



Living the Liturgical Year: Advent

First Sunday of Advent

The main thing to remember is that your *Advent season* should look more spare, more meditative, and more penitential than your Christmas season (during which you will feast and celebrate for 8 straight days). *Where possible*, try to limit candy, parties, and other celebratory activities. The more you do so, the more the Christmas season will stand out as a rush of joy and welcome for the newborn Savior!

November 30: Feast of St. Andrew

- [Coloring page](#)
- St. Andrew is said to have been martyred on an X-shaped cross. To commemorate him, serve your children celery sticks (or carrot sticks or pretzel rods) “glued” together into an X-shape with a dab of peanut butter.
- Alternatively, to honor his trade as a fisherman, serve goldfish crackers. Have your children try to “catch” the fish by using pretzel rod “reels” with a dab of PB or cream cheese on the end to “hook” them.

Dec 3: Memorial of St Francis Xavier

- [Learn more about this saint](#)
- St Francis Xavier’s life inspires us to ponder our own missionary duty as Catholic Christians. Teach your children his favorite prayer: “Give me souls” and encourage the practice of penances offered up for those souls.
- St. Francis Xavier was one of the church’s most illustrious missionaries. Cook a meal inspired by his trip to India, Japan, or the Philippines
- Get out a globe/map and find the places where St. Francis Xavier traveled and ministered while you read more about him.
- [Coloring page](#)
- There is a 30-minute children’s video on FORMED about St Francis Xavier.
- St Francis Xavier taught the faith by setting words to popular tunes and by versifying doctrine. Try this with your kids at snack time or at dinner! How can you make a rhyme about the gifts of the spirit? The works of mercy? To what tune can you set the story of the nativity? Be silly with your rhymes (though not irreverent) and have fun!
- [Read a letter from St Francis Xavier](#) describing his mission work; I found it to be very interesting and his descriptions of the “barbarians” not to be so far off from the mission field we find ourselves in here every day! (For middle school/high school)

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Dec 6: St Nicholas (optional memorial) SUPERSEDED by the Sunday liturgy

- [Read about St. Nicholas](#)
- Your library likely has several picture books about St Nicholas.
- [Coloring pages](#)
- There is a 30-minute children's video on FORMED about St Nicholas
- As you can imagine, there are a ton of recipes online to honor St. Nicholas. My favorites are the unexpected "[taco boats](#)" (he is the patron saint of sailors!) as well as this [easy candy-cane shaped coffee cake](#).
- If you would like to read more about the conflation of the Bishop of Myra and the jolly guy from the North Pole, [read this interesting article](#).
- Since St. Nicholas did his charitable acts in secret, challenge your children to do one act of kindness in secret today in his honor.
- Play this music: [The Legends of St. Nicholas](#) by Anonymous 4--medieval music sung by 4 female vocalists.

Dec 7: Memorial of St Ambrose

- [Learn more about St. Ambrose](#).
- Crafty? Since St. Ambrose is the patron saint of candle-makers, consider making your annual Christ candle on this day.
- [Coloring page](#)
- 30-minute video on FORMED about St. Augustine, which of course includes St. Ambrose
- Make "[beehive buns](#)" for this "honey-tongued" doctor of the church or [bee-shaped treats using cookie dough and pretzels](#), among other ideas. Find many snack ideas for St. Ambrose's day [here](#). A food idea that I particularly like is this recipe for "[ambrosia](#)" [fruit salad](#).

December 8: Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

On this solemnity, we celebrate that "the most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Saviour of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin."
(*Catechism of the Catholic Church*)

- [Coloring page](#)
- Look up "Bernadette" on FORMED for a 30-minute children's video; or
- If you prefer, there is a 30-minute *audio* file about St. Bernadette of Lourdes on FORMED, to whom Mary identified herself as the Immaculate Conception
- Cooking a "white" meal in honor of Mary's Immaculate Conception: something like fettuccini alfredo or chicken with roasted cauliflower. Simple ideas like this drive the point home for children!

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December 9: Optional Memorial of St. Juan Diego

- [Learn more here](#)
- Check out the ideas listed for December 12 (Our Lady of Guadalupe)

December 12: Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

- [Coloring page](#)
- Watch the 30-minute children's video or listen to a 30-minute audio file on FORMED.org.
- Check out the library for several picture books on Our Lady of Guadalupe.
- [Catholic Cuisine has a ton of lovely ideas](#), my favorite of which is a tilma shape made out of a large tortilla, folded up to hide the "roses" (i.e. ham) inside. Also, don't miss the sombreros made out of pringles and string cheese!
- Meditate on Our Lady's beautiful words to St. Juan Diego:
"Hear and let it penetrate into your heart, my dear little son; let nothing discourage you, nothing depress you. Let nothing alter your heart or your countenance. Also, do not fear any illness or vexation, anxiety or pain. Am I not here who am your Mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Am I not your fountain of life? Are you not in the crossing of my arms? Is there anything else that you need?"
- Pray for the unborn today! This is the only approved apparition in which Mary is pregnant.

December 13: St. Lucy (memorial), SUPERSEDED by the Sunday liturgy

- St. Lucy, a virgin martyr of the early 4th century, is listed in the canon of the Mass. According to legend, either she herself or her persecutors plucked out her eyeballs; consequently, she is often depicted holding her eyeballs on a platter. [Learn more about St. Lucy.](#)
- In some cultures, the oldest girl awakening the rest of the family on this day to invite them to a breakfast of coffee and sweet rolls. She traditionally wears a white robe with a red sash, and on her head is a crown with candles (paper or battery-operated candles).
- [Read about other cultural traditions regarding St. Lucy](#)
- [Coloring page](#)
- Say a prayer to St. Lucy for those who are spiritually blind.

December 14: Memorial of St. John of the Cross

St. John of the Cross is a Doctor of the Church and, along with St. Teresa of Ávila, was a great reformer of the Carmelite order and cofounder of the Discalced Carmelites. Persecuted by members of his own order who did not welcome his reforms (and who even imprisoned him), St. John underwent severe sufferings and is a great mystic of the church. The lesson for our children (among many) is God's ability to redeem suffering.

- Serve celery sticks, carrot sticks, or pretzels rods "glued" together in the shape of a cross with some peanut butter or cream cheese.
- Pray for those who are imprisoned.

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December 17: Beginning of the O Antiphons

An ancient monastic tradition is the O Antiphons: seven responses, or antiphons, that are sung or recited to introduce the canticle of Mary (the Magnificat) at evening prayer from December 17 to December 23, the octave before Christmas. These antiphons are based on Isaiah's prophecies and refer to the different ancient titles given to the Messiah.

If your family is large enough, assign each family member one O Antiphon. This person will plan (often with a parent's help) some food item at dinner that relates to his O Antiphon. [Catholic Cuisine offers many ideas](#). The ones I enjoy:

- **O Sapientia** (O Wisdom--see Isaiah 11:2–3; 28:29): any “brain” food; or eggs, from which we can see the wisdom of God's creation.
- **O Adonai** (O Lord and Ruler of the House of Israel--see Isaiah 11:4–5; 33:22): what a perfect day to put together your gingerbread house!
- **O Radix Jesse** (O Root of Jesse--see Isaiah 1:1; 11:10): any root vegetable or root beer
- **O Clavis David** (O Key of David--see Isaiah 9:6; 22:22): the O Antiphons were originally a monastic tradition, and on this evening, the monk in charge of the wine cellar would serve a special bottle of wine. This can be done in your home, or get some sparkling juice or flavored waters to serve to your children. A frozen key lime pie is an alternative.
- **O Oriens** (O Rising Sun or Dayspring -- see Isaiah 9:1): clementines or navel oranges are obvious reminders of the sun. Or serve a cheese-covered dip in a bowl with tortilla chips arrayed around it.
- **O Rex Gentium** (O King of the Nations--see Isaiah 9:5; 2:4): do you have any leftover sprinkles from Christ the King Sunday? Make a cake in a bundt pan, decorate cupcakes with “jewels” (sprinkles), or serve a recipe like chicken a la king.
- **O Emmanuel** (O God with us--see Isaiah 7:14): this antiphon goes on to say “our king and lawgiver”: try serving toast cut into the shapes of the tablets on which were written the 10 commandments or get some Pepperidge Farm milano cookies.

And where all planning fails? Just serve bagels, donuts, or a lifesaver that day.

Sing the verse of “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” that corresponds to your day. The verses plus icons corresponding to each day can be found in [this printable resource from CatholicCulture.org](#).



Advent ideas and what you will need

Jesse tree

The idea:

Go over salvation history. Use ornaments decorated with symbols to represent events and stories leading up to the birth of Jesus and hang them on a tree of some kind (the tree is so named after Jesse, father of King David--see Isaiah 11:1).

What you will need:

- You can order a kit.
- You can do it yourself...you need something to be the tree, something to make ornaments, and a Bible or a knowledge of the Bible stories. I have done one by using [a book](#) that has reproducible ornaments, which I have photocopied for the kids. I cut out a Christmas tree shape from wrapping paper and taped it on the wall. Each day (when all goes well), the kids color their ornaments while I read to them the appropriate passage from the Bible. They then cut out their ornaments and tape them on the tree.

Advent stockings: good works

The idea:

The family does a spiritual or corporal work of mercy (or other charitable act) each day of advent. For example, we might give away a piece of clothing; pray for an end to abortion; pray for our priests; call someone who might be lonely, etc.

You need:

- Slips of paper listing the good works you will do.
- Something to put them in.
I have [mini stockings](#) with numbers on them, which we hang up. Every evening I put a slip of paper in the next day's stocking, and I choose the activity based on our family calendar (see the list of ideas, formatted for printing, at the end of this section). You could easily do the same with numbered envelopes or even a mason jar.

Making a soft bed for Baby Jesus

The idea:

Family members make sacrifices and do good acts throughout Advent. For each one, they lay a piece of straw or hay in an empty manger, trying to get the bed as soft as possible before Baby Jesus will be born on Christmas morning.

You need:

- [Raffia](#), hay, straw, grass, or strips of construction paper.
- Some sort of manger.
- Baby Jesus statue. Here is [one similar](#) to what I bought for our family.

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Advent wreath

The idea:

Four candles represent the four Sundays of Advent. Three are purple to represent penance; the fourth is pink for Gaudete Sunday (the 3rd Sunday of Advent. Gaudete means “joy,” and the priest will wear rose-colored vestments). Each Sunday of Advent light another candle and say a prayer of longing for Our Savior.

You need:

- An [advent wreath](#)/candle holder
- [Candles](#)

Salvation history candle

The idea:

You will draw on a large candle (about 2 feet tall) the scenes from salvation history, starting with Adam and eve at the top and Baby Jesus at the bottom. You will burn the candle throughout Advent.

You need:

- A church-style large candle, 51% beeswax, about 2' tall. Can be found at [St Jude Shop](#)
- Drawing implements

Planned reading

The idea:

Read advent and nativity books during Advent: either one story per day in a book of collected Advent stories or separate books.

You will need:

- A book with a collection of 22-28 Advent stories; or
- 22-28 picture books that are Advent-related; if you choose this option, you might want to wrap them in wrapping paper and number them.



Slips to put into Advent stockings (or numbered envelopes): formatted for printing

Do something nice for someone in secret today.

Look around your room. Is there anything you can give away to the poor?

Do an extra chore today.

Try hard to be cheerful in everything you do today.

Draw a picture of the nativity.

Read about a saint today.

Pray for your parish priests today.

Pray for an end to abortion today and give away something to moms in need.

Pray for the deceased today. What sacrifice can you make for the souls in purgatory?

Pray for persecuted Christians today and learn about a country where people do not have freedom of religion.

Pray for people who do not know Jesus. Is there something you could do extra as an offering for them?

Pray for your family today. What can you do to help your family be more like the Holy Family?

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Pray a Rosary today.

Pray the Chaplet of Divine mercy.

Do an examination of conscience tonight, and if possible, schedule Confession sometime soon.

Take a meal to someone in need.

Make a card to send to someone who lives far away.

Call or invite someone over who might be lonely.

Read the Nativity story from the Bible.

Make ornaments to send to a nursing home.

Do something for someone else that you normally don't want to do (such as offer to play a game you know they like).

Eat all of your food with a good attitude (even if you don't like it) and be grateful you have it.

Sing a song to baby Jesus or make up a poem for Him.

Act out the nativity or part of the salvation story or do a puppet show.

Give money to the poor. You may do an extra chore and give away any money you earn.

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Bake something and give away half.

Write or draw a thank-you card for someone.

Make a gift for your parish priests.

Give away food to the food pantry.

Give away a piece of warm clothing.

Work on memorizing a Bible verse.

Go to morning Mass.

Give up something you like to do or eat today and offer it up as a prayer for someone in need.

Wrap up something you have and give it to someone.

These activities were compiled and created by CatholicMom contributor Amanda Woodiel. Learn more at her blog, [In a Place of Grace](#). Affiliate links are included. Your purchase through these links benefits the author.

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