

Excerpted from:

The Catholic Parent  
**Book of  
Feasts**

Celebrating  
the Church Year  
with Your Family

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**Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division  
Our Sunday Visitor, Inc.  
Huntington, Indiana 46750**

# Advent

## Quick Activities

### **SUPPLIES**

one large, white  
candle  
markers  
sequins  
glue  
lots of ideas  
colored moldable  
wax

### Christ Candle

Decorate the candle to be your family “Christ Candle.” Use Jesse tree symbols, alpha, omega, Pax Christi — whatever your family chooses. See the “Appendix” for the symbols.

### Christmas Eve

Put up the family Christmas tree and decorate for Christ. Make this family time and talk about the ornaments and their significance.

Many families bless their Christmas trees before lighting them. (See the “Prayers and Devotions” chapter for “Blessing of the Christmas Tree.”) The Christmas tree provides our children with a concrete reminder of a tree’s role in both the fall of man and the victory of Christ.

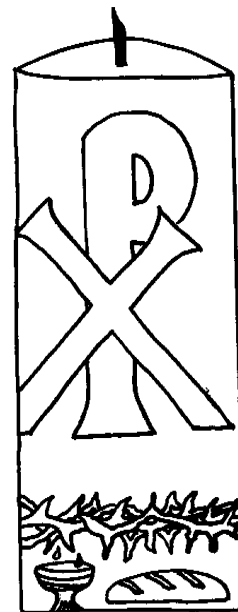
The Christmas tree itself traces its origin to the paradise plays that were popular in medieval Germany during Advent. In the plays, the garden of Eden was represented by a fir tree hung with apples, representing both the “tree of life” and the “tree of discernment of good and evil.” After the plays were suppressed in the German churches, the paradise tree found its way into the homes of the faithful as a symbol of the coming Savior.

In the fifteenth century the faithful began adding small white wafers, representing the Holy Eucharist, to the apples. Thus the tree that had borne the fruit of Adam’s sin now bore the saving fruit of the sacrament of Christ’s sacrifice. Only in later usage were the white wafers gradually replaced by angels, bells, and other religious ornaments.

### Light the Night

You’ll need electric candles or a string of white lights.

Put lights in the front windows. A candle in a window was



**A Christ candle with Jesse tree symbols.**

## Advent

a symbol of Christianity, an outward sign of welcome to passersby that Christ resides in the house, as well as a welcome for the coming of Christ at Christmas.

### Service

Pray for the foreign missions. Try to attend Mass as a family and continue to do good works and pray for your “*Christkindl*” (Christ Child).

#### **SUPPLIES**

construction paper  
markers and/or  
crayons  
glue  
glitter  
old Christmas  
cards  
paper clips  
scissors

### Tree Decorations

Using old Christmas cards, allow the children to cut, stencil, or draw symbols of Christmas. These can all be made fairly sturdy with paper and glue. They can even be used to help tell the story of Christmas to the younger children.

### Jesus' Ancestors

Dress tiny dolls to represent Christ's ancestors to hang on the tree. Include Jesse, David, Our Lady, St. Anne, St. Joachim, St. Joseph, Adam and Eve, etc.

With clay and paint add a tiny apple and a serpent to give Eve significance and make more real the reason for Christ's redemption. You can add symbols to the other characters, too.

#### **SUPPLIES**

paper or  
cardboard cut-  
out dolls  
scissors  
construction paper  
paper clips  
clay  
paint  
glue

### Family Trip for Christmas Tree

Make an outing of selecting and purchasing your family Christmas tree. If you can, try to find a cut-it-yourself tree farm. Bring your special tree home, trim branches if necessary, and shake it out well before bringing it inside to decorate.

If you can't decorate the tree right away, cut a one-inch slice off the trunk and put it in a bucket filled with water. Keep the tree in a cool place, such as in the garage, until you can bring it inside. Select the area in your home where the tree will be placed, and prepare it before bringing the tree inside. Have a sturdy stand ready that can be filled with water after the tree is placed in it.

The tree is a symbol of life. Green stands for giving life and hope.

### Family Trip to a Barn

Travel to a barn or cave together. Talk about the weather, the animals, comfort, discomfort, smells, etc. Explain how Mary and Joseph were very tired, yet settled in a similar place, where Mary delivered the Son of God. Jesus was laid in a manger, the food trough for the animals. There is much to learn when you experience the discomforts first-hand, such as detachment and simplicity.

Try to prepare a feast for dinner since it is Sunday, the day to remember the resurrection of Christ.

### **Family Service Outing**

Take the family to a nearby nursing home. It would be nice to take a gift such as cookies, decorations (bows for the doors, for example), or flowers. Practice songs to sing. It's even fun to plan this activity with a couple of other families and sing the carols that await Christ's coming, such as "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel."

### **Honor the Blessed Mother**

Try to go to Mass as a family, taking a special moment after Mass to invoke Our Lady's prayers to prepare our hearts to better receive Christ this Christmas.

If the weather permits, prepare an outdoor meal in remembrance of the journey of Mary and Joseph. Plan a barbecue of hamburgers, a salad, and soft drinks. Dinner conversation could focus on eating outside, grilling outside, or what traveling might have been like for Mary and Joseph.

#### **SUPPLIES**

a family photo, or  
photos of each  
member  
white paper,  
8"x10"  
tape or glue  
pens, crayons, or  
markers

### **Write a Family Christmas Letter**

Have each family member write or dictate an individual message on the letter. Tell something special about the past year or hopes for the next. Tape or glue pictures to the paper. Have children add artistic touches and signatures. Finish the family letter by photocopying the number you want to send out. (If your family has a computer and printer, some of this could be done using word processing and other programs.) Address the envelopes and stamps. This is a great family gift to send and fun for all ages.

### **Christkindl Brief**

"*Christkindl Brief*" is German for "letter to the Christ Child."

You'll need white paper (letter size) and pens, crayons, or markers.

Write a letter to the Christ Child explaining your love and anticipation for His arrival. Explain how you are trying to prepare your hearts (and the soft manger!) for Him. Add artwork if you want, and place on the family altar. This activity is especially fun and meaningful for young children.

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