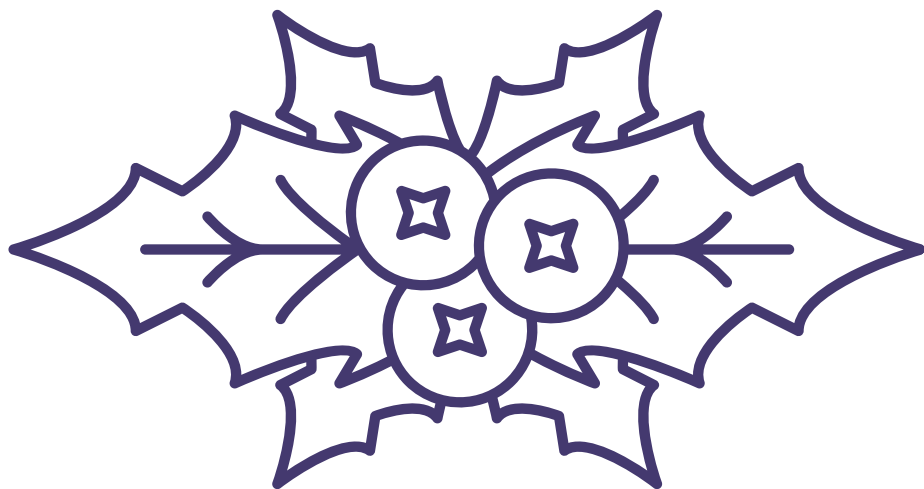


Advent Guidebook





December 3

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.



The circle shape of the wreath represents God's infinite and unending love. Evergreen represents everlasting life in Jesus Christ. The jagged leaves of holly represent the crown of thorns and the berries represent Christ's blood.



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. Some churches use blue candles rather than purple, which symbolizes hope, the night sky before the dawn, the sea before creation, and Mary.



The lighter pink candle represents a lightening of the serious and somber mood of Advent and a turn 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 to the middle 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**



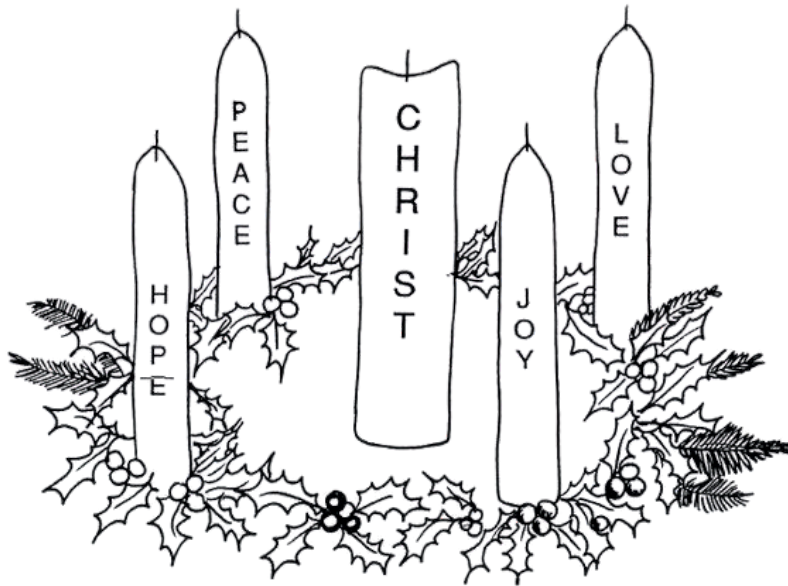
Directions:

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 altogether!

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 churches worldwide). 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: Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37

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.*

Hymn: Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

Prayers for weeks 2-4 can be found on December 10, 17, and 24.

Come Thou Long-Expected Jesus

1. Come, Thou long ex - spect - ed Je - sus, Born to set Thy peo - ple free.
2. Is - rael's Strength and Con - so - la - tion, Hope of all the earth Thou art;
3. Born Thy peo - ple to de - liv - er, Born a child and yet a King,
4. By Thine own e - ter - nal Spir - it Rule in all our hearts a - lone;

From our fears and sins re - lease us; Let us find our rest in Thee.
Dear De - sire of ev - 'ry na - tion, Joy of ev - 'ry long - ing heart!
Born to reign in us for - ev - er, Now Thy gra - cious king - dom bring.
By Thine all suf - fi - cient mer - it, Raise us to Thy glo - rious throne.

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It features a treble and bass staff for the voice, and a grand staff (treble and bass) for the piano accompaniment. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The melody is simple and hymn-like, with the piano accompaniment providing harmonic support through chords and moving lines.



December 4

Nativity: The Manger

Another way to live into the slow and steady preparation of Advent is by gradually laying out the nativity set week by week rather than all at once. For this approach, 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 Day.



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?

Hymn

Away in a Manger

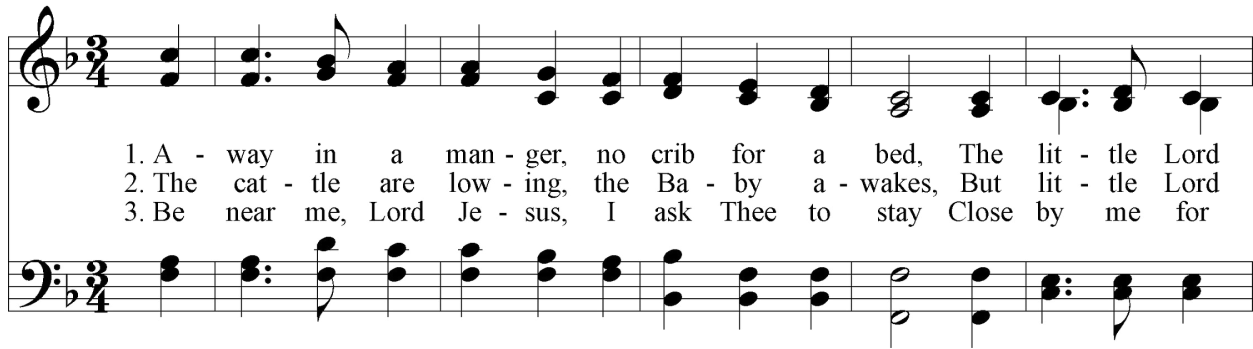
Recommended Reading

Christmas in the Manger by Nola Buck and Felicia Bond

This is the Stable by Cynthia Cotten

The Three Trees by Angela Elwell Hunt

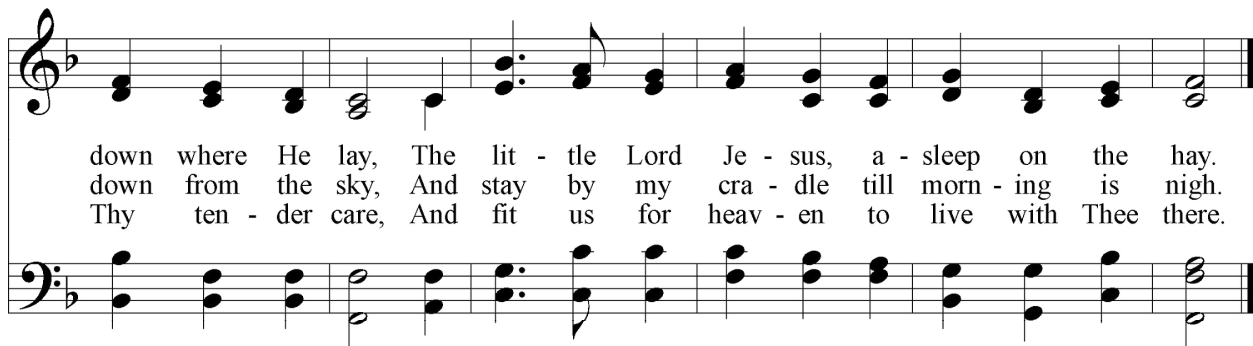
Away In A Manger



1. A - way in a man - ger, no crib for a bed, The lit - tle Lord
2. The cat - tle are low - ing, the Ba - by a - wakes, But lit - tle Lord
3. Be near me, Lord Je - sus, I ask Thee to stay Close by me for



Je - sus laid down His sweet head; The stars in the sky looked
Je - sus, no cry - ing He makes; I love Thee, Lord Je - sus! look
ev - er, and love me, I pray; Bless all the dear chil - dren in



down where He lay, The lit - tle Lord Je - sus, a - sleep on the hay.
down from the sky, And stay by my cra - dle till morn - ing is nigh.
Thy ten - der care, And fit us for heav - en to live with Thee there.



December 5

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.

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

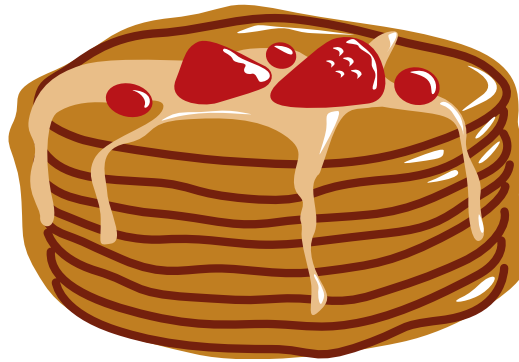
The Legend of St. Nicholas by Anselm Grun



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 dinner, 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 provided 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

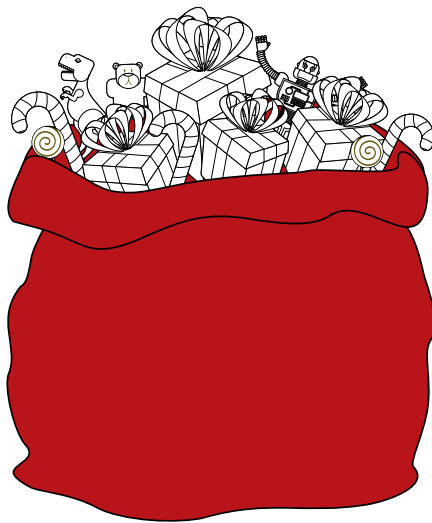
The True Story of Saint Nicholas by Foster Eich



December 7

Donating: 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 8

Dried Orange Ornaments

Oranges are a traditional Christmas fruit not simply because they are one of the few fruits that ripen 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 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 or peppermint tea 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.

Hymn

Silent Night

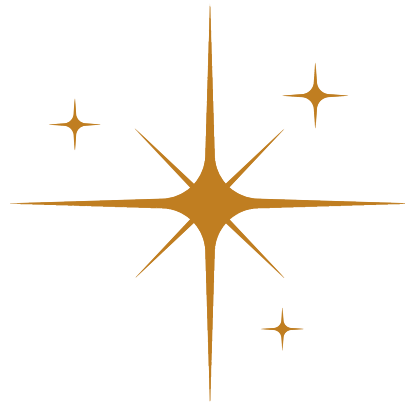
Prayer

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.*

Recommended Reading

Silent Night by Lara Hawthorne

Song the Stars by Sally Lloyd-Jones



Silent Night, Holy Night

1. Si - lent night, ho - ly night, All is calm, all is bright
2. Si - lent night, ho - ly night, Shep - herds quake at the sight.
3. Si - lent night, ho - ly night, Son of God, love's pure light
4. Si - lent night, ho - ly night, All is calm, all is bright

Round yon vir - gin moth - er and child. Ho - ly Inf - ant, so ten - der and mild,
Glo - ries stream from heav - en a - far, Heav'n - ly hosts sing al - le - lu - ia;
Ra - diant beams from Thy ho - ly face, With the dawn of re - deem - ing grace,
Round yon vir - gin moth - er and child. Ho - ly Inf - ant, so ten - der and mild,

Sleep in heav - en - ly peace, Sleep in heav - en - ly peace.
Christ the Sav - ior is born! Christ the Sav - ior is born!
Je - sus, Lord, at Thy birth, Je - sus, Lord, at Thy birth.
Sleep in heav - en - ly peace, Sleep in heav - en - ly peace.



December 10

Advent Wreath

On the second Sunday of Advent, we light the candle of peace, a reminder that the Light of the World is our Prince of Peace, and comes this season bringing peace of earth. As you go throughout your days during this second week of Advent, ask yourself "How can I be a peacemaker? How can I live in Christ's peace?"

Week Two: Peace

Candle: Two purple

Scripture: Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-15a ; Mark 1:1-8

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.*

Hymn: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel



O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

1. O come, O come, Em - man - u - el, and ran - som cap - tive
 2. O come, O come, thou Lord of might, who to thy tribes, on
 3. O come, thou rod of Jes - se, free thine own from Sa - tan's
 4. O come, thou Day - spring from on high, and cheer us by thy
 5. O come, thou Key of Da - vid, come and o - pen wide our

Is - ra - el, that mourns in lone - ly ex - ile here,
 Si - nai's height, in an - cient times didst give the law
 • tyr - an - ny; from depths of hell thy peo - ple save,
 draw - ing nigh; dis - perse the gloom - y clouds of night,
 heav'n - ly home; make safe the way that leads on high,

Refrain
 un - til the Son of God ap - pear.
 in cloud and maj - es - ty and awe.
 • and give them vic - t'ry o'er the grave. Re - joice! Re - joice!
 and death's dark shad - ows put to flight.
 and close the path to mis - er - y.

Em - man - u - el shall come to thee, O Is - ra - el.

Latin antiphons, 12th cent.
 Latin hymn, 1710
 Tr. John Mason Neale, 1851; alt. 1961

VENI EMMANUEL L.M.ref.
 Plainsong, 13th cent.
 Arr. Thomas Helmore, 1856



December 11

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. Notice there is no accompanying scripture reading because the Bible never mentions animals at the scene--only that Jesus was placed in a manger, so we assume there were animals present. Fun fact: Saint Francis, who is known for his love of animals, is credited with adding animals to the first nativity scene.

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 Christ's birth?

Hymn

O Little Town of Bethlehem

Recommended Reading

The Animals Christmas Carol by Helen Ward

The Friendly Beast by Tomie DePaola

Who is Coming to Our House? by Joseph Slate



O Little Town Of Bethlehem

1. O lit - tle town of Beth - le - hem, How still we see thee lie!
 2. For Christ is born of Mar - y, And gath - ered all a - bove,
 3. How si - lent - ly, how si - lent - ly The won - drous gift is giv'n!
 4. O ho - ly Child of Beth - le - hem! De - scend to us, we pray;

A - bove thy deep and dream - less sleep The si - lent stars go by.
 While mor - tals sleep, the an - gels keep Their watch of won - d'ring love.
 So God im - parts to hu - man hearts The bless - ings of His heav'n.
 Cast out our sin, and en - ter in; Be born in us to - day.

Yet in thy dark streets shin - eth The ev - er - last - ing Light;
 O morn - ing stars, to - geth - er, Pro - claim the ho - ly birth!
 No ear may hear His com - ing, But in this world of sin,
 We hear the heav'n - ly an - gels The great glad tid - ings tell;

The hopes and fears of all the years Are met in Thee to - night.
 And prais - es sing to God the King, And peace to men on earth.
 Where meek souls will re - ceive Him still The dear Christ en - ters in.
 O come to us, a - bide with us, Our Lord Em - ma - nu - el. A - men.



December 12

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 a simple and quiet activity, and that is just the point: Advent is a season of reflection, of quiet moments, and of simplifying our lives to create space for the coming of the King.

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 13

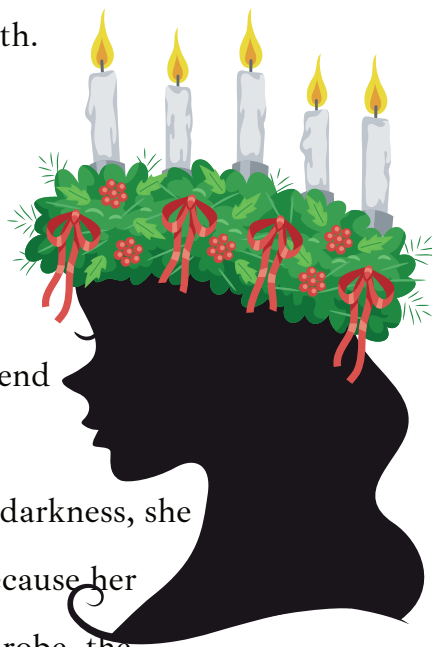
St. Lucia Day

Historical Background

St. Lucia, or Lucy, was born around 283 CE in Syracuse, Sicily. When she was a young woman, the Roman Emperor Diocletian launched a violent persecution of 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 took food and aid to the Christians living in the catacombs to escape their persecutors. Under the cover of darkness, she wore a wreath of candles on her head to light the way—because 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.

To celebrate St. Lucy Day, 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 in the 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.

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. The two raisins represent eyes, because St. Lucia is the patron saint of the blind. One story says her eyes were gauged out, but of course you needn't share that information with sensitive children.

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



Cinnamon Roll Wreath

Crown Recipe

A “Cinnamon Roll Wreath Crown” is another 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.

Ingredients

1 can of cinnamon rolls with icing

Birthday candles

Directions

Unroll cinnamon rolls and make three strands

Braid or twist the 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!

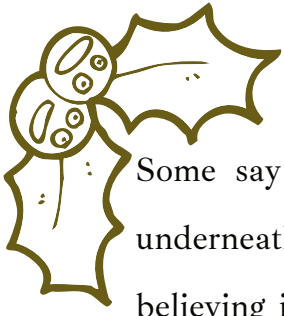
[Blow out candles]

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.



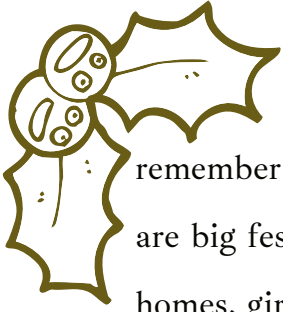
Some say that Lucy even brought food to the Christians hiding in dark tunnels underneath the ground. They hid there so no one would find them and punish them for believing in God. Lucy's hands were so full carrying food to them that she could not carry a candle or lantern to see her way through the dark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

Prayer

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

Lucia: Saint of Light by Katherine Bolger Hyde (this book speaks straightforwardly about her martyrdom and is recommended for ages 8+)



December 14

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?

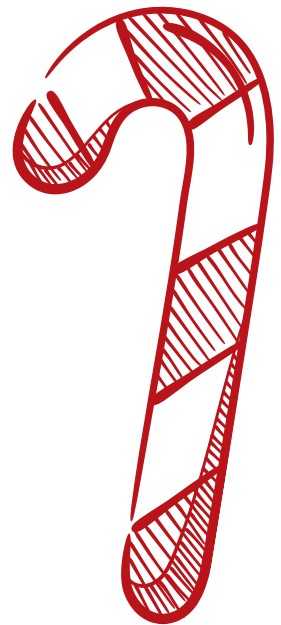


December 15

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 (think Jesus as the Good Shepherd) or bishop's crozier (think St. Nicholas) and in the liturgical colors of martyrdom (red) and Christmastide (white). Christians from evangelical or free-church backgrounds offer a different but equally theologically-significant 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 (gift cards provided on next page) or hang them on the tree.

Blessing of the Candy Canes


Gracious God, In the spirit of Saint Nicholas we 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. (by William Sadlier)

Recommended Reading


The Legend of the Candy Cane by Lori Walburg

A decorative border for a card, featuring a repeating pattern of red, white, and green diagonal stripes, resembling a candy cane.


*Wishing you joy
and peace!
Love,*

A decorative border for a card, featuring a repeating pattern of red, white, and green diagonal stripes, resembling a candy cane.

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Love,*



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" dressed as Mary and Joseph go door to door (planned in advance) in search of lodging. 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. Also give thanks for the people who

Mexican Hot Chocolate have cultivated this tradition and kept it alive.

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

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.

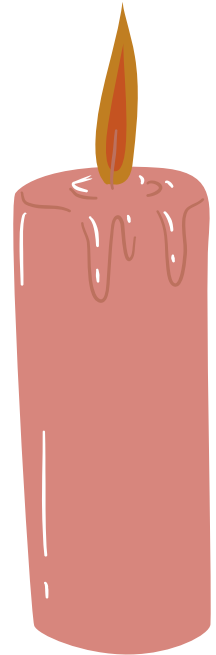
Week Three: Joy

Candle: Two purple and one pink

Scripture: Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; Psalm 126; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28

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.*

Hymn: Joy to the World



Joy To The World

1. Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth re - ceive her
 2. Joy to the earth, the Sav - ior reigns! Let men their songs em -
 3. No more let sins and sor - rows grow, Nor thorns in - fest the
 4. He rules the world with truth and grace, And makes the na - tions

King; Let ev - 'ry heart pre pare Him room, And
 ploy, While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains Re -
 ground; He comes to make His bless - ings flow Far
 prove The glo - ries of His right - eous - ness, And

heav'n and na - ture sing, And heav'n and na - ture sing,
 peat the sound - ing joy, Re - peat the sound - ing joy,
 as the curse is found, Far as the curse is found,
 won - ders of His love, And won - ders of His love,

(1. And heav'n and na - ture sing, And heav'n

And heav'n, and heav'n, and na - ture sing.
 Re - peat, re - peat, the sound - ing joy.
 Far as, far as, the curse is found.
 And won - ders, won - ders, of His love.

and na - ture sing,)



December 18

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





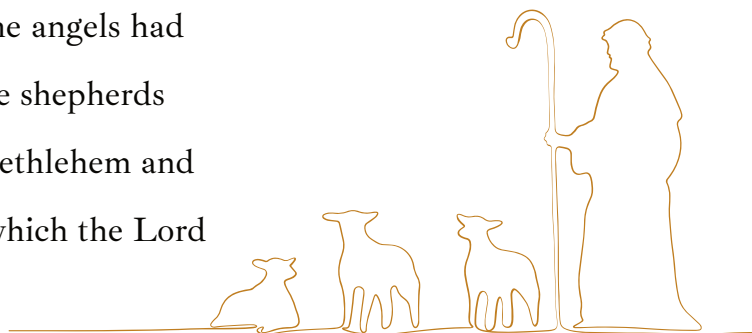
December 19

Nativity: The Shepherds & Angels

This week, we add the shepherds and angels 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?

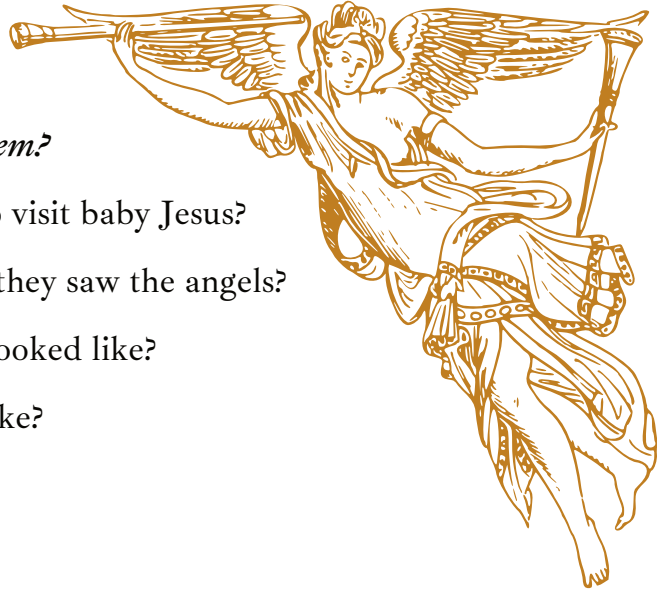
I wonder why the angels appeared to *them*?

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?

I wonder what "peace on earth" looks like?



Hymn

Angels We Have Heard on High

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. Enjoy Angel Food Cake for dessert.

Recommended Reading

The Crippled Lamb by Max Lucado

The Little Shepherd's Christmas by Carol Heyer

Angels We Have Heard On High

1. An - gels we have heard on high, Sweet - ly sing - ing o'er the plains:
2. Shep - herds, why this ju - bi - lee? Why your joy - ous strains pro - long?
3. Come to Beth - le - hem, and see Him whose birth the an - gels sing;
4. See Him in a man - ger laid, Whom the choirs of an - gels praise;

And the moun - tains in re - ply, Ech - o - ing their joy - ous strains.
What the glad some tid - ings be Which in spire your heav'n ly song?
Come, a - dore on bend - ed knee Christ the Lord, the new - born King.
Ma - ry, Jo - seph, lend your aid, While our hearts in love we raise?

Chorus

*Glo - - - ri - a in ex - cel - sis De - o!

Glo - - - ri - a in ex - cel - sis De - o!



December 20

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, bringing Joy to the world. Keep them in your car and give one away as you come across someone in need. Alternatively, take them to a local food pantry.

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 21

Christmas Caroling

It's difficult to think of a more joyous Advent activity than caroling, especially at a hospital or nursing home. If caroling won't work for your family, hold a family sing-along 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 22

Candlelit Dinner

This evening, eat dinner by the light of your Advent wreath. Start in total darkness, reminding your family of how dark the world is without Jesus. In the darkness, recite John 1:1. You'll need to memorize it since you'll be in sitting in darkness! Light the first candle and read John 1:2-3. Light the second candle and read John 1:4. Finally, light the third candle and read John 1:5. You might choose to pass the lighter and the Bible around the table and each person gets a turn.

Reflection

With all of the candles lit, eat dinner and discuss:

I wonder what the world was like in the beginning, before God made anything?

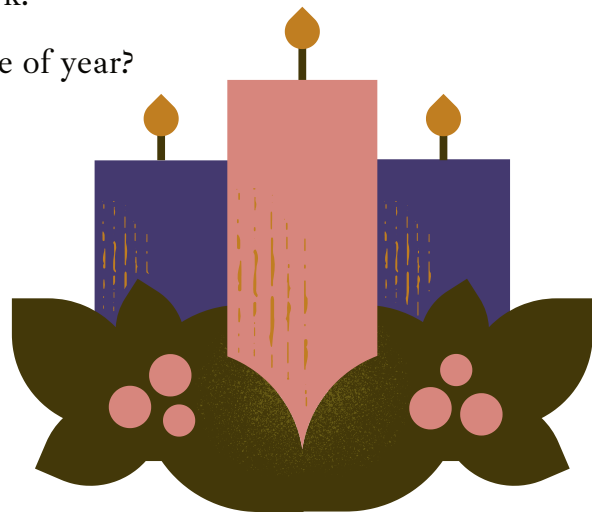
I wonder how you feel when you are in the dark?

In what ways does the world feel dark this time of year?

I wonder *who* was with God in the beginning?

I wonder how Jesus is the light *of* the world?

I wonder how we can be light *in* the world?



Recommended Reading

Song of the Stars by Sally Lloyd-Jones



December 23

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. When you finished, place all the cards in the middle and offer the following blessing:

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

The Legend of the Poinsettia by Tomie dePaola
The Story of Holy and Ivy by Rumer Godden



December 24

Advent Wreath

This year, Christmas Eve marks the beginning *and* the end of the fourth week of Advent. 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: 2 Sam 7:1-11, 16; Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; Rom 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

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.*

Hymn: O Holy Night

Nativity: Mary and Joseph

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?

Hymn

O Holy Night!

Recommended Reading

The Night Before Christmas by Clement Clarke Moore

The Story of Christmas by Pamela Dalton



O Holy Night!



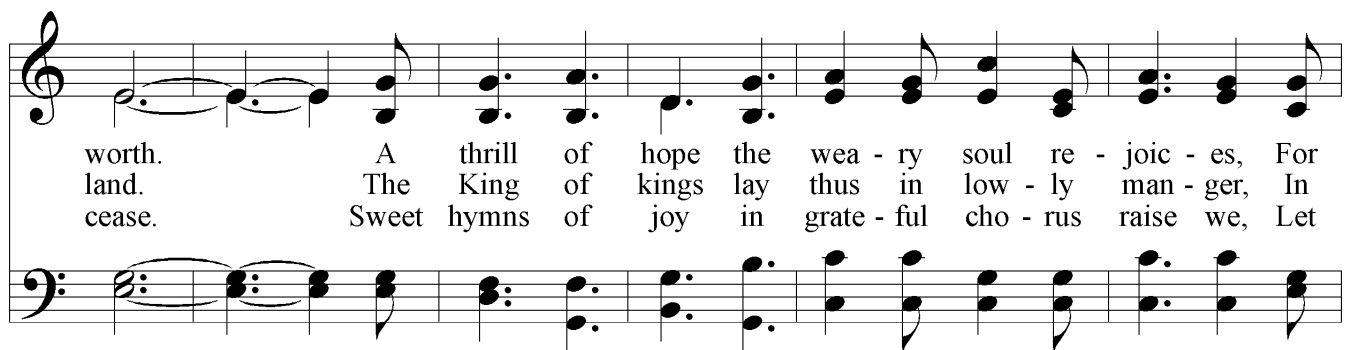
1. O ho - ly night! the stars are bright - ly shin - ing, It is the
 2. Led by the light of faith se - rene - ly beam - ing, With glow - ing
 3. Tru - ly He taught us to love one an - oth - er; His law is



night of the dear Sav - ior's birth; Long lay the world in
 hearts by His cra - dle we stand; So led by light of a
 love and His gos - pel is peace; Chains shall He break, for the



sin and er - ror pin - ing, Till He ap - peared and the soul felt its
 star sweet - ly gleam - ing, Here came the wise men from O - ri - ent
 slave is our broth - er, And in His name all op - pres - sion shall



worth. A thrill of hope the wea - ry soul re - joic - es, For
 land. The King of kings lay thus in low - ly man - ger, In
 cease. Sweet hymns of joy in grate - ful cho - rus raise we, Let



December 25

Christmas Day

Merry Christmas! God is with us. Before opening gifts, place baby Jesus in the manger 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



Hymn

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Hark The Herald Angels Sing

1. Hark! The her - ald an - gels sing, "Glo - ry to the new-born King!
 2. Mild, He lays His glo - ry by, Born that man no more may die;
 3. Hail the heav'n - born Prince of Peace! Hail the Son of Right-eous-ness!

Peace on earth, and mer - cy mild God and sin - ners rec - on - ciled!"
 Born to raise the sons of earth, Born to give them sec - ond birth.
 Light and life to all He brings, Ris'n with heal - ing in His wings.

Joy - ful, all ye na - tions rise; Join the tri - umph of the skies;
 Veiled in flesh the God - head see; Hail th'in - car - nate De - i - ty;
 Christ, by high - est heav'n a - dored, Christ, the ev - er - last - ing Lord:

With th'an - gel - ic host pro - claim, "Christ is born in Beth - le - hem!"
 Pleased as man with men to dwell, Je - sus, Our Im - man - u - el!
 Come, De - sire of na - tions, come, Fix in us Thy hum - ble home;

With th'an - gel - ic host pro - claim, "Christ is born in Beth - le - hem!"
 Pleased as man with men to dwell, Je - sus, Our Im - man - u - el!
 Come, De - sire of na - tions, come, Fix in us Thy hum - ble home.

Color the candle each week!

