

How to celebrate Advent like a Catholic

the Advent season has these characteristics:

It is a season of:

- 1) Hopeful longing,
- 2) Joyful expectation,
- 3) Prayerful penance, and
- 4) Spiritual preparation.

It looks to:

- 1) Salvation history of the past,
- 2) Our present redemption being accomplished, and
- 3) the future coming of Christ.

Advent connects us spiritually with God's whole plan of redemption through Jesus Christ.

WHEN DOES ADVENT BEGIN?

Advent is the liturgical season we celebrate as the precursor to the Christmas season. Don't skip it! It's there for a reason. Advent begins on the Sunday nearest the feast of St. Andrew the Apostle (November 30th) and ends on December 24th. Christmas begins December 25th at midnight and continues until the Feast of the Baptism of Jesus.

Advent is our liturgically built-in time of spiritual preparation for Christmas. If you want to get the most out of the Christmas season and fill up your soul with love for Christ, the best way to do that is to "let every heart prepare Him room" —and celebrating Advent is the Church's way to do it!

Listed below are 12 ways to celebrate Advent like a Catholic.

- 1) **Advent Wreath:** One of the most popular ways to celebrate Advent is with an Advent wreath or Advent candleholders. Four candles (three purple and one pink), are used to count down the weeks until Christmas. Each Sunday of Advent one of the candles is lit and special prayers are said. Each Sunday of Advent has a particular theme leading up to the birth of Christ. Read more about the Advent Wreath Tradition and Meaning.
- 2) **Advent Dinners:** Make the Sundays of Advent into something special. Prepare a nice dinner or host a potluck and invite over family & friends. This would be a great time to light the candles on your Advent wreath and invite all to join in the special prayers for that week.
- 3) **Prepare Seasonal Food:** Many historically Catholic countries have traditions of preparing food that goes with the liturgical seasons, especially Advent and Christmas. Catholic bloggers are doing a great job of making these traditions more popular for all Catholics. Come up with something creative yourself or find ideas on pintrest or catholic websites.
- 4) **Advent Devotional Reading:** There are lots of great Advent books that take you deeper into the profound theology of Advent. God comes to us as a child, and this is amazing to think about! Going through each day with devotional reading is one of the best ways to spiritually prepare yourself for Christmas, the birth of the King of Kings.
- 5) **Special Prayers:** Adopt special prayers during the Advent season. You can often find them in Advent devotional books. There is also the St. Andrew Christmas Novena which is traditionally prayed from the feast of St. Andrew (November 30th) until Christmas Eve.

Another tradition is praying the O Antiphons from the Liturgy of the Hours in the eight days leading up to Christmas. The O Antiphons are the antiphons of the Evening Prayers (Vespers) during the week before

Christmas. Each antiphon welcome the birth of the Savior by heralding one of the resplendent Biblical titles of the soon-to-be-born Son of God as foreshadowed in the Old Testament by the prophet Isaiah.

- 6) Advent Calendars: Another popular way to celebrate the Advent season, especially popular with children, is the Advent calendar. Counting down the days to Christmas helps children to anticipate patiently and to focus on waiting for the baby Jesus to be born. You can purchase one or make one as a fun craft time for kids.
- 7) Advent Music: Make your own playlist of music appropriate for Advent which anticipates Christ's birth.
- 8) Nativity sets are a classic tradition and are great to display during the Advent season. To make the display especially poignant, wait until Christmas Eve to place the Baby Jesus into the scene. The Vatican has a neat tradition of the Holy Father blessing the Baby Jesus from family nativity scenes, you could ask your parish priest to bless your Baby Jesus figure!
- 9) Jesse Tree: If you have kids, the Jesse Tree (named after the father of King David, the ancestor of Jesus, as mentioned in Isaiah 11) is a fun biblical activity during the Advent season which prepares for the birth of Christ and his mission. It's fun for kids and great catechesis. It goes through the ancestry of Jesus and how all of his ancestors played a role in salvation history. The tree created can then be used as a holiday decoration.
- 10) Advent Penance Services: Advent is known as the "little Lent" and is therefore a time for penitential practices. Many Catholic parishes have special penance services for Advent. Confession is an important part of preparing room for the coming of Christ into our hearts, that is, allowing Him to draw us into worship and gave precious gifts to the Christ Child, so we can do the same; we can give the Baby Jesus our sacrifices during the Advent season.
- 11) Small Sacrifices for the Christ Child: Because Advent is known as the "little Lent," prayer, alms, and sacrifices are also a also part of Advent season. Just as the Magi labored through a long journey to worship and gave precious gifts to the Christ Child, so we can do the same; we can give the Baby Jesus our sacrifices during the Advent season.

Adults can do this alone, but with kids a visual aid goes along well with the practice. Two popular ways are Jesus Stockings and a Baby Jesus creche. For the stocking, small sacrifices are written on little slips of paper and placed into the stocking; for the creche, a piece of straw is added for each good deed. These add up each day of Advent as birthday presents for the newborn King. When Jesus is born, and the baby Jesus is placed in the creche, the prayers and sacrifices have prepared Him room in our hearts. A beautiful visual! See also [A Great Tradition for Kids! Making Small Sacrifices for the Baby Jesus During Advent](#).

- 12) Almsgiving. Good deeds and generosity have always been an important part of preparation for Christmas. Advent is a great time to practice spiritual and corporeal acts of mercy such as Christmas gifts for disadvantaged children, volunteering at a nursing home or soup kitchen, visiting the sick in a hospital, or simply inviting people into your home who may have no friends or family of their own to celebrate the holidays with. If you can't find something to be a part of in your parish or local community, be an organizer for a cause you're passionate about and get others involved.