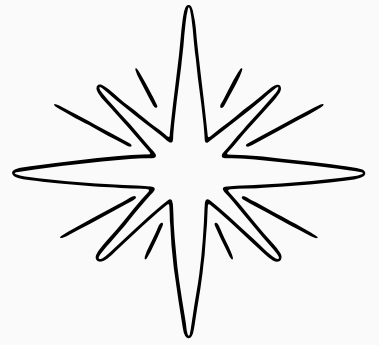


ADVENT - CHRISTMAS - EPIPHANY 2025



St. Michael & All Angels
Episcopal Church
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saintmichaels-sanibel.org

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MESSAGE FROM FR. BILL

Advent is a 4 week season of watching, waiting and preparing for the coming of Christ. In candlelight and scripture, prayer and song, we remember God's promises and make room in our hearts for hope, peace, joy, and love. The world may rush ahead to Christmas, but Advent invites a different pace: to slow down, to notice grace, and to prepare a manger-place within for Christ to be born once again. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (John 1:5).

This booklet highlights many ways to enter the story: ideas to bring the seasons into your home, seasonal events, online resources, and more. Choose one or two offerings that speak to you. Invite a friend to participate with you. Try something new.

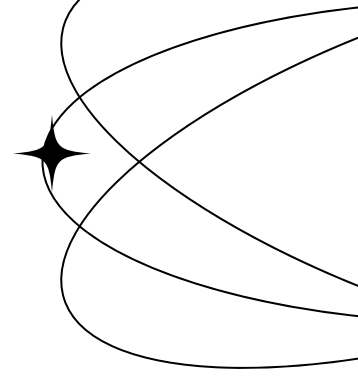
Walking the Spiritual Pathways

At St. Michael's we grow in Christ through our Spiritual Pathways—simple, everyday ways of following Jesus with heart, mind, soul, and strength. Some pathways are outward and active. Some are reflective and interior. All are meant to be lived in community. During the seasons of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany, you'll find unique spiritual practices and programs that meet you where you are and gently invite your next faithful step.

May Christ find in our heart a home ready to receive him, where He might come into the world once again as light and love, and may this Advent renew our hope for Sanibel and the wider world.



THE SEASON OF ADVENT



Although Advent appears at the end of the secular calendar year, it is the four-week season that begins the Church year, starting on the Sunday closest to November 30 and ending on Christmas Eve. It is a time of hopeful waiting and preparation—for Christ’s coming in history recalling the Nativity at Bethlehem and Christ’s presence with us now. The word “Advent” means arrival or coming.

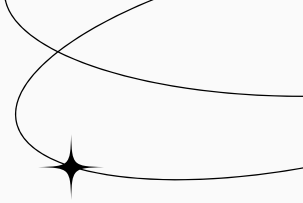
Advent is not an early Christmas, but the path that prepares us to receive it fully. It is a time to try and take time to slow down, in the frenetic pace of preparing for Christmas and ask “What am I waiting for - and how am I waiting?”

This booklet has several ways you can “wait”, so browse through and choose 1 or 2 that speak to you and help you “wait.” The aim isn’t busyness but attentiveness, so that Christ finds in us a ready heart.

As the days grow shorter each week, we are invited to draw closer to the light of Christ. In her book *Learning to Walk in the Dark*; Episcopal priest Barbara Brown Taylor writes, “new life starts in the dark, whether it is a seed in the ground, a baby in the womb, or Jesus in the tomb, it starts in the dark.” Advent is an invitation for rest and growth before a new beginning. What light do you see this year? What would you like this season to look like? Is there something you can give up or drop from your busy schedule to make more room for Christ to enter in?

In short: Advent is the Church’s gentle reset—a season to slow down, listen for promise, and make room for the Light that the darkness cannot overcome.

ADVENT WREATH



The Advent Wreath is a many centuries old tradition of bringing light into homes and places of worship to help prepare for the coming of Jesus at Christmas. The wreath is a circle, symbolizing God's continual love for us, with no beginning and no end. Often it is decorated with evergreens, reminding us of the natural world God created. There are four candles, one for each week. Three candles are a deep blue (Saron blue) to signal hope, peace and love; while some use purple. On the Third Sunday of Advent (Gaudete), pink is used to mark a note of joy as we draw nearer to the birth of Jesus. A white candle can be placed in the center for the Christ Candle, which burns on Christmas Eve and Day. It reminds us that Jesus is the Light of the World.

You can also just use 4 votive candles, 4 battery powered candles or whatever you have in your home and light one each week. The next few pages have prayers and reflections you can use as you light your Advent wreath to bring hope, peace, joy and love in your heart and home.

ADVENT WREATH PRAYERS

First Sunday of Advent- Blue Candle of Hope

In the Bible, we learn to hope because God promised to send us someone to bring light to the world. The prophet Isaiah says, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light."

Prayer: God of promise, awaken in us a living hope that looks beyond what is to what, by your grace, can be. Give us patience in our waiting and courage in our trusting, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Questions to reflect on: What are you hoping for today? this season? next year?
Where am I being invited to trust God's promise rather than my own timelines?

Second Sunday of Advent- Blue Candle of Peace

In the Bible, we learn that Jesus will be called the Prince of Peace. When the angels announce Jesus' birth, they sing "peace on earth and goodwill to all people."

Prayer: Lord Jesus, Prince of Peace, quiet our anxious hearts and reconcile what is divided within us and around us. Make us instruments of your peace in this community, to the glory of your Name. Amen.

Questions to reflect on: What is one step I can take this week to make peace—with God, with myself, or with another person? In this busy season, what are some ways I can find peace?

Third Sunday of Advent- Pink Candle of Joy

When the shepherds hear the angels announcing that Jesus is born in Bethlehem, they learn of "good news of great joy, which shall be to all people." Even the simple shepherds were included in God's plan, our happiness increases too as we learn that we are in God's plan too.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, wellspring of joy, open us to your gladness that no circumstance can steal. Teach us to rejoice in your nearness and to share that joy with others. Through Christ our Savior. Amen.

Question to reflect on: Where did I glimpse God's joy this week, and how can I pass that joy along? What are some things that bring you joy?

Fourth Sunday of Advent- Blue Candle of Love

God's great gift to us is Jesus, the one who shows us God's love. In the Bible we read, "God so loved the world that God gave God's only son."

Prayer: Gracious God, whose very nature is love, shape our hearts after yours. Help us to love in deed and truth, especially toward those who are overlooked or hard to love. Through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Question to reflect on: Who is God placing on my heart to love more concretely this week, and what will that love look like in action? How do our Christmas gifts show our love for our families and friends? Could we give the gift of an experience or time with them that would show our love instead of something physical?

ADVENT CALENDAR

There are many ways to “count down” the days of Advent leading to Christmas. Here are a few options you can look at and decide which one fits best for you.

adventword.org/ AdventWord is an inspirational online Advent calendar featuring a daily prompt word. Followers receive a daily meditation and image inspired by the day’s word, and are invited to share their own personal reflections, art, poetry, or other creative expression.

Two versions are below; one for children/grandchildren to do, the other for adults; adapt any day’s activity if you’d like, it doesn’t have to be the exact one on the calendar.

KINDNESS ADVENT CALENDAR

1 MAKE A CARD FOR A NEIGHBOR	2 DONATE A BOOK TO A LITTLE FREE LIBRARY	3 TELL SOMEONE WHAT YOU LOVE ABOUT THEM	4 CALL A FAMILY MEMBER TO SAY HI	5 PICKUP TRASH OUTSIDE	6 HELP MAKE DINNER
7 WRITE A THANK YOU NOTE FOR A TEACHER	8 TAKE CANNED FOOD TO THE FOOD BANK	9 MAKE A GIFT FOR A FRIEND	10 WRAP AND DONATE A NEW TOY	11 OFFER SOMEONE A HUG	12 DONATE SUPPLIES TO AN ANIMAL SHELTER
13 OFFER TO HELP SOMEONE	14 SAY SOMETHING NICE TO A FRIEND	15 PUT OUT FOOD FOR THE BIRDS	16 SAY HELLO TO SOMEONE NEW	17 LET SOMEONE GO AHEAD OF YOU IN LINE	18 LEAVE OUT TREATS FOR DELIVERY DRIVERS
19 MAKE COOKIES FOR FRIENDS	20 HELP A FAMILY MEMBER WITH A CHORE	21 WRITE A THANK YOU CARD FOR YOUR MAIL CARRIER	22 READ ALoud TO A PET OR FAMILY MEMBER	23 HELP SET THE TABLE	24 LEAVE A KIND NOTE FOR SOMEONE TO FIND

24 DAYS OF KINDNESS

CHRISTMAS ADVENT

25 DAYS OF KINDNESS

DAY 1

Write a thank-you note to someone who's helped you.

DAY 2

Donate food items to a local food bank.

DAY 3

Compliment someone today, sincerely and warmly.

DAY 4

Leave a cheerful note on a neighbor's door.

DAY 5

Pick up litter in your neighborhood or park.

DAY 6

Send a holiday card to a family member or friend.

DAY 7

Donate clothes you no longer wear to charity.

DAY 8

Leave a positive review for a small business you love.

DAY 9

Bake treats and share them with friends or neighbors.

DAY 10

Call or message someone you haven't spoken to in a while.

DAY 11

Pay for the coffee or snack of the person behind you.

DAY 12

Give a handmade gift to someone special.

DAY 13

Donate toys or books to a children's charity.

DAY 14

Help a family member or friend with a task or chore.

DAY 15

Leave a kind note for a teacher, coworker, or service worker.

DAY 16

Surprise someone with a small, thoughtful gift.

DAY 17

Offer to walk a neighbor's dog or help with their pet care.

DAY 18

Share words of encouragement with someone.

DAY 19

Donate supplies to an animal shelter.

DAY 20

Put together a small care package for someone in need.

DAY 21

Let someone go ahead of you in line.

DAY 22

Send a heartfelt message to someone you appreciate.

DAY 23

Leave an extra tip for your server or barista.

DAY 24

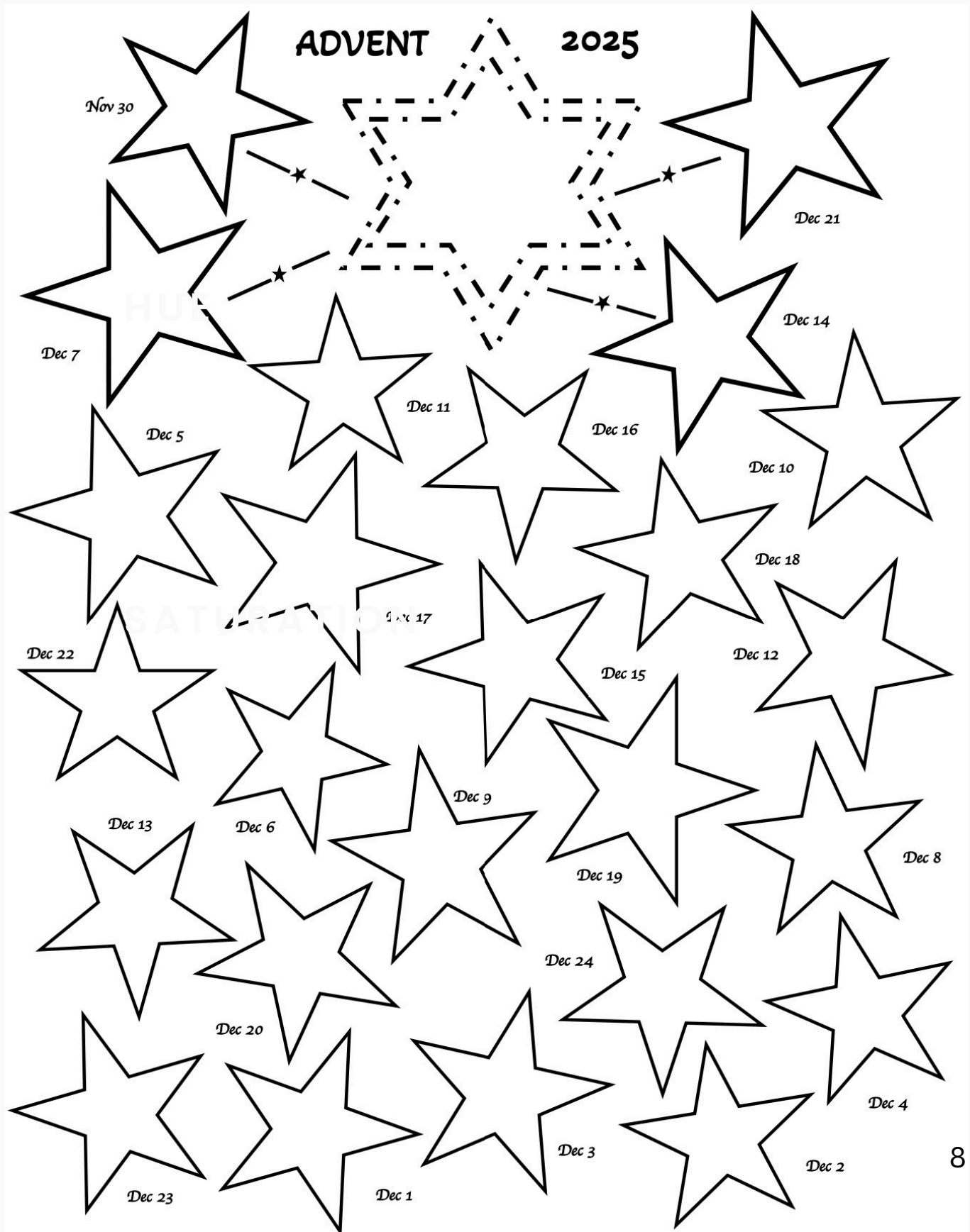
Drop off holiday flowers or a plant at a care home.

DAY 25

Spend quality time with loved ones and reflect on gratitude.

ADVENT CALENDAR

Here's a calendar you can fill in each day with something you are grateful for, someone or something you want to pray for, or whatever is on your heart. From Sybil MacBeth's Praying in Color





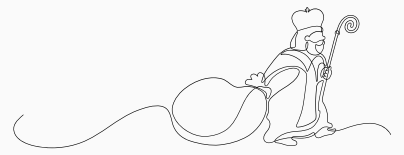
TRADITIONS- GIFT GIVING

Perhaps gift giving has wrongly become the focus of Christmas instead of thanking God for the gift of God's Son, who brought light into a dark world. When we stop and realize that the birth of Jesus was not just a one-time gift from God over two thousand years ago, but that it has tangible meaning and impact on our lives every single day in the "now"; giving gifts to one another can be a natural expression of our gratitude.

Reflect on the type, amount and to whom you give gifts. Instead of being in a frenzy trying to purchase gifts, try to focus on each recipient and what they truly would enjoy; here are some ideas that are not material or don't cost a lot of money:

- Give an "experience", it might be a lunch date; going to a play together, visiting a museum, or a new city
- Volunteer somewhere in the recipient's name
- Write down wonderful memories of that person, qualities they have, etc and put in a jar for them to take out one at a time
- Cook them their favorite meal or treat
- Give the gift of time- make a commitment for a monthly date for tea/coffee
- Share your family's cherished recipes
- Grow something for them
- Create a journal of your favorite inspirational quotes/scripture/ books
- Gift them a special memento you have in your possession
- Share your talents, draw a portrait of their dog, knit a scarf, write a poem
- Make a digital playlist of songs, poems, or movie clips that remind you of them
- Make a photo album or video: Put together a collection of photos or a video montage of your favorite memories with them.
- Help them tackle a challenge nobody wants to do the hard things by themselves. Things like moving, decluttering, and painting aren't exactly fun, but they can become fun with a friend.
- Surprise them with a free event, there are always free things to do around town, but not necessarily the motivation to do them. Make sure it actually happens: pick them up, don't tell them where you're going, and have fun.
- The gift of your ear, your acceptance, your humor, your happiness

ST. NICHOLAS



Who was St. Nicholas? The true story of Santa Claus begins with Nicholas, who was born during the third century in the village of Patara in Asia Minor. At the time the area was Greek and is now on the southern coast of Turkey. His wealthy parents, who raised him to be a devout Christian, died in an epidemic while Nicholas was still young. Obeying Jesus' words to "sell what you own and give the money to the poor," Nicholas used his whole inheritance to assist the needy, the sick and the suffering. He dedicated his life to serving God and was made Bishop of Myra while still a young man. Bishop Nicholas became known throughout the land for his anonymous generosity to those in need, his love for children and his concern for sailors and ships. [Read more](http://www.stnicholascenter.org/who-is-st-nicholas) at www.stnicholascenter.org/who-is-st-nicholas

- Find Myra and Turkey where Saint Nicholas lived on a globe or map. <http://christmas-world.freesevers.com/turkey.html>
- Learn about the difference between St. Nicholas and Santa Claus. St. Nicholas was a real person who lived hundreds of years ago. Many people around the world celebrate his life and good deeds on December 6. This is a day to think more about giving than receiving!
- This can be a great day for older children and youth to better understand the story of St. Nicholas. Watch this short video about how to "become" St. Nicholas. Perform a "Nicholas deed." The video shows how to become St. Nicholas every day when you make simple acts of kindness a routine. Start on St. Nicholas Day with some special Nicholas deeds. <https://www.stnicholascenter.org/who-is-st-nicholas/movies/becoming-santa>
- Make gift bags for neighbors or friends and plan a way to leave on their porch or doorstep when no one is looking. Start with a bag and fill it with gold wrapped chocolate coins (a reminder of Nicholas' many gifts of gold coins to the needy) a candy cane (a sweet treat shaped like the bishop's crozier) and a St. Nicholas prayer.

St. Nicholas' Prayer: God of joy and cheer, we thank you for your servant, the good bishop Nicholas. In loving the poor, he showed us your kindness; in caring for your children, he revealed your love. Make us thoughtful without need of reward so that we, too, may be good followers of Jesus. Amen adapted from Lisa Pucchio



NATIVITY SCENE / CRECHE



Tradition credits St. Francis with creating the first nativity scene with live animals in 1223. From Italy, the nativity was adapted and spread quickly. Some swapped out live animals for figurines, some added characters like the shepherds and magi. If you have a nativity with figures, move the kings throughout the house as they journey to the manger, and arrive on Epiphany January 4.

Reflect on the characters in the nativity story, what might their lives been like? Which one is your favorite and why?

Blessing Prayer for setting up the nativity scene in your home

Gracious God, bless this home and all who dwell here. Bless the stable and the figures I/we place— Mary and Joseph, steadfast in faith; the shepherds, quick to wonder; the animals of your good creation; and, in due time, the Christ Child, Prince of Peace and Savior of the world.

May this simple scene become for me/us a living sign of your presence with the lowly and the hopeful, and a gentle summons to make room for you. As I/we look upon this nativity through the days of Advent and Christmas, grant that my/our hearts may be a Bethlehem for your Son: open to joy, awake to mercy, and ready to share your love with all. May the light of Christ shine in this house, casting out all darkness, and filling us with compassion, gratitude, and peace. Amen.

Here is a video we compiled in 2021 of various parishioners nativity sets and the stories behind them; even more special because some of the people in the video have since passed on.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjsn_C2eO0o&list=PLmr9MkoTk1PQKloKJXNxteQwoxWk41f-D&index=1

We will be making a new video, and would love more submissions; send a photo or video of your nativity set and a brief description of it to communications@saintmichaels-sanibel.org

THE SEASON OF CHRISTMAS– THE 12 DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

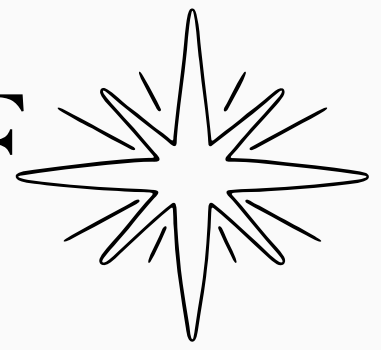
In the Episcopal Church, Christmas is not just a day but a season—a full twelve-day celebration of the Incarnation. We begin on Christmas Day (December 25) and continue through January 6, with the Feast of the Epiphany (celebrated the Sunday before) as the joyful climax and turning point into a new season.

Christmas (“Christ’s Mass”) proclaims the heart of the Gospel: God has come among us in Jesus—not as an idea, but as a real human life. The “Twelve Days of Christmas” are an ancient way the Church resists letting it pass too quickly. The 12 days of the Christmas season teaches us that joy is not rushed.

Ways to “keep” the Season of Christmas

- Let the nativity “live” all twelve days. Keep it up through Epiphany, and don’t rush to pack it away on Dec. 26. The lingering is the point.
- Move the Magi a little closer each day. Start them across the room on Dec. 25 and “journey” them toward the manger daily.
- Light a candle at the crèche each evening.
- Bless your home on Twelfth Night. On Jan. 5 (the eve of Epiphany), do a gentle house blessing: process room-to-room with a candle, praying for Christ’s light to fill your home.
- Read the Christmas stories slowly instead of all at once.
Dec. 25–27: Luke 2:1–20 (Nativity)
Dec. 28–31: John 1:1–14 (Incarnation)
Jan. 1–5: Matthew 2:1–12 (Magi)
- Plan one small “Christmas hospitality” act each day. Bake for a neighbor, call someone who’s alone, write a thank-you note, etc
- Have a real Twelfth Night treat or dinner. Something simple but set-apart—dessert with friends, leftover-party, soup and carols—so the season has a finish line that feels celebratory.
- Make a Christmas carol “playlist for the season,” not the day. One carol after dinner, or in the car, keeps the soundtrack alive past Dec. 25.

THE SEASON OF EPIPHANY



The Epiphany season in the Episcopal Church is the stretch of the Church year in which we celebrate the “showing forth” of Jesus Christ to the world—his identity revealed not just to a few, but to all people. “Epiphany” means manifestation or revealing. It starts on the Feast of the Epiphany (January 6), or in many parishes with the Sunday closest to Jan. 6. The season continues until Ash Wednesday (the start of Lent).

The day of Epiphany is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew that tells us the magi followed a star and arrived in Bethlehem with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh for baby Jesus. The gospel readings trace a series of “epiphanies”—moments when Jesus is made known:

1. The Magi and the star — Christ revealed to the Gentiles/nations.
2. The Baptism of Jesus — God’s voice and the Spirit’s descent reveal Jesus as God’s beloved Son.
3. Jesus’ first signs and teachings (like Cana and early ministry) — his glory and compassion become visible in public life.

So Epiphany is really the season of “Who is Jesus, and what does his light mean for the world?” Who or what is leading you to God? Which stars will you follow this year and what road will you take? What gifts will you offer?

Because Christ is revealed to us, we are sent to reveal him in how we live—justice, mercy, evangelism, service, hospitality. Epiphany is part of “ordinary time” in the sense that it focuses on growing in faith through Jesus’ teaching and ministry. In short: Epiphany is the season of Christ’s light spreading outward—from the manger to the nations, from the Jordan to our daily lives.



STAR WORDS

A tradition that has grown in popularity in many churches is the distribution of star words on Epiphany. **On Epiphany weekend, January 3-4 we will be handing out wooden Star Words at the services with a different word on each star.** The star word you will receive will be your guiding “star” for the new year. Just as the magi followed the star to seek out baby Jesus, we also seek Jesus in our lives, trusting the God can/does use many signs to guide us closer to Him.

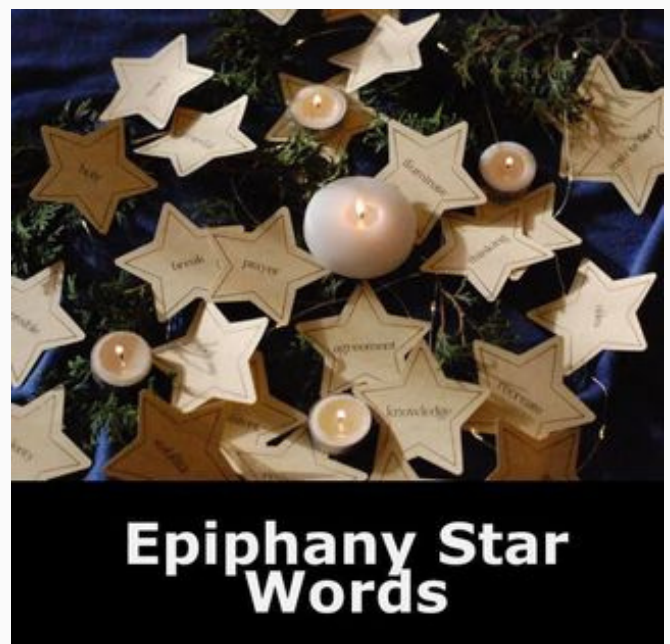
You can reflect on that word for the coming year and are invited to ponder what significance this word might have in your life, and how God might be speaking to you through that simple one word message. You can start by looking up the word in an online dictionary. Everyone who receives a star word is encouraged to take it home and place it where you will see it every day. Trust that the word has selected you. A word that at first seems unclear may gain new meaning as the year goes on. Often the words seem very timely, as if they were indeed designated for the recipient; it is this sense of wondering how God might be working through a simple word that can make it very meaningful throughout the year. Many people keep their star words from year to year, gradually accumulating a virtual constellation of wise words and encouragement as a reminder of God’s guiding presence in their lives.

There are also online star word generators:

<https://perchance.org/xxp0wwpf7m>

OR

<http://wordoftheyear.me/>





ONLINE RESOURCES

- **Advent webpage on our website,** www.saintmichaels-sanibel.org/advent
-
- **Advent and Christmas @ Washington National Cathedral.** Several of their special services are livestreamed, including their Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, Blue Christmas Service and Gospel Christmas. <https://cathedral.org/worship/christmas-advent/>
- **Advent Word** A daily word to prompt reflection during Advent <https://adventword.org/>
- **Living Well through Advent,** a free pdf of daily reflections for the days of Advent, or you can sign up to receive a daily email with the reflection in it. <https://www.livingcompass.org/advent>
- **Virginia Theological Seminary's** collection of Advent articles, prayers and more <https://buildfaith.org/category/advent/>
- **A spotify playlist of Advent songs**
https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5XkycrQU8tpPuzlMrX8TkG?mc_cid=2f2b377b77&mc_eid=db9c69418a&si=v_-YJzHLTJu88ZaAKPrNUQ&nd=1&dlsi=d4f85870beff454d
- **The St. Nicholas Center** is a wealth of information, activities, and videos explaining who the real St. Nicholas of Myra was.
<https://www.stnicholascenter.org/>



Advent & Christmas @ St. Michael's



- Sat/Sun Nov. 29/30 First Weekend of Advent
Advent In a Bag Distribution, Giving Tree
- Wed. Dec. 3 Gingerbread Workshop for kids with FISH 2:30pm
- Thurs. Dec 4, 11, 18 Advent Bible Study 10am Zoom
- Thurs. Dec. 4 Caroling at King's Crown@Shell Point 2pm
- Fri. Dec 5, 12, 19 Grief Support Group 10am
- Fri. Dec. 5 Luminary Event 5-9pm
- Sat. Dec. 6 Concert with Erik Entwistle & Renata Arado 3pm
- Mon. Dec. 8 ECW Christmas Program 12:30pm
- Fri. Dec. 12 Lessons & Carols/Reception 3pm
- Sun. Dec. 14 Christmas Messy Church 5pm
- **Wed. Dec. 24 Christmas Eve Services 5pm & 8pm**
- **Thurs. Dec. 25 Christmas Day Service 10am**
- **Epiphany Services/Star Words Jan 3 5pm Jan 4 8 & 10:30am**