

Tell the story - Tell the Nativity story in the round. While riding in the car or airplane, have someone begin the Christmas story, then after a sentence or two the next person adds a couple sentences to the story, going around the family until the story is completed.

Jesus' Birthday - Make Happy Birthday cards for Jesus. Make a Birthday Cake for Jesus, and enjoy it on Christmas day.

Christmas Caroling – We will have our pizza party and Christmas Caroling Event on Wednesday December 18th at 5:30 p.m.

Christmas Pageant – Plan to attend and participate in the Christmas Pageant at 6:00pm on December 22nd. The pageant will be followed by the annual Chili Dinner.

Lighting the Christmas Tree Prayer

O God, who sent your Son to be the Light of the World, bless us as we light our Christmas tree. Grant that its light may bring joy to all who pass our home and bring joy to us who celebrate the coming of your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

Christmas Eve Prayer

O Lord Jesus, born in a stable because there was no room for you in the inn, may your Spirit come into our hearts and stay with us forever. Grant, that peace and goodwill may shine forth in our lives, and in the lives of people everywhere. Amen.

Christmas Day Prayer

Dear Lord, we gather to celebrate the marvelous birth of your Son, Jesus. By his example, we can learn what it means to share, to love and to respect our friends and neighbors. We thank you for your representative in this season in the form of Santa Claus who gives presents, just as the Wise Men did when Jesus was born. Happy Birthday to Jesus! Amen.

Christmas Night Prayer

Dear God, we thank you for the good times and the happy thoughts we enjoyed today. Help us to make every day as nice as Christmas. Help us to love Jesus as he loves us. Amen.



Holy Innocents Episcopal Church

Seven Springs, North Carolina



ADVENT

A Time to Prepare For
The Coming of Christ

So That

We May Never Forget
The Presence of Christ.

————— Advent 2024 Edition —————

Advent is...

Advent is about anticipation and expectation.

It is about the anticipation and expectation that God will continue to bring his kingdom into its fullest reality in and through those who will hear and respond to his call. It is about living in hope that God's purposes are being accomplished in a world that frequently bears little resemblance to God's kingdom of love, justice, and peace. The season of Advent bears witness to a reality that is to come and is coming in and through us, and it is not dependent on how much we spend on gifts, how many cards will send, nor any decorating we may have done. Begin able to celebrate the present and coming kingdom of God does have to do with our being able to listen for and recognize his call as it comes to us. May this Advent be a time when we hear, above the din of our hectic Christmas preparations, the voice of the Lord of life, so that we may be heralds of the coming of his kingdom.

Advent is a season of preparation

A time to prepare spiritually for the arrival of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Advent is a time

- To prepare to truly celebrate the birth of Jesus.
- To rededicate your life and your family to Christ every day through your actions, thoughts and prayers.
- To prepare for the day when Christ will come again in glory.

Advent means *coming*.

- Advent begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas Day and ends at sunset on Christmas Eve. This year: Dec 1 to Dec 24.
- Our greatest challenge is to make Advent a time of expectation for Christ's coming to be with us, not a frantic time trying to meet all the secular demands of the season.
- Advent is a time to remember that the best way to prepare for the coming of Christ is to never forget the presence of Christ.

Christmas Chain - Small children have a hard time understanding the concept of time. To help a small child begin to understand time, let him make a chain for Advent. Put as many links as there are days left in Advent. Each day let him or her take one link off the chain. The last one may be silver or gold to represent Christmas day. Explain that there are as many days until Christmas as there are links in the chain.

Count your blessings - Make a list or a poster of the joyous things that happened to your family during 2024.

Make candles - Go to a craft store search online and buy a candle-making kit. Be careful when melting the wax. When you burn the candles you've made, talk about Jesus being the light of the world, and how his light overcomes darkness.

Make snowflakes - Fold white paper several times and cut tiny pieces out along the folds. Display the snowflakes in a window and talk about how no two snowflakes are the same, like there are no two people the same and God loves each of us.

Say Grace - Write a special table grace/food blessing that is short and easy to remember. Try to make it rhyme or set it to an easy tune such as twinkle, twinkle or Mary had a little lamb.

Alphabet Game - While riding in a car or airplane, have the children say a Christmas or Advent word for each letter of the alphabet: Angels, Bethlehem, Candles.... Go through the alphabet more than once.

Gather around the TV - Find the movie "It's a Wonderful Life." Talk about what makes this life wonderful.

Empty Chair - Set an extra place and extra chair at the dinner table to remind the family of Christ's presence in the world, in our homes, and in our lives.

Kwanzaa - Explore the celebration of Kwanzaa, it is not a religious holiday, but one that honors African history and customs from December 26 until January 1.

Hanukkah - Find out more about this holiday that celebrates our heritage and find out how the Hebrew people got the right to worship God freely.

Thanksgiving Stocking - Take an old sock and hang it where the Christmas stockings will be hung. Then during Advent family members can put coins or bills in the sock in thanksgiving for good things that happen. On Christmas Eve take the money to church or give to a local charity.

Crowns - Our Lord is King, crowns remind us of this. The Wise Men brought gifts to the King to honor and adore him.

Star - The star reminds us of the star over Bethlehem that led the Wise Men and shepherds to the cradle of the newborn King. "Star of wonder, star of night, star with royal beauty bright, westward leading, still proceeding, guide us to thy perfect light."

Family Activities for the Advent Season

Advent Wreath - Purchase a Styrofoam ring from a craft store, the circle represents eternity. The rings come in a variety of sizes, you might choose one to fit on to an aluminum pizza pan to protect your table or tablecloth. Place 3 purple and 1 pink candle evenly in the ring, pushing them down into the Styrofoam. Arrange evergreen around the candles and add bows or other Advent decorations. Spray the evergreens every couple days with water to keep them ever green.

Advent Calendar – On the first Sunday of Advent at Saint Matthews, it has been tradition to present each of our Sunday School families with an Advent Calendar to use daily during the season of Advent. Each day there is a "window" to open. A picture is revealed, along with some text in the window to portray the story of Christmas. The calendar should be displayed in a prominent place in the home, such as taped to the refrigerator door, so that everyone can see the special item of the day. They can also be purchased at card stores, department stores, or Christian bookstores

For our feathered friends – Make a bird feeder using a pinecone. First attach a chenille stick by wrapping it around the widest end of the cone, pushing it inside. Mix shortening with cornmeal (peanut butter is too sticky for birds) and spread it over the pinecone. Then roll in bird seed to totally cover. Use the chenille stick to hang on a tree. Alternatively, you can string popcorn or cranberries as a garland for an outside tree or shrub. As you notice birds eating the garland, remember the animals that were present at the nativity of Our Lord.

Apple Snack - Have an adult slice an apple across the center, the way tomatoes are usually sliced, so each slice shows the Bethlehem star in the middle.

Christmas cookies - Make and decorate cookies cut in the shapes of Mary, Joseph, the star, shepherds, Wise Men. With children helping, each of the cookies will be a unique creation. Talk about how God has created each person to be unique and each of us are special to God. Jesus is a person, like the rest of us, but unique and very special.

Advent Season Prayers

Blessing of the Home Nativity Scene

We ask you, Almighty God, to bless this crib which we have prepared in honor of the birth in the flesh of your only begotten Son. May we see in this manger the mystery of Christ's birth and be filled with the light of his glory, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever. Amen.

Advent Wreath Blessing Prayer

Leader: Let us pray. O God, by whose word all things are made, we give thanks for this wreath, and ask that we who use it may prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ daily into our lives. Amen.

Advent Family Worship

Lighting candles is a simple way to start a tradition of family worship in the home. The simple ceremony may take place at the main family meal, when all members of the family can be present. Various members of the family read the prayers and light the candles.

The Advent wreath helps us to prepare our hearts and minds, families and homes for the coming of Christ at Christmas. The following pages are a suggestion for a simple family devotion with Bible readings to go along with the candle lighting on Sundays and through the weeks.



First Sunday in Advent and First Week in Advent

Leader: Our King and Savior draws near
Family: O Come, let us adore Him.
Child: Thank you God, for sending Jesus to the world. Amen.

Leader: Almighty God, be by our side and cast away all works of darkness which separate us from you. In your great mercy, forgive all the things we have done that we should not have done, and all the things we failed to do that we should have done; and teach us to live as children of God; in Jesus' name. Amen.

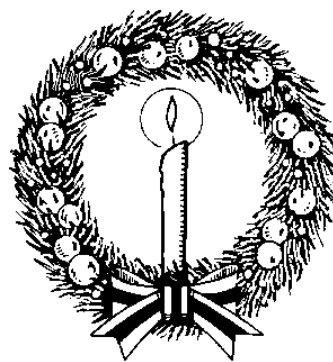
Leader: And now as Jesus taught us, we are bold to pray:
Family: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Bible reading: Luke 21: 25-31

Leader: The almighty and merciful God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bless us and keep us. Amen. (Extinguishes candle)

Suggested Bible readings for the first week:

Monday	John 3:16-21
Tuesday	Isaiah 60:1-3
Wednesday	Psalms 43:3-5
Thursday	Isaiah 58:6-9
Friday	I John 2:8-11
Saturday	I John 3:1-2,7-10



**The First Sunday
of Advent**

Symbols of the Advent Season

Colors of the season – Colors of the season are purple and blue. Purple to remind us of royalty, our King is coming, and of preparing the way of the Lord in our hearts and lives. Blue adds to our understanding of Advent as we reflect on Mary, the mother of Jesus, and on the birth when God is made man.

Candles and Light - The light of Jesus which overcomes the darkness is God's promise of light and life. Jesus is the light for the world, his light has entered the world and the church is formed.

Bells - The bells announce the news of the coming King, the Savior, the Son of God. The bell traditionally announces the presence of God in the Eucharist. Bells call us to worship and to his presence with joy and celebration.

Trumpets - In history and Scripture, trumpets announce the arrival of a king; the second coming of the Lord; and the presence of the God in the temple. In Advent, the uplifted trumpets remind us of the coming of the Lord and the joy found in God's presence.

Candy Canes - A candy cane is shaped like a shepherd's staff. This reminds us that the Good News of the Savior's birth was announced first to the lowly shepherds. The shape of the candy cane also reminds us that Jesus is our Good Shepherd.

Chrismon Tree - Monograms of Christ were first used by early Christians to identify themselves to one another. Chrismons are generally gold and white. Gold symbolizes that Jesus is King, and white is the color of celebration, joy and light.

Jesse Tree - The Jesse Tree is named for the Old Testament figure Jesse, the father of David. Many years after Jesse lived, the prophet Isaiah spoke about a new tree that could grow from the stump of Jesse. With a Jesse Tree, we remember the family of Jesus and all those people throughout history who prepared God's people for the coming of Jesus. We use symbols to remind us of some of the very important persons who came before Jesus.

Holly - The holly's thorning leaves and red berries are symbols of Jesus' passion and remind us of the fate awaiting the child, for as the carol says, "Christ was born to save, Christ was born to save." Holly is an evergreen. Evergreens stay green even in the winter so they are a symbol of new life; giving us hope at the darkest time of the year that Spring will come.

Angels - Angels are messengers from God. During Advent, we think of the Angel Gabriel who came to Mary with a special message. Angels also appear to Joseph and during events surrounding Jesus' birth. They announce good news of great joy, a child has been born, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Advent is a time to give yourself to others

- When family members come home from work or school, greet them warmly
- Have a family night, with the children planning the menu and activity
- Help another person with his/her chores
- Let someone else have the biggest piece of dessert
- Help someone with his/her schoolwork
- Read to a younger brother or sister
- Go to bed without fussing or playing around
- Do your work before you are reminded
- Do something to help poor people
- Offer to help in the kitchen
- Pray for a sick person
- Feed the birds
- Smile at the other people in your family
- Compliment someone in your family
- Let others watch a TV program they want, even if it isn't what you would choose
- Write a letter, or e-mail someone who has been waiting to hear from you
- Use the magic words: please, thank you, you're welcome, I'm sorry
- Call or write to grandparents to say "I love you"

Add your own ideas here:

Second Sunday in Advent and Second Week in Advent

Leader: Our King and Savior draws near
Family: O Come, let us adore Him.
Child: Dear God; help us to walk in Jesus' light. Amen.
Leader: Our Father, pour your love into our hearts so that we may love our neighbors as ourselves. Help us to be understanding of the needs of others, as you were understanding of the needs of all people and sent your Son Jesus Christ to save us. This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

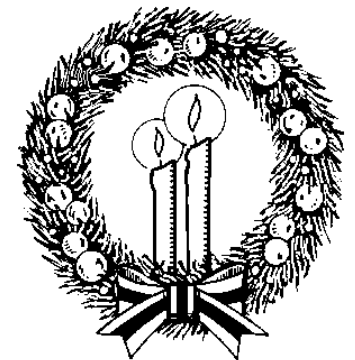
Leader: And now as Jesus taught us, we are bold to pray:
Family: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Bible reading: Luke 3:1-6

Leader: The almighty and merciful God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bless us and keep us. Amen. (Extinguishes candles)

Suggested Bible readings for the second week:

Monday	Genesis 3:1-7
Tuesday	Genesis 3:8-13,22-23
Wednesday	Hosea 11:3-4
Thursday	Psalms 130
Friday	Micah 6:6-8
Saturday	Jeremiah 14:8-9



**The Second
Sunday of Advent**

Third Sunday in Advent and Third Week in Advent

Leader: Our King and Savior draws near
Family: O Come, let us adore Him.
Child: Dear God, help us to be ready for Christmas, Jesus' birthday. Amen.

Leader: O God, who sent prophets to prepare the way for the coming of your Son: help us to hear their warning and their message of great joy which was given for all people; so that at the Birthday of your Son, we may receive him more joyfully into our hearts. Amen.

Leader: And now as Jesus taught us, we are bold to pray:
Family: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Bible reading: Luke 3:7-18

Leader: The almighty and merciful God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bless us and keep us. Amen. (Extinguishes candles)

Suggested Bible readings for the third week:

Monday Isaiah 7:10-14
Tuesday Isaiah 11: 1-6
Wednesday Isaiah 40:10-11
Thursday Isaiah 52:7
Friday Jeremiah 33:14-16
Saturday Malachi 3:1-2



**The Third
Sunday of Advent**

Fourth Sunday in Advent and Fourth Week in Advent

Leader: Our King and Savior draws, near
Family: O Come, let us adore Him.
Child: Dear God, help us to love one another. Amen.
Leader: Blessed God, we await the coming of your Son our Savior. In this last week of our waiting, bring us to greater love for our family by learning to give greater respect and honor to one another; that our home may be a happy, joyful place into which your Son, Jesus Christ may come. Amen.

Leader: And now as Jesus taught us, we are bold to pray:
Family: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Bible reading: Luke 1:39-49 (50-56)

Leader: The almighty and merciful God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bless us and keep us. Amen. (Extinguishes candles)

Suggested Bible readings for the fourth week:

Monday Luke 1:26-33
Tuesday Luke 1:34-35,38
Wednesday Luke 1:39-45
Thursday Luke 1:46-56
Friday Luke 1:57-66
Saturday Luke 1:67-80



**The Fourth
Sunday of Advent**