

Family Traditions For Advent

Looking for ideas about how to celebrate Advent as a Catholic Family? Try adopting some of these family traditions.

- 1) If you struggle with the commitment to Sunday Mass, take this time to work on that above all else. The Holy Mass is **THE GREATEST** form of prayer we have. It is the centerpiece of our Catholic Faith. All Catholics are required (under pain of mortal sin) to attend Mass every Sunday. This is how we fulfill the Third Commandment: "Keep Holy the Sabbath Day."



- 2) Since the Holy Mass is the greatest prayer we have, try to attend at least one weekday Mass in addition to Sunday Mass for each week of Advent. Offer up the inconvenience of this as a prayer for someone in need.

- 3) Prepare your hearts for Jesus by attending the Parish Penance Service.

- 4) Set up an Advent Wreath in your home and, before supper each day, light the appropriate candles and say an Advent prayer.



- 5) Make a chain out of purple paper (the color of Advent) with one chain for each day of Advent. On each chain write some random act of kindness or spiritual activity. Each day, remove one of the chains and try to do the acts listed throughout the day at school, work, home, etc.

- 6) Make a simple "crib" for baby Jesus. You can make it out of popsicle sticks, or simply take a shoe box and cover it with wrapping paper. Buy a large bag of cotton balls and tell your children that every time they do a good deed they can put a cotton ball into the crib and make it a little softer for Baby Jesus. Then on Christmas, you can put Baby Jesus in the soft crib that they helped to make.

- 7) Teach your children short prayers to say during the day like "Come, Lord Jesus" or "Lord have mercy on us."

- 8) Fasting? A great way to prepare ourselves spiritually for Christmas is to do a fast. You can fast from food (like giving up dessert) or from something else (like TV). It's always a good idea to connect this with service (for example: giving up a certain food and giving that food to the poor).

- 9) Do the Advent version of Secret Santa, sometimes called "Advent Angels." Write down the names of each member of the family on separate pieces of paper. Each person selects a paper and spends Advent secretly doing acts of kindness and praying for the person on that paper. On Christmas Day, everyone reveals the name they received.



- 10) Read the Sunday readings as a family before you go to Sunday Mass. Discuss what the readings teach you about preparing for the coming of Christ.



- 11) Celebrate the feastday of St. Nicholas, the real Santa Claus! Check out www.stnicholascenter.org for stories, crafts, plays, activities, and more.



Family Traditions for Christmas

Looking for ideas about how to celebrate Advent as a Catholic Family? Try adopting some of these family traditions.

- 1) With all the secularization in our culture, you definitely want to make sure that your children understand that Christmas is the celebration of the birth of Jesus. It's important that all our Christmas traditions and activities point to this central mystery of the holiday. A great way to get grounded in this is to attend Midnight Mass as a family on Christmas Eve. This has become a very beloved tradition for so many Catholics. It's also a great idea to attend Mass as a family on the Feast of the Holy Family (the Sunday after Christmas).



- 2) Set up a Nativity set prominently in your home to remind you and your family of the purpose of Christmas. (Some families don't put baby Jesus in the manger until Christmas. Before they open their presents they first have one of the children put baby Jesus in the manger while they sing Happy Birthday to Jesus or say a prayer together.)



- 3) Make a birthday cake for Jesus and eat it together on Christmas day.

- 4) Make your Christmas Tree a symbol of Christ and the true meaning of Christmas. Decorate it with Christian ornaments and symbols. Read a passage from the Bible and say a prayer when the Tree is ready. (As a way to focus on Advent, some people won't put up their tree until Christmas Eve. Others put up the tree early but don't turn the lights on until Christmas Eve.)



- 5) Teach your children the true meaning of Christmas by reading about the first Christmas from the Bible. Read as a family part or all of the first two chapters of Gospels of Matthew and/or Luke.



- 6) Go Christmas caroling to shut-ins from Church. Ask the Church secretary for a list of shut-ins, and share the Christmas spirit with them. Have your children make home-made Christmas cards for an extra-special touch. (Be sure to include lots of religious carols.)

- 7) Teach your children about the joy of giving, especially when they receive nothing in return except the grace of God and the happiness in knowing that they helped someone. A few ideas: A) Shop for toys to donate to a shelter for women and children, or to some other agency that works with the poor, and to deliver them as a family to the agency. B) Place items for a traditional Christmas dinner in a large laundry basket and deliver the basket to an agency in your area that will bring it to a family who would not have that kind of dinner. C) Purchase several miniature Christmas Trees, decorate them and bring them to residents of nursing homes.

- 8) To help foster gratitude amongst children, some families do this: As each person open their gifts, they each have to say why they are thankful for the person who gave them the gift. Doing this helps them be appreciative of the people in their lives.



- 9) For younger children, have them color pictures that tell the story of Christ's birth. See www.stmarysdre.info/advent for links to websites with free coloring pages.

- 10) Don't buy in to the politically correct mentality that is trying to completely secularize Christmas and take away all its religious meaning. Tell people in public: "Merry Christmas!" Send out religious Christmas cards. Thank stores and companies when they aren't afraid to use the word Christmas. Help keep Christ in Christmas!