

# December

## November 30 (1st Sunday of Advent)--Advent

"We are approaching Christmas. We all know how much this involves by way of preparation. It is a feast that gives rise to humanitarian thoughts, and feelings of joy and peace. The children, the poor, the unfortunate are in the minds of all. This is one of the most heartening and praiseworthy aspects of our society. It educates us in a spirit of brotherhood, and so to an awareness of the needs and sufferings of others.

We must include in our Christmas planning some genuine reflection on Christ in the manger and a resolution for personal and social renewal. He himself came among us as one who was lowly, humble, poor. At the same time, he was the Messiah who redeemed us from every moral misery, as well as the prophet of hope of the kingdom of heaven." (Pope Paul VI)

During Advent, we prepare to welcome Jesus into our hearts in a special way at Christmas. It is a time of joyful prayer, and a time to think of others.

Your advent signs of waiting may include the advent wreath or a manger scene; perhaps your family has its own advent customs. With your family, why not decide on a special advent practice that will lead each member to a holy and joyful Christmas celebration.

### The Advent Wreath

Like the Christmas tree, the advent wreath is a custom that has its roots in an ancient non-Christian culture. It was adapted for Christian celebrations and has become a favorite advent tradition.

The wreath is made of a circle of evergreen branches. Four candles (three purple and one pink) are arranged around the wreath. The wreath could also be made in poster fashion and pinned to a bulletin board. (Pin on a bright paper "flame" to "light" each candle.) The circular form of the wreath, with no beginning and no end, is a symbol of eternity. The purple candles (lit on the first, second and fourth Sundays of Advent) symbolize our advent waiting; the pink candle (lit on the third Sunday) symbolizes joy.

It is easy to add solemnity to the lighting of the advent candle. A Scripture reading, followed by praying for people you know who need prayers and then the lighting of the candle. The service could be done with the room darkened and conclude with the Our Father.

It is a beautiful custom to light the wreath before family meals and family prayer times.

During Advent, four people are front stage in the Gospels: Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph, John the Baptist. Look up in your Bible and read Luke chapter 1 and Matthew chapter 1 verse 18 and following and find out why.

### Christmas Night Activity

Materials Needed:

- dark-blue construction paper
- white chalk

- sugar
- water
- bowl

Directions:

Soak the chalk for several minutes in a mixture of 1 part sugar and 3 parts water. (The sugar-and-water solution prevents the chalk from rubbing off the picture.)

On construction paper, use the chalk to draw the manger scene, with the star and the angels. If the chalk becomes too dry, dip it into the sugar-and-water solution.

### **Family Traditions**

If you have an answering machine at your home, put an Advent message on it to greet your callers. You can also use it to keep your family prayer and together times during Advent from being interrupted.

On Christmas Eve give a religious gift to each child (a medal, book, tape or Christian T-shirt or cap) so that it gets special attention and highlights the fact that Christmas is about Christ.

### **December 8--Immaculate Conception**

From the very first instant of her life, Mary was free from original sin. On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception we celebrate this special grace and privilege God gave Mary because he had chosen her to be his Mother.

Prayer

O Mary, conceived without sin,

Pray for us

Who have recourse to you.

### **Activity--Quiet Time and Prayer**

The Bible tells us how special Mary is. She is the most graced of all women; the Holy Spirit came upon her; she is the Mother of the Lord (see Luke 1:28-43). These are wonderful things! But it is even more important that Mary "heard the Word of God and kept it" (see Luke 11:28). Mary's cousin Elizabeth praised her for trusting that God would keep his promises to her and to his people.

In a quiet place with Jesus and Mary, ask the Holy Spirit to come upon you to fill you with trust in God's promises. Repeat Elizabeth's words to Mary, "You are blessed because you believed what the Lord said to you would really happen" (Luke 1:45).

### **December 12--Our Lady of Guadalupe**

In 1531, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to an Indian convert named Juan Diego in Mexico. She asked simply that a Church be built in her honor on the hill where she had appeared. Juan was supposed to ask the bishop to build the church. Now the bishop was not about to go and build a church till he really was sure that it was the Blessed Virgin asking this. So he asked her to give him a sign.

Juan Diego went back to Mary and asked for a sign. She told him to pick the beautiful roses growing on the hillside. When Juan looked around he was surprised to actually see roses blooming there. It was the

wrong time for flowers to be blooming, and there were no native rosebushes in Mexico at this time. So Juan very carefully cut the roses and put them in his tilma (a cape).

When Juan returned to the bishop he told him that he had the sign. He knelt down and opened up his tilma. The roses fell out onto the floor and there on his tilma the picture of Mary was imprinted. Juan Diego's tilma remains today at the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City. Studies have been done through the centuries but no scientist has been able to figure out how the portrait was impressed on the fabric.

Our Lady of Guadalupe is the patroness of all the Americas.

### **Prayer to Say**

Our Lady of Guadalupe, pray for us.

### **Lace Up Tilma**

Obtain a picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe for each child. Give each child a piece of construction paper that is larger than the holy card enough so that holes can be punched along the edges. After gluing the picture of Our Lady of Guadalupe to the front of the construction paper, colorful yarn can be laced in the holes around the edge. Leave a loop at the top, and the picture becomes a wall hanging for the child's room, or a present for someone else.

### **Research**

Invite a Mexican from your community to tell the story of Juan Diego and share some of the songs that celebrate that feast.

