

Preparing Our Homes for Advent

Our Savior Lutheran Church + November 17, 2024

The Importance of Habits

Think for a second about your day. How does it begin? What are the very first things you do in the morning? What are the final things you do at night before going to bed? For better or worse, we are creatures of habit. We form habits over time, and then our habits form and shape us and those around us. Building good habits requires patience, thoughtfulness, and a plan. They give us an identity. They form a community.

Advent serves as a wonderful time to (re)build habits and traditions in our own lives and to shape the lives of those around us. Advent begins on the Sunday closest to St. Andrew's Day (November 30) and ends with the first celebration of Christ's birth on Christmas Eve.

Why?

- To introduce and encourage the habit of daily prayer and devotion
- To prepare to celebrate the true meaning of Christmas
- To grow as followers of Jesus and help others do the same
- To reflect on and share our faith
- To honor God as the center of our lives and homes
- To build a culture and memories, strengthening our bonds with others
- And besides all that, it can be fun!

How to get started:

1. Who? You, your spouse, your family, a friend or neighbor, godchildren, grandchildren
2. When? Pick a time—after dinner, before going to bed, etc.
3. Where? Pick a place—at the table, in the living room, etc.
4. What? Make a plan—start simple

Remember: Even doing something three times a week is a habit!

The Advent Wreath

“In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:4–5). Advent wreaths and candles are a lovely custom to observe the season. A white Christ candle can also be placed at the center of the wreath to be lit on Christmas Day and throughout the twelve days of Christmas.

Decorating the Wreath

Place the ring on a board so that it’s easy to move. You can use evergreens, holly and berries, shells to decorate around it. Be creative!

The Week of December 1 + The First Sunday in Advent

- Light the first purple candle (across from the pink candle).
- Themes: Hope, the “Prophet’s Candle” or “Messiah Candle” recalling the prophecies about the Messiah and the hope He brings to the world.

The Week of December 8 + The Second Sunday in Advent

- Begin lighting a second purple candle.
- Themes: Peace, the “Bethlehem Candle” reflects Mary and Joseph’s journey to Bethlehem and the peace that Christ’s birth brings.

The Week of December 15 + The Third Sunday in Advent

- Begin lighting the pink candle.
- Themes: Joy, the “Shepherd’s Candle” represents the joy of our Lord’s birth as well as the joy we have in anticipation of His return.

The Week of December 22 + The Fourth Sunday in Advent

- Begin lighting the fourth candle (now all the candles will be lit!).
- Theme: Love, the “Angel’s Candle” symbolizes the message of God’s love as announced by the angels at Christ’s birth.



An Order for Evening Prayer in the Home

For use by families, individuals, or groups

The sign of the cross may be made by all in remembrance of their Baptism.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

A candle may be lighted.

Let my prayer rise before You as incense,
the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

Joyous light of glory:
of the immortal Father; heavenly, holy, blessed Jesus Christ.
We have come to the setting of the sun, and we look to the evening light.
We sing to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit:
You are worthy of being praised with pure voices forever.
O Son of God, O Giver of life: the universe proclaims Your glory.

A hymn, canticle, or psalm may be sung or spoken.

Reading of Holy Scripture

A portion of the Small or Large Catechism may be read.

Lord's Prayer

Prayers for others and ourselves

The Collect for the week may be prayed.

Concluding prayer:

Lord Jesus, stay with us, for the evening is at hand and the day is past. Be our constant companion on the way, kindle our hearts, and awaken hope among us, that we may recognize You as You are revealed in the Scriptures and in the breaking of the bread. Grant this for Your name's sake.

Amen.

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Acknowledgments

Early Evening from Lutheran Service Book

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Other Activities and Ideas for Advent

Bless the Advent Wreath. Pray: O Lord Jesus Christ, the true light who comes into the world to enlighten all people, bless us as we light the candles of this wreath in preparation for Your coming, and enkindle in our hearts the fire of Your love that we may receive You with joy and gladness and evermore remain steadfast in the faith; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Setting. Prepare the atmosphere, such as having only the Christmas tree lights on and a fire in the fireplace. Hang up icons. Light the candle(s), use your devotional plan, add traditions or elements that suit your situation. Follow the time with cocoa and Christmas cookies. Make it a time of worship and joy, wonder and mystery, as we grow in faith.

Involve Others. Invite a friend or neighbor to join you (even once a week). Rotate turns for lighting and snuffing the candles, selecting a hymn or carol to sing, or picking an activity.

What Else to Do?

- If you have an advent calendar, open the day's door during your devotional time.
- Use Christmas Cards you receive to pray for family and friends
- Set up the Creche (Nativity) and add a new figure each night. For children, ask what they know about the figure. What might you hear, smell, taste, if you were there?
- Discuss what "nativity" is and means. For children, tell each child's nativity story, then discuss Jesus' nativity story.
- Start flowers (e.g., narcissus, amaryllis) to engage the idea of waiting.
- Write out Bible verses (e.g., verses from Luke 2 or a Sunday reading) and "Christmas" words (e.g., adoration, incarnation, glory, swaddling clothes, expectation . . .) on pieces of paper, then draw one out each night and discuss.
- Memorize Luke 2:1–20 or Luke 1:46–55.
- Illustrate or write out thoughts and prayers during Advent. Provide children with art supplies (paper, crayons, pencils, clay) and/or a journal. Invite them to talk about and share their creations.
- Listen to Handel's Messiah, especially part I, and read the Scriptures in the libretto.
- Sing carols, hymns, and other Bible songs.
- Go outside, look at the stars, recite the Apostles' Creed, pray the Lord's Prayer, talk about the Magi and the Bethlehem Star (or save that for Epiphany).

Connecting to Sunday

The Week of December 1 + The First Sunday in Advent

Readings. Jeremiah 33:14–16; Psalm 25:1–10; 1 Thessalonians 3:9–13; Luke 19:28–40.

Prayer. Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Your mighty deliverance; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn. Savior of the Nations, Come (LSB 332)

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| 1 | Savior of the nations, come,
Virgin's Son, make here Your home!
Marvel now, O heav'n and earth,
That the Lord chose such a birth. | 5 | God the Father was His source,
Back to God He ran His course.
Into hell His road went down,
Back then to His throne and crown. |
| 2 | Not by human flesh and blood,
By the Spirit of our God,
Was the Word of God made flesh—
Woman's offspring, pure and fresh. | 6 | For You are the Father's Son
Who in flesh the vict'ry won.
By Your mighty pow'r make whole
All our ills of flesh and soul. |
| 3 | Here a maid was found with child,
Yet remained a virgin mild.
In her womb this truth was shown:
God was there upon His throne. | 7 | From the manger newborn light
Shines in glory through the night.
Darkness there no more resides;
In this light faith now abides. |
| 4 | Then stepped forth the Lord of all
From His pure and kingly hall;
God of God, yet fully man,
His heroic course began. | 8 | Glory to the Father sing,
Glory to the Son, our king,
Glory to the Spirit be
Now and through eternity. |

The Week of December 8 + The Second Sunday in Advent

Readings. Malachi 3:1–7b; Psalm 66:1–12; Philippians 1:2–11; Luke 3:1–20.

Prayer. Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of Your only-begotten Son, that by His coming we may be enabled to serve You with pure minds; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn. On Jordan's Bank, the Baptist's Cry (LSB 344)

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| 1 | On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
Announces that the Lord is nigh;
Awake and hearken, for he brings
Glad tidings of the King of kings! | 4 | Lay on the sick Thy healing hand
And make the fallen strong to stand;
Show us the glory of Thy face
Till beauty springs in ev'ry place. |
| 2 | Then cleansed be ev'ry life from sin;
Make straight the way for God within,
And let us all our hearts prepare
For Christ to come and enter there. | 5 | All praise, eternal Son, to Thee
Whose advent sets Thy people free,
Whom with the Father we adore
And Holy Spirit evermore. |
| 3 | We hail Thee as our Savior, Lord,
Our refuge and our great reward;
Without Thy grace we waste away
Like flow'rs that wither and decay. | | |

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The Week of December 15 + The Third Sunday in Advent

Readings. Zephaniah 3:14–20; Psalm 85; Philippians 4:4–7; Luke 7:18–35.

Prayer. Lord Jesus Christ, we implore You to hear our prayers and to lighten the darkness of our hearts by Your gracious visitation; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn. When All the World Was Cursed (*LSB* 346)

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|---|--|
| 1 When all the world was cursed
By Moses' condemnation,
Saint John the Baptist came
With words of consolation.
With true forerunner's zeal
The greater One he named,
And Him, as yet unknown,
As Savior he proclaimed. | 3 Behold the Lamb of God
That bears the world's transgression,
Whose sacrifice removes
The devil's dread oppression.
Behold the Lamb of God,
Who takes away our sin,
Who for our peace and joy
Will full atonement win. |
| 2 Before he yet was born,
He leaped in joyful meeting,
Confessing Him as Lord
Whose mother he was greeting.
By Jordan's rolling stream,
A new Elijah bold,
He testified of Him
Of whom the prophets told: | 4 O grant, dear Lord of love,
That we receive, rejoicing,
The word proclaimed by John,
Our true repentance voicing,
That gladly we may walk
Upon our Savior's way
Until we live with Him
In His eternal day. |

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The Week of December 22 + The Fourth Sunday in Advent

Readings. Micah 5:2–5a; Psalm 80:1–7; Hebrews 10:5–10; Luke 1:39–56.

Prayer. Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come and help us by Your might, that the sins which weigh us down may be quickly lifted by Your grace and mercy; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn. O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (*LSB* 357)

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|---|---|
| 1 O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear. Refrain | <i>refrain</i>

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel! |
|---|---|

2 O come, Thou Wisdom from on high,
Who ord'rest all things mightily;
To us the path of knowledge show,
And teach us in her ways to go.

refrain Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel!

3 O come, O come, Thou Lord of might,
Who to Thy tribes on Sinai's height
In ancient times didst give the Law
In cloud and majesty and awe.

refrain

4 O come, Thou Branch of Jesse's tree,
Free them from Satan's tyranny
That trust Thy mighty pow'r to save,
And give them vict'ry o'er the grave.

refrain

5 O come, Thou Key of David, come,
And open wide our heav'nly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery. *refrain*

6 O come, Thou Dayspring from on high,
And cheer us by Thy drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to
flight. *refrain*

7 O come, Desire of nations, bind
In one the hearts of all mankind;
Bid Thou our sad divisions cease,
And be Thyself our King of Peace.

refrain

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The Liturgical Calendar: The Christmas Cycle

Advent. The Christmas cycle governs the onset of the liturgical year. It begins with four weeks of Advent, a season that focuses on our Lord's coming to us through the Incarnation and again on the Last Day.

Christmas. Advent ends with Christmas, a season of twelve days that focuses on our Lord's birth in Bethlehem of Judea. Eight days into the Christmas season, the Church celebrates our Lord's circumcision, the first time He shed His blood on our behalf.

Epiphany. From Christmas the Church moves into the Epiphany season. She remembers our Lord's revelation to the Gentiles in the visit of the Magi, to the teachers of Israel as a boy in the Temple, to John the Baptist at the baptism of Jesus, and to His disciples.

Read to Children!

Read books and Scriptures aloud that embrace the spirit of the season. Here is a short list of picture books you might enjoy:

- [A Small Miracle](#) by Peter Collington. This is wordless book with pictures that tell the tale of the figures of a creche coming to life and helping an old woman.
- [The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey](#) by Susan Wojciechowski. This is the story of a widowed woodcarver and a miraculous project he agrees to undertake for a widow and her son.
- [The First Christmas](#) by Tomie dePaola. This book is out of print but is a treasure, if you can find one (some can still be found used on Amazon). It's a pop-up book that children love and is full of little surprises.
- [The Legend of the Candy Cane](#) by Lori Walberg. This is a "sweet" tale about a candy maker and how the candy cane can point us to the love of Christ at Christmas.

Many Christmas Carols have been illustrated for children. Here are just two:

- [Good King Wenceslas](#) illustrated by Jamichael Henterly. This brings the classic message to life: "In his master's steps he trod . . ."
- [The Twelve Days of Christmas](#) some say has a hidden meaning. You can look it up and remember it as you sing through the detailed illustrations in Jan Brett's version.

A few examples of chapter books that can be read year after year during Advent:

- [Dangerous Journey](#) is written using the original language of the author John Bunyan in his classic allegory Pilgrim's Progress. It's edited by Oliver Hunkin. The illustrations are brilliant but might be frightening to some children and so quite captivating to others.
- [The Best Christmas Pageant Ever](#) by Barbara Robinson is about some naughty children and how they turn a Christmas Pageant on its head. This book is hilarious and poignant and will have you in tears by its end.
- [One Wintry Night](#) by Ruth Bell Graham is a retelling of the Christmas Story from Creation to Resurrection.

Notes

Resources

All the Household: <https://allthehousehold.com/>

Issues, Etc.: <https://issuesetc.org/?s=advent>

Lutheran Public Radio: <https://lutheranpublicradio.org/>

Many thanks to the Church Growth Committee for their input and planning, especially to Bill & Leslie Duskocil!