

The O Antiphons
as translated by J. M. Neale and sung to the tune,
Veni Veni Emmanuel.

Dec 17 O come, Thou Wisdom from on high,
Who orderest all things mightily;
To us the path of knowledge show,
And teach us in her ways to go.
Refrain: Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

Dec 18 O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save,
And give them victory over the grave. [Refrain]

Dec 19 O come, Thou Day-spring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight. [Refrain]

Dec 20 O come, Thou Key of David, come,
And open wide our heavenly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery. [Refrain]

Dec 21 O come, O come, great Lord of might,
Who to Thy tribes on Sinai's height
In ancient times once gave the law
In cloud and majesty and awe. [Refrain]

Dec 22 O come, Thou Root of Jesse's tree,
An ensign of Thy people be;
Before Thee rulers silent fall;
All peoples on Thy mercy call. [Refrain]

Dec 23 O come, Desire of nations, bind
In one the hearts of all mankind;
Bid Thou our sad divisions cease,
And be Thyself our King of Peace. [Refrain]

Dec 24 1. O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear. [Refrain]

An Introduction for Advent Continued...

It took several Christmas seasons before we understood the connection between Christmas shopping and "Silent Night" and the other carols blaring from loudspeakers in these pre-Christmas weeks. And even now that we do understand, it still disturbs us greatly. These weeks before Christmas, known as the weeks of Advent, are meant to be spent in expectation and waiting. This is the season for Advent songs--those age-old hymns of longing and waiting; "Silent Night" should be sung for the first time on Christmas Eve. We found that hardly anybody knows any Advent songs. And we were startled by something else soon after Christmas, Christmas trees and decorations vanish from the show windows to be replaced by New Year's advertisements. On our concert trips across the country we also saw that the lighted Christmas trees disappear from homes and front yards and no one thinks to sing a carol as late as January 2nd. This was all very strange to us, for we were used to the old-world Christmas, which was altogether different but which we determined to celebrate now in our new country.

- Maria Augusta Trapp

A Brief History of how Advent Developed...

The development of Advent is extremely complex and layered. The need to prepare for the feast of the Christmas Liturgy has been part of the Church since the early generations. The formation of Advent in the West as a formal time of preparation likely first began in France, then spread to England, Italy, Spain and Germany.

We find the earliest documentation of any detail on Advent as a time of preparation and penance to be from St. Perpetuus in the late fifth century. St. Perpetuus declared a fast to be held three times a week. There is no way to determine if he was extending an already established custom, or if he was putting into a place this discipline for the first time.

The practice of preparation and penance during the time of "coming", of Advent, varied for the next several hundred years. At times strict fasting for 40 days in places, Advent length varied from 4 Sundays in places, 5 Sundays in other regions and times, and 6 Sundays still today in the Ambrosian rite. Also, the observance varied at times between religious and the laity. At one point it became a sad practice that only religious were holding penitential practices during Advent.

St. Gregory instituted the form of Advent that is still used today, but the practice of penance by the laity in Advent once again seems to be in need of attention.

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How can we as a family slow down a little this Advent?

Do we need to give more attention to Advent in our home? If so, what are some steps we might take?

What Advent traditions, if any, did you grow up with?

Did you know that most countries have small differences of emphasis during the Advent and Christmas seasons?

Some give gifts primarily on the Feast of St. Nicolas, others on the Feast of Christmas, and others on the Feast of the Epiphany.

Making the Advent Wreath

1. Purchase a metal or plastic Advent Wreath frame from a hobby store. You can also use heavy wire.
2. Go to a Christmas tree seller (not to buy a Christmas tree yet!) and ask for any evergreen trimmings. They may even give them away.
3. Get twine from any hardware store.
4. You also need three purple and one rose candle.
5. Now cut the evergreen to workable strips and use the twine to fix the evergreen to the frame.
6. You're ready to go! Place on dinner table and start preparing for Christ's coming!

The O' Antiphons - An introduction by Abbot Gueranger, O.S.B.

THE Church enters to-day on the seven days which precede the Vigil of Christmas, and which are known in the liturgy under the name of the *Greater Ferias*. The ordinary of the Advent Office becomes more solemn; the antiphons of the psalms, both for Lauds and the Hours of the day, are proper, and allude expressly to the great coming. Every day, at Vespers, is sung a solemn antiphon, consisting of a fervent prayer to the Messiah, whom it addresses by one of the titles given Him in the sacred Scriptures.

In the Roman Church, there are seven of these antiphons, one for each of the greater ferias. They are commonly called the O's of Advent, because they all begin with that interjection. In other Churches, during the middle ages, two more were added to these seven; one to our blessed Lady, *O Virgo virginum*; and the other to the angel Gabriel, *O Gabriel*; or to St. Thomas the apostle, whose feast comes during the greater ferias; it began *O Thorna Didjme*.¹ There were even Churches where twelve great antiphons were sung; that is, besides the nine we have just mentioned, *O Rex Pacifice* to our Lord, *O mundi Domina* to our Lady, and *O Hierusalem* to the city of the people of God.

The canonical Hour of Vespers has been selected as the most appropriate time for this solemn supplication to our Saviour, because, as the Church sings in one of her hymns, it was in the evening of the world (*vergente mundi vespere*) that the Messiah came amongst us. These antiphons are sung at the Magnificat, to show us that the Saviour whom we expect is to come to us by Mary. They are sung twice, once before and once after the canticle, as on double feasts, and this to show their great solemnity. In some Churches it was formerly the practice to sing them thrice; that is, before the canticle, before the *Gloria Patri*, and after the *Sicut erat*. Lastly, these admirable antiphons, which contain the whole pith of the Advent liturgy, are accompanied by a chant replete with melodious gravity, and by ceremonies of great expressiveness, though, in these latter, there is no uniform practice followed. Let us enter into the spirit of the Church; let us reflect on the great day which is coming; that thus we may take, our share in these the last and most earnest solicitations of the Church imploring her Spouse to come, to which He at length yields.

Appendix

Keeping the lights out

Here's another great tradition we have heard of from our friends. At dinner time they eat only by the light of the Advent Wreath candles. This is quite an inconvenient situation for so many reasons, but it does truly force you to feel an exterior need for light. This lack of physical light is a small act of mortification that should offer moments of great anticipation and desire for Christ in our lives. This also offers time for the children to ask good questions about the darkness and light. What a great opportunity at dinner to discuss our Lord, Jesus Christ. The husband and wife then continue the evening with no light other than candles where they together read a spiritual book fitting for the season.

Acts of Charity

If your small children are having a hard time understanding the penitential reality of Advent, perhaps help explain to them by way of acts of charity. Most small children do not grasp such an abstract idea of redemptive suffering or the definition of sin. Without neglecting family sacrifices during Advent, help your child make acts of charity during Advent too. This may include doing extra chores without being asked, letting a sibling pick the games to be played, or eating some food item at dinner they do not like without complaining. Try starting broad in teaching your children about penance by beginning with acts of charity. As they grow a bit older (the age of reason) they will begin to grasp the meaning of mortification, penance, and sacrifice more.

Try to avoid Parties

This can be very difficult, but try to avoid Christmas parties during Advent. This can be difficult depending on work or friend circumstances, but Advent in our own families, while being liturgical in nature and rhythm, should penetrate into our community. Try to plant seeds with friends and family to have Christmas parties during Christmas.

Puppet Show

On the feast of St. Nicolas, get together with other families and have a puppet show about St. Nicholas. Do a little research on St. Nicholas, keep in mind the age of your children, and prepare a simple show about the Saint Bishop of Myra. If your children are older, have then put on a play for the family.

So, how can we make Advent meaningful in our Home?

Truly celebrating the Advent Liturgical Season, especially in a penitential manner, is very counter-cultural today. So, how can we make Advent meaningful in our home in the days of mass advertisement and marketing in place of the fulcrum of history, the celebration of the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ? Honestly, it is not an easy thing to do! However, with the proper resources and catechesis about how to make Advent a time to prepare for the Christmas Season, it becomes very doable!

Many of us may have grown up putting up the Christmas tree the weekend after Thanksgiving Day, then hanging lights outside with our father soon after that, and begin to listen to Christmas music as soon as it hit the radio stations. Advent became Christmas; and Christmas became...well, nothing except waiting for the Super Bowl in January (now Feb). The Epiphany is not in most families' vocabulary. And as Maria Augusta Trapp stated in the opening remarks of this booklet, the tree is outside on December 26. Some of us may celebrate Advent very much like this, with the exceptions of much more prayer and attention to the faith. Yet, where is Advent? We must ask this important question. It's time to draw up a battle plan of how to make Advent...Advent, and Christmas...Christmas. Don't be overwhelmed! We will give you several places to begin and encourage small steps as opposed to a complete 180 degree turn.

A good resource to ponder is Maria Trapp's book, "Around the Year with the Trapp Family", as a primary resource for ideas to truly celebrate Advent. In the following pages, we hope to pass along some of these traditions and others to assist you in developing your 'Advent traditions' within the life of the Church. These ideas are not necessary to start all at once. In fact, it may be best to take two or three Advent's to incorporate all the new traditions into your family's preparation for Christmas. Below is a short list of great ideas to incorporate into your family.

1. Advent Wreath
2. Preparing the manger for Jesus
3. Jesse Tree
4. Feast of St. Nicolas
5. Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe
6. Feast of St. Lucy
7. Gaudete Sunday
8. Getting a Christmas Tree
9. O' Antiphons
10. Appendix



Preparing and using the Advent Wreath

“It’s round and it’s made of evergreen, and this is all that is necessary... An Advent wreath is round as a symbol of God’s mercy of which every season of Advent is a new reminder; and it has to be made of evergreens to symbolize God’s ‘everlastingness’”

“One more thing has to be added: a tall, thick candle, the Advent candle, as a symbol of Him Whom we call ‘the Light of the World. During these weeks of Advent it will be the only light for the family evening prayer. Its feeble light is the symbol and reminder of mankind’s state of spiritual darkness during Advent”

— Maria Augusta Trapp

The Advent Wreath is the best first step to take to celebrate Advent. Gather the prayers that correlate with the weeks of Advent and make the lighting of the candle(s) and recitation of the weekly prayer a part of dinner prayers. It’s amazing how the traditions of Advent, like the Wreath, will quickly become part your family routine.

The Advent Wreath is not simply something to do, but something to look forward to! The candle(s) that is lit seems to immediately focus our hearts on our need for the coming of Christ into our lives. Without Him, we are nothing. Without Him, where is our hope? He is the Light of World and this candle prepares the way for Him to enter into our home again in a special way on Christmas Eve night.

So, where do you get your wreath? Well, you can look in the big stores, or in the small Catholic stores. And what if you can’t seem to find the right Advent Wreath! We suggest that you make one. You may think, “I am a busy guy, where am I going to find the time to make a wreath, just buy a fake one.” Don’t do that! Making an Advent Wreath is fast, easy, and a great family activity!

Look in the appendix for directions on making an Advent Wreath.

Meaning of the Advent Wreath

Four Candles

The four Sundays of Advent

Purple Candles

A reminder of the need to be penitential during Advent

Rose Candle

A reminder that Christmas is close and that our joy should be waiting to burst forth from us

Circle Shape and Greens

God is eternal, with no beginning and no end. He is unchanging



Instructions for making an Advent wreath can be found in the Appendix.

O’ Antiphons

December 17: O Sapientia (December 17) O Wisdom
Isaiah 11:2-3; 28:29

O Come, Thou Wisdom, from on high,
and order all things far and nigh;
to us the path of knowledge show,
and teach us in her ways to go.

December 18: O Adonai (December 18) O Adonai or O Lord and Ruler
Isaiah 11:4-5; 33:22

O Come, O Come, Thou Lord of might,
who to thy tribes on Sinai’s height
in ancient times didst give the law,
in cloud, and majesty, and awe.

December 19: O Radix Jesse (December 19) O Root of Jesse
Isaiah 11:1, 10; Micah 5:1; Romans 15:8-13; Rev 5:1-5

O Come, Thou Rod of Jesse’s stem,
from ev’ry foe deliver them
that trust Thy mighty power to save,
and give them vict’ry o’er the grave.

December 20: O Clavis David (December 20) O Key of David
Isaiah 22:22; 9:6

O Come, Thou Key of David, come,
and open wide our heav’nly home,
make safe the way that leads on high,
that we no more have cause to sigh.

December 21: O Oriens (December 21) O Rising Dawn
Isaiah 9:2

O Come, Thou Dayspring from on high,
and cheer us by thy drawing nigh;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night
and death’s dark shadow put to flight.

December 22: O Rex Gentium (December 22) O King of the Gentiles
Isaiah 9:7; 2:4

O Come, Desire of the nations, bind
in one the hearts of all mankind;
bid every strife and quarrel cease
and fill the world with heaven’s peace.

December 23: O Emmanuel (December 23) O Emmanuel
Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,
and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.



For ideas in making the O’ Antiphons part of your family prayer see the Appendix.

Blessing of the Christmas Tree

All make the sign of the cross as the head of the home says: Blessed be the name of the Lord.

All reply: Now and for ever.

Read one of the following from your Bible:

Titus 3:4-7

Genesis 2:4-9

Isaiah 9:1-6

17:22-24

With hands joined the head of the home prays:

Lord our God, we praise you for the light of creation: the sun, the moon, and the stars of the night. We praise you for the light of Israel: the Law, the prophets, and the wisdom of the Scriptures. We praise you for Jesus Christ, your Son: he is Emmanuel, God-with-us, the Prince of Peace, who fills us with the wonder of your love.

Lord God, let your blessing come upon us as we illumine this tree. May the light and cheer it gives be a sign of the joy that fills our hearts. May all who delight in this tree come to the knowledge and joy of salvation. We ask this through Christ our Lord. All: Amen.

Taken from the Book of Blessings published by Liturgical Press

Blessing of the Advent Wreath

950 All make the sign of cross as the minister (or head of household with no priest or deacon is present) says:

Our help is in the name of the Lord.

All reply:

Who made heaven and earth.

951 One of those present or the minister reads a text of sacred Scripture,

**Brothers and sisters (Children), listen to the words of the prophet
Isaiah: 9:1-2, 5-6**

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; Upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone.

You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing,

As they rejoice before you as at the harvest, as men make merry when dividing spoils.

For a child is born to us, a son is given us; upon his shoulder dominion rests.

They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace.

His dominion is vast and forever peaceful,

From David's throne, and over his kingdom, which he confirms and sustains

By judgment and justice, both now and forever.

952 A minister who is a priest or deacon says the prayer of blessing with hands outstretched; a lay minister says the prayer with hands joined.

Lord God,

your Church joyfully awaits the coming of its Savior, who enlightens our hearts and dispels the darkness of ignorance and sin.

Pour forth your blessings upon us as we light the candles of this wreath; may their light reflect the splendor of Christ, who is Lord, for ever and ever.

R. Amen.

Lord God,

let your blessing come upon us as we light the candles of this wreath.

May the wreath and its light be a sign of Christ's promise to bring us salvation.

May he come quickly and not delay.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

Slightly adapted from the *Shorter Book of Blessings* (NY: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1990).



Preparing the Manger



The use of the Christmas creche as we know it today began with St. Francis of Assisi in 1223 AD. With the permission from his bishop, St. Francis had a great celebration on Christmas Eve. He had a manger constructed and in the woods near Greccio, he and his community celebrated with great joy and adoration the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ. From that point onward, individual churches began to recreate the scene of the birth of our Lord and eventually this tradition made its way into the homes of the faithful.

But, wait...let's not just simply put the manger out with baby Jesus in it. That would stop at mere routine. The celebration of the Nativity of our Lord needs preparation; and the use of such great imagery should be a tool for preparation!

During the first week of Advent, either make or purchase a small manger, but large enough to fit a baby doll. Make sure that it is empty and place it where you will put the tree in the coming weeks. Either from a local farm or from a hobby store, acquire a bag of hay (or imitation hay). Throughout Advent, focus on making several small acts of sacrifice. This may be giving up on TV, or limiting the amount of TV viewed, eating more healthy foods, denying desserts, sharing toys with each other, or doing chores for each other. The key to this is that the children (and parents) do these things without being noticed. Before bed, go the manger and pray together. Then have the children (and you) take one piece of hay for each act of sacrifice they made that day. Remind them that their acts of sacrifice are preparing the way for Jesus to have a proper place to arrive in their home. Then, on Christmas Eve, have the youngest child bring out the baby Jesus and place Him in the manger. Take the time to sing songs of Adoration... "Glory to God in the Highest!"



Getting the Christmas Tree

One of the big changes you may have to make to celebrate the Advent Season is waiting to get the Christmas tree until Christmas Eve. Christmas Eve! Are you crazy?! That's what many of us may think at first too because how are you supposed to find a good tree on Christmas Eve? Unless you like fake trees, there's pretty much no hope. And there just isn't time either! For those of you are reading this and thinking, "why have a tree for only two days?" just kick back and read.

The Christmas Season goes until the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, the Sunday after the Epiphany, so keep your tree through that Sunday. As Catholics, we get an extended "Christ-centered" season because we anticipate His coming for four weeks, then we celebrate for almost two more! How amazing is that?!

So, what about when to get the tree? Your discussion here will likely go back and forth on this one...and back and forth...and back and forth. Some just might not seem to agree on a good time to get one. The husband may be dead set on Christmas Eve and his wife is of course concerned about getting a tree while being too stressed on Christmas Eve with all the baking and cooking.

So, we have a great Sunday during Advent called Gaudete Sunday. This is the week we light the rose colored candle on the Advent wreath. This is the Sunday we experience some joy and hope because the coming of the Messiah is so close! This could be just the day! Since Sunday should exclude unnecessary commerce, go on that Saturday and pick out your tree and cut it down. Then on Sunday as a family put it up in the house, but since Christ has not yet come, be sure to either leave it completely undecorated, or put purple ribbon around it. This teaches us and our children that we are still preparing, but are getting ready to grow in holiness because of Jesus Christ, our Messiah! (Blessing of the Tree on the next page)

And, not forgetting about Christmas Eve of course, the first thing you will need to do as a family is to decorate the tree, but wait to turn the Christmas tree lights on until just before you go to Mass that evening. At that time, Christ has come! And "Silent Night" will be sung for the first time! Praise be to God.



Feast of St. Lucy

It was in the year 303, during the fierce persecution of Diocletian. She was first of all condemned to suffer the shame of prostitution; but in the strength of God she stood immovable, so that they could not drag her away to the place of shame. Bundles of wood were then heaped about her and set on fire, and again God saved her. Finally, she met her death by the sword. But before she died she foretold the punishment of Paschasius and the speedy termination of the persecution, adding that Diocletian would reign no more, and Maximian would meet his end. So, strengthened with the Bread of Life, she won her crown of virginity and martyrdom.

St. Lucy (Lucia) feast day brings many different types of celebrations in various countries. Her feast is also tied in with the celebration of light and winter, as her name means light and her feast day originally coincided with the winter solstice, which marked the shortest day of the year.

(Text from the Catholic Encyclopedia)

St. Lucy's name means, "light" and her feast day, December 13, falls on (near) the shortest day of the year. From this day forward the days will grow longer, we will see the sun more. There are several different traditions of celebrating this feast day, depending on what country you live in.

The traditions range from baking certain foods, to dressing the oldest daughter up as St. Lucy and having her wake up the family to the smell of sweet rolls, and even to her being the gift giver instead of St. Nicholas. You can do more research if you like at the sites mentioned in this booklet.

This feast may be a way for your family to take a tradition you grew up with that was not totally proper to Advent and make it very meaningful to the purpose of this season.

On December 13, right after celebrating the fact that Mary leads us to Jesus, celebrate the "Light of the World" being seen right outside our homes, so near to coming in. Jesus is not quite here, but He is so close! On this day put up white lights outside, but not inside! We know that Jesus is coming, but we have to wait just awhile longer! He has not quite entered into our home, but be patient because He is almost here!



The Jesse Tree

We all love a good story. We all need a story! With no story for us to be part of we wander aimlessly with no map, or an insufficient map, toward no named goal. We are all part of this story - the story of our very salvation. A story which begins with creation, ordered to the Incarnation and Paschal Mystery, and moves toward the Parousia. The Jesse Tree is a centuries old tradition in the Church which highlights major events in our family history leading up to the birth of Jesus.

December 1: Creation and the Fall (Gen 1:1-27; 3:1-24) Apple
 December 2: Noah's Ark (Gen 6-8) Rainbow
 December 3: Covenant with Abraham (Gen 12) Stars
 December 4: Abraham's Sacrifice (Gen 22) Knife
 December 5: Jacobs's Dream (Gen 28) Ladder
 December 6: God calls Moses (Ex 2-3) Burning Bush
 December 7: God gives Commandments (Ex 19-20) 10 Commandments
 December 8: Blessing of Aaron (Num 6) Hand Raised in Blessing
 December 9: Joshua/Jericho Falls (Josh 6) Trumpet
 December 10: Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1-4) Wheat
 December 11: God calls Samuel (1 Sam 3) Oil Lamp
 December 12: Jesse's Family Chosen (Is 11:1; 1 Sam 16) Vine
 December 13: David (1 Sam 16-19) Harp
 December 14: Wisdom of Solomon (1 Kgs 3) Scales of Justice
 December 15: Elijah (1 Kgs 17) Chariot
 December 16: Elisha (2 Kgs 2) Dove
 December 17: Nehemiah (Neh 2) City Walls
 December 18: Esther (Esther) Crown
 December 19: Isaiah (Is 6; 9) Lit Candle
 December 20: Jeremiah (Jer 31) Stone
 December 21: Jonah and the Whale (Jonah 1-2) Whale
 December 22: Gabriel appears to Mary (Luke 1) Rose
 December 23: John the Baptist (Luke 1:57-80)
 December 24: Joseph (Mt 1:18-25) Carpenter Square
 December 25: Nativity (Luke 2:1-20) Manger
 or- to follow the O' Antiphons
 December 17: Jesus is Wisdom (Wisdom 3) Light
 December 18: Jesus is Lord (Is 11:4-5)
 December 19: Jesus is the Flower of Jesse (Is 11:1-3) Flower
 December 20: Jesus is the Key of David (Is 22:22) Key
 December 21: Jesus is the Radiant Dawn (Psalm 19:6-7) Sun Rising
 December 22: Jesus is King of the Gentiles (Ephesians 2:14-20) Crown
 December 23: Jesus is Emmanuel (Is 7:14) Chalice
 December 24: Jesus is the Light of the World (John 1:1-14) Flame

1. Purchase a small artificial tree or cut the very top off an evergreen and place in a pot of soil so you can water it.
2. Place in prominent place in the house.
3. It is best to create the symbols to be used for your Jesse Tree using clay or Sculpty. This is time consuming, but a great family work or prayer and reflection.
4. Sew a Jesse Tree 'cabinet' that is flat to hang on a door or wall. Or build/purchase a little cabinet with at least 25 little doors.
5. Place the items in the pockets or doors.
6. Prepare which Scripture will be read ahead of time.
7. Each night have a different child take out and hang the new symbol on the tree while an older child or parent read the Scripture.
8. Be prepared for questions!

Feast of St. Nicholas

As parents you may have some concern about the fat, jolly, red man in the malls during Advent. As you begin discussions on Advent traditions in your home you may come to the conclusion that the “secular Santa” is not a bad thing, but that it lacks so much meaning, especially the true meaning of the season...Jesus Christ!

You may not want to call the red guy, Santa, but to call him St. Nicholas, his original name. In fact, you may want the jolly guy out, and the real guy in! Or you may desire a more so-called balanced approach, fearing that your children may be confused about who Santa is and who St. Nicholas is because after all, they are two names for the same person. So, as a conclusion you might refer to the bishop of Myra as both St. Nicholas and Santa Claus. In fact, many countries refer to him as Santa (meaning Saint) Claus, but he is depicted as a bishop.

Your children will hear both names, but should see images mostly of St. Nicholas dressed as a bishop in your home, but you might also have a Fontinini Santa Claus in red waiting for Jesus at the manger, where he stays adoring Christ during the Christmas season (Dec 25-Baptism of the Lord). I hope you also begin to celebrate the Feast of St. Nicholas, December 6.

Who was St. Nicholas?

- 1 of 318 bishops at the First Ecumenical Council of Nicea where he defended the two natures of Christ
- Both parents died when he was a boy and he gave everything away
- Fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays as an infant
- Was sent to prison under the edict of Diocletian and Maximian
- Was faithful in teaching and generosity
- He saved 3 girls from a life of prostitution by paying their dowry.
- Holy Oil flowed from his tomb for more than eight centuries



On the evening of December 5, put out your shoes on the floor by the front door or under the window. When you wake up, you will notice your shoes filled with goodies, like sweet dried fruit, cookies, maybe a holy card, and a letter from St. Nicholas himself! The letter will have praises about the child's good behavior and also some corrections about the poor behavior. (He has a book with all the children's good and bad moments from the past year. He knows this because each child's Guardian Angel records the information in the book...see all the teachable moments!) The letter should also have instructions about preparing your hearts for the coming of Christ. Take time while putting the shoes out to talk about St. Nicholas. You can also have the father of the home dress up as the bishop of Myra and deliver the gifts and letters. Then a little later, dad comes home from work and gets to hear all about the amazing visit! Have fun with this great feast day!

Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

This is a great celebration in many homes during Advent and requires very little preparation. One very popular purchase during Advent is the poinsettia, which is a flower native to Mexico. You may be surprised to discover that in Mexico this plant was used in the celebration of the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Patron Saint of the Americas.

So, on December 12, the feast day, purchase a poinsettia and place it on the kitchen table at least for the family dinner that evening. Of course, you can move it to a favorite decorative spot after dinner or the next day. Before or after dinner, draw attention to the flower and explain the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Below is a brief description, but you are encouraged to look in a book of feasts or go to www.newadvent.org for more information. After the small teaching and lesson, sing a hymn in honor of Mary, or pray a decade of the Rosary together.

Around the year 1500AD, the Spanish were landing in Central America and made strong efforts to convert the Aztecs to the Christian faith. This was quite a task since the Aztec religion was one of the most explicitly satanic religions ever practiced. The effort of conversion was largely unsuccessful, until in the year 1531 AD, Juan Diego was visited by Our Lady, who was dressed in Aztec clothing and spoke in his native tongue. These appearances of Our Lady to Juan Diego, now canonized, had led to millions of Aztecs converting to the Catholic faith. Mary was the sole reason for leading all these souls to Christ. On this feast day we are reminded that Mary leads us to Christ, in our own land, circumstances, and state of life.

