“Do you hear what I hear?” The words of the popular Christmas song ring in our ears this holiday season, but perhaps we can view them in a different light. Do you hear what the angels are saying? Are you able to slow down and take to heart the great gift coming to us this Christmas and at the end of time? Yes, it is Christ Our Lord! But, are we listening?

I myself have made every excuse at times to not do the special devotions this time of year like lighting the Advent wreath each evening, or completing the Jesse tree with my children. It’s so tempting to rush through the nighttime routine, and treat this season like any other. But the Church is inviting us to make this time of the year truly special and unique! Not with holiday sales, or extra presents under the tree, but with a renewed and greater focus on what this season is truly about. The Church has built in an antidote to the hustle and bustle of the holiday season. That antidote is Advent.

How can we make the most of Advent? How can we make it something our families will never forget, and something they look forward to each year? Hear are some suggestions for you and your loved ones:

**#1: Participate in an Advent Mission or Special Event.** If you’ve never gone to a parish mission before, make this the year a new habit begins. It’s a special time of prayer to help you refocus. Check the local bulletins in your area for what is planned. Our Lady of Sorrows in Victoria has a helpful list of upcoming events on their website https://olsvictoria.org, St. Philip’s in El Campo has a mission this coming Monday listed on
their website (scroll near bottom): https://stphilipapostle.org, and Holy Cross in Bay City has a penance service coming up to name a few: https://d2y1pz2y630308.cloudfront.net/2447/bulletins/20211128.pdf. Make this a time of year where you seek out ways to go deeper in faith along with your family.

#2: Do the special devotions, even if you’ve never done them before! By the time this newsletter is published, we’ll be almost through the first week of Advent. Didn’t make an Advent Wreath? Don’t worry, it’s not too late! Never made a Jesse Tree? Don’t worry, it’s not too late! These devotions are simple, fun, and something the whole family can do. You can even find most supplies at the Dollar Tree. Here’s a short and simple video explaining Advent candles: https://youtu.be/QSwUSYWz3VI. Here’s another explaining the Jesse Tree: https://youtu.be/J2l2Qv5DdgY

#3: WAIT to light up the Christmas Tree! Okay, okay...I know this one may be tough, but it’s just a suggestion. Given how we wait during Advent for the Light of the World, Christ Himself, to come, why not wait to light up your tree? At first, your kids may be confused, but what a neat way to explain the coming of Jesus to your children. They will certainly remember that your house waited to light up the tree. In addition to waiting to light up the tree, maybe you can wait until Christmas Day to put up lights around your house? Or even put out the presents? And what’s another great part about waiting? We get to celebrate the Christmas season for SIXTEEN days as Catholics, from Christmas Day through The Baptism of the Lord on January 9. So, it’s definitely worth the wait :).

I pray that you and your loved ones may experience an Advent, and therefore Christmas season, unlike any other this year! If you have any other ideas or suggestions on ways families can more greatly embrace these special seasons, please send them my way! I’d love to share them with others. God bless!

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All for the Sacred and Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, all through the Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart of Mary, all in union with St. Joseph. Amen.