

## **ADVENT WREATH**

The wreath is circular and made of evergreens symbolizing the eternity of God. Seeds and fruit we may place on the wreath represent life and resurrection. There are four candles on the wreath, each representing one week of Advent. The three purple candles stand for prayer and penance. The rose candle is lit on the third Sunday and it symbolizes joy as we draw closer to the birth of Christ. The light that the wreath brings symbolizes Christ Himself – our Light. Place it in a visible spot where your family gathers often, perhaps the kitchen table. Light it during your evening prayer or at meal times throughout the advent season.

## **NATIVITY SCENE**

Saint Francis of Assisi began the custom of the nativity scenes when he celebrated Christmas with his brothers at Greccio in 1223 with a Bethlehem scene which included live animals. This tradition quickly spread and people began to construct their own nativity scenes in their homes. Children take a great joy in helping to set up a nativity scene. You may set up your entire scene at the beginning of Advent, leaving the crib empty for the Christ Child to arrive on Christmas Eve. Or you may set up the scene slowly, day by day. We like to hide one figure (an animal, or a branch...) each day of Advent, have our children search for it, and then place it around the manger. Joseph and Mary arrive to Bethlehem last. On Christmas Eve, the youngest child finds a small golden package under the Christmas tree with the figure of the Baby Jesus. Mary and Joseph can also 'travel' to Bethlehem, as they move slowly across your room every day.

## **JESSE TREE**

The Jesse Tree is an old tradition depicting the relationship of Jesus with Jesse and other biblical figures who were the ancestors of Jesus. Jesse was the father of King David. He is often looked upon as the first person in the genealogy of Jesus. For your own Jesse Tree, a branch can be placed into a pot or a large vase at the beginning of Advent and every day a new ornament can be hung onto it. These ornaments represent the individual figures from the two Testaments. They can be made out of paper, felt, clay, wood, or other materials. As the children place the ornaments onto the branch, read an appropriate Scripture passage that talks about the given ancestor of Jesus. There are many passages that can be chosen and many symbols that can represent various figures. Each family can create their own list of figures and their symbols.

## **THE CRIB FOR THE CHRIST CHILD**

A small wooden crib can be displayed somewhere in your home. This empty crib can be filled with a new piece of straw every day for acts of kindness and small sacrifices. Encourage your children to notice goodness in others, instead of focusing on their own deeds and accomplishments. By the end of Advent, the crib should be filled with straw. On Christmas Eve, children can place a small figure of Baby Jesus in his soft bed of hay.

## **ADVENT ANGELS**

At the beginning of Advent each family member can blindly pick a name of another member of the family and become his or her Advent angel. Prayers and acts of kindness can be offered and exercised daily. During the Christmas season small homemade gifts can be exchanged between the 'angels'. This prolongs the joy of Christmas, encourages creativity and teaches children (and adults) to discover unique talents they can share with others.

## **PREPARING OUR HOMES**

Our homes should reflect our readiness for Christ's birth. Clean your home together, simplify, share. Children can help to prepare a box for the poor and the lonely. You can donate extra clothing and household items, bake cookies together and share them or save them for the joyous time of Christmas. Begin working on Christmas cards and gifts early in Advent so that you can 'rest your heart' during the final days of Advent.

*adapted from <https://www.foryourmarriage.org/celebrating-advent-as-a-family/>*

