



a traditional
ADVENT
calendar

25 days of devotions
and activities

by Selah Woody



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When the countdown to Christmas starts, some kids excitedly open the numbered doors of Advent calendars as they await the celebration of Jesus' birth. These fun calendars, based on a centuries-old German tradition, are among the most popular traditions. But many other well-loved traditions also have sprung up around this sacred season. Vibrant and rich, these traditions are tangible reminders of profound Christian truths, helping families to focus on Christ throughout the holiday season.

Advent, which begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas, is a time devoted to waiting, as believers anticipate the hope that comes in the form of a Savior. The name *Advent* is derived from the Latin word *adventus*, which means "arrival." This season anticipates the arrival of Christ! Advent not only looks back to the birth of Christ more than 2,000 years earlier, it also remembers Christ's presence here with us now, and it anticipates His promised return.

Even families who do not observe Advent at church can discover a more meaningful, more Christ-centered Christmas season by observing these traditions at home. If you would like to celebrate Advent with your family this year, consider using the *Thriving Family* Advent calendar to make these time-honored traditions and deep spiritual truths come alive.

Our fun, easy-to-use Advent calendar offers you a wonderful opportunity to make Christ the center of your Christmas celebration.

December 1: First Sunday of Advent
Read: Isaiah 9:2; John 8:12

One of the most treasured traditions of the Advent season is the Advent wreath. Made of evergreens, the wreath includes five candles. You can make this wreath with your children out of live or plastic evergreen branches by fastening them into a circle with

green twisty ties or lightweight wire. Then place four candleholders and taper candles within the greenery. Three of the candles should be purple—although some churches now substitute a blue candle to represent the church for one of the purple candles—and the fourth is rose-colored. In the center of the wreath's circle, place a thick, white candle. Why these colors are important will be explored later in the Advent season.

At dinner, light one of the purple candles. This lighting of the first candle signifies the beginning of the Advent season. Extinguish the flame when dinner is over. Every night this week, light the same candle at dinner. The next purple candle won't be lit until the second Sunday of Advent (a new candle being lit each Sunday), and the final white candle isn't lit until Christmas Day.

Not only will this Advent wreath be a daily reminder of those who historically waited for the fulfillment of God's promises, it may also be a meaningful holiday tradition and a seasonal decoration for your family.

December 2

Read: Isaiah 9:6-7; Psalm 89:1-2

Talk to your children about the circle of evergreen branches in your Advent wreath. The circle reminds us of God's love; it never ends. The evergreen branches represent God's faithfulness; they remain green during all seasons. The four taper candles symbolize how God's people have suffered and rejoiced as they waited for the birth of the Christ child. The center candle serves as a reminder that Christ is central to this Christmas season. Let a child light the first purple candle (as you supervise him) during dinner today.

December 3

Read: John 18:37; Hebrews 1:1-4

Though red and green are the customary colors of Christmas, the traditional color for the Advent season is purple. In many churches, this is reflected in the

clothing of the clergy and the decorations on the altar. During the time of Christ, purple was a royal color, worn mostly by kings and rulers. Have your children search for something they own that is purple. The color reminds us that the birth of Christ was a royal entrance. Discuss how Jesus came into the world as a baby, even though He was the King.

December 4

Read: Psalm 51:10-12; Psalm 40:1-3

As the Advent season begins, it is important to remember that this time is one of preparation. Just as a family prepares for a guest to visit, so we prepare our hearts and lives for the celebration of the Christ child.

Have your children help clean your home as though you were expecting a very important guest. As you clean, talk with your children about cleaning their hearts through prayer and repentance. Intentional preparation of our hearts and our homes reflects the anticipation we feel as Christmas draws closer.

December 5

Read: Isaiah 7:14; Psalm 92:1-5

Music and worship are important aspects of most Christian celebrations. The carols and hymns surrounding the birth of our Savior are a rich part of the Advent season. You can help your children grow in their appreciation of the special sounds of the Christmas season, even as they learn more about praising God through song. “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” is a traditional Advent hymn that can be sung in church, at home and around the neighborhood, perhaps as part of Christmas caroling. Sing this song with your children. When you are done singing it together, explain to them that “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” may be a traditional Advent song, but it also reminds us to focus on the arrival of the Christ child.

December 6

Read: Luke 1:26-38; Matthew 1:18-24

Two central figures in the Christmas story are Mary and Joseph. Discuss the Christmas story with your children (you may even want to read a children’s book about the Nativity, such as *My First Message: The Christmas Story* by Eugene H. Peterson), focusing on these characters. The story of Mary can teach us to trust that God’s words are true and His promises will be fulfilled. Joseph provides an example of obedience to God. The humility of Mary and the obedience of Joseph are wonderful examples of people who trusted God.

Have your children draw or create figures from clay of Mary and Joseph, and display them in a place

where your family will be reminded of their amazing stories.

December 7

Read: Hebrews 11:1; Psalm 27:14; 130:5

Giving and receiving gifts are an important part of the Christmas season. For Advent, prepare a small gift for each of your children, such as a cookie, a water balloon or a paper doll, and hide the gifts in relatively easy places to find throughout your home. Have your children take turns searching for a gift, but stall for a moment before letting the youngest child go first. Younger children may feel as if they have waited a long time, even if they haven’t. While each child is waiting for his or her turn, talk about the excitement of waiting. It can be difficult to wait for something even as small as this little gift, so imagine how exciting it is to wait for and anticipate the gift of Jesus.

When all the gifts are found, remind your children that you gave these gifts out of love—how much more must God love us to give us His Son, Jesus!

December 8: Second Sunday of Advent

Read: John 3:16-17; Ephesians 5:1-2

This Sunday have one of your children light the first and second purple candles of the Advent wreath. Let them know that this new candle is lit to remind us that God showed us His love by sending His Son as a gift to the world. As with last week, your children can take turns lighting these two candles during dinner throughout the rest of the week. Emphasize how taking turns lighting the candles shows their love for each other. When they take turns, they give up always being the one to light the candle. How much more must God love them because He gave his Son for them!

December 9

Read: Mark 15:17; Hebrews 9:26-28

Today, discuss another reason why we light purple candles during the Advent season. Ask your kids what the purple candle stands for. If they don’t remember, remind them that it speaks of Christ’s royalty. Tell them that it means something else, too. It represents Christ’s death on the Cross because purple is the color of pain and suffering. Therefore, Christ’s royal birth *and* the importance of His death are inseparable. Advent is a time when Christians reflect on Christ becoming human in order to sacrifice himself for the salvation of all people.

Help children understand how a single element, such as purple, can represent two things at the same time. To do this, talk about homonyms, words that

sound the same but mean two different things, such as *ant/aunt*. One is an insect and the other is a family member. You can use other words, such as *knight/night*, *eye/I*, *bell/belle*, and others that your children come up with. Then tie this into the two things that this purple candle represents.

December 10

Read: Deuteronomy 32:7; Luke 22:19

The tradition of the Advent wreath helps us to remember that Christ is the reason for Christmas. Talk about other Christmas traditions that your family has. Perhaps you decorate with red and green, which originally came from the evergreens and holly used in older European traditions. They were used to represent the ongoing life and hope that Christ's birth brought to the world. After you've discussed your family's traditions, do one of them together today. If you don't have one, start one. Maybe you'll want to make hot apple cider and talk about past Christmases or even share one story about what you did at Christmas as a child. Traditions help us remember things in the past as we celebrate those things today.

December 11

Read: Psalm 19:1; Romans 12:4-6

Every day, God decorates the world with His glory. Have your family consider sunsets and the beauty of nature. Then create a Christmas ornament with which to decorate your Christmas tree. It can be as simple as painting a Styrofoam ball or as elaborate as making a hanging Nativity scene from craft sticks and glitter. Be creative, and allow your children's individual gifts and talents to be displayed in this family ornament.

December 12

Read: Luke 2:8-14; Psalm 9:11

The angels' announcement of the birth of Christ was the first proclamation of the good news that Jesus was born. Explain to your children that *proclaim* means to announce something publicly. To help them understand, have them proclaim things all day, such as "It's time for breakfast" or "We will now leave for school." Then as a family, sing the Christmas song "[Hark! The Herald Angels Sing](#)." As you sing, your children should understand what the angels are doing because they have proclaimed their daily activities all day.

December 13

Read: Luke 2:15-18

The shepherds were the first to hear about the birth of Jesus. Though they were not highly regarded, God chose to share the Good News of Jesus with these

people first. Jesus came to save everyone, not just the rich or the famous. God's choice to share this joyous announcement with the shepherds is a great example of not showing preference based on someone's social standing. Have your children dress up like shepherds, using either a bathrobe or a large towel. Then put a smaller towel on their heads and hold it in place with a headband or a tie. As your children get dressed, talk with them about the shepherds and how God chose them to be first to hear the Good News. Let them act out what shepherds do.

Now have your children make figures of the shepherds. They can use craft sticks, draw faces on them with markers and glue fabric pieces on them for clothes. Cotton balls at their feet can look like great little sheep. Explain how this story is a beautiful example of God's love for everyone.

December 14

Read: John 13:34; 1 John 4:7-12

God showed His love for humankind through the gift of His Son. It's good to show your love for others during the holiday season, too. One of the ways that people can show their love for each other is to send Christmas cards. Have your children make cards for their family members and friends. Enjoy the time with your children as you make cards together. Explain that Jesus commands us to love one another, just as He loves us, and ask your children to think of other ways they can show their love.

December 15: Third Sunday of Advent

Read: Isaiah 44:23; Romans 5:1-2

This Sunday, your children can light the third candle of the Advent wreath, along with the first two. This pink candle represents joy because today is a celebration of the halfway point in this journey to Christmas. Have your children gather the Christmas figures they have made throughout the previous weeks, and talk about the joy that these people must have felt as they learned about the birth of Christ. Take a few minutes together to discuss a time when you were filled with joy and excitement. Then relate that experience to the joyful feelings experienced by the shepherds, Mary and Joseph.

December 16

Read: John 12:45-46; 2 Corinthians 4:5-6

As your family lights the candles of the Advent wreath, discuss how the candlelight represents that Jesus is the Light of the World. Gather two pieces of heavy cardboard and a flashlight. Have children use a table knife

to poke a tiny hole through one of the pieces of cardboard and a large hole through the other piece. After dark, turn off the lights and place the cardboard with the tiny hole against the flashlight's beam. Have children describe how much light they see. Compare this glimmer of light to the glimpses of God that those in the Old Testament may have had. Then place the sheet with the large hole against the flashlight. Let children describe what they see. Explain that this is what the New Testament people (and we) get to see of the Father through Jesus. Finally, show the whole beam and compare that to Jesus' coming and our being with the Father. This week, we rejoice with those who were able to see the Father's light through Jesus and anticipate Jesus' return.

December 17

Read: Luke 2:9-11; Psalm 126:2-3

The entire third week of Advent is an invitation to transition from preparation to the celebration of the nearness of Christ's birth. Though much of Advent is dedicated to preparation, remind your children that the Christmas season is also a time that is full of joy. To help your children realize the abundant joy brought to Bethlehem by the angels' announcement, make angel cookies together. Help them use your favorite sugar cookie recipe to bake and decorate angels. Once all the angels are complete, spread them across your table to help get a feel for the magnificence of the heavenly hosts on the night Jesus was born.

December 18

Read: Psalm 37:23-24; Psalm 119:105

In continuing with the theme of joy and light, make luminaries with your children. Go outside and fill small white paper bags with sand, two-inches deep. Place a small flashlight or tea light candle in the sand in the bag. Line your sidewalk or make a path through your yard with the luminaries. If using flashlights, set up a path in your home. As your children walk in and around these lights, talk about Christ as the Light that guides their steps through every season of life.

December 19

Read: Psalm 98:1-6; Psalm 100:1-2

Focus again on the fact that music and worship are an important aspect of most Christian celebrations. The carols and hymns surrounding the birth of our Savior are a rich part of the Advent season. You can help your children grow in their appreciation of the special sounds of the holiday season, even as they learn more about praising God through song.

Today's Christmas hymn is "[Joy to the World](#)." Consider the line in the hymn that says, "Joy to the world! The Lord is come!" As you sing this song with your children, be sure to remind them that the real joy of Christmas is found in the birth of Christ.

December 20

Read: Matthew 2:1-12

The wise men, also known as the Magi, are some of the most familiar characters in the Christmas story. Read the story of the Magi while your children draw these visitors from the East. You can use construction paper, pipe cleaners or craft sticks with decorations for this week's creations. They can decorate their Magi with cloth scraps to create robes and veils. When you have finished reading the Bible story, talk about how the wise men came to worship Jesus, just as we can still worship Jesus today. When they are done, they can cut out their drawings and add the Magi to the Christmas scene they have been making throughout the Advent season.

December 21

Read: Luke 2:4-7; Philippians 2:5-11

The characters who were present at or near the time of Christ's birth have been introduced in this Advent season, and your children have created their figurines as they learned about each character. Using a shoebox, have your child assemble these characters and create a stable or cave to hold their homemade Nativity scene. As they create, talk with them about the beauty of the lowly setting for the birth of Christ. Because Jesus was a king, He could have been born in a royal palace with many servants, but He chose to come among the lowly, in a shelter meant for animals. What does this tell us about Jesus? How does it show Jesus' humility? How does it show the Father's love?

December 22

Read: Isaiah 9:6-7; John 14:27

This Sunday, light the fourth candle in the Advent wreath, along with the other three. This purple candle represents peace. Talk with your children about what it means to be at peace. A peaceful life is not just a life without stress or conflict, but one in which our trust in God does not allow fear to rule our lives. As you light the candle of peace this evening, talk about ways that your family can cultivate God's peace in your home.

December 23

Read: Mark 16:15; Luke 2:16-18

After seeing Jesus, the shepherds went and told the

good news of the birth of Christ. Years later, Christ commanded all Christians to go and share the Good News of His salvation. Today's hymn encourages believers to celebrate and proclaim the good news of Christ's birth. Teach your children the Christmas song "[Go, Tell It on the Mountain](#)" and encourage them to live lives that share the Good News that Christ brought through His birth, death and resurrection.

December 24 – Christmas Eve

Read: Psalm 33:20; Luke 25-32

In years past, Christmas Eve was the traditional night for the hanging of the greenery in the church, though nowadays most congregations and families decorate long before Dec. 24. This delayed decoration represented the transition from a time of waiting and preparation to one of exuberant joy. To go along with this idea of waiting in anticipation, have your child make a baby Jesus figure out of tissues, but wait until morning to place Him in a Nativity scene. Use 10 tissues and wet them. Then form them into a sleeping infant—a circle for the head and an oval for an infant's body wrapped in cloth. Set it in the sunlight to dry. When it dries, have children paint their infant to look more like they think Jesus looked.

Advent ends at midnight on December 24. The following is one activity you can use to begin celebrating Christmas Day with your family!

December 25 – Christmas Day

Read: Luke 2:1-20

The day for which you have been waiting and preparing has finally arrived! Light the first four candles of the Advent wreath, then light the final and middle candle! This is known as the "Christ candle." The imagery of Christ as the Light of the World is represented visually in this candle. Tell your children that the central location of the Christ candle serves as a reminder that the focus of this season is the Incarnation of Christ.

Before your children tear through their presents, sit with them and read through the Christmas story found in Luke. Keep it short and simple. Have your children place their Jesus figure in their Nativity scene and talk about the joy and excitement they feel because it's finally Christmas Day, the celebration of the birth of Christ. Make the connection between the presents your children receive on Christmas morning and the gift of Christ to the world.