

Make Our Hearts Like Yours

Archdiocese of Seattle

Use this guide to help you and your family transform your hearts as you prepare for the coming of Jesus at Christmas.

Advent Family Traditions

Advent, the liturgical season before Christmas, is a great opportunity for families to enjoy joyful, faith-based traditions that keep the focus of the season on the anticipation of Jesus. This isn't easy when retailers start Christmas the day after Halloween. Even if you didn't grow up with many Advent traditions, are there one or two traditions on this list that you can try this year?

Advent Wreath

The Advent wreath is rich with the symbolism of the season: four candles for the four weeks of Advent with the flames representing the light of Christ to come. Lighting each candle is an opportunity for the family to gather in prayer and read the daily scripture or reflection from an Advent book. Try turning off the lights and sing a song like, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" or "Light the Advent Candle" as the candles are lit.

Advent Calendar

The point of an Advent calendar is to inspire hopeful anticipation for the coming of Jesus and to emphasize the spirit of waiting over the spirit of receiving. Although the chocolate and Lego calendars are fun, try a faith inspired Advent calendar this year, which are easy to purchase online. Many have daily scripture quotes from Advent to keep you in the Advent frame of mind.

For more resources, an Advent reflection guide, and other inspiration, go to archseattle.org/advent.

Christmas Anticipation Prayer

Also known as the St. Andrew Christmas Novena (not a typical 9-day novena), this beautiful, short daily prayer is traditionally prayed 15 times a day during Advent, starting on the Feast of St. Andrew on November 30. But for most busy families, praying it together once a day is a win. The words of the prayer are a reminder of the humble and historical event of the incarnation. Try saying the prayer after lighting the Advent wreath or as part of your prayers before dinner.

Straw for Baby Jesus

This tradition is when you put out a "manger" (a small cardboard box will do) and a bowl of "straw" in a common area (such as the kitchen table). The idea is to create a full bed of straw for baby Jesus by Christmas Eve by adding a piece of straw when a good deed or small sacrifice is done for Jesus. Everyone can participate, even parents! On Christmas Eve, lay baby Jesus (or a doll to symbolize) on the (hopefully) full bed of straw and sing "Away in a Manger" or "Silent Night."

Blessings for the Advent Wreath, Nativity set and Christmas Tree

You can find blessings for the Advent Wreath, Nativity set and Christmas Tree in many Catholic prayer books or online (such as archseattle.org/advent). Taking a moment to pause and pray a blessing is a great way to reflect on the meaning of these traditions. These blessings invite us to enjoy them with intention and gratitude.

Jesse Tree

This tradition traces salvation history from the Old Testament through the birth of Christ. Much like the Advent calendar but more involved with longer daily readings and song, it's a daily activity rich with symbolism and a great way for all ages to participate.

Decorating in stages

Instead of putting up all the Christmas decorations the morning after Thanksgiving, consider putting them up in stages to emphasize the season of waiting for the light of Christ. This will help put more focus on your Advent traditions. One idea is to wait to light and decorate the Christmas tree until Guadete (Rejoice) Sunday, the third Sunday of Advent. Remember, the Christmas season starts on Christmas and lasts all the way through the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord in January.

"O" Antiphons

The "O" Antiphons are beautiful, short chants used at vespers (evening prayers) for the last seven days of Advent from December 18-24, each starting with "O" and each highlighting a title for the Messiah (O Wisdom, O Lord,...), which increases the anticipation of Christ's coming. You can add these to your evening prayers around the Advent wreath or in front of the Nativity set.

St. Andrew Christmas Novena

Traditionally prayed November 30 to Christmas Eve.

Hail and blessed be the hour and moment in which the Son of God was born of the most pure Virgin Mary, at midnight, in Bethlehem, in the piercing cold. In that hour vouchsafe, I beseech Thee, O my God, to hear my prayer and grant my desires through the merits of Our Savior Jesus Christ, and of His Blessed Mother. Amen

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