

# First Week of Advent

## Blessing of an Advent Wreath

God of all hopefulness,  
we pray for your blessing upon us  
and upon this wreath.

With joyful expectation  
we, your people, wait in darkness  
for the coming of the Christ light.

As we light these candles,  
kindle our faith.

As we pray together,  
increase our hope.

As we go out into the world,  
strengthen our love.

Let your wisdom encircle our lives  
as this wreath encircles the candlelight.

And grant us the humility to receive  
your light,

even as these candles receive the flame.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



## November 30, 2008 Stay Awake!

Today's Gospel (Mark 13:33–37) tells us to be awake and ready to receive the master of the house whenever he comes. Yet national health organizations are concerned because millions of North Americans are sleep-deprived. How does this scripture, reminding us to stay awake, speak to people who aren't sleeping enough? Lack of sleep affects awareness. Job performance suffers and we become accident-prone. This Advent, if we are to become more spiritually awake and aware of Christ's presence in our lives so that we can fully experience the joy of Christmas, we need to take care of the Master's house. That is, we need to get the sleep our

bodies need. We also need to make time for the spiritual rest that renews heart and soul. Worship, prayer, meditation, and retreats are as important to a people expecting the Messiah as good nutrition is to an expectant mother. Our souls need such care and attention! And we mustn't try to keep this vigil alone. However true our hope, however sincere our faith, there will be times when we doze off, get distracted, or simply forget what is most important to us. Vigilant people need one another. Advent is a time to get our house in order, to refresh our souls, and to connect with people of faith who can help us wake up to the power of Christ's light in our lives.

# This Week at Home

**Monday, December 1**

## **What Are We Waiting For?**

Using an Advent calendar is a tradition that gives eager children a concrete way to mark off the days until Christmas. One little door is opened each day to reveal a picture, scriptural passage, prayer, or figure. To help children (and adults) focus on the blessings we receive, get together as a family and name 24 gifts Jesus brings into your lives. Write each of these gifts on a piece of paper. Write, "We await (name the gift)," and place the papers into a small container. Each day when you open a door on your Advent calendar, also draw a paper from the container and let family members take turns reading.

**Tuesday, December 2**

## **The Gift of Giving**

One good practice of Advent almsgiving is a gift tree. Contact your parish, Catholic Charities, or a hospital for the names of needy children or adults. Each family member cuts a star shape from colored paper, writes on it the name of a needy person, and hangs or pins it on a tree (or use a sturdy potted plant or a picture of a tree on a bulletin board). Throughout Advent, the family prays for the people represented by the stars and makes or buys them gifts, taking them to the organization that gave you the names in plenty of time for Christmas delivery.

**Wednesday, December 3**

## **Memorial of Saint Francis Xavier**

Today we remember Saint Francis Xavier, the first Jesuit missionary to Asia. Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical letter *Mission of the Redeemer*, asks us to renew the Church's missionary activity, including a "new evangelization" of those who have already received the Gospel. We are called to evangelize those who have heard of Christ but have not accepted his love for them. The first way to evangelize is through the witness of our lives. Take a moment to examine your life as a Christian. If you were someone else, would you want what you have?

**Thursday, December 4**

## **Preparing for Jesus**

Advent is a season of preparation. Here is a simple tradition that can help our children learn (and remind ourselves) that this preparation is not done at the department store but in the heart. Each child receives a manger (or you could have a family manger). This can be purchased, but a small box decorated with paper will do. At bedtime, children place one straw (or a strip of yellow paper) in the manger for each good deed done and each kind word spoken that day. Then on Christmas, each child discovers the infant Jesus (a doll wrapped in a blanket) in the manger.

**Friday, December 5**

## **In the Bleak Midwinter**

It is in the darkest, coldest season of the year that we celebrate the coming of the light of Christ into our world. For some people, shorter days and less sunlight increase

moodiness and even depression. Holiday celebrations can recall memories of loved ones who have died and stir up grief. Still others may feel low spirited because of the stress and demands of holiday preparation. Make time for these people and don't hesitate to ask for consolation yourself if you need it. Find comfort in Psalm 23 or Psalm 121.



**Saturday, December 6**

## **Memorial of Saint Nicholas**

Saint Nicholas, a fourth-century bishop, is said to have devoted himself to the religious education of children. Stockings are hung today, cookies baked and eaten, and gifts of candy and fruit are given. The patron saint of children, Saint Nicholas, traditionally tests children's knowledge of their prayers. Give a treat to children who can recite their prayers or a verse of scripture. Be sure to help the children prepare, and make the "test" appropriate to their level so that everyone gets a treat!

