

Third Week of Advent

Blessing of the Crèche

God our Father,
bless all who gaze
upon this scene of your Son's birth.
Fill our hearts with the song of angels,
the humility of the creatures,
the eagerness of the shepherds,
the longing of the Magi,
and the love of your Holy Family.

This Advent, grant us the virtue of hope,
and bless us throughout the Christmas
season

with the joy of your presence.

Help us to discern the signs of your Spirit,
and grant us the courage to follow wherever
you lead.

Make of our home a new Bethlehem
where you are ever welcome
and all are welcome in your name.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



December 14, 2008 Living the Good News

This week we continue to prepare for the coming of the Lord. In joyful anticipation, you may wish to set up your nativity scene, gather around it, and pray the blessing prayer given above. However, you will want to wait until Christmas Eve to put the Holy Infant in place. Our Responsorial Psalm today is taken from Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46–48, 49–50, 53–54)—a wonderful prayer for households to pray together as we wait for the Lord.

Enacting Gospel stories can make them come alive for us. *Las Posadas* (meaning “the shelters”) is a Mexican nativity tradition commemorating Mary and Joseph's search through Bethlehem for a place to sleep. It is celebrated on an evening (or consecutive evenings) between December 16 and 24. To organize a *Posada*, invite

family and friends. Set up a nativity scene on a decorated home altar in one room of the house to represent the inn. The figures of Mary and Joseph are carried from room to room (or house to house). In each room, they ask for shelter and are turned away. After each of these exchanges, you might pray the Angelus, the Rosary, or the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The people representing the innkeepers in each room then join the procession until everyone arrives at the inn where Mary and Joseph are placed on the home altar. All may pray the Our Father and sing “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.” Serve refreshments, such as Mexican hot chocolate and *buñuelos*, delicious fritters. (Find a recipe at <http://www.rollybrook.com/bunuelos.htm>.)

This Week at Home

Monday, December 15 Discovering Joy

The third Sunday of Advent is called *Gaudete* Sunday from the first word of Sunday's Entrance Antiphon. *Gaudete* is Latin for "rejoice." This joy is symbolized by rose-colored vestments at Mass and a rose-colored candle in the Advent wreath at home. The power of Christian joy can be seen in stories of conversion. Invite someone whose faith you admire to tell the story of how they discovered the joy of Christ, and share your own story. Or, read one of the great conversion stories, such as Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, Thomas Merton's *Seven Story Mountain*, or C. S. Lewis's *Surprised by Joy*.

Tuesday, December 16 Christmas Novena

In many cultures, Catholics pray a novena (nine consecutive days of prayer) beginning today. This is a special way to prepare ourselves to receive Christ. In the Philippines, it is traditional to attend daily Mass. In Italy, prophesies from the Old Testament are read and canticles are sung. Many families say a decade of the Rosary each night, and others pray Vespers (Evening Prayer) from the Liturgy of the Hours. Prepare for Christmas by praying the Rosary or Evening Prayer together. You can obtain the Liturgy of the Hours in various editions from a Catholic bookstore or download the prayers at www.ebreviary.com.



Wednesday, December 17 O Antiphons

The O Antiphons are the refrains sung before the Magnificat at Evening Prayer from December 17 to 23. They recall a prophecy of Isaiah about the coming of the messiah, and each names a title by which Jesus is known. They are paraphrased in the popular Advent hymn, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel." Beginning today, sing an antiphon each day as you light a candle on your Advent wreath and during Evening Prayer.

Thursday, December 18 Family Roots

The Jesse tree is an Advent tradition recalling Isaiah's prophesy, "A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, / and a branch shall grow out of his roots" (Isaiah 11:1). Jesse was the father of David, ancestor of Jesus. To make a Jesse tree, secure a branch in a pot. Make ornaments to represent the ancestors of Jesus (a lily for Mary, harp

for David, Jacob's ladder, burning bush for Moses, rainbow for Noah). Hang an ornament each night, reading the Bible story it represents. Include ornaments made from pictures of beloved relatives such as grandparents, telling stories about how these people lived their Christian faith.

Friday, December 19 Take a Breath

Advent is a time of waiting. We wait for someone who has already come and is yet to come. Most of us live in several time frames at once. We live in a school year, a fiscal year, and a liturgical year. We juggle work and school schedules. For many of us, there are too many time frames and not enough time. Advent invites us into God's time frame. Breathing prayers are a good way to slow down and get grounded in this Advent time. Follow the recommendation of Saint Ignatius and pray the Our Father, breathing deeply between each phrase.

Saturday, December 20 Foretaste of Heaven

Advent (in Latin *adventus*, "coming") celebrates the coming of Jesus into human history and anticipates his coming in glory in the *eschaton*, or final days. We rejoice because Christ's coming is both present and future. How has Jesus come into your life? Are the joys you have experienced foretastes of heaven? Keep a journal of these joys. Use the journal to reflect on the presence of Christ in your life and to discover the person you can become through God's grace.