

## Advent is Almost Here

Advent is almost here. We know it's coming, but yet it seems to sneak up on us every year. Add the seemingly endless to-do lists, school and family activities and obligations and the true meaning of this time of anticipation and joy can get lost.

As parents of Catholic school students, there are ways to keep the season's religious traditions alive and to connect with our children and restore the hope and joy of the season.

Creighton University has a website called Praying Advent. It contains prayers, resources and activities to bring joy to others during this holy season: <https://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/Advent/>; and Busted Halo has tips on making Advent more spiritual than secular, <https://bustedhalo.com/ministry-resources/5-tips-spiritual-advent>.

While some Advent practices might at first seem to be very old style, remember that they are timeless ways to

carve out family time and echo what is taking place at school during this season of anticipation, prayer and hope.

**Advent Wreath** - You can buy Advent wreaths at Catholic gift shops, online and at some local nurseries. But consider making an Advent wreath as a family and commit to lighting it, even if it's just once a week perhaps at Sunday night dinner. Whatever time you set aside, there are books that can entertain and educate, such as *We Light the Candles*, a guidebook of prayers and songs. Tips on making an Advent wreath can be found here: <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/liturgicalyear/activities/view.cfm?id=954>

**Advent Calendar** - There are many Advent calendars to be found, with doors and flaps behind which wait trinkets and chocolates. But maybe making one together would be a great family project, <https://prayingincolor.com/advent-calendar-templates-a-countup-to-christmas>. You could add a step by taking



and sharing pictures with family who live far as the calendar progresses.

**Carols and Services** – In addition to your own parish and school services and activities, think about attending a worship service with a friend of a different religion. There will be differences in content from your traditional Catholic “Christmas season” services, but also note the similarities. Christmas carols can lift a sagging spirit or add to the joy of the season. If you don’t want to join in singing carols, then go listen as a family to a group of carolers.

**Acts of Joy and Kindnesses** – Local charities need help with Angel Trees, food and toy collections and visits to those who might be alone during the season. One way to get everyone involved at home is through the Cross Catholic Box of Joy: <https://crosscatholic.org/boxofjoy/>.

**Nativities** – Instead of waiting until you decorate your Christmas tree or Christmas Eve, start putting up your Nativity set on December 1. Begin with the structure, if you use one, and each night or weekly add the shepherds, angels, animals, Joseph and Mary, ending with the manger in place by Christmas Eve waiting for the Baby Jesus. Your children can add small toys to the group over the weeks. I’ve heard stories of G.I. Joe, Polly Pocket and Peppa Pig along with superheroes waiting at the manger by Christmas morning. Don’t worry if you don’t have a Nativity or Creche, a family trip to find one is another way to share the real spirit of the season or make a manger with the next activity in mind.

**Prepare the Manger** – One lovely tradition, shared by a religious education teacher, is to prepare the manger during Advent. Each evening, parents and kids place a piece of straw (or cut up strips of gold construction paper) into the manger for each secret act of kindness done during the day – a simple offering to Jesus to prepare our hearts by preparing the manger. The hardest part of this is NOT asking your kids what they did and gently reminding them they don’t need to tell you, but to talk to Jesus about it. By Christmas there should be a nice bed of straw on which to lay the infant Jesus.

**Pray as You Go App** – Maybe this spiritual resource from a group of Jesuits can open up your teens to short daily devotions, accessible via a website or free app. It features Ignatian Spirituality with the Examen, an Ignatian exercise, adapted for children, teens and young adults. Seasonal digital ‘retreats’ pop up for Lent and Advent. Simply lighting an Advent wreath and pressing play on the Examen would be a profound Advent practice, <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/pray-as-you-go/id865934048>.



There are books that can entertain and educate your family. Children of various ages can appreciate *The Advent Jesse Tree: Devotions for Children and Adults to Prepare for the Coming of the Christ Child at Christmas*. If your family enjoys crafts, you might even try *The Jesse Tree: A Family Craft for the Story of Advent*. Also consider *A Catholic Family Advent: Prayers and Activities*. And younger children might enjoy the book *Advent Storybook: 24 Stories to Share Before Christmas*, which tells a story about a little bear on his way to see Baby Jesus.

Even if your kids melt into a screaming match over who gets to light the Advent candle, you now have some simple ideas to focus your hearts and minds on the Baby Jesus... born unto us with tidings of peace on earth and goodwill to men.

Have a joyous Advent and Christmas season.

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