

Christmas it is a time to reflect on the way that Christ has already come and will come again. The following suggestions are made having in mind the goal of making Christmas a joyous time; and making Christmas (12 days) the times of celebration and feasting. Therefore, all the activities for Christmas are "preparations" for celebration.

I. Christmas Preparation. Nov. 23-30

- A. All Christmas shopping should be completed by Nov. 23. in order to devote ourselves to Christmas.

B. Christmas Wreath.

Make or purchase one that will last thru 4 weeks. Don't just make do-use care and creativity. As you prepare your wreath, take time to explain its meaning to your children.

1. Symbolic meaning.

- A. CIRCLE: The unending love of God; cycle of thousands of years from Adam to Christ; and the cycle of years that we have been waiting for His second coming.
- B. GREENS: Suggests life, growth and hope; Laurel is a symbol of victory (Christ's victory over sin and death).
- C. CANDLES: The light reminds us of Jesus the light of the world; the increasing light as each week one more candle is lighted recalls the world's long years of waiting for Jesus Light.

CANDLES:

FIRST WEEK-- Prophets candle reminds us of those who spoke God's word hundreds of years before Christ was born; them is expectation.

SECOND WEEK-- Bethlehem candle reminds us of the time when Christ came to earth as a baby and was born; the theme is joy of the incarnation and Christ's coming again.

THIRD WEEK-- Shepherd candle (rose) reminds us of what the shepherds did-- they saw and believed and told all what had happened to them; the theme of the week is hope. (Jesus

brought us hope and salvation)

FOURTH WEEK-- Angel's candle reminds us of God's actions to save His people; the theme is acceptance.

- D. **COLORS:**three purple candles-- royal color symbolizes the coming of a king; also represents humility and repentance which we should feel during Christmas. One rose-colored candle symbolizes the love and faithfulness of God. The Christ candle is a free-standing white candle in the center of the wreath to represent the purity and perfection of Christ.

C. CHRISTMAS SCENE.

It's use will help children anticipate and visualize the unfolding drama of Christmas.

1. Components

- A. Flat board
- B. Child-proof nativity scene
- C. Uniform-sized, flat pebbles for a path leading to the manger. (or cardboard discs.)

2. Place in location suitable to be left for the duration of Christmas. Place 22 or 23 pebbles on the inside edge of the path and 27 or 28 pebbles on the outer edge depending on the number of days before Christmas.

3. USE OF THE SCENE.

- A. First Sunday in Christmas set up the scene. Animals near the stable; shepherds out in "fields" or "hillside" and Mary and Joseph at the farthest edge of path.
- B. Children move Mary and Joseph one pebble's length closer to the stable each day. (during devotions)
- C. Christmas Eve, Mary and Joseph should arrive at the stable; the baby Jesus is placed in the manger and the shepherds are moved from the "hills" and placed before the manger.

D. FASTING.

Explain fasting to your children and decide on a joint family plan. Their understanding may be limited, but they will accept it as something that their family does during Christmas.

1. Consider the following:

As you try to come to a decision about how your family will fast, you should do the following:

1. Consider the ages of your children; their ages should make a difference in what you choose to do. Don't expect preschool or early elementary school children to be capable of the sacrifices that you can expect of older children.
2. Make a joint plan. It's easier to execute , and you can reinforce one another.
3. Keep it simple. Don't let initial enthusiasm carry you off into an elaborate plan so rigorous that you'll all abandon it before the second week of Christmas. (If your joint fasting plan is not very demanding because your children are small, you and other adults in the family may wish to quietly adopt other restrictions for yourselves in addition to the family plan.)

Here are several fasting suggestions which you can adapt for use in your home. Growing children should not attempt the last two suggestions.

- * Eliminate all between-meal snacks and bedtime snacks.
- * Eliminate all junk food from your diet (pop, chips, crackers, some cold cereals, sugary desserts)
- * Limit your meat intake to two or three meals a week.
- * Have two or three evening meals which consist solely of soup, bread and beverage.
- * Limit your diet to one meal a day. The rest of the day encourage family members to drink milk, juice or broth.
- * Fast totally, except for liquids, for one twenty-four-hour period each week.

Your goal is to plan a diet that is nutritionally sound but noticeably sacrificial, so that you r family will feel in their bodies that Christmas is a time set apart.

E. PLAN CHRISTMAS DEVOTION.

Take time to plan activities, stories and songs that will make the nightly Christmas readings special memorable times.

- F. Plan enjoyable family or church times for preparing foods and gifts that will be put away!! and saved til Christmas.

II. CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION (NOV. 30-DEC. 24)

- A. Devotions- Begin with creation and trace God's redemptive plan.

1. **FIRST WEEK**--Theme is expectation. Light the Prophets candle. Stories of creation and the Fall, Noah. Bring out the theme in the Scripture.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:

- a. Tell the origin of the Christmas Tree (material available).
Make tree ornaments of apples; pastry wafers or animals; dough art ornaments.
- b. Dec. 6 Tell the history and legends of St. Nicholas (material available)
- hang stockings
 - make small gifts for children's friends
 - have each family member write down a special favor to be done for someone else and follow thru in the next few day.
 - make a sacrificial gift to the poor.
- c. Sing some songs:

It came upon a Midnight Clear

2. **SECOND WEEK**-- Theme is Joy. Light the Bethlehem candle. Bring out the theme -- Joy in knowing Christ, sharing with others, planning for Christmas. Stories

of Isreal -- law judges, ect.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:

- make ornaments with tissue paper
- Children do special favors for parents like serving the breakfast in bed.
- Sing carols by candlelight using lots of candles.

c. Sing songs:

Joy to the World
O little Town of Bethlehem

3. THIRD WEEK-- Theme is Hope. Light the Shephard's Candle. (this week you light the rose candle which means happiness-- the purple candles are for sorrow because of our sins but the rose means Christ brought hope and Salvation.) Stories about David.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:

- A. Read the Shepherd's story
- B. Sing songs:

The First Noel

4. FOURTH WEEK-- Theme is acceptance. Light the Angels candle. Stories about the coming King; John the Baptist; Mary.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:

- A. Read the account of Mary (Luke 1:26-56)
- B. Have family members and or children act out the parts of the angel and Mary.
- C. Sing songs

Hark the Herald Angels Sing

5. EXAMPLE OF CHRISTMAS DEVOTION:

- A. Gather the family around the table, and light the appropriate candle.

- B. Sing carols appropriate to the week's theme.
- C. Read the story out of a children's Bible storybook in chronological order beginning with creation thru redemption.
- D. Read actual scripture readings.
- E. Do an activity that will help children conceptualize what they have heard.
- F. Praying with family -- encourage each member of the family to say a short thank-you prayer for anything that comes to mind. Since Christmas is a season of repentance, stress prayers of confession always being careful to emphasize the unending forgiveness that God gives to us. Could include the Lord's Prayer.

B. Prepare foods for Christmas parties and feasts.

1. Choose foods with symbolic meaning or traditional value. Have fun making cookies, breads and other items. Explain their significance but resist the urge to eat the now! This will help bring about a true attitude of preparation and make the celebrations to come that much more exciting because of the anticipation.
2. Make decorations for the Home.

C. Plan now actual Christmas celebrations: parties, carolling, family or church feasts, open houses, housewarmings.

III. CHRISTMAS EVE.

- A. Make this night relaxed and unhectic time at home. Sing carols, read the Christmas Story.
- B. Maintain your fast thru Christmas A.M.. Have a simple but traditional supper. Seafood or other fish are often eaten (i.e. oyster stew, crackers, salad). Have a simple Christmas A.M. breakfast.

IV. Christmas -- This is a time to pull out the stops. Bring out all the foods, gifts that were thoughtfully and carefully prepared.

- a. Worshipping- Spend joyful time of prayer, praise, singing, breaking bread together. Make Christmas the climax of the Christmas season
 - 1. Light the Christ Candle in the Christmas Wreath with rejoicing.
 - 2. add fresh greens to the wreath and white ribbons as a symbol of victory and purity and hope of new life.

- B. Feasting-- Celebrate the coming of the King with foods fit for a king. The weeks of preparing and storing foods for this time will now have their fulfillment.

- C. Gift-giving-- make gift giving a special time. To remind us of the Greatest Gift ever given Jesus Christ.

THE CHRISTMAS TREE

In the midst of the Christmas Season we set up our Christmas Tree, but: where did it come from? We really do not know, but there are some lovely stories which have come to us down through the centuries. Attached to each of these we find some of the symbolism which this annual tree has for Christian.

Let us hear them together. Travel with me back through the centuries to a Missionary in Germany called Boniface. Our story opens late in the year, perhaps 722 A.D., and the dedicated missionary is deep in pagan lands. There has been little success in converting these devotees of warrior gods. But something is about to happen.

On December 24th, Boniface hears of a dread pagan ceremony, the sacrifice of a small child, to be held that night under the Thunder Oak, a huge old oak tree dedicated to the pagan god, Thor. The Lord tells him, "Boniface, you go there."

Picture the scene in your mind. The cold wintry night. Boniface and his companions face the driving, blasting wind to climb the swelling hill, crowned with the great oak. Under its spreading limbs stands the sacrificial altar, and at the foot of the altar, the fire. Its leaping flames shoot bright red sparks into the dark sky and reveal the horrid scene. On either side stand the curved ranks of women and children. And there, in the center, the star attraction of the night. At the place where all eyes are fixed stands the gray-haired High Priest. Hammer in hand, he fixes his attention upon one kneeling before him -- a small child who is to be sacrificed to the great god, Thor, the Hammerer.

The hammer descends, faces tighten, as watchers prepare to take the shock of seeing this familiar and dearly-loved child die under its blow. At that moment, into the circle burst Boniface, the Missionary. The cross in his hand, thrust desperately forward, miraculously diverts the blow. The child is spared.

Shock binds the crowd. Boniface releases the boy, holds him close by his side and speaks, "This night shall this tree fall." Taking his axe, he strikes mighty blows at its trunk and the Thunder Oak falls with but a crunching whisper. Then, from the lips of Boniface, this pagan tribe hears the story of the Incarnation of the Son, Jesus the Christ, told simply and directly. They hear how the giving up of sin, not the taking of human life, is the sacrifice He asks.

At a crucial moment the Missionary turns, his eyes falling on a young fir tree, standing straight and green, with its top pointed to the stars, amid the divided ruins and

barren limbs of the fallen oak. "Here," he says, "is the living tree, with no stain of blood upon it, that shall be the sign of your new worship. See how it points to the sky. Let us all call it the tree of the Chirst-child. Take it up and carry it to the Chieftain's hall, for this is the birth-night of the Savior. You shall go no more into the shadows of the forest to keep your feasts with secret rites of shame. you shall keep them at home with laughter and song and rites of love."

Thus it was that the hour of darkness, the power of wither, of sacrifice, and mighty fear vanished for this German tribe before the glad radiance of redeeming love. Far and wide spread the story, and it was in Germany that the Christmas tree has had truly Christian meaning for many centuries.

And indeed how fitting! There in the cold north countries most trees are bare and brown at Christmas-tide. But the evergreen trees brought inside bear the sight and smell of life -- indeed of resurrection. And we should never forget that resurrection is the true promise of the Incarnation, the hope brought to man when that small Baby was born in Bethlehem. Always and ever, and especially this Christmas season, as you look on the green and savor the aroma of your tree, remember the Incarnation and your own resurrection.

DAILY SCRIPTURE READINGS FOR ADVENT

<u>DAY</u>	<u>OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE</u>	<u>NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE</u>
Nov. 29	<u>Isa. 9:1-7</u> - (In relation to His divinity Jesus Christ has always reigned as King but at His Incarnation He also began to reign <u>as a man</u> over the Kingdom of God. Therefore, before His Incarnation, He reigned as a King in one nature, now He reigns in two.)	<u>Matthew 4:13-25</u> - (The great light that always shined from the divine nature of the King now shines through His human nature in order that we might partake of that light.)
Nov. 30	<u>Micah 5:2-5</u> - (God the Father is addressing a prophecy to the city of Bethlehem. He explains that His Son, Who is born from Him <u>before all time</u> , is to be born <u>there</u> as a Man. He then describes the purpose of His Son's second birth).	<u>Matthew 2:1-12</u> (The second birth of the Son is fulfilled).
Dec. 1	<u>Genesis 3:1-6, 22-24</u> (Adam's disobedience caused us to lose the Kingdom of God).	<u>John 1:1-18</u> (God's Kingdom is regained for us through the incarnation of the eternal Son).
2	<u>Psalms 118:22-29</u> (Salvation and blessings in the Kingdom of God come to us through the Chief Corner Stone).	<u>Matthew 21:33-46</u> (Rejection and death could not prevent the Incarnate Son from becoming the Chief Corner Stone through Whom the Kingdom is given).
3	<u>Exodus 16:1-17</u> (After Israel came out of Egypt, the Lord gave them bread out of heaven to eat. It was called manna. With this bread He sustained and nourished them in the desert).	<u>John 6:31-51</u> (This manna is a type of the life-giving flesh of the Incarnate Son. Those who eat this life-giving flesh in the Eucharist by faith will live forever).
4	<u>Exodus 3:1-17</u> (The Angel or Messenger of the Lord appeared to Moses in a burning bush and declared Himself to be the I AM, and that He would bring Israel into the promised land).	<u>John 8:54-59</u> (This Messenger from the Father Who appeared to Moses was none other than the eternal Son. After He became incarnate, He told the Jews that not only had He seen Abraham but that He was indeed the I AM, also spoken of in Exodus 3).
5	<u>Isaiah 40:3</u> (This is a prophecy concerning the voice of John the Baptist. His voice is calling for the people to come under the active reign of our God).	<u>Matthew 3:1-17</u> (This God about Whom John is speaking is God Incarnate, our Lord Jesus Christ. We come under His active reign through Holy Baptism).
6	<u>Isaiah 42:1-4</u> (God the Father is speaking to us about the One He has chosen to be His Servant. This One will reign in justice).	<u>Matthew 12:15-21</u> (This Servant is Jesus the Incarnate Son of God. In His name we place all our hopes and dreams).

<u>Day</u>	<u>Old Testament Scripture</u>	<u>New Testament Scripture</u>
7	<u>Jeremiah 31:31-34</u> (This is a prophecy concerning the giving of the New Covenant. Several features of this covenant are mentioned).	<u>Mark 14:22-25</u> (This New Covenant is established in the body and blood of Christ of which we regularly partake in the Holy Eucharist).
Dec. 8	<u>Psalms 78:1-2</u> (The Eternal Son is speaking and asking for His people to listen. He predicts that after He becomes a Man He will teach in parables).	<u>Matthew 13:34-43</u> (Jesus, the eternal son of God, spoke in parables, one of which was about a sower).
9	<u>I Chronicles 17:11-15</u> (God the Father promised King David that His Son would become a Man through David's seed. This Incarnate Son would build a house for the Father, a house that would last forever).	<u>Matthew 16:13-18</u> (This house which the Son of God is building is the Church. We are part of this house).
10	<u>Psalms 23:1-6</u> (The Lord our Shepherd leads us to the quiet waters of Baptism and to His table, the Eucharist).	<u>John 10:11-18</u> (This Shepherd is the Lord Jesus Christ, and we follow His voice speaking in the Church).
11	<u>Psalms 2:1-12</u> (God the Father declares that His Son is born from the Father's eternity and that He will give His Son, Who is to become Incarnate, the nations as an inheritance. Therefore, the leaders of the earth had better show discernment and respect to the Son lest they fall under the Son's wrath).	<u>Hebrews 5:5-9</u> (This Son is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ).
12	<u>Psalms 36:8-9</u> (The eternal Son of God is likened to a river that flows from the Father, a fountain from which we drink, and a light radiating from light. The Nicene Creed calls Him Light of Light. In His light we see the Father).	<u>John 8:12-19</u> (Jesus Christ, God Incarnate, is the Light of the world, and He reveals the Father to us).
13	<u>Psalms 40:6-8</u> (The Son of God is speaking prophetically of His days in the flesh. His human will was in perfect submission to the Father's will).	<u>Hebrews 10:5-10</u> (Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, did the Father's will and in so doing provided the one offering of His human nature by which we are set apart to the Father).
14	<u>Psalms 45:6-9</u> (God the Father is speaking prophetically to God the Son, Who is to become Incarnate. The queen is the Church).	<u>Hebrews 1:6-9</u> (The Father's Firstborn did come into the world as God Incarnate. Christ's companions are we, the members of His body, and we worship Him in both His natures).

Day	Old Testament Scripture	New Testament Scripture
15	<p><u>Psalm 102:25-28</u> (God the Father is speaking prophetically to God the Son, Who is to become Incarnate. The Son's human nature will not wear out and come to an end like the present creation. Rather He is both God and Man in One Person forever! Therefore, we His servants will continue forever as well!).</p>	<p><u>Hebrews 1:10-14; 3:6</u> (Those who hold fast to Christ will inherit the eternal salvation that comes through the Son's two natures. Even angels help us to keep on believing in Him).</p>
16	<p><u>Psalm 110:1-3</u> (God the Father is speaking prophetically to God the Son, Who is to become Incarnate. The Father invites the Son to reign with Him in His humanity. The Son needed no such invitation in relation to His divinity, for He has always reigned with the Father in that regard).</p>	<p><u>Matthew 22:41-46</u> (The Pharisees, who were Jesus' enemies, did not understand the hypostatic union, which is the union of the two natures in the one Son. The hypostatic union is the answer to Jesus' question, "If David then calls Him 'Lord', how is He his Son?" Jesus is David's Lord because He is the eternal Son of the Father. He is David's Son because He became a Man through David's lineage).</p>
17	<p><u>Psalm 110:4-7</u> (God the Father has declared as an eternal reality this fact, that His Son is Priest forever. His priesthood is called the order of Melchizedek. All nations are accountable to this Priest!)</p>	<p><u>Hebrews 5:5-10</u> (The Son, Who has always been the High Priest, is also Priest in both natures. Those who obey this Priest will be saved).</p>
18	<p><u>Proverbs 8:22-36</u> (Wisdom is speaking to God the Father and acknowledges His eternal birth from Him. Wisdom also calls Himself a master workman who participated with the Father in creating the universe. All sons of men who find Wisdom are blessed, but those who reject Him love death).</p>	<p><u>I Corinthians 1:18-25</u> (This One called Wisdom is none other than the eternal Son of God, Who by taking human flesh was crucified on our behalf).</p>
19	<p><u>Isaiah 7:14</u> (Immanuel means <u>God with us</u>. God the Son would be conceived as a Man in the womb of a virgin and be born).</p>	<p><u>Matthew 1:18-25</u> (The virgin's name was Mary, and in her womb God became Man! That is why she is called the Mother of God. Jesus is our Savior in both His natures).</p>
20	<p>_____o_____</p>	<p>Luke 1:1-25</p>
21	<p>_____o_____</p>	<p>Luke 1:26-38</p>
22	<p>_____o_____</p>	<p>Luke 1:39-45</p>
23	<p>_____o_____</p>	<p>Luke 1:46-56</p>
24	<p>_____o_____</p>	<p>Luke 1:57-80</p>