The Gifts of Christmas



An Advent guide for busy families

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SAINT JOSEPH CATHOLIC CHURCH SJM

How to use this guide:



What is the one thing that every child loves most about Christmas? Presents! There is nothing more magical than a Christmas tree with piles of wrapped gifts just waiting to be opened. The anticipation of that moment is almost unbearable... and perfect! This moment becomes one of our most precious memories and we try to recreate it for our children each year. However, sometimes the magic starts to wear off for us as adults and we can long for the days where we opened the piles of presents instead of wrapping them all. I know that I do. The good news is that God wants us to have all the joy that comes from gifts at Christmas.

Receiving gifts is exactly what God wants us to do at Christmas. Each year we wrap dozens of gifts in pretty paper so that we can show our love to those who are closest to us. We want to surprise them, dazzle them, and make them feel seen and loved. The gift is about far more than the value of the item itself. The time we put into it, the money we sacrifice to buy it, and the excitement of doing something unexpected are all a part of the gift. Our desire to shower our family and friends with presents is not just a random cultural phenomenon. It is rooted in our deep desire to be like God.

Every day of our lives, God wants to give us gifts. He doesn't just want to give us what we need, but he wants to go above and beyond what we expect. He wants to surprise us, dazzle us, and make us feel seen and loved. The gifts he gives us fill every part of our lives and there are endless examples. He doesn't just give us food, he gives us more options then we could ever think of. He doesn't just give us a beautiful world, he changes it up just because he knows we will like it. He doesn't just save us from our sin, he promises to heal us. He doesn't just promise to hear our prayer, he stays with us in the Eucharist so we can have access to him 24/7. He never gives the minimum, but always exceeds our expectations.

We are all blessed with a God who loves us so much that he floods our lives with gifts, and this advent guide is all about recognizing that. It is full of simple ways to be excited and appreciate those gifts as a family. As parents it is our job to help our kids realize how deeply and truly loved they are- both by us and by our God. So choose which activities work for you. Pick some of them, or do them all. Either way, let's challenge ourselves to receive the gifts of God with thanksgiving this Advent!





The Season of Gifts

While giving gifts is traditionally done on Christmas day, we as Catholics like to celebrate a lot more than that! We have a variety of traditions that you can add to your Christmas traditions to help you embrace the joy of the season while learning more about our faith.

St. Nicholas Day

St. Nicholas day is celebrated on December 6th. St. Nicholas was a Bishop in the early church who was known for his generosity and for giving away his money and possessions to people in need. He needed to hide his gifts from the leaders who hated Christians, so he often put them down the chimney or in shoes. Some say that St. Nicholas is how Santa got his start! On December 5th, children leave their shoes out to be filled with candy or small gifts.





12 Days of Christmas

The Christmas celebration in the Catholic church is not just one day. We celebrate 12 days of Christmas starting on December 25- January 6th. There is a tradition of giving gifts on each of these days. Some families will give individual gifts to each family member or will have a special family gift for each day. Get creative! Spreading the joy of gifts out over several days really makes Christmas feel like the big celebration that it is!

Epiphany

The last day of Christmas is Epiphany on January 6th. This is the day we celebrate the three wise men and their gifts to baby Jesus. In some Catholic cultures this is when kids receive their gifts. The night before they leave straw out for the wise men's camels to eat. In return, the wise men leave presents!



The Perfect Present Calendar

The Best Gifts

To me, Advent isn't complete without a countdown calendar! This one is a bit different. Instead of taking things away each day, you are going to add them. Each day you will place a gift under your tree. Each one represents something that God gives you. As you place it under the tree, take a few minutes to reflect on that gift as a family and talk about how you see it in your own life. Then say a prayer of thanksgiving to God who gives your family so many amazing things. The pile of gifts will grow as you get closer to Christmas, reminding everyone in your home that we love a God who wants to fill our lives with good things!







Directions:

1. Print the Perfect Present printable and cut out the gifts. Don't forget to print extra blank gifts so you can write down other gitfs God gives if you have one that isn't listed.

2. Find a place to display the countdown. Use a small basket to hold the presents and keep a glue stick nearby.

3. Each day, choose a gift. Talk about how you see that in your life and say a prayer of thanks.

4. As the days go by, glue the presents under the tree (be sure to point out how God gives us so much).

5. On Christmas Day, glue the star to the top of the tree!

Making Memories with Music

Music during the Christmas season is a must! Click on our handpicked playlists that will help you enjoy the season of Advent no matter what you are doing!



Advent Playlist

The season of Advent in the Church has its own collection of songs that help us remember that we are waiting! Let this playlist help keep your mind on what Advent is all about.



Prayer Playlist

Have you ever used music for prayer? It is a powerful way to pray. Try putting this playlist on to begin your prayer time as a family. Use the lyrics as words for your own prayer.



Baking Playlist

We all enjoy making traditional food during this season. This is a playlist to help set the mood for enjoying seasonal baking!



Celebration Playlist

Celebrating Christmas includes great music! Here are some of our favorite songs of the season!

Movies and Christmas go together like Christmas trees and lights! While we all have our favorite movies of the season, try adding one of these to your movie nights this Advent! Don't forget to take a moment to talk about how the movie helps us think about the love of Jesus this season!

1.



This is one of my FAVORITE movies at Christmas. It is told through the eyes of the Donkey who traveled with Mary and Joseph. It is full of funny moments for kids and adults!

The Star

2.



This is on our book list too! Netflix adapted this book as a show. It is a sweet story about one girl's desire to keep baby Jesus warm in the cold.

Angela's Christmas

3.



While not technically a Christmas movie, C.S. Lewis wove Christian themes throughout Narnia! It is fun to try to find the truths of our faith woven through this epic fantasy world.

The Chronicles of Narnia

4.



This is a retelling of Charles Dickens famous book and it is hilarious! While we laugh our way through this, it is still a beautiful way to talk to kids about the real things of value in life.

The Muppets Christmas Carol

5.



This is a beautiful portrayal of the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. I love the powerful way movies can help us reflect on different parts of a story we have heard a thousand times.

The Nativity Story

6.



This is the BEST drama of Jesus' life I have ever seen. It is all about the relationship people had with him and how that impacts their lives. It makes Jesus come alive as a real person!

The Chosen

7.



This is a movie all about the importance of each life in our world. What a better way to spend an evening than remembering that Jesus made you with real importance in this universe.

It's a Wonderful Life

8.



This is a great cartoon about the life of St. Nicholas who later became the legendary Santa.

Nicholas: The Boy Who Became Santa

9.



Celebrate Our Lady of Guadalupe's feast on December 12th by watching this short film that is free on FORMED.

Our Lady of Guadalupe & St. Juan Diego

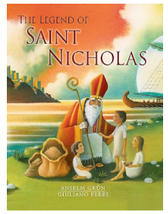


Stories of the Season

There is nothing like the gift of reading to your kids. It is a simple way to give something to your family that can have a big impact! Stories are not just for kids. Evvveryone enjoys a good story. Choose a Christmas book from the list below to read and then discuss with your family how this book helps us to think more about Jesus this advent.



The Best Advent Ever



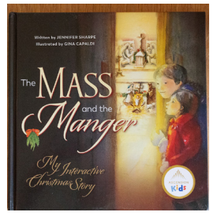
Saint Nicholas



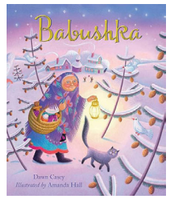
The Last Straw



Long Ago on a Silent Night



The Mass and the Manger



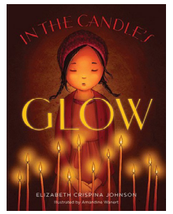
Babushka



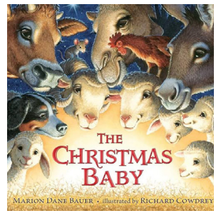
The Carpenter's Gift



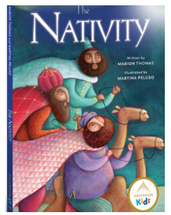
'Twas the Evening of Christmas



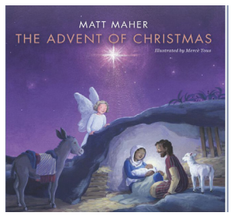
In the Candle's Glow



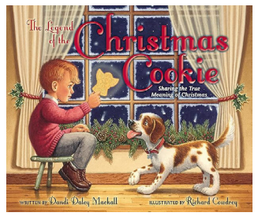
The Christmas Baby



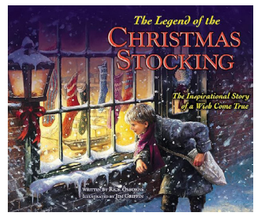
Nativity



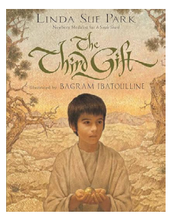
The Advent of Christmas



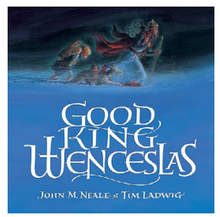
The Legend of the Christmas Cookie



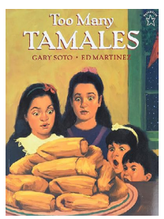
The Legend of the Christmas Stocking



The Third Gift



Good King Wenceslas



Too Many Tamales



The Little Fir Tree



The Night the Saints Saved Christmas





MERRY & BRIGHT

Day By Day

Consider having a small daily dose of time with God this Advent. This book list is perfect for finding the right book for you or your family.



Advent Bundles - Catholic Family Crate



Advent Devotional (Adult) - Blessed Is She



Mary on the Mantel



Adore - Ave Maria Press



Advent Meditations - Ascension Press



Advent Reflections - Word on Fire



Best Advent Ever - Dynamic Catholic



Prepare Your Heart - Ave Maria Press



Advent Devotional (Child) - Blessed Is She



The Giving Manger



Messiah Stories of Advent - LifeTeen



24 Christmas Stories for Little Ones

Recipes for the Soul

The act of giving a gift is a chance for us to be like God our Father! When we give to the people in our lives we can give them a bit of the joy we feel when we receive gifts! This is a recipe for a sweet and salty snack mix that you can give to neighbors, friends, or just about anyone! Each ingredient represents a part of the Nativity story, so you can share with them the true joy of gift giving!



Nativity Snack Mix

4 cups of Chex
3 cups of pretzels
3 cups of Bugles
3 cups of animal crackers
2 cups of M&Ms
1 cup butter
1 ¼ cup brown sugar
1 tablespoon of corn syrup
¼ teaspoon of salt
Gift tags

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 250 degrees. Cover two baking sheets with parchment paper.
Mix Chex, pretzels, Bugles, and, animal crackers in a large mixing bowl. Set aside.



Place butter, brown sugar, salt, and corn syrup in a heat proof bowl. Microwave on high for 3-4 minutes until bubbly.



Pour over mix and toss until well coated. Dump mix onto the prepared baking sheets dividing it evenly between the two. Bake it for 1 hour, stirring every 15 minutes.
Remove from over and cool. Mix in the M&Ms when cool. Bag and attach tags to give as a gift to friends and neighbors.





Family Gift Guide

When it comes to buying gifts, for people we are faced with the question of what is the best gift to get. Sometimes we need a little inspiration. This gift list is full of cool Catholic things that you can give this year. It is a great way to bring our faith and the fun of Christmas together!

1.



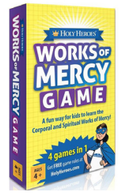
Nativity Balance Game

2.



Mary Dress Up Magnet Playset

3.



Works of Mercy Game

4.



Catholic Name It

5.



Nativity Puzzle

6.



Jesus Bandages

7.



Shining Light Dolls

8.



Journeys of St. Paul Board Game

9.



Tiny Saints

10.



Fr. Leopold Mass Lego

11. 

[Feast Day!]

12. 

[Crush King Herod Game]

13. 

[Sock Religious]

14. 

[Little Drops of Water]

15. 

[Catholic Card Game]

16. 

[Totally Catholic Tees]

17. 

[Stella & Tide Jewlery]

18. 

[Catholic Coffee]

19. 

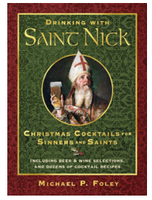
[Saint Tote]

20. 

[Pray & Wait Candle]

21. 

[St. Joseph Mug]

22. 

[Drinking With St. Nick Book]

23. 

[Ave Maria Scarf]

24. 

[Ave Maria Sweatshirt]

25. 

[Chews Life Rosary Bracelet]



Peek-a-boo Prayer Card

Prayer is a Gift

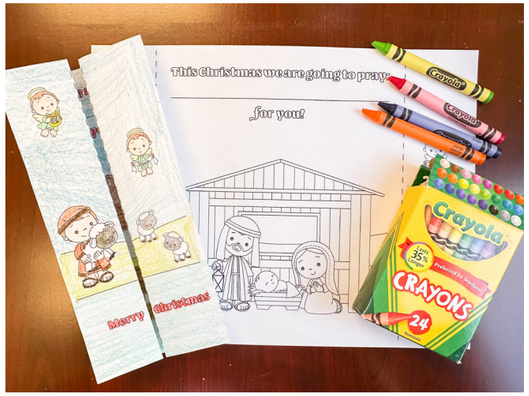
Praying for other people is a powerful gift to give! It costs nothing, you can do it at any age, and it can create a powerful impact in someone's life. This Christmas send the gift of prayer to someone. Maybe its a neighbor, a friend, a family member, or your parish priest!

This fun peek-a-boo card is a great way to do that. Print it off and decorate it however you want! Use crayons, paint, markers, or whatever else you can find. Then add the prayers you will pray on the line inside the card.

To fold the card, start with the outside flaps and fold them toward the back. Bring the folded edges to meet in the middle and your card is all ready to send. Don't forget to sign your name!







Prayers you can pray:

There are so many prayers you can pray for other people. If you need an idea of what to put in your card, choose one or more of these ideas. Remember, you can pray as many prayers for someone as you want.

1. Pray a Hail Mary
2. Pray an Our Father
3. Pray a Glory Be
4. You can offer your Mass for that person
5. Pray a Rosary
6. Pick a Novena to pray
7. Pray the St. Andrew Christmas Novena
8. Write a special prayer for that person
9. Pray to the Holy Spirit
10. Pray to a saint



Praying Together

Prayer is the most important thing we can do every day as a family, especially during advent. The best part about praying is that we can do it any time of day! So pray in the car on the way to school, pray before meals, before bedtime, or even in the shower. Find a way this Advent to bring your family together for prayer every day...no matter where that is. There are more ways to pray than there are people on earth, so find a prayer that is just right for your family. I have included some prayers for Advent to help you get started.

St. Andrew Novena

The Saint Andrew Christmas Novena prayer below is traditionally prayed 15 times a day from November 30, the Feast of Saint Andrew, through Christmas Eve. It is said Jesus will grant any request of the person who prays this faithfully if it is good for them.

Hail and blessed be the hour and moment at which the Son of God was born,
of a most pure Virgin Mary, at midnight,
in Bethlehem, in piercing cold.
In that hour, vouchsafe, oh my God,
to hear my prayers and grant my desires,
(Mention your intentions here)
through the merits of Our Savior Jesus Christ, and of his Blessed Mother.
Amen

Christmas Prayer



Loving Father,
Help us remember the birth of Jesus,
that we may share in the song of the angels,
the gladness of the shepherds,
and worship of the wise men.
Close the door of hate
and open the door of love all over the world.
Let kindness come with every gift
and good desires with every greeting.
Deliver us from evil by the blessing
which Christ brings,
and teach us to be merry with clear hearts.
May the Christmas morning
make us happy to be thy children,
and Christmas evening bring us to our beds
with grateful thoughts,
forgiving and forgiven,
for Jesus' sake.

Amen.



Christmas Tree Blessing

Leader: Let us glorify Christ our light, who brings salvation and peace into our midst, now and forever.
All: Amen
Leader: My brothers and sisters, amidst signs and wonders Christ Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea: his birth brings joy to our hearts and enlightenment to our minds. With this tree, decorated and adorned, may we welcome Christ among us; may its lights guide us to the perfect light.
Listen to the words of the Prophet Ezekiel:
"Thus says the Lord God: I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of a cedar; I will set it out. I will break off a tender one from the topmost of its young twigs; I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain."
The Word of the Lord
All: Thanks be to God.
Leader: Now let us pray for God's blessing on those who gather around this tree.



God of all creation,
we praise you for this tree
which brings beauty and memories
and the promise of life to our home.
May your blessing be upon
all who gather around this tree,
all who keep the Christmas festival by its lights.
We wait for the coming of the Christ,
the days of everlasting justice and of peace.
You are our God, living and reigning,
for ever and ever.
All: Amen.



The lights of the tree are then turned on and the leader sprinkles the tree with Holy Water. Conclude with a Christmas Song (like Oh Come, Oh Come, Emmanuel)

Nativity Prayer of St. Bernard

Let Your goodness Lord appear to us, that we made in your image, conform ourselves to it. In our own strength we cannot imitate Your majesty, power, and wonder nor is it fitting for us to try. But Your mercy reaches from the heavens through the clouds to the earth below. You have come to us as a small child, but you have brought us the greatest of all gifts, the gift of eternal love Caress us with Your tiny hands, embrace us with Your tiny arms and pierce our hearts with Your soft, sweet cries. Amen.

Advent Night Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You for this day and the many blessings You've given us. Grant us a restful night of sleep as we await the celebration of the birth of Your Son, Jesus.
Amen.

Advent Wreath Blessing



Leader: Our help is in the name of the Lord.

All: Who made heaven and earth.



Leader: O God, by whose Word all things are sanctified, pour forth Your blessing upon this wreath and grant that we who use it may prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ and may receive from You abundant graces. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.
The wreath would then be sprinkled with holy water.

Week 1:

The following prayer should be repeated each day during the first week. After the prayer the first purple candle is lit and left burning during the evening meal.

Leader: O Lord, stir up Thy might, we beg Thee, and come, that by Thy protection we may deserve to be rescued from the threatening dangers of our sins and saved by Thy deliverance. Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Week 2:

Two purple candles are lit and left burning during the evening meal following the prayer.

Leader: O Lord, stir up our hearts that we may prepare for Thy only begotten Son, that through His coming we may be made worthy to serve Thee with pure minds. Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Week 3:

The two purple candles from last week and the rose colored candle are lit this week. The rose candle reminds us of the joy of Christmas that is getting closer.

Leader: O Lord, we beg Thee, incline Thy ear to our prayers and enlighten the darkness of our minds by the grace of Thy visitation. Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Week 4:

Light all four candles during the evening meal this week.

Leader: O Lord, stir up Thy power, we pray Thee, and come; and with great might help us, that with the help of Thy Grace, Thy merciful forgiveness may hasten what our sins impede. Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is a way to pray with the scripture in a deeply personal way. The method was based on Jewish traditions and was later developed by St. Benedict in the early days of the Church. This can take as long as you want, but typically people set aside 15-30 minutes to go through the five steps. You can use any bible passage you want, but using the daily readings for mass is an easy place to start. The great thing about Lectio Divina is that it is something that can easily be done alone or as a family. Start with a prayer to the Holy Spirit (Come, Holy Spirit). Then follow these steps, remembering there is no wrong way to do it.

Step 1: Read
In this step, read the passage several times. Let the Holy Spirit show you a word or phrase that resonates (or sticks out) to you. Write it down in your journal. If you are doing it as a family, read it out loud once, then give a moment of silence and read it out loud again.

Step 2: Meditate
In this step, we reread the passage again and think about the part that stuck out to us in the last step. Consider it from different angles. Place yourself in the scene and think about what you see, hear, or experience. Take a moment to focus on the words, their meaning, their implications. Consider the historical or biblical context of the words. This is a time to ponder and study.

Step 3: Respond
In this step, we reread the passage one more time and take a moment to write down our thoughts and response to God's inspiration. What do you want to say about this to God? What are your thoughts on what stuck out to you?

Step 4: Contemplate
The final step is to sit quietly. This is a time to let God speak to you and to listen to him. Sometimes we just rest in silence and let God love us.



Advent Bible Passages

Here are 30 bible passages you can use for Lectio Divina with your family. That is enough to do one per day if you want to. If that is too many, just pick one or a few and spend a few minutes focusing on Jesus this Advent together!

Day 1 - Isaiah 9:2
Day 2 - Isaiah 9:6-7
Day 3 - Genesis 3:15
Day 4 - Isaiah 7:14
Day 5 - Isaiah 11:1-4
Day 6 - Isaiah 40:9-11
Day 7 - Isaiah 42:1-4
Day 8 - Isaiah 61:1-3
Day 9 - Jeremiah 23:5-6
Day 10 - Micah 5:2-4
Day 11 - Zechariah 9:9-10
Day 12 - Isaiah 52:7-10
Day 13 - Isaiah 40:1-5
Day 14 - Isaiah 53:1-5
Day 15 - John 1:1-5
Day 16 - Luke 1:5-17
Day 17 - Luke 1:18-25
Day 18 - Luke 1:26-38
Day 19 - Luke 1:39-45
Day 20 - Luke 1:47-56
Day 21 - Luke 1: 57-66
Day 22 - Luke 1:67-80
Day 23 - Matthew 1:18-24
Day 24 - Luke 2:1-7
Day 25 - Luke 2:8-20
Day 26 - Matthew 2:1-6
Day 27 - Matthew 2:7-12
Day 28 - Matthew 2:13-15
Day 29 - Matthew 2:16-18
Day 30 - Matthew 2:19-23

The Rosary

This is a quick overview on how we pray the rosary:

- Make the Sign of the Cross.
- Holding the Crucifix, say the Apostles' Creed.
- On the first bead, say an Our Father.
- Say one Hail Mary on each of the next three beads.
- Say the Glory Be.
- For each of the five decades, announce the Mystery you will ponder then say the Our Father.
- Say one Hail Mary on each bead while meditating on the Mystery. End with a Glory Be.
- (After finishing each decade, some say the following prayer requested by the Blessed Virgin Mary at Fatima: O my Jesus, forgive us our sins, save us from the fires of hell; lead all souls to Heaven, especially those in most need of your mercy.)
- After saying the five decades, say the Hail, Holy Queen.
- End with the sign of the cross.

Joyful Mysteries

The Annunciation of the Angel Gabriel to Mary
The Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth
The Birth of Jesus in Bethlehem of Judea
The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple
The Finding of Jesus in the Temple

The Sorrowful Mysteries

The Agony of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane
The Scourging of Jesus at the Pillar
The Crowning of Jesus with Thorns
The Carrying of the Cross
The Crucifixion and Death of Jesus

The Luminous Mysteries

Jesus' Baptism in the Jordan
The Wedding at Cana
The Proclamation of the Kingdom
The Transfiguration
The Institution of the Eucharist

The Glorious Mysteries

The Resurrection of Jesus
The Ascension of Jesus into Heaven
The Descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost
The Assumption of Mary into Heaven
The Coronation of Our Lady in Heaven





Printables & Resources

Daily Reflection

1. What gift are we thinking about today?

2. Where do we see this gift in our own life?

3. Do we ever thank God for this gift?





Daily Reflection

1. What gift are we thinking about today?

2. Where do we see this gift in our own life?

3. Do we ever thank God for this gift?







The gift of God. We get to know him as a friend.

The gift of Free Will. We get to make choices.

The gift of Faith so we can believe what he tells us.

The gift of the Church. We have a place to belong.

The gift of Prayer. We get to talk to God.

The gift of the Mass. We get to be with God every Sunday.

The gift of Baptism which make us God's family.

The gift of Eucharist. We get to receive God in our hearts

The gift of Confession. We get to be forgiven no matter what.

The gift of our parents. God made our family right for us.

The gift of our family who loves us.

The gift of Grandparents who spoil us with love like God.

The gift of Godparents who help us become holy.

The gift of pets to love and care for.

The gift of our home where we are safe and warm.

The gift of school and our ability to learn.

The gift of play where we have fun!

The gift of food and all the good things we can eat.

The gift of nature and the beauty around us.

The gift of our health and bodies that are active.

The gift of the Bible that is God's word for us.

The gift of Christmas and the fun of the holiday. Jesus is here!

The gift of friends so we are not alone.

The gift of clothes that we like to wear.



“Every good and perfect gift is from above.” James 1:17





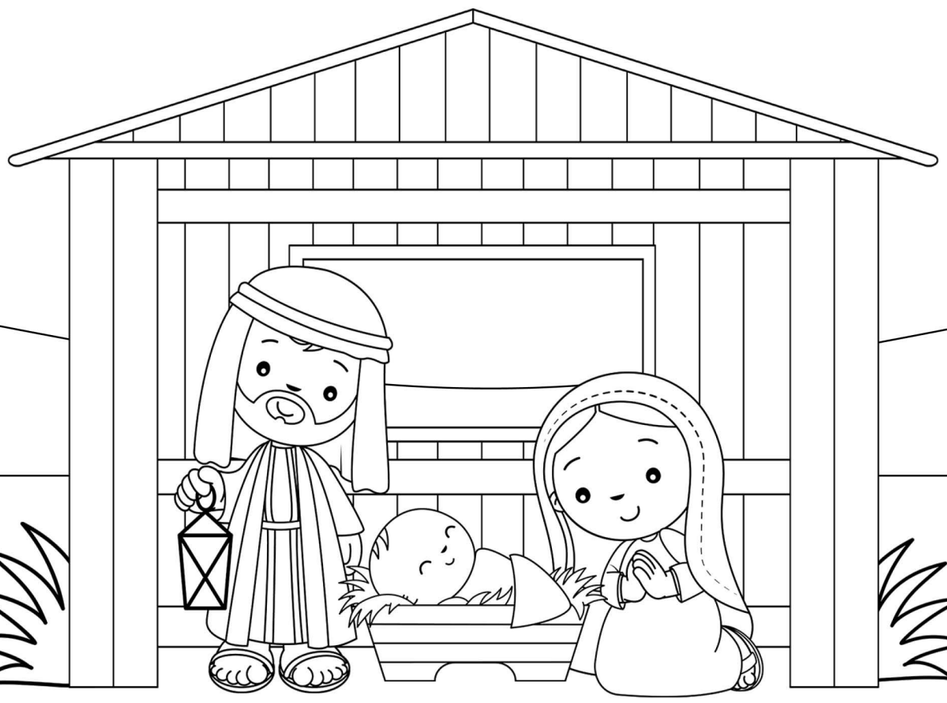
This Christmas we are going to pray:

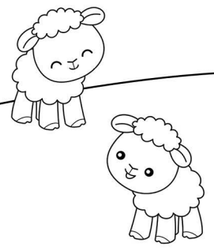
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for you!









Merry Christmas



Nativity Snack Mix

Animal Crackers:
Remind us of the donkey Mary rode to Bethlehem.
Chex:
Remind us of the straw in the stable.
Pretzels:
Remind us of baby Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes.
Bugles:
Remind us of the announcement of the angels to the shepherds.
M&Ms:
Remind us of the treasure the wise men brought Jesus



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Thank You



We want to invite you to join FORMED. If you don't know what this is, the best way to describe it is a Catholic Netflix. It has movies, series, books, and music that are all free to our parishioners since we pay for everyone to have a subscription. Please check it out to find some awesome Advent resources.

To login please visit: formed.org
Click sign up
Click I belong to a Parish or Organization
Find our parish: St. Joseph Parish 104 W. Broadway St. Maumee, OH
Type in your name and email address to join

We want to thank each and every one of you parents for the love and dedication you put into teaching your children about the faith. You are the missionaries in your homes and your work is so visible to the world. We are praying weekly for each and every one of you during our staff prayer!

We also want to thank the parish staff for all their help in building this project. So many people had a hand in making this possible.

And most of all, have a blessed Advent! We are praying for you!

