

# Advent



## FESTIVALS OF LIGHT CHRISTMAS SYMBOLS

### ADVENT

The word Advent means "coming" or "arrival." The focus of the entire season is the celebration of the birth of Jesus the Christ in his First Advent, and the anticipation of the return of Christ the King in his Second Advent. Advent is the beginning of the Church Year for most churches in the Western tradition. It begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas day, which is the Sunday nearest November 30, and ends on Christmas Eve (Dec 24). If Christmas Eve is a Sunday, it is counted as the fourth Sunday of Advent, with Christmas Eve proper beginning at sundown.

### ADVENT CALENDAR

There are a wide variety of Advent calendars, but usually they are simply a card or poster with windows that can be opened, one each day of Advent, to reveal some symbol or picture associated with the Old Testament story leading up to the birth of Jesus.

### WREATH

An Advent wreath is a circular evergreen wreath (real or artificial) with five candles, four around the wreath and one in the centre. The circle of the wreath reminds us of God, The green of the wreath speaks of the hope that we have in God. Candles symbolize the light of God coming into the world. The four outer candles represent the period of waiting during the four Sundays of Advent. There are usually three purple candles, colours of Advent, and one pink candle. One of the purple candles is lit on the first Sunday of Advent. On subsequent Sundays, previous candles are lit with an additional one. The pink candle is lit on the third Sunday of Advent. The light of the candles reminds us that we are called to be a light to the world as we reflect the light of God's grace to others. The first candle is traditionally the candle of Expectation or Hope. The remaining three candles of Advent may be associated with other aspects of the Advent story, Peace, Joy, Love. The candle for the Third Sunday of Advent is traditionally pink, and symbolizes Joy. The centre Christ candle is white and is traditionally lit on Christmas Eve or Day.

## AN ADVENT CALENDAR

### Leader's notes to accompany the Advent calendar

1. BIBLE - for the story of the birth of Jesus, the line of descent and the prophecies. There are many books and children's bibles available giving a clear account of the birth of Jesus.
2. JESSE TREE STUMP - to remind us about the last remnant of Israel and the hope that it represents in the new life coming out of what was thought dead. See Advent Calendar information in this section.
3. CANDLE - reminding us of the light of the world. According to one tradition the four candles for each of the four Sundays in Advent should be purple, the Advent colour. A pink candle may sometimes be used on the third Sunday to represent Joy. The Christ candle is white. In other traditions, the advent candles are red or white.
4. BULB - planting bulbs gives us a real experience of waiting and hoping. Begin this activity early in Advent. Share the task of planting a crocus (or other) bulb outside in the garden or in a planter. Use a glass bulb planter indoors and some water to observe the bulb's roots and shoots develop. Think about choosing a purple bulb, the liturgical colour for Advent, representing humility and penitence. The water level should just reach the bottom of the bulb and be maintained throughout the growing time. Place the bulb in a dark cool place for three weeks and explain that this period of darkness is necessary for the plant to bloom. Bring it into the light when the top appears. Hopefully it will bloom on Christmas Day or just after.
5. STAR - reminding us of the star the wise men followed on their journey. Stars have long been used to guide travellers especially those at sea. A star also gives us light on a dark night.
6. CROWN - to remind us of Jesus.
7. MANGER - to remind us of the humility of the Jesus' birth.
8. ANGEL - representing the messenger in the Christmas story.

9. CROOK - for the shepherds who were the first to respond to the news of Jesus' birth. Jesus called himself the 'Good Shepherd.'
10. DOVE - is associated with peace. The Messiah, in Isaiah's prophecy, is referred to as the 'Prince of Peace.'<sup>1</sup>
11. GLOBE - to remind us that Christians live all over the world. Gather information from everyone in your class/group about the different ways Christmas is celebrated in different parts of the world.
12. CHRISTINGLE - a very old ceremony going back over two hundred years. Christingle means 'Christ-Light.' Follow the instructions for making one in the Advent Calendar information in this section.
13. SANTA CLAUS - tell the story of Saint Nicholas in the Advent Calendar information in this section.
14. GIFTS - remind us of the gifts of the wise men to Jesus and the gift of Jesus himself. Consider buying presents that are environmentally friendly or produced in a sustainable way. Support your local charity shop, buy presents from charity catalogues and look for Fair Trade alternatives. Consider supporting a Conservation or Overseas Development agency by giving money to them, on behalf of your loved one, for a tree or some blankets - you will receive a bookmark or a photo poster/card for the recipient as a record. Another alternative gift could be a year's membership subscription to conservation or other charitable organisation. The gifts we exchange at Christmas are usually wrapped in wrapping paper much of which ends up in our rubbish bins - see [www.wasteonline.org.uk](http://www.wasteonline.org.uk). Good quality wrapping paper can be reused especially if you use string instead of sticky tape and gift tags can be made out of old Christmas cards. If you don't reuse the wrapping paper, consider putting it to use in paper crafts. For gifts that don't cost a penny see the Advent Calendar information in this section.
15. COINS - Think of all of the ways we can use the resource of money at Christmas. Unfortunately many people get into debt because of

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 9, 5.

over-spending. Jesus told many stories about coins/money.<sup>2</sup> Read some of these.

16. CROSS - a reminder of the sacrificial death of Jesus.
17. HOLLY AND IVY - reminding us of the carol. You will find a copy of this carol in the Advent Calendar information in this section. All the different parts of the holly remind us of some aspect of the Christmas story. The evergreen colour itself represents life and hope.
18. CHRISTMAS TREE - what does having a Christmas tree in your home mean to you? What are the consequences? 7.5 million Christmas trees were bought in 2001. The total number of Christmas trees reported to be recycled stands at nearly 1.2 million. Consider growing a Christmas tree outside and decorating it with natural decorations and food for the birds, or giving one as a gift planted in a pot.
19. CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS - choose decorations that can be reused. You can have fun making decorations from scrap materials. Talk about how you might decorate your tree in order to stay focused on the birth of Jesus. Think about decorating an outdoor tree with food for the birds. You will find some recipes and suggestions for making alternative indoor and appropriate outdoor decorations in the Advent Calendar information in this section.
20. CHRISTMAS CARDS - The Royal Mail delivers around 150 million cards and packets each day during the pre-Christmas period. It is estimated that up to 1 billion Christmas cards could end up in bins across the UK. The Woodland Trust has set up a campaign to recycle our cards. For further details visit their website at [www.woodland-trust.org.uk/recycling](http://www.woodland-trust.org.uk/recycling)
21. BELLS - making a joyful sound; calling us to worship.
22. MUSIC - for Christmas music. The Wild Goose Worship Group of the Iona Community have written a number of songs for Christmas that reflect on some of the issues that come up at Christmas - refugees and asylum seekers; poverty; homelessness; strangers;

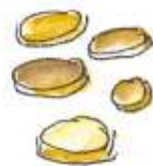
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<sup>2</sup> Bible references - Matthew 26:7-13; Mark 12:15-17; Luke 21:2-4; John 2:15-17.

etc. They have produced CD's and DVD's of their Christmas music - see [www.iona.org.uk](http://www.iona.org.uk)

23. ADVENT LOG - expresses the close bond between faith and the life of nature. The log is always long enough to hold four Advent candles. See the Advent Calendar information in this section for instructions.

24. CALENDAR - reminding us that the season of advent is about waiting and that the date we remember the birth of Jesus is the 25<sup>th</sup> December.



# Advent Calendar

3	1	14	10
21	5	4	11
7	9	16	6
8	18	19	2
17	23	20	12
13	24	22	15

## ACTIVITIES

For leaders for use with Advent Calendar

### 1. JESSE TREE (Isaiah 11:1-2) (Day 2)

The Gospel of Matthew begins with the ancestry of Jesus and goes right back to Abraham. A 'Jesse Tree' takes its name from one of Jesus' ancestors Jesse, from whose roots his son, King David sprang. In Isaiah's time it looked as if that tree had been felled but Isaiah hints of a wonderful hope - 'A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse.'



The Traditional Jesse Tree looks at some of the important stories in the history of Jesus' people, right back to the Creation story, one story for each of the days from the first Sunday in Advent until Christmas Day.

### 2. CHRISTINGLE (Day 12)



The Christingle service is very old. It means 'Christ light' and is a celebration of the coming of Christ the light into the world. In the service gifts of money are presented for charity and Christingles are received. To make a Christingle, make a hole in the top of an orange for a candle. Fasten a band of red flame-proof paper or fabric round the middle of the orange, Add four

cocktail sticks holding fruits such as raisins or glace cherries. The orange stands for the world, the candle for Jesus the light of the world, red for the blood of Christ shed on the cross, four cocktail sticks for the four seasons and fruits for the fruits of the earth.

### 3. SANTA CLAUS (Day 13)

On December 6<sup>th</sup> many Christians commemorate Saint Nicholas the kindly bishop of Myra in Lycia, (now part of Turkey), who died in the fourth century. Although little is known of his life, there are many legends. One of the legends tells of how Nicholas responded to the Gospel story of Jesus who became poor and taught his followers that it was more blessed to give than to receive. Nicholas gave surprise gifts to those who were very poor from the donations he received from wealthy friends. Santa Claus is a shortened version of 'Saint Nicholas' and the tradition of gift giving have their basis in him. Discuss within your class/group attitudes to over-spending at Christmas and the images of 'Santa' that they see on Christmas programmes, cards and ads on television. How do they compare with this story? Collect some old Christmas cards and use the cartoons in, 'Images of Christmas.' You will need to have the support of parents and other colleagues in these discussions of course, and the sense of generosity, justice and fair play expressed by year 4 children during the pilot revealed much understanding of these issues.



### 4. GIFTS (Day 14)

Five gifts that don't cost a penny

- The gift of listening to those who live alone; or those who have been hurt.
- The gift of signs of affection - a hug or a word of encouragement.
- The gift of a thought/prayer or a written message of encouragement.
- The gift of being cheerful instead of complaining or feeling sorry for yourself.
- The gift of time to be with someone who needs you.



## 5. HOLLY AND IVY (Day 17)

The writer of this traditional English Carol drew some parallels between the characteristics of the various parts of the holly and the reasons we celebrate Christmas.



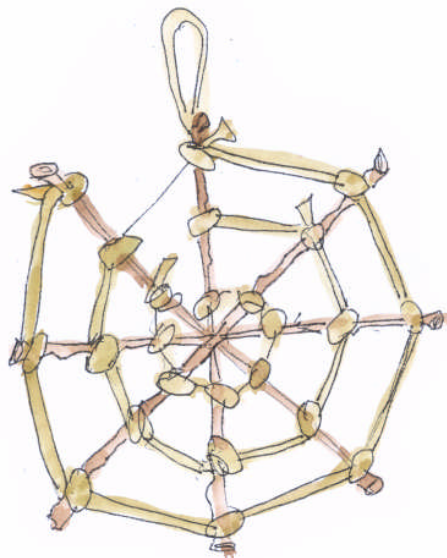
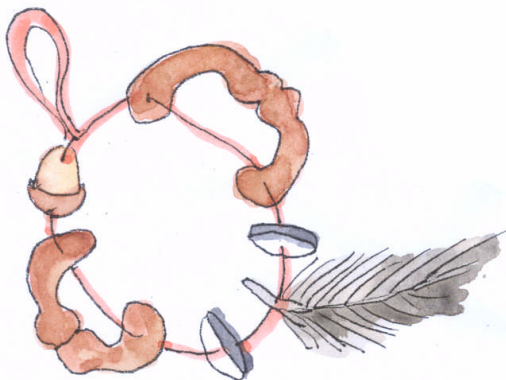
### 1. The Holly and the Ivy

Now both are full well grown,  
Of all the trees that are in the wood  
The holly bears the crown.

2. The holly bears a blossom As white as lily flower And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ To be our sweet saviour.	3. The holly bears a berry As red as any blood And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ To do poor sinners good.
4. The holly bears a prickle As sharp as any thorn And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ On Christmas day in the morn.	5. The holly bears a bark As bitter as any gall And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ For to redeem us all.

## 6. CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS (Day 19)

Think about decorating a tree in the school grounds for your Christmas tree. Christmas decorations can be made from natural materials by weaving grass and twigs for example.



The 'angel' can be made by stringing together a cone, berries, nutshells, a seed and a leaf.



Decorations can also double-up as food for the birds. Use half a coconut or orange shell. Make a hole at the top for the string, tying a knot on the inside. Fill it with bird cake.



#### BIRD CAKE RECIPE

- Mix together 3-heaped tablespoonfuls of lard, a tablespoonful of birdseed, some raw peanuts, raisins and grated cheese. The lard will need to be pliable so take it out of the fridge for a while to warm up before using it.
- Squeeze the mixture together and press it into the coconut/orange.
- Chill it in the fridge until hard, and then hang it on the tree.

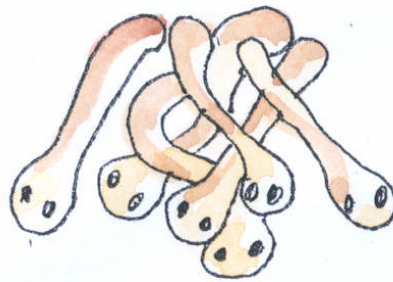
#### KEBABS

- Use a large needle and some strong thread.
- String together some monkey nuts in their shells, seeds and cheese.
- Make a loop at the top and hang on the tree



## CRUMBLE PASTRY MAGGOTS

- You will need some short crust pastry, which you can make by rubbing together 4 ounces of flour and 2 ounces of fat (margarine).
- When your mixture looks like breadcrumbs and feels dry, add a teaspoonful of water and knead it into dough.
- Roll the pastry into 2 inch or 6-cm long maggots and give them a couple of raisin eyes.
- Tie them together and hang them from the tree.



## 7. ADVENT LOG (Day 23)



The Advent log (or wreath) serves as a practical receptacle for the Advent candles and expresses in yet another way the close bond between faith and the life of nature. Some people find it meaningful to preserve the Advent log from year to year. If using a wreath, a taller Christ candle is placed in the centre, if using a log, it is placed in the middle.

- Find a log in the woods.
- Saw off each end so the log is about 1 foot long.
- Saw a piece off the bottom of the log so it doesn't roll about.
- Drill four holes for the Advent candles, and if you wish, a fifth hole in the middle for the Christ candle.
- Light one candle on the first Sunday in Advent, two on the second, three on the third and all four on the fourth. Light the four Advent candles and the Christ candle on Christmas Day.

## CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS AND CUSTOMS - LEADER'S NOTES

### CUSTOMS

Because Christmas is celebrated throughout the world wherever there are Christian people, families living in different countries do different things according to the custom in that land.

In the Netherlands, children fill wooden shoes with sweets and exchange gifts on December 6<sup>th</sup>

In Sweden a special star with an electric light in it called an Advent star is put up in a window.

In Australia, they might celebrate Christmas by eating cold turkey and salad in the garden in the sun, or having a barbeque on the beach.

In Armenia, they eat fried and boiled spinach on Christmas Eve.

In Germany, four cakes are made and eaten on the four Sundays in Advent.

In Alaska the most obvious lights are those from the stars because the sun is hardly seen in the winter so during Christmas week children carrying lanterns take a star made of coloured paper from door-to-door.

In Italy, some people fast on Christmas Eve.

In Mexico, each night leading up to Christmas Eve, the people celebrate 'Posadas' (meaning 'lodgings') with a procession around their villages. Dressed as Mary and Joseph or carrying Nativity figures, they knock at every door seeking lodging. When a door opens, they enter to a party where a 'Piñata' or container of sweets is broken as part of the entertainment. The 'Piñata' is made from wire frames, papier-mache, paint and decorations and sometimes made in the shape of animals. On Christmas Eve after the midnight service bonfires are lit and fireworks let off.

In India, some Christians have transferred aspects of the Hindu festival of Diwali to the celebration of Christmas. Advent begins for them on 25<sup>th</sup> November and from sunset on that day lamps are kept alight every evening until Christmas Eve when there is a midnight service. All Christmas decorations are removed on 8<sup>th</sup> January, the day people remember Jesus being taken to the Temple.

Customs can also vary from family to family within countries. Encourage the children to talk about their customs.

What do they do during Advent or on Christmas Day?

# Christmas Cartoons





