

WALKING with Christ

DECEMBER 2021

Nurturing Our Families of Faith

ADVENT & CHRISTMAS EDITION



Some images have links.

"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."



Welcome the Season with Anticipation & Hope

**A message from the TCDSB
Nurturing Our Catholic
Community Team**

Welcome to the "Nurturing our Families of Faith" newsletter for Advent/Christmas 2021. This is a newsletter to support the faith journey of students, staff, and their families across The Toronto Catholic District School Board. We invite you to find time and space for prayer, with your families, and to take the time to be in the presence of God. We wait in joyful anticipation and hope for the coming of Jesus.



What is Advent?

The people of Israel waited generations for the promised Messiah to arrive. Their poetry, their songs and stories, and their religious worship focused on an awaited savior, whom God had promised, over and over, would come to them to set them free from captivity, and to lead them to the fulfillment of all that God had chosen for them.

Israel longed for a Messiah, and John the Baptist, who came before Jesus, promised that the Messiah was coming, and could be found in Jesus Christ, God's son, the "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."

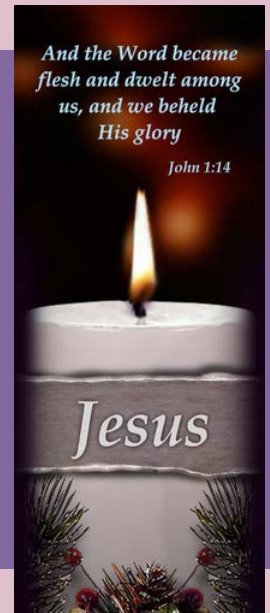
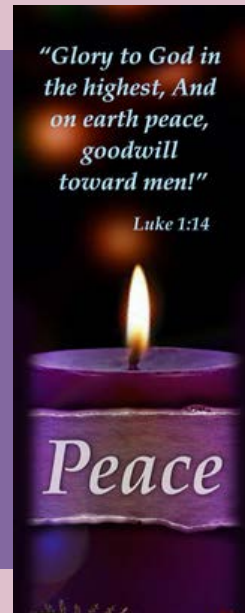
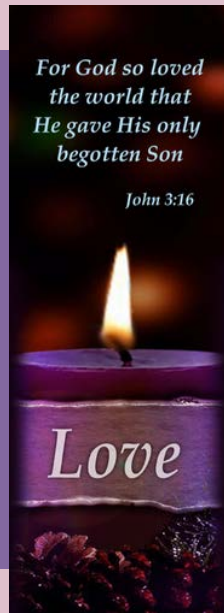
Advent is a season in the Church's life intended to renew the experience of waiting, and longing, for the Messiah. Though Christ has already come into the world, the Church invites us to renew our desire for the Lord more deeply into our lives, and to renew our desire for Christ's triumphant second coming into the world.

Advent is the time in which we prepare for Christmas, the memorial of Jesus Christ being born into the world. Preparations are practical, like decorating a tree or stringing lights, but they're also intended to be spiritual. During Advent, we're invited to enter more frequently into silence, into prayer and reflection, into Scripture, and into the sacramental life of the Church, all to prepare for celebrating Christmas.

Introduction from [*What is Advent Anyway?*](#) (Catholic News Agency)

THE ADVENT WREATH

The Advent wreath and candles are full of symbolism tied to the Christmas season. The wreath itself, which is made of various evergreens, signifies continuous life. The circle of the wreath, which has no beginning or end, symbolizes the eternity of God, and the everlasting life we find in Christ. The candles also have their own special significance. The four candles represent the four weeks of Advent, and one candle is lit each Sunday. Three of the candles are purple because the color violet is a liturgical color that signifies a time of prayer, penance, and sacrifice.



LIGHTING THE ADVENT CANDLES

The first candle, which is purple, symbolizes hope. It is sometimes called the "Prophecy Candle" in remembrance of the prophets, especially Isaiah, who foretold the birth of Christ. It represents the expectation felt in anticipation of the coming Messiah.

The second candle, also purple, represents faith. It is called the "Bethlehem Candle" as a reminder of Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem.

The third candle is pink and symbolizes joy. It is called the "Shepherd's Candle," and is pink because rose is a liturgical color for joy.

Adapted from: <https://www.mercyhome.org/>

On the fourth week of Advent, we light the final purple candle to mark the final week of prayer and penance as we wait for the birth of our Savior. This final candle, the "Angel's Candle," symbolizes peace. It reminds us of the message of the angels: "Peace on Earth, Good Will Toward Men."

The white candle is placed in the middle of the wreath and lit on Christmas Eve. This candle is called the "Christ Candle" and represents the life of Christ.

[Advent Wreath Craft Ideas for Kids of All Ages](#)
[Build an advent wreath with your family.](#)



SYMBOLS AND PRAYERS

The Christmas Crib

Manger, Nativity Scene or Crèche



What is it?
A depiction of the scene of the birth of Jesus in a manger in Bethlehem.



"I wish to recall to memory the little child who was born in Bethlehem. I want to set before our bodily eyes the hardship of his infant needs, how he lay in the manger, how with an ox and ass standing by, he lay upon the hay."
ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

DID YOU KNOW?
St. Francis of Assisi made the Christmas crib popular and turned it into a familiar part of Christian homes around the world. He presented a Bethlehem scene with live animals on Christmas Eve in 1223 in Greccio, Italy.

The preparation of the Nativity scene at home is a wonderful opportunity for family prayer!

TIP #1: Include a reading from St. Luke's account of the birth of Christ
Our Saviour is coming
Luke 1:28-33
Bethlehem
Luke 2:1-5
Birth of Jesus
Luke 2:6-7
The Shepherds & Angels
Luke 2:8-20

TIP #2: Sing an Advent hymn or a Christmas carol
O Come All Ye Faithful
Joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem.
Come and behold Him,
Born the King of Angels;
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord!

TIP #3: Say prayers of petition and praise
Let us praise our Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, who was born for our salvation.
Glory to God in the highest!



THE LEGEND OF THE FIRST CHRISTMAS TREE
An evergreen sprang from the centre of an oak cut down by St. Boniface. The oak symbolized paganism, and its death brought an end to the old ways. The new tree was "the sign of endless life, for its leaves are evergreen."
St. Boniface took this as a sign of the Christian faith.

HISTORY
11TH CENTURY
During Advent, religious plays were performed around Europe. There was always a tree on stage, decorated with red apples, to symbolize the Tree of Paradise.
15TH CENTURY
The faithful began displaying paradise trees in their homes on December 24, the feast of Adam and Eve.
16TH CENTURY
Decorated standing trees became popular in Germany and France. Immigrants brought the tradition to America, but the custom was not popular until the 19th century.
18TH CENTURY
The Christmas tree tradition started in Canada.



Oh, Christmas Tree!

The decorating of the Christmas tree offers an opportunity for family prayer.

PRAYER:
We praise you for the beauty of this tree: may its evergreen branches remind us of your unending care for all people; may its lights illumine the darkness of the winter nights; may its presence bring cheer and hope for all people. Amen.

The Christmas tree reminds us of:

- the tree planted in the centre of Eden
- the tree of the Cross




Archdiocese of Toronto | www.archtoronto.org
#AdventTO

You are my hope, my trust,
O Lord.
Psalm 71:5



Hope

For God so loved ... he gave his only Son.
John 3:16



Love

Many will rejoice because of his birth.
Luke 1:14



Joy

Light to guide our feet into a way of peace.
Luke 1:79



Peace

[Read-Alouds and Daily Scripture on Google Slide Advent Calendar](#)
[Advent Activities for All \(Loyola Press\)](#)
[Advent Prayers \(Xavier University\)](#)
[Christmas Countdown Family Advent Activities](#)



ANNUAL EXAMEN

A Reflective Review of the Past Year: An Ignatian Annual Examen

St. Ignatius Loyola's Examen is an opportunity for peaceful daily reflective prayer. It invites us to find the movement of God in our life.

The following is a reflective review of the past year.

Before you begin, identify some major events of your year, such as those at school [e.g., graduation, holidays, etc], or events [e.g., birthdays, weddings, etc) to orient yourself to the full 12-month time period.

The Examen is simply a set of introspective prompts for you to follow or adapt to your own character and spirit. Begin with a pause and a slow, deep breath or two; become aware that you are in the presence of the Holy.

As I review the past 12 months, from a year ago through to the present moment:

What am I especially grateful for this year?

An event that took place

Courage that I mustered

Love and support I received



I ask for the light to know God and to know myself as God sees me.

Where have I felt true joy this year?

What troubled me this year?

What has challenged me?

Where and when did I find an opportunity for renewal and pause?

Have I noticed God's presence in any of this?

In light of my review, what is my response to the God of my life?

As I look ahead, to the coming months what comes to mind?

With what spirit do I want to enter the next few months, the next year?

I ask for God's presence and grace, for this spirit, as I enter the next year.

Amen

Prayer from *Xavier University - Ignatian Annual Examen*



THE HISTORY OF THE CRECHE

Tradition attributes to Saint Francis the merit of introducing the **Nativity Scene** to the vast cycle of Christmas customs, when, at Christmas 1223 in the village of Greccio near Assisi, as we are told by St. Bonaventure, he took a manger and filled it with hay, tied a donkey and an ox near it and with a crowd of people from all over the neighboring countryside attended the celebration of Mass in front of the crib.



From the 14th century onwards these religious representations became ever more lavish, with the addition of mobile puppets, that some consider the forefathers of our present day crib-figures. The Christ Child in the manger and other pictures of the story of Bethlehem have been used in church services from the first centuries.

But the crib in its present form and its use outside the church originated with St. Francis of Assisi. Through his famous celebration at Greccio, Italy, on Christmas Eve 1223, with a Bethlehem scene including live animals, he made the crib popular. Since then, it has been a familiar sight in Christian homes all over the world.

Adapted from *[History of the Creche](#)*



MAKING A NATIVITY SCENE

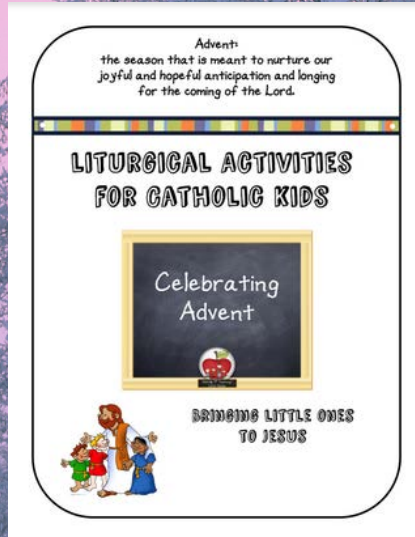
In the four weeks of Advent running up to our Christmas festival you can make your Christmas nativity scene. Each week you can make or find something to add to it.

By Christmas Day it will be filled with the special people, animals and objects that we think about at Christmas and which are mentioned in the Christmas story.

For the stable you can use: pieces of bark or branch, cardboard box (e.g. shoe box), corrugated cardboard, large and small fir cones, wood chips or shavings, straw, moss, small stones.

To make: Using the items, build up a stable with two sides, a back and a roof. Leave the front open to display all the people and animals. You can also leave the nativity scene empty and place a small box of straw next to it. When family members do a good deed, they can add a piece of straw. By Christmas this manger will be softly lined and ready for Jesus.

FUN FAMILY ACTIVITIES



Interactive Advent calendar for children

12 Awesome Advent Saints



Advent prayer chain, vocabulary cards, window decorations and other activities

Additional Activities

[Daily Christ-Centred Activities for Pre-Schoolers](#)

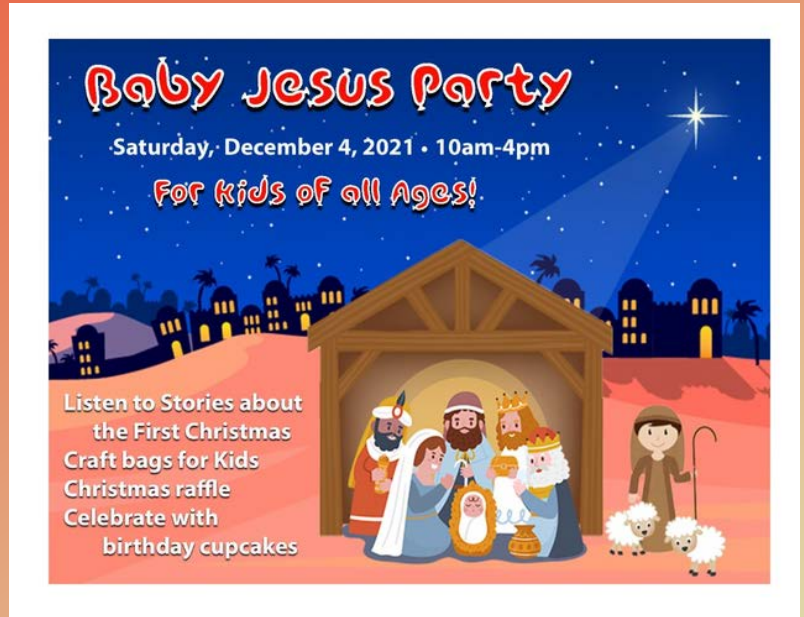
[Advent Christmas Crafts and Activities for Kids](#)

[Catholic Advent Crafts and Activities for Kids](#)

On these sites, you'll find activities or further links to resources such as:

- Finger puppets
- Advent/Christmas sweets and treats
- Baby Jesus crafts
- Daily calendar activities
- Colouring pages; and more!

CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS



Time: 10am to 4pm
Date: Saturday December 4th
Place: Pauline Books & Media Center
 3022 Dufferin St, North York, ON M6B 3T5



View the [NCC YouTube Channel](#) for our upcoming weekly Advent reflections and the livestream broadcast of the TCDSB Advent mass:

Advent Reflections - Nov. 30, Dec. 7 & Dec. 14 @ 9:45 am
Advent Eucharistic Celebration - Dec. 16 @ 9:15 am

The *Ontario Catholic Schools Trustees Association* also wishes to share their Advent resource in their **Rebuild, Restore, Renew Together Kit**.



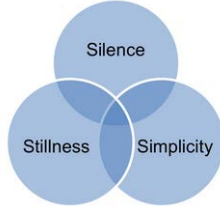
This meditation was written by Patty McCulloch and originally published in *Touching Jesus: 20 Guided Meditations on His Care and Compassion*.



WORTH EXPLORING



Christian Meditation – The Prayer of 3 “S’s”



ONLINE / LIVESTREAM MASSES

Catholic TV

Daily at 12:30 pm EST

Salt and Light TV

Daily at 6:30 am, 11:00 am, 3:00 pm & 10:30 pm (all times EST)

Radio Maria

Monday and Thursday at 12:30 pm EST

Daily TV Mass

(Loretto Abbey Chapel)

Fr. Rob Galea's YouTube Channel

Archdiocese of Toronto: Day of Confession:

<https://www.archtoronto.org/confession>

GIVING OPPORTUNITIES



FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Visit us at: [Nurturing Our Catholic Community](#),

Contact us at: ncc.team@tcdsb.org



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