

Celebrating Advent with Your Family

by James Campbell, D Min



When we think of New Year's celebrations, we usually think of party time. It's time to let the old year go. We anticipate the new year by making resolutions, promising changes in behavior.

As Christians, we celebrate the arrival of a new liturgical year differently. The new year that begins on the first Sunday of Advent is a quiet one. In the readings for the four Sundays of Advent, we remember the time when people waited in anticipation for the coming of the Messiah. And while we know that the Messiah has come in Jesus Christ, and we have remembered his life, Death, Resurrection and Ascension many times, we can still reflect on and celebrate the newness of

his coming once again.

What is great about celebrating the coming of Jesus with children is that they help us approach the season with fresh eyes and insight. They present us with a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge they present is the way they soak up the values of the culture that has had them anticipating Christmas since the beginning of November. The opportunity they present is that we can introduce them to the timeless rituals celebrating the coming of the Messiah that will add depth to their spiritual lives.

There are a number of ways families can celebrate the season of Advent:

Make an [Advent wreath](https://www.loyolapress.com/catholic-resources/liturgical-year/advent/about-advent/advent-links-to-explore-and-share/bleasing-an-advent-wreath) and place it in the middle of the dining room table. An Advent wreath consists of a frame holding four candles placed inside a circle of evergreens. The greenery in the wreath symbolizes the promised new life in Jesus. The four candles denote the four Sundays of Advent. There are three purple candles and one rose candle. Purple is a sign of penance, and rose is the color denoting the anticipation of joy. Light a candle on each Sunday evening of Advent, saying a short prayer or singing a verse of "O Come, O Come Emmanuel." The light of the candles represents the light coming into the world as we prepare to celebrate Jesus' birth.

[Advent calendars](https://www.loyolapress.com/catholic-resources/liturgical-year/advent/calendars) are available at many gift stores. The calendar consists of two pieces of cardboard on top of each other. Twenty-four doors are cut out of the top layer. One door is opened each day from December 1 through December 24, revealing a picture.

There is a long tradition in Christian art of depicting the [Jesse tree](https://www.loyolapress.com/catholic-resources/liturgical-year/advent/the-jesse-tree), a symbolic tree or vine with spreading branches on which there are images depicting the genealogy of Jesus. There are several variations of the Jesse tree. In one variation, each ornament has a picture on one side and a Scripture passage on the other. An ornament is hung on the tree every day during Advent.

With the celebration of Advent each year, everything old can be new again. Each year gives ourselves and our family an opportunity to remember and anticipate the celebration of the birth of Jesus on Christmas morning.





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