



Your (Unofficial) Guide to Advent

The Basics

WHAT IS ADVENT?

Happy New Year! Advent is the start of the Christian Church Calendar. Advent traditionally starts four Sundays before Christmas Day. The word “Advent” is a mash-up of two Latin words: *adventus* (arrival) + *venire* (come). This makes sense because during Advent we anticipate and prepare for the arrival of the coming (or more accurately the second coming) of Christ and reflect on what that means for us.

WHY IS EVERYTHING IN CHURCH BLUE OR PURPLE INSTEAD OF CHRISTMAS RED AND GREEN?

Blue is used to symbolize Mother Mary, hope, and anticipation. Purple is often linked to penance and Lent, another time of waiting in the church year.

WHAT SCRIPTURE IS LINUS QUOTING IN *A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS*?

In *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, Charlie Brown cries: “Isn’t there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?” Linus, with his security blanket, takes center stage and recites the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 2, verses 8–14. During his recital Linus drops his blanket (like a mic) and at the end, picks up his blanket, returns to Charlie Brown, and says: “That’s what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown.” Linus is speaking truth!

CAN YOU TALK ABOUT SANTA CLAUS IN CHURCH?

Santa Claus and “small c Christmas” go together like hot chocolate and marshmallows. Santa isn’t as good a fit for “big C Christmas”, but Jolly Old Saint Nicholas is! December 6 is Saint Nicholas Day, a wonderful time to celebrate the life of the early Christian bishop. Just like Santa Claus, there is more legend about Saint Nicholas than fact. He is consistently known for his kindness and generosity, especially to the less fortunate.

WHY DO I GET GIFTS IF IT IS JESUS’ BIRTHDAY?

That’s a good question. What do you think?



For more facts about the season and ways to prepare for Advent, check out our Advent Unwrapped resources and blogs at the United Church website, or search #adventunwrapped, #uccan on social media channels.



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Connecting to the Holy During Advent

Here are some spiritual practices that can help you stay connected to the reason for the season (as we love to say).

- **Daily Prayer:** Write a short prayer out on a card, put it somewhere you will encounter it regularly, and say it every day. It helps to do it at the same time and place, but that is certainly not necessary.
- **Worship with Others:** Carve out time each week for a community spiritual practice or holy habit: worship, bible study, fellowship, service, giving, advocacy, or a family Advent calendar. However you praise, spend time growing with other people of faith.
- **Go Deeper:** Explore ways to deepen your faith and understanding of Jesus this Advent. Find a new book or podcast, take on a new spiritual practice, Holy Habit, or family ritual for the season, or take a self-directed study on some of the big questions of our faith. (You can find resources with great ideas on the UCRD website!)





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Daring to Be Just

The lure of nostalgia can often stop us from critically reflecting on our Advent traditions. I have fond memories of singing “O Come, O Come Emmanuel”, dressing up children in tea towels and bathrobes for pageants, and reciting passages around darkness by the glow of candles. I can appreciate the beauty in these memories while also identifying and acknowledging the harm that these worship traditions have caused. As Maya Angelou said: “Do the best you can until you know better. Then, when you know better, do better.” I know better, so I will do better. Here are some “isms” that I have learnt about and am working on during Advent:

- **Supersessionism** names Christianity as superior to any religious belief that came before it. How do we faithfully testify to who Christ is for us, without disrespecting and demeaning other faith traditions? Avoid any words or practices in worship that imply that Jesus’ coming supersedes or replaces God’s covenant with other Abrahamic traditions and faiths. In Advent this often looks like naming a Jewish promise and showing it fulfilled and perfected in Christ for all people.
- **Exoticism** is wearing cultural clothing that does not belong to you or that you do not have a close relationship to; it’s a form of cultural appropriation. Because of the universal appeal of the people in the Christmas story, it can be easy to forget that Mary, Joseph, and Baby Jesus are all historical people within a culture and a historical context. How we represent that culture in our re-enactments of the story says something. What do you hope to say?
- **Shadism** is the idea that good equals *light, fair, and pure*, and evil equals *dark, ugly, and dirty*. This ideology has been used for centuries to support racist beliefs and traditions. How do your worship words support or work against shadism?





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Supporting Mental Health and Wellness

The pressure to feel happy and be hopeful during the Advent season can be overwhelming, harmful, exhausting, isolating, and so much more—especially for people who are living with mental health challenges. Here are a few tips on ways to support our own mental health of that of others during this holiday season.

- **Be a friend:** “A friend loves at all times...” (Proverbs 17:17a). Listen without judgment. Provide companionship. Offer a ride or a meal. Share some cookies. Respect confidentiality. Avoid shame and guilt. Remember that we all have and we all are impacted by mental health.
- **Remember that words can hurt:** “Rash words are like sword thrusts...” (Proverbs 12:18a). Pay attention to the words you use and how they affect the people around you. Avoid labelling and stereotyping people. Avoid stating how people “should” feel.
- **Stop the stigma:** “We, who are many, are one body in Christ” (Romans 12:5). Challenge negative attitudes toward mental health and neurodiversity whenever you encounter it. Question your assumptions. Correct misinformation about mental health challenges, substance use disorders, trauma, and brain differences.
- **Educate yourself:** “Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice?” (Proverbs 8:1). Learn the facts about the various challenges that can affect mental health, including substance use disorders, neurodevelopmental difference, trauma, and brain disorders. Realize that mental health is physical health.
- **Thank God for neurodiversity:** “Wonderful are your works” (Psalms 139:14) Be aware that we all process the world around us differently. Celebrate and affirm neurodiversity and the many gifts that each person brings.

Adapted from Mental Health and Wellness: Worship Resources for All (you can find this resource in the Mental Health Sunday section on the United Church website)





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Advent Ideas for Young Children

Creating a Play and Pray Space

by Rev. Tori Mullin

If you are a faith community looking for ways to make your sanctuaries more child and family friendly consider adding a Play and Pray Space! These spaces can be as simple or elaborate as you have time and creativity for.

The basics are a place to sit, to do activities, and some storage. A children's table and chairs and some storage baskets on the floor will suffice, but depending on the amount of space you have you may want to include a play mat for infants, comfortable seating for parents who may be nursing or need to provide a cuddle, a book shelf, art supplies...and so on.

For communities of faith who don't have Sunday School during worship services this space can be used to provide activities that compliment that Sunday's theme. Sensory bins, colouring sheets, simple crafts, Bible story figures and felt boards are all excellent choices which can be enjoyed by a wide variety of ages. Visit the [Advent Unwrapped webpage](#) to find colouring pages and activity sheets that can be used to help families engage in the liturgical season.

Nativity Set Challenge

Have fun with a nativity set challenge! Share pictures or reels on social media of your creative homemade nativity sets and you could win Advent Unwrapped bragging rights for a year! Make sure to tag #UCCAN and #AdventUnwrapped





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Advent Ideas for Young Children

Advent Sensory Bin

Ages: Preschool, 2–5 years

To create a sensory bin you need three things: a container, a base layer, and small items that represent the theme of your bin.

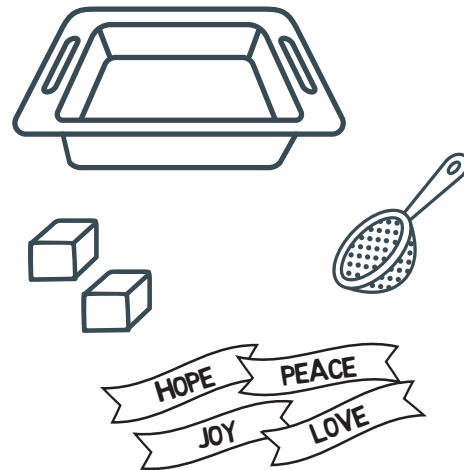
- A wide, flat container with a lid is ideal.
- For the base layer you can use sand, water, or something edible! Rice and cornmeal are great choices as smaller children may try to ingest it. For an Advent-theme sensory bin, fill your container with white rice to represent snow.
- The small items you add to your bin can match your theme, with different items for different liturgical seasons. For Advent, add painted rocks for each of the Advent candles in purple/blue and pink for the four candles of our Advent wreaths. You can write the words PEACE, HOPE, JOY and LOVE on rocks as well, or add wooden cut-outs from the craft store. I add purple and pink beads to my sensory bin, but you can also add pompoms, blocks, feathers, and even pieces of evergreen trees. Add anything that will be interesting to feel with little hands! Older children can also participate by decorating the rocks or other items you add to your bin. Small implements like tongs, scoops, and funnels can add another element of play to the bin.

Sensory bins can also be put together by families to enjoy at home.

Spiritual Play in Advent

Sensory bins are a wonderful spiritual formation tool because they are tactile! Engaging children with sensory experiences will help to reinforce the stories they hear around Advent.

- Each week of Advent, add the candle and word associated with that week to your bin. Consider adding a white candle for Christmas Day with a peg-doll baby Jesus. If you have some non-breakable nativity figures at home you can add these to your bin too.
- Bury each object in the sensory bin, invite children to discover the objects and share what each one is as they find them.





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The Great Canadian Christmas Baker

Some hot tips, from my kitchen to yours, to help you be the star of the cookie exchange this year!

If you bake it they will come!

Own Your Recipe. Make sure the recipe is your own and is to your taste. Compare it to a few different recipes to make sure that the basic proportions are okay. Consider the occasion you are baking for, and what might be good flavor pairings.

Be Clean! Clean everything (your workspace, yourself, your supplies) and have your ingredients ready before you begin. It makes the space less stressful and helps to guard against cross-contamination.

Create a Vibe. Baking is a spiritual practice for me. I try to make sure that I am in a good space when baking and pray at every stage of the process. I also make sure that I surround myself with good things that I am grateful for (good shows, good tunes, good company, good ingredients, good blessings); where good things come in, good things come out.

Know the Climate. Have ingredients at room temperature so that they are easier to combine. If making cut cookies, make sure to chill your dough before rolling and shaping—this will help with shape definition (especially on cookies like stars and snowflakes). If decorating cookies, make sure that your cookies are completely cool so the icing doesn't melt.

Flavor Everything! Season your icing (and cookies) with a little salt (trust me) and a little flavoring (such as vanilla) so that your cookies are more interesting to eat. You may also be able to use less sugar in your cookie dough recipe with the right flavor profile.

Make it Pretty! One of the easiest ways to make a tray of cookies look pretty is to choose an attractive colour palette of two or three shades that go well together. This way your cookies will look great on their own and amazing together!

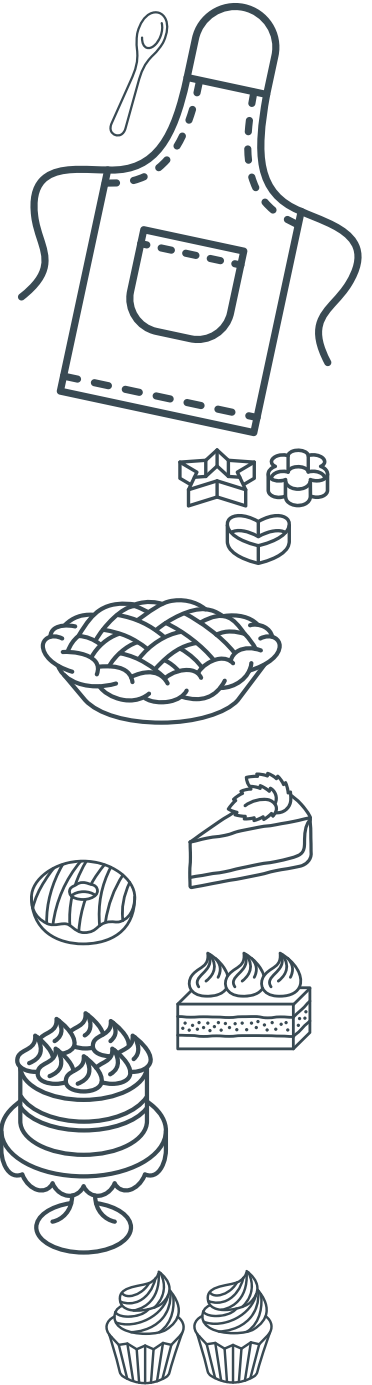


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A Christmas Candlelight Worship

by Susan Lukey



You will need seven candles of different colours, a bible, and a hymnbook or Christmas Carol Sheet. You may want to include carols that are beloved by your family.

Greeting:

We gather to welcome the birth of Jesus,
who is the Light of the World.

**(Light fifth candle.)*

Scripture: Luke 8–20

Sing: “Hark! the Herald Angels Sing”
(one verse)

**(Light first candle.)*

Scripture: Luke 1:26–31

Sing: “Joy to the World” (one verse)

**(Light sixth candle.)*

Scripture: Revelation 21:1–6

Prayer:

Hold in prayer your loved ones,
those living and those gone before...
Give thanks and offer concerns.
Where might hope and compassion
be needed this year?

**(Light second candle.)*

Scripture: Matthew 1:18–25

Sing: “O Come, All Ye Faithful”
(one verse)

**(Light seventh candle.)*

Scripture: Isaiah 9:2b, 6

Sing: “Silent Night, Holy Night”
(one verse)

**(Light third candle.)*

Scripture: Luke 2:1–5

Sing: “O Little Town of Bethlehem”
(one verse)

**(Light fourth candle.)*

Scripture: Luke 2:6–7

Sing: “Away in a Manger” (one verse)

Blessing:

May the love born in Jesus be carried in my
heart to family, friends, and strangers today.
May I/we reflect to others that God is with us!
Amen.



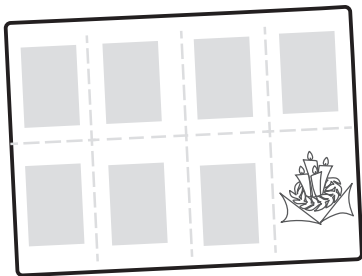


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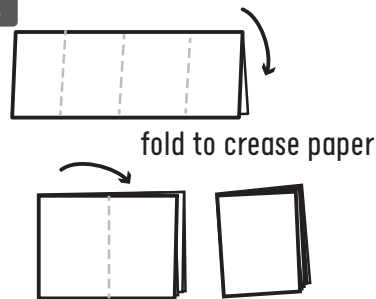
Pocket Prayer Zines: A How-to Guide

No matter where you are on your faith journey or what you are doing this advent, take us with you with our handy-dandy pocket prayer zines! (Zine resources can be found on our Advent Worship webpage.)

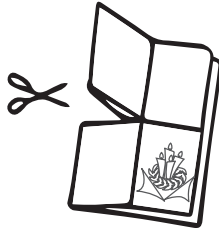
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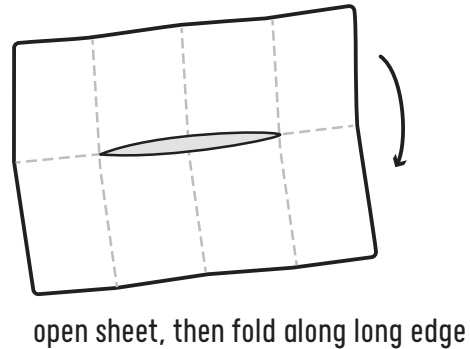
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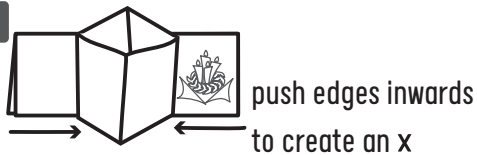
3 unfold and cut on marked line



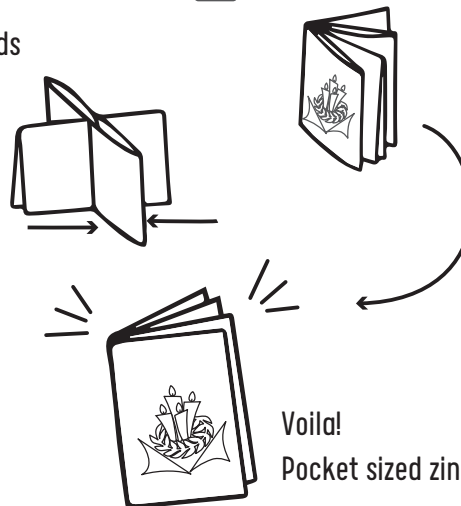
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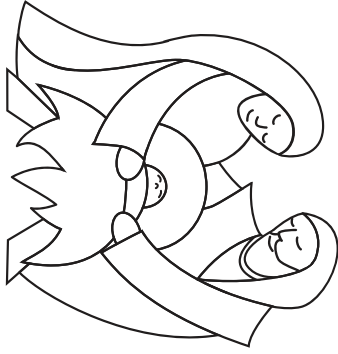
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Advent unwrapped



Prayers for the Whole Family

"May grace and peace be yours in abundance."
(1 Peter 1:2)



The United Church of Canada
L'Église Unie du Canada

Advent Wreath Blessing



Week 1

What will become of the dream of hope and healing?

In... (name places where you are praying for hope and healing)

With... (name people in need of help)



Week 2

What will become of the dream of peace and justice?

In... (name places where you are praying for peace and justice)

With... (name people in need of wisdom)



Week 3

What will become of the dream of love and kindness?

In... (name places where you are praying for love and kindness)

With... (name people who demonstrate love incarnate)



Week 4

What will become of the dream of joy and laughter?

In... (name places where you are praying for joy and laughter)

With... (name people in need of courage)

Light a new candle each week until all of the candles are lit on Christmas day.

ACTS OF PRAYER

Use this simple and old prayer formula to create your own daily prayer.

A Adoration: What do you love (or adore) about God?

C Confession: What are you sorry for? What are you sad about?

T Thanksgiving: What are you thankful for?

S Supplication: What do you need help with?

Prayers for Your Day

Morning Prayers

For each new morning with its light;

For rest and shelter of the night;

For health and food;

For love and friends;

For everything Thy goodness sends.

(Ralph Waldo Emerson)

Day by day,

may my hope grow deep.

Likkle by likkle,

may my peace grow strong.

Petit à petit,

may my joy grow free.

Poco a poco,

may my love grow wide.

Until we are one.

Each Week

Candle is lit (moment of silence)

We wonder and wait for Christ's hope* on this journey.

Although there are no simple answers or easy paths.

May we find the courage

to keep on advancing towards God's

dream of justice, peace, and

A love that lasts.

**hope/peace/joy/love*

(John Oldham and Alydia Smith)

At Meal Time
(sing to Frère Jacques)
We are thankful, we are thankful.
We are glad, we are glad.
For the many blessings, for the many blessings
That we have, that we have.

At Night
(sing to Away in a Manger)
Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask you to stay
Close by me forever, and love me, I pray
Bless all the dear children in your tender care,
And fit us for heaven, to live with you there.