



## Family Advent Retreat



### Schedule of Events

- 15 **Welcome**  
**Opening Prayer (if attended mass omit)**  
**Introductions**  
    Theme  
    Team  
    Participants
- 20 **Community Building Activity**
- Advent Crossword Puzzle
  - Christmas Gift Wrap Race
- 30 **What is Advent?**
- History
  - What celebrations occur during the Advent Season
  - The Purpose of Advent
  - Things to do during Advent
- 30 **Advent Group Activities**
- Advent Chain
  - Advent Wreath
- 10 **Wrap Up**
- Closing remarks on Advent
  - Large Group Reports
  - Parish invitations to upcoming Advent Events/Activities
- 15 **Closing Prayer Service**  
**Thank you's**

(Note: this schedule doesn't include Mass nor reception (refreshments or potluck))

# Community Building Activity

## Christmas Gift Wrap Race

- Want your kids to understand it's better to give than receive?
- Help your older kids understand the giving spirit of Christmas with this game.
- Kids are given everything they need to wrap a present for the world...the only thing is, they have to come up with the gift. Will they choose peace? An end to hunger? It's up to them!

### **Supply List:**

(Amount needed –pending on attendance)

Wrapping Paper

Boxes (Different sizes)

Ribbons

Markers

Paper

Tape

# History

## **ADVENT and CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS and SYMBOLS**

The following is background reading to assist teachers in the preparation of lessons during this season.

### **ADVENT & CHRISTMAS**

The period of four weeks preceding Christmas can be seen as:

- A Time of Anticipation
- A Time of Waiting
- A Time of Preparation through Prayer and Sacrifice
- A Time of Promise
- A Time of Reflection

The Christmas Season can be seen as:

- A Time for Rejoicing
- A Time for Giving

### **THE WREATH**

The wreath is circular with no beginning or end, signifying God's never ending and unchanging love that Jesus brings to us. The circle also reminds us of our belief in God who has no beginning and no end. It is made of evergreens that never change color.

The four candles remind us that during the four Sundays of Advent we wait for the coming of Jesus, the Light of the World. Three of these candles are purple and one is pink in colour. The purple signifies the penitential aspect of Advent; the pink signifies the joy of the near approaching day of Christmas.

### **THE STORY OF THE FIRST CHRISTMAS CRIB**

St Francis of Assisi wanted to make the story of Jesus' coming real for the people in a little village in Greccio, Italy. Together with the other Brothers he prepared an old stable. This was all done secretly. On the night of Christmas Eve, as the first star shone, Francis led the people to this stable without saying a word. What a surprise met them! There in the manger lay a sleeping baby. Looking down lovingly was a gentle mother with 'Joseph' standing by to protect them. A furry donkey crowded close by. Watching also was an ox and a little lamb. Silently the people looked, astonished. Then someone said, "*This is like Bethlehem, and we are like the shepherds who came to see Jesus.*"

News of the nativity scene in Greccio spread. Soon wood carvers began to etch out little figures for manger scenes. Others formed beautifully colored figures and animals in ceramics. Now, all over the world in churches, homes, museums, in small towns and in big cities, manger scenes can be found which today we call a "*crib.*"

Here are some words for "crib" in different languages.

French *Crèche*

Italian *Presipio*

German *Kripp*

Spanish *Nacimiento*

Philippino *Kuna*

## **KRISTKRINDL**

*Kris Kringle* means “*Christ child*.” People prepare for the coming of the Christ child by seeing and serving him in others. Names are written on a slip of paper, collected and placed in a box. Each person then draws out the name of someone who is to be their *Kris Kringle*. The name is kept a secret but each day something special (a kindness or a prayer) is done for their *Kris Kringle* and an anonymous note is sent each week to their *Kris Kringle* telling him/her the deeds or prayers. At Christmas when the final note is written, the senders sign their names. While a person is doing all this for another, someone is doing similarly for them.

## **THE CHRISTMAS TREE**

Early Romans exchanged green tree branches for good luck every year on January 21. The English adopted the custom but changed the day to Christmas Day. It was in Germany that decorating with stars, angels, toys, tinsel, candles and candies originated. People there saw the evergreen tree as a symbol of their faith, and the decorations signified works of love.

## **CHRISTMAS LIGHTS**

The Irish always had a popular custom of leaving a candle burning in a window to light the Christ child’s way on Christmas Eve. The Catholic religion was suppressed in Ireland for many years and priests were forced to go into hiding. The custom of leaving a candle burning in the window developed because Catholic families hoped that the priest would see the candle and know that he was welcome in the home. Coming to the house the priest would find that the door was left unlatched a further sign of welcome. It is believed that lights were first put on a Christmas tree in Germany to symbolize the glory and beauty of the stars above Bethlehem on the night of Jesus’ birth.

## **MUSIC**

Christmas carols date back to AD 400. St. Francis of Assisi is remembered as the father of caroling because he encouraged all members of churches to sing. Most modern Christmas carols sung in English originated in England during the 19th century.

## **CHRISTMAS GIFTS**

Exchanging Christmas gifts began in remembrance of the gold, frankincense and myrrh given to the Christ child by the Wise Men.

## **CHRISTMAS CARDS**

Christmas cards originated in the 15th century and were quite different to what they are today. The very first Christmas cards were sheets of paper which had the *Christmas Story* printed on them. The first ever card as we know them today was printed in 1843 and had the words “*A Merry Christmas and A Happy New Year to You.*” Over the years this has become a popular custom associated with Christmas with hundreds of millions sent every year.

## **SANTA CLAUS**

The Dutch called Saint Nicholas "*Sinter Klass*" which later, in America, became "*Santa Claus*." The original St. Nicholas was the bishop of Myra in southern Turkey during the 4th century, and he spent much of his time helping the poor and giving gifts to needy children. This desire to help the poor and the needy was encouraged by his family, who were wealthy merchants. As Bishop of Myra Saint Nicolas shunned publicity as he travelled all over the city offering help to the destitute. Children received special treatment from Saint Nicolas as he gave them small toys and candies.

## **Celebrations during Advent**

- **St. Francis Xavier, Priest - Feast Day December 3<sup>rd</sup>**
- **St. Nicholas, Bishop- Feast Day December 6<sup>th</sup>**
- **Immaculate Conception for Blessed Virgin Mary, Patronal Feast Day of the United States of America - December 8<sup>th</sup>**
- **Saint Juan Diego - Feast Day December 9<sup>th</sup>**
- **Saint Damasus, Pope- Feast Day December 11<sup>th</sup>**
- **Our Lady of Guadalupe Feast Day December 12<sup>th</sup>**
- **Saint Lucy, Virgin and Martyr - Feast Day December 13<sup>th</sup>**

# The Purpose of Advent

## Advent: A Time of Preparation

In the Catholic Church, Advent is a period of preparation, extending over four Sundays, before Christmas. The word *Advent* comes from the Latin *advenio*, "to come to," and refers to the coming of Christ. This refers, first of all, to our celebration of Christ's birth at Christmas; but second, to the coming of Christ in our lives through grace and the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Our preparations, therefore, should have all three comings in mind. We need to prepare our souls to receive Christ worthily.

### First We Fast, Then We Feast

That's why Advent has traditionally been known as a "little Lent." As in Lent, Advent should be marked by increased prayer, fasting, and good works. While the Western Church no longer has a set requirement for fasting during Advent, the Eastern Church, both Catholic and Orthodox, continues to observe what is known as Philip's Fast, from November 15 until Christmas.

Traditionally, all great feasts have been preceded by a time of fasting, which makes the feast itself more joyful. Sadly, Advent today has supplanted by "the Christmas shopping season," so that by Christmas Day, many people no longer enjoy the feast.

### The Symbols of Advent

In its symbolism, the Church continues to stress the penitential and preparatory nature of Advent. As during Lent, priests wear purple vestments, and the Gloria ("Glory to God") is omitted during Mass. The only exception is on the Third Sunday of Advent, known as Gaudete Sunday, when priests can wear rose-colored vestments. As on Laetare Sunday during Lent, this exception is designed to encourage us to continue our prayer and fasting, because we can see that Advent is more than halfway over.

I noticed our priest started wearing purple vestments on the first Sunday of Advent. Aren't purple vestments usually worn during Lent? At Christmas time, I would have expected something more festive, like red or green or white.

You're very observant! You've probably also noticed that the altar cloth is purple, and if your church normally has flowers or plants near the altar, those have been removed. You may also have noticed that the Gloria ("Glory to God in the highest") is not sung during Advent, either.

All of these things are signs of the penitential nature of Advent and a reminder that the Christmas season hasn't started yet. I've mentioned before that Advent was once known as a "little Lent," and so the penitential color of purple makes an appearance, the organ is muted, and the Gloria--one of the most festive hymns of the Mass--isn't sung. Our thoughts, even on Sunday, are supposed to be on preparing ourselves for the coming of Christ, both at Christmas and at the Second Coming.

Just as during Lent, however, the Church allows us some rest as we pass the halfway point of Advent. The third Sunday of Advent is known as Gaudete Sunday, because "Gaudete" ("**Rejoice**") is the first word of the entrance antiphon at that Mass. On that Sunday, your priest will likely wear rose vestments--a color that still reminds us of the penitential purple, but also has a lightness and joy to it, reminding us that Christmas is drawing near.

## Things to do during Advent

### Spiritually

- Posadas( Nine day Novena – begins 9 days before Christmas)
- Reconciliation
- Weekly or daily if possible Mass
- Retreat ( individual or family)
- Daily Advent scripture prayer
- Bless your Christmas tree, crib and wreath
- Light the Advent wreath daily just be meals and recite prayer of the day

### Activities

- Food Drive
- Coat & Blanket Drive
- Gift Drive for homebound and Children
- Make Cookies & Christmas cards for our homebound or senior facility.
- Make an Advent Wreath and recite Advent prayer every Sunday as a family. Share a meal or reception after prayer
- Make Cookies for your neighbors or special friends and delivery as a family
- Christmas carol with your family to the homebound or friends
- Make Christmas ornaments with your family
- Make Christmas cards
- Read the story of St. Nicholas
- Attend your Christmas Parade or community Christmas celebration
- Decorate the Christmas tree as a family or invite family and friends over to decorate
- Watch a Christmas movie as family
- Make a gift from the heart for someone special