

Celebrating Advent with Our Children

As we rapidly approach the Advent season, it is appropriate to begin to think through how we can celebrate the beauty of the season and communicate its profound meaning to our children. The holidays are often filled with many obligatory events (school programs, cookie exchanges, neighborhood get-togethers, church programs, office parties, shopping, family get-togethers, Nutcracker performances, baking, gift buying, wrapping and giving, etc. etc.) In the midst of much activity, it may become difficult to find quiet moments to minister to our children by reminding them what this season is really all about. So I invite you to be proactive now and make some plans to be intentional with your children during the Advent season. Here are a few tools that you might find helpful in taking the opportunity to anticipate the Savior's Advent and the wonder of the Incarnation.

1-The Jesse Tree. The Jesse Tree is a helpful tool in daily remembering the coming of Jesus from December 1st to 25th. You will need a small Christmas Tree and 25 ornaments. I would suggest purchasing a book to use each day. Two suggestions are *The Advent Jesse Tree: Devotions for Children and Adults to Prepare for the Coming of the Christ Child at Christmas* by Dean Lambert Smith (our family has used this book over the years) or *Unwrapping the Greatest Gift: A family Celebration of Christmas* by Ann Voskamp (this is a brand new book that looks really good). You will need to prepare the ornaments ahead of time. One idea is to get 25 people to make 25 of the same ornament and then have an ornament exchange. You can also create the ornaments with your children or a few other families if you prefer this. I am partial to the Jesse Tree because it has been a tradition in our own family to have time each evening before bed during December to listen to an Advent devotion together and decorate the Jesse Tree with a different ornament every day of December. I usually wrap the ornaments and number them so that it is a surprise when we open it each day. Our family would be glad to talk with anyone who is interested in incorporating the Jesse Tree into their family's Advent celebration.

2-Advent Calendar. Some families enjoy having an advent calendar. Dudley and Julie Bell and their family have used an Advent Calendar through the years during Advent. They created the calendar by making the biblical characters from the story of Jesus' birth. Each night at dinner during December, they take a character for the specific day of December and read a verse that describes this character's role in the birth of Jesus. Julie would be glad to be a resource for those who might want to use an Advent calendar during December (dudnjulie@aol.com).

3-Advent Wreath Another option is to have an Advent wreath for your family. You can make the wreath with supplies from a craft store or purchase the wreath and have candles in it that you can light at the special time when your family is together to reflect on Advent. The Advent wreath was a special tradition in Lauren Beam's Advent season celebration as she grew up. She would be glad to share thoughts about using the Advent wreath with your family during the Advent season (laurenrogers418@gmail.com).

Here are a few other books (list compiled by Lauren Beam) that you could check out to use during the Advent Season with your children:

**[Family Advent Devotional](#) by Beth Myers and B.A. Snider (this is a new 2014 PCA-specific resource that can only be order online from the PCA Resources Bookstore - only \$7.65) Looking at the sample pages, each day of advent explains the purpose of the candle for that week, a related scripture, a craft (particularly good for families with young kids), a short lesson, questions for the family to discuss, a memory verse, and a Christmas hymn. It's really simple, but excellent.

[25 Days 'Til Christ: An Advent Devotional for the Family](#) by Paula Whidden (family friendly)

[Watch for the Light: Readings for Advent and Christmas](#) (featuring daily readings by CS Lewis, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen, and other theologians) - may be better for couples or families with older kids/teenagers

[The Other Side of Christmas Devotional](#) by Dennis Bennett (also from the PCA online store) - a bit less kid-friendly, but still seems good.

May the wonder of the Incarnation fill you with joy and anticipation as you celebrate the coming of Jesus with your children.