



# ADVENT ACTIVITIES FOR FAMILIES

Schoenstatt Families, USA.

Prayers and Activities taken from  
Advent Meditations, 2022. ©



# Blessing of the Advent Wreath

*Family celebration at the beginning of Advent with the participation, if possible, of all the members. Different parts of the celebration can be read by individual members of the family.*

| 1

**Father:** Lord Jesus Christ, as a family we: are gathered together with you and your Mother to begin the holy season of Advent. In these coming weeks we wish to prepare a worthy dwelling place for you in our home, in our family, in each one's heart. With great longing and joyful expectation we await your coming, and we rejoice in the promise of your constant presence among us.

**Mother:** For thousands of years people waited for your birth as God had promised. Every year in the four weeks before Christmas, the Church remembers these long years of darkness. In the midst of all the hustle and bustle of our busy lives - getting Christmas cards sent, gifts bought, cookies baked, parties prepared, dreams and wishes expressed (each one can add his and her own concerns and busy activities) we want to think of you, Lord Jesus, our true Light, the Light of the world whose birth we will celebrate again. We are eagerly awaiting your coming to us on Christmas, your coming into our hearts day by day, and your coming in glory and majesty at the end of time on the final judgment day. Your birth has changed world history. It will also change our lives and fill us with the great hope to become united with you in eternal happiness.

**Child:** In this holy season of Advent we look at the Blessed Mother as she waited with great love and longing for your coming and prepared for your birth. We wish to walk at her side through the time of darkness into the light of Christmas.

**All:** Come, Lord Jesus, into our home and hearts. We want to prepare your way, and we long for your light to shine in our daily lives.

Father: This Advent wreath shall be a sign of our faith in you, Lord Jesus. It shall remind us of our holy task in these weeks. We must get ready to meet you when you come; we must open our hearts and purify them so that we can follow your direction and fulfill your holy will.

- The circle of the wreath reminds us of you, the eternal God, who are without beginning or end.
- The evergreens speak of your everlasting love for us and of hope that one day we will share this love and life in eternal bliss in heaven.
- The four candles indicate the many hundreds of years when mankind awaited your coming.
- The purple candles point to these days of waiting and longing for your birth, to a time of prayer and silence, a time of purification and sacrifice.

*(The father of the family makes the sign of the cross over the wreath)*

- The rose candle symbolizes the joy and hope we share in awaiting your coming and constant presence among us.
- As we light one more candle each week and watch the light grow, we become filled with great joy because the true Light of the world is near.

Father: Lord Jesus, accept our readiness to make this Advent a holy season, a time of prayer and purification, a time of love and sacrifice, a time of expectation and longing for your coming. Graciously hear our petitions and fulfill our desires and secret wishes.

*(Each member of the family may express his or her special intentions and wishes for this Advent season.)*

Father: Lord Jesus, we ask you now to bless this wreath and to grant us your special help and strength for our journey to the light.

# Celebration of the Light for every Week

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## First Sunday of Advent

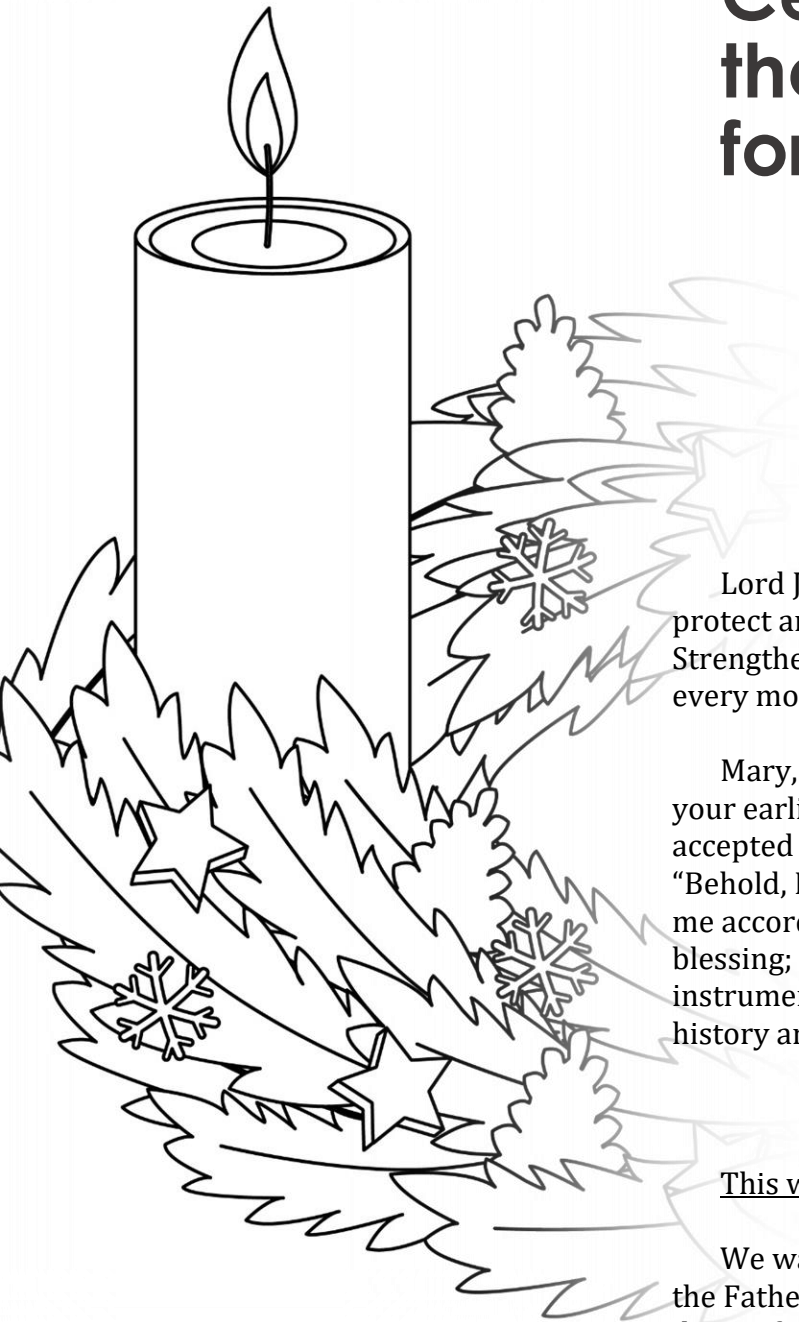
1 candle is lit

Lord Jesus, come into our hearts. With your might protect and save us from all harm of sin and temptation. Strengthen us to do your will and to give our yes to you every moment of our day.

Mary, you longed for the coming of our Savior from your earliest years. You grew in love of God and accepted his plan of salvation. You spoke your yes: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to your word." Your yes brought great blessing; it made you the Mother of God and the instrument of salvation for mankind. Your yes changed history and brought hope, joy and light to the world.

This week in preparation for our Lord's coming

We want to look for opportunities to give our yes to the Father's will each day, be that a yes to prayer, to discomfort, to renunciation, to selfless service, to joy, or...





## Second Sunday of Advent

2 candles are lit

Lord Jesus, prepare our hearts to welcome you. You entered this life on earth as a simple small child and taught us the childlike attitude before the Father. Inspire us to sanctify each day and to perform the ordinary tasks in silence and loving surrender to you.

Blessed Mother, after you gave your yes in the hour of the annunciation, God, the Most High, took his abode within you. Silently, you adored him in your heart.

Quietly, you fulfilled your everyday duties, not bragging to anyone of your great privilege and selection. Every act throughout the day became important because of the great love for the Savior in your heart.

This week in preparation for our Lord's coming

We want to carry out our everyday task most faith full and silently, without expecting too much gratitude or appreciation.



## Third Sunday of Advent

2 purple candles and the rose candle are lit.

Lord Jesus, our hearts rejoice in the hope of your coming to us very soon, and with great longing we wish to receive you. Prepare our hearts, enlighten the darkness of our minds, and remove all sadness that hinders us from experiencing the joy and hope which your presence will bestow.

Mary, in this week of joyful expectation, we accompany you on your way to Elizabeth. Selflessly serving love urged you to help your cousin in need. You also shared God's great blessing with her: your joy and longing, your thanks and praise as you intoned your song of praise, the Magnificat: "My soul does magnify the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior."

This week in preparation for our Lord's coming

We want to share each day one great blessing which we received from God on this day.



## Fourth Sunday of Advent

all the candles are lit

Lord Jesus Christ, the day draws near when your glory will make radiant the night of the waiting world. May the darkness not blind us to the vision of love and wisdom which fills the minds of those who find you. In your mercy forgive us our sins and offenses. Cleanse our minds and hearts so that we can receive you worthily when you come.

Mary, you set out for Bethlehem as the time for Christ's birth approached. You had to leave the comfort of your own home, leaving for the place where God wanted you to be. You joyfully accepted the discomfort and inconvenience because you knew that this would please the Father.

This week in preparation for our Lord's coming

We want to receive the sacrament of reconciliation. We also want to renounce a little comfort and convenience so that we become more like Christ who was born for us in a humble abode.

# Other Advent Customs

*Throughout the centuries, many different Advent customs developed in the Church in individual nations, and families. These customs express visibly the meaning of Advent and help to create the spirit of waiting and of longing for the coming of Christ. Usually actions and activities are very excellent teachers and can keep enthusiasm alive. It is very important that we choose such customs which will strengthen our spiritual lives and inspire us to exert ourselves anew for the goal ahead, by performing good deeds of love, of joy, of sacrifice, of prayer, etc. We never lose sight of the brightly shining goal of the Advent season: the coming, the birth of Christ in our homes and hearts. He would like to find a worthy dwelling place, well prepared and cared for.*

*The following examples are suggestions and stimulations to help find a practice which suits each one best and to develop one's own way.*

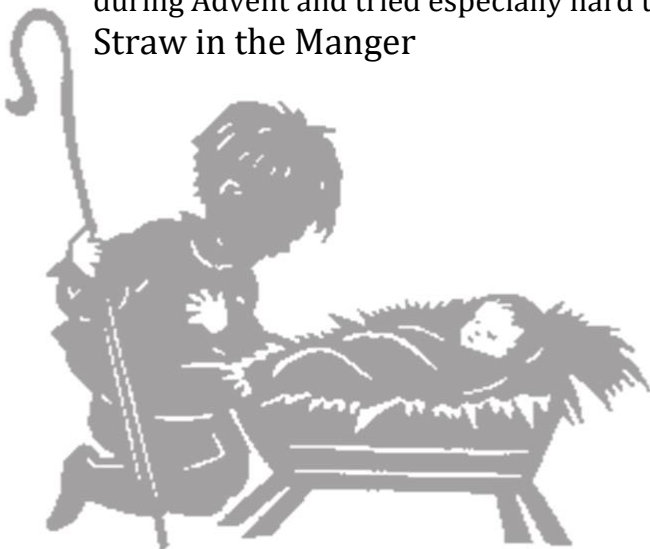
## Advent Wreath

The Advent wreath imparts the spirit of Advent to us and reminds us again and again of the Light to come on Christmas. (The first chapter of this booklet offers suggestions for an Advent wreath celebration.)

## Christ Child

Written on separate slips of paper, the names of all family members are placed into a box. Each one picks a name and the name picked becomes his or her Christ Child. Each day we should do something special for our Christ Child: an act of love, a favor, a sacrifice, a prayer, etc. On Christmas our Christ Child gets a special gift from us and, we reveal who our Christ Child was. These are moments of great happiness we may find out that someone with whom we argued countless times before, had been faithfully cleaning our shoes during Advent and tried especially hard to be kind to us!

### Straw in the Manger



In the beginning of Advent we place the empty manger in a prominent place of the house. In order to prepare a soft bed for the Child Jesus, we can place a piece of straw, a thread or a colored piece of paper into the empty manger, but only if we have done a kind deed, made a sacrifice or a special gift for another person, if we said a prayer and communicated with God. By Christmas, Mary, Joseph and the manger should be knee deep in straw!



## Building the Crib-Scene



During Advent we could also build the crib-scene together by placing the figures gradually into the scene. For example, we could place the sheep into the stable on the first day, the shepherds on the second day until the whole scene is finished. Mary and Joseph should be the last figures placed into the nativity scene. The Child will complete the crib-scene during the Christmas celebration before the opening of the gifts. Some families also make their own figures. During the preparation and the building of the crib-set, we could meditate about the poverty of Christ, the simplicity of the shepherds, the bright light of the star, the joy and great wonder of the birth of the Most High.

## Advent Calendar

The Advent calendar is a very successful means to keep the children (and also the adults) in expectation before Christmas, and in a spirit of waiting, longing and preparing for Christ's coming. Usually, an Advent calendar has two parts: a sheet of paper decorated with 24 doors and another sheet of paper underneath it, containing special messages.

It is suggested that the family make its own calendar and write a special resolution behind each door, to be opened day by day. This custom should help us to

direct our thoughts heavenward, making Advent a truly holy season, a time to wait, a time to hope, a time to grow. If in this way we truly long for Christ's coming, we will primarily look forward to the spiritual gifts we have prepared and will receive. An Advent-calendar can have various exterior forms: an evergreen tree (1), a Christmas city (2), a clock (3), a shrine, etc.

## Advent Ribbon

The whole family decides on special resolutions, deeds of love and joy, and writes them on individual slips of paper which are then sealed in envelopes. These envelopes can be fastened to four red ribbons, six to a ribbon (5). Every night one envelope is opened, the resolution read, and each family member tries to fulfill it the next day.

## Advent Chain

This custom is particularly appropriate for the smaller children.

Small strips of paper can be cut to size, colored, stapled or taped together to form a link of a chain. For every good deed brought throughout the day, each one may add one link to the chain. At Christmas this chain of good deeds can be used as a decoration.

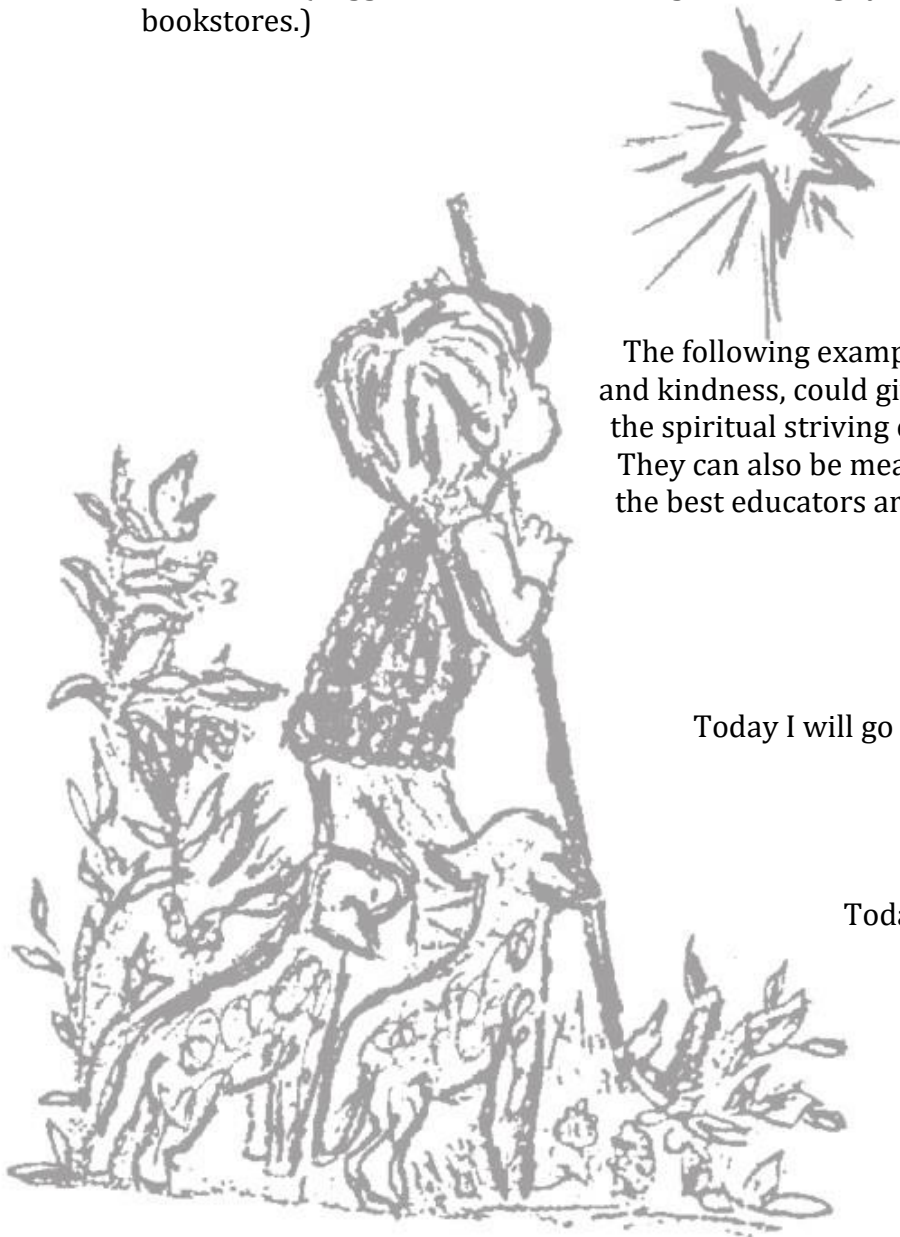
# Jesse Tree

The Jesse Tree is the so-called family tree of Jesus suggested by the prophet Isaiah: "But a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse and from his roots a bud shall blossom." (Is 11:1)

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A small tree or branches can be decorated with symbols portraying the spiritual heritage of Jesus. It includes events of the Old Testament with its important personalities, such as Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, the prophets, Mary and Jesus himself.

There is a special symbol for each day with an appropriate reading from the Old Testament. (Suggestions for the readings and fitting symbols can be obtained in religious bookstores.)



## Good Deeds

The following examples of resolutions, deeds of love, joy and kindness, could give you a starting point and ideas for the spiritual striving of your children throughout Advent. They can also be meaningfully applied to the parents, for the best educators are those who constantly educate and improve themselves.

Today I will do my homework well  
I will obey my parents.  
I will clean my room.

Today I will go to the shrine or make a  
special visit to our home shrine.  
I will do something today to make  
someone happy.

I will help Dad today.  
Today I want to pray often: "Come, Lord  
Jesus, come!"

I want to go to Mass today.  
Today I will not watch TV.  
I will receive the sacrament of  
reconciliation soon.



## Shelter Seeking

*Shelter seeking is an old custom reminding us of Mary and Joseph seeking shelter when the Savior was about to be born. At Bethlehem there was no room for them in the inn. Will they find shelter with us today - when they come to our home pleading for shelter and acceptance? SHELTER SEEKING is a novena in preparation for Christ's coming, for Christmas. We want to open wide our hearts for Christ and his mother.*

*We can begin this novena on December 15 by preparing a special place for the Blessed Mother in our home. Each day we bring our MTA picture or a statue of the Blessed Mother to a different room in our house and offer her a special place of honor in this particular room for the entire day. Each night when we arrive at the next room, we could use the suggested readings and meditations. This 'Shelter Seeking' may also be conducted with nine other families: each night we can offer Our Lady shelter in a different home.*

*The following meditations can also be used as a novena without the 'Shelter Seeking' ceremony.*

*Try it. Set aside a few minutes each day before Christmas for this interior preparation and you will see how much more meaningful Christmas will become for you this year!*

### December 15

*WE READ: Zep. 3 14-17*

*WE REFLECT:*

**"My heart is your Zion! As in Zion the God of the Old Testament ruled the Israelites, and as God took his dwelling in Zion, so the Lord has established his dwelling within me."**

*WE PRAY:*

**"Dear God, I surrender to you the depth of my heart. Accept it and take full possession of it. Take care that nothing will replace you and tear you out of my heart. I offer you my inner soul as your everlasting possession. It shall become your Zion!"**

## December 16

*WE READ:* Matt. 24:37-44

*WE REFLECT:*

"I have frequently repeated the words of St. Augustine, the person in search of the great God: 'My God, you were within me, but I was outside of myself!' How often are we away from our selves with our thoughts, with our feelings?"

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*WE PRAY:*

"Therefore, dear Mother Thrice Admirable, Queen and Victress of Schoenstatt, prove yourself admirable also in transforming our mind, our fantasy, our emotions. Yes, take care that we who carry the Triune God within us will also receive the ability to speak with him constantly, and to converse with him in a simple, original, childlike way. It shall never be that we are not at home when the Triune God, dwelling within us wishes to speak to us."

## December 17

*WE READ:* Is. 2:1—5

*WE REFLECT:*

"Here on earth we are not only temples of the Holy Spirit, but we should also be used as stones, as living stones in order to build a new temple the New Jerusalem in heaven. Heaven appears before us as the new Jerusalem, built with living stones."

*WE PRAY:*

"Blessed Mother, take care that the shrine which we represent can become a living shrine. We want to surrender our hearts totally to you and to the eternal Triune God, especially to the Father."

## December 18

*WE READ:* Is 48:17-19

*WE REFLECT:*

"We want to become sensitive to the voice of the Holy Spirit in our soul. The Holy Spirit wants to form us more and more; yes, he wants to transform us into instruments for the redemption of the world. But painfully we admit that we do not listen to him very closely. The voice of the world is much louder within our soul."

*WE PRAY:*

"Holy Spirit, you live within us. In you through you let us recognize the true value of objects. Seize our will and our passions so that our whole being can be more and more formed and transformed."

## December 19

*WE READ:* Lk. 1:26-38

*WE REFLECT:*

"We want to use the time of silence, of loneliness and quiet in order to dedicate ourselves anew to the dear Blessed Mother and to adhere to whatever God demands of us."

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*WE PRAY:*

"Dear Mother and Queen, let me become quite calm so that God's spirit can fill me and that I may understand what he wants to say to me as I meditate and pray. Give me that fineness of hearing which enables the heart to sense the approach of the beloved. Help me to hear God's inspiration and attune me to his wishes. Amen" (Courage of Faith Novena, p. 9).

## December 20

*WE READ:* Is. 7:10-14

*WE REFLECT*

"The Blessed Mother was to be the dwelling place of the Son of God. Isn't it self-understood, and doesn't it correspond completely to the thought of God, that this dwelling was to remain totally free, pure?"

*WE PRAY:*

"Hail Mary for the sake of your purity, keep me pure in body and soul. Open wide to me your heart and the heart of your Son. Implore for me deep self-knowledge and the grace to persevere and remain faithful until death. Give me souls and keep all else for yourself."

## December 21

*WE READ:* Lk. 1:39-45

*WE REFLECT:*

"Within our hearts we carry the Most High, similar to the Blessed Mother who carried Christ and brought him into the world. We, too, may carry Christ and bring him into the world."

*WE PRAY:*

"Mary, you are a wonder. You are the unsurpassable masterpiece of God's creation. You are the mirror into which we may look. And when we gaze into this mirror, we again become aware of our own greatness. We are a creation of God's love, of God's wisdom and of God's omnipotence."

## December 22

WE READ: Is. 11:1-10

WE REFLECT:

"The Prince of Peace wants to erect his kingdom of peace in our hearts, in our restless hearts torn by strife. Receive him into your heart through frequent reception of the sacraments and through a zealous life of sacrifice and prayer."

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WE PRAY:

"Blessed Mother, let Christ take complete possession of my soul!"

## December 23

WE READ: Lk. 1:67-79

WE REFLECT:

"Through the merciful love of our God, the radiant light from on high will overshadow us."

WE PRAY:

"Mother, give me your child. My heart is so little prepared; yet it longs for your Child."

## December 24

WE READ: Is. 9:1-6; Lk 2:1-14

WE REFLECT AND PRAY:

"Mother, please give your Child to all of us today. We promise you that he shall be bedded warmly in our hearts. We promise you: We want to love and greet your Child as you have done. You knelt adoringly before your Child. And we, too, want to kneel adoringly before this same Child within our heart. And we want to pour into the heart of this little Child all our suffering, all our guilt. In the future we shall not be alone anymore. It is not us who carry and support ourselves, but the Child in us who carries us on our journey heavenward."

*(All the preceding quotations are from Fr. Kentenich unless otherwise indicated.)*

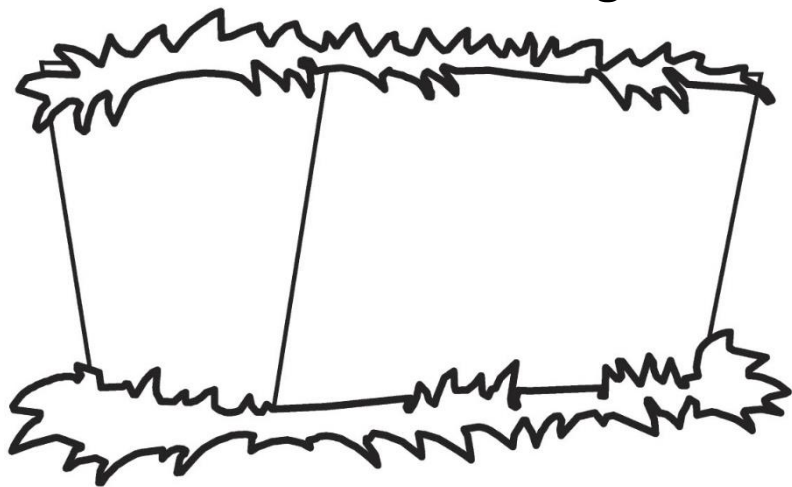
## Our Longing is a Glowing Fire

Our longing is a glowing fire  
Lit in our hearts.  
When will you show your face to us?  
Lord, it is night.

A thousand hands are raised in prayer  
Beseeching you.  
A thousand voices rise to you;  
Lord, come to us. Your coming  
by a distant star  
Is now made known.  
Your kingdom and your love will come  
To conquer sin.

And heaven enters our poor hearts.  
The Virgin's Child  
Is born, the Father's only Son,  
And night is gone!

## Welcoming the Christ Child



*The Advent expectations, longing and intense striving have come to a climax on Christmas Eve when our long-awaited Savior appears. Many families have decided to make the birth of Christ a tangible reality in their family and home. They have adopted the custom of laying the Christ Child in the manger using a special ceremony on Christmas Eve.*

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*The family gathers together in one room of the house, and the youngest child is given the statue of the Christ Child to carry to the manger. Earlier his parents, brothers and sisters have told him what a privilege it is to carry the Child Jesus, and often during the day, he has been reminded of his responsibility to be good in order to live up to this honor. He leads the procession through the house accompanied by an older brother and sister with lighted candles Christmas carols are sung or played (records) as the procession makes its way toward the Christmas room. All gather around the manger while the father of the family reads the account of the birth of Christ from Holy Scripture.*

Father: "While they were in Bethlehem the days of her confinement were completed. She gave birth to her first-born Son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the place where travelers lodged.

Mother: "There were shepherds in that locality, living in the fields and keeping night watch by turns over their flocks. The angel of the Lord appeared to them as the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were very much afraid. The angel said to them:

Children: "You have nothing to fear! I come to proclaim good news to you - tidings of great joy to be shared by the whole people. This day in David's city a savior has been born to you, the Messiah and Lord. Let this be a sign to you: in a manger you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes.

Father: "Suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

ALL: "Glory to God in high heaven, peace on earth to those on whom his favor rests.

Mother: "When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to one another,



All: "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this event which the Lord has made known to us.

Father: "They went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger; once they saw, they understood what had been told them concerning this child. All who heard of it were astonished at the report given them by the shepherds.

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Mother: "Mary treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart. The shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, in accord with what had been told them." (Lk 2:6-20)

*The child places the Christ Child in the manger.*

Mother: Listen to the good news of great joy.

All: This day our Savior, Christ the Lord, is born to us. This day the Light of the world has come upon the earth.

Father: Jesus, you are a child, born of Mary; you are our Lord and our God.

All: We believe in you.

Child: Helpless Child, you lay in the manger.

All: King of glory, you reign in heaven.

Mother: You are fed with little milk,

All: But you give food to all living creatures.

Child: You are God's eternal Word,

All: But you became a small child for us.

Father: "A child is born to us, and a son is given to us. Dominion is laid on his shoulder and he shall be called Wonderful God, Prince of Peace, the Father of the world to come and his kingdom will never end." (Is 9:2; Lk 1:33)

All: What can I give him, poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd, I would give him a lamb.  
If I were a wise man, I would do my part.  
But what can I give him?  
I will give him my heart

Mother: We thank you, dear Lord Jesus Christ, that you became man like everyone of us.  
We thank you for choosing a mother to take care of you and to bring you to us. She prepared a worthy abode in her heart for you.

All: We thank you, dear Lord, that you became a small and humble child for us. We long to become like you, simple, small and dependent on our Father and Mother in heaven. Teach us to become a child before our heavenly Father. Form our heart like Mary so that we also can give you a home in our hearts and bring you to all mankind.

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Father: Lord Jesus, Divine Child before us in the manger, we come to you with many special requests: bless the children in our family; bless the children in our neighborhood and in the whole world because you became a little child out of love for them.

All: Divine Child, hear our prayer.

Child: Bless the poor and all those who could not give rich gifts to each other tonight, for you also became poor for their sake.

All: Divine Child, hear our prayer.

Mother: Bless the abandoned, the prisoners, all the forsaken, and those in need. Out of love for them you had to flee to Egypt.

All: Divine Child, hear our prayer.

*Other intentions may be added here.*

All: Child Jesus, we rejoice because you have been born again in our hearts and in our home. Please stay with us and make us more and more like you. Bless us in a special way and give us all your love. Amen.

*Opening of the Christmas gifts.*



# Christmas Stories



## Feathers for the Christ Child

Each year as Christmas drew near, Tony's parents noticed a remarkable change in his behavior. They rejoiced in Tony's efforts to be good, and yet they just weren't quite sure what prompted their little son to such earnest efforts. Only one person knew the reason why - that was God - and HE told no one!

When Tony was only five years old, his grandmother had told him about the little Christ Child, how poor he was and how he had had to lie in a manger on hard straw in the cold of the winter.

The tears ran down Tony's cheeks. "No pillow and no quilt - only prickly straw - and he came from heaven? Poor baby, poor little fellow," he said softly through his tears.

"Wouldn't you like to make him a softer bed with warm blankets, Tony?" asked his grandmother.

"Could I, Grandma? But how?"

"Each sacrifice done out of love for Jesus makes a feather for a pillow and quilt; each prayer is a snow white thread for Our Lady to weave into a linen sheet. There are still four weeks, Tony; make the crib soft for the little Christ Child."

That was Tony's secret. He never forgot it. When, a few days later God called Grandma away quite suddenly, Tony cried bitterly. Now there was no one to help him to make a softer bed for the little Christ Child. Then he remembered. Grandma was looking down from heaven to see whether he was getting feathers together for the Christ Child.

A few days later, his mother made the Advent wreath and, lit the first of the thick purple candles; Tony began to look for feathers and to spin threads. At first it was not at all easy, for there was nothing to be found. He simply did not see the little sacrifices that were waiting to be

made. But one day Teddy threw a hard ball right at his back and he was just about to hurl back a stone in return when suddenly a soft voice inside him whispered: "Don't throw it; give it to me, make it an offering."

"Oh," thought Tony, "that is how it is. This is what the feathers look like!" He dropped the stone and picked up the first feather to put it away in his soul as though in a heavenly money box.

And when his sister gave him a candy cane that afternoon, he knew already that this could be turned into a feather for the Christ Child. So instead of keeping it all for himself, he broke it into two pieces, and popped the larger one into his little brother's pocket.

The next day Tony put his room in order, without even grumbling. His mother was so pleased that she gave him ten cents. A very good mark at school brought in another ten cents.

Tony became a diligent saver. He saved up everything, sweets, money and sacrifices. When the third candle began to burn on the Advent wreath, he already had 39 feathers for the Christ Child. Would that be enough? he wondered. Because he did not know whether 39 feathers would be enough for a pillow and a quilt; he quietly pinched his sister's doll-pillow, opened the seam a little and carefully pulled out 39 feathers. He looked in dismay at the tiny heap of feathers. Goodness! They were only half of what was in the doll's pillow. How could that little bit keep the Baby warm? "Too few, much too few!" he said sadly, and put them back into the pillow, and hiding it under his jacket he smuggled it: into the doll's bed. Now he had no other idea in his mind but to get feathers. He

was so concerned that the Christ Child would not be cold on his birthday. How grateful he was. How wide he kept his eyes open so that he would not miss a chance to make a sacrifice.

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In those special days, Tony tried to be more friendly to the boys he did not like very much. He would have almost liked to ask them to be unkind to him, so that he might have a chance to collect more feathers. Tony's treasure grew larger and larger.

But the Christ Child had to have a linen sheet, too. Grandma had told him how to do this. Every prayer is a snow white thread for a linen covering. So Tony added a 'Hail Mary' to his morning and night prayers, and whenever he looked at the picture of Jesus over his bed, he would think: "Dear Jesus, come to me!" Even on his way to school the Christ Child was not forgotten. Whenever he had a chance, he stopped in church to say a short prayer.

And now it was Christmas, and little Tony knelt in the church close to the crib and spoke to the Infant Jesus: "You are lying in the straw, dear Baby Jesus, but in my heart there are fine feathers to cover you all over. You will not feel cold with me, dear little Christ Child I have spread out a linen sheet for you and a soft pillow. You will not feel cold with me little Jesus."

Yes, the infant Jesus lay warm in Tony's heart. Tony knew it, for he had never felt as happy as on that Christmas Day.

How will the Christ Child lie in your heart?

O little Jesus come to us we pray,  
Our hearts we'll make all ready  
for you to stay;  
All clean and warm and bright  
on Christmas Day.

# Your Christmas Gift

(From: *Als das Holz zu Reden Begann*, by M.A.M. Renes-Boldingh, Arena-Verlag, Würzburg, 1965)

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Christopher couldn't take his eyes off his grandfather's busy hands as he worked away on the figures before him. It was almost Christmas and the crib had to be ready in time. Hour after hour Christopher sat on the other side of the table and watched, and as he watched, his head grew heavy. He propped his head on his arms, but it wasn't long before his eyes closed. Christopher was asleep.

And as he slept, he dreamt about the crib. He saw Mother Mary and Joseph and the Baby asleep in the manger. Close by were the ox and the ass, and soon the shepherds came in to adore the newborn King.

As they knelt or stood around the manger adoring the Child, the Child opened his eyes. It was as though two bright suns were shining in the stable. The Child lifted his head so that he could look over the end of the manger, looked all around, and then spoke with a voice that was as clear as a bell. "Let Christopher be the first to come to me."

Christopher could hardly believe his ears. Should he come to the crib even before the shepherds and kings? But how could he manage? He was far too big.

Suddenly he felt that he was getting smaller and smaller. Soon he was as small as all the other figures around the Christ Child. He made his way slowly between the shepherds and kings, and carefully



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entered the stable. On his tiptoes he walked towards the manger and knelt down beside the Child. The Child looked at him more lovingly than even his own mother did.

As Christopher saw this look, he began to cry. "Why are you crying?" the Christ Child asked. "Because I haven't brought

you a present," Christopher answered between sobs.

"I would have liked to receive something from you," the Child replied.

Christopher turned red and looked at the floor. "Oh dear Jesus, I would like to give you everything I have."

"I would like you to give me three things," the Christ Child told him.

"My new cap? My new ball? The nice coloring book I got for my birthday?"

"No," said the Child, "I didn't come down to earth for that. We have all those things in heaven as well. I want you to give me something we haven't got in heaven."

"But what?" asked Christopher in amazement. Did he have something they didn't have in heaven?

"Give me your last homework," the Christ Child whispered so softly that no one else could hear. Christopher was shocked. He suddenly realized that there are things on earth that are not in heaven. He was quite at a loss. He bent down to the crib and said very softly, "Dear Jesus, my homework was so bad that my teacher didn't give me any mark at all."

"That's just why I want it," said the Child.

"But why?" Christopher asked in amazement. He couldn't imagine how the Christ Child could do any thing with his bad homework.

"You must always bring me whatever you do wrong or badly," said the Child,

"not only now, but also later on when you are big. Bring me everything that isn't good enough. I will put it right. Come to me before you start something. Then I will help you to do it, and it will turn out well. Will you promise me that, Christopher?"

"Oh Jesus, I promise with all my heart," said the boy.

"But I want a second present from you as well," the Christ Child told him firmly. He looked at the boy as though he were hoping he would guess what it was.

"I really don't know what it could be," Christopher said all of a sudden, as though he were afraid.

"Your cup," said the Christ Child.

"But I dropped it this morning and it is all in pieces," said the boy, and began to cry.

"I want your broken cup," insisted the Christ Child.

Christopher suddenly realized that there are no broken cups in heaven. But he couldn't imagine what the Christ Child could do with a broken cup.

"You must always bring me what you break in your life," said the Christ Child, "even when you are big. I will help you to fix things again. Will you promise to come to me always?"

"Yes, I promise," said Christopher very seriously. He had stopped crying and looked gratefully at the Child.

"But now for my third wish," said the Christ Child. Once again he looked at Christopher as though he hoped he would

guess his wish this time. But Christopher had no idea what this wish could be. "You still have to bring me the answer you gave your mother when she asked how the cup broke."

Christopher put his face in his hands and wept bitterly. For the first time he saw how far he was from the Child and he began to feel how great the love must be that can reach over that distance and come to him.

Between sobs he answered, "I--, I--, I told my mother a lie. I told her that the cat had jumped on the table and knocked the cup down. But really and truly I dropped it myself."

"Yes, Christopher, that is what really happened," said the Christ Child, and his

voice sounded full of forgiveness. "You must always bring me your sins and whatever is wrong in your life, even later when you are grown up and are a man. I will forgive you, and I will help you to fight bravely against sin and to win the fight. Will you promise to bring me your sins always, Christopher?"

"Yes, I promise," and the answer came from the depths of his heart.

And now that he had given the Christ Child his bad homework, his broken cup and his lie, Christopher's heart was full of joy and peace. And he heard the Christ Child say, "I have enjoyed Christopher's presents most of all."