins during the Advent season. These sacramentals are rich in meaning, easy to implement and can either be simple, costing little, or very elaborate, costing more, handmade or store-bought, with fresh greenery, or permanent greens.

The Advent wreath is a wreath, or circle, of evergreens, made in various sizes. It is either suspended from the ceiling by ribbons (preferably purple) or placed on a table. The devotion is usually incorporated during the family meal, or during family night prayers. Fastened to the wreath are four candles standing upright, at equal distances. These candles represent the four weeks of Advent. Three of the candles are purple, reminding us of the penitential nature of the season. A rose or pink candle is lit for the Third Sunday of Advent, also known as Gaudete (rejoice) Sunday. The name is taken from the entrance antiphon or Introit "Rejoice (gaudete) in the Lord always, again I say, rejoice." It is reminding us that the end of Advent is almost here, and we can hardly contain our joy.

The wreath should be in a circle, a symbol of eternity, and a reminder that God has no beginning and no end. The evergreen is a symbol of eternal life and a reminder that God is immutable or unchangeable.

The appearance of the actual Advent wreath is varied—everyone has their own interpretation of the Advent wreath. The look of your family's wreath depends on how much time and creativity you have to devote. Your family can create their own special wreath, or add personal touches to a store-bought wreath. With this devotion being so popular, one can go into any craft or garden store and buy a wreath. Any religious goods store carries several varieties, and the prices range from inexpensive to very costly.

Some families want to create a new wreath every year, with everyone involved in the activity. Using evergreens, however, does add the risk of fire hazard, especially as the greens go dry. For less risk, or with smaller children or tight schedules,

you may want to consider making a permanent wreath that you can reuse every Advent.

Directions

There are five elements to the wreath: 1) Base, 2) candleholders, 3) greens, 4) candles and 5) ribbons and decoration. Your wreath can either be live or permanent. Below are several different ideas for each element, so you can create a wreath of your own.

1. The Base:

a) Spaghnum moss wreath form The form needs to be pre-soaked and full of moisture for the evergreen. This should be done overnight, excess water allowed to drip off. This pre-soaked form then needs to be wrapped with green florist wreath wrap.



b) Oasis or some type of wet florist's foam shaped into a wreath form This foam usually comes in blocks, and you must find some round waterproof container to cut and shape your form in. If you do some searching, there are Oasis wreath forms available.

c) Vine Wreath form You can put attach live or artificial greens to a vine wreath. The vine wreath can either be purchased, or handmade using vines from wisteria, grape arbor, cane or willow. Presoak or moisturize the vine ahead of time, because the vine must be pliable to be able to curl into a wreath.

d) Styrofoam, straw, or some other type of wreath form At any craft store you can find a variety of wreath forms available in different materials. Styrofoam is the most readily available and the least expensive. There are also straw forms, either wrapped in plastic or wire bound to keep the straw from falling out. Any of these forms do not provide any moisture for the live evergreens. Unless you are using permanent greens, expect to either change the greens every so often, or have a very dead wreath by Christmas!

e) Wire frame There are several types of ready-made wreath wire-forms you can purchase, or you could form your own out of strong wire, or even coat hangers. You could also purchase an actual Advent wreath form, consisting of a simple ring and candleholders.

f) Ready-made Christmas Wreath You can purchase a ready-made Christmas wreath, either artificial or live. Usually the purpose of these wreaths is to hang on doors, so if you are suspending your wreath, make sure the underside is as attractive as the top.

2. Candleholders

a) Florist Candleholders

These are usually inexpensive plastic green holders, available at any craft or garden store or florist shop. If using foam or moss type form, these can be inserted directly into the form. Otherwise, these need to be securely fastened to the wreath with florist wire or hot glue.



b) Spikes For the moss or foam forms, large nails or spikes can be inserted on the underside of the wreath so that the pointed side comes through the top, high enough to put your candles. The spike cannot be too wide, otherwise it will split and break your candle. If you use a large pillar candle, this option would be ideal.

c) Wire Use heavy florist wire and twist around the bottom of the candles (about 2 inches), then fasten the ends to the form. This has to be very tight, with no movement for the candle.

d) Other ideas There are such a large variety of candles and candle holders available in almost every store. There might be different types of attractive holders that could be attached to a wreath form. Just make sure you get something that will hold the candle and prevent the flame from coming too close to the evergreens.

3. Greens

a) Live Evergreens For live evergreens, the choice is endless: yew, any type of pine, cedar, fir, laurel, holly, boxwood, spruce, hemlock, balsam twigs, even magnolia leaves can give an interesting look. Use what is available in your area, what is easy to manage, and what appeals to you.



The way your greens are cut depends on what type of form. If you just have a wire frame, you need to have branches that you can wire together and attach by florist wire onto the frame. If using forms, like foam, you can have small twigs or leaves and attach them to florist pics and insert throughout, or if the branches or leaves are sturdy enough, insert them without pics.

Check with your local craft store to see if there is a spray or preparation you can add to your leaves to make them non-flammable.

b) Permanent or Artificial Greens There are a variety of types of artificial greens. You can buy prepared florist "pics" and insert them into your form. Or with smaller branches, attach each piece to the form with strong florist wire.

Another option to consider, especially with smaller frames, like wire, is to purchase an artificial garland. Measure the garland around the form, and cut the garland just a little longer than the ring. Attach the garland around the wreath form with florist wire. Shape the branches around to hide the form.

4. Candles

With the surging popularity of candles, this by far is the easiest item to find. Usually the candles are tall taper candles, 3 purple or violet and 1 pink. These can be found almost anywhere. If you plan on burning the candles everyday, it helps to have a few extra to replace the first and second weeks of Advent candles as they burn down.



If you absolutely can't find these colors, use white or ivory candles and attach ribbons (don't let the flames come to close) to the candles—three with purple bows, one with a pink bow.

Most candles are paraffin, which burn quickly and drip. If you can find them, beeswax candles burn cleanly and smell wonderful. As you continue this tradition through the years, just keep an eye out for bargains and sales on purple and pink candles.

If you are incorporating a different type of candleholder that can accommodate other sizes of candles, look for pillar candles, or other shapes to use in the wreath.

5. Ribbons and Decorations

Keep in mind that although Advent is joyfully awaiting Christ's arrival, there still should be some element of penance. The wreath should not be elaborately decorated, to show the difference between the Advent Season and Christmas season. Pine cones, seed pods, red berries can be added to the greens. You could attach purple bows to the wreath, and suspend the wreath with



Purple ribbons. But besides these type of decorations, the wreath should be kept simple to remind us of the penitential nature of Advent.

For the Christmas season, the greens can be refreshed, the candles changed to white, red or gold and the ribbons changed to joyful Christmas colors. Other options: add some Christmas balls or other decorations inside the greens.



Time Out! During Advent

As the calendar year draws to a close, family schedules and personal agendas fill with meetings, programs, parties, and annual obligations. The carol "Silent Night" could not have been written at the end of the twentieth century, when its title evokes the peace and stillness modern women and men can only imagine.

Yet this busiest time of year calls us to draw close to others, above all to God, who became flesh and lived with us. Contemplation and carpooling?! Meditation and manic shopping?! How do we carve out moments of quiet when we open ourselves to God's presence?

Perhaps we have to lower our sights from hours spent around hearths and lengthy readings or litanies. Between traffic jams and parking lot crushes, scribbling holiday notes and decking our halls, there may still be ten minutes - or even five - when the family (which may mean something as informal as those who share meals and lodging) can sit quietly around the lighted Advent wreath. Once a day, once a week, or perhaps only once during the Season of Preparation.

Someone we know pampers herself and her family by baking a simple recipe for gingerbread. As the spicy smell fills the kitchen, the household comes together to light the Advent candles, to pray and meditate briefly, and to enjoy a homely feast. It brings them closer together and closer to the mysteries we contemplate and celebrate in Advent.

Advent Meditations

First Week of Advent

"Jesus said to his disciples: 'Be constantly on the watch! Stay awake!...You do not know when the Master of the house is coming.'" *Mark. 13:33*
First Sunday of Advent

O Jesus, your voice sounds through the house of my world: Be on your guard! Stay awake!



Yet I hardly hear you. Busy with so much, I go about the things I do like a servant trapped in household routine, hardly giving a thought to what my life is about. My spirit within has grown tired and you, my God, seem far away. How can I hear your voice today?

Speak to my heart during this season of grace, as you spoke to your prophets and saints. Remind me again of the journey you call me to make and the work you would have me do. I am your servant, O Lord. Speak to me in this holy season and turn my eyes to watch for your coming.

O Emmanuel, Jesus Christ,
desire of every nation, Savior of all peoples,
come and dwell among us.

Second Week of Advent

When John the Baptizer made his appearance as a preacher in the desert of Judea, this was his them: Reform your lives. The reign of God is at hand!" *Mt. 3:1* *Second Sunday of Advent*

O Jesus, in an empty desert your prophet John proclaimed: God is here, at your side. God has come to bring about a kingdom where injustice and suffering will be no more, where tears will be wiped away, and where those who turn to God will feast at a banquet.



"Turn now, your God is standing at your side. Reform your lives, God's kingdom is at hand." In an empty desert John said these things.

Give me faith like John's, O Lord, strong enough to believe even in a desert that you and your kingdom are no farther from me than my hand. Make my heart strong like his, not swayed by trials or snared by false pleasures. Give me courage to be faithful until your promises are fulfilled.

O King of all nations, Jesus Christ, only joy of every heart, come and save your people.

Third Week of Advent

John's disciples said to Jesus, "Are you 'He who is to come' or do we look for another?" In reply, Jesus said: "Tell John what you hear and see: the blind recover their sight, cripples walk, lepers are cured, and the poor have good news preached to them..." *Lk. 3:10 Third Week of Advent*



O Jesus, I rejoice at the signs that say you are near. Your power is everywhere if I could see it.

Yet my eyes often see only darkness and what has yet to be done. I believe in you, yet when I look around evil seems so strong and goodness so weak. If you have come, why is there still so much suffering and why do the poor still despair? Where are your miracles today?

Your grace, O Lord, is more fruitful in my world than I imagine. I know your power is everywhere around me, if I could only see it. Show me today where the blind see and cripples walk.

Make my vision sharper than it is.

Fourth Week of Advent

The angel Gabriel said to Mary, "Do not fear, Mary, you shall conceive and bear a son and give him the name Jesus. Great will be his dignity and he will be called Son of the Most High..." *Lk. 1 Fourth Sunday of Advent*

O Jesus, I believe you were born of Mary and are God's Son.



Your mysterious coming is beyond understanding. Yet like your holy mother, Mary, I wish that you come to me, for you promised you will. Let me serve you in any way I can and know that you are with me day by day as my life goes by.

Like Mary, your mother, though I know you only by faith, may my whole being proclaim your greatness and my spirit rejoice in your favor to me.

O Wisdom, holy Word of God, Jesus Christ, holding all things in your strong yet tender hands, come and show us the way to salvation.

Advent facts and activities for your families while preparing the way for Jesus

Holly, Ivy and other greenery such as mistletoe were originally used in pre-Christian times to help celebrate the Winter Solstice Festival and ward off evil spirits and celebrate new growth.

When Christianity came into Western Europe, some people wanted to keep the greenery, to give it Christian meanings and to ban the use of it to decorate homes. The U.K. and Germany were the main countries to keep the use of the greenery and here are the Christian meanings:

Holly



The prickly leaves represent the crown of thorns that Jesus wore when he was crucified. The berries are the drops of blood that were shed by Jesus because of the thorns.

In Scandinavia it is known as the Christ Thorn.

In pagan times, Holly was thought to be a male plant and Ivy a female plant. An old tradition from the Midlands of England says that whatever one brought into the house first over winter, tells you whether the man or woman of the house would rule that year!! But it was unlucky to bring either into a house before Christmas Eve.

Ivy



Ivy has to cling to something to support itself as it grows. This reminds us that we need to cling to God for support in our lives.

In Germany, it is traditional that Ivy is only used outside and a piece tied to the

outside of a Church was supposed to protect it from lightning!

Fir & Yew Trees



Fir and Yew trees are evergreen and so signify everlasting life with God.

Fir is also very commonly used for Christmas Trees.

Laurel



Laurel has been worn as a wreath on the head to symbolize success and victory for thousands of years.

It was given to the winners of events in the original Olympic Games. It symbolizes the victory of God over the Devil.

Rosemary



Rosemary was connected with the Virgin Mary (because it was thought to be Mary's favorite plant) and people thought that it could protect you from evil spirits. It is also sometimes called the friendship plant and it was the most common garnish put on the boar's head that rich people ate for Christmas dinner in the Middle Ages!

It is also known as the remembrance herb and was used at Christmas as this is the time that we remember the birth of Jesus.

In the late 1700's a special Christmas Rosemary Service was started in Ripon Cathedral School where a red apple, with a sprig of Rosemary in the top of it, was sold by the school boys to the members of the congregation for 2p, 4p or 6p (depending on the size of apple!).

When should you take the greenery down?

It is traditional to take down the decorations on the 12th Night (also known as Epiphany) on January 6th. But during the Middle Ages, greenery (including mistletoe) was often left hanging up until Candlemas (when Christians celebrate Jesus going to the Jewish Temple as a baby) in early February!

The Jesse tree: The Jesse tree tells about Christ's ancestry through symbols and relates Scripture to salvation history, progressing from creation to the birth of Christ. The tree can be made on a poster board with the symbols glued on, or on an actual tree. For further information read, *Advent and Christmas in a Catholic Home*. The Jesse tree reminds us of Jesus' Davidic ancestry (cf. Mt. 1:1).

St. Nicholas Day: The feast of St. Nicholas is on Dec. 6th. It is a highlight of the Advent season. Each child puts out a shoe the night before St. Nicholas Day in the hope that the kind bishop — with his miter, staff, and bag of gifts — will pay a visit. The current "Santa Claus" is modeled after St. Nicholas, but commercialism has tarnished the true story. Many families give gifts on both Dec. 6 and Christmas. Read about St. Nicholas in your favorite saints book.

The Christ candle: Any large white candle can be used for the Christ candle. The idea is to decorate it with symbols for Christ. Use old Christmas cards, sequins, holly, etc. The candle can be lit on Christmas Eve to show that the Light of the World has arrived. Then continue to light the Christ candle throughout the year at Sunday dinner to remind your family of our waiting for Christ, as well as celebrating His birth and Resurrection.

The Mary candle: Some families have the custom of decorating the Christ candle with a blue veil on December 8th, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. On this great

feast, others place a candle with a blue ribbon before a statue or picture of the Blessed Virgin, whose "yes" to God enabled our Lord's coming at Christmas. The candle is lit during meal times to serve as a delightful reminder of Mary's eager expectation of the "Light of the World." It can also serve as a reminder to each family member to keep their own light of grace burning as a preparation for Christ's coming.

St. Lucy cakes: The feast of St. Lucy, virgin and martyr, is on December 13th. This marks the opening of the Christmas season in Sweden. Her life story can be found in most saints books, as can the recipe for the traditional cakes. The symbolism is rich and her life story worthwhile reading.

The Nativity scene: This is the event in which the entire family shares — setting up the Christmas manger. Mary and Joseph should be far off traveling and their approach to Bethlehem can be adjusted daily. Older children can make life-size Nativity models, carve them, cut them out from cardboard, or set up pre-made figurines. The creative ideas are without limit. Make sure to place the Nativity scene where many can admire the children's efforts to give God glory. Move the manger to a focal point, add lights to the Nativity to be lighted on Christmas Eve, and anticipate together.

Christmas baking: There are many recipe books available to find great traditional Christmas baking ideas. The baking usually starts around December 20th. As Christmas approaches, the house will smell of baking and fresh wreaths. The glory of Christmas is at hand!

Blessing of the tree: More and more frequently families are blessing their Christmas trees. It is good to remind children that "the tree" relates to many aspects of our faith. For example, we are reminded that our first parents were not allowed to eat from one tree, and that Christ paid the great price for our redemption by hanging on a tree (cf. Acts 5:29-32).

There are many different stories which attempt to explain why we use a tree at Christmas. For instance, St. Boniface in the eighth century gave the balsam fir tree to the Druids in place of the oak tree, the symbol of their idol. He said, "The fir tree is the wood of peace, the sign of an endless life with its evergreen

branches. It points to heaven. It will never shelter deeds of blood, but rather be filled with loving gifts and rites of kindness.”

A family can also participate in Advent through daily Mass, the Liturgy of the Hours, or at least by following the weekday Mass readings at home, as the Church anticipates her Savior’s coming, and then His early life following Christmas. A family that participates together in Mass and other activities during the Advent and Christmas seasons will grow closer in Christ — “The Reason for the Season” — and give a great witness to friends and relatives.

Father, all-powerful God, your eternal Word took flesh on our earth when the Virgin Mary placed her life at the service of your plan. Lift our minds in watchful hope to hear the voice which announces His glory and open our minds to receive the Spirit who prepares us for His coming.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Existing Traditions or new traditions to share with my family:

