

Introduction

I wrote this little book during the spring lockdown, but honestly, you could have written it too. Because you and I—all of us, really—have been living Advent all year. As we waited for schools to reopen and watched every fever and cough that came our families' way, we prayed. We lit candles. We began new family traditions.

As everything changed this year, we gained new perspectives. What was important pre-pandemic didn't matter so much now. Our priorities shifted. Now that we're officially in Advent, it's time to take stock. Did all the good that we did this year stick? If we've strayed a little from the plans we made for ourselves, we can use these four weeks to right our course, with God's help. Use what you can here. Think of the reflections, activities, and brief family prayers as little sparks to get you started.

A final note. When this book was written, we had no idea what the world would look like as you read this. But we can be sure of one thing. Our celebration of Christmas and Advent may change, but Advent and Christmas won't. We still wait. We still celebrate the birth of the Savior who transforms us with his light and life and makes us new people forever and ever.

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November 29

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Isaiah 63:16B–17, 19B; 64:2–7; 1 Corinthians 1:3–9; Mark 13:33–37

New Alerts

Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come.

MARK 13:33

I don't know about you, but this Scripture passage always felt a little distant to me. Then along came 2020. We're watchful about spreading the virus. We're alert to any cough or fever our kids get. When loved ones are admitted to the hospital, we don't know when the time will come that we might see them again. But let's remember this: God watches too. When we've been shut inside, God has been there. When we watch and wait with loved ones, God watches alongside us. This Advent, let's be watchful of the ways God is here right now, loving us and asking us to trust him.

FAMILY PRAYER Light one candle on an Advent wreath. (If you don't have one, try making or coloring one—you can find images online.) One person can read the prayer aloud while everyone else responds after each line: ***We walk in the light of the Lord.***

Lord God, we look for you during Advent with hope.

Give us some light each day to find you.

Help us walk in your light, and shine it for others. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION The first Advent candle is called the Prophecy Candle. It symbolizes hope. Have dinner tonight by candlelight. Talk about times when things felt dark this year, and what gave you hope.

November 30

MONDAY, FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT ☉ FEAST OF ST. ANDREW THE APOSTLE

Romans 10:9–18; Matthew 4:18–22

Net Worth

At once they left their nets and followed him.

MATTHEW 4:20

When Andrew and Peter put aside their nets to follow Jesus, they left behind their livelihood as fishermen. Many of us have left nets behind this year—jobs and livelihoods—though not by choice. Like the Apostles, we don't know what's next. And with families to support, we'd really like to pick up our nets again. But unlike the Apostles, we didn't just meet this man Jesus. We've known him for a while. When he tells us to cast our nets a little differently, we can trust him, because he died for us, and rose to bring us life. What is Jesus saying to you about your own net today?

FAMILY PRAYER *Hail and blessed be the hour and moment in which the Son of God was born of the most pure Virgin Mary, at midnight, in Bethlehem, in the piercing cold. In that hour vouchsafe, I beseech you, O my God, to hear my prayer and grant my desires through the merits of Our Savior Jesus Christ, and of his blessed Mother. Amen.*

ADVENT ACTION The St. Andrew Novena (above) is often said fifteen times a day, every day between now and Christmas, for special intentions. Whether you say it once or fifteen times, it's a good prayer to help your family remember the reason for the season. Try it today.

December 1

TUESDAY, FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Isaiah 11:1-10; Luke 10:21-24

Life Guard On Duty

*For the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the LORD,
as water covers the sea. ISAIAH 11:9*

When my son showed me drone photography of a clear, aquamarine shoreline and miles of sun-kissed sand, I thought it was some untouched, romantic getaway in the South Pacific. But no. This was Newport Beach, California, U.S.A. Normally teeming with beachgoers, litter, and a thick coating of sunscreen across the water's surface, it had been closed to the public for weeks during lockdown. Now, with just a few weeks' rest, it had been transformed. I wondered, could we keep it this way? Could we guard and keep safe "the knowledge of the Lord" here in his creation? Where do you see the Lord's beautiful knowledge in creation today? Spend a minute just being in awe.

FAMILY PRAYER All respond after each line: *We see the beauty of your creation, Lord.*

Lord God, today we thank you for the changing seasons.

Give us eyes to notice the changes in trees, sky, birds, and animals.

Give us hearts to care for all that you have placed around us.

ADVENT ACTION It might feel like winter, but technically it's still fall. If weather permits, take a walk with your family and look for ways the earth is getting ready for its long winter rest. Talk about how we get ready for the Savior's coming too.

December 2

WEDNESDAY, FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Isaiah 25:6–10a; Matthew 15:29–37

Feed Your Hungry Crowd

“Where could we ever get enough bread in this deserted place to satisfy such a crowd?” MATTHEW 15:33

For many of us, empty store shelves are a signal to stock up so we don't run out of items. But for many people, empty shelves mean hunger. Today, more than 37 million Americans don't have enough to eat. Worldwide, the number is closer to 815 million. But—and this is important—we do not live in a “deserted place.” This crowd of hungry people is, truly, *our* crowd. Jesus multiplied loaves and fishes, but he also sent the Holy Spirit to help us continue his work. This Advent, let's ask God's help to share our bread with other families in need.

FAMILY PRAYER All respond after each line: *Jesus, teach us to love others as you love us.*

Bless us, Lord and the gifts you give us.

Bless all of your children everywhere.

Bless us, Lord and show us how to share what we have with those who do not have enough. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION Make a plan to cut back where you can this Christmas and use the money to support those who need your help. Talk to the people at your parish or local food pantry, or check with organizations like marysmealsusa.org or feedingamerica.org to see how your family can help.