

## Advent Traditions

By Whitney Stager, M.S.

What does “Advent” mean? For many Christians, Advent is a special period of four weeks before Christmas to prepare for the coming of the Christ child - the birth of Jesus, the Savior of the whole world. Perhaps it is a way for us to slow down and simplify so we are ready to enjoy the true meaning of Christmas.

Do you anticipate the season of Advent? Are there special memories that you have of celebrating the weeks before Christmas with your family? Many look forward to this time as a reminder to focus on what is important during the Christmas season. Some families use the Advent wreath, special prayers, extra family time, special meals, or even fasting during the weeks of Advent. All of these can be used to help our hearts be ready for Jesus.

If our hearts and minds are filled with all the trappings of life, it is hard for us to be truly aware of the significance of this holiday. What can be more pure and innocent than the birth of a child, a child of humble means? And yet, at the same time, it seems difficult to comprehend that this infant Jesus is the King of all Nations. Are we ready to really soak in the incredible meaning of this? Is there room in our hearts to understand this amazing gift?

What can be done during the time of Advent to prepare our hearts for Jesus? Are things like bitterness and stress taking up room that could be filled with Jesus' love instead? Would you like to enjoy more family time during this season, instead of rushing from one holiday event to another? Let's explore some ideas to help us prepare for Jesus' birthday!

Ideas for the Advent season:

Advent wreath - a wreath with four candles representing the four Sundays before Christmas. As each family member takes a turn lighting the candles, a special prayer can be said, or each member can take a turn to say what they are grateful for. Be creative - let each member take a Sunday and decide what should be done!

Special Prayers - is there a special prayer you said when you were young that you have been meaning to teach your children? Perhaps you can write your own family prayer that can be prayed together.

Extra Family Time - watching classic Christmas movies together is always fun - pick one for each Sunday! How about “Memory Sunday”? Share some special memories with your friends or family - and don't forget to write them down!

Special Meals - maybe great-grandma made a special meal that she never made any other time of year - track down the recipe and try it out! Are there special cookie cutters

that were taken out just for the Christmas season?

Fasting - fasting can take many forms. This can be an individual or family choice. Can the kids fast from video games? Can the parents fast from extra hours at work? Advent is a great time to start (or keep!) holiday traditions in your family. It helps bring the importance of the Christmas season into focus and connects us to our friends and family. No matter what makes Advent special for you, may God bless you during this wonderful time of year.

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