

Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany at Home- 2020

This time of year brings with it many treasured traditions. Let the thoughts and ideas in this booklet affirm your traditions that you already engage in and give you ideas for new or modified traditions. Let the questions and thoughts enrich these days, all to God's glory. This is a short booklet, not intended to be comprehensive in any way, but instead filled with a few ideas to get you thinking.

Have ideas we should add to this booklet? Tell Pastor Tim!

Advent at Home

Advent means 'to come.' The color of advent is royal blue, the color of hope. It is a time to intentionally slow down and pay attention for God's coming. It is a time of hope and expectation of the coming of Jesus Christ who came in the past, is with us now, and will come at the end of time to restore all things. This is a season of paying attention to our longing, of preparation, watching, pondering, and reflection; a time to pause and think. So go ahead, snuggle up with a blanket and a cup of hot chocolate and take some time to pray, to read, to ponder, to pay attention to your longings for God, and, of course, to join us in worship.

Thoughts and questions to ponder in Advent

- As we practice sitting with our longing for God we are formed to live with patient waiting, intense prayer, and hopeful trust in God.
- God comes in many ways: in a meal, by a word, as a light, in the Christian assembly gathered, as a complete surprise, following a long wait, or suddenly.
- Advent is an intentional time to wait to celebrate Christmas until Christmas is here.
- The earth is resting, in some parts of the world the snow is falling, frequently the sky is grey and dark, and we look to God for light and hope and new life, trusting that God is already here and at work.
- How do you long for God's coming?
- How do you see God's coming among us?
- Take time to sit with that longing instead of jumping to fulfilling the longing. Can you take some time to let that longing guide your heart to see God's coming?
- How might you de-clutter your life and create open spaces for Jesus to enter in that you might enjoy and give thanks for the blessings God has given you.

Nativity/Manger Scene- *A custom that immerses children in the story and makes them participants. (ideas from Come Lord Jesus, Augsburg Fortress, 1996)*

- Set up empty manger, various animals, etc. Shepherds and sheep could be on a 'hillside' in another room. Mary and Joseph are in 'Nazareth.' The three kings are in the eastern room of the house- or simply out of sight. The infant Jesus is hidden.
- During advent the figures move, Mary and Joseph begin their journey to Bethlehem (down a hallway?)
- On Christmas eve the Christ child and angels appear while the shepherds rush from the hillside to Bethlehem
- The three kings (magi) begin their 12 day journey to the nativity, finally arriving on Epiphany (evening of January 5th)

Advent Wreath- *As Christians, we use symbols to express visually the basic tenets of our faith and as reminders of the pilgrimage of our life in Christ. Symbols can have heightened meaning for us when associated with particular seasons of that journey. One such symbol is the Advent wreath.*

The Advent wreath has its roots in the pre-Christian practices of northern Europe. People sought the return of the sun in the dark time of the year (at the winter solstice) by lighting candles and fires. As early as the Middle Ages, Christians used fire and light to represent Christ's coming into the world. Using this same symbolism, the Advent wreath developed a few centuries ago in Germany as a sign of the waiting and hopeful expectation of the return in glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. The wreath, a circle, came to represent the eternal victory over death through Jesus Christ. The evergreens were a sign of the faithfulness of God to God's people, even in death, and the lighted candles were a reminder of the light of Christ brought into the world.... (from elca.org)

- Make a simple wreath with some greens (real or fake) and 4 candles.
- Greens remind us of God's faithfulness
- Candles mark time as they burn up and get shorter. They also remind us of the light of Christ in our world
- One simple way to use this wreath is to place it on your family meal table and each evening at dinner read a devotion, say a prayer, and light your wreath's candle (one candle during the first week of advent, two during the second, etc)
- Want to do an advent calendar? How about a box where you put a food item in each day and then at the end of advent donate this box of food to a food pantry.

Prayer ideas for at the Advent Wreath

God in the night, God at my right
God all the day, God with me stay
God in my heart, Never depart
God with thy might,
 Keep us in light
Through this dark night. Amen.

Angel sent by God to guide me,
Be my light and walk beside me;
Be my guardian and protect me
On the paths of life direct me.
Amen.

Here I wait in quiet hope
That you will come,
Water the field of my heart,
And make your love blossom
Amen.

Open my eyes to see your light.
Open my hands to
 receive your bread.
Open my ears to hear your word.
Open my mouth to speak your love.
Amen.

Blessing of a Christmas Tree- *You might use this prayer around your Christmas tree, giving thanks for God's everlasting, evergreen presence and for the tree lit with lights that shine in hope for the true light of Jesus which never fades.*

God our Creator, we praise you for this tree that is a sign of your evergreen, everlasting presence. May the branches of this tree remind us of your sheltering arms and care for all of creation. May the lights on the tree lead us to eagerly welcome you, our true light and life. Be our light and our salvation, that we may receive the Christ child into our hearts with gratitude and song, resting always in you. **Amen.**

Saint Nicholas- *Though Nicholas is one of the church's most beloved saints, little is known about his life. He was bishop of Myra on the south-west coast of Turkey during the early 300's. Beyond this, legends abound. Legends that surround Nicholas tell of his love for God and neighbor, especially the poor. One famous story tells of Nicholas secretly giving bags of gold to the three daughters of a father who was going to sell them into prostitution because he could not provide dowries for them. Nicholas has become a symbol of anonymous gift giving. He is commemorated on December 6.*

Some questions/thoughts to ponder surrounding this day:

- How might we become the gift of God's love in the world through surprising acts of kindness?

- Advent and Christmas are times of gift giving in response to God's gift of Jesus to the world. Gifts do not need to be bought, they can be simple acts of goodness and kindness toward others.
- Nicholas was concerned about the poor, not giving extravagant gifts to those in an already over-consumed culture.
- Create a tradition surrounding Nicholas.
 - o Have Nicholas bring coins and then decide where you might give these coins to help others.
 - o Find some true stories about what life is like for other people and other children. Find many stories at lwr.org or use a link:
 - o Daisy and her family: <http://tinyurl.com/LWRDaisy>
 - o Mina(mother) and learning how to better grow vegetables: <http://tinyurl.com/o9zxf3k>

Christmas at Home

Christmas is a 12 day season of the church that begins as the sun sets on Christmas Eve and concludes as the sun sets on January 5th. On December 24th as night falls, our journey through advent comes to a close and for the next 12 days we celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus. These 12 days of Christmas are a time of celebration of God come among us.

Thoughts and questions to ponder during Christmas

- Keep your tree up and Christmas songs playing until the end of Christmas on the evening of January 5th. Enjoy this countercultural, intentional Christian practice of celebrating all 12 days of Christmas.
- Looking for gift ideas? How about donating in someone's name to Lutheran World Relief, ELCA World Hunger or Heifer international? For more ideas pay attention for our yearly mission gift fair and giving tree. Or if you want an actual gift, check out www.serrv.org to purchase gifts from around the world which give the person making it a fair wage and support their livelihood. Finally, take some time to reflect upon why gift giving is a part of your Christmas tradition- a good place to start is reflecting upon the gift we have in Christ, the Christmas birth story from Luke chapter 2, and Matthew 1.18-2.23.

A Prayer before gift giving

Blessed be your name, O God, You are the source of every blessing. From your hand, we receive the good gifts of life, health, and salvation. As we give and receive these presents, bless us with hearts thankful for the birth of your Son. May our opening of these gifts lead us to share our love, faith, and goods, with the poor and needy. Blessed be God forever. Amen.

1st Day of Christmas- Birthday party for Jesus

Today is the birth of Jesus, so why not have a birthday cake and celebrate by singing happy birthday to Jesus. As the 12 days of Christmas go on you can think about the gifts you bring to Jesus, like the wise astrologers will on the evening of January 5th.

1st Day of Christmas- Other ideas

We often forget that Christmas celebrations begin on December 25 and continue until January 6, Epiphany- when the wise men visited Jesus and marking the manifestation of Jesus to the whole world. So, keep your tree up, keep out your nativity,

and let the house lights burn bright for now the light of the world is alive and well and dispelling the darkness.

To show the travels of the Kings and the shepherds, move them far away from the nativity. Have a family member decide where to put them for the day. Some families choose to hide them and whoever finds them puts them in another spot. You choose what works for you, but put them far enough away from the nativity that they can move a little closer for each of the 12 days. If you're visiting a relative's house, be sure to ask them if you can use their nativity or bring yours and have them share in the fun.

Read together Luke 2.1-20 and discuss the gift of Christ.

December 26: The 2nd Day of Christmas

Move the 3 Kings and the shepherds/sheep closer to the nativity today.

Looking back over Christmas Day have each family member share their most memorable or special moment. Consider keeping these memories in a Christmas journal you write in each year.

December 27: The 3rd Day of Christmas

Move the 3 Kings and the shepherds/sheep closer to the nativity today.

Do something today that you had on your list of things you wanted to do prior to Christmas, but didn't get around to doing. Sew, bake, work on the photo album, write a personal note, etc. What was it that you really wanted to do? Spend some time focusing on that activity today.

December 28: The 4th Day of Christmas

Move the 3 Kings and the shepherds/sheep closer to the nativity today.

Don't forget to celebrate thankfulness this season! Isn't that part of Christmas anyway - being thankful that God cared enough about us to send us Jesus?

- Have each family member name 3 things they are thankful for today.
- Write cards of thanks to special people, whether or not you are thanking them for specific gifts

December 29: The 5th Day of Christmas

Move the 3 Kings and the shepherds/sheep closer to the nativity today.

Often we are our own worst critics. We tell ourselves so many negative things. Be honest with yourself today and think about 4 gifts you feel God has given you or 4 things that

you do really well. Share out loud or not, but at least write them down so you can read them again when you're feeling sad or discouraged. Remember, God says, "You are mine!"

December 30: The 6th Day of Christmas

Move the 3 Kings and the shepherds/sheep closer to the nativity today.

Jesus has come to us in the flesh as a little baby. Even today Christ is in your midst. How have you seen Christ in your day today?

December 31: The 7th Day of Christmas

Move the 3 Kings and the shepherds/sheep closer to the nativity today.

Tomorrow starts another year. With new beginnings come new opportunities. Instead of making a resolution that will be hard to keep, start thinking about a gift of yourself that you can give to Jesus for the new year (more patience for a family member, forgiveness, building a relationship that's been difficult, spreading cheer instead of anger, saying my prayers at night, etc.)

While deciding what to do, spend some time reflecting on the celebrations and hardships of the past year - what helped you through them, what you learned, or what opportunities came out of your situations.

On Jan. 6th you'll write down what you chose as the gift to give to Jesus for the next year. Take some time to think about it.

January 1: The 8th Day of Christmas

Move the 3 Kings and the shepherds/sheep closer to the nativity today.

Take time to rest today

January 2: The 9th Day of Christmas

Move the 3 Kings and the shepherds/sheep closer to the nativity today.

On the 9th Day of Christmas my true love gave to me 9 Ladies Dancing... Have you turned off the Christmas music? Most radio stations have, but Christmas is not over. Pull out the Christmas music, crank it up, and dance around the house!!

January 3: The 10th Day of Christmas

Move the 3 Kings and the shepherds/sheep closer to the nativity today.

Today or tomorrow many of you must return to school or work or simply re-enter the daily routine. Don't forget, there are still 2 more days to celebrate Christmas! Have fun tonight by playing this game to bring back memories of your holiday break: Word by Word invented by Peggy Kaye. Here's how it works: Each person takes a turn rolling a die. Add that many words to the story. For instance a 3 might result in "On Christmas morning . . ." The next person rolls the die and adds to the story. You can be silly if you want to. Don't have a die? Put small pieces of paper in a hat or bowl and draw from there.

January 4: The 11th Day of Christmas

Move the 3 Kings and the shepherds/sheep closer to the nativity today.

Back to Work/School/Routine?! Don't fret! It's the 11th Day of Christmas and you're still celebrating. Break out the sparkling cider or grape juice! At dinner tonight, share your feelings about how your return to work/school/routine went today. Talk about how you can keep the spirit of Christmas alive for 1 more day.

January 5: The 12th Day of Christmas

Move the 3 Kings and the shepherds/sheep closer to the nativity today.

Look through the newspaper and see if there is any mention of Christmas still being celebrated. Discuss why you think this is? What news dominates the paper today?

January 6: Epiphany!

Put the 3 Kings and the shepherds/sheep at the nativity today.

See "Epiphany at Home", below.

Watch for announcements about an epiphany party at church! If we are doing one this year, come and join in!

Epiphany at Home

On January 6th (technically January 5th after the sun has set) we celebrate epiphany. On epiphany we mark the coming of the magi and their spreading this news of the Christ child to the whole world. It is a time to celebrate the light of Christ; the light of the whole world who shines into the whole world, including shining into you. In Christ's light we find life, safety, and hope.

Consider having an epiphany celebration today. You may have been thinking about the gifts you bring to Jesus during these last 12 days? Whether you were or were not, write down a gift you bring to Jesus and present it at your home nativity. Then carry a lighted candle into each room of your house (lights off if you can) and ask Jesus to be with you in that room this year.

Talking point: Today, Mary and Joseph share Jesus with us. Parents, talk about how you felt the first time you shared your newborn children with the outside world of extended family and friends. Don't have children? Share your feeling about an exciting event in your life that you decided to tell others. What do you remember about that day?

Epiphany- Home Blessing

Last updated: 10/2020

“Why then is this day called Epiphany? Because it was not when [Jesus] was born that he became manifest to all, but when he was baptized, for up to this day he was unknown to the multitudes.”

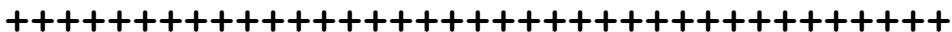
John Chrysostom- Epiphany 387 AD

Epiphany means “manifestation.” An epiphany is an appearing; the revealing of something hidden. The evening of January 5th marks the end of the 12 days of Christmas and entering into the day of Epiphany. On this day we celebrate the revelation of Christ to the Gentiles- that is, to all nations. Some Christian traditions celebrate three great epiphanies on this day: the magi's adoration of the Christ child, Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River, and his first miracle in which he changes water into wine. The word and sacraments (baptism, holy communion) are for us the great epiphany of God's grace and mercy. We go forth to witness to the light that shines brightly in our midst.

Matthew writes that when the magi saw the shining star stop overhead, they were filled with joy. “On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother” (Matthew 2.10-11). In

the home, Christ is met in family and friends and in visitors and strangers. In the home, faith is shared, nurtured, and put into action. In the home, Christ is welcomed.

Epiphany offers an occasion for gathering with friends and family members for a blessing of the home. Though there are many traditions, a simple one is provided below. You may break up the portions of this rite and have different people lead them.



You will need: A piece of chalk. Optional: A candle, and a method to light the candle.

All gather at the main place of entering and leaving. A candle may be lit.

Jesus said, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will have the light of life.

May peace be to this house and to all who enter here. By wisdom a house is built and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures. *Proverbs 24.3-4*

Let us pray... O God, May peace and wisdom be to all who enter this house. We give you thanks for all that happens here and pray that all may be grounded in your love-chores and hobbies, cooking and eating, relaxing and relationships. Watch over all in their going out and coming in to this home. Keep evil away from our door, and let us share the hospitality of this home with all who visit, that all who enter here may know your love and peace.

The magi of old traveled by the guiding of a star to worship the baby Jesus, God come to live among us. May peace be with this house and all who dwell in it, and peace to all who enter here. Christ bless this house and remain with us throughout the year that in our home we might share the peace and hospitality of Christ with family, friends, visitors and strangers... welcoming not only these people but welcoming Jesus!

An inscription is made with chalk above the entrance:

20 † Christ, bless this house † 21

Christ bless this house throughout 2021!

Let us pray... O God, may this home be a place where you are made known (Your epiphany manifestation) that we might come to see you in new ways and always be filled by your light. May your love be our inspiration and guide throughout the year. Grant that

we may show your love to each other and to all whose lives we touch. Guide, comfort, and strengthen us in peace, O Jesus Christ, now and forever. Amen

You may choose to walk throughout the house and bless each room with a sprinkling of water, perhaps using a branch from the Christmas tree. You also might read the story of the Magi in Matthew 2.1-12.

Primary sources:

Briehl, Susan. *Come, Lord Jesus: Devotions for the Home* (Augsburg Fortress: Minneapolis, 1996), 51-53.

Johnston, Timothy D. Original content.

*** Have ideas we should add to this booklet? Feedback for the future?
Tell Pastor Tim! This is a living, changing, ongoing project! ***