

ADVENT

Traditions

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

AN ADVENT PRAYER

*Lord God,
during this time of Advent
may your Word illuminate
all darkness in my life.
May one flame serve as a spark
to ignite in me a fire of desire for you.
May a second flame light a lamp
by which I may find my way to you.
May a third flame warm my heart
so I may love as you love.
And may a fourth flame shine so brightly
that the world may see your Word in me.
Come, Lord Jesus. Come, Emmanuel.
Use me to shine forth Your Word
to a world seeking light in the darkness.
Amen.*

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The Christmas Tree

Trees have always been used in human history for celebrations and storytelling. Pagans and Romans both used evergreen trees in their various seasonal celebrations, including the winter solstice. Some early Christian communities would use trees in morality plays, primarily retelling the story of Adam and Eve. Around 1000 years ago, we can see evidence where households started using evergreen trees in seasonal decoration, particularly hanging them upside down from the ceiling or on a chandelier. In sixteenth century Europe, mainly in Germany, we see depictions of something similar to the Christmas tree we have today.





They often were adorned with food and fruit crafted from glass. The first Christmas trees came to England in the early 1800s and then spread to all the West after that.

Although the Christmas tree has not always been an Advent tradition in history, today most of us put up a tree long before Christmas arrives. There are still some families that continue to wait until Christmas morning for their tree to make its grand debut. But most of us use it as the focal point for our seasonal home decorations. However, there are ways to keep the Christmas celebration at bay while we focus on Advent preparations.

Some households wait and decorate the tree a little at a time as the weeks go by. Perhaps ornaments that have no real religious significance but have sentimental value can be placed on the tree first. Religious symbols can be held until Christmas. Maybe the angel or star placed at

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the top of the branches can wait until Christmas Eve. I have also heard of some families that wait to light their tree until Christmas Eve as well.

One ritual that can be done, regardless of when you decorate your tree, is to say a prayer of blessing for your tree. It reminds all that this celebration is truly about God and not all the commercialism. Use your tree as a place for prayer all Advent long.

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Advent Q&A

What is the Hispanic Advent custom of "Las Posadas"?

"Posada" is the Spanish word for inn or lodging. "Las Posadas" refers to a traditional Advent custom in preparation for the birth of Jesus, beginning on December 16. For nine successive evenings, groups reenact the search of Mary and Joseph for shelter in Bethlehem.

Two children dress as Mary and Joseph, sometimes with Mary riding on an actual donkey. They are usually accompanied by children dressed as angels and shepherds along with the Wise Men. Adults accompany them as they process to designated homes where they sing Christmas songs and request lodging. Part of the group enters the home and becomes the chorus that responds to the request for lodging. In the beginning the request is rebuffed. They move to several more homes where the ritual is repeated. Eventually, at the last home, their need is recognized, and they all enter the home where a party ensues. This is repeated in different neighborhoods and homes each of the nine days.

While this custom teaches children an important aspect of the Christmas story, it also emphasizes the need for hospitality to strangers and the continual need we all have to make room for Jesus in our "posada." As we struggle to arrive at a fair and just immigration policy, especially with Mexico, it would be good to recall the fact that Mary, Joseph, and Jesus were also immigrants looking for a hospitable place to dwell.

OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

12 December 2016

On December 9, 1531, Our Lady appeared to a simple Aztec Indian who had converted to the Catholic faith, Juan Diego. Three days later, at Juan Diego's request, Mary provided a sign so the local bishop would believe that she actually had appeared. Roses grew out of the cold winter soil, and when Juan Diego opened his cloak to show the bishop what he had found, an image of Our Lady appeared on the fabric. These occurrences led to the conversion of most of Mexico and remain today a strong sign of Our Lady's concern and love for us.

Church-approved Marian apparitions always point to her Son, Jesus. For many of us with a strong Marian devotion, Mary is a pathway into a stronger relationship with our Lord. Her generosity shown to Juan Diego is the same generosity shown to each of us that choose to ask her intercession. Families pray for one another and she is a very prominent member of our family. May the miracle of Our Lady of Guadalupe be a sign of warmth for you in the cold of winter and of Advent hope for a Christ Child that has redeemed the world.

INSPIRATION FOR THE WEEK

Today's feast recalls the apparitions of Mary at the hill of Tepeyac to the native convert, St. Juan Diego. It is a feast for all of the countries of the Americas and an opportunity for us to reflect on the wisdom and example we gain from the Mother of God. Always a mother to all, Mary stands before us again as an example of faith, hope, and especially love.



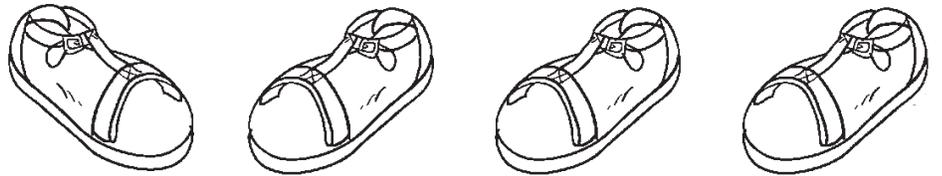


KIDS' Corner

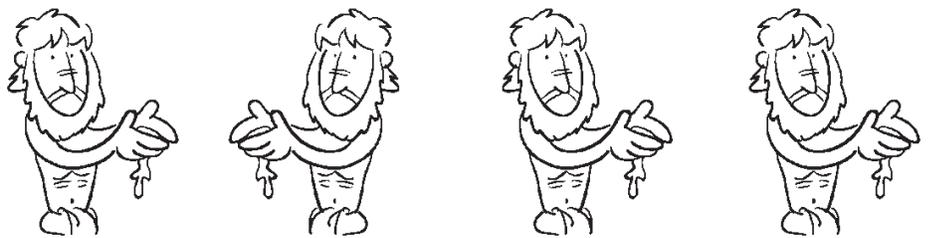
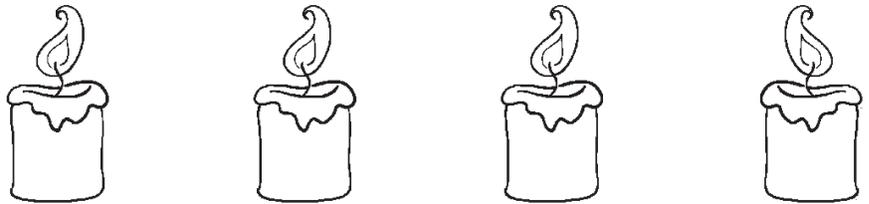
G R O W I N G W I T H T H E G O S P E L

Lord,
forgive me
for all of
my sins.

Circle the picture that is facing the wrong way,
then color all the pictures.



John the Baptist prepared the way for the Messiah, Jesus Christ. He shouted in the desert, "Get your soul ready. The Lord is coming." Today John still warns you to get your soul ready for Jesus. Ask God to forgive you. Then forgive yourself and others. Shout to the world. Be a witness by your actions. Show that you believe in God. Then you will be ready when Jesus comes to take you to heaven with him.



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Mission for the Week: I will forgive others and ask them to forgive me when I hurt them.