



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**



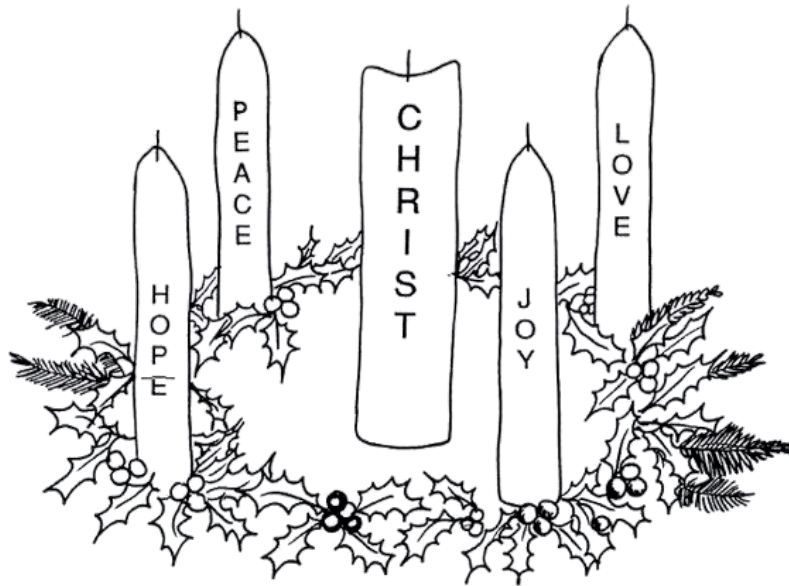
Directions:

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

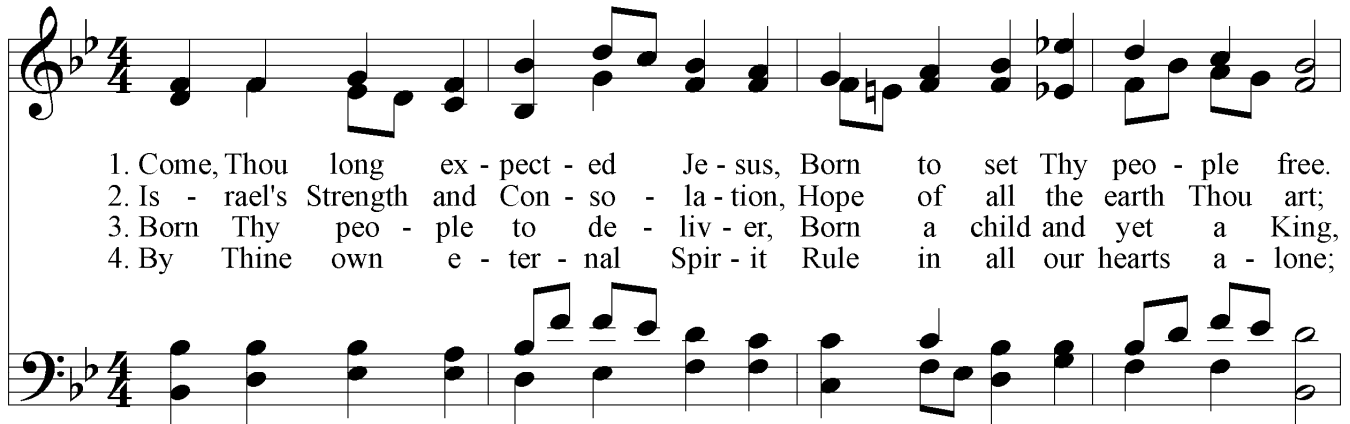
Scripture: Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37

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.



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

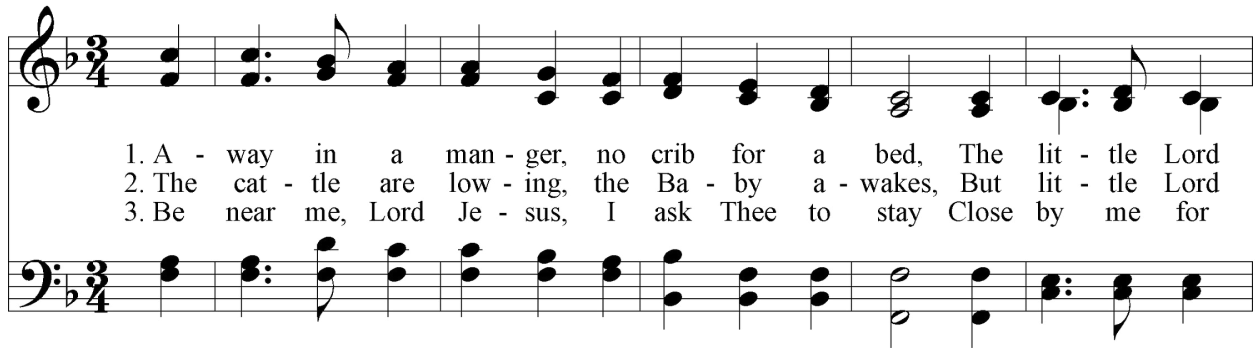
Recommended Reading

Christmas in the Manger by Nola Buck and Felicia Bond

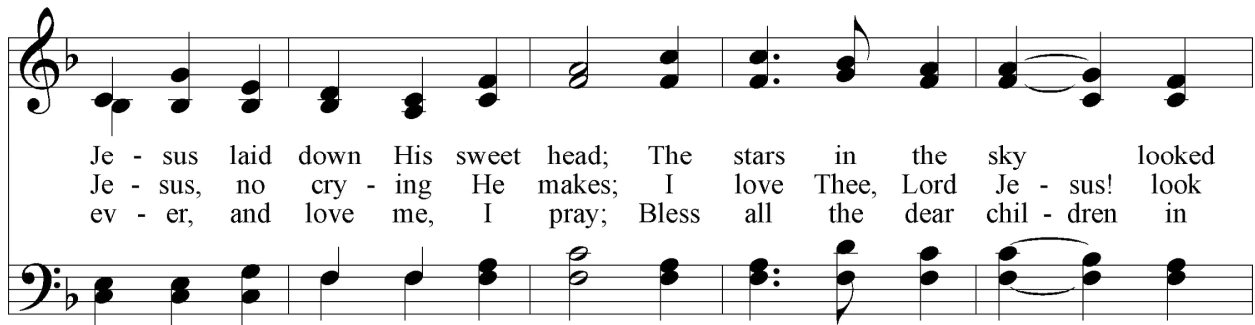
This is the Stable by Cynthia Cotten

The Three Trees by Angela Elwell Hunt

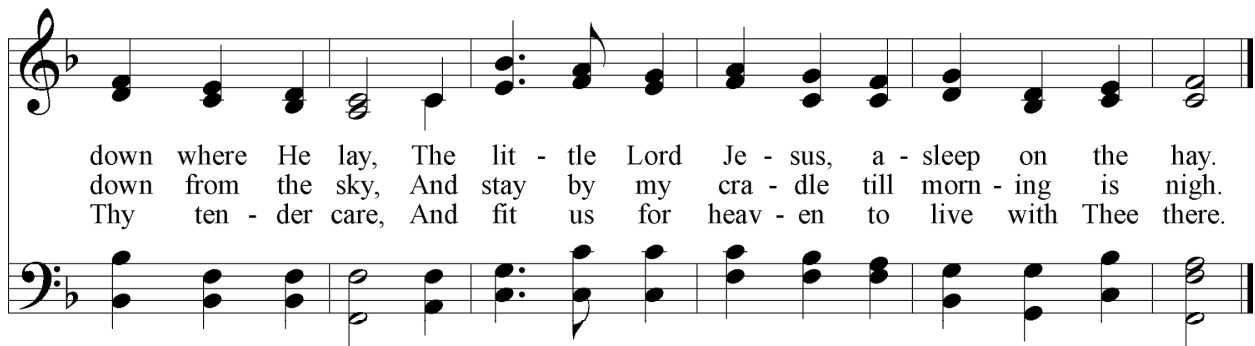
Away In A Manger



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

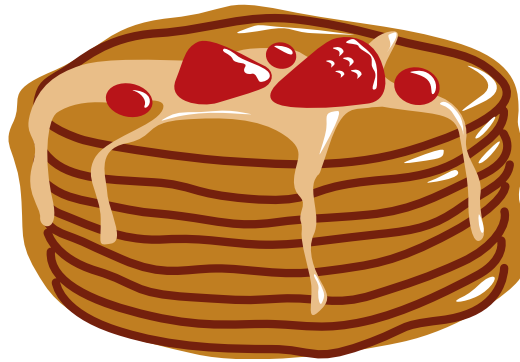
The Legend of St. Nicholas by Anselm Grun



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

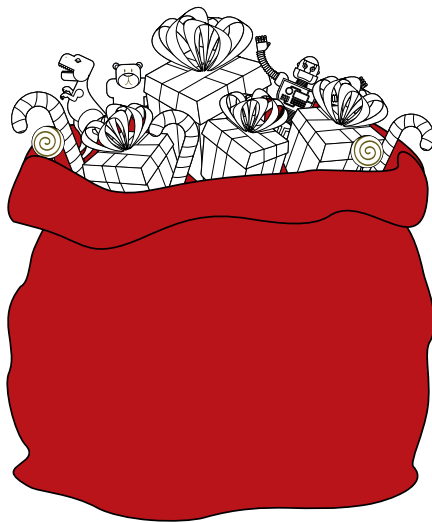
The True Story of Saint Nicholas by Foster Eich



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

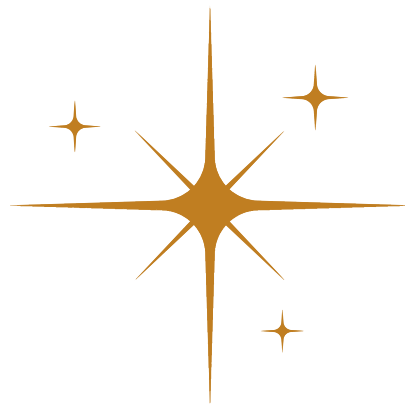
Prayer

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 you 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 you 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.