

A Guide to Advent

Trinity Church

What is Advent?¹

The Christian year begins with Advent. The season of Advent (from a Latin root meaning “coming” or “arrival”) runs through the four Sundays before Christmas. Advent is a time of preparation for the coming of Christ in to the world, which traditionally both looks back to the first coming of Christ and also looks forward to the second coming or return of Christ.

These four weeks, like the six of Lent which formed a model for Advent as a liturgical device, are traditionally associated with spiritual disciplines of repentance, fasting and waiting and are characterized by attitudes of longing and hope.

The movement of Advent is also a rich journey through the Bible. Each of the weeks has come to have strong associations with particular readings in which Christians trace the promise of the Messiah through the Hebrew Scriptures and are introduced to significant characters in the impending drama of the Christmas story. During Advent we wait with and through these characters and we hear their stories as witness. Elizabeth and Zechariah, John the Baptist, Mary and Joseph. The Taize book of common prayer says about Advent: “Advent is a time of waiting in contemplation for the presence of Christ within us; we are called to bear Christ, to live Christ for others. We along with the witnesses are invited to live that same spirit of poverty, of humility and joy.” This suggests an understanding of waiting, above all, with Mary; just as Christ is forming in her body, so we reflect on Christ being formed in our lives, coming again to us, to be born again in us.

What can I do to observe Advent?

There are no hard and fast rules to keeping Advent. Every person and family prepares for Christmas in their own way. However, there are tools and resources (like this guide) that can assist us. Some people use an Advent calendar and/or an Advent wreath with candles. Guides like this one are helpful for families to use together. There are also published resources that offer brief thoughts and challenges for each day of Advent. For instance, there is a series of books called “Advent and Christmas Wisdom” that feature various theologians like Henri J. M. Nouwen, St. Francis of Assisi, G.K. Chesterton and others.

About this Guide:

This guide was created for families with children, but could also be used by individuals, couples, or with a Trinity Group. If used with children, you are encouraged to have your child participate by reading, praying or (if they are old enough) lighting the candles.

A Few Ideas to Get You Started:

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¹ This page contains excerpts from “Alternative Worship” by Jonny Baker and Doug Gay

-Advent Wreath / Readings-

Where can I get an Advent Wreath and candles?

Craft stores like Michael's have pre-assembled wreaths and candles for Advent, or you can create your own. Check out Pinterest for some great ideas! A wreath and 5 candles are all that is needed.

First Sunday of Advent - Prophet Candle - HOPE

Say: Long ago, the prophet Isaiah spoke these words of promise about Jesus to God's people: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6

Say: Long before Jesus was born, God promised it would be so. We joyfully celebrate Christmas because Christmas is when God gave the world his own Son. Jesus was the very first Christmas gift. And we want to make room for Jesus in our hearts.

Poem (optional):

Christ is the world's light, he and none other;
Born in our darkness, he became our brother.
If we have seen him, we have seen the Father:
Glory to God on high.

Light the first candle and say:

This is the prophet candle. Prophets are those who have told us how to find God. They are pointing us to Bethlehem. As we light this first Advent candle, we hope for the fuller brightness that is to come in the days ahead that lead us to Christmas. We want it to remind us to watch for what God will give us, and to see what God has already given.

Pause for a minute or two of silence - a time to think quietly as we watch the candle burning.

Read: Mark 1:1-8

Prayer: God of the prophets: in the wilderness of Jordan you sent a messenger to prepare people's hearts for the coming of your Son. Help us to hear the good news, to be truly sorry for our sins, and to be ready to welcome the Lord, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sing (optional):

Joy to the world! The Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare him room,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven and nature sing,
And heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

Say: Each Sunday we'll light one more candle so that the week before Christmas all four candles will be lighted. As we talk about the meaning of the candle, we'll read what God says in the Bible about that meaning.

Second Sunday of Advent - Bethlehem Candle - FAITH

(Re-light the first candle before continuing).

Say: This week we light two candles on the Advent wreath. The first candle symbolizes the prophets and reminds us of the hope that Jesus brings. This week we will light the Bethlehem candle, which symbolizes faith. One of the Old Testament prophets, Micah, said these words hundreds of years before Jesus came: "But you, Bethlehem, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." Micah 5:2

Say: The prophet, Micah, was speaking about the location of Jesus' birth: Bethlehem. When we think about Bethlehem, we think about the very long and difficult journey that Mary and Joseph had to take to get to Bethlehem from their hometown of Nazareth.

Read: Luke 2:4-5 "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."

Say: Though it was a long and difficult journey, Mary and Joseph had faith that God would get them to Bethlehem safely. Faith is trusting God no matter what.

Light the second candle and say: We light this candle to remind us of how the way was prepared for Mary and Joseph on their journey and of the great faith they had in God. We pray that as this Advent light increases, our own readiness may also increase.

Prayer: Christ Jesus, you make God known to us, and you make us known to God. You can make the darkness and the despair of our lives shine like day. You are the light of the world, the dawning of a new day. Give us faith to follow you. Live within us, we pray. Amen.

Pause for a minute or two of silence - a time to think quietly as we watch the candles burning.

Sing (optional):

O little town of Bethlehem
How still we see thee lie
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight

Third Sunday of Advent - Shepherd's Candle - JOY

(Re-light the first and second candles before continuing).

Say: This week we light three candles on the Advent wreath. The first candle symbolizes the prophets and reminds us of the hope that Jesus brings. The second candle is the Bethlehem candle, which symbolizes faith. This week we will light the Shepherd's candle, which symbolizes joy. Last week, we read from the gospel of Luke how the angels announced that Jesus, God's great gift of love, had been born.

Angels visited shepherds to announce the birth of Jesus. In the gospel of Luke it says, "When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.' So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told."

Light the third candle and say: Our Advent wreath is growing brighter and with it the hope that we may see clearly all that is made known to us in the coming of Jesus.

Pause for a minute or two of silence - a time to think quietly as we watch the candles burning.

Poem (optional):

A cry in the night, and a child is born,
A child in a stable, there isn't any room.
A cry in the night, and God has made
Our homelessness his home.

Prayer: As you come in the stillness of night, great God, enter our lives this night and bring us your joy. Overcome darkness with the light of Christ's presence, so that we may clearly see the way to walk, the truth to speak, and the life to live for him, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Song (optional):

The First Noel, the Angels did say
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay
In fields where they lay keeping their sheep
On a cold winter's night that was so deep.
Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel
Born is the King of Israel!

Fourth Sunday of Advent -Angel's Candle- LOVE

(Re-light the first, second and third candles before continuing).

Say: This week we light four candles on the Advent wreath. The first candle symbolizes the prophets and reminds us of the hope that Jesus brings. The second candle is the Bethlehem candle, which symbolizes faith. Last week we will light the Shepherd's candle, which symbolizes joy. Today, we light the Angel's candle, which symbolizes love.

In the gospel of Luke, it says, "And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.' Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.'"

The angels announced the good news of a Savior—because God loves us, God sent Jesus into the world! "God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son. Anyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life. God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world. He sent his Son to save the world through him." John 3:16-17

Light the fourth candle and say: Let us enjoy the light of the angel's candle of love.

Pause for a minute or two of silence - a time to think quietly as we watch the candles burning.

Poem (optional):

Clear shining light,
Your face lights up our way;
Light of the world,
Dawn on our darkened day.
Hope of the world,
You come again to reign;
King of the earth,
Walk in our streets again.

Prayer: Almighty God, each day brings us closer to the day of the Advent of your Son, Jesus Christ. He is your gift to us, the fulfillment of your promises. Your Spirit helps us now to pray and to watch for his coming. Praise to you, Father, Son, and Spirit, for the promise of Advent, and the love that Jesus brings us on Christmas.

Sing (optional):

Angels we have heard on high
Sweetly singing o'er the plains,
And the mountains in reply

Echoing their joyous strains
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

Christmas Eve or Christmas Day - The Christ Candle

(Re-light the first, second, third and fourth candles before continuing).

Say: Today we light all of the candles on the Advent wreath. We've spent the past four weeks preparing our hearts for Jesus' birthday and the day has finally come. This last candle is called the Christ candle and it reminds us of Jesus' birth into the world.

Read: Luke 2:1-20

Prayer: O God, we thank you for the wonderful gift of Jesus. Help us, like Mary, to think deeply about what Jesus' coming means for us, and like the shepherds, to sing praises of joy because he has come into our world. Amen.

Light the Christ candle and say: Today, Jesus is born! He is the one we have been waiting for. As we light this final candle, we hope that we may share in bringing his light into the lives of those around us.

Pause for a minute or two of silence – enjoy the brightness of the five candles.

Sing (optional):

O Come All Ye Faithful
Joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem.
Come and behold Him,
Born the King of Angels;
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord.

Say: "The virgin is going to have a baby. She will give birth to a son. And he will be called 'Immanuel.' The name Immanuel means 'God with us.'" Matthew 1:23

What a gift God has given us! Jesus is God with us. When Jesus enters our lives, not only do we receive God's gift, but we can become gift givers too! We give the gift of Jesus to the world when we share God's message, love, compassion, and kindness.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, help us to spread light and joy and love in the world by the way we live, the things we do and the words we say. Be with us always. Amen.

-The Jesse Tree-

The tradition of the Jesse Tree is rich and engaging for participants of all ages. The Jesse Tree is named after Jesse, the father of David, the first royal branch in the tree of the Messiah to come. It is through the lineage of David that God promised a King that would reign forever—Jesus. Isaiah 11:1 says, “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.” The Jesse Tree’s daily devotions start in Genesis and journey to the birth of Jesus.

Items you’ll need:

-**Tree of some sort** (this may be a silhouette of a tree sewn, painted, etc and hung on a wall, fridge or door. Or, you can grab a tree branch from your yard, prop it up or get really serious and cement it into a bucket.)

-**Twine, string, or yarn** to tie ornaments to your tree (or tape them up if that works better for your chosen tree)

-**Ornaments and devotional guide** (there are various places devotions and patterns may be obtained, but you’ll want to make sure your ornaments relate with your devotion for the day. Here are a couple recommended resources: aholyexperience.com (full of other great ideas—check out “free tools”; for specific download for Advent Readings: <http://www.aholyexperience.com/thegreatestchristmas/#gc-title-fgtc>) or <https://www.rca.org/sslpage.aspx?pid=1628>. You can also check out kits on Etsy.com or make your own. Another new resource by Ann Voskamp, specifically for families with older children, came out in 2014: *Unwrapping the Greatest Gift* (available on Amazon).

Don’t forget, you can repurpose your tree for Lent as well—the Resurrection Tree (See Trinity’s Guide to Lent).

-A Simple and Creative Spin on the Advent Calendar-

An Advent calendar is a special way to mark this passing of time and can be a practical tool to teach little ones (and big ones!) about the Christmas story and the true 'reason for the season'. This calendar usually counts down the 24 days before December 25th, but can be adjusted by a day to begin December 1st if wanted. Each morning from December 1st, at devotional time open one envelope that first focuses on giving or sharing, and then sometimes has an activity or craft to be completed that day. You can opt for mostly quick & easy ideas and other days more time or effort requiring activities.

Items you'll need:

- 24 or 25 envelopes of any color or size
- same number of index cards or cardstock pieces to fit envelopes
- clothespins (mini ones can be found inexpensively at crafting stores)
- any type of sturdy string, rope or way to hang envelopes
- number stickers if desired, or simply write in pen or marker

Used as a teaching tool, ideas may focus on giving generously of ourselves just as Christ did—helping children to know that giving doesn't always require purchasing an item, but could be something we already have.

Along the way, you can incorporate various family traditions such as reading the Christmas story or making gingerbread cookies as activities for fun. On each index card, you can include both a giving focus and an activity or craft, or simply one or the other; whatever is best and easiest for you.

Some ideas ::

- ~ pray for those who may feel alone this season, may Jesus be near to them*
 - ~give the gift of a smile*
 - ~give the gift of a hug*
- ~write notes of appreciation (or draw a picture) for someone in our family or church*
 - ~share a special something with a family member*
- ~share the gift of a Christmas carol with someone—over the phone, at home or somewhere else*
- ~make a treat for those in our community who serve us; example: the lady who delivers our mail, our librarians, those who service our cars*
- ~chose items for families around the world through the gift catalogs of your favorite organizations*
 - ~ snuggle up in pjs and read Christmas books together*
 - ~ give the gift of laughter by telling jokes*
 - ~ paint wooden ornaments to give to family, friends or teachers*
 - ~ go out to eat as a family and give an extra tip to our waitress or waiter*
 - ~ give the gift of our time by making a 'coupon' to serve another*
- ~ give a gift to the birds outdoors by making pinecone birdfeeders for the winter ahead*
 - ~ surprise a neighbor with flowers on their doorstep*
 - ~ make lots of gingerbread cookies for ourselves and to share*
 - ~ read and act out the Christmas story from Luke 2*

The list can go on, be creative! The key is to keep it practical, especially if there are little ones involved, and to included ideas that perhaps your family is already doing and a few you would like to try.

Advent is a time of celebration, not stress. Keep it simple and enjoy! Taken from the Frugal Granola blog post at <http://frugalgranola.com/2010/11/simple-advent-envelope-calendar/>

-Throwing a Birthday Party for Jesus-

Throwing a birthday party for Jesus is an idea that works particularly well for Trinity Groups—especially those with young children. But, if your group doesn't have kids, don't let that stop you! There are some ideas below, but be creative and have fun.

During the planning of the party, identify a need to which your group can respond (a mission organization, an individual, a family, etc.). Generate a list of their needs and put it into the form of a birthday wish list.

Mail out birthday party invitations and be sure to include the wish list in the invitation.

Encourage kids to be a part of selecting and wrapping the gifts. Discuss with your kids what Jesus had to say (in Matthew 25) about giving to the poor and oppressed and how God sees it as giving to Him.

At the party:

- Sing Christmas songs!
- Read the Christmas story and have everyone--kids and adults (adults make excellent stable animals)—act out the different characters—in costume, if you'd like!
- Have a birthday cake prepared. Sing happy birthday to Jesus and blow out the candles on the cake.
- Bring out the birthday presents for Jesus and talk again about the wonderful gift that God gave to us when he sent Jesus and how the gifts we are giving are just one very small way to show God our love for Him and for others.

Additional ideas:

- Go caroling at a nursing home together.
- Bake cookies together and save some for some people for whom you'd like to show some love (neighbor, co-worker, etc.)
- Find a Jesus' birthday themed craft that you can do together.

-Illustrated Advent-

Check out Illustrated Children's Ministry for additional resources that are coloring based:

www.illustratedchildrensministry.com. This is a wonderful resource for families or people who really love to color.