

# *Advent & Christmas: Year A*

## *Ideas, Activities, and Resources*

The Liturgical Year begins with the First Sunday of Advent, four weeks before Christmas Day, the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a season of preparation and waiting; waiting for the Light to return to the world. There are a variety of practices and resources that can assist individuals and families in slowing down during this time of year when the world around us picks up the frantic pace of consumerism.

*Advent God, sustain us as we journey to the stable. Strengthen our hands and make firm our feeble knees, Open our eyes to the dawning of the sun, and guide our steps on the pathways of peace. Amen.*

### **The Lectionary Texts – Year A**

Sunday, November 27, 2016 is the First Sunday of Advent in which Year A (Daily Office Year 1) begins. The Prayer Book Guide to Christian Education, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (2009: Morehouse Publishing) offers a review for each Sunday's readings along with ideas for study. Additional reflections on the weekly lectionary, with discussion questions can be followed at [www.prayerbookguide.com](http://www.prayerbookguide.com).



#### **1 Advent: Be Ready**

- Isaiah 2:1-5
- Psalm 122
- Romans 13:11-14
- Matthew 24:36-44

#### **2 Advent: Repent!**

- Isaiah 11:1-10
- Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19
- Romans 15:4-13
- Matthew 3:1-12

#### **3 Advent: Promises**

- Isaiah 35:1-10
- Psalm 146:4-9
- James 5:7-10
- Matthew 11:2-11

#### **4 Advent: Proclamation & Presence**

- Isaiah 7:10-17
- Psalm 80:1-7, 16-18
- Romans 1:1-7
- Matthew 1:18-25

**Advent wreaths** have their source in pagan practice. Turn an old wagon wheel on the side, hang it up, bore a few holes, and continue to add candles as the days get shorter. (It's sort of the reverse of Tenebrae (a long office originally spread over several weeks in the spring in which the number of candles was reduced as the days lengthened.)

In the 17th and 18th centuries, German churches, particularly of a pietist sort, "invented" the modern Advent wreath as a focus of domestic devotions around the table. It was a time of sharing Scripture, praying, singing, and lighting candles, as the family ritualized its way toward the end of Advent

Except among the heirs of some of those German pietist groups, Advent wreaths were largely unheard of in liturgical and non-liturgical churches until the early 1950's. It seems that the candle companies made "a little wire Advent set," again for domestic use and distributed through the Sunday School. By the mid-fifties, they began to appear in the churches and by the 1970's had become virtually universal.

As for the color of the candles, the marketers to the liturgical traditions (before the Council) put in three purple and a pink, a practice that followed the color scheme of the vestments in use at the time among Roman Catholics, Anglo-Catholics, and extremely high church Lutherans. A slightly later affectation among Anglicans was to substitute "Advent blue" (with due respect to the Sarum Use which is its own historical problem!).

Prior to this commercialization of the whole thing, the tradition had known only two colors of candles: bleached and unbleached. Bleached for Sundays and Feasts, unbleached for ferial use. Except, perhaps, in those places where the vestments are still "moderated" on Advent III, I suggest that the Advent wreath be adorned with white candles. It is a little nonsensical when the remainder of the Advent rite has been reformed, the vestments and paraments are consistent through the season, and the only vestige of the shift in color scheme is in the Advent wreath candles, that ancient tradition, circa 1955.

*Attributed to The Right Reverend J. Neil Alexander, Bishop of Atlanta*

### ***Make your own Advent Wreath:***

- Wreath making supplies: <http://www.aworldofplenty.com/7-floral/floral.html>
- Making & using an Advent wreath: <http://www.kencollins.com/question-10.htm>
- Variety of Advent wreath bases, including simply wire ones with candleholders: <http://shop.catholicsupply.com/store/p/16897-11-Goldtone-Advent-Wreath.aspx>

### ***Prayers for use with your Advent Wreath:***



***Blessing:*** Lord God, You who sent into the world Your Beloved Son as a light that shines in darkness, invest this wreath, our Advent symbol, with the power of Your energy and light. With each of these candles that is lighted, may we rekindle within ourselves the desire to prepare a way for the birth of Christ. With each new candle that is lighted, may the flame of Christ's coming grow brighter and brighter so that this Christmas may see a fresh and ever-green coming of the Lord of Light into each of our hearts and into our whole world. (Candle is lighted.) We pray, then, that the richness of God's blessing rest upon this Advent wreath, upon our home and upon each of us as we light this candle in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.<sup>1</sup>

***First Sunday of Advent:*** Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

***Second Sunday of Advent:*** Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one god, now and for ever. Amen.

***Third Sunday of Advent:*** Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us;

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<sup>1</sup> Hays, Edward. *Prayers for the Domestic Church* (Forest of Peace Publishing, 1979).

through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and forever. Amen.

**Fourth Sunday of Advent:** Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one god, now and forever. Amen.

## **Blue Christmas Service**

Many find Christmas a difficult time, especially those who are grieving the loss of loved-ones. There are many resources available for designing such a service in your church.

- ★ Building Faith <http://www.buildfaith.org/tag/blue-christmas/>
- ★ From *The Whole People of God* (Wood Lake Books)  
<http://www.rockies.net/~spirit/sermons/bluexmas.php>

## **A Service of Lessons & Carols for Advent IV**

1. Genesis 3:1-15 – First Sin & Punishment  
*Hymn 53: Once He Came in Blessing*
2. Isaiah 40:1-11 – Comfort/Voice in the Wilderness  
*Hymn 75: There's a Voice in the Wilderness*
3. Isaiah 6:1-11 – A Vision of God in the Holy Temple  
*Hymn 67: Round the Lord in Glory*
4. Isaiah 11:1-9 – The Peaceful Kingdom  
*Hymn 81: Lo, How a Rose Er Blooming*
5. Baruch 4:36-5:9 – Help for Jerusalem  
*Anthem: People Look East*
6. Luke 1:26-38 – Angel Gabriel Appears to Mary  
*Hymn 265: The Angel Gabriel*
7. Matthew 1:18-23 – The Birth of Jesus  
*Hymn 74: Blest Be the King*

### *Note:*

- Lesson #3 may be adaptable to make into a mural. It is very descriptive of cherubim & seraphim, etc. Lots of gold and purple on a mural filled with angels could be a fun children's project.
- Lesson #6 is a traditional lesson that most pageants are based on. This could easily be adapted for 3 children to read as narrator, Gabriel, and Mary.

**Lord, grant us peace** when we worry about trying to shop and not having enough money to buy the things we want to for our friends and family. Grant us the peace to remember that the spirit of Christmas dwells in our homes and hearts and not in the mall. Grant us the peace to understand that the true gift of Christmas doesn't come from a store but comes from your Son, the Prince of Peace, the reason we celebrate. Amen.

*The Book of Uncommon Prayer: Contemplative and Celebratory Prayers and Worship Services for Youth Ministry* by Steven L. Case (Youth Specialties, 2002)

## ***A Christingle for Advent<sup>2</sup>***

The word Christingle means “Christ Light” and originated from the Moravian Church custom of giving children lighted candles on Christmas Eve in a small church in Marienborn, Germany in 1747. The minister wanted a simple symbol to bring home the message of Christmas for the children. He gave them a lighted candle tied with a red ribbon while praying, “Dear Lord Jesus, kindle a flame in these dear children’s hearts.” This custom was imported to Britain, where it continues to be practiced today.



### ***You will need:***

- A large orange – represents the world
- A small candle – as a reminder that Jesus is the Light of the world
- A red ribbon – stands for forgiveness, a reminder of the blood shed by Jesus on the cross (red sticky tape or florist’s ribbon works best)
- Small piece of aluminum foil
- Four toothpicks with dried fruit & sweets such as raisins and gumdrops – represent the four seasons and all the good things God created for us

### ***Assembly:***

- Take a small slice off the bottom of the orange so that it can stand securely without rolling.
- Wrap the tape or ribbon around the middle of the orange.
- Make two slits crosswise, with a knife, to the orange, or use an apple corer to make a slight hole.
- Place a circle of silver foil over the hole made, to trap the hot candle wax.
- Gently push the candle into the orange until it is secure.
- Thread sweets, fruits and raisins onto the toothpicks, ensuring that the sharp point is covered and
- Fix four completed sticks into the orange.

## ***Resources for Advent to Celebrate the Season at Home:***

- ★ *Whose Birthday Is It, Anyway?* Is published each year from Alternatives for Simple Living <https://simpleliving.startlogic.com/indexoth.php?place=xb/PromoKit.php>
- ★ *Cloth for the Cradle: Resources for Advent, Christmas & Epiphany* ISBN 1-57999-062-2
- ★ *Before & After Christmas* by Debra Trafton O’Neal ISBN 0-8066-4156-8
- ★ *Winter: Celebrating the Season in a Christian Home* by Peter Mazar ISBN 1-56854-134-1
- ★ *Best of Blessings* edited by Ginny Arthur ISBN 1-55126-220-7
- ★ *To Dance With God* by Gertrud Mueller Nelson ISBN 0-8091-2812-8
- ★ *Feast of Faith: Celebrating the Christian Year at Home* by Kevin & Stephanie Parks ISBN 0-7151-4938-5
- ★ *Build Your Own Bethlehem* by Gertrud Mueller Nelson & Peter Mazar ISBN 1-5684-448-0
- ★ *Winter Saints* by Melissa Musick Nussbaum ISBN 1-56854-246-1
- ★ *All Through the Day, All Through the Year* by David B. Batchelder ISBN 0-8066-4039-1
- ★ *The Anglican Family Prayer Book* by Anne Kitch ISBN 0-8192-1940-1
- ★ *The “E” Book: Essential Prayers & Activities for Faith at Home* by Gill Ambrose ISBN 0-7151-4937-7
- ★ *What We Do in Advent: An Anglican Kids’ Activity Book* by Anne Kitch ISBN 978-0-8192-2195-7
- ★ *Teach Us to Number Our Days: A Liturgical Calendar for Advent* by Barbara Dee Baumgarten ISBN 978-0-8192-1765-3
- ★ *Together For a Season: All-aged Seasonal Resources for Advent/Christmas/Epiphany* by Gill Ambrose, Peter Craig-Wild, Diane Craven and Mary Hawes ISBN 978-0-7151-4062

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<sup>2</sup> *The Christingle Pack: The Archbishop of Wales Fund for Children*, The Council for Mission and Ministry – The Church in Wales, 1999.

## ***Other Advent activities and resources for Church and Home:***

- ★ Faith at Home – great site for all kinds of stuff!  
<http://www.faith-at-home.com/tips/advent-resources.html>
- ★ CandlePress – materials for Advent calendars, Advent devotions and more!  
<http://www.candlepress.com/category/55-seasonal.aspx>
- ★ Anglicans On-Line – a special section devoted to Advent resources and links  
<http://anglicansonline.org/special/advent.html>
- ★ St. Nicholas – all you ever wanted to know about the original Santa Claus  
<http://www.stnicholascenter.org/>
- ★ Barnabas in Churches – The Bible Fellowship (BRF) is a United Kingdom charity organization that publishes resources for Bible reading and prayer for all ages  
<http://www.barnabasinchurches.org.uk/find/all/ideas/1/advent/>

***Building Faith:*** Throughout November and December, a new article will be posted daily on this site for Christian formation. Check regularly to learn more about resources, activities, ideas, and links.  
<http://www.buildfaith.org>

## ***Christmas Pageants!***

Whether it is to be held on Advent IV, Christmas Eve, during the Christmas season or to celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany, the annual Christmas Pageant is a memorable experience for young and old alike. Many are written using the Birth Narrative found in the Gospel of Luke, but many variations can also be found from the very simple to the complex production.

- ★ St. Gregory of Nyssa, San Francisco offers a downloadable script for pageants for Year A, B, and C of the lectionary, following the Gospel of Matthew, Mark and Luke:  
<http://www.saintgregorys.org/liturgy-scripts.html>
- ★ Go Tell It On the Mountain by Gretchen Wolff Pritchard offers three pageants to be held in the context of the liturgy. <http://www.the-sunday-paper.com/id2.html>
- ★ **Skiturgies** is a website [www.skiturgies.com](http://www.skiturgies.com) full of pageants, plays, rites and rituals for a simple pay-and-download fee. Resources for Advent, Christmas and Epiphany include:
  - *A Journey Though Advent: Stations of the Nativity*
  - *The Jesse Tree*
  - *Sunday Morning with St. Nicholas and John the Baptist*
  - *The Christmas Story According to the Four Evangelists*
  - *A Christmas Present*
  - *Joseph & Mary*
  - *Rejoice!*
  - *Looking Forward to Christ*
  - *The Pageant of Deliverance*
  - *The Pageant of Miracle Births*
  - *The Pageant of Poems*
  - *A Christmas News Broadcast*
  - *How the Magi Became Truly Wise*
  - *The Feast of Lights* (for Epiphany)

## *The Reason for the Season<sup>3</sup>*

### **What children really want for Christmas:**

1. *Relaxed and loving time with the family.* Between Thanksgiving and Christmas, children feel the stress of family more as time is consumed with preparation, shopping, parties, social events, benefits, rehearsals, money worries, rushing around. Parents need to make a conscious decision to set aside relaxed time with their families which means having to say “no” to some chores or events
2. *Realistic expectations about gifts.* Watching television on a Saturday morning, a child may see 50- 60 toy commercials using sophisticated techniques to get them to “need” the item. But know that parental influence is stronger – kids want parents to define the celebration and share their sense of values. When children have exciting family activities to look forward to before and after the present- opening, gifts start taking their rightful place in the festivities. Commercial time for a child may be 90 days before Christmas, ending on Dec. 25. Used to be a week before Christmas and last for the 12 days.
3. *An evenly paced holiday season.* Hold off on some important traditions until a week or so before Christmas. Get the decorations out on December 10th, tree up on Dec. 20th, celebrate the 12 days and culminate it on Epiphany.
4. *Strong family traditions.* Children perceive that anything they can count on year after year is a tradition, and most of us have more of these hidden traditions that we realize. The holiday food, customary visits, music, how you display Christmas cards. Talk with your children to find out which holiday activities are most important to them and make an effort to do them.

### **What to do about Christmas Gifts:**

On a sheet of paper, write each of your children’s names and jot down a few sentences that describe his or her attitude toward Christmas presents last year. If one or more of your children seem overly concerned with gifts, you may wish to explore this further with them: Talk to them as soon as possible about your plans to give them fewer presents. Be clear about what they can expect. Explain to children who are old enough to understand why it’s important for you to minimize gifts.

Give your children something else to look forward to, like a special trip or family activity. Focus on what they will be getting, not on what they won’t. What do I get them? Getting your child the one thing that’s at the top of their list helps them see that you are paying attention to their wishes and dreams, even though –this is the tricky part – you may not fully support them. If you have strong objections to your child’s request, it’s better to be honest and help them think of other things they’d like as well. When older children ask for gifts that are too expensive, it’s okay to be honest and say, “That sounds like a great gift, but we can’t afford it this year” rather than to give the gift along with the hidden message that you regret having spent so much money. What about grandparents? Ask them to send family gifts at Christmas and individual gifts on birthdays. Have them give the gift of time of themselves if possible.

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<sup>3</sup> These ideas are from *Unplug The Christmas Machine: How to Have the Christmas You’ve Always Wanted* by Jo Robinson and Jean Coppock Staeheli (New York: Quill, 1982).

## *The Christmas Pledge<sup>4</sup>*

Believing in the beauty and simplicity of Christmas, I commit myself to the following:

1. To remember those people who truly need my gifts
2. To express my love for family and friends in more direct ways than presents
3. To rededicate myself to the spiritual growth of my family
4. To examine my holiday activities in light of the true spirit of Christmas
5. To initiate one act of peacemaking within my circle of family and friends

### ***Questions to ponder:***

1. Which holiday traditions do your children seem to enjoy most? (If you are uncertain, take some time in the next few days to talk to them.)
2. Which holiday traditions or family activities do your children have to look forward to after December 25th?
3. Check the statement that most accurately completes this thought: Gift-giving plays the following role in our family celebration:
  - a. It is by far the most important tradition
  - b. It is one of several important traditions
  - c. It is of moderate importance
  - d. It is of relatively minor importance
4. On a sheet of paper, write each of your children's names and jot down a few sentences that describe his or her attitude toward Christmas presents last year.
5. What are you celebrating? What are your core values in regard to Christmas? On the below list, cross off those statements that have no importance to you and add any that have not been listed. Then rank them, 1 being highest and 10 being least important. Once you decide what your deepest beliefs are, you can plan a celebration that is in harmony with your values.

Christmas is a time:

- to be a peacemaker, within my family and the world at large.
- to enjoy being with my immediate family.
- to create a beautiful home environment.
- to celebrate the birth of Christ.
- to exchange gifts with my family and friends.
- for parties, entertaining, and visits with friends.
- to help those who are less fortunate.
- to strengthen bonds with my relatives.
- to strengthen my church community.
- to take a few days off from work and have a good time.

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<sup>4</sup> From the *Institute for Peace and Justice* <http://www.ipj-ppj.org/>

## *Ideas to go with your Advent Calendar<sup>5</sup>*

- ★ Advent was originally a time of self-examination. Write down 3 hopes you have for this Advent. Place your list along with other family members in a sealed envelope.
- ★ Count each light you use to decorate this Christmas. Give 10¢ to charity for each.
- ★ December 6th – Learn more about Saint Nicholas at [www.saintnicholascenter.org](http://www.saintnicholascenter.org)
- ★ Think about the gifts you plan to give this Christmas. Would you feel uncomfortable if Jesus was present during your gift sharing?
- ★ Pledge to read, watch or listen to at least one form of alternative media each week outside the mainstream media (ie: TV and computers).
- ★ Make a list of things you would like to receive. Give \$1 for every luxury item on your list.
- ★ December 12th – Learn about the Festival of the Virgin of Guadalupe, a celebration in Mexico.
- ★ Instead of sending Christmas cards, make a card that shares your concerns as you anticipate the birth of the Prince of Peace. Invite others to sign it and mail it to a political leader.
- ★ Practice the 5-R's – reduce, reuse, recycle, restore, respond.
- ★ Think not only about year-end contributions, but also about SRI – Socially Responsible Investing. Visit [www.ussif.org](http://www.ussif.org)
- ★ Share a skill. Pledge to teach a child to garden or bake, a teenager to do home repairs or prepare taxes.
- ★ The biggest shopping binge of the year creates an enormous amount of waste. Keep track of how many bags of garbage you have this week and give \$1 for each bag.
- ★ December 26th – Boxing Day! Read Acts 6-7, on this day that we remember St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Fill a box with food or clothing and give it to someone in need.
- ★ When have your friends, neighbors or relatives been a blessing to you? Give 50¢ for each situation.
- ★ December 28th – Holy Innocents Day. Read Matthew 2:1-18. Where are children in danger today? Pray for children of the world.
- ★ Visualize yourself talking with God face-to-face. Name five blessings in your life that are not things. Donate a generous amount for each.
- ★ Acknowledge all Creation as God's. Vow not to abuse Creation. See God's work in Nature, even in the dead of winter.
- ★ December 31st – New Year's Eve. Make some time to be quiet during the evening. Alone or with others express three hopes for the coming year: for yourself, your country and your world. Give \$1 for each hope of peace.
- ★ January 1st – New Year's Day! Open the envelope containing your lists of hopes for Advent. Think about or discuss with those in your household: How were my hopes realized this Advent? What would I do differently? Give 50¢ for each hope.
- ★ January 6th – Epiphany! Read & meditate on Matthew 2:1-12 and Ephesians 3:1-12. Discuss your plans for the coming year, including next Advent and Christmas. Offer the money you have been saving the past several weeks to the cause of your choice.

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<sup>5</sup> Adapted from Alternatives for Simple Living <http://www.SimpleLiving.org>



## ***Resources for Adult Study and Reflection from Church Publishing Incorporated***

[www.churchpublishing.org](http://www.churchpublishing.org)

*A Thrill of Hope: The Christmas Story in Word and Art* - DVD and study guide using the artwork of John August Swanson (2011)

*Love Life Live Advent: Make Room for the Manger* by Paula Gooder and Peter Babington (little booklets for children and families to count down the days) <https://www.churchpublishing.org/siteassets/pdf/first-chapter/love-life-live-advent-sample.pdf>

*Advent Presence: Kissed by the Past, Beckoned by the Future* by Bud Holland

*What We Do in Advent: An Activity Book* by Anne E. Kitch

*Teach Us to Number the Days: A Liturgical Advent Calendar* by Barbara Dee Baumgarten

*Come Thou Long-Expected Jesus: Advent and Christmas with Charles Wesley* by Paul Wesley Chilcote

*Advent with Evelyn Underhill* edited by Christopher L. Webber

*Run, Shepherd, Run: Poems for Advent and Christmas* compiled by L. William Countryman

*From Holidays to Holy Days: A Benedictine Walk through Advent* by Albert Holtz, O.S.B. (2008)

*Light to the Darkness: Lessons and Carols, Public and Private* by Katerina Whitely (2008)

*Waiting for the Wonder: Voices of Advent* by Katerina Katsarka Whitley (2008)

*The Womb of Advent* by Mark Bozzuti-Jones

*Times and Seasons: Creating Transformative Worship Throughout the Year* by Richard Giles (2008)

*Mary and Her Miracle: The Christmas Story Retold* by Barbara Cawthorne Crafton

*Love Came Down: Anglican Readings for Advent and Christmas* by Christopher L. Webber

*Let Every Heart Prepare: Meditations for Advent and Christmas* by Barbara Cawthorne Crafton

*Our December Hearts: Mediations for Advent & Christmas* by Anne McConney

*The Christmas Tide* by Frederick Buechner

*Songs in Waiting: Spiritual Reflections on Christ's Birth* by Paul-Gordon Chandler

*Come, Lord Jesus! Daily Readings for Advent, Christmas and Epiphany* by Geoffrey Rowell and Julien Chilcott-Monk

*Stations of the Nativity: Meditations on the Incarnation of Christ* by Raymond Chapman