

Advent Family Fun Possibilities

to spend time together and focus on Jesus in December



Advent Wreath: Set out four candles in a circle and one in the middle (or you can buy or create a wreath to hold them). On the first Sunday of Advent, the family lights one candle (leaving four unlit). On the next Sunday, light two candles. The central (white) candle is only lit on Christmas Eve. Some families do this only on Sundays, others light the current number of candles at every dinner. We light them whenever we have family devotions times. Our family has always just used red and white candles, to match our decorations, but the traditional colors are purple, pink, and white, in this order:

1. Week 1 (starting Dec.1 this year): purple
2. Week 2 (12/8/19): purple
3. Week 3 (12/15/19): pink
4. Week 4 (12/22/19): purple
5. Christmas Eve (12/24/19): white

You can simply light the candle(s) and talk about waiting for Jesus' birth, or you can burn them while you sing a song, read a story, read a devotional, or do any of the activities below.

Jesse Tree Each day, the children hang one new ornament on a special "tree" of some kind (we use an old tomato cage; some people use a single branch). Each ornament has an illustration of one character from Jesus' family tree ("the root of Jesse"), or scene from Bible history. This is a great way to draw kids' attention to how the whole Bible hangs together—how God promised a Messiah in the Garden of Eden, and worked through the centuries until Jesus' time. (This is also your chance to make sure they know that Abraham comes before Moses, and so on!) You can buy a set of Jesse Tree ornaments online, or you can find free printable versions, and have the kids color them in. Depending on your kids' age, you might briefly tell the story in your own words, read a Jesse Tree devotional or book, or read the story from the Bible as they hang the ornament.

Here is a link to one site that offers free printable ornaments, explanations, Scripture passages, and devotionals:



Songsheets There are so many wonderful Jesus-songs at Christmas time! Five minutes can't be better spent than singing a Christmas carol together. Having songsheets ready and waiting near where you will need them makes

everything much easier, as does deciding in advance whether you will be near an instrument, play a recording, or just belt it out a capella. You might experiment with having each child pick one song, or rotating who picks. (If you don't want them to pick certain ones, make sure they are not on your song sheet. I'm thinking "Frosty," "Rudolph..."). When they were little, our girls loved to dance around, or just run in circles on the rug, while we sang. Some songs also have great dramatic possibilities (you would only have to model hamming it up on the later verses of "We Three Kings" once to establish a tradition, if your kids are like mine).

Picturebooks There are hundreds of beautiful picturebooks that focus on Jesus and the story of Christmas. You can reserve books at your local library through the internet. (I have been known to walk out with a stack of 20 picture books, all sent to me from different branches all over the city. Some of them we loved so much, I bought the ones you see here—mostly from used online booksellers.) Some families wrap each book, and let the children unwrap a book to read each night. But even just having a stack waiting to be read can be exciting, with no wrapping required!

Family Devotionals These books usually include a Bible passage and a short thought about it, to be read aloud. Some of the ones we have used have included a classic artwork on each page. A quick Amazon search brought up some with crafts or coloring. Our best year ever was one which had us listen to one song of Handel's "Messiah" each night, along with a Bible verse and reading. If you decide to buy one, try to look inside to make sure that the level is right for your kids, and that it is centered on the Bible.

Nativity Scenes Even toddlers and preschoolers can play with cloth or plastic sets, and learn to tell the story of Jesus' birth! Moving the characters around as you narrate the story can be pretty fun. They make great decorations for kids' rooms, too. (We also have a "grown-up" scene in carved wood, which was always put up high, and had to be touched "very carefully." I still remember the awe as my little girls gazed at it. I think it's good that children know they will not grow out of Christmas, but will in fact grow into some parts of it!)

Background Music Traditional carols about Jesus come in all kinds of musical genres, and are easy to find on Spotify, or any music player you might use. Our library also provides an app called "Freegal," which allows five songs a week to download for free—and unlimited streaming. (If you like choral or Celtic-style arrangements, and want recommendations, just ask!)

Advent Calendars Each day, the kids pull back one paper flap to reveal a tiny picture and a Bible verse. It's a classic!

A Few Christmas Picturebooks:

Berger, *the Donkey's Dream*

DePaola, *Joy to the World*

Henry, *The Gift of the Magi* (illus. Zwerger)

Kennedy, *the Beasts of Bethlehem*

L'Engle, *The Glorious Impossible*

Lloyd-Jones, *Little One, We Knew You'd Come*

Lloyd-Jones, *Song of the Stars*

McCaughrean, *Wenceslas*

Petersham, *The Christ Child*

Peterson, *The Ballad of Matthew's Begats*

Ray, *The Story of Christmas*

Tyrell, *The Huron Carol*

Vivas, *The Nativity*

Wangerin, *Mary's First Christmas*

Wangerin, *Probity Jones and the Fear Not Angel*