

Catholic Passage

WINTER 2024

HOPE, PEACE, JOY &
LOVE THIS ADVENT
SEASON

5 FAMILY ADVENT
ACTIVITIES



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“THE TRUE LIGHT THAT GIVES LIGHT TO EVERYONE, WAS COMING INTO THE WORLD.”

JOHN 1:9



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Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love

THIS ADVENT SEASON

By: Jennifer Redenius: Catholic Passage Board Member

The holiday season can be easily overshadowed by the noise and busyness of gift giving and holiday parties. In an effort to anchor Christmas to its true meaning, many families include traditions such as lighting Advent candles. The season of Advent is a time of anticipation between Thanksgiving and Christmas leading up to the celebration of Jesus' birth. Each candle that is lit represents something different—love, hope, joy, and peace.

Hope

The first candle, the candle of Hope, represents Jesus's birth that delivered hope into the world. No matter the hardship we face, God's hope-filled arrival means we can have hope right here, right now. The gift of hope was not just for the past—it's for our present and our future too. We can hold a hopeful expectation for the dreams in our hearts, the deep prayers, and the desires we hold dear.

Questions for reflection:

1. What am I hopeful for today?
2. How can I be better about placing my hope in my faith instead of in other things?

Joy

If you ever need a reminder of what joy means, think of the smile you see on a child during the Christmas season. Jesus delights in the moments of happiness in our lives, but He also offers us something that goes beyond momentary happiness—forever joy. What a gift was given to us when He was born!

Questions for reflection:

1. When was the last time you felt happiness?
2. What does choosing joy look like this Christmas?

Peace

When you consider the business of Christmas, peace may not be the first thing that comes to mind. However, it is important to pause and consider this gift of peace that God gives us. Lay your burdens at His feet and trust that He's fighting battles on your behalf.

Questions for reflection:

1. What are some things that may take away your peace during the holiday season?
2. How can you slow down and delight in God's peace this Christmas?

Love

God's unending and limitless love is a gift that holds the power to transform our hearts and lives forever. This is something to be celebrated! When you understand the magnitude of God's love, wrapped in the gift of His Son, Jesus, it changes the way we view Christmas.

Questions for reflection:

1. When do you feel most loved by God?
2. How can you show God's love to others this holiday season?



An Opportunity for More

By: Aaron Lorch, Catholic Passage Board Member

This time of year is full of richness in mind and spirit, as well as our bellies. We nourish our bodies with lots of good food, while gathering together with extended family and friends more than we typically do. It's such a special time at the year's end with a swath of holidays and good times. Our secular culture recognizes the many opportunities we have to be thankful and merry, sharing in love and familial memories, but we as Christians know there is so much more there.

We of course have our Christmas Mass schedules to double check, the children's program to attend, the nativity set and other decorations to focus on, and the Christmas hymns to brush up on before we belt them out in the pew.

But what else are we doing for Advent? Considering the word itself means preparation, how well are we preparing ourselves? I know I can always do better. It's cool to try new stuff, so go ahead and check out Hallow or other app or website that can help guide you in prayer, spiritual growth, and preparation during this time. Tools like these can keep you regimented and in better spiritual focus when all the string lights, department store shopping, Santa Claus visit, extra minivan trips with the kids, and Michael Bublé can certainly pull your focus.

There is an opportunity for more! Reflect on what personal change you'd like to try this year to make this "The Best Advent Ever." Oh and on that note, you should go check out and sign up for Dynamic Catholic's "Best Advent Ever," a fantastic resource that's engaging and insightful, sent for free to your email inbox. But as you make a game plan for this season, please note that you don't have to do it all. You can get burned out during sports or rehearsal season with your children and grandchildren, but spiritual burnout is just as real of a thing. Start with prayer and ask God for grace and strength as you add another thing or two to your plate that you want to be dedicated to.

And speaking of plates, I have to again mention all that good food that we nourish our bodies with during the holidays. As we sit around the table, sharing food and memories with loved ones, recognize the additional opportunity there. Not only can we feed the bodies of our immediate and extended families, but also their souls. What that looks like might be completely different from one person and their family setting to the next, but I know that some people may only have a one-time yearly limited-time opportunity to see these particular loved ones of great distance. Who and what are you going to feed in that time? What (or who) is the greatest source of your nourishment this season?

ADVENT:

Joyful Preparation

By: Fr. Brian Feller

Advent is a time of joyful preparation. Do you recall the anticipatory joy in preparing your home for the kids' return at holiday or vacation time? What all goes into preparing for this homecoming? Groceries are bought, foods are prepared, the table is lengthened, tables are set up, and the holiday tablecloth is spread. In addition, you might have presents to wrap, decorations to place, to-do lists to complete. Of course there are the extras! There might be a project you'll need your kids' help completing. You might have a box of 'stuff' that your kids need to go through, or you might have some dates to discuss with the family. There can be a lot that goes into preparing for visitors. Take it all with a grain of salt and don't let it rob you of the joy of being together!

In Advent, we prepare our families to celebrate Jesus' first coming at Christmas. We also prepare for his second coming whenever that might be. We slow down our eyes (from screens), our ears (from useless jabber), and our feet (from needless running). It is a time to open our hearts to the heard Word of God spoken in our homes as we read the Sunday readings aloud at the dinner table. It is a time to think of others as we participate in the Jesse Tree or buy surprise gifts for others. It is a time to enjoy the light of the candles around the Advent Wreath. It is a time to come back to the Sacrament of Forgiveness and receive endless mercy and a fresh new start.

Advent is a joyful preparation because we anticipate seeing the one we love: Jesus. He loves you so much. He comes so small – as a baby – so that we can hold him close to our hearts and not have any fear. You are so important to him. Your children are so important to him. One of the gifts you can give your kids is the still peace and elevating joy of knowing Jesus.

DID YOU KNOW?

By: Erin Bohlmann, Catholic Passage Board Member

Did you know the Mass changes throughout the season of Advent?

During Advent, be sure to pay attention to the way the Mass changes. You'll notice differences in certain prayers, the hymns, decorations, and colors. For example, we refrain from saying the Gloria prayer, just as we refrain from saying Alleluia during Lent. Why? "Glory to God in the highest..." is what the angels proclaimed to the shepherds on the night of Christ's birth. We take a break from saying these words so they are even more special when we say them again on Christmas.

The hymns are specifically about waiting for Jesus... no Christmas songs yet! The most popular is O Come Emmanuel. You should also pay attention to the scripture stories. They will be about the Old Testament people waiting for God to send a Savior.

You won't see many decorations... yet. One decoration you will definitely see, though, is an Advent Wreath. It features three candles that are the church's color of preparation: violet. It also features one rose candle, which symbolizes that the waiting is almost over! This candle is lit on "Gaudete Sunday," the third week of Advent. Gaudete means "rejoice," because Christmas is so near!



Advent with Teenagers

By Jeanna Clayburg, Catholic Passage Board Member

Some of us have it figured out, some of us are still working on it and some of us have no idea.

What am I talking about? Advent, and the importance of teaching the meaning of it to our children. I fall into the category of, “still working on it.” I’ll admit that I didn’t even know what the Jesse Tree was until a few years ago! As I was doing some research for a new Advent lesson for my 4th grade CCD class, I came across the Jesse Tree. WOW! I thought it was so good and wondered why I had never heard of it before.

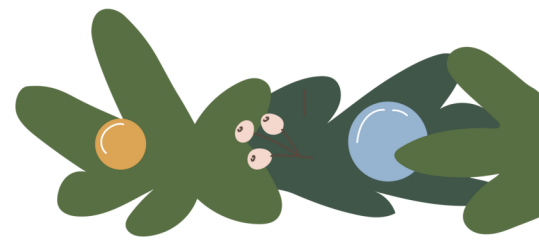
I’ll get back to the Jesse Tree in a moment, but I want to just touch base on Advent in general. Advent at our home, when the kids were little, consisted of saying a brief prayer and taking turns lighting the proper votive candle. Even when I spoke about Advent and the importance of it, they seemed to be more concerned about whose turn it was to light the candle and what was going on that night afterwards.

As they entered high school, and the schedule became even more demanding, we would only say the prayer once per week. However, I still lit the candles daily so when the kids would pass by, they would hopefully recognize it. Sometimes, though, the candles would only stay lit for 15 minutes, and sometimes they didn’t even get lit at all, as we just weren’t home.

We currently have two children in college and one in high school. They were all three at home a few weeks ago, and I heard them talking about our Advent wreath and how they used to light the candles. My heart was warmed. It’s easy to think that we didn’t do enough for our children or we should have done things differently, like add the Jesse Tree, but I’m quick to remind myself of where those thoughts are coming from, and they are not from our Lord.

Remember that the little things matter, and what sometimes doesn’t seem to be sinking in, is picked up by those little eyes and little ears. The visuals of religious items such as the Advent wreath or the Jesse Tree matter, even if each day of prayer around them looks a little different.

Just like I didn’t know about the Jesse Tree, depending on where you are at in your faith journey, you may not know exactly what Advent is, and that there are different ways you can prepare for the coming of Christ. That’s okay. New traditions can start now, and this newsletter offers some great ideas. Just like this year, I plan to send a “snap” to our family group snapchat, Fam Bam. I’ll video the lighting of our Advent candle and prayer, and include a special blessing that is personalized. There will definitely be some humor in the personalization, as that’s how our family rolls. It will be sent by Mom with love.



Advent with Teenagers

When does the liturgical season of Christmas actually start and end?

It seems that Christmas decorating begins earlier and earlier each year, and the rush to take down the tree begins for some on December 26. However, the liturgical season of Christmas actually lasts many days past the 26. Here are the “official” dates of the liturgical season of Christmas:

Advent- This takes place four Sundays prior to December 25. Advent is actually not part of the Christmas season. It is a season of anticipation. During this time, you will notice the liturgical readings recall Israel’s waiting for Christ as well as the Church’s longing for His return.

Christmas Day- This takes place from sunset on December 24 until sunset on December 25. In the church, Christmas Day begins not at midnight but with the celebration of Christmas Eve Mass.

Octave of Christmas- This happens from December 25 until January 1. These eight days extend the celebration of Christmas. The eighth day, January 1, is the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God—a holy day on which all Catholics are obliged to celebrate Mass.

The Twelve Days of Christmas- This happens from December 26 until January 6, which also happens to be Epiphany. Since 1970, Roman Catholics have celebrated Epiphany on the first Sunday after the Octave of Christmas.

Last but not least, the Catholic church’s liturgical season of Christmas - This begins on Christmas day (December 25) and lasts until the feast of the Baptism of the Lord (the Sunday after the Epiphany, usually the second Sunday of January). Ordinary time begins the day after we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord. So take your cues from what you see at your church, and don’t take down those decorations until Ordinary Time begins! Keep singing those Christmas carols and celebrating Jesus’ birth all the way until the true end of the Christmas season.

These dates were taken from: <https://www.teachingcatholickids.com/how-long-is-the-christmas-season/>

Chalking Doors for Christmas

Have you ever seen symbols like these written in chalk along a doorway?

20 + C + M + B + 25

This tradition is a Catholic blessing of the home (or other dwelling) that people typically celebrate on the Feast of the Epiphany. The Epiphany is a commemoration of the magi visiting Jesus in his first home. “Epiphany” means “manifestation”. Jesus was made manifest (shown) to the magi as the Savior of the world, and they adored Him. While we don’t know how many magi visited “the house” (Matthew 2:11) in Bethlehem, nor how long it was after His birth, there is a tradition that there were three (to match the 3 gifts referenced in Scripture: gold, frankincense, and myrrh). Tradition also names the magi: Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar. In a Chalking of the Door, the letters C, M, and B stand for the names of these three magi. The letters also stand for the Latin phrase, “Christus Mansionem Benedicat”, which means, “May Christ bless this house.” The first and last numbers comprise the four digits of the current year (ex: 2025). A cross is placed between each set of numbers and letters. The chalk symbols are nice reminders that you have asked for a blessing upon your dwelling and all who come in and out of those doors. It is also a good reminder to search for the Lord in your life and in the world, just like the magic.



Chalking Doors for Christmas



How to Chalk Your Door

1. Choose a date – Epiphany is on January 6, 12 days after Christmas. The church celebrates this feast on the next Sunday after Jan. 1, so either date is a good option.
2. Find some chalk – Sidewalk chalk is a particularly sturdy option.
3. Gather everyone together – If you're blessing your home, gather your whole household. If you're blessing your church building, invite the congregation.
4. Pray – Here is an option:

Leader: Peace be to this home, and to all who enter here.

All: *Amen.*

Choose one:

May all who come to our home this year rejoice to find Christ living among us; and may we seek and serve, in everyone we meet, that same Jesus who is your incarnate Word, now and forever. Amen.

God of heaven and earth, you revealed your only-begotten One to every nation by the guidance of a star. Bless this house and all who inhabit it. Fill us with the light of Christ, that our concern for others may reflect your love. We ask this through Christ our Savior. Amen.

All may take turns chalking the door: 20 + C + M + B + 25 as the following words are prayed:

The three Wise Men, Caspar [C], Melchior [M], and Balthazar [B], followed the star to Bethlehem and the child Jesus 2000 [20] and 25 [25] years ago. [+ +] May Christ bless our home [+ +], and remain with us throughout the new year. Amen.

All: Our Father, who art in Heaven... (finish the Lord's Prayer)

From: buildfaith.org/chalking-the-door/; prayers by Bosco Peters



1. Make a DIY Advent Wreath

Creating your own Advent wreath can be a fun activity you can do with your family as a way to enjoy the kick off and then prayerfully enjoy the Advent season.

Materials Needed:

- Four candles: three purple, one pink
- Evergreen branches: these can be real or artificial
- Round plate or something to display it on
- Nature decorations: berries, pinecones, etc.

Directions:

Gather your Materials. Arrange your candles on the plate. Cut and arrange the evergreen branches around the candles.

Arrange your decorations on the plate. Display in your home and ENJOY! Gather each Sunday to pray the Advent prayers and light the candle(s) for the week.

FIVE FAMILY ADVENT ACTIVITIES

By: Jennifer Redenius: Catholic Passage Board Member

2. Celebrate the Saints

- **December 6: Feast of St. Nicholas**
 - On the evening of December 5, children often leave out their shoes or stockings, eagerly anticipating the arrival of St. Nicholas, who leaves candy or small gifts.
- **December 13: Feast of St. Lucy**
 - On December 13, families can honor St. Lucy by having the oldest daughter (or another child) serve a treat to the entire family.

3. Go Christmas Caroling

Going caroling is an excellent way to spread the joy of Christmas to your community. By singing these songs, you can deepen your family's understanding and appreciation of the true meaning of Christmas. Have a conversation with your kids about the meaning of the lyrics or the origins of the songs you are singing!

4. Make a DIY Jesse Tree

The Jesse Tree, named after King David's father, is a wonderful tool to help children delve into the stories of the Old Testament. Through the use of stories and accompanying pictures, kids can gain a deeper understanding of the Old Testament and the prophecies that led to the birth of Jesus.

- Start on December 1st and hang an ornament each day. These ornaments serve as visual representations of significant biblical events and characters
- Dynamic Catholic has made excellent free instructions and printable ornaments. You can find them here: [Download the Jesse Tree Instructions](#) and [Download Printable Ornaments](#)

5. Spread Joy in the Holiday Season

The holiday season is an excellent time to remember those who may feel alone. You and your family can organize a trip to visit a nursing home or take homemade treats to an elderly or lonely neighbor. Be creative in thinking of ways you can spread cheer as a family to your community this holiday season.



Recharge Reflection

By: Tandy Gulbranson- Member of Our Lady of the Plains

The name says it all!

Sometimes after a long day, the last thing I want to do is be around people. But I also know we are called to be in communion with others. With that being said, I have found special graces are received every time I'm in community with others, even when I don't FEEL like it.

This Recharge gathering was good for the soul! Good food, good people, good leaders, good kids, and good conversations. The importance of carving out time for my faith, no matter how full my schedule, is a crucial stepping stone in being the best version of myself! Recharge is one way I can continue to go deeper in community and my faith. The night was the perfect Recharge every soul needs.

Photos from August 2024 Recharge Gathering



Thank You

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