

Excerpt from: **Catholic Traditions in Crafts** by Ann Ball.
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The Christmas Season

The celebration that begins the liturgical year is Advent, a movable observance beginning on the Sunday closest to the last day in November. The season precedes and prepares the way for Christmas. As a preparatory season, Advent started in Rome during the sixth century with a joyful character; later, the Frankish influence gave it a penitential character. By the twelfth century, a compromise made it a time of joyful penance.

In the year 312, under the Emperor Constantine, the Church was at last free from persecution. About the middle of the fourth century, she established a special feast to commemorate the birth of Christ. In 386, St. John Chrysostom wrote that Pope Julian had made an extensive investigation of the correct birthday of Christ and found that the Western churches all considered December 25 to be the Nativity date, although the Eastern churches claimed January 6. Other opinions abounded, variously setting the date in March, April, May, or September. To end the controversy, and basing his opinion on the majority, Pope Julian decreed the feast for December 25.

By the Middle Ages, this feast acquired the popular name of Christmas (Mass of Christ). It rapidly became one of the most joyous feasts of the liturgical year and was celebrated happily in the churches and in the home.

From the early Middle Ages, the twelve days from the Nativity of Our Lord to the Epiphany (January 6) were kept as a festive season. Although these twelve days are dominated by Christmas, they also contain other liturgical feasts to increase the spirit of joy and celebration.

Throughout the history of the season, handcrafts have always made a large contribution to the festivities in the form of decorations and gifts. Each ethnic heritage has special crafts dedicated to this season. Entire books can be, and have been, written on the crafts of Christmas. It is well outside the scope of this book to do anything other than present a sampling of the thousands of crafts used in the celebration of Christmas.

Luminarios

The Mexican custom of *los luminarios* has crossed the border and many places now decorate with these festive lights, symbolizing the Advent of the Christ Child. During Advent and Christmas, the hilly city of El Paso, Texas, sparkles with the *luminarios* set out in hundreds of front yards. Traditionally, the *luminarios* are made by partially filling a paper sack with sand, placing a small candle inside, and lighting it. The sacks are placed along the walkways leading to the homes. Unfortunately, long periods of burning use quite a lot of candles, and the wind plays tricks by blowing them out time and again.

Our friend Army Emmot created a more practical, safe, and beautiful *luminario*.

Directions

Collect several coffee cans; if you use various sizes, they will be easier to store by stacking one inside the other. Remove paper labels.

Fasten your wood in a vise, if one is available, so you can use it for support when punching holes in your cans.

Draw a star or other pattern on a heavy piece of paper and tape it to the can. See the star pattern on the next page; it can be enlarged on a copier to 150 percent. Put the can over the board for support and using a hammer and awl, or large nail, punch out the holes of your design. Do not try to punch directly over the board; set the point just beside the board in the vise so the awl can go through the can. Wiggle the awl and it will widen the hole a bit and come out of the can easily.

Make a holder for each light on your string from the wire by bending it in a tight loop twice around the plastic base of the bulb and bending it straight down, as shown in our diagram. You may need pliers to help you hold and bend the wire. Cut the wire three to five inches below the bottom of the bulb's base.

Arrange your lights along your front sidewalk, sticking the wire holder in the ground but leaving at least two inches between the ground and the bottom

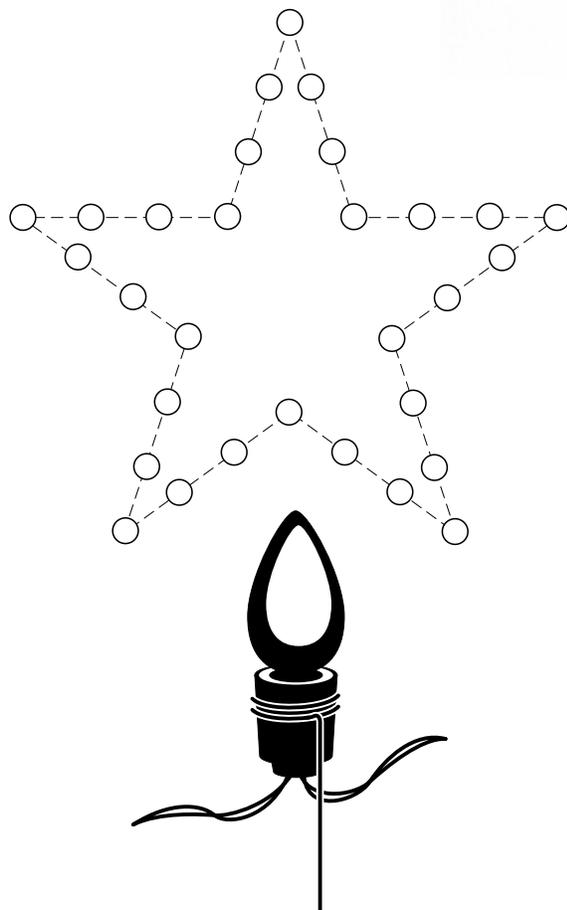
Supplies needed

coffee cans
short piece of 2"x4" wood
scrap
awl or large nail
hammer
string of large size Christmas lights, UL rated for outdoor use
moderately heavy wire or pliable wire coat hangers
pliers
wire cutters
vise, if available

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of the base of the bulb. This way, your lights will be held up away from the dew or water that may be on the grass.

Cover your lights with your decorative tin *luminarios*, using the largest cans close to the house and graduating down to the smaller cans.



**Above, the finished *luminario*.
At left, the star pattern can be enlarged on a copier to 150 percent. The light bulb assembly is also shown.**