

Toddler's love waiting. They enjoy seeing something they yearn for and not being able to have it until the proper time, said no parent ever! Advent is designed intentionally for us to await the Christ. In Advent, we are yearning and preparing for the incarnation of God whom we can authentically encounter in the Eucharist and through our Catholic Community. Advent allows us to recognize and grow our inner toddler that despises waiting, yet we know it is worth it! My wife and I decided several years ago that besides pointing out the priests were wearing purple/rose and we like Christmas wreaths, we wanted to slow down and savor the beauty of this season. We did, like all millennial parents, started searching blogs and texting friends to see how Catholic families make Advent come to life. In America we celebrate Thanksgiving and then its Black Friday, which is the inaugural kick-off to Christmas. We have somehow skipped over Advent in a lifestyle of hurry.

Advent is over looked and yet so important, Advent allows us to be reminded, renewed, and re-aligned to who Christ is, what He means in my life, and how I can live my Catholic faith stronger this year than last year. Enough churchy speak, it's time to get practical, which is the only way young families know how to survive. Below you will find our top 10 ways my family hopes to enjoy Advent this year. We pray these mini-traditions will allow you to spend time as a family, enter into prayer as a family, and most of all prepare for the coming of Christ. Happy upcoming birthday Jesus, thank you a head of time for THE gift, which is YOU!

Top Ten Activities

Homemade Advent Wreaths: we have made them from paper plates, woven sticks, and even four candles simply placed on our lazy Susan. Get creative and make some advent wreaths to decorate your kitchen table.

Beef up your nativity (s): we literally have 5+ nativities scenes and we place them all around the house. One is made of plastic toy material so kids can use their imagination without worrying about breaking a family heirloom. If you do not have one, get one, if you have one, get more. Allow the center of your rooms to be the nativity scenes. We also remove baby Jesus from them (if baby Jesus is removable) and use that as a teachable moment for children and visitors. When they ask; "what happened to baby Jesus?". We can respond; "well well well, it is only Advent and Jesus has not been born and we are preparing.... saga continues" 😊

Empty Manger: each time a family member demonstrates an act of kindness, virtue or service they put a piece of straw in the manger to warm baby Jesus, when He arrives.

Decorate Over Time: we do not put up every single decoration in one fail swoop. We piece it out and do parts at a time. This allow us to keep unpacking and keep preparing our home for Christ, during Advent. You will notice when we decorate for Christmas, we often remove clutter, do a little more dusting, and organize our spaces so they are open for the décor. This is exactly what we are asking our hearts to do in Advent (keep journeying towards Christ by removing the clutter-reconciliation, dusting-service to others, and opening ourselves to the Lord-prayer).

St. Nicholas' Feast Day: each family approaches this a little different, but it was important for us to embrace the joy and generosity of our beloved Saint Nicholas. We make Dec. 6th a big deal at our house. We have a nice meal, read many books about the historical St. Nicholas, bring to life the goodness and generosity of St. Nick, and then load up our kiddo's shoes with fun stuff while they are sleeping (just like St. Nick did when helping the poor). Our kiddos make some St. Nicholas coloring sheets, cut them out, and tape a piece of chocolate to them. We then hand them out to friends, visitors, and anyone around! At the heart of this mini-tradition is the reality St. Nicholas loved Jesus, helped those in need, and was a model witness of the Gospel. Saint Nicholas, Bishop of Myra pray for us!

Journeying Wisemen: in theory they would start in your house far away and you would incrementally move them closer to your central nativity scene. We have been blessed to have a 2 or 3-year-old for the past number of Christmas' and thus our wisemen are constantly being knocked over, hidden, lost, and then found. In short, we move them around the house as they make their way to bring gifts and glad tidings.

Star of Bethlehem: instead of a rowdy elf that makes messes and instigates trouble around the house when all are asleep, we chose a different route. We have a Bethlehem star that we hide around the house each evening and the kids try to find each day. It is a simple reminder as kids and adults to look up, to see where we are in our journey of life in Christ.

Family Service: last year we sang some Christmas carols in a local retirement community with the parish MOMS group. We know service is important year-round, but in the true spirit of St. Nicholas, this is a great way for young families to be the hands and feet of Christ.

Jesse Tree: our Jesse tree is a couple of branches fastened to a cross-cut log with home-made ornaments. If you are not too familiar the Jesse tree, it reminds us of our salvation history that moves from the Biblical creation story until the birth of Christ. Jesse was King David's father and from that stump of Jesse we have the lineage and birth of Jesus Christ. It is a bit of leg work the first year making the stand and ornaments, but so worth it. Neat way to tell THE STORY.

Birthday Cake for Jesus: we realized a few years back we celebrate Jesus birthday on Christmas, but we had never made him a cake. Last couple of years we have made Jesus a cake, sang to him happy birthday, and thank Him for the blessings he bestows upon us.