



Finding God

Our Response to God's Gifts

© LOYOLA PRESS • All rights reserved.

Special seasonal issue by
Verónica Rayas.

Make a Space in Your Home and Your Heart This Advent

Advent invites us to focus on the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. It is a time during which we joyfully wait to celebrate the birth of the Christ Child. Many parents remember the hope, excitement, and preparation of waiting for the birth of their first baby. Advent is similar in that it is an opportunity to prepare a place in our homes and our hearts for celebrating the birth of the baby Jesus.



In these next four weeks, I invite you and your family on a hope-filled journey toward

Christmas by focusing on four key spiritual symbols that point to the birth of Jesus: the manger, Our Lady of Guadalupe, the *Posadas*, and luminarias. These traditions will help make your Advent a season of joy as you await the celebration of our Lord's birth. †

FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT: We Prepare for Jesus

As the birth of their first baby approaches, soon-to-be parents prepare a space in their home for the child. This includes buying a crib, diapers, clothes, bottles, child-proof locks, mild soaps, baby carriers, books, and strollers, to name a few. It is amazing to watch the way a parent prepares a space in his or her heart to receive the newborn child with selfless love, caring, and dedication. Then, when the baby is born, there is great celebration and immense joy.

Guide your family this Advent in the exciting experience of preparing for new life and the birth of Jesus. Embrace this time as an opportunity for your family to become more deeply grounded in the Christian values and virtues that will shape your children and help your family become a domestic church where the message of Jesus Christ is celebrated and lived. Fill your home with love, care, laughter, forgiveness, generosity, and patience.

In the first week of Advent, take time during a family meal to discuss how each person can prepare a space in his or her heart for the baby Jesus. Ideas might in-



clude spending more time in prayer with the Advent wreath, setting up Christmas decorations together, taking food to people who are poor, elderly, or alone, baking together, or reading Scripture together before going to Mass. In these ways, you can prepare your family to anticipate the new blessings and new joys this Advent. ■

MAKE A BED OF HAY FOR THE BABY JESUS

As a family, prepare a manger for the baby Jesus.

Cut a sheet of paper into half-inch-wide strips that are long enough to write on. Give each member of the family four to six strips of paper.

Have each person write on the strip of paper something he or she can do to prepare home and heart for the Christ Child. For example, "I will be patient,"

"Gather daily for family night prayer,"
"Make cookies for the neighbor," or
"Laugh together."

Use the strips of paper to make a "bed of hay" for a manger. Set the manger in a visible place where it can be seen daily.

Pray together around the manger:
"Lord, help us make a space for you in our homes and our hearts." ■



Our Lady of Guadalupe

On December 12, 1531, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to Juan Diego at Tepeyac Hill and asked him to become a messenger of God's work in the Americas. The Blessed Mother sent him to the bishop with her request to build a shrine so that people would know of her motherly love and of God's love for all people.

Juan Diego, an indigenous man, felt unworthy of such an important task. He said, "You know that I am a nobody, a nothing, a coward, a pile of old sticks, just like a bunch of leaves. I am nothing. You have sent me to walk in places where I do not belong."



Our Lady responded, "Know for sure that I have no lack of servants or messengers. But it is very necessary that you, personally, go and plead, that my wish, my will, become a reality, be carried out through your intercession."

The message of Our Lady of Guadalupe speaks to us today. She calls us to live our faith where all of God's children feel worthy to be God's messengers and do his work, and where all people will know God's love for them. ■

SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT: We Are Called

In the time of Juan Diego (1474–1548), the role of the messenger was considered a skilled profession; not just anyone could be a messenger. When Juan Diego was asked by the Blessed Mother to be her messenger, he was unsure of his ability to complete the task. The Blessed Mother understood his insecurities and offered him words of comfort, compassion, and encouragement to live out his mission.

Your child is like Juan Diego, called to be God's messenger by living and sharing the Good News of Jesus. When he or she feels inadequate or insecure, your compassionate and encouraging words can comfort and challenge your child to find the strength and courage to live out his or her mission. Allow Our Lady of Guadalupe to be your example, to speak words that build, strengthen, and encourage your child to be all that God created him or her to be. ■



© LOYOLA PRESS. All rights reserved.

ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER

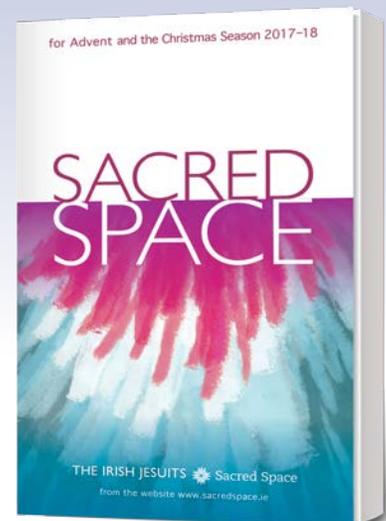


Use construction paper to make Christmas cards for family members, friends, and neighbors. On the inside of the card, write: "One gift you have given me throughout the year is ____ . Thank you for making the world a better place. Merry Christmas!" Examples of such gifts might include humor, strength, kindness, etc. Decorate the outside of the card and deliver it to the person. ■

A Sacred Advent

Advent is a joyful time to prepare for the celebration of Jesus' birth. *Sacred Space for Advent and the Christmas Season 2017–18* provides a daily Scripture reading along with six steps of prayer and reflection. With its small size and meaningful message, it is a simple way to build a richer relationship with God and embrace the Advent season. ■

[*Sacred Space for Advent and the Christmas Season 2017–18*](#) (Loyola Press, 2017)



Finding God: Our Response to God's Gifts
A newsletter for parents and families by Loyola Press
Contributors: Verónica Rayas

Art Credits: iStockphoto.com, Loyola Press, page 4,
page 2, Shutterstock.com, page3, Thinkstock.com,
pages 1-4.

To contact any of our writers, please e-mail us at
newsletter@loyolapress.com.

Excerpts from the *New American Bible, revised edition*
© 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian
Doctrine, Washington, D.C., and are used by permis-
sion of the copyright owner. All rights reserved.

The newsletter is published seven times a year
(including issues for Advent and Lent) by Loyola Press.

LOYOLAPRESS. A JESUIT MINISTRY

3441 N. Ashland Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60657
(800) 621-1008
www.loyolapress.com

For activities, quick tips, and other resources to
encourage faith-filled family living, visit
www.loyolapress.com/our-catholic-faith/family.

Web Number: W1523

Copyright © Loyola Press, 2017

All rights reserved. Materials may not be reproduced
in any form without permission of the publisher.



Las Posadas

Las Posadas is a rich Mexican tradition rooted in Scripture that reenacts the Holy Family's search for a room at the inn. Actors portraying Joseph and a pregnant Mary make their way through the neighborhood, knocking on several doors asking for posada, or lodg-

ing. People follow with lighted candles, singing the traditional hymns that tell this rich Advent story.

You are not just watching a drama; everyone is called to actively participate in the singing and the procession. Either you journey with the Holy Family and face rejection, or you reject the Holy Family, closing the door on them in their time of great need. Finally, the pilgrims are welcomed into the last home, which is followed by a fiesta with food, sweets,



and piñatas.

Las Posadas invites us to be people of hospitality and to welcome Jesus into our lives.

It is this welcoming of Jesus—especially those who are rejected and marginalized in our society—that best prepares us to celebrate the birth of Christ among us. ■



THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT: We Welcome Others

Echale mas agua a los frijoles is a Mexican *dicho*—or “wise saying”—that translates to “Add more water to the beans.” It means that if an unexpected visitor arrives, you just add water and there is always enough food for everyone. The deeper meaning is that there is always room for one more person; we had better not turn away or exclude anyone because the person we are excluding could be Jesus.



The popular tradition of the Posadas is about hospitality. It's the story of Jesus knocking on our door, calling us for a response. The Posadas remind us that Jesus comes to us as a homeless person, an immigrant, a neighbor, or a family member in need. So, if I reject someone, then I am rejecting Jesus knocking at the door. The faith lesson of the Posadas reminds us that our actions and words teach our children to be hospitable so that they too can welcome and embrace Jesus in our midst. ■

PUT A WELCOME SIGN ON YOUR HEART

Invite your family to focus on being more hospitable this week.

- Make friends with people from another culture, who speak a different language or have a different religion.
- See if your parish is having a Posada and participate.

- Reflect and pray the final words of the Posada hymn: “Enter holy pilgrims; receive this corner, not of this humble dwelling but of my heart.” ■



FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT: We Share Christ's Light

Where there is a lack of love, there is darkness; where there is the love of Christ, there is light. As we prepare for the birth of Jesus, the Light of the World, we are called to reflect that light by sharing the love of Christ with all people.

A tradition that marks the end of Advent is the lighting of luminarias. These paper lanterns are placed along a path that leads to a Nativity scene where people can venerate the newborn baby Jesus. Luminarias remind us that each of us is called to bring the light of Christ where there is darkness. We bring the light of Christ when we

- forgive others,
- help people feel joy,
- take food to those who are homeless,
- support laws that help the common good,
- give comfort to those who are grieving,



- give hope to those who despair, and
- care for our sacred earth.

These actions are living luminarias that point the way for the birth of Christ among us. ■

LIGHT THE WAY

Make luminarias by placing the paper lanterns outside your home this Christmas Eve.



1. Reflect on the symbol of the light. On several lunch-sized brown paper bags, write how your family brings light to others so that the world will come to live in the light of Christ.
2. Fold over the top of the paper bag.
3. Fill the bag with one to two inches of sand to weigh it down.
4. Place a battery-powered tea light candle inside.
5. Mark a welcoming path to your home using the luminarias and say a prayer as you light the candles inside the bags. ■



© LOYOLA PRESS. All rights reserved.

Christmas

The Advent season of anticipation and waiting leads us to the celebration of Christmas and the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Christmas is not the end of the journey but a step on our path toward God. Pray the following prayers with your family throughout the Christmas season. May you continue to grow closer to one another as you grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. Gather as a family around a lit candle or hold a candle in your hand while you pray as a reminder that Jesus Christ is the Light of the World.

Christmas Family Prayer

Jesus our Light, we remember the day you were born. We give thanks that we do not walk in darkness because we know you are with us. Shine bright in our house and in our hearts. Remind us to treat one another with care, love, patience, forgiveness, and compassion so that we may carry your light and your love to all people. Amen.

Christmas Parent Prayer

Jesus, Light of the World, I ask for your guidance, support, strength, and creativity to share this light with my family. Help me be an example of faith in my words and actions so that my children will also bear your light. Amen.

Christmas Children's Prayer

Jesus, when I share your love, I share your light. Help me show your love to my family, friends, and neighbors. May I see your face in all people. Amen.

