

# Restore the Roots

Cultivating Your Domestic Church

A Liturgical Living Initiative of St. Joseph the Workman Cathedral, La Crosse, WI

Advent



## Advent



Saint Paul writes to the Galatians, “When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption.” As Christians, we are not merely interested in time but rather in the fullness of time, and we are willing (sometimes patiently and sometimes impatiently) to wait 4,000 years for this plenitude. It is not by accident, then, that the first season of the liturgical calendar, the “Christian New Year” so-to-speak, is marked by waiting. As Saint Alphonsus reflected, if we received instant gratification, we would hardly appreciate the gift.

Advent is derived from the Latin word meaning to come. Someone is coming to our house! Someone is coming over to stay! Let us make our house ready! The preparations that come with Advent should be filled with anticipation, with excitement. We clean what we need to clean (our carpets and our souls), we dust off what we need to dust off (our shelves and our prayer lives), and we light what we need to light (the fireplace and the flame of love in our hearts).

Who is coming to our house, and why is he coming? The God of the universe wants to

became man so that man might become god.” It is not that we literally become God, but that we share in His divine nature through grace. That’s crazy! It is worth considering every day. At Mass throughout the Advent season, we get to consider this more deeply, for God slowly revealed to His people His plan. We hear Isaiah say to the house of David, “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall name him Emmanuel.” The Lord says to Jeremiah, “The days are coming... when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and Judah... I will raise up for David a just shoot.” “The Lord, your God, is in your midst,” says Zephaniah, “a mighty savior; he will rejoice over you with gladness, and renew you in his love.” And Micah tells us that this great King and Shepherd will come from the tiny town of Bethlehem.

Just as we diligently prepare for a beloved guest whom we know in advance will come, let us prepare well for our divine guest! For just as he came once to live, to die, and to reconcile us to himself, we know he will come again to renew all things, when death will be no more. “Behold, I am coming soon” Jesus says in the book of Revelation. Let us prepare the way of the Lord. Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!

*Choose your own ‘Advent’ure!*



On the following pages are various practices for Advent. These are meant to help you enter prayerfully and deeply into the season. Don’t do them all; choose what looks interesting and what would increase your spiritual life. It’s better to do one thing well, not all things poorly. Don’t overwhelm yourself.

Start by looking for swaps, things that you already do and switch them to remain prayerfully in the season. Do your kids write letters to Santa? Write a letter to Jesus instead. Do you do a big decorating day? Pick a feast day closer to Christmas to do your decorating.

Next, choose a spiritual activity for you and/or your family. Get an Advent devotional for yourself. Do the Jesse tree as a family. Maybe the St. Andrew Novena will fit nicely on your drive to work or school. Tie these practices to something you do everyday, like dinner or bedtime. Most importantly, make a plan to go to confession.

Finally, look for ways to be quiet. Turn off music and TV. Put down the phone. While this is typically a very busy season, look for ways to be less distracted and spend time listening to God and preparing our hearts for Jesus.



## Advent Wreath

There are many symbols of our faith in the Advent wreath. The circle of the wreath, with no beginning or end, symbolizes God's eternal nature. The wreath is traditionally made out of evergreens which hold their green color long after they are cut. When looking at these we remember the immortality of our souls. If you decorate your wreath with seeds, berries, or pinecones, they represent new life and resurrection. The colors of Advent candles have meaning as well. Violet symbolizes prayer, penance, sacrifice, and good works. Violet is also a color of royalty reminding us that Jesus is a King. Rose symbolizes joy. The third Sunday of Advent relaxes the discipline of penitence because the "Lord is near" (Phil 4:5) so the candle is changed to rose to reflect joy. Each Advent, we wait in darkness for the coming of the Messiah. We light the candles of the wreath as a reminder that Jesus is the light of the world. "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined." (Isaiah 9:2.)

Do you have an Advent wreath and candles ready? If you don't have one, you can easily make your own. Cut a few evergreen branches and arrange them in a circle on a large plate. Add some candles in glass votive holders and berries if you have them. If you have younger kids, let them make their own wreath out of green playdough and birthday candles. It doesn't matter if your wreath is simple or elaborate, the point is to have one!

## Advent Music

Advent is a season of prayerful anticipation of the coming of Christ. This year make an effort to keep Christmas music or movies for the Christmas season. Also, leave room in your day for quiet; limit time listening to podcasts or music and stay off your phone. It's difficult to prepare your heart for Jesus' coming when all you hear is about how Jesus is already here! Advent music is different. It speaks of preparation and longing for Christ's coming. This year, try listening to Advent music instead. We have recommendations listed in the resources. One simple option is to listen to Handel's *Messiah* during Advent, especially part 1.

## St. Andrew Novena

The St. Andrew Christmas Novena is prayed for 25 days, starting on the Feast day of St. Andrew (Nov. 30) and going until Dec. 24. This simple yet powerful prayer is said 15 times and will only take three to five minutes. This could be recited in one sitting or spread throughout the day. It is believed that whoever prays the St. Andrew Christmas novena until Christmas Eve will obtain the favor requested. (Find the prayer on page 3 of November Issue.)

## Nativity Set



The very first nativity scene was portrayed by St. Francis of Assisi. He used a few animals in a cave to preach about Jesus' birth. This year is the 800th anniversary of that scene! If you don't have a nativity, get one this year. As a way to prepare your heart for Christmas, set it up bit-by-bit throughout the days of Advent. Or if your set has 8 pieces, set one piece out daily starting 7 days before Christmas. Always save baby Jesus for Christmas! You could even set Mary and Joseph out in a far corner and have them journey towards the set throughout the season. If your set has three kings, save them to put out on Epiphany.



## Letters to Jesus

Are your children used to writing letters to Santa? Have them write a letter to Jesus this year. They can still write what presents they would like to receive for Christmas, but have them start by writing what they are grateful for this year and thank Jesus for those gifts. Have them put this out for the feast of St. Nicholas on Dec. 6th. If time doesn't allow, have them put it with your Nativity set.

## Book Countdown

If you have a number of Christmas books that focus on the birth of Christ, a good Christian message, or good deeds, use them as an Advent book countdown for your kids. Bring out one new book each day and sit down to read it to them. Maybe re-read some of the favorites from the previous days. If you have time, you can even wrap enough books for each day of Advent and number them so they have a "new" one to open each day! If you are looking for new books to add, check out the Shower of Roses blog!



## Christmas Parties

Companies and families tend to host Christmas parties during Advent. Go, and have fun. However, if you are planning a gathering, try to wait until the Christmas season for your party. Allow yourself and others to prepare in Advent and then celebrate during Christmas. If you have grandkids, your children might appreciate having the Christmas season extended!

## Advent Devotionals

Whether you are a kid, teen or adult, devotionals encourage our spiritual growth by taking our focus off of ourselves and putting it on communion with God. They are a great way to begin the habit of making time to pray each day. We have many resources listed for devotionals. You can also use any spiritual book and turn it in to a devotional. Divide the number of pages by the days in Advent (24 this year) and read that many pages each day. (It's wise to pick a shorter book for Advent!)



## Feast of St. Nicholas

There are some wonderful traditions for the feast of St. Nicholas. One of the most popular customs is to leave shoes out for St. Nick on his feast, Dec. 6. Some families even hang stockings. Then, these are filled overnight with treats. If your family has a tradition of stockings for Christmas, this year try it on St. Nick's day instead. Then talk about the story of St. Nick and the connection to Santa. A simple swap to bring a saint to the season!

## Straw for Jesus



A beautiful way to reinforce kindness and good deeds for kids is *Straw for Jesus*. This tradition is perfect for the whole family. Make a manger (a box is fine) and some "hay" (strips of paper or bits of yarn) and place it in a prominent location: near the Advent wreath, on the dinner table or under your tree if it is up. Any time someone does a good deed, a piece of straw is placed into the manger, making a soft place for Jesus on Christmas. These acts are more than just a nice thought, they truly serve Jesus.



## Decorations

Think of your preparing your house like you prepare your heart. Typically, we don't decide to do something big and then do it all at once. Try decorating your house little by little. A few decorations one day, the tree up another, lights on one day and ornaments the next week. Or if you like decorating all at once, decorate close to Christmas. Pick some of the big feast days to do these preparations. Why? It is hard to focus your mind on prayerful preparation when your house says, "The celebration is here!" If you prefer having decorations up, why not try advent décor? Purple lights on your tree, empty Nativities, Advent symbols and greenery. Even a purple kitchen towel!

## Other Ideas for Advent

- Send cards to nursing home residents or those who are homebound
- Pray for a different person each day of Advent
- Offer to watch young kids so parents can go out for a date or to get shopping done
- Visit an elderly neighbor
- Wear purple during Advent, pink on the third Sunday
- Donate or volunteer at a local food bank, soup kitchen, warming center or women's shelter
- Go to confession!

## Important Days in Advent

- December 6 - St. Nicholas
- December 9 - Immaculate Conception
- December 12 - Our Lady of Guadalupe
- December 13 - St. Lucy
- December 15 - Third Sunday of Advent (Gaudete)

## Jesse Tree

The name of the Jesse Tree comes from the prophecy of Isaiah 11:1 "And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a branch shall rise up out of his root". Each day a Bible story is read and an ornament is placed onto the tree. Each ornament represents a person from Salvation history who was waiting for the Messiah, much like now when we are waiting for the second coming of Jesus. You can find Jesse Tree plans online (find some in the resources), with scripture readings for each day, and sometimes printable ornaments. We have a few books listed on the resources page that have the reading, reflection, often a prayer and ornaments. Even if you don't have children, getting a Jesse tree plan to read for your daily devotions is a wonderful spiritual practice.

If you plan to use ornaments, you can use the paper ones, make them out of clay or felt, or you can also purchase them. (Just be careful, there are many different versions of the Jesse Tree, so be sure the symbols match yours.) The tree can be anything; a small Christmas tree, a stick from the yard or you can even stick the ornaments to the wall in the shape of a tree.



## Secret St. Nick

This is a great way to encourage meaningful gifts between members of your family. At the beginning of Advent, have every member of your family pick a name. Throughout the season, do little acts of kindness for that person, but keep it secret! Do one of their chores, make a lunch, leave a note, make their bed, or leave them a treat; something little! For Christmas, make sure to give that person something special. This could be something homemade, store-bought, or even a coupon book for use throughout the year. It doesn't need to be expensive but should be truly heartfelt. Exchange these special gifts during a time set aside from other presents on Christmas Eve or Day. This will encourage kids to focus on family and service to others and not just presents.



**All the resources mentioned (and more!) are available on the Cathedral website or by scanning this QR code**

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# 'O' Antiphons

The 'O' Antiphons are something that we are all familiar with but we might not realize it. They are taken from the Evening Prayer of the Church (one of the five set times during the day that priests and other religious pray.) Starting on December 17 and going to the 23, the Evening Prayer contains the 'O' Antiphons that accompany the Magnificat Canticle. These antiphons contain the hope of the coming of the Messiah from the people of the Old Testament. We see the repeated phrase of "come" as the desire of their heart but also the longing for our hearts for Jesus in the Second coming. The 'O' antiphons were turned in to the song, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel".

Over the centuries, different customs arose to mark the different days of the 'O' Antiphons. Monasteries would add something to their meals for each day, like wine from the cellar (locked with key) for 'O' Key of David or root vegetables such as carrots, parsnips and onions for 'O' Root of Jesse. Recently, families have taken to doing activities to mark each day. We have provided some ideas if you would like to observe the 'O' Antiphons in your home. And don't forget to sing or recite the day's verse!

## **December 17: O Sapientia (O Wisdom)**

Read from the Bible or another Catholic book. Get a new spiritual book. Have brain food like berries, dark chocolate or coffee.

## **December 18: O Adonai (O Lord and Ruler)**

Make gingerbread houses. Have a fire.

## **December 19: O Radix Jesse (O Root of Jesse)**

Make root-beer floats or carrot cake. Have root vegetables for dinner, maybe a vegetable stew. Get a poinsettia or other flowers.

## **December 20: O Clavis David (O Key of David)**

Have a glass of wine or Key Lime pie. Use your keys to go do something like a play or movie.

## **December 21: O Oriens (O Radiant Dawn)**

Go see Christmas lights. Have citrus fruits. Light candles for dinner.

## **December 22: O Rex Gentium (O King of Nations)**

Make a bundt cake or crowns to wear.

## **December 23: O Emmanuel (O God with Us)**

Tell the story of the Christ's Birth with your nativity set. Find a chocolate nativity set. Set the table beautifully. Make a birthday cake.

O come, O come, Emmanuel,  
And ransom captive Israel,  
That mourns in lonely exile here  
Until the Son of God appear.

Refrain  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel!

O come, Thou Wisdom from on high,  
Who ord'rest all things mightily;  
To us the path of knowledge show,  
And teach us in her ways to go.

O come, O come, Thou Lord of might,  
Who to thy tribes on Sinai's height  
In ancient times didst give the law,  
In cloud and majesty and awe.

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse's stem,  
From ev'ry foe deliver them  
That trust thy mighty pow'r to save,  
And give them vict'ry o'er the grave.

O come, Thou Key of David, come,  
And open wide our heav'nly home;  
Make safe the way that leads on high,  
And close the path to misery.

O come, Thou Dayspring from on high  
And cheer us by thy drawing nigh;  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
And death's dark shadow put to flight.

O come, Desire of Nations, bind  
In one the hearts of all humankind;  
Bid thou our sad divisions cease,  
And be thyself our Prince of Peace

## **ERO CRAS**

If you take the first letter of each of the Latin 'O' Antiphons and reverse it, you get the Latin words, "Ero cras" which in English means "Tomorrow, I will be there". The depth of the 'O' Antiphons is profound; spend some time reflecting on them this Advent!