

A Family Guide to the Seasons

O God, by the leading of a star you manifested your only Son to the Peoples of the earth: Lead us, who know you now by faith, to your presence, where we may see your glory face to face; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

– Book of Common Prayer

Scriptures

Hebrew Bible

Isaiah 60:1-6

Psalms

Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14

New Testament

Ephesians 3:1-12

Gospel

Matthew 2:1-12

Color

White

Music

“We Three Kings”

*We three kings of Orient are;
Bearing gifts we traverse afar,
Field and fountain, moor and mountain,
Following yonder star.*

*O star of wonder, star of light,
Star with royal beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect light.*

Keeping Advent & Christmas

A Family Guide to the Seasons

2023-2024



KeepingAdvent.com™

Saturday, January 6, 2024

Epiphany

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Today is Epiphany, when we commemorate the Magi's arrival and adoration of Jesus. It's the day that Christ was revealed to the Gentiles.

Epiphany is the culmination of our journey through the seasons: from the longing of Advent, to the jubilation of Christmas, and now a celebration of our unity in Jesus the Messiah. Epiphany reminds us that the good news of the Gospel is for everyone – rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female – because we “are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). As Peter told the crowd at Pentecost, “the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39).

Practices

Host an Epiphany party, and have guests bring dishes from all over the world. Serve Kings Cake, and if you hide a trinket inside of it, the guest who finds it must host next year's party.

Prayers

Radiant Morning Star, you are both guidance and mystery. Visit our rest with disturbing dreams, and our journeys with strange companions. Grace us with the hospitality to open our hearts and homes to visitors filled with unfamiliar wisdom bearing profound and unusual gifts. Amen.

– Revised Common Lectionary

Monday, January 1, 2024

Feast of the Holy Name / New Year's Day

Advent and Christmas

Eight days after His birth, Jesus was circumcised and given His name, according to the law of Moses. This event is commemorated today, on the eighth day of Christmas, as the Feast of the Holy Name.

Advent and Christmas are distinct seasons of the Christian Calendar. The Calendar opens with Advent, marking the Church's new year, and gives way to Christmas. Advent is a season of *preparation*, Christmas is a season of *celebration*.

Practices

Today also marks the beginning of the secular new year. Use January 1 to reminisce about old times and plan fun days in the year ahead. Thank God for his blessings, and do as Mary did: "treasuring up all these things, pondering them in [your] heart" (Luke 2:19).

Advent is about expectancy, hope, and repentance. In this season, we look ahead to Christ's Second Coming even as we prepare to celebrate His birth two thousand years ago. Christmas is a time of merriment and joy, when we gather with friends and family, share meals, give gifts, and rejoice that our Redeemer has come.

Prayer

O God of ancient blessing, your servant Mary pondered in her heart the treasured words spoken about her Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Prepare our hearts to receive his Spirit, that our tongues may confess him Lord. Amen.

Together, these seasons are a yearly reminder that God keeps His promises, that just as the Messiah came once to redeem, He will come again to renew and restore all things.

– Revised Common Lectionary

This book, *A Family Guide to the Seasons*, will help you and your family journey through Advent and Christmas with Christ-centered expectancy and joy. It is arranged chronologically, starting with the First Sunday of Advent and ending with Epiphany, and highlights the practices, prayers, Bible readings, and feastdays for the seasons.

Scriptures

| | |
|----------------------|-----------------|
| <i>Hebrew Bible</i> | Numbers 6:22-27 |
| <i>Psalms</i> | Psalms 8 |
| <i>New Testament</i> | Galatians 4:4-7 |
| <i>Gospel</i> | Luke 2:15-21 |

A Family Guide to the Seasons is a companion to our website KeepingAdvent.com. We hope it will enrich and deepen your experience of the holidays. We wish you and your family a blessed Advent and a very merry Christmas.

Sunday, December 3, 2023

First Sunday of Advent

Advent begins, and with it, a new Church Year. It is right that Advent opens the Church Year. Just as Luke's Gospel begins with the birth of John the Baptist, the one who would "prepare the way" for the Messiah, so the Church's yearly cycle begins with the preparatory rhythms of Advent.

Practices

On this day and throughout this week, light the first candle of your Advent wreath. Traditionally, the candle is lit for the evening meal. Say a prayer, read a seasonally appropriate Scripture, and sing a hymn.

Begin your Advent calendar. Most Advent calendars have 24 compartments. In 2022, Advent is 28 days long (November 27-December 24), so you may want to wait and begin your Advent calendar on December 1.

Read nightly from an Advent devotional for adults or children. Find suggestions and book reviews at KeepingAdvent.com.

Prayers

Unexpected God, your advent alarms us. Wake us from drowsy worship, from the sleep that neglects love, and the sedative of misdirected frenzy. Awaken us now to your coming, and bend our angers into your peace. Amen.

– Revised Common Lectionary

Sunday, December 31, 2023

First Sunday of Christmas

Today is the first Sunday after Christmas Day. This is a day for rejoicing in the truth that God sent His Son Jesus into the world to redeem and call a people to Himself, and that this Jesus is now Lord over all creation.

Scriptures (Year B)

| | |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Hebrew Bible</i> | Isaiah 61:10-62:3 |
| <i>Psalms</i> | Psalms 148 |
| <i>New Testament</i> | Galatians 4:4-7 |
| <i>Gospel</i> | Luke 2:22-40 |

Prayer

God of glory, you have given us a new name and robed us in salvation. May we like Anna find our home in your presence, and like Simeon recognize Jesus as the Christ, so that, in joy and thanksgiving at becoming your children, we may join with all creation to sing your praise. Amen.

– Revised Common Lectionary

Music

"All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name"

All hail the power of Jesus' name!

Let angels prostrate fall.

Bring forth the royal diadem,

And crown him Lord of all.

Thursday, December 28, 2023*Feastday of the Holy Innocents*

Today we remember the children of Bethlehem so cruelly murdered by an evil tyrant desperately clinging to power. This is a grim day amidst the celebrations of Christmas, when death and birth stand side by side. It's there to remind us, as Dorothy Day said, of "the closeness of joy and sorrow."

Evil, injustice, and death still stalk our world. Mark this day by praying for victims of abuse, violence, and war – innocent lives snuffed out by terrorists, women trapped in domestic violence, families fleeing tyranny. Remember the promises that a redeeming God spoke to the prophet Jeremiah:

See, I am going to ... gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here. With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back.... Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.

(Jeremiah 31:7-14.) And remember the great hope of those who are in Christ Jesus: we look for the resurrection of the dead, for the New Creation, when "the last enemy to be destroyed is death" itself (1 Corinthians 15:26).

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

– Book of Common Prayer

Scriptures (Year B)

| | |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Hebrew Bible</i> | Isaiah 64:1-9 |
| <i>Psalms</i> | Psalms 80:1-7, 17-19 |
| <i>New Testament</i> | 1 Corinthians 1:3-9 |
| <i>Gospel</i> | Mark 13:24-37 |

Colors

Purple (Violet) or Royal Blue

Themes

Hope, Salvation, Prophecy, Judgment

Music

"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"

*O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

Wednesday, December 6, 2023

Feastday of St. Nicholas

A feastday is a special day for remembering or celebrating a particular event or person. On December 6, we remember St. Nicholas, the fourth-century bishop whose generosity to the poor helped inspire our modern tradition of gift-giving.

Practices

Today is a wonderful opportunity to learn and teach about the real-life generosity and Christlike example of St. Nicholas. Encourage your children to do a kind deed – a “Nicholas deed” – for someone else today. Make and deliver treats or homemade gifts to friends and family. Find more ideas at KeepingAdvent.com.

Prayer

Almighty and most merciful God, we remember before you all poor and neglected persons whom it would be easy for us to forget: the homeless and the destitute, the old and the sick, and all who have none to care for them. Help us to heal those who are broken in body or spirit, and to turn their sorrow into joy. Grant this, Father, for the love of your Son, who for our sake became poor, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

– Book of Common Prayer

Wednesday, December 27, 2023

Feastday of St. John

Today we celebrate the life and example of John, the beloved disciple. St. John did not die a martyr. According to tradition, he lived a long life and cared for Mary, the mother of Jesus, in her latter years.

Practices

St. John gave us a simple yet profound teaching: “Beloved, let us love one another” (1 John 4:7). It’s customary on this day to drink a cup of mulled cider or wine called *wassail* (the word literally means “be healthy”). Thank God for the blessings of life and health, and drink a toast to one another in Christlike love. Find a recipe for wassail at KeepingAdvent.com.

Prayer

God of all ages, in the birth of Christ your boundless love for your people shattered the power of darkness. Be born in us with that same love and light, that our song may blend with all the choirs of heaven and earth to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

– Revised Common Lectionary

Music

“Wassail Song”

Here we come a-wassailing

Among the leaves so green . . .

Love and joy come to you

Tuesday, December 26, 2023

Feastday of St. Stephen

Today we remember St. Stephen of Acts 6-7. Stephen was the first deacon, one of seven leaders chosen to care for the poor in the early Jerusalem church. He was also the first Christian martyr.

Practices

It's customary on this day to serve others, especially those who may be overlooked or neglected, just as St. Stephen did. Mark this day by giving to the needy, volunteering with church or charity, and showing hospitality to neighbors.

Prayer

Almighty and most merciful God, we remember before you all poor and neglected persons whom it would be easy for us to forget: the homeless and the destitute, the old and the sick, and all who have none to care for them. Help us to heal those who are broken in body or spirit, and to turn their sorrow into joy. Grant this, Father, for the love of your Son, who for our sake became poor, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

– Book of Common Prayer

Music

“Good King Wenceslas”

*Therefore, Christian men, be sure
While God's gifts possessing,
You who now will bless the poor
Shall yourselves find blessing.*

Sunday, December 10, 2023

Second Sunday of Advent

The rhythms of Advent are spiritual tutors, teaching us to think, speak, and live *watchfully*. In lighting the candles of the Advent wreath, we keep a nightly vigil, waiting for the long-expected Messiah.

Practices

On this day and throughout this week, light the first and second candles of your Advent wreath. Say a prayer, read a Scripture, sing a hymn. Continue your Advent calendar and devotional.

Prayers

Laboring God, with axe and winnowing fork you clear a holy space where hurt and destruction have no place, and a little child holds sway. Clear our lives of hatred and despair, sow seeds of joy and peace, that shoots of hope may spring forth and we may live in harmony with one another. Amen.

– Revised Common Lectionary

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

– Book of Common Prayer

Scriptures (Year B)

| | |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| <i>Hebrew Bible</i> | Isaiah 40:1-11 |
| <i>Psalms</i> | Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13 |
| <i>New Testament</i> | 2 Peter 3:8-15a |
| <i>Gospel</i> | Mark 1:1-8 |

Colors

Purple (Violet) or Royal Blue

Themes

Peace, Repentance, Justice

Music

“Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus”

*Come, thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art;
Dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.*

in the eternal, in that same child, that we might join shepherds and all the heavenly host in praising the coming of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

– Revised Common Lectionary

O God, you make us glad by the yearly festival of the birth of your only Son Jesus Christ: Grant that we, who joyfully receive him as our Redeemer, may with sure confidence behold him when he comes to be our Judge; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

– Book of Common Prayer

Scriptures

| | |
|----------------------|---------------|
| <i>Hebrew Bible</i> | Isaiah 9:2-7 |
| <i>Psalms</i> | Psalm 96 |
| <i>New Testament</i> | Titus 2:11-14 |
| <i>Gospel</i> | Luke 2:1-14 |

Colors

White or Gold

Music

“Once in Royal David's City”

*Once in royal David's city stood a lowly cattle shed,
Where a mother laid her baby in a manger for his bed:
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ, her little child.*

Monday, December 25, 2023

Christmas Day

Christmas is here! Hope has turned to joy. The ache of Christ's absence has become the peace of His presence. The Savior has come. It's time to celebrate!

Christmas is a joyous festival – not a single day, but twelve. This season commemorates one of the most important events in human history: the entry of God into the world He made. We can't grasp the significance of this event in a single day. Having prepared our hearts through Advent, we need time to rejoice and reflect.

Practices

Christmas is a time for merriment and good old-fashioned fun. It's less rhythm and more revelry. Gather with friends and family, throw a party, share meals, give gifts, sing carols, play games. It's hard to go wrong at Christmastime.

If your Advent wreath has a Christ candle, light all five candles of the wreath each night of the Christmas season. Put candles in your windows. Keep up your strings of lights. Light is a reminder of our hope fulfilled, that Christ has come to drive out darkness.

Prayers

O Holy One, heavenly angels spoke to earthly shepherds and eternity entered time in the child of Bethlehem. Through the telling of the Christmas story, let our temporal lives be caught up

Wednesday, December 13, 2023

Feastday of St. Lucy

Today we remember St. Lucy, a young Christian woman who lived in Sicily during the fourth century. In a time when many Christians were persecuted for their faith, Lucy ("light") brought food to poor Christians hiding in the catacombs. To light her way while keeping her hands free to carry food, she fashioned a candle-lit wreath for her head. She was later martyred for her faith.

Practices

By tradition, today is a day for ginger snaps, cinnamon rolls, and saffron buns. It's also a day to learn and teach about a compassionate yet fearless young woman who paid the ultimate price for her faith. Learn more (and find recipes) at KeepingAdvent.com.

Prayer

God of joy and exultation, you strengthen what is weak; you enrich the poor and give hope to those who live in fear. Look upon our needs this day. Make us grateful for the good news of salvation and keep us faithful in your service until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives for ever and ever. Amen.

– Revised Common Lectionary

Sunday, December 17, 2023*Third Sunday of Advent*

In Advent, we have double vision. As we prepare our hearts for the celebration of the Messiah's birth two thousand years ago, we also look ahead to the end of days when He will come again.

While the previous two weeks of Advent focused on the Last Days, judgment, and repentance, today marks a turning point. Today is *Gaudete* Sunday – the Sunday of Joy. We're halfway through Advent. We remain quietly watchful, but our hearts are lighter because Christmas is near.

Practices

On this day and throughout this week, light three candles of your Advent wreath. In wreaths with purple or blue candles, the third candle is often rose (pink) to signify the Sunday of Joy.

As you begin your joyful preparations for Christmas, consider waiting until today to start Christmas caroling and decorating the house.

Prayers

God of hope, you call us home from the exile of selfish oppression to the freedom of justice, the balm of healing, and the joy of sharing. Make us strong to join you in your holy work, as friends of strangers and victims, companions of those whom others shun, and as the happiness of those whose hearts are broken. We make our prayer through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

– Revised Common Lectionary

Scriptures (Year B)

| | |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Hebrew Bible</i> | 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16 |
| <i>Psalms</i> | Psalms 89:1-4, 19-26 |
| <i>New Testament</i> | Romans 16:25-27 |
| <i>Gospel</i> | Luke 1:26-38 |

Colors

Purple (Violet) or Royal Blue

Themes

Love, God-with-us, Restoration, Fulfillment

Music

“Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates”
*Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates;
 Behold, the King of glory waits;
 The King of kings is drawing near;
 The Savior of the world is here!*

Sunday, December 24, 2023*Fourth Sunday of Advent*

The last week of Advent is like early dawn, when the sky glows a deep blue and the air seems restless. Night is passing. Light is on its way. The fast of Advent is drawing to a close. The great feast of Christmas is almost here!

This year, the final “week” of Advent is only a day, and that day is also Christmas Eve.

Practices

Light all four candles of your Advent wreath. Say a prayer, read a Scripture, sing a hymn. Continue your Advent calendar and devotional.

Prayers

O God of Elizabeth and Mary, you visited your servants with news of the world’s redemption in the coming of the Savior. Make our hearts leap with joy, and fill our mouths with songs of praise, that we may announce glad tidings of peace, and welcome the Christ in our midst. Amen.

– Revised Common Lectionary

Purify our conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in us a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

– Book of Common Prayer

Stir up your power, O Lord, and with great might come among us; and, because we are sorely hindered by our sins, let your bountiful grace and mercy speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and forever. Amen.

– Book of Common Prayer

Scriptures (Year B)

| | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Hebrew Bible</i> | Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 |
| <i>Psalms</i> | Psalms 126 |
| <i>New Testament</i> | 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 |
| <i>Gospel</i> | John 1:6-8, 19-28 |

Colors

Purple (Violet), Royal Blue, and Rose (Pink)

Themes

Joy, Mercy, Redemption, Steadfast Faith

Music“People Look East”

*People, look east. The time is near
Of the crowning of the year.
Make your house fair as you are able,
Trim the hearth and set the table.
People, look east and sing today:
Love, the guest, is on the way.*

Antiphons: *December 17 also marks the beginning of the “O Antiphons.” See below.*

Sunday, December 17, 2023

Beginning of the “O Antiphons”

Among the richest treasures of Advent are the seven “O Antiphons,” a series of ancient verses that use prophecy and biblical imagery to express our ever-present longing for the Messiah. The Antiphons serve as the “**heralds of Christmas**,” building a sense of expectation as Christmas approaches. A different Antiphon is sung or chanted each of the seven nights leading up to Christmas.

December 17

O Wisdom, coming forth from the mouth of the Most High, reaching from one end to the other mightily, and sweetly ordering all things: Come and teach us the way of prudence.

December 18

O Adonai, and leader of the House of Israel, who appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush and gave him the law on Sinai: Come and redeem us with an outstretched arm.

December 19

O Root of Jesse, standing as a sign among the peoples; before you kings will shut their mouths, to you the nations will make their prayer: Come and deliver us, and delay no longer.

December 20

O Key of David and scepter of the House of Israel; you open and no one can shut; you shut and no one can open: Come and lead the prisoners from the prison house, those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.

December 21

O Morning Star, splendor of light eternal and sun of righteousness: Come and enlighten those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.

December 22

O King of the nations, and their desire, the cornerstone making both one: Come and save the human race, which you fashioned from clay.

December 23

O Emmanuel, our King and our lawgiver, the hope of the nations and their Savior: Come and save us, O Lord our God.

* * *

You can incorporate the Antiphons into your Advent activities or simply enjoy their poetic riches. Learn more and listen to the Antiphons at KeepingAdvent.com.