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ADVENT

Advent begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas. It is a period of simple living and extra prayer as we prepare for the coming of Jesus our Savior. The first coming of Jesus, at Bethlehem, will not happen again. During Advent and Christmas we retell the story of that coming, but it reminds us to prepare for a new coming. In Jesus, God has come among us. He is with us still, and one day when his work is complete, he will gather us into his glory. Until then we wait, and we prepare.

During the weeks of December we hear the encouraging words of Isaiah and John the Baptist. One will come, they tell us, who will be called "Emmanuel," which means "God-with-us." "Prepare the way," they tell us, "make straight his path."

Jesus, the Prince of Peace, calls his followers to make their world loving and peaceful. So we take time during Advent to prepare gifts for others, and we are generous with signs of apology and forgiveness. Many schools and parishes prepare gifts for families in need and plan penance services.

Advent has many customs and traditions. There is the song of invitation, "O Come,

O Come Emmanuel." Make an Advent wreath and gather around it for prayer each day. Remember the Advent saints. Set out an empty stable and bless it as a sign of preparation for the coming of Jesus. Use an Advent calendar and open up a window each day, or hang symbols on a Jesse tree. During the final days of Advent, keep the Christmas novena with added prayer (the O Antiphons, for example), or *Las Posadas*. Remember ethnic or local traditions.

There are so many possibilities for the celebration of these days that choices must be made. Look through the prayers and blessings in this section of the book to help you choose which of these customs will help you celebrate the holy season of Advent with simplicity and joy.

Christmas will be the second half of our two-part celebration of the coming of God among us. The very idea of Christmas fills us with expectation! But we don't want to rush into the customs of Christmastime before we savor each part of Advent. We will wait until after December 25 to enjoy Christmas decorations and stories, songs, and parties.

Meal Prayer for Advent

Music option: Bless Us, O Lord (3), or a familiar Advent hymn

LEADER Let us offer God praise and thanksgiving.



all make the sign of the cross

LEADER Come, Lord Jesus!

ALL Come quickly!

LEADER Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation:
in the darkness and in the light.
Blessed are you
in this food and in our sharing.
Blessed are you as we wait in joyful hope
for the coming of our Savior,
Jesus Christ.

For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever.

ALL Amen.



all make the sign of the cross



end with a song



O LORD



O ROOT
OF JESSE



O KEY
OF DAVID



Welcome to the Gospel of a New Year

BEGINNING OF ADVENT, FOURTH SUNDAY BEFORE CHRISTMAS


Preparation: Welcome the new Gospel at the end of the last gathering during Ordinary Time or before the beginning of the first gathering of Advent.

Statements describing the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are printed at the end of this prayer. The two descriptive statements needed for the current year should be marked by the leader of prayer.

Where a three-volume lectionary is used for school Masses, both the "old" and "new" volumes are carried in procession. Otherwise, the one-volume lectionary or Book of the Gospels is carried, with additional students carrying icons of the two evangelists (pictures, or signs with the evangelists' names).

Select two readers.

Music options: If Today You Hear the Voice of God (11), Celtic Alleluia (4)

 begin with a song

LEADER For the past year we have listened almost every Sunday to a reading from the holy Gospel according to N____. That Gospel has taught us many things about God's love.

READER ONE read the appropriate descriptive statement (see end of prayer),

LEADER Let us show our appreciation for the Gospel according to N____ with a deep bow (or a round of applause).
We will now close the holy Gospel according to N____. We will bring it back again in two years.

the lectionary or icon is placed on a side table

LEADER Let us now welcome the holy Gospel according to N____.

the "new" lectionary or icon is raised for all to see

READER TWO read the appropriate descriptive statement (see end of prayer)

The first Sunday of Advent begins a new Church year, and a "new" Gospel is opened for our reflection during the coming year. The Catholic liturgy provides a three-year cycle of readings for the major feasts and seasons of the year.

The Sunday Gospels are generally taken from Matthew during year A, from Mark during year B, and from Luke during year C. Portions of the Gospel of John are read each year (especially during year B, because Mark's Gospel is so short). In our daily prayer at school, we try to follow the Sunday readings as well as the spirit of the changing seasons.

LEADER Let us show our welcome for the holy Gospel according to N____ with a deep bow (or round of applause).

Loving God,
we praise you for your living word
spoken to us through all eternity.
And we thank you
for the words of the holy Gospel
through which the voice of your son Jesus
calls us to follow him.
Strengthen us,
through the power of your Holy Spirit,
to answer that call
now and for ever.

ALL Amen.

LEADER Let us bow our heads and pray.

Loving God,
bless this sacred book,
and bless all who proclaim your holy word
with their lips
and with their lives.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

ALL Amen.

continue with the prayer of the day, or sing an alleluia



Descriptive Statement: Matthew—Year A

The tradition of the Church teaches that Matthew was also named Levi. He was a tax collector whom Jesus called to become an apostle. The Gospel of Matthew tells us many things about the reign of God and the qualities necessary for a good disciple. Through the words of this Gospel, Jesus reminds us that he will be with the church until the end of time.



Descriptive Statement: Mark—Year B

The tradition of the Church teaches that Mark grew up in Jerusalem and became a missionary when he was still a very young man. He and Peter traveled to Rome where they preached the word of God. The Gospel of Mark was the first to be written, and it records many of Peter's stories about the life and wisdom of Jesus.



Descriptive Statement: Luke—Year C

The tradition of the Church teaches that Luke was a doctor and a missionary companion of Paul. Luke is a patron of artists, and his words paint a picture of Jesus as loving and kind, welcoming all and teaching of God's forgiveness. This Gospel gathers the stories and teachings of Jesus into an orderly account so that all who hear it can come to believe.

Blessing of the Advent Wreath

BEGINNING OF ADVENT

Preparation: The blessing prayer can be used at any time after the Advent wreath is prepared but before the first candle is lighted. A bowl of burning incense can be placed near or in the middle of the wreath.

The prayer is marked to show how five leaders can participate. If there are fewer leaders, they can take turns reading parts of the prayer.

Once the wreath is blessed, it should be used throughout the season. Open with the invitation, "Come, Lord Jesus," and the response, "Come quickly." Light the proper number of candles and proceed with daily prayer. Put out the candle(s) carefully when prayer is ended.

Music options: Awake, Awake and Greet the New Morn (2), In the Lord I'll Be Ever Thankful (12), For Your Gracious Blessing (8), O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

LEADER ONE Let us offer God praise and thanksgiving.



all make the sign of the cross

LEADER ONE Come, Lord Jesus!

ALL Come quickly!

LEADER ONE It is wintertime. Days are short and nights are long.
We need the light of Christ. We need the warmth
and joy of Christ. And so we gather around this
wreath in hope.

gently wave the smoke of the incense toward all parts of the wreath,
saying

Like smoke from this incense,
let our Advent prayers
rise to you, loving God.

LEADER TWO God our creator,
by your word all things are made holy.
Bless this wreath
as a sign to us of Jesus our Light.



One of the strongest symbols of Advent is an evergreen wreath holding four candles. The circular wreath is a sign of God's loving care, which has no ending. The evergreen branches suggest the faithfulness of God, which is always alive and fresh.

During the first week of Advent, a single candle is lighted during daily prayers. Two candles are lighted during the second week, then three, and finally four. In this way the light gradually increases as we move toward the coming of Jesus, the Light of the world.

According to tradition, three candles are purple, while the candle for the third Sunday is a bright rose color. It is meant to lift our spirits, just as the liturgy for that day tells us to rejoice (*gaudete* in Latin)!

The wreath should be somewhat large and placed in a prominent place. It can be decorated with ribbons or symbols, but it should retain its simplicity and beauty. It might even be hung by wide ribbons from the ceiling, calling to mind a royal crown, or a victory wreath, or even the wheel of time.

The use of candles during the darkest and coldest days of the year is an ancient custom adopted in the sixth century by European Christians. The Jewish people have a similar tradition. Even as we light candles on our Advent wreath, they will be lighting the candles on their menorahs in celebration of Hanukkah, the festival of lights.



LEADER THREE The circle of this wreath will remind us of the coming of Christ, whose love for us has no end. The light of these candles will remind us of the coming of Christ, who is the Light of the world.

LEADER FOUR The green color of these branches will remind us of the coming of Christ, who brings us eternal life.

Let us bless the Lord.

allow a minute or two of silence

LEADER FIVE By day and by night,
and through every season,
you watch over us, loving God.
By the light of this Advent wreath
we shall wait in patience for your Son,
our Lord Jesus Christ.
His coming comforts our fears
and brings hope to our waiting world.
All glory be yours,
now and for ever.
ALL Amen.



all make the sign of the cross



end with an Advent song

Prayer for Opening the Advent Calendar

EACH DAY DURING ADVENT

LEADER Bless the Lord on this Advent day,
Bless the Lord and prepare his way!
ALL Blessed be God for ever!

open one door of the Advent calendar and discuss what you find there

LEADER As we continue with the duties of this day
let us pray:
Come, Lord Jesus!
ALL Come quickly!

In many countries an Advent calendar is used as to count the days until the solemnities of Christmas (December 25), Epiphany (Sunday after January 1), or the Baptism of the Lord (Sunday after Epiphany). The calendar is usually a paper poster or cloth wall-hanging with the necessary number of doors or pockets. Each day a door is opened to reveal a saying or person from the Bible or a symbol of the Advent season. Each surprise hidden in the door or pocket should help us to think about concrete ways to prepare for the coming of Jesus.





O ROOT
OF JESSE

Creating a Jesse tree, a visual "family tree" that traces the spiritual ancestors of Jesus back to David and Jesse and other people from the Bible, is an Advent custom of recent origin, although hints of it can be traced to medieval manuscripts. It involves making hand-made symbols for all of those ancestors and hanging them like ornaments on a small evergreen tree, a bare branch in a vase, or a banner in the shape of a tree. It is a way to remember all of those people who faithfully waited for the Savior and prepared for his coming.

Blessing of the Jesse Tree

ANY TIME DURING ADVENT

Preparation: Prepare cards by writing on each one the name of a person from the scriptures, the place where the person's story can be found in the Bible, and some information about his or her role in preparing the people of God for the coming of the Messiah. If you think students might have a hard time thinking of symbols, a few suggestions might be added to the cards.

Each student draws a card. After reviewing the story of the person he or she has chosen, the student (or group of students) designs and cuts out a symbol to hang on the Jesse tree. When everyone is ready, the students take turns explaining their symbols and hanging them on the tree. The last symbol, placed at the top of the tree, represents Jesus, the long-awaited Savior.

Patterns for Jesse tree symbols are available at Christian bookstores, but it is usually better for children to create their own symbols for the tree.

A Selection of Figures for the Jesse Tree: The following list should be adjusted according to the students' age and familiarity with the Bible.

THE SPIRIT OF GOD moved over the waters of creation. Genesis 1:1–2 or 1:1–2:2 (dove, wind over water, days of creation)

ADAM and **EVE** in the garden, sinned. Genesis 3:1–6 (man and woman, tree, apple)

NOAH saved his family from the flood. Genesis 6:11–22; 9:8–17 (ark, flood, rainbow)

ABRAHAM went to a new land, was promised a large family, father of faith in the one God. Genesis 12:1–5; 15:1–6; Hebrews 11:8–10 (suitcase, map, tent, stars)

SARAH laughed at the promise of children. Genesis 18:1–14 (empty cradle, laughing woman)

ISAAC, son of Abraham, made peace. Genesis 26:23–33 (feast, peace treaty, well)

JACOB dreamed of a ladder going to heaven. Genesis 28:10–22 (ladder, rock)

JOSEPH wore a colorful coat and forgave and fed his brothers. Genesis 37:1–4, 45:1–11 (fancy coat, wheat, 13 brothers)

MOSES led the Israelites out of Egypt and received the Ten Commandments. Exodus 14:10–31; 19:16–19, 25; 20:1–17 (walking stick, water held back, chariots in water, fiery mountain, thunder and lightning, tablets of the law)

RUTH remained faithful to her husband's faith and family. Ruth 1:15–18 (wedding ring, road, two pairs of sandals)

SAMUEL heard God's call as a young boy and anointed the kings of Israel. 1 Samuel 3:1–10; 16:4–13 (bed, sleeping boy, jar of oil)

JESSE of Bethlehem was the father of David. 1 Samuel 16:4–13; Isaiah 11:1–2 (town of Bethlehem, man with eight sons, Jesse tree)

DAVID was a shepherd, killed Goliath, was king of Israel for 40 years, wrote many psalms. 1 Samuel 16:17–23; 17:41–50; 2 Samuel 5:1–5 (sheep, slingshot, harp, star of David, crown)

SOLOMON was a king known for his wisdom and for building the Temple. 1 Kings 3:3–13; 5:1–8 (lamp or book, temple)

ISAIAH spoke of the Messiah and his kingdom of peace. Isaiah 2:1–5; 7:13–14; 9:2–3; 11:4–8, 10–11 (pregnant woman, peaceful animals, broken weapons, farm tools)

JEREMIAH told of God's promises. Jeremiah 23:5–6; 31:31–34 (scales of justice, heart)

JOSEPH of Nazareth was Mary's husband. Matthew 1:18–25 (carpenter's tools, lily)

MARY was the mother of Jesus. Luke 1:26–38 (rose, lily, mother and child)

ELIZABETH and **ZECHARIAH** were parents of John the Baptist. Luke 1:5–17 (angel, altar)

JOHN THE BAPTIST baptized Jesus. Matthew 3:1–11, 13–17 (shell, font, water)

SHEPHERDS came to worship Jesus. Psalm 23; Luke 2:8–20 (angels, sheep, crook)

MAGI brought gifts to the stable. Matthew 2:1–12 (gifts, road, star, stable)

JESUS, the "son of David," came to save the world. John 1:1–18 (infant in manger, light, Good Shepherd—there are many symbols of Jesus)

Music options: For Your Gracious Blessing (8), O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, Advent songs, p. viii

LEADER Come, Lord Jesus!


ALL Come quickly!

LEADER God most merciful,
from the dawn of the creation
you formed a people
in strength and wisdom.
You blessed them with leaders and prophets,
men and women of holiness
who trusted in your promises
and longed for your coming.
We praise and thank you
for seeing the needs of your people
and preparing them for the coming
of Jesus, their Savior.

Loving God,
bless this Jesse tree
as a sign of our membership in your family of faith,
as a sign of our gratitude for all those
who prepared a way for us,
as a sign of our longing for you to be with us
now and always.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

ALL Amen.

 sing an Advent song

LEADER Come, Lord Jesus!

ALL Come quickly!



O LORD



**O KEY
OF DAVID**



Blessing of the Stable during Advent

Preparation: Some time during Advent place an empty stable near the Advent wreath and prepare it for the figures of Mary and Joseph, which should be added before leaving for the Christmas break. In some places students make additional figures of people typical of their towns (such as parents, grocers, nurses, farmers) or of themselves and place them around the stable to welcome Mary and Joseph. After the Christmas break, the figures of the Christ child and the shepherds are added, and at Epiphany, the magi. In some classes the groups of figures are positioned around the room and are gradually advanced toward the stable.

Use the following blessing of the stable during Advent and the blessing on page 72 after you return from the Christmas break and are ready to complete the scene.

Music options: For Your Gracious Blessing (8), O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, Advent songs, p. viii

gather around the stable

LEADER Let us ask God to bless us during this Advent season.

✦ all make the sign of the cross

LEADER As we have prepared our hearts, we also prepare this stable to receive the Lord Jesus when he comes.

Let us pray.

Loving God,
bless the home
we have prepared for you.
Its door is open
as a sign of our love
and hospitality.
We wait with bright hope
for your coming,
as we pray,
Come, Lord Jesus!
Come quickly!

ALL

♪ end with a song

In the year 330, the Emperor Constantine built a church in Bethlehem. Under the church was a series of caves, one of which, according to local tradition, was the place where Jesus was born. This cave became a sacred shrine for Christians, and over the years they filled the place with gifts of precious gold, silver, and jewels. Other churches copied the grotto, adding statues or pictures of the birth of the Lord. These too became richly decorated with offerings.

Saint Francis of Assisi had seen such shrines, and he thought that people needed a reminder that Jesus was born in a poor shelter, with a feed box as his cradle. He invited the people of Greccio to the simple stable he built beside his church, where they found real people and live animals acting out the story of the birth of the Messiah. Soon others were making simple crèche scenes for their homes and churches.

Blessing of Tangerines

DECEMBER 6, MEMORIAL OF SAINT NICHOLAS

Preparation: In some schools Saint Nicholas makes an unexpected visit on his feast day, asking the children if they can guess his name and tell his story. He scolds any who have been lazy about their school work, and then offers encouragement and pardon for all in the form of tangerines or candy canes. The tangerines are reminders of his bags of gold. Candy canes are signs of his bishop's crosier, which is itself a form of shepherd's crook.

Music options: We Sing of the Saints (27), with verse for December 6: Saint Nicholas, We Bring God's Holy Love (25), Advent songs, p. viii



begin and end with a song

LEADER

On this day in Advent let us remember the holy
Bishop Nicholas as we pray.



all make the sign of the cross

LEADER

Loving God,
you ask each of us
to show kindness and care
for one another.
We thank you for the witness
of good Saint Nicholas
who shows us the joy
of preparing gifts for others.

Let us pray.

We ask you, Lord, to bless these tangerines
which remind us of the gifts of Saint Nicholas.
As we share the freshness of this fruit,
so may we share in his love for the poor
and his care for children around the world.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

ALL

Saint Nicholas was a fourth-century bishop of Myra in what is now Turkey. He was known for his compassion and generosity. When Nicholas learned that a poor man's three daughters could not marry because they had no dowry (a money gift that all husbands required), he threw three bags of gold in through their window at night. Icons of the saint usually show those three bags of gold. Saint Nicholas may be, after the Blessed Mother, the most universally known and beloved of the Christian saints. He is the patron of Russia and Greece, as well as of children, travelers, sailors, unmarried women, and pawnbrokers (the three balls that usually hang over pawn shops, where money is lent to the poor, represent the three bags of gold). Under the title of Santa Claus or Father Christmas, he is credited with gifts left in stockings or shoes all over the world.

Christians in Scandinavian countries imagined Nicholas racing across the ice in a sleigh drawn by reindeer. Dutch settlers in New York called him Sinter Klaas, which soon became Santa Claus. In the nineteenth century, the artist Thomas Nast and the poet Clement Moore gave Santa Claus a red suit, white beard, and fat tummy, creating a figure that the good bishop Nicholas would hardly recognize!

On the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, we celebrate our belief that Mary was full of God's grace from the moment she was given life in the womb of her mother Anne. This privilege was given in preparation for her role as the mother of God. Mary did not earn this freedom in any way. It was simply a gift bestowed out of God's goodness.

Recognition of Mary's preservation from all sin began in the East, spread to the West in the middle ages, and was declared a dogma of the Church in 1854. Four years later, in 1858, Mary appeared to fourteen-year-old Bernadette Soubirous, in Lourdes, France. She said of herself, "I am the Immaculate Conception." The miracles of healing at the scene of the appearances quickly spread devotion to Mary under this title.

By the time European immigrants began arriving in the United States in large numbers, December 8 was a popular feast. Mary, under the title of the Immaculate Conception, is the patron of the United States. A very large basilica in Washington, D.C., the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, is dedicated to her.

This solemnity is a holy day and all Catholics participate in the Eucharist.


Prayer for the Immaculate Conception

DECEMBER 8, SOLEMNITY OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE VIRGIN MARY

Music options: Sing of Mary (21), We Sing of the Saints (27) with verse for Feasts of Mary, Immaculate Mary, Advent songs, p. viii, or the following verse sung to the familiar melody of Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow


Behold a virgin bearing Him
Who comes to save us from our sin.
The prophets cry: Prepare his way!
Make straight the path to Christmas Day.

LEADER Let us begin our prayer on this feast of Mary.

 **all** make the sign of the cross

LEADER We praise you, Lord,
in this daughter of Israel,
Mary, your faithful one and our mother!
We pray as she did:
may your name be holy;
may the hungry be filled
and the rich know hunger;
may the proud be scattered
and the oppressed raised up;
may your love be ever with your people.
We make our prayer always
through Mary's child;
he arose from her the sun of justice,
Jesus, who is Lord for ever and ever.
ALL Amen.

LEADER O Mary, conceived without sin:
ALL Pray for us who have recourse to you.

 **end with a song**


Prayer for Our Lady of Guadalupe

DECEMBER 12, THE FEAST OF NUESTRA SEÑORA DE GUADALUPE


Preparation: Create a shrine around an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Decorate it with candles, bright flowers, pierced paper designs, or ribbons, and gather there for prayer.

Copies of the litany will be needed, unless the leader reads both title and refrain and invites the assembly to repeat it.

Music options: Sing of Mary (21), Las Mañanitas, Advent songs, p. viii, or another hymn to Mary

 begin and end with a song

LEADER Let us offer God praise and thanksgiving
on this feast of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe

 all make the sign of the cross

LEADER Come, Lord Jesus!
ALL Come quickly!

LEADER Loving God,
you bless the peoples of the Americas
with the Virgin Mary of Guadalupe
as our patron and mother.
Through her prayers
may we learn to love one another
and to work for justice and peace.
ALL Amen.

LEADER
Lady of Guadalupe,
La morena of Tepeyac,
Mother of the faithful,
Refuge of the oppressed,

ALL
pray for us
comfort us
defend us
strengthen us

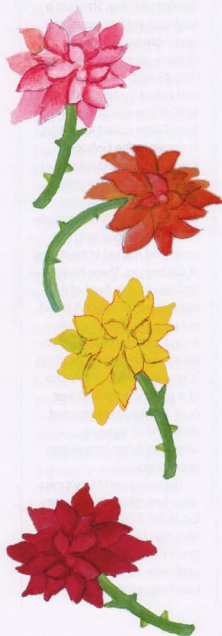


In the year 1531, Mary appeared to an Aztec native named Juan Diego. He saw her dressed as an Aztec princess wearing brightly colored clothing. She had a sash around her waist that was worn by pregnant women. Mary promised to help all who called on her and asked that a church be built where she stood. When Juan Diego asked for a sign to convince the bishop of the vision, Mary guided him to a spot where roses were suddenly blooming where only cactus had grown. He filled his cloak with the roses and rushed to the home of the bishop. There he emptied his cloak in front of the astonished bishop and found not only the roses but the image of Mary imprinted on his cloak. That cloak, or *tilma*, is now placed over the altar of a great church that was built, as Mary had directed, on the hill of Tepeyac where an Aztec temple had once stood.

The vision and Mary's message brought faith and comfort to the Aztec people, who had been treated with great cruelty by Spanish explorers. Aztec women had been especially abused, and

they were greatly honored by Mary's appearance in their features and clothing. Today the oppressed native peoples of the Americas see her as a promise of justice and a cause for hope.

Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe is the patron saint of Mexico, where her feast is often preceded by a novena. On December 12 people rise before dawn to sing "*Las mañanitas*," often accompanied by mariachi music, before celebrating the eucharist.



LEADER

Hope of the immigrant,
Light of the traveler,
Friend of the stranger,
Shelter of the poor and needy,
Patron of the Americas,
Mother of many children,
Star of the morning,

cheer us
guide us
welcome us
sustain us
unite us
watch over us
waken us
to the coming of
your Son, Jesus
Christ, who arose
from you the sun
of justice and is
Lord for ever and
ever. Amen.

ALL

God of mercy,
through the prayers of Our Lady of Guadalupe
help us to place our trust in you,
and with ever growing faith,
to care for the poor and needy
in your name.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.