

Family Activities for Advent

The following is extracted from:

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December / Advent / Christmas

December / Advent / Christmas at a Glance

Dedication for December: The Immaculate Conception

Liturgical Colors

Patron Saints of the Month

Celebrations Table for December/Advent

Season of Advent

December 6: Feast of St. Nicholas

December 8: Feast of the Immaculate Conception

December 13: St. Lucia Day

December 21: 1st Day of Winter

Saint Francis and the First Crèche

The Christmas Candle Tradition

December 24: Christmas Eve

December 25: Christmas Day

Christmas Booklet

Christmas Peace

A Christmas Legend

December 26: Feast of St. Stephen

December 27: Feast of St. John the Evangelist and Apostle

December 28: Feast of the Holy Innocents

1st Sunday after Christmas: Feast of the Holy Family

Dedication for December: The Immaculate Conception

Mary, Jesus' mother, is such a special person; she was chosen by God to be without any sin all her life.

December/Advent/Christmas Liturgical Colors

Advent: Purple

The Advent colors symbolize waiting, penance and preparation.

Christmas: White

The Christmas color symbolizes joy.

December

Patron Saints of the Month

- December 3: Francis Xavier: patron of missions, Borneo
- December 4: Barbara: architects, builders, the dying, miners, prisoners
- December 6: Nicholas of Myra: children, brides, Greece, merchants, sailors
- December 7: Ambrose: learning
- December 8: The Immaculate Conception: Brazil, Portugal, United States
- December 12: Our Lady of Guadalupe: North America and South America
- December 13: Lucy: eye diseases
- December 26: Stephen: bricklayers, deacons
- December 27: John: Asia Minor (Turkey)
- December 28: The Holy Innocents: babies

Celebrations Table for December/Advent

The table can reflect this holy time in several ways. Use a dark blue-violet cloth, or a dark blue cloth that is strewn with stars to symbolize the darkest time of the year and the years of darkness while the Jewish people waited for the Messiah. The table can be used to focus on the saints of Christmas time, particularly St. Nicholas and St. Lucia. Place a statue or holy card of Nicholas on the table and ask children to bring in cans of food to be donated to a food pantry, telling them of Nicholas' generosity as well as his concern for those who do not have what they need. The food can be on the table for a few days.

St. Lucia is associated with light. On her feast day, place a statue or picture and one candle. Add another candle each day until Christmas. Explain that Jesus is the Light of the World, and saints help us know his Light.

The table can also be used as the setting for an Advent wreath. It is a simple but powerful symbolism of the four week wait until Christ's birthday.

Another use for the table would be the placement of a child-proof Christmas crèche. In the beginning of Advent, place only the empty stable. As the days go by, add sheep, shepherds, other animals, the magi coming from the east, and Mary and Joseph traveling across the table towards the stable. Add the manger and Baby Jesus last.

Season of Advent

"Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths." Matthew 3:3

The beginning of the church year is marked with the season of Advent. The word "Advent" comes from the Latin word "Adventus" with means arrival or coming. Traditionally Advent begins on the Sunday nearest St. Andrew's feast day, which is November 30, and observed on the four Sundays before Christmas on December 25. The Advent season is one of anticipation, reflection and hope as we wait for the arrival of Jesus.

Prayer

Be with us, Lord, as we enter this waiting season of Advent. We thank you for the many blessings in our lives and with anticipation, preparation and hope we look forward to the arrival of the your Son, Jesus, the light of the world. Amen.

Activities

The Advent Wreath

The use of the Advent wreath with four candles has been an Advent ritual for hundreds of years. The Advent wreath is a symbol of the 4-week wait for Jesus' birth. The green branches remind us of the new life we have in Jesus, the circle represents the eternity of God's love for us (with no beginning and no end), and the candles represent the light and hope Jesus brings into a dark world.

Set up an Advent wreath in your classroom and use the prayers to observe the season with the children you teach. Or, pray with a living Advent wreath explained below.



A Living Wreath

Make a living Advent wreath with your children as you observe Advent. Use a 12' length of green garland. Cover 4 wrapping paper tubes or potato chip cans with purple paper and cut out 4 large flames from yellow paper. For each week in Advent add a flame to another candle. As you pray the Advent prayers have the children stand in a circle holding the green garland. Give four of the children a candle to hold. As you begin your prayer tape the flame to the candle. Add a flame to each candle as the weeks go by during Advent.



• *Prayer for Week 1*

As we light the 1st candle on our Advent wreath we start down a holy path to Christmas. We give thanks to God for all of the good things in our lives, especially the love of our family and friends. We are happy to share God's love with others while we are preparing to celebrate the birth of Jesus, God's Son. We ask that you help us stay on the Advent path and keep our hearts focused on Jesus as we prepare for Christmas. Amen.

• *Prayer for Week 2*

Mary and Joseph were people of great love. They were chosen to be the parents of Jesus because of their love for God. We are thankful to have their obedience, kindness and deep faith as our examples. As we travel on our Advent path and light the 2nd candle on the Advent wreath, we pray that we too will love God as much as Mary and Joseph. Amen.

• *Prayer for Week 3*

The journey to Bethlehem must have been very hard for Mary and Joseph. A long donkey ride on a rough path must have seemed to go on forever, but Mary and Joseph trusted God and knew that God would be there to take care of them. We are so thankful that God is always here for us, during good times and bad. We remember this when we light the 3rd candle on our Advent wreath. As we continue on the Advent path we ask God to be with us in all we do each day. Amen.

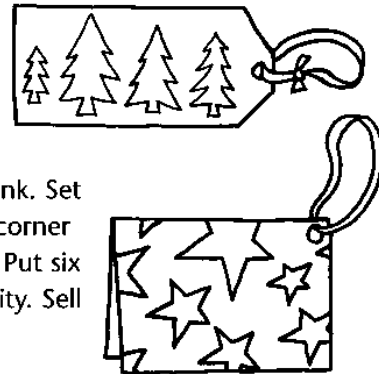
December

• *Prayer for Week 4*

How excited Mary and Joseph must have been as the day of Jesus' birth grew closer! Their hearts must have been full of joy and thanksgiving. As we light the 4th candle on our Advent wreath and Christmas Day comes closer, we too have become more excited and joyful. Be with us loving God and help us continue to keep Jesus in our hearts as our Advent path takes us closer to Christmas. Amen.

Gift Tags

Make gift tags as a service project during Advent. Collect used Christmas cards from parents and others in your community. Ask a volunteer to cut off the backs of the cards and sort through them so that the backside of all of the pictures is blank. Set up a workstation and have the children punch holes in an upper corner of each card. Have older children tie a ribbon through each hole. Put six tags in a zip lock bag and give them to members of the community. Sell the tags and donate your earnings to a "Toys for Tots" program.



Toy Workshop

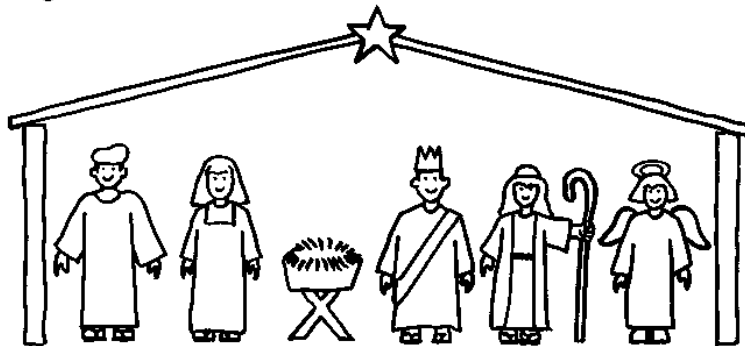
Set up a toy workshop in your classroom. Ask the children to bring in next-to-new toys that they have outgrown. Set up a center with wet wipes, tape, toothbrushes, etc. and have the children fix and clean up the toys. Donate the toys to a school or center in your community for their use or check with a homeless shelter for needs they may have.

Scavenger Hunt

Plan a magazine scavenger hunt. Have the children search through old November and December magazines to find pictures of Advent and Christmas symbols. Choose four to six symbols and place a picture of each on a large piece of construction paper attached to a shoebox. As the children find the symbols, they cut them out and place them in the correct box. Use these pictures to make holiday cards or place mats. Suggestions for symbols include candles, trees, lights, nativity scenes, stars, angels or gifts.

Nativity Scene

Put together a life-size nativity scene for a wall in a hallway or large meeting space. Assign each child a character out of the nativity story. If you have a large group, assign several shepherds and angels. Have the children take turns tracing each other's body for their character from the story on large paper. After the body is cut out, allow a lot of time to dress the character to fit the role. Use paper scraps, crayon, wrapping paper, etc. for clothes. To make halos staple tree garland or wire stars shaped in a circle to the top of the heads.

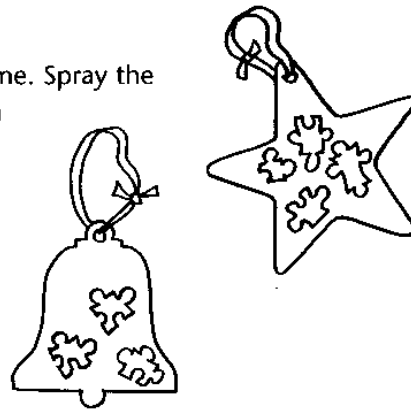


Use yarn for hair and sequins to decorate crowns. The sky is the limit on how far you go. Use crepe paper to outline a stable and paper cut outs to make the manger bed for baby Jesus. To make Jesus, trace a toddler or a baby doll one of the children owns. Tape the figures inside and around the stable. Add stars to the sky as well as trees and hills. If you have extra time have the children make sheep and cows, etc. Be sure the children put their names on their figures so that they can take them home later in the season.

Recycled Ornaments

Make recycled tree ornaments for the children to take home. Spray the small pieces of puzzles that are not being used any more with gold, red or green spray paint. When dry have the children glue these to Christmas symbols cut out of box cardboard also painted with spray paint.

Add a bit of glitter paint to the ornaments and allow to dry. Punch a hole in the top of the ornament and lace a ribbon through for hanging.



December 6 – St. Nicholas

St. Nicholas was a well-loved bishop born in the fourth century in the country now known as Turkey. His family was very wealthy and both of his parents died when he was very young. St. Nicholas is remembered for his very generous spirit. He always helped others and gave most of his inheritance away. St. Nicholas once helped a father who could not afford to take care of his three oldest daughters. The father did not know what to do. Nicholas found out and left money in the daughters' shoes that were drying outside of the house. Thus the tradition of leaving shoes at the doorstep for St. Nicholas to fill on December 6.

Here is yet another story of how St. Nicholas helped others:

In the city by the sea, the people were hungry because so little food had grown that year. One day, a ship came into the harbor, filled with grain for the powerful emperor. Bishop Nicholas went to the ship's captain. "My people need food, and the emperor has plenty," Nicholas said. "Please give us some grain. I promise you will not have any missing when you get to the emperor." This was impossible! And, the captain would be punished when the emperor found the grain missing. Still, he left some grain for the people. That grain supply lasted until food grew once again! And, the ship was not missing any grain! Bishop Nicholas miraculously kept his promise.

Prayer for St. Nicholas Day

Today we remember the generous spirit of St. Nicholas. He loved God and shared his devotion to God by helping people in need and putting others before himself. Dear God, we ask you to help us learn from the example of St. Nicholas. Help us to share kind words, our toys, and the games we play with those around us. We offer you this prayer with generous and loving hearts. Amen.

December

Activities

Filling Shoes With Candy

A favorite tradition on St. Nicholas Day is to have the children leave one shoe outside the classroom door. Have an adult friend leave a few candies, gold chocolate coins, a prayer card, pencil or small toy in each shoe.

Shoe Blessing

Celebrate with a shoe blessing before the children leave their shoes outside the door. Have the children sit in a circle and put one shoe in the center. Call the children a few at a time to retrieve a shoe (other than their own) from the pile of shoes in the circle. After everyone has a shoe they quietly look to see whose shoe they have. Start the blessing by having one person say,



“May God bless you today _____ (the child’s name) with a kind and giving heart just like St. Nicholas.”



as they return the shoe they have to its owner. The second child then returns the blessing to the first child. The second child then passes the shoe he or she has to its owner with the same blessing. The third child returns the blessing and on it goes until everyone has his or her own shoe back.

Holiday Service Project

Begin a holiday service project with a collection of socks on St. Nicholas Day. Encourage families to send in new socks in child and adult sizes for the children to fill. Before filling the socks, put one sock inside the other. This will keep the pairs of socks together. Fill the socks with soaps, toothbrushes, wrapped candy, small toys, pens, prayer cards, printed Band-Aids, etc. After filling them gather the top of the sock together and tie with a ribbon. Deliver to your local shelter.

Bishops’ Hats

Make bishops’ hats (Miters) for the children to wear in class on this special day. Use the pattern on page 69, tracing it on colored paper to make the front of the bishop’s hat. Cut out a gold cross and glue to the front of the hat. Staple or tape this to a strip of construction paper about 2” wide and 24” long. Adjust to fit on each child’s head.

Candy Canes

Share candy canes with the children and talk with them about the symbolism of the shape of the cane. Jesus was often called the Good Shepherd. A shepherd uses a cane or long hook to guide the sheep back to the fold or rescue. As a bishop, St. Nicholas carried a staff as a symbol of his relationship with God and the people he served. Bishops today still carry the staff when celebrating with the community.

Follow-up by making candy canes by twisting a red and white pipe cleaner together. Send them home with a brief explanation.

