# Little Way Advent

2026 Advent Devotional
Guide for Families

# Little Way Chapel

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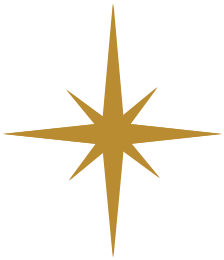
# *How to use this guide*

Inside these pages you'll find a user-friendly companion to prepare your heart and home for the birth of Christ. Each day offers a Scripture reading, a short teaching moment, "wondering" questions for open-ended family reflection, and a guided activity to put your faith in action. Some activities take five minutes and require no preparation, while others are more labor-intensive and must be planned ahead of time. I suggest looking at the week ahead on Saturday and planning for what you will need in terms of materials and time. Remember, these are merely suggestions—do not be overwhelmed! It is up to you to decide what will work for your family. Advent is about slowly and deliberately getting ready for the birth of Christ – let this guide help rather than hinder your family to enter deeply into the spirit of the season.

If you enjoy the daily surprise and anticipation of Advent calendars, the daily activities are also formatted into strips that can be cut out and inserted in the pockets of a traditional Advent calendar. If you do not have one, the strips can also be made into a paper chain so that one link may be torn off each day. There are several blank strips in case you would like to switch out your own activity for a particular day.

This Advent Guide is meant to be savored and enjoyed. It is not meant to be one more thing on your to-do list! Most of all, it is meant to help you prepare your heart and home for the birth of our Savior. Wishing you a blessed Advent!

NOVEMBER 29



# *Advent Week I:*
# *Jesus is our hope.*

*"So let us enter Advent in hope, even hope against hope. Let us see visions of love and peace and justice. Let us affirm with humility, with joy, with faith, with courage: Jesus Christ — the life of the world." -Daniel Berrigan, Testimony: The Word Made Fresh*

GATHER: Bible, Advent candles, lighter, Advent wreath ring, greenery (Christmas tree trimmings work great), garden, shears

READ: 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 (additional Advent Wreath readings for this week include Jeremiah 33:14-16; Psalm 25:1-10; Luke 21:25-30).

TEACH: Today is the first day of a new Church Year. The world marks time by days and weeks and months, but the Church marks time by colors and symbols and seasons, and most importantly: Jesus. We begin the year with Jesus in Mary's womb during Advent and follow him all the way through his birth at Christmas, his life during Ordinary Time, his death during Lent, his resurrection at Easter. Today is the first day of Advent, when Jesus is just a tiny life inside of Mary's womb. Each day of Advent brings us closer and closer to his birth: Christmas.

The Advent wreath is a tool that helps us mark the time during Advent. Each week we light a new candle, and each of these candles has a name. This week, we light the candle of hope. Sometimes the world can feel like a sad and scary place. During Advent, we remember not only how Jesus came into our world long ago as a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths, but we also look forward with hope to the promise that Jesus will come again. And when he does, he will wipe every tear from our eyes, and will put to right all that is wrong. The Bible tells us that hope is like an anchor (Heb. 6:19). When we feel we are getting swept away by crashing waves, our hope in Jesus anchors us and keeps us steady. Jesus is our hope.

# NOVEMBER 29

WONDER: I wonder if you have ever felt hopeful about something? I wonder if you have ever found it hard to be hopeful? I wonder what you hope Jesus will do in your life this Advent season?

DO: Make your Advent wreath and light one purple candle on the Advent wreath. Advent wreath instructions can be found in the Appendix.

SING: "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus"

PRAY

*God of hope, we light this candle as we prepare for the coming of your Son. Awaken our hearts to you this Advent season so that when Christ arrives, we are ready to receive him with all our hearts, all our minds, and all our strength. Amen.*

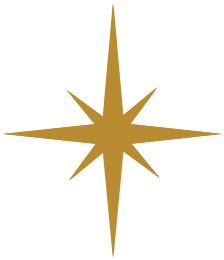
# Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus




Words: Charles Wesley
Music: F. Mendelssohm

*PDHymns.com*

# NOVEMBER 30



## *Jesus is the greatest gift.*

GATHER: Bible, Christmas tree, lights, decorations, and tree topper

READ: John 3:16

TEACH: The Christmas tree is a symbol of God's eternal life. While the leaves outside wither and die, the evergreen springs forth as a reminder of the everlasting life we have through Christ, our Lord. The lights on the tree remind us that Jesus is the Light of the World. The angel on top reminds us of the Angel's pronouncement: "A savior is born! Peace on earth and goodwill toward all people." Some people put a star on top instead to remind us that, like the magi, we are on a journey to find Jesus this Advent. The gifts below remind us of the most precious gift of all: Jesus Christ.

WONDER: I wonder if you have ever received a gift that you really loved? I wonder how receiving that gift made you feel? I wonder if you have ever given a gift that someone really loved? I wonder how giving that gift made you feel? I wonder what it means that Jesus is a gift?

DO: If you've been waiting to put up your tree, now is the day! Waiting until Advent to put up the Christmas tree reminds us that this is a season of waiting, difficult though it may be, and of preparation for Christmastide. In fact, traditionally, people have waited until Christmas Eve to put up the tree, and then kept it up for the twelve days of Christmas (taking it down on January 6). If you've already decorated your tree, you can put the topper on now, and pray the blessing below around it:

May the lights among its branches remind us that Jesus is the
Light of the World who has overcome the darkness.

# NOVEMBER 30

May the angel on top remind us of the angel's announcement:
"A savior is born! Peace on earth and goodwill toward all people" OR

May the star on top remind us that we, like the magi,
are on a journey to find Jesus this Advent season.

May the gifts below remind us of the most precious gift of all: Jesus Christ.

SING: "O Christmas Tree"

PRAY

*Holy God, bless this tree around which we will make many memories this Advent season. Help us to make room in our hearts for your gift to us: Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.*

## *Recommended Reading*

*The Year of the Perfect Christmas Tree* by Gloria Houston and Barbara Cooney (Ages 4-8)

## *Note to Parents*

There are many way to decorate the Christmas tree so that it intentionally reflects the slow and steady preparation of the Advent season. Taking this approach reminds us that preparing our hearts for the coming King is a process, not an event. Here are some examples:

- Keep the tree bare and wait until Christmas Eve to decorate.
- Gradually add more ornaments or lights each week.
- Decorate with purple ornaments (the color of Advent) and switch to white and/or red on Christmas Eve.
- Decorate using Jesse Tree ornaments, which tell the story of Jesus' lineage from the Old Testament prophecies to his birth.

# 618 O CHRISTMAS TREE

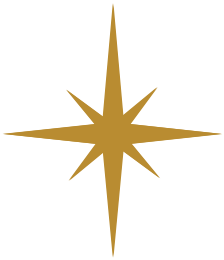
*Evergreen 878887*

From the German
Tr. H. Brueckner, 1926

German



# DECEMBER 1



## *Mary's "yes."*

*"His mother bore him in her womb; let us bear him in our hearts. The virgin was big with the incarnation of Christ; let our bosoms grow big with the faith of Christ. She gave birth to the Savior; let us give birth to praise."*
*-St. Augustine, Sermon 189*

GATHER: Bible, Print of Henry Ossawa Tanner's painting *The Annunciation* (found in the Appendix)

READ: Luke 1:26-28

TEACH: All of Advent begins with a simple "yes." Nine months before Christmas, the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, announcing that she would bear a son—and that son would be God himself. This moment is called the *Annunciation,* meaning announcement, and is celebrated on March 25—exactly nine months before Christmas (because it takes exactly nine months to grow a baby!). The Gospel tells us that Mary was very afraid: maybe of the angel, maybe of what people might think of her, maybe of the great responsibility of being a mother, maybe because she didn't understand all that the angel had said. There were many reasons for her to be frightened and confused. But Mary didn't run and hide and she didn't ask God if someone else could do the job for her. Instead, Mary said, " I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said." She said "Yes." And with that "yes" comes Advent, Christmas, and God with us.

DO: Print Henry Ossawa Tanner's painting, *The Annunciation* (found in Appendix B) and spend a few moments enjoying it in silence before moving on to the wondering questions. Hang the print somewhere where you will see it every day of Advent.

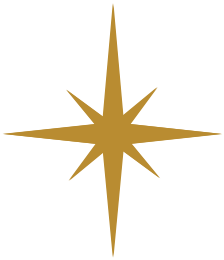
WONDER: I wonder what you notice about this painting? What do you notice about Mary? I wonder what she is feeling? I wonder what Mary was doing when the angel visited her? What do you notice about the room? I wonder why the angel is shown as a light? I wonder where you are in this painting?

# DECEMBER 1

## PRAY

*Heavenly Father, we thank for giving us Mary as an example of obedience and faithfulness to our Lord, Jesus Christ. May we say with her today and always, "Let it be to me according to your word." Amen.*

# DECEMBER 2



## *Jesus is our King.*

*"God is in the manger, wealth in poverty, light in darkness, succor in abandonment."*
*-Dietrich Bonhoeffer, God is in the Manger*

GATHER: Bible, Nativity set stable and manger (It's best to use a baby Jesus that is detachable from the manger so it can sit empty until Christmas Day. )

READ: Luke 2:4-7

TEACH: Advent is a season of getting ready for Jesus. Just as we prepare our house for visitors and special guests, we also prepare for Jesus to arrive on Christmas day. Over the next few weeks, we will prepare our nativity for Jesus's birth. Week by week, we will set out new pieces as we tell the story. It can be tempting to hurry and set out all the pieces at once. We like to have good things right away, don't we? But Advent teaches us to slow down. It teaches us to wait. It teaches us to be patient. So, this week we set out just the stable and manger.

WONDER: I wonder what kind of home a king lives in? I wonder what kind of bed a king sleeps in? I wonder if you have ever been in a barn? I wonder what you saw and smelled? I wonder what it would be like to sleep in a barn? I wonder what it tells us about Jesus that he was born in a barn?

DO: Set out the stable and manger in a prominent place in your home. Just like we have an altar in church that holds the body and blood of Jesus, this will be our altar at home that will hold Jesus.

SING: "Away in a Manger"

PRAY

*King of Kings and Lord of Lords, you humbled yourself and came to us as a small helpless babe. You left the glories of heaven to be born in a smelly, crowded barn. You gave up all your riches to become poor for us. Teach us true humility this Advent season. Amen.*

# DECEMBER 2

## *Note to Parents*

To stay true to the story, the magi should not be set out until Christmas Day. You can start their journey in a different room than the Nativity set, and over the twelve days of Christmas, move them around the house until they arrive at the manger on Epiphany (January 6), which is the day the church celebrates the magi's late arrival to Jesus. Kids love to wake up in the morning and see where the magi have moved to overnight! (We joke that, instead of an "Elf on the Shelf," we have "Magi on the Fly.") If you would like to do this during Advent as well, move Mary and Joseph each night of Advent as the move closer to the manger.

## *Recommended Reading*

*Christmas in the Manger* by Nola Buck and Felicia Bond (Ages 1-3)
*This is the Stable* by Cynthia Cotten (Ages 2-5)
*The Three Trees* by Angela Elwell Hunt (Ages 3-7)
*Mortimer's Christmas Manger* by Karma Wilson and Jane Chapman (Ages 3-6)

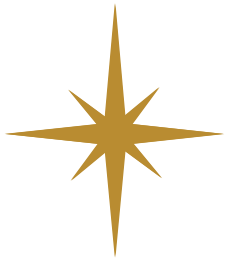
# *Away in a Manger*




Words: Anonymous, vss, 1, 2 (1885), John Thomas McFarland, vs 3 (1892)
Arrangement by James R. Murray (1887)

PDHymns.com

# DECEMBER 3



## *Jesus is our Provider.*

GATHER: Bible, 4-5 navel oranges, cutting board, parchment paper, baking sheet, sharp knife or mandolin slicer, paper towels, string

READ: Matthew 6:26-27

TEACH: Have you ever seen dried oranges hanging as decoration at Christmas time? Or perhaps you've ever made them yourselves. It might seem a little silly to use old, crunchy fruit as decoration, but there's a deep symbolism and a long story behind this strange tradition. Oranges are one of the few fruits that grow during the winter time and they only grow in certain warmer climates, so long ago they were very expensive to purchase. Because of this, they became a special treat to give to loved ones at Christmas time! Can you imagine getting an orange for Christmas and feeling like that was the greatest gift you could receive? Nowadays, many children get more toys, games, and stuffed animals than they can even play with.

But there's another reason why oranges are a Christmas tradition, and it's because of a man who gave good gifts to children because God gave good gifts to him. His name was St. Nicholas. St. Nicholas was a Christian, and he heard of three sisters who were going to be sold off into slavery because their father could not afford to pay their dowries. To save these girls from this terrible fate, Saint Nicholas threw three bags of gold down their chimney, landing perfectly in their stockings drying over the fire. To remind us of St. Nicholas' generosity and provision in the name of Jesus, people began to put oranges in stockings at Christmas.

WONDER: I wonder what it would be like to be happy with a simple orange for a Christmas? I wonder how Jesus has provided for you? I wonder how you can provide for others this Advent season?

DO: Find ways to use oranges today to remind you of God's provision. This can be as simple as packing an orange in your kids' lunch, or you can make dried orange ornaments for decoration.

# DECEMBER 3

Thinly and evenly slice your oranges, and gently blot them to remove excess juice (this is a great job for little hands). Place them on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper and bake at 250 for 3-4 hours, flipping halfway through. Once cooled, string to use as garland, ornaments, or on gift packaging.

- Slice oranges approximately 1/2 in. wide.
- Blot excess juice on both sides.
- Place on tray lined with parchment paper.
- Bake at 250 for 3-4 hours, flipping on the hour.
- Once cool, string to use as garland or ornaments.

You can connect this further to the theme of God's provision by adding them to "blessing bags" for the homeless, which we will make later in Advent, or by hanging them outside to provide for the birds when food is scarce during the winter.

When placed in front of lights on the tree, dried oranges will light up and look almost like stained glass or like a sun, reminding us that Jesus is the Sun of Righteousness.

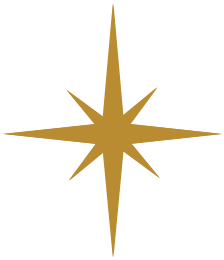
*PRAY*

*Our Father, you give us this day our daily bread, and through your Son Jesus provide all that we need. Help us to recognize and be grateful for all that you have blessed us with this Advent season. Open our eyes to see your many gifts so that we may be a gift to others. Amen.*

## *Recommended Reading*

*St. Nicholas and the Nine Gold Coins* by Jim Forest (Ages 5-9)
*An Orange for Frankie* by Patricia Polacco

# DECEMBER 4



## *Jesus is our neighbor.*

*"As long as there are people, Christ will walk the earth as your neighbor, as the one through whom God calls you, speaks to you, makes demands on you. That is the great seriousness and great blessedness of the Advent message. Christ is standing at the door; he lives in the form of a human being among us." - Dietrich Bonhoeffer, God is in the Manger*

GATHER: Bible, paper or plastic bags, contents for blessing bags such as water bottles, granola bars, band aids, chapstick, gloves, socks, toothbrush and toothpaste, baby wipes, hard candy, $5 gift cards

READ: Matthew 25:31-40

TEACH: During Advent, we also remember Jesus' promise that he will come again—not as a baby, but as a righteous judge. He will put all things right, and will separate those who followed him from those who did not. But how will we know if we've followed Jesus? If we've fed the hungry, helped the sick, clothed the naked, welcomed the stranger. Why? Because when we do this things for others, we do them for Jesus. Jesus *is* our neighbor, and during Advent, we prepare for his coming by helping our neighbor.

WONDER: I wonder why Jesus says when we feed the hungry, help the sick, welcome the stranger, we do it to him? I wonder if you have ever done any of these things? I wonder how it felt when you did? I wonder why it can sometimes feel hard to do?

DO: Pack blessing bags for the homeless. Be sure to include a handmade Christmas picture or card—a great project for the little ones. Afterwards, pray the blessing below over them. Keep these bags in your car to hand out as needed, or drop them off at a local food pantry.

# DECEMBER 4

PRAY

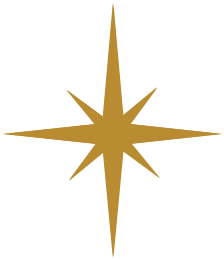
*Almighty and merciful God, bless these bags and those who will receive them, for you know each one by name. Help us always to remember before you all poor and neglected persons whom it would be easy for us to forget: the homeless and the destitute, the refugee and the overlooked, and all who have none to care for them. Grant this, Father, for the love of your Son, who for our sake became poor, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

## *Recommended Reading*

*Maybe I Can Love My Neighbor Too* by Jennifer Grant (Ages 4-8)

PRAY

# DECEMBER 5



## *Jesus is the Good Giver.*

*"The giver of every good and perfect gift has called upon us to mimic Gods giving, by grace, through faith, and this is not of ourselves." -St. Nicholas of Myra*

GATHER: Bible and Christmas stockings or shoes

READ: James 1:17

TEACH: St. Nicholas was born around 270 AD in Asia Minor, located in modern day Turkey. Though not much is known for certain about his life, his remarkable generosity is undisputed. Nicholas was born into a devout Christian family, and when his parents died, he sold off their belongings and distributed his inheritance among the poor. Nicholas became a priest, and eventually the Bishop of Myra, purportedly attending the First Council of Nicaea in 325 AD, which produced the Nicene Creed ("We believe in one God, the Father Almighty...."), recited weekly in churches around the world.

Perhaps the most famous story about St. Nicholas is that of the "Three Sisters and the Gold Coins," which we learned about a few days ago. Nicholas heard of a man who had three daughters, but no money to pay for their dowry. With no prospect of a husband or employment, these girls would have likely been forced into a life of servitude. Nicholas heard of their plight, and, under the cover of darkness, threw a bag of gold coins—the cost of one dowry—through their open window one night. Some stories say he threw it down the chimney and the gold coins landed in their stockings drying above the fire. Sound familiar? He did the same thing the next two nights, and the three sisters were saved from a life of misery. There are many stories like this of Nicholas' secret gift-giving, and his love of children, and all of them point to this one truth: Nicholas understood that every gift he had was given to him by God, and he chose to give it away to others. He knew the Good Gift Giver and chose to follow him.

# DECEMBER 5

Eventually, Nicholas was named a saint, and his feast day was set for December 6. On the night of December 5th, children around the world set stockings and shoes by the fire place or front door for St. Nicholas to fill with treats just add he did for the three sisters.

WONDER: I wonder if you have ever been given a really wonderful gift? I wonder if you have ever given something wonderful to someone else? I wonder if God has given you any gifts? I wonder if you have ever given something that belonged to you away? How did that make you feel?

DO: It's time...hang those stockings or set your shoes by the fireplace and see what St. Nicholas brings in the morning! Pizza, which originated in St. Nicholas' home country of Italy, is a traditional St. Nicholas Day Eve meal...perhaps because the shape and golden color is a reminder of the gold coins. (*Note to Parents:* Traditional stocking stuffer ideas, and the symbolism behind them, are listed in Appendix C.)

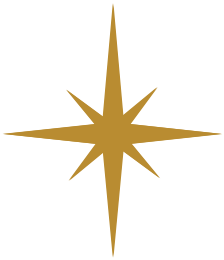
PRAY

*Gracious God, every good and perfect gift is from you. We thank you for the witness of your servant, good Saint Nicholas. Through him, we learn to be more like you. Help us to give without expectation of reward, to serve without asking what's in it for us, and to love without reserve. In the name of your son, our savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

## *Recommended Reading*

*St. Nicholas and the Nine Gold Coins* by Jim Forest (Ages 5-9)
*The Christmas Stocking* by Rick Osborne (Ages 4-8)
*The Legend of St. Nicholas* by Anselm Grun (Ages 4-8)
*The Story of St. Nicholas* by Little Way Chapel (Ages 4-10)
*Saint Nicholas the Giftgiver* by Ned Bustard (Ages 3-7)

# DECEMBER 6



## *Advent Week II:*
## *Jesus is our peace.*

GATHER: Bible, Advent wreath, lighter

READ: 2 Peter 3:8-15 (additional Advent Wreath readings for this week include Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; Mark 1:1-8).

TEACH: This week, we light the candle of peace, and we consider the angels' greeting to the shepherds, "Peace on earth!" What a bold statement! With all the war, and hunger, and sadness in the world, how could they proclaim such a thing? And how can we believe it now? The answer comes from our Scripture reading: "But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." God works in his own timeline, and we are here for just a short part of it. God sees the complete picture when we can only see a small part. Jesus has brought peace, and is still bringing it. And as we follow him, we bring peace on earth and goodwill to all.

WONDER: I wonder what peace feels like? I wonder what peace in the world looks like? I wonder how we can bring peace on earth? Reread Isaiah and Mark. I wonder if you notice any connections?

DO: Light two purple candles on the Advent wreath.

SING: "Comfort, Comfort, Ye My People"

PRAY

*God of peace, during this Advent season, keep us from getting caught up in the busyness and chaos of the world around us. Help us to slow down so that we may find rest in the Prince of Peace, your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

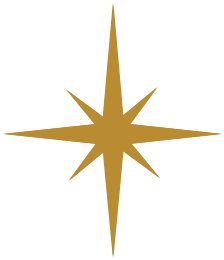
# Comfort, Comfort Ye My People




Words: Johann Olearius, Tr. by Catherine Winkworth
Music: Bourgeois's Genevan Psalter, Har. by Claude Goudimel

*PDHymns.com*

# DECEMBER 7



## *Jesus' story is our story.*

GATHER: Bible, A favorite Advent storybook
(see suggestions below)

READ: Matthew 1:1-17 (Feel free to read verses 1-6, then skip down to 15-17. The important part is that everyone gets a sense of what a geneaology sounds like!)

TEACH: Strange as it might sound, the Advent story begins here, with this very long list of names, called a geneaology. We all have a geneaology. You have your parents, and your parents have parents, and *their* parents have parents, and on it goes. Can you imagine trying to trace your geneaology back as far as this one here? But what's the point of this? Matthew's geneaology reminds us that Jesus is part of a story that God has been telling since the beginning of time. God coming to be with us in Christ Jesus was *always* the plan. And it reminds us that we are part of that story, too. Like Abraham, like Ruth, like David, *you* are a part of Jesus' story. And even though God is still writing it, Advent reminds us that we already know the ending: Jesus returns and makes all things new.

DO: Read a favorite Advent story and reflect on the wondering questions below.

WONDER: I wonder which part of this story you liked best? I wonder which part of this story you think is most important? I wonder where Jesus is in this story? I wonder where *you* are in this story? I wonder what makes a good story?

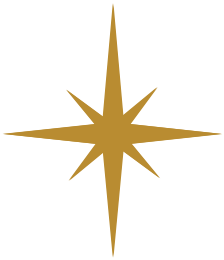
PRAY

*God, you are the author and perfecter of history itself. We thank you for sending Jesus to be with us and make us part of your story. Help us to slow down and notice the story you are telling in our lives this Advent season. Amen.*

### *Recommended Reading*

*The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey* by Susan Wojciechowski (Ages 5-10)

# DECEMBER 8



## *Jesus is the Lamb of God.*

GATHER: Bible, Nativity animals

READ: Isaiah 6:9-11

TEACH: Long before Jesus was born, the Prophet Isaiah proclaimed that a Messiah would come. And this is the scene he describes when the Messiah arrives: wolves lying down in peace with lambs, bears eating alongside cows, and children playing with cobras. What a strange scene indeed! It tells us that the peace the Messiah brings will be so powerful that lions will no longer be predators and lambs no longer prey—they will all live together as friends.

This week, we add the animals to the stable, and pause to marvel that the Son of God was born among donkeys and cows. How can it be that the King of Kings would be born in such a place? But perhaps it's not so strange after all when we compare this nativity scene to the one that Isaiah describes. The Messiah has come, and just as Isaiah prophesied: the animals were at peace.

DO: Add the animals to your nativity. Feel free to let your children get creative and add other animals to the scene. This may stress Type A parents, but consider what it might add to your understanding of the story. Be open to pausing and learning from your children's imagination here.

WONDER: What role do animals play in Jesus' first coming, and his second coming (according to Isaiah)? John the Baptist calls Jesus "the lamb of God" who takes away the sins of the world. Why do you think he uses animal imagery here? I wonder why God chose to include animals in the story of Christ's birth? I wonder how animals can show us God's peace today?

# DECEMBER 8

SING: "O Little Town of Bethlehem"

PRAY

*God, Creator of all creatures great and small, not even a sparrow falls to the ground without you knowing it. Thank you for loving your creation so much that you sent your Son to be born in a barn among the animals. Amen.*

## *Recommended Reading*

*The Animals' Christmas Carol* by Helen Ward (Ages 4-10)
*The Friendly Beast* by Tomie DePaola (Ages 4-8)
*The Crippled Lamb* by Max Lucado (Ages 4-8)

## *Note to Parents*

Though the Gospels never mention animals at the scene, they do note that Jesus was placed in a manger, so we assume there were animals present. Fun fact: Saint Francis (1181-1126 AD), who is known for his love of animals, is credited with adding animals to the first nativity scene!

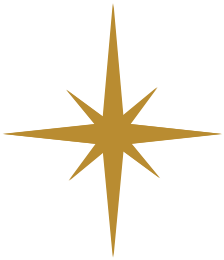
# O Little Town Of Bethlehem




Words by Phillips Brooks Music by Lewis H. Redner

PDHymns.com

# DECEMBER 9



## *Jesus was born for us.*

GATHER: Bible, candy canes

READ: Isaiah 53:1-6

TEACH: We all know candy canes are a Christmas candy, but did you know there is a hidden meaning behind them? Hold the candy can in front of you and consider what it looks like. Do you notice the shepherd's staff? In the Gospels, Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd: we are his sheep and he cares for us, providing for us and keeping us safe. The staff can also remind us of a Bishop's crozier (the special rod they carry), like St. Nicholas. Now, turn the candy cane upside down and we see a "J" for Jesus.

Finally, let's take a closer look at the colors and pattern. Candy canes are white, reminding us that Jesus was pure and free of sin. The red reminds us of the blood that Jesus shed for us. The striped pattern reminds us of what we've just read in Isaiah: "by his wounds, we are healed." In old fashioned language, people said "by his stripes, we are healed." The candy cane's red stripes are a reminder, even during Advent as we think about Jesus' birth, that he was born for a very special purpose: to live and love and die for us.

DO: It's time to hunt for candy canes! Parents, hide the candy canes around the house and see how many the kids can find. This is especially fun while racing around to the iconic "Candy Cane" score from Tchaichovsky's *The Nutcracker*. After all the candy canes have been found, collect them in a pile and pray the Candy Cane Blessing over them to then distribute to friends and neighbors. Don't forget to save a handful to buy you a few quiet moments in church this Advent!

# DECEMBER 9

WONDER: I wonder why Jesus was born? I wonder if God would have sent Jesus even if we had never sinned? I wonder why the color for Christmas in the Church is white? I wonder what the color red represents in the Church?

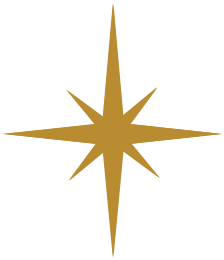
PRAY

*God of joy and good cheer, we pray that you would bless these candy canes, which tell the story of your Son's love for us. As we give them away, help those who receive them to know your Son's love, too. Amen.*

## *Recommended Reading*

*The Legend of the Candy Cane* by Lori Walburg (Ages 4-9)

# DECEMBER 10



## *Jesus is in the silence.*

GATHER: Bible, hot cocoa

READ: Matthew 2:9-10

TEACH: Advent can quickly become a hustle and bustle. There is shopping to do, gifts to wrap, holiday parties to enjoy, school concerts to attend, cookies to bake, and if we aren't careful, we will miss the mystery of Advent entirely. In our Gospel reading, a mysterious star appears in the east, and the magi know it is a sign that the King is coming. They follow the star all the way to Bethlehem. Will we too, have eyes to see the mystery and a heart to follow it all the way to Jesus this Advent?

DO: Take a moment this evening to slow down and quiet your heart. With a cup of hot cocoa or peppermint tea in hand, take a walk, or sit outside and look up at the stars in silence, reflecting on the fact that these are the same stars the shepherds stared at from the hills outside of Bethlehem.

WONDER: I wonder why God chose a star to lead the magi to Jesus? I wonder what the shepherds thought as they gazed up at the stars that night? I wonder how gazing up at these stars makes you feel? I wonder if the stars remind you of anything?

SING: "Silent Night"

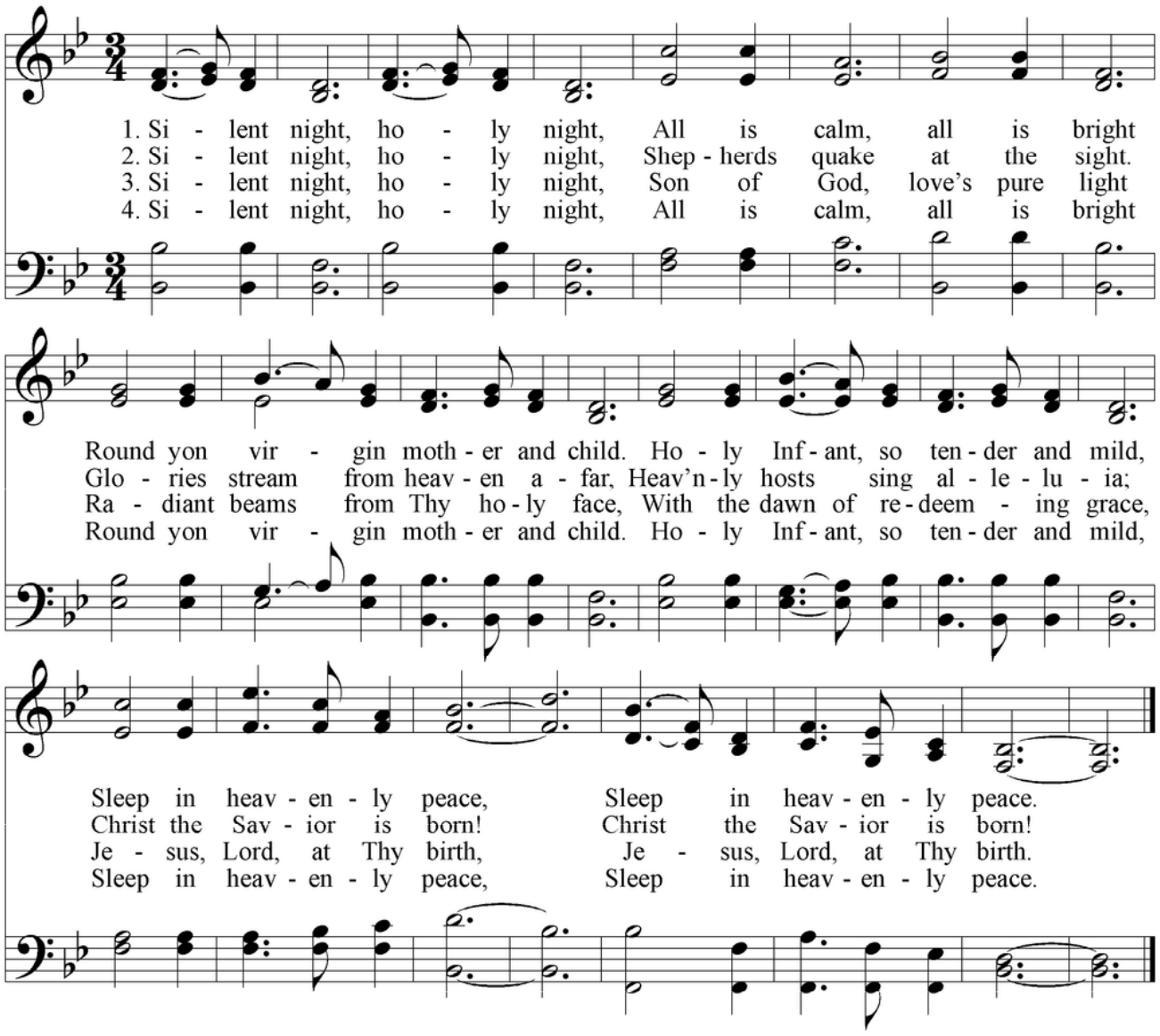
PRAY

*Dear God, Help us to slow down this Advent season. Help us to be still. Help us to be quiet. And in the quiet, prepare our hearts for the coming of your Son, in whose name we pray. Amen.*

### *Recommended Reading*

*Silent Night* by Lara Hawthorne (Ages 2-4)

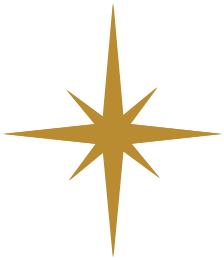
# *Silent Night, Holy Night*




Words by Joseph Mohr; tr. John F. Young
Music by Franz Grüber

*PDHymns.com*

# DECEMBER 11



## *Prepare him room.*

GATHER: Bible, garbage bags

READ: Matthew 3:1-3

TEACH: During Advent, we prepare the way for Jesus, just as John the Baptist talks about in this passage. How does John tell us to do this? By repenting, by turning away from sin, and turning towards God. You see, Advent isn't just about Jesus coming to live among us—it is about Jesus coming to live *within* us. Advent is about making space for Jesus in our hearts—about setting aside all the things that don't belong there and making our hearts into a manger for the Christ child to rest in.

DO: Go through toys, clothing and books to donate. Not only does this activity make room for the gifts to come at Christmas, but more importantly, it is a reminder that just as our homes can become cluttered, so can our hearts and lives. Advent is about making room for Jesus, and to do that, sometimes we have to clear out what is broken, unnecessary, or just plain taking up too much space.

WONDER: I wonder if you've ever had a feeling in your heart that you know didn't belong there? I wonder how we can prepare our hearts for Jesus' coming? I wonder why it is hard to give things away that we feel are ours? I wonder how we can become better at it?

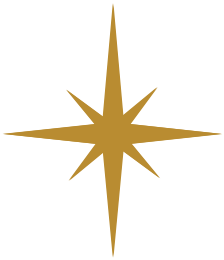
PRAY

*Almighty God, free us from the distractions and sin that take up space in our our hearts and help us to make room for your Son this Advent. May he come abide with us, and may our hearts be his home. Amen.*

### *Recommended Reading*

*Who is Coming to Our House?* by Joseph Slate (Ages 1-3)

# DECEMBER 12



## *You are the light of the world.*

GATHER: Bible, ingredients for *lussekatter*

READ: Matthew 5:14-16

TEACH: Today is the eve of St. Lucia Day, a day that celebrates the saint whose name means "Light." St. Lucia, or Lucy, was born around 283 CE in Syracuse, Sicily. When she was a young woman, the Roman Emperor Diocletian launched a violent persecution of Christians all across the Empire. Lucy was born into a devout noble family and from a young age pledged herself to God, choosing to remain unmarried so that she could instead give her dowry—and her life—to the poor and suffering.

One popular legend tells the story of how Lucy took food and aid to the Christians living in the catacombs to escape their persecutors. Catacombs were tunnels under the ground where people were buried when they died. During periods of persecution, Christians were known for hiding in these catacombs. Under the cover of darkness, Lucia carried supplies to her fellow Christians with a wreath of candles on her head to light the way.

Lucy's mother, however, had different plans for her life and arranged for her to marry a wealthy pagan man. When Lucy refused, he reported her as a Christian to the authorities. She was martyred, or killed, for refusing to recant her faith.

With a name that means light, it's fitting that Lucy's feast day falls during Advent, a season when the Light of the World is born amid the darkest and longest days of the year. Lucy's feast day, December 13, was set to align with what used to be the Winter Solstice, and still falls very close to it today.

# DECEMBER 12

DO: St. Lucia Day is thought to mark a turn from the penitence and solemnity of Advent toward the light and joy of Christmastide. It is celebrated around the world, but is particularly popular in Scandinavian countries. Early on the morning of December 13th, the oldest daughter, dressed in a white robe, red sash and wreath crown, rises early and delivers sweet rolls made with saffron ("Lucy buns" or *lussekatter*) to family members in bed , reenacting Lucy bringing food to the hungry.

To celebrate St. Lucia Day tomorrow, bake *lussekatter* or another type of spiced sweet bread (cinnamon quick bread, for example) for your "St. Lucy" and/or "Star Boy" to deliver in the morning. The children may deliver them to the family in bed, or perhaps they might deliver them to neighbors—a tradition which seems in keeping with the spirit of St. Lucia who brought food to others as a ministry. For a full guide to St. Lucia Day, see Little Way Chapel's *Saint Lucy Day Guide.*

WONDER: John says that *Jesus* is the Light of the world. I wonder why then Jesus tells us in our gospel reading that *we* are the light of the world? I wonder how we can serve others like St. Lucia? I wonder how we can be brave like her?

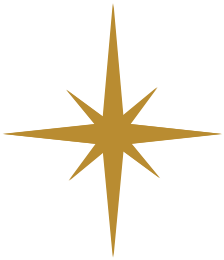
PRAY

*God our Father, we thank you for sending your Son to be the Light of the World, and for your servant, Lucy, who was a faithful witness to his light. Help us to follow in St. Lucy's footsteps and be a light for you always. Amen.*

## *Recommended Reading*

*Saint Lucy Day Guide* by Little Way Chapel (All Ages)
*Kirsten's Surprise (American Girl Doll Series)* by Janet Shaw (Ages 7-11)
*Lucia Morning in Sweden* by Ewa Rydaker (Ages 4-7)
*Lucia: Saint of Light* by Katherine Bolger Hyde (this book speaks graphically about St. Lucia's martyrdom and is recommended for ages 8+)

# DECEMBER 13



## *Advent Week III:*
## *Jesus is our joy.*

GATHER: Bible, Advent wreath, lighter

READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:16–24 (additional Advent Wreath readings for this week include Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11; Psalm 126; John 1:6–8, 19–28).

TEACH: This week, we light the pink candle of joy, The third Sunday of Advent is known as *Gaudete* Sunday—a word which means "rejoice" in Latin. This Sunday marks a turn from the solemn preparation and penitence of Advent toward joy as we anticipate the coming King. This lighter mood during this week of Advent is marked visibly by the lighter rose candle. Today is also the feast of St. Lucia, the Saint of Light!

WONDER: I wonder what brings you joy? Can you think of a particular memory where you felt joyful? I wonder where joy comes from? I wonder how you can bring joy to others?

DO: Light two purple candles and one pink candle on the Advent wreath. Don't forget to deliver your St. Lucia buns, too!

SING: "Joy to the World"

PRAY

*God of joy, it is in your love that we find lasting joy. Keep us from seeking happiness in things that will not last. Teach us instead to find joy in the gift of your Son, who came into this world with nothing, yet gave us everything. May his joy fill our hearts and overflow to all we meet this Advent season. Amen.*

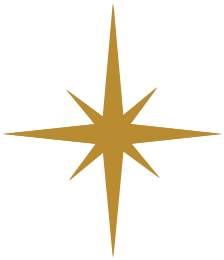
# Joy To The World




Words by Isaac Watts, Music by Lowell Manson (based on Handel)

*PDHymns.com*

# DECEMBER 14



## *Dance for joy.*

GATHER: Bible, Christmas music

READ: Zechariah 9:9

TEACH: Long before Jesus was born, the prophet Zechariah spoke of his coming. "Rejoice! Shout for joy! Your King is coming!" Even though he spoke these words to Israel long ago, it is still the message for *us* today—especially during this "joy week" of Advent. Up until this point in Advent, we have focused on preparing our hearts for Christ—looking at our sin and turning away from it. This is important work, but it can be serious and solemn. This week, we get to shift from John the Baptist's message of "Repent!" to Zechariah's message of "Rejoice!" Let's get excited...Jesus is coming!

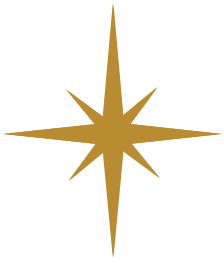
WONDER: I wonder why it feels hard to repent? I wonder if you have ever found it difficult to rejoice? I wonder why?

DO: Did you know our bodies can tell us how to feel? This is why the liturgy in church is so important! We bow to remind to worship, we kneel to ask forgiveness, we raise our hands to praise. So what greater way to be joyful than to dance for joy? Hold a quick dance party around the Christmas tree to your favorite tunes.

PRAY

*Good Father, Give us grace to repent from our sins so that we may turn with joy to the coming of your Son. When he comes, may he find us blameless before you. Amen.*

# DECEMBER 15



## *Jesus is the Good News.*

GATHER: Bible, Nativity shepherds and angels

READ: Luke 2:8-15

TEACH: Did you know that the word Gospel comes from a Greek word that simply means "good news"? This week, we add the shepherds and angels to the nativity scene, and we reflect on their message, "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." The good news that Jesus is coming is a cause for celebration. This week, consider how you can share this good news with others.

WONDER: I wonder if Jesus' coming is good news for everyone? I wonder why someone would not rejoice at Jesus's arrival? I wonder how you can share the good news of Jesus's coming with otbers? I wonder how you can experience joy this week?

DO: Add the shepherds and the angels to the nativity.

SING: "Angels We Have Heard on High"

PRAY

*Holy God, thank you for the good news of the Gospel. Give us grace to share it with others not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service., through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

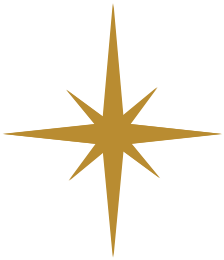
# *Angels We Have Heard On High*




Words and Music: Traditional French Carol
Arrangement by Warren M. Angell

*PDHymns.com*

# DECEMBER 16



## *Jesus is knocking.*

*"Jesus knows well the pain of not being welcomed and how hard it is not to have a place to lay one's head. May our hearts not be closed as they were in the homes of Bethlehem." -Pope Francis, Urbi et Orbi*

GATHER: Bible, Mexican hot chocolate, *The Night of Las Posadas* by Tomie dePaola

READ: Revelation 3:20

TEACH: Today begins a festival called *Las Posadas*, which means "the inns" in Spanish. It is a commemoration of Mary and Joseph's painstaking journey to find lodging, and a celebration of the holy hospitality they received...and it lasts for nine days (called a *novena*). This festival is celebrated mostly by Christians in Mexico and Latin America. A different family hosts each night, and the "pilgrims," dressed as Mary and Joseph, go door to door (planned in advance) in search of lodging. At each door they are turned away with a traditional song, until at the final home they are invited in, where a nativity scene and party awaits. This tradition reminds us that when we welcome the stranger, we welcome Jesus himself, just as we read a few weeks ago in Matthew 25, and as we are reminded of today in our Scripture reading today. For, "Behold, Jesus stands at the door and knocks, and if we invite him in, he will come in and dine with us, and we with him."

WONDER: I wonder if you have ever had a stranger or someone new come over for dinner? I wonder how you might have seen Jesus in them? I wonder where else we can welcome the stranger?

DO: Sit down with a cup of Mexican Hot Chocolate and Tomie dePaola's lovely book, *The Night of Las Posadas*. Discuss how Las Posadas invites us to consider how in opening up our lives and doors to the stranger, the neighbor, and the refugee, we welcome

# DECEMBER 16

Christ himself to come in and take up residence. Mexican hot chocolate is a dark hot cocoa with a secret ingredient: cinnamon. Both the Abuelita and Ibarra brands are great and available at most grocery stores, but you can also make this yourself by adding cinnamon to your hot chocolate mix—and a dash of cayenne if you're feeling spicy!

If you would like more ways to celebrate *Las Posadas,* eat Mexican or Latin American food for dinner (Christmas tamales are traditional). You can also make *farolitos* (also called *luminarias*), which are traditionally used at *Posadas* host homes to light "Mary and Joseph's" pathway. You can do this by cutting out or drawing stars on white paper bags and placing votive candles inside.

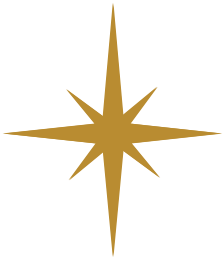
PRAY

*God of gracious hospitality, We give you thanks for sending your Son to be our savior, to lead us from darkness into light. As we prepare for his coming, Let us offer your hospitality to others beginning now with this food and in our fellowship. Amen.*

## *Recommended Reading*

*The Night of Las Posadas* by Tomie dePaola (Ages 5-9)
*Farolitos of Christmas* by Rudolfo Anaya (Ages 5-9)

# DECEMBER 17



## *Jesus is the Good Shepherd.*

GATHER: Bible, mediterranean food for dinner

READ: John 10:14-15

TEACH: This week, we added the shepherds to the nativity, inviting us to wonder why God chose to share the first news of the Savior's arrival with them in particular. Shepherding was a difficult and sometimes dangerous job for the poor, and yet for some reason God chose these shepherds to be the first to know and the first to meet the Messiah. Eventually, that tiny Messiah grew up and became a poor, ordinary laborer much like these men and he called himself the "Good Shepherd." The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep, he leaves the 99 to find the one, and he knows each of his sheep by name...including you.

WONDER: I wonder who the shepherds were? I wonder why the angels revealed the message to them in particular? I wonder what they thought when they saw the angels in the sky? I wonder how this changed their lives?

DO: Imagine what it may have been like to be the shepherds on that fateful night by turning down the lights in the living room, with only the lights of the Christmas tree and candles to see. Spread out a blank on the floor and enjoy a "Shepherd's Dinner" with mediterranean foods that the shepherds may have eaten that special night: hummus, pita, grapes, olives, cheese, nuts, bell peppers, and tomatoes.

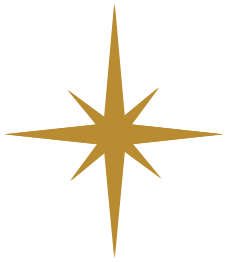
PRAY

*Good Shepherd, You know each one of your sheep by name. Thank you for sharing your good news with the poor, the ordinary, and the humble. Help us to follow wherever you lead this Advent. Amen.*

### *Recommended Reading*

*The Little Shepherd's Christmas* by Carol Heyer (Ages 4-8)

# DECEMBER 18



## *Jesus blesses.*

GATHER: Bible, Christmas cards from friends and family

READ: Romans 15:13

TEACH: Today's Scripture is from the end of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans. Paul typically ends his letters with greetings to friends, final instructions, and always a benediction like the one we just read. Benediction comes from the Latin words *bene,* which means "well" and *dicere* which means "to speak." Benediction literally means to "speak well to someone" or "to bless." At the end of a church service or mass, your priest or pastor likely offers you a benediction, and you might even hold out your hands to receive it. Paul's benediction to the Romans is especially relevant for Advent because it pulls together the three Advent themes we have focused on so far: hope, peace, and joy. Let's read it one more time and listen for these themes: "May the God of *hope* fill you with all *joy* and *peace* as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." This Advent, may our words be a benediction to all we meet.

WONDER: I wonder if you have ever been blessed by someone's words? I wonder if someone has ever spoken a benediction over you? I wonder who you can offer a benediction to this week?

DO: Let's offer Advent benedictions to those we love. Around the dinner table this evening or at bedtime, gather all the Christmas cards your family has received this Advent season and place them in a pile. Read letters aloud, share special memories you have of that person, but most importantly, pray for them. If you'd like to pray for each family individually, split the cards up, and each person in your family can take a turn

praying. When you finished, place all the cards in the middle and offer the following benediction over them:

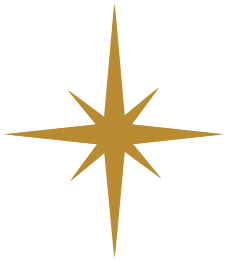
PRAY

*May the God of hope fill these friends with all joy and peace as they trust in him, so that they may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

## *Recommended Reading*

*The Legend of the Poinsettia* by Tomie dePaola
*The Story of Holly and Ivy* by Rumer Godden

# DECEMBER 19



## *Sing for joy.*

*"Hope is a song in a weary throat."*
*-Rev. Pauli Murray, The Dark Testament*

GATHER: Bible, Christmas carol sheet music

READ: Isaiah 52:7-9

TEACH: Good news is hard to keep to yourself, isn't it? When you learn something wonderful—whether it's a good grade in school, and fun trip you or taking, or someone is going to have a baby—it's hard not to blurt it out! The good news of Jesus Christ is no different. Like the prophet Isaiah says, we ought to "shout for joy" and go tell it on a mountain that our Savior is here. Christmas caroling, or going door to door with a group to sing hymns of Christ's birth is one way we can do that! The practice of caroling finds its origins in 13th century Italy with St. Francis, who was the first to create "nativity plays" for the public, including song and dance. He encouraged folks to act and sing in their own native languages rather than the traditional Latin so that the message could spread far and wide. As Christianity spread across Europe, the practice of caroling spread as well, and is still something we do today to share our Christmas joy with others.

WONDER: I wonder if you have ever heard good news that you couldn't wait to share with others? Was it hard to keep it to yourself? I wonder if you have ever felt like "bursting into a song of joy" like Isaiah describes? I wonder why joy makes us sing? I wonder why Isaiah says we should sing "together"? What difference does it make to sing with others?

# DECEMBER 19

DO: It's our turn to sing for joy! Take your family caroling tonight. If your neighborhood isn't a good option, plan ahead to go caroling at a nursing home or hospital. If none of these are possible, hold a carol-sing with your friends and neighbors at home.

PRAY

*God of joy, may our lives be a song that tells the world of your beauty and hope. As we sing the story of your salvation to others, may others be filled with your love and peace through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

## *Recommended Reading*

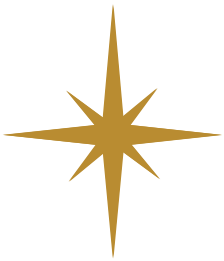
*Tomie dePaola's Book of Christmas Carols* by Tomie dePaola
*A Christmas Carol: The Illustrated Just-for-Kids Edition* by Charles Dickens

## *Recommended Carols*

Christian Carols:
Angels We Have Heard on High
Away in a Manger
Go Tell It On the Mountain
Hark! The Herald Angels Sing
Joy to the World
O Come All Ye Faithful
O Holy Night
O Little Town of Bethlehem
Silent Night
The First Noel

Non-Religious:
Deck the Halls
Frosty the Snowman
It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas
Jingle Bells
Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer
Silver Bells

DECEMBER 20



# *Advent Week IV:*
# *Jesus is love.*

GATHER: Bible, Advent wreath, lighter

READ: Luke 1:46b–55 (additional Advent Wreath readings for this week include 2 Samuel 7:1–11, 16; Luke 1:26–38; Romans 16:25–27; ).

TEACH: Today begins the final week of Advent, and we light the final candle of love, a reminder that Jesus is love itself made flesh. Mary's words in our gospel reading come just after she learns she is pregnant from the Angel Gabriel. She goes to visit her cousin, Elizabeth, who is also pregnant with John the Baptist. Elizabeth immediately recognizes Christ within her and greets Mary with the words, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!" Mary responds with this speech, called the *Magnificat*, which is Latin for "it magnifies." Meaning Mary magnifies, or gives all the glory to God. Like Mary, when Christ dwells within in us, our love will be evident to the world. As we await his coming, may our souls magnify the Lord, giving God all the glory.

WONDER: I wonder when you feel most loved? I wonder what love looks like? I wonder why love is the last candle we light?

DO: Light all four candles on the Advent wreath.

SING: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"

PRAY

*God of love, you sent your Son, Jesus, to shine bright like the sun, lighting the way for all who walk in darkness. May the light of Christ's hope, peace, joy and love shine bright in us as we approach his coming, so that we may be ready to welcome him on Christmas day. Amen.*

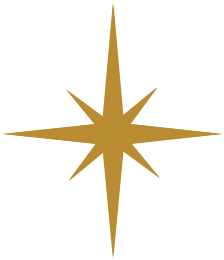
# *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*




Latin antiphons, 12th cent.
Latin hymn, 1710
Tr. John Mason Neale, 1851; alt. 1961

VENI EMMANUEL L.M.ref.
Plainsong, 13th cent.
Arr. Thomas Helmore, 1856

# DECEMBER 21



## *Jesus gives.*

GATHER: Bible, scraps of paper, pen

READ: Matthew 6:1-4

TEACH: If we aren't careful, the Advent and Christmas season can quickly become all about gifts: buying them, wrapping them, giving them, getting them. The true gift, of course, is God himself, given to each of us in Jesus Christ. Rather than a present, we are given God's *presence*, which is far better than anything you could buy. Because Christmas has never actually been about gifts, presents were traditionally given on December 6th, which is the feast of St. Nicholas, who gave gifts in secret to those in need. In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus warns that when we give to the poor, we should do it in secret, so it doesn't become about showing off what good people we are. We give, not because we want to receive praise or thanks, but because God has given everything we have to us. And so at Christmas, we give to others because we have received the most precious gift of all: *Emmanuel,* God with us.

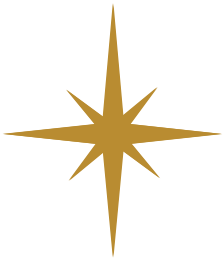
DO: Be a "Secret Santa" today. Just as St. Nicholas helped people in secret, do something kind for a family member or friend today without them knowing.

WONDER: I wonder how you felt after doing something kind for someone today? Was it hard to keep it a secret? I wonder why Jesus tells us to give in secret? I wonder why Jesus says it's better to give than to receive?

PRAY

*O God who is the true Giver all good things, teach us to give without need for praise or reward. For it is in giving that we receive and through the gift of your Son that we receive eternal life. Amen.*

# DECEMBER 22



## *Jesus is the Light of the World.*

GATHER: Bible, Advent wreath, lighter

READ: John 1:1-5

TEACH: During Advent, we light one more candle each week to represent the light of Christ growing brighter and brighter as we journey closer to Christmas on December 25th. While we don't actually know the real date of Jesus' birth, one of the many reasons the Church selected December 25 is because it falls close to the Winter Solstice, which is the darkest and longest day of the year. Christ shines bright in the darkness, reminding us that he is the Light *of* the World, and we are his light *in* the world.

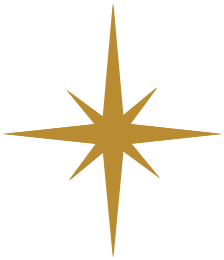
DO: This evening, eat dinner by the light of your Advent wreath. Start in total darkness, reminding your family of how dark the world is without Jesus. In the darkness, recite John 1:1. You'll need to memorize it since you'll be in sitting in darkness! Light the first candle and read John 1:2-3. Light the second candle and read John 1:4. Finally, light the third candle and read John 1:5. You might choose to pass the lighter and the Bible around the table and each person gets a turn.

WONDER: I wonder what the world was like in the beginning, before God made anything? I wonder *who* was with God in the beginning? I wonder how you feel when you are in the dark? I wonder what it means that Jesus is the Light of the World?

PRAY

*Almighty God, who sent your Son to be the Light of the World, illuminate our way so that we may follow you faithfully as we await his coming these final days of Advent. Amen.*

# DECEMBER 23



## *Jesus is with us.*

*"The best of all is, God is with us" - John Wesley's, last words*

GATHER: Bible, quiet activies such as books or a board game

READ: Matthew 1:20-23

TEACH: This final week of Advent, we light the candle of "love." It is the final and most important Advent candle because love is the entire reason for Christmas. Because God *loved* the world, he gave us his son. In our gospel reading, an angel appears to Joseph and tells him that Mary's son will have two names, and each name gives us a better understanding of his mission. The baby will be named *Jesus*, which means "Savior," because he is born to save the world. And he is also named *Emmanuel* which means "God with us." You see, even if Adam and Eve had never sinned in that garden long ago, even if we didn't need a savior, Jesus would have come. Christmas would still happen. Because God didn't simply send his son *for us* to save us from our sins, as important as that is. God sent his son to be *with us* simply because he loves us.

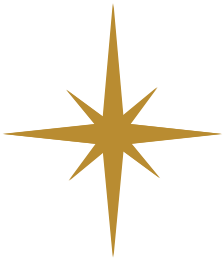
WONDER: I wonder if you have ever felt loved just by being with someone? I wonder what kinds of things you like to do with the people you love? I wonder how we can spend time with God?

DO: Tonight, practice being *with* one another. You can do this simply by spending an evening at home in the living room as a family with no agenda. Turn on the Christmas lights, play a board game, or grab books and sit in silence. Another option is to get everyone in their Christmas PJs, pop some popcorn, and load everyone in the car to look at Christmas lights. Enjoy the gift of being *with* one another.

PRAY

*Holy God, thank you for sending your son to be with us. Help us to make time to be with him in these busry final days of Advent. Amen.*

# DECEMBER 24



## *Jesus is our journey's end.*

*"You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." -St. Augustine, The Confessions*

GATHER: Bible, Mary and Joseph nativity figures

READ: Luke 2:6-7, 19

TEACH: Tonight, after a long and harrowing journey, Mary and Joseph arrive at the stable. We, too, have been on a journey this season of Advent. We began with just a stable and an empty manger, preparing a place for Christ in our own hearts—pushing out the things that didn't belong, and making space for Jesus to dwell. Then, the animals arrived, teaching us to slow down and notice the beauty of creation and this season. As we got closer and closer to Christmas, we turned towards joy, adding the shepherds and angels who brought "good news of great joy." Now, finally, we have arrived with Mary and Joseph. All that we have been waiting for comes together in this one night of our dear Savior's birth.

DO: Place Mary and Joseph in the nativity.

WONDER: I wonder how Mary and Joseph must have felt when they were told there was no room in the inn? I wonder what it was like for Mary to hold the Son of God in her arms? I wonder what it is that Mary "treasured" or "pondered" in her heart? I wonder how we too can "treasure" theses things in our hearts?

SING: "O Holy Night"

PRAY

*O God, you have brought us through this season of watching, waiting, and hoping for your Son. We give you thanks that he has at long last come and pray that we may treasure him in our hearts now and always. Amen.*

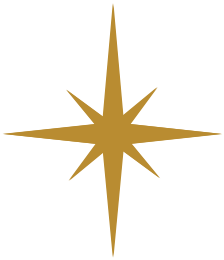
# *O Holy Night!*




Words by John S. Dwight
Music by Adolphe Adam

*PDHymns.com*

# DECEMBER 25



## *God is come.*

*"I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year."*
*-Charles Dickens, A Christmas Carol*

GATHER: Bible, baby Jesus nativity figure, lighter

READ: Isaiah 9:6-7

TEACH: We have come all the way to Bethlehem, and today we celebrate the birth of our Lord. Today is only the beginning of a new year with God. May we walk with him as he grows to become a carpenter, a teacher to his disciples, as he heals the lame and the sick, brings justice and righteousness, as he carries his cross to calvary, is raised again in new life, and as he ascends to be seated with his Father in heaven. And may we follow him until he returns again, just as he has promised. For Jesus has come, Jesus is come, and Jesus will come again.

DO: Place baby Jesus in the manger before opening presents as a physical reminder that Christmas is about just one very special gift: God with us. Don't forget to light the white Christ candle on your Advent wreath as well!

WONDER: I wonder how we can "walk with Jesus" through all the seasons of the Church year?

SING: "Hark The Herald Angels Sing

PRAY

*Almighty God, you have given your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and to be born this day of a virgin: Grant that we, who have been born again and made your children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit; through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with you and the same Spirit be honor and glory, now and for ever. Amen.*
*- Book of Common Prayer*

# *Hark The Herald Angels Sing*




Words by Charles Wesley
Music by Mendelssohn / Arrangement by William H. Cummings

PDHymns.com

# Appendix

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## November 29

*Jesus is our hope.*

Today is the first day of Advent.
Make your Advent wreath and light one purple candle.

## November 30

*Jesus is the greatest gift.*

Decorate your Christmas tree and pray the Christmas tree blessing around it.

## December 1

*Mary's "Yes."*

Enjoy Henry Ossawa Tanner's painting, *The Annunciation.*

## December 2

*Jesus is our King.*

Set up your Nativity stable and manger.

## December 3

*Jesus is our provider.*

Find out why oranges are a traditional Christmas fruit, and make dried orange ornaments.

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## December 4

*Jesus is our neighbor.*

Make "Blessing Bags" for those in need, and care for Jesus by caring for others.

## December 5

*Jesus is the Good Giver.*

Hang up stockings or put out shoes for St. Nicholas Day tomorrow. Read a book about the true Saint Nick.

## December 6

*Jesus is our peace.*

Today is the Second Sunday of Advent and St. Nicholas Day!
Check your shoes or stockings for a surprise and light two purple candles.

## December 7

*Jesus' story is our story.*

Read your favorite Advent story by the fire or under the tree and reflect on it as a family.

## December 8

*Jesus is the lamb of God.*

Nativity: The animals arrive at the stable.

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## December 9

*Jesus was born for us.*

Ready, set...go hunt for candy canes!

## December 10

*Jesus is in the silence.*

Take a moment to be still and silent this evening. Sit outside with a cup of hot cocoa and look at the stars.

## December 11

*Prepare him room.*

Prepare room for Jesus by clearing our and giving away toys, books, and clothes you no longer need.

## December 12

*You are the light of the world.*

Tomorrow is St. Lucia Day. Learn about how she was a light in the darkness and make St. Lucy buns for tomorrow.

## December 13

*Jesus is our joy.*

Today is the Third Sunday of Advent: *Gaudete* Sunday *and* St. Lucia Day! Light two purple and one pink Advent candle and deliver St. Lucy buns.

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## December 14

*Dance for joy!*

This week's pink Advent candle represents joy. Put on your favorite Christmas tune and "dance for joy" around the tree.

## December 15

*Jesus is the Good News.*

Nativity: The shepherds and angels arrive at the stable.

## December 16

*Jesus is knocking.*

*Las Posadas* begins today. Read *The Night of Las Posadas* and celebrate with a cup of Mexican Hot Chocolate.

## December 17

*Jesus is the Good Shepherd.*

Eat a "Shepherd's Dinner" on the floor tonight!

## December 18

*Jesus blesses.*

Gather all the Christmas cards you have received this Advent and pray for each family by name.

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## December 19

*Sing for joy!*

Hark! The herald angels sing...it's time to go caroling!

## December 20

*Jesus is love.*

Today is the Fourth Sunday of Advent: Light all four candles.

## December 21

*Jesus gives.*

Be a "Secret Santa" today and give a gift or do something kind for someone without them knowing.

## December 22

*Jesus is the Light of the World.*

Eat dinner by the light of your Advent wreath and reflect on John 1:1-5 using the guided meditation.

## December 23

*Jesus is with us.*

Practice being *with* one another tonight with a family night in, or a drive to look at Christmas lights.

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## December 24

*Jesus is our journey's end.*

It's Christmas Eve! Mary and Joseph arrive at the stable.

## December 25

*God is come.*

Merry Christmas! Place baby Jesus in the manger and give thanks to God for the greatest gift.

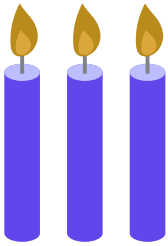
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# *Making an Advent Wreath*

The Advent wreath provides a way of marking time through the Advent season. As another candle is lit each week, the light grows brighter and brighter leading up to the arrival of the Light of the World. This practice creates space to slow down amid a busy season of preparation, and to spend time in prayer and reflection as a family.



The circle shape of the wreath represents God's infinite and unending love. Evergreen represents everlasting life in Jesus Christ. The jagged leaves of holly represent the crown of thorns and the berries represent Christ's blood.



The candles represent Jesus as the Light of the World. Purple, the color of three candles, symbolizes not only penitence, but also royalty, signaling the coming of a King. Some churches use blue candles rather than purple, which symbolizes hope, the night sky before the dawn, the sea before creation, and Mary.



The lighter pink candle represents a lightening of the serious and somber mood of Advent and a turn towards the joy of Christmas. This candle is lit on the third Sunday of Advent, called Gaudete Sunday, which is Latin for "rejoice."



A fifth white candle--the Christ candle--may also be added to the middle and lit on Christmas day, and through Christmastide.

# Appendix A

## *Making an Advent Wreath*

### You will need:



Greenery: If your family picks a live tree, ask the tree farm for your trimmings to use for your Advent wreath. Otherwise, forage your yard or neighborhood for evergreen, rosemary, holly, magnolia leaves, etc..

Advent candles: These are sold at most craft stores in a set of three purple and one pink taper candles. If you would like to light your wreath every night of Advent rather than just Sundays, you will need at least 12-inch candles. Beeswax are more expensive but they will burn slower. Making your own beeswax Advent candles is a fun activity for children, and kits are available online.

Christ candle: This large white pillar candle is optional and set in the center of the wreath. It is typically lit on Christmas day and throughout Christmastide. You may wish to keep it on your table throughout the year to be lit during dinner as an invitation for Christ to be present at your table.

Advent wreath ring: A circle wreath form with four holes for candles

Garden shears

Floral wire

### Directions:

Use floral wire to fasten greenery around the wreath ring. Spritz with water daily. Note that holly is toxic for many animals, so if you have curious pets or children, you may want to skip the red berries altogether!

Color the candle each week!

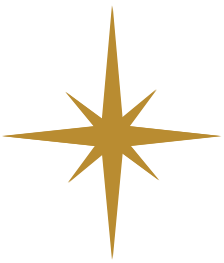


# *The Annunciation*

Henry Ossawa Tanner was born in Pittsburgh in 1859, and was the first African American artist to gain international acclaim. Tanner painted *The Annunciation* in 1898 after returning from a trip to the Holy Land. While most painters had previously depicted the Annunciation in Renaissaince or Baroque style with Mary as a wealthy European, Tanner was inspired by his travels and notably painted Mary as a Middle Eastern girl in a humble dwelling.




The Annunciation by Henry Ossawa Tanner (1898)



# *St. Nicholas Day*

St. Nicholas morning is filled with merriment as children rush to find the surprises left for them in their stockings or shoes. Over a special breakfast or dinner, read one of the recommended St. Nicholas books and offer the prayer on the next page.

## St. Nicholas Pancakes

Add some cinnamon and nutmeg to your pancake mix, use chocolate chips for eyes, whipped cream for a beard, and sliced strawberries for a hat and you have festive spiced St. Nicholas pancakes for breakfast.

## St. Nicholas Cookies

Traditional St. Nicholas spice cookies are called *Spekulatius*, which either comes from the Latin for "mirror (*speculum*)" (because they often have St. Nick's face on them) or the Dutch word for "spice." Recipes are readily available on the internet (visit stnicholascenter.org), and there is also one provided in *The Baker's Dozen: A Saint Nicholas Tale,* one of the recommended children's book listed for today. If you do not have a St. Nicholas cookie cutter, a candy cane shape cookie can represent his Bishop's crozier, or you could cut out stockings or "gold coins." A St. Nicholas cookie cutter would be a great addition to your children's stocking so you have it to use for years to come!

## Recommended Reading

*The Baker's Dozen: A Saint Nicholas Tale* by Aaron Shepard

*The True Story of Saint Nicholas* by Foster Eich

# *St. Nicholas Day*

## St. Nick Stockings and Shoes

On the night of December 5, children around the world set stockings and shoes by the fire place or front door for St. Nicholas to fill with treats such as:

- Bags of gold chocolate coins to symbolize the gold coins given in the
- dowry as well as the food St. Nicholas gave to those in need
- A clementine or orange also to symbolize the gold coins
- A candy cane to symbolize St. Nicholas' bishop's crozier
  like a shepherd's staff)
  A dollar to give away to someone in need just as St. Nicholas did with his inheritance
- An Advent or Christmas book, which is a great way to slowly build your collection
- A Christmas ornament so that when your child moves out, they will have an entire collection to remind them of their childhood