

Advent Intergenerational Program

"The Messiah is Coming!"

Learning Objectives

"The Messiah is Coming" learning session guides learners of all ages to...

- develop a deeper understanding of Jesus the Messiah through the exploration of Advent readings and traditions (know-what)
- appreciate the richness of the Advent season as it prepares us to celebrate the Messiah at Christmas and all year (know-why)
- participate more fully in the Advent season (know-how)

Catechism Connection

522-524, 840, 2772, 2816-21

Background Readings

Catholic Updates

Annual Advent Catholic Update Issue

Advent: Waiting in Joyful Hope. Julie Irwin Zimmerman. Catholic Update C1103.

Advent to Epiphany: Celebrating the Christmas Cycle. John Bookser Feister. Catholic Update C1196.

Celebrating Advent in Your Home. Kathryn Schneider and Robert Hamma. Catholic Update C1191.

The Incarnation: Why God Wanted to Become Human. Kenneth R. Overberg, S.J. Catholic Update C1202.

The Incarnation – God's Gift of Love. Kenneth Overberg. Scripture from Scratch N1201.

The Jesse Tree: Daily Prayers for Advent. Diane Houdek. Catholic Update C1197.

Books

Brown, Raymond. *A Coming Christ in Advent.* Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1988.

Bergant, Diane, with Richard Fragomeni. *Preaching the New Lectionary.* (Three Volumes: Year A, B, C) Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999, 2000, 2001.

Birmingham, Mary. *Word and Worship Workbook.* (Three Volumes: Year A, B, C). New York: Paulist Press, 1998, 1999, 2000.

Brown, Raymond. *Reading the Gospels with the Church – From Christmas through Easter.* Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1996.

Brown, Raymond. *A Coming Christ in Advent.* Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1988.

Donohue, John. *Hearing the Word of God – Reflections on the Sunday Readings.* (Three Volumes: Year A, B, C). Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003, 2004, 2005.

Living Liturgy. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, annual.

Senior, Donald. *Jesus: A Gospel Portrait*. New York: Paulist Press, 1992.
Shea, John. *The Spiritual Wisdom of the Gospels for Christian Preachers and Teachers*. (Three Volumes: Year A, B, C) Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004, 2005, 2006.
Sourcebook for Sundays and Seasons. Liturgy Training Publications. Chicago: LTP, annual.
Theological-Historical Commission for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. *Jesus Christ, Word of the Father: The Savior of the World*. New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1997.

Potential Uses

- Preparation for the Advent and Christmas Season

Session Resources

Before the Session

Environment

Set up a prayer table or decorate the large group meeting space with symbols of Advent: Advent Wreath, Jesse Tree, liturgical colors, candles, Lectionary, etc.

Home Kit

Home Activities at Generations of Faith Online

1. Prayers for Every Day of Advent
2. Table Prayers for Advent
3. Table Prayer for the Christmas Seasons
4. Praying the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary
5. Blessing before the Christmas Meal and the Christ Candle
6. Blessing for a Christmas Crèche
7. Spiritual Reflection for the Family: Preparing for the Messiah
8. Popular Gospel Stories: Christmas – “Christmas Presence”
9. An Advent Sharing List for Families

People of Faith—Generations Learning Together Magazines (Harcourt Religion)

Following Jesus: Preparing for the Messiah, (Volume 2, Number 1)

Catholic Update (St. Anthony Messenger Press)

Annual Advent Catholic Update

Advent: Waiting in Joyful Hope. Julie Irwin Zimmerman. Catholic Update C1103.

Advent to Epiphany: Celebrating the Christmas Cycle. John Bookser Feister. Catholic Update C1196.

Celebrating Advent in Your Home. Kathryn Schneider and Robert Hamma. Catholic Update C1191.

The Incarnation: Why God Wanted to Become Human. Kenneth R. Overberg, S.J. Catholic Update C1202.

The Incarnation – God’s Gift of Love. Kenneth Overberg. Scripture from Scratch N1201.

Creative Communications for the Parish

Advent Calendars (children, teens, and adults)

Creative Communications for the Parish produces inexpensive Advent booklets for families, teens and adults, as well as prayer cards, calendars, activities, and lectionary reflections.

Twenty-Third Publications

Twenty-Third Publications produces inexpensive Advent booklets of prayers, activities, and lectionary reflections for families and individuals.

Prayer Resources

Haas, David. *Increase Our Faith – Parish Prayer Services for Whole Community Catechesis*. (Three Volumes: Year A, B, C) Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2004, 2005, 2006.

For additional prayer services consult:

Costello, Gwen. *Junior High Prayer Services by Themes and Seasons*. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2000.

Cronin, Gaynell Bordes, and Jack Rathschmidt, O.F.M. Cap. *The Blessing Candles – 58 Simple Mealtime Prayer-Celebrations*. Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2000.

Galipeau, Jerry. *Prayer Services for Parish Life*. Schiller Park, IL: World Library Publications, 2004.

Haas, David. *Praying with the Word – Advent, Christmas and Epiphany*. Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1996.

McCann, Deborah. *Let Us Gather – Prayer Services for Catholic Schools and Assemblies*. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2002.

Morley, Jack, editor. *Bread of Tomorrow – Prayers for the Church Year*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992.

Piercy, Robert W., and Vivian E. Williams. *When Children Gather – 20 Prayer Services for the Liturgical Year*. Chicago: GIA Publications, 1998.

Rupp, Joyce. *Inviting God In – Scriptural Reflections through the Year*. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2001.

Rupp, Joyce. *Out of the Ordinary – Prayers, Poems, and Reflections for Every Season*. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2000.

Singer, Charles. *Prayers for Feasts*. Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2002.

Vos Wezeman, Phyllis, and Jude Dennis Fournier. *Celebrations Seasons – Prayer Lessons for Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter*. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2000.

Materials for the Session

Gathering

- Name tags
- Community building activities

All Ages Opening Learning Experience

- Opening Prayer Service
- Bible

In-Depth Learning Experience

- See materials listed under preparation below each learning experience, as supplies needed vary depending on the learning activity chosen.

Sharing Learning Reflections and Home Application

Closing

- Closing Prayer Service

Session at a Glance

Part One: Gathering (5 minutes)

Part Two: All Ages Learning Experience (20 minutes)

Jesus the Messiah

Part Three: In-Depth Learning Experience (90 minutes)

Choose a Learning Group Format

- Age Group Format
- or
- Learning Activity Centers

Family Learning Plan

Activity 1. Advent Wreath
Activity 2. Jesse Tree
Activity 3. Advent Calendar

Adolescent Learning Plan

- Option 1. Waiting and Advent
- Option 2. The Messiah is Coming! (Adult Session)

Additional activity to use with Option 1 or 2: Adolescent Advent Wreath Making

Adult Learning Plan Outline

The Messiah is Coming!

Activity Center Learning Plan

1. Advent Wreath Making
(Two centers: one for families with children and one for adolescents/adults)
2. Jesse Tree
(Two centers: one for families with children and one for adolescents/adults)
3. Advent Calendar
4. Scripture and Music in the Advent Season (adolescent and adults)

Part Four: Sharing Learning Reflections and Home Application
(20-25 minutes)

Part Five. Closing Prayer Service (5-10 minutes)

Part 1

Gathering (5 minutes)

1. Registration and Hospitality

- Welcome people and ask them to sign in for the program.
- Ask people to make a name tag. (See below for instructions.)
- Distribute the Home Kit for the session, including any handouts participants will need for the session. (You can also distribute handouts for the In-Depth Learning program at the beginning of the activity.)
- Invite people to share a meal; depending on time of day, the program may end with a meal instead.

Welcome

Welcome the participants to the program and introduce the theme of the session.

2. Group Formation

In the Whole Group Format, organize people into intergenerational small groups of approximately eight people OR organize table groups of families with children, adolescents, and adults. If you organize into intergenerational groups, participants will remain with their group for the entire program. Ask all members of the same family to sit together in these intergenerational groups. Each group should have as many of the following categories as possible: family (parents, children, teens), young adults, adults without children, and older adults. If members of the same family are intergenerational – children, teens, parents, and grandparents – keep them together in one group.

3. Opening Prayer Service

Lead the participants in an opening prayer service on the theme: “The Messiah is Coming!”

Suggested Advent Lectionary readings on images of the Messiah for prayer:

- Old Testament: Isaiah 35:1-6, 10 (Third Sunday of Advent-A) or Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11 (Third Sunday of Advent-B),
- Gospel: Matthew 11:2-11 (Third Sunday of Advent-A)

Use the following church resources for creating an opening prayer service:

- Prayers from the Sacramentary for the Sundays of Advent
- Music that will be used during the Advent season.

Part 2

All Ages Learning Experience (20 minutes)

Option 1. Media Presentation

Create a video or PowerPoint presentation (text and images) with a variety of images of the Messiah with accompanying Scripture passages from the Advent Lectionary (Cycles A, B, and C), as well as images of the Messiah from the Gospels. You can find images of Jesus in artwork by going online to view and download pictures from the Vatican museum www.christusrex.org/www1/vaticano/0-Musei.html. There are other online art galleries of religious art that you can find by using your search engine (e.g., www.google.com).

You can read the Scripture passages aloud and/or include them in the media presentation. The presentation should answer the question: “The Messiah will come to...” Accompany the presentation with instrumental music.

In addition to Gospel stories from the life of Jesus, here are three readings from the Advent Lectionary that contain images of the Messiah:

- Old Testament: Isaiah 35:1-6, 10 (Third Sunday of Advent-A) or Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11 (Third Sunday of Advent-B),
- Gospel: Matthew 11:2-11 (Third Sunday of Advent-A)

Option 2. Music

Use hymns and songs to illustrate images of the Messiah. Check your parish hymnal, children’s music (CDs), and liturgical music (CDs) and select songs that reflect different images of the Messiah. Introduce the song, sing it together, and then connect the song to a Scripture passage from Advent or the life of Jesus in the Gospels.

Option 3. Dramatization

You can dramatize Matthew 11:2-11 or several Gospel passages that illustrate images of the Messiah. Here are several resources with dramas and role plays.

- Glavich, Mary Kathleen. *Acting Out the Miracles and Parables*. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1988.
- Glavich, Mary Kathleen. *Acting Out the Gospels – 40 Five-Minute Plays for Education and Worship*. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1999.
- Crehan, Diane. *I Remember Jesus – Stories to Tell and How to Tell Them*. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1999.
- Marmoughet, Rosemary. *Scripture Alive – Role-Plays for Youth*. Winona, MN: St. Mary’s Press, 1997.
- Rousell, Sheila O’Connell and Terri Vorndran Nichols. *Lectionary-Based Gospel Dramas for Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany*. Winona, MN: St. Mary’s Press, 1997.

- Rousell, Sheila O'Connell and Terri Vorndran Nichols. *Lectionary-Based Gospel Dramas for Lent and the Easter Triduum*. Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 1999.
- Schneider, M. Valerie. *Gospel Scenes for Teens – 23 Guided Prayer Meditations*. Mystic, CT: Twenty Third Publications, 2000.
- Zyromski, Page McKean. *Echo Stories for Children*. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1998.

Part 3

In-Depth Learning Experiences (90 minutes)

The In-Depth Learning Experience is designed so that it can work flexibly with two formats:

Age Group (using the lesson plan with break-out groups for families with children, adolescents, and adults), and **Learning Activity Centers**.

Age Group Format

This format provides for three separate parallel learning programs. Though age groups are separated, each one is focusing on the same topic.

You might choose this format if you have:

- an adequate number of meeting spaces for the various groups to gather
- an adequate number of competent facilitators and catechists to work with each group
- a topic that is best explored through age-specific learning

Facilitation Tips for This Format

- Organize participants into three or more parallel learning groups: families with children (grades 1-5), adolescents (grades 6-12), and adults.
- If there are a large number of adolescents, divide them into two groups: middle school and high school.

Organize separate groups for young adults, adults, and older adults. Or you can give the adults their own choice for forming small groups.

- Direct the adolescents and adults into small groups. Give them all the handouts and learning materials needed for the learning experiences
- Guide the families with children into table groups of two or more families. Give each table all the handouts and learning materials necessary for the learning experiences.
- A facilitator must guide all of the families through each learning experience, while catechist move from table to table assisting.

Age Group Format Outline

The In-Depth Learning Plan can be utilized for break-out groups of families with children, adolescents, and adults.

Families with Children

You can organize the learning activities in two ways. The lesson plan is designed for table groups of two or more families (you can organize individual family groups). Make sure each table has the supplies, instructions, and learning materials necessary to do the activities. A

facilitator guides the families through each activity. Catechists move from table to table assisting families.

Learning Plan Outline

Activity 1. Advent Wreaths

Activity 2. Jesse Tree

Activity 3. Advent Calendar

Adolescents

Learning Plan Outline (Choose Option 1 or 2.)

Option 1. Waiting and Advent

Option 2. The Messiah is Coming! (Adult Session)

Additional activity to use with Option 1 or 2: Adolescent Advent Wreath Making

Young Adults and Adults

Learning Plan Outline

The Messiah is Coming!

Learning Activity Centers

The Learning Activity Center Format provides structured learning activities at a variety of stations or centers in a common area. Learning activity centers are self-contained learning experiences, focusing on a specific topic or theme. They include brief presentations by the facilitators, interactive and experiential activities, group discussion and sharing. Each center can utilize a different learning method, such as drama or role play, creative arts, prayer, ritual, film, games, demonstrations, exhibits, and music.

One of the best ways to envision a Learning Activity Center Format is to imagine visiting a children's museum or one of the Epcot pavilions at Walt Disney World in Orlando. You will find a variety of interactive, experiential exhibits, media presentations, and staff-facilitated learning activities.

Learning Activity Centers can be used with all age groups. They can be developed for an intergenerational audience or for particular age groups, such as families with children or adolescents or adults. Learning Activity Centers can also be utilized in the families with children learning program within the Age Group Format.

Scheduling and Learning Plan Outline

You can use the activities in the learning plan to create intergenerational or age-specific activity centers for the following four learning activities. It would be best to organize the participants into groups so they can easily move from one activity center to the next (see organizing ideas below). You can also create an activity center for adolescents and adults using activities from the "Images of the Messiah" session.

Learning Plan Outline for using Activity Centers

5. Advent Wreath Making
(Two centers: one for families with children and one for adolescents/adults)
6. Jesse Tree
(Two centers: one for families with children and one for adolescents/adults)
7. Advent Calendar
8. Scripture and Music in the Advent Season (adolescent and adults)

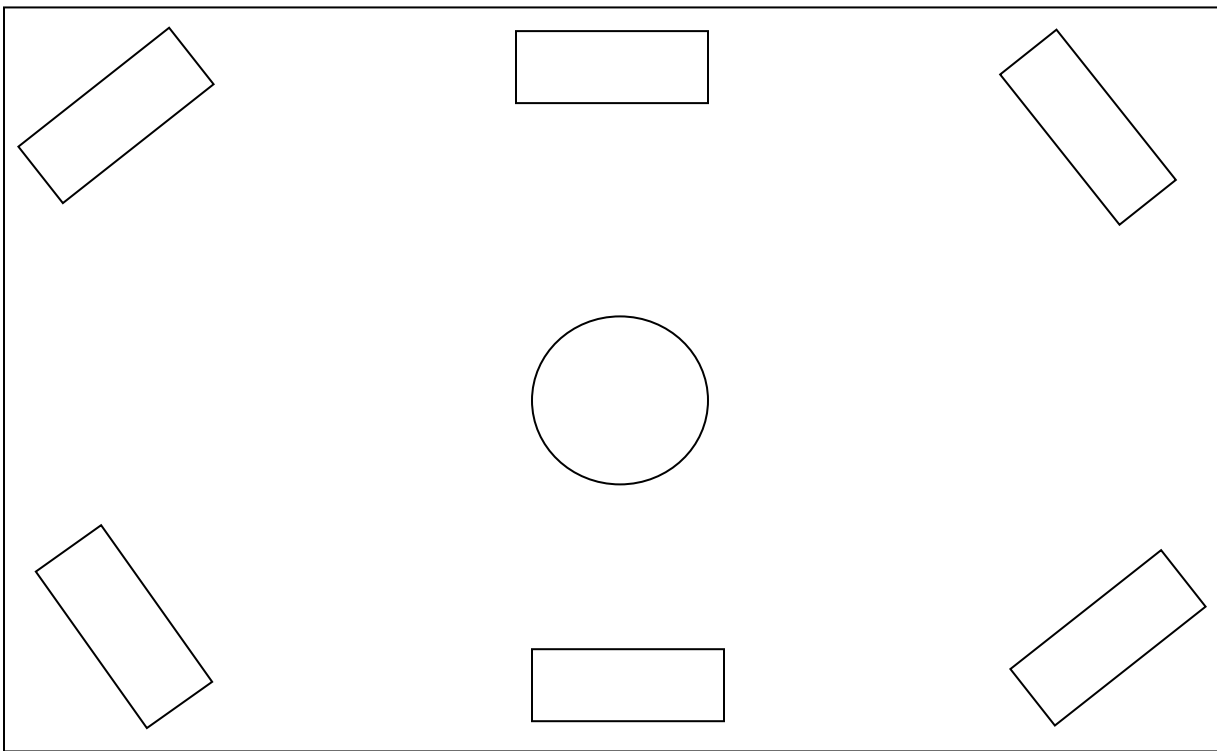
Learning Activity Centers are designed to be conducted within a 20-25 minute timeframe. Here is a sample schedule with three rounds of learning centers:

- 6:00 Hospitality and Dinner
- 6:30 Part 1. Gathering and Prayer
Part 2. All Ages Learning Experience
- 7:00 Round 1: Learning Activity Centers
- 7:25 Break (move to next center)
- 7:30 Round 2: Learning Activity Centers
- 7:55 Break (move to next center)
- 8:00 Round 3: Learning Activity Centers
- 8:25 Break (gather in intergenerational groups)

Organizing the Activity Centers

There are two ways to set up activity centers: one large room, or multiple break-out rooms.

If you arrange all of the learning centers in one large meeting gym or parish hall, set-up the centers around the outside of the room (see example). The center space can become a storytelling center with a carpet or chairs for children to sit. The example below shows six different learning centers plus the storytelling center. You may still need separate rooms if you have a learning center that focuses on prayer (worship space) or shows a film (meeting room).



Keep in mind the following when organizing in one room:

- Make sure there is adequate space between learning centers so that people are not interrupted by the activity at other centers.
- Set-up each learning activity center with tables and chairs (or carpeted floor space) for participants to listen, discuss, and create. Children and teens can use the floor, but adults will need chairs.
- Assign each learning center a number and post the number on the wall and floor at each center.

If you arrange learning centers in multiple rooms such as meeting rooms, classrooms, parish hall, gym, worship space, assign one learning center to each space. This format resembles a conference where people move from room to room for each session. Place the learning center name outside each room and develop a list of centers with locations, and a map if necessary, so that people can easily find the correct room.

Organizing Groups

Once you have determined how many learning centers you will offer, you can organize participants accordingly. If you offer four learning centers, you can organize the participants into four groups of equal size and assign each group a specific sequence that they will move through the learning centers. Assign a number to each learning center and an alphabet letter to each group, then describe how they will move through the centers: Group A: 1-2-3-4; Group B: 2-3-4-1, Group C: 3-4-1-2, and Group D: 4-1-2-3. If you offer three learning centers, there would be three groups rotating among the three learning centers. Keep families together in one group.

If you offer more than three or four learning centers, allow people to choose the learning centers they are going to experience. Remind them that if a particular center is crowded, they can move to another center and then return to their first choice in another round. Families with children should stay together because the activities require parents to work with their children.

Staffing

Each center is facilitated by a team of facilitators/catechists who guide the participants through the activity plan. The teaching team facilitates the overall learning plan for the center: making presentations, guiding learning activities, organizing discussions, and so on. The number of team members needed depends on the complexity of the activities and the number of participants at a learning center. Teams should have at least two or three people, but some centers will require five or six people. Older adolescents can also serve as members of the teaching team, and are especially valuable in facilitating creative activities and dramatic presentations.

To present the focus of each learning activity center, ask the teaching teams to present a very brief overview of what they will be doing in each center. Give each participant the list of learning activity centers with short descriptions, a schedule and the locations of the centers.

Advent Wreath

Age Group: Families with Children
Learning Activity Centers: All Ages

Preparation

- A Bible
- Advent wreath-making supplies: (The supplies listed will be needed for *each* wreath to be made.)
 - A circular base to which you can attached evergreen branches. The base can be made from a variety of materials such as: vine wreath, wood, wire mesh, Styrofoam, modeling clay, compressed straw, a florists' sponge wreath form, or a straightened coat hanger shaped into a circle. Check a local craft store or craft catalog for options.
 - Evergreen branches sprayed with water to reduce drying. If you are able to collect branches in your area, involve the participants in cutting and trimming them. Provide old scissors or hand shears for cutting. If boughs are not readily available in your area, ask parishioners to donate trimmings from their Christmas trees the Sunday prior to the program. Provide several buckets of water near the church entrance for collection of the cuttings.
 - Four candles, either taper or votive style: three purple and one pink; or four white candles with purple and pink ribbon to tie around the base of the candles.
 - Candle holders (glass or foil) or a way to attach the candles to the wreath, or set inside the wreath.
 - Pieces of wire, hammer and tacks or carpenter staples to attach the evergreen sprigs to the wreath base.

Activity Plan

1. [spoken text] Introduce the Advent wreath activity by saying: *The lighting of the Advent wreath is one of our most popular Advent traditions. Its origin is in pre-Christian Germany and Scandinavia where the people gathered to celebrate the return of the sun after the winter solstice. The circular wreath made of evergreens with four candles interspersed represented the circle of the year and the life that endures through the winter. As the days grew longer, people lit candles to offer thanks to the "sun god" for the light. For us, the lighting of the Advent candles represents the promise of the coming of Jesus, the light of the world. As the light of the Advent wreath grows, we share in the expectations of Isaiah, of John the Baptist and of Mary for the fulfillment of God's promise to send a savior. We look forward to the coming of Jesus who pierces the darkness of sin by the light of his love.* (From: *Celebrating Advent in Your Home* by Kathryn Schneider and Robert Hama. Catholic Update, C1191. St. Anthony Messenger Press.)
2. [spoken text] Provide the participants with a brief background on the significance of Advent and the Advent wreath using the text below or your own words. Include how the Advent wreath is used each week in your parish at Sunday liturgies and how it can be used at home.

- *The Church's liturgical year begins with the first Sunday of Advent.*
- *Advent begins on the Sunday nearest November 30th, which is the feast of St. Andrew, and lasts until December 24th.*
- *The word Advent comes from the word adventus which means "coming."*
- *Advent is a season in the Church year when we remember how the Word of God became human in the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem, which we celebrate on Christmas. During Advent we also reflect on and celebrate how Jesus comes into our lives and is present with us every day.*
- *Advent is a time of hoping and working for a change of heart. We focus on being more open to the love of God in our lives, and the salvation offered through Jesus.*
- *The Advent wreath is a tradition of the season. It is a symbol of our hope in Jesus Christ, who is the Light of the world.*
- *The circle and evergreens on the Advent wreath remind us of God's everlasting love which has no beginning and no end.*
- *The four unlit candles on the wreath remind us of the four thousand years before Christ's birth, a time of spiritual "cold and darkness" as humanity awaited the birth of the Messiah. They also represent the four weeks of Advent.*
- *It is customary to use three purple and one pink or white candle on the Advent wreath. The purple reminds us of the need for sorrow for our sins. The pink or white candle reminds us of the joy and hope we share in Jesus, the Light of the World, whose birth we celebrate at Christmas.*
- *Advent begins with the lighting of one purple candle on the first Sunday of Advent. The pink candle is lit the third week when the Advent focus shifts to the special joy of the Christmas event. The increasing light of each week reminds us that Christmas is closer, and Christ's presence continues to grow and brighten our lives. It also reminds us that by being Christ's light today, we can brighten the "darkness" we find in our lives and in the world around us.*

3. Then distribute wreath-making materials and guide the participants in making a wreath. Depending on the plan you chose, they will either make one wreath as a group, or make individual wreaths for participants to take home.

Play some traditional Christmas carols as the wreaths are being made. If social time is not scheduled at the end of the program, consider providing refreshments while making the wreath.

Begin with the base. Place fresh evergreen branches over the base. You will find it helpful to place the styrofoam circle on a piece of cardboard (or other firm base for moving the Advent wreath). Attach the evergreen branches and candles to the base. If white candles are used, tie purple ribbon around three, and a pink ribbon around one.

4. Add a Scripture passage or a prayer to the Advent wreath. Participants can add a weekly Scripture passage to the Advent wreath by selecting a reading (Old Testament or Gospel reading) from the Sunday or daily Lectionary readings in Advent. Participants can write a prayer for each week of Advent to pray before lighting the Advent wreath candle(s) for the week. Here are sample prayers for each week of Advent.

Prayer for the First Week of Advent: Come, Lord Jesus! Open our minds and hearts and souls as we wait for you to be born anew in our lives and in our family. Help us to experience your love in our family throughout Advent.

Prayer for the Second Week of Advent: *Come, Lord Jesus! Bring peace and healing into our family and our world. May we hear again your own prayer – “that we may be one.” May we prepare the way for you by being generous and forgiving.*

Prayer for the Third Week of Advent: *Come, Lord Jesus! Come and stay with our family and friends – and all who are dear to us. May your light shine brightly so we can see you everywhere. Help us to spread your light and joy by giving freely and happily to all we meet.*

Prayer for the Fourth Week of Advent: *Come, Lord Jesus! We hunger, we thirst, we wait for you! Come, Lord Jesus and do not delay!*

5. Close with a blessing of the Advent wreaths. Use or adapt the following prayer. (You may want to write the responses on newsprint or poster board for all to see.)

Leader Our help is in the name of the Lord.
All Who made heaven and earth.

Leader As we gather around these wreaths, we remember God’s promise. Listen to the words of the prophet Isaiah: *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.* The Word of the Lord.
All Thanks be to God.

Leader Let us now pray for God’s blessing upon us and upon this wreath. *(Short silence)*
Lord our God, we praise you for your child, Jesus Christ: Emmanuel, the hope of all people, the wisdom that teaches and guides us, the Savior of every nation. Lord God, let your blessing come upon us this Advent season. May the wreath and its light be a sign of Christ’s promise to bring us salvation. We ask this through Christ our Lord.
All Amen.

Leader Let us bless the Lord.
All Thanks be to God.

Advent Calendar

Age Group: Families with Children
Learning Activity Centers: All Ages

Making an Advent Calendar is a great way to help people of all ages chart their path of preparation for celebrating Christ's coming at Christmas. Participants are reminded of the spirit of the Advent season—a time of waiting and making room for the Christ child to be born among us. Each participant will leave this session with a personalized Advent calendar containing reminders of things to do to prepare for Christmas.

Preparation

Supplies

- Copies of the handouts: *Advent Calendar Ideas* and *My Advent Calendar*
- Bible
- Pens / pencils for participants
- Easel and newsprint for presentations, masking tape, markers
- Christmas music and cassette or CD player

To simplify the activity and save time, you will want to prepare for the calendar making in advance. Using the *Calendar Options* handout, select the best option based for you. If you select the construction paper calendars, be sure to arrange for volunteers to help prepare this option in advance.

Activity Plan

1. Read each statement one at a time, allowing enough time for members of the groups to share a response with each other. Select as many questions as time allows. Keep the discussion moving from question to question.

Questions Set #1: Thinking Back on Christmas

- "Christmas is . . ." or "What is Christmas?"
- "The word or phrase that best describes Christmas preparation for me is . . ." For younger children: "How do you get ready for Christmas?"
- "What I like most about waiting for Christmas is . . ." or "What do you like about waiting for Christmas?"
- "What I like least about waiting for Christmas is . . ." or "What don't you like about waiting for Christmas?"
- "If there were no presents, what would be the best part about Christmas?"

Questions Set #2: An Alternative Set of Questions

Think back on Christmases past and how you prepared individually and as a family for the holiday celebration. What events and experiences, thoughts and feelings come immediately to mind? Use the following sentences to describe what preparing for Christmas is like for you.

- The word or phrase that best describes Christmas preparation and celebration for me is....
- Getting ready for Christmas brings out the best in me and in others because....
- Getting ready for Christmas brings out the worst in me and in others because....
- If every day were Christmas....

2. [spoken text] Introduce the calendar activity by explaining the following in your own words or using the words below:

- *Advent, which means “coming,” is a time when we remember that the world waited for Jesus who was the perfect and complete gift of God’s love.*
- *Jesus is always with us, but we take this particular time to prepare and wait to celebrate Jesus’ birth at Christmas.*
- *In a special way, we celebrate the hope that Jesus brings, and our call to continually grow in our love and faith in God – this growth is called conversion.*
- *Jesus is also called Emmanuel, which means God with us. At Advent we take time to recall and celebrate that Jesus, as God, became human like us to show us the way to live and love.*
- *Advent is also a time to remember God’s call to love and share. We can prepare for Christmas by praying, by being generous, by being kind, and by serving others.*
- *To celebrate Advent, we can choose to do things that we hope will help us prepare for Christmas, we can also choose to not do things as a way of making more room for prayer and sharing.*
- *One of the traditions of celebrating Advent is to use an Advent Calendar to count off the days until Christmas, and help us focus on our preparation for this holiday as a “holy” day.*
- *Our waiting during Advent is “hopeful” waiting, which means we are hoping and believing in something good in the future. We want to be sure that we don’t waste our time waiting during Advent. We want to use our time well in preparing to celebrate Christmas, and the gift of Jesus as the Messiah. So what might we do during this time of Advent? As Christians, how are we called to prepare for Christmas?*
- *We will each make an Advent Calendar that will help us to focus on preparing for Christ’s presence at a time when all of the stores and commercials are trying to get us to focus on Christmas as a time of material gifts and money!*

3. Guide the participants in making a personal Advent calendar.

For younger children:

Guide them in making a weekly calendar with several ideas for each week.

- Using the *Advent Calendar Ideas*, select a variety of possible things that the children can do. Write these ideas on poster board or newsprint or on a transparency. Ask the children to help you find ways that they can prepare for Jesus’ coming.
- In each of the four boxes on the handout, *My Advent Calendar*, ask the children to write down at least one thing they will do that week to prepare for Jesus’ coming. Help them to answer the question, *This week I will...*
- Give them Christmas stickers so that they can put a sticker next to each idea that they do on their Advent calendar.

For older children:

Guide them in making a 25 day Advent calendar.

- Distribute the *Advent Calendar Ideas* and *My Advent Calendar*.

- Ask the participants to read the variety of ideas on the handout, *Advent Calendar Ideas* and your own ideas. Invite the participants to brainstorm other ways that they can prepare for Jesus' coming.
- Place each idea chosen into a box on the handout, *My Advent Calendar*. (Boxes 24 and 25 are already provided on the calendar.)
- Explain how to complete the Calendar based on the option you have selected from *Calendar Options*.

While participants are making calendars play some Christmas music in the background.

4. Suggest that participants take their calendar home and post it on their bedroom door or mirror so they can view it each day in a private way, or on the refrigerator if they want some help from family members to live their Advent ideas.

Jesse Tree

Age Group: Families with Children, Adolescents

Learning Activity Centers: All Ages

Preparation

- To make the Jesse tree symbols: cardboard, poster board, construction paper, large file cards, and/or clear plastic transparency sheets that can be traced and colored with magic marker; aluminum foil, last year's Christmas cards, (clay or dough can also work well); pens or pencils, crayons or colored makers, magazines for photos, tape or glue sticks, etc.
- To make the Jesse tree: You will also need a bare tree (no leaves) or a series of branches that you can connect. Make sure the tree or branches are large enough for you to attach all of the Jesse Tree symbols. You may need several trees. Pot the "tree" or branches in a bucket using sand and stones to help it to stand erect.
- If you assign Scripture stories to individuals or pairs, you will need to give them Bibles or a copy of their Scripture passage on a handout.
- Purchase copies of *The Jesse Tree* by Diane Houdek (Catholic Update, November 1977, C1197) for all teachers and program leaders. (Call 800-488-0488 to order.)
- Purchase copies of *Advent – Reclaiming a Birthright* by Kathy Mulhern (Youth Update, Y1197) for all of the adolescents. (Call 800-488-0488 to order.)
- Prior to the session leaders should review *The Jesse Tree* by Diane Houdek (Catholic Update, C1197) and all of the Scripture passages from *Stories of Advent – Making Your Jesse Tree* that will be used in the session.

Alternative Format

Another way to create a Jesse tree without the "tree" is to use a very large sheet of poster board or foam core. Draw the outline of a tree on the poster/foam core and use this as a display for the Jesse tree symbols.

Activity Plan

1. [spoken text] Introduce the Jesse tree activity to the group using the following commentary or in your own words.

Many of us have photographs of parents, grandparents, great-aunts and uncles, and great-grandparents. Some we actually knew, many we know only through stories. People who make up our family tree hold a fascination for us.

So, too, the people who make up our family of faith tell us much about who we are and how we are related to God. As Christians we are part of the extended family of Jesus of Nazareth. His family tree is the story of salvation history, the story of a people chosen, spared and redeemed by God.

Matthew's genealogy (Mt 1:1-17), which we hear at Christmastime each year, tells us that Jesus was the son of David, Israel's greatest king, and back even further, the son of Abraham, the first patriarch

of the Hebrew people, the first person called by God. Out of this family line, God would take flesh and live among the people of earth.

*From medieval times, Christians have been fascinated with visual representations of the family tree of Jesus. A stained glass window at Chartres Cathedral in France, built in the early 13th century, depicts a Jesse tree, representing the family tree of Jesse, the father of King David, that blossoms in the birth of Jesus the Messiah, the “Son of David.” This ancient tradition of the Jesse tree was revived in the mid-20th century as an Advent practice. (From *The Jesse Tree* by Diane Houdek. Catholic Update, November 1977, C1197)*

Continue with...

The Jesse tree represents Jesus’ family tree. The name is taken from Isaiah 11:1, in which Jesus is referred to as a shoot coming up from the stump of Jesse, the father of David. The ornaments on the Jesse tree tell of Jesus’ ancestors, and of the events leading to Jesus’ birth. While it is hard to establish when and where the custom of the Jesse tree began, it most likely started in the Middle Ages as a way to teach Bible stories. A Jesse tree is a bare branch that holds symbols of people from the Old Testament who waited and prepared for Jesus. Tradition has it that the love and preparation given the Jesse Tree would make flowers burst forth from the branch. This is why a bare branch, rather than an evergreen, is used.

Roots are important parts of a tree. As people, we need to know our roots, as well. Often, we run from one thing to another without reflecting on where we have been or where we are going. As we create a Jesse tree during this Advent season, let us pause and look at the great people of faith upon whose shoulders we stand.

To give the group a sense of Jesus’ family tree, read the genealogy of Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 1:1-17. (Do your best with all the names.) Make the connection between the Jesse Tree activity and the genealogy of Jesus. Note how many of the people in the genealogy are included on the handout, *Stories of Advent – Making Your Jesse Tree*.

Activity Option: Your Family Tree

To illustrate what a genealogy looks like, consider inviting the participants to draw their own family tree on a sheet of newsprint or poster board and presenting it to the group at this time.

2. On the handout, *Stories of Advent – Making Your Jesse Tree*, you will find prominent people from the Bible, the references to where you can find their stories, and suggested symbols that represent each person. Use the following process to guide participants in the creation of tree ornaments for the Jesse tree.
 - a) Select the people from the handout, *Stories of Advent*, for whom you are going to create symbols. (Depending on how the program is organized a particular age group may study several people or the entire list.)
 - b) Read the passage(s) from the Bible as indicated on the handout, *Stories of Faith*. For older children and adolescents, you can assign individuals or pairs one Bible person from the list to read. (You may want to make copies of the handout for each person or write the contents of the handout on a sheet of newsprint or poster board.) For

- younger children, you will need to read the Bible stories and guide them in creating symbols.
- c) Create your symbol to hang on the Jesse Tree. For each symbol: include the person(s) name, the symbol artwork, and a brief quote from the Scripture passage that captures the character or contribution of the person.

You can make the symbols out of cardboard, construction paper, or clear plastic transparency sheets that can be traced and colored with magic marker; aluminum foil, last year's Christmas cards, clay or dough. Run a string through the top of each ornament for hanging on the tree.

3. Invite the individuals or pairs to share their Jesse tree ornament by introducing their person to the group, the symbol, and the brief quote from Scripture that they included on their ornament.
4. Close by praying The Magnificat (Luke 1:44-57) together. Consider giving each person a copy of The Magnificat to take home. Encourage them to take it home and pray it every night during the remaining days of Advent, asking Mary to give them the courage to approach God with humility and an openness to God's will and spirit in their lives during this Advent season.

Additional Resources

Advent Stories and Activities – Meeting Jesus through the Jesse Tree. Anne Neuberger. (Mystic CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1997)

This book introduces the Advent tradition of keeping a Jesse Tree, and offers 24 ancient stories and symbols (from creation to the nativity) to mark the days before Christmas for children of all ages.

Tree of Hope: Our Advent Celebration. (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press)

This 32-page booklet contains 14 Jesse tree "ornaments" to color, with prayerful material to help you reflect and celebrate. (Single copy: \$1.25, bulk discounts available. Call 800-488-0488.)

Variations and Extensions

- **Family Tree of Faith:** Have the children and adolescents make a genealogical tree for their own family. Have them do the research by asking older relatives to share their knowledge about the family's history. Ask them to identify their family's "people of faith" and the unique gift or strength or characteristic they possessed. During the session, ask the participants to create a symbol for each person. These symbols can be placed on the family Christmas tree.
- **Parish Tree of Faith:** A parish can make a "parish tree of faith" or other similar listing of people who have been important to the church family, such as pastors, pastoral associates, lay ministers, catechists, teachers, janitors, parishioners, and the like. Place these people's names in a prominent place at the beginning of Advent, and invite the parish to stop by, read the "tree," and offer prayers for those listed on it.

Advent Wreath Making: Adolescents

Age Group: Adolescent

Participants will learn about the liturgical year, the season of Advent and the importance of rituals and symbols to help them celebrate Christmas as a “holy day” rather than simply a “holiday.” They will learn how to make an Advent wreath and be provided a prayer service to lead with their families during the Advent season.

Preparation

- Handout: *The Liturgical Year: Seasons of Our Church*
- Handout: *Advent – Did You Know?*
- Handout: *Advent Wreath Lighting Prayer*
- Leader Background Articles: (One copy of each article is included with *FaithWays*, purchase additional copies from St. Anthony Messenger Press at 800-488-0488.)
- *The Liturgical Year – How Christians Celebrate Time* by Sandra DiGidio, O.S.M. Catholic Update C1195.
- *The Lectionary and the Liturgical Year* by Thomas Richstatter, O.F.M. Scripture from Scratch N0795.
- A liturgical calendar poster (Optional. Available from *Liturgy Training Publications* at 800-933-1800)
- Several sheets of Christmas wrapping paper (with a simple design)
- Large markers and tape
- Christmas music and a tape or CD player
- Matches
- Purple, or dark blue cloth (optional)
- Clean-up supplies
- Advent wreath-making supplies (**Note:** the supplies listed will be needed for *each* wreath to be made. If individual participants are making wreaths, each person will need the supplies listed.)
 - A circular base to which you can attached evergreen boughs. The base can be made from a variety of materials such as: vine wreath, wood, wire mesh, Styrofoam, modeling clay, compressed straw, a florists’ sponge wreath form, or a straightened coat hanger shaped into a circle. Check a local craft store or craft catalog for options.
 - Evergreen sprigs or boughs sprayed with water to reduce drying. If you are able to collect boughs in your area, involve the adolescents in cutting and trimming them. Provide old scissors or hand shears for cutting. If boughs are not readily available in your area, ask parishioners to donate trimmings from their Christmas trees the Sunday prior to the program. Provide several buckets of water near the church entrance for collection of the cuttings.
 - Four candles, either taper or votive style: three purple and one pink; or four white candles with purple and pink ribbon to tie around the base of the candles.
 - Candle holders (glass or foil) or a way to attach the candles to the wreath, or set inside the wreath.

- Pieces of wire, hammer and tacks or carpenter staples to attach the evergreen sprigs to the wreath base.

Activity Plan

1. Introductions and Focusing Activity (10 minutes)

Invite participants to share their name, what season of the year they would like best if there were no school, and why they chose that season.

Dialogue

Lead a brief dialogue about the changes and seasons of nature. Use the following questions as a guide:

- How do you know when the season has changed from spring to summer, to fall, to winter, to spring?
- If you woke up from a long coma and did not know the date, how would you know what season it was? (If you woke up from a coma, how might you determine what season it is in the liturgical calendar – what would be some clues you could look for?)
- If someone who had never experienced the changes of seasons ask you why there are seasons, and how can you tell them apart, what would you tell them?

2. Presentation: Seasons of the Church (10 minutes)

Distribute the **Handout: *The Liturgical Year: Seasons of Our Church***, and post a liturgical calendar “poster” on the wall, if available. Give a brief presentation on the seasons of the Church highlighting the following points. (Use the two Leader Background Articles for more information.)

- The cycle of the Church seasons reflects the story of salvation – a story which began in the Old Testament. Youth have been exploring the Old Testament in their learning groups during the Fall.
- Through the course of each year, the Church remembers and re-tells the story of Jesus’ life through the seasons of the liturgy – and each season is reflected in the vestments and environment at Mass.
- The season of Advent which is about to begin, is a time of preparing and waiting for Christmas – a time when we celebrate both the birth of Jesus in Nazareth, and the continued presence of Jesus in our lives today.

3. Group Discussion: Differing Views on Preparing for Christmas (10-15 minutes)

[spoken text] Introduce this activity by saying in these words or in your own words: *If Advent is a time of preparing for Christmas, then let’s consider several different views on getting ready to celebrate. What does the media say about getting ready for Christmas? How does your family get ready? And how do we as a Church get ready?*

On a sheet of Christmas wrapping paper (one with a simple design so printing will be readable), invite participants to draw lines down the page to form three columns. Title them Media, Family/Home, and Church (see example).

Ask the group to briefly describe what the media suggest Christmas is about, and how to get ready. Record their responses in the Media column of the newsprint. Then ask them to name some of the ways their family gets ready and celebrates Christmas, recording responses and noting any ethnic traditions that are named. And finally ask how the Church gets ready to celebrate Christmas, recording responses.

Example:

Ways to Prepare for Christmas		
Media	Family/Home	Church
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shop til you drop • buy big gifts • buy new decorations • make a big meal • travel to visit • call long distance • send gifts express 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • decorate the tree • wrap presents • write cards • get ready for guests • Advent calendar & wreath • sing Christmas carols • make cookies • light Luminaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • decorate with trees and flowers • the nativity scene • Advent wreath • special programs • Christmas carols • clean the Church

Summary

Review the lists that were created, pointing out the differences that are emphasized in preparing for Christmas, particularly between the media and Church.

[spoken text] Close with the following comments, using the text below or in your own words:

The media tends to focus primarily on Christmas as a "holiday," whereas the Church focuses on Christmas as a "holy day." The real meaning of Christmas is in the holy day – not the holiday! Sometimes it can be a challenge as a family to keep the two in balance, and not get consumed by the media blitz for glitz. The season of Advent is when the Church helps us remember what Christmas is really about.

4. The Advent Season (5 minutes)

[spoken text] Share with the young people the following explanation of Advent, in your own words or in the words that follow.

Advent is a time when we prepare to celebrate Jesus' birth and reflect on how we welcome Jesus in our lives today. Imagine what it would be like if Jesus were literally coming to your house on Christmas. Consider what you would do to prepare to welcome him if you had four weeks to get ready. Now, consider that Jesus is already here among us!

Advent lasts four weeks beginning on the Sunday nearest November 30th. During Advent we prepare to celebrate how God became human through the birth of Jesus two thousand years ago. We also celebrate God's presence through Jesus in our lives today. It is a time when we consider how we might open ourselves more fully to God – how we can “prepare to meet Jesus” each day in the people we meet and the choices we make. Just as your family has traditions and rituals to prepare for Christmas, so does our Church. One of the rituals and symbols we use during this season is the Advent wreath. Today we are going to make an Advent Wreath together, and learn about it's meaning and use.

5. Wreath Making (15-30 minutes)

Using the **Handout: Advent – Did You Know?** explain the Advent wreath including its symbols and use during the Advent season. Include how the Advent wreath is used each week in your parish at Sunday liturgies.

Then distribute wreath-making materials and guide the youth in making a wreath. Depending on the plan you chose, they will either make one wreath as a group, or make individual wreaths for participants to take home. Play some traditional Christmas carols as the wreaths are being made.

Supplies needed for each wreath being made are

- a circular base
- evergreen boughs
- four candles (three purple and one pink, or four white with purple and pink ribbons)
- four candle holders
- wire or staples to fasten the evergreens and candle holders to the base

Attach the evergreen boughs and candles to the base. If white candles are used, tie purple ribbon around three, and pink ribbon around one.

Word and Music in the Advent-Christmas Seasons

Age Group: Young Adult and Adult

Learning Activity Centers: All Ages

Preparation

Organize a presentation, using the music and a reading from each Sunday of Advent and Christmas Day, by a parish staff person or guest speaker and the parish music director or other musician. This program is best done in church where the musician has access to an organ or piano.

Activity Plan

Guide participants through the Advent-Christmas seasons by using the following process, repeating it for each Sunday of Advent and Christmas Day:

1. Begin with a reading from the Lectionary (Old Testament or Gospel reading) that focuses on preparing for the Messiah.
2. Share a brief reflection on the reading. Use a Lectionary commentary.
3. Invite the participants in small groups to share a reflection on the reading using a question such as: *What does the reading say to us about the Messiah and what he will come to do? What are the implications of the images of the Messiah found in this reading for our lives as Catholics?*
4. Conclude by singing an Advent hymn on the theme of the reading. Use hymns that will be sung during the Advent-Christmas season.

Waiting and Advent

Age Group: Adolescents

The **Waiting and Advent** program features a prayerful and creative activity to help adolescents chart their path of preparation for celebrating Christ's coming at Christmas. Participants are reminded of the spirit of the Advent season, a time of waiting and making room for the Christ child to be born among us. Each participant will leave with a personalized Advent calendar containing reminders of things to do to prepare for Christmas.

Preparation

- Handout: *Advent Calendar Ideas*
- Handout: *My Advent Calendar*
- Handout: *Worth Waiting For*
- Bible
- Pens / pencils for participants
- Easel and newsprint for presentations
- Masking tape
- Newsprint / markers
- Christmas music and cassette or CD player
- Supplies to make Calendar covers: (depends upon option selected)
 - construction paper
 - scissors
 - magazines
 - used Christmas cards
 - markers
 - glitter
 - glue / glue sticks
- Make the "Meeting in Progress – Please Wait" sign to be posted on the door for the waiting activity.
- Create newsprint posters for the four "Calls" described in the Scripture reading. You will need at least one poster for each call. If you expect a large number of participants, you may need two sets of newsprint posters. The four calls are
 - We are called to prayer
 - We are called to be peacemakers
 - We are called to share
 - We are called to love

To simplify the activity and save time, you will want to prepare for the calendar making in advance. Using the Leader Resource: *Calendar Options*, select the best option based on your community and resources. If you select the construction paper calendars, be sure to arrange for volunteers to help prepare this option in advance.

Activity Plan

1. Introduction / Focusing Activity (10 minutes)

To gather for this activity, adapt the following idea to your climate and facilities. Rather than welcoming the youth into the room where you will meet, place a sign on the door that states: **Meeting in Progress – Please Wait**. With the leaders and participants, find a place to stand and wait for the room to be ready. After five to seven minutes, have someone check the room and invite everyone in to find a seat.

[spoken text] In these or similar words, welcome the group: *Welcome, I apologize that the room wasn't ready for us. How did it feel to have to wait? What did you want to do instead of waiting?*

(Gather ideas from group)

*I can not tell a lie. We did this on purpose as a way to experience together what it means to **wait**. In our culture, waiting is sometimes a hard thing that we try to avoid, like waiting in line at the movies or an amusement park, or waiting for our favorite show to start on TV, or waiting (desperately) for vacation to start! In fact sometimes we alternate between rushing to get somewhere and waiting to start. "Hurry up and wait," as they say.*

2. Reflection Activity (15 minutes)

[spoken text] Introduce the reflection activity in these or similar words:

Waiting is a part of our lives – but the experience of waiting is not always the same. We can be frustrated or bored while waiting for some things. Sometimes waiting means that we end up with extra time on our hands that we didn't count on. We don't like to "waste" time, so we often try to find some way to fill the time.

For other events, the waiting is part of the experience because we are anticipating something special and because we have things to do to get ready while we are waiting for the special event. Waiting can be fun – some of the most important occasions in our lives are ones that are worth waiting for. A special birthday celebration for instance, or a visit from a special person living far away. Part of the joy of the celebration is the anticipation – the getting ready.

With special occasions, there are usually important things to do and people to be with while we are preparing for the event. What are some special events or occasions that we wait for and we get ready for while we are waiting?

List responses on newsprint. Add additional ideas if needed. Here are several examples.

- Preparing for a special guest to come to your home
- Getting ready for an older brother or sister to return home from college
- Preparing for a birthday celebration
- Planning for a vacation or holiday
- Preparing for graduation

Distribute a copy of the **Handout: Worth Waiting For** and a pencil to each participant. Explain the next activity in these or similar words:

*Using your worksheet, take a few minutes to reflect on **waiting** by choosing one event from our list or one from your own life. What are some of the ways that you and/or your family might prepare or get ready for this special event? For example, we wait for the chance to celebrate someone's birthday and while we are waiting we usually think about that person, we select or make a birthday card or gift, we get the house ready for a celebration, we call friends and talk about the party and other special things to do to celebrate their birthday. After working individually you will have the chance to share in your group some of the ways that we spend our time while waiting and preparing for a special occasion.*

Allow five minutes for individual reflection, then form small discussion groups. In the large group model, divide into learning groups or groups of six to eight. Each group will need a **Learning Guide** or group facilitator. (If groups are new to the participants, allow a few minutes for introductions.)

Allow ten minutes for individuals to share their responses to the handout in small groups. Here are several sample starter questions for the small group discussion.

- How do we spend our time waiting and preparing?
- What were the most common ways people prepare for a special occasion?
- Which responses were unique to an individual?

After several minutes of small group discussion, gather in a large group and ask for a sampling of ideas that were shared.

Presentation

[spoken text] Transition from “waiting” to highlighting some key ideas about the season of Advent using the text below or your own words.

*We have shared together things we do personally or as a family to prepare for a special event. Our faith community also sets aside seasons of time to prepare for our most important church celebrations. Today's program focuses on the upcoming season of Advent, which we celebrate in our faith community as a time dedicated to **waiting**.*

- *Advent, which means “coming,” is a time when we remember that the world waited for Jesus who was the perfect and complete gift of God's love.*
- *Jesus is always with us, but we take this particular time to prepare and wait to celebrate Jesus' birth at Christmas.*
- *In a special way, we celebrate the hope that Jesus brings, and our call to continually grow in our love and faith in God – this growth is called conversion.*
- *Jesus is also called Emmanuel, which means God with us. At Advent we take time to recall and celebrate that Jesus, as God, became human like us to show us the way to live and love.*
- *Advent is also a time to remember God's call to love and share. We can prepare for Christmas by praying, by being generous, by being kind, and by serving others.*
- *To celebrate Advent, we can choose to do things that we hope will help us prepare for Christmas, we can also choose to not do things as a way of making more room for prayer and sharing.*

- *One of the traditions of celebrating Advent is to use an Advent Calendar to count off the days until Christmas, and help us focus on our preparation for this holiday as a “holy” day.*
- *Today we will each make an Advent Calendar that will help us to focus on preparing for Christ’s presence at a time when all of the stores and commercials are trying to get us to focus on Christmas as a time of material gifts and money!*

3. God’s Call and Our Responses (25 minutes)

[spoken text] Introduce this portion of the session by saying:

Our waiting during Advent is “hopeful” waiting, which means we are hoping and believing in something good in the future. We want to be sure that we don’t waste our time of waiting during Advent. We want to use our time well in preparing to celebrate Christmas, and the gift of Jesus as the Messiah. So what might we do during this time of Advent? As Christians, how are we called to prepare for Christmas?

Let’s listen together to a part of the letter from St. Paul to the Phillipians. As you listen, what does St. Paul remind us that we are called to do? How would St. Paul suggest we spend our time waiting for Christmas to come?

Ask someone to read: Philippians 4: 4-9

St. Paul is writing to us today as much as he was to the people of his own time. What are some of the things St. Paul suggests we are called to do and called to be as people of faith? How are we to spend our time waiting?

Ask for some sample responses from the group. After several responses, suggest that Advent is an opportunity to reflect on four particular ways we are called to be God’s people, and to show that we belong to Christ Jesus.

Introduce the four “Calls” that will be the focus of discussion by posting each one on a separate sheet of newsprint:

1. We are called to prayer
2. We are called to be peacemakers
3. We are called to share
4. We are called to love

Group Activity

This activity engages participants in brainstorming practical ideas of things they can do during Advent to live out the four “Calls” suggested in Scripture. The activity can be done either as one large group or facilitated in multiple small groups.

Explain that groups will be asked to create a list of ideas for things to do as a response to each “Call.” These lists should be practical ideas of things we can do this Advent season as a way to live out the “Call” while preparing for Christmas.

To help initiate the process, present and list some examples. For instance, as a response to our call to pray, we could write down a list of people we want to pray for and put the list in our pocket to remind us to pray for these special people during the day. As a response to our call to share, we could choose a charity organization and set aside some of the money that we would use for entertainment or extra clothes to be donated to an organization doing what Jesus would want done.

Option: One Group

If there are less than sixteen participants facilitate the process as one group. Present and post the four “Calls” on newsprint. Spend five to eight minutes brainstorming ideas with the group for one of the “Calls,” then move on to the next. Continue until ideas have been generated for all four newsprint sheets. If possible, post the newsprint sheets in four different parts of the room and ask participants to move from one area to the next as you facilitate the brainstorming process.

Option: Multiple Small Groups

If there are more than fifteen participants, divide the participants into groups of six to ten with a facilitator. Post the four “Calls” on newsprint in four different parts of the room. Assign each group to one newsprint sheet. Allow ten minutes for brainstorming of ideas, then ask groups to rotate to a different newsprint sheet and allow five minutes for them to add ideas to the posted list. Continue until each group has responded to each of the four “Calls.” If your group is very large (more than 50) post duplicate sets of newsprint sheets.

4. Activity (30 minutes)

Distribute the **Handout: Advent Calendar Ideas** and the **Handout: My Advent Calendar**. Leaders should be available to assist the adolescents while they are creating their calendars. Encourage leaders to make a personal Advent calendar as well.

Introduce the activity in these or similar words: *Now is the time when we get the chance to choose some of these ideas as personal reminders of what we hope to do during this Advent season as we wait and prepare for Christmas. You will each create a personal Advent Calendar.*

Explain the following process for calendar-making.

1. Select 24 ideas from the ideas on the newsprint lists, the ideas listed on the **Handout: Advent Calendar Ideas** and your own ideas. (The 25th idea is already provided on the calendar.)
2. Place each idea chosen into a box on the **Handout: My Advent Calendar**.
3. Explain how to complete the Calendar based on the option selected.

Note: While participants are making calendars play some Christmas music in the background.

The Messiah is Coming!

Age Group: Young Adults and Adults

This learning activity explores images of the Messiah as they are introduced in the Advent Lectionary and then developed throughout the Gospels. The focus Scripture readings for this activity are:

- Old Testament: Isaiah 35:1-6, 10 (Third Sunday of Advent-A) or Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11 (Third Sunday of Advent-B),
- Gospel: Matthew 11:2-11 (Third Sunday of Advent-A)

Preparation

Organize participants into groups.

Part 1. Images of the Messiah

1. Invite the participants to take a moment for quiet reflection on their personal images of Jesus. After a period of reflection, ask the participants to share their reflections with the group. This is a storytelling experience so be sure each person has the time to share his or her story without interruptions or discussion.

Personal Reflection: [spoken text]

Close your eyes and relax. Call to mind the many images of Jesus Christ you have learned from the Gospels, from personal study and experience, from family and friends, from your ethnic tradition, and from your involvement in church life (ministry involvements, religious education, Sunday Mass, and other activities).

From all of these images of Jesus which are the most personally meaningful for you? Which images best reflect who Jesus Christ is for you today? Capture an image in a key word or phrase. Can you recall a Gospel story that illustrates each of your images. Take a moment now to reflect on your image of Jesus Christ using the following questions:

- *What does your image of Jesus Christ say about your thoughts and feelings about Jesus? What does it say about your thoughts and feelings about yourself?*
- *How does your image of Jesus Christ influence your relationship with him and the way you live your Christian faith?*

Storytelling:

Share one of your most meaningful images of Jesus with the group, and then discuss the two reflection questions (above) as a group.

2. Begin the exploration by recording the list of the images named by the participants in the reflection activity. Write these on newsprint for all.

3. [spoken text] Share the following in your own words or using the words provided below:

The Advent Lectionary readings announce the coming of the Messiah and what will be the central theme of Jesus' ministry and message: the coming of the reign of God (or kingdom of God). (See the Catechism of the Catholic Church #541-550.)

Through his actions and relationships Jesus gave witness to the meaning of the reign of God. As the Catechism states, "Jesus accompanies his words with many 'mighty works and wonders and signs,' which manifest that the kingdom is present in him and attest that he was the promised Messiah" (#547).

The reign of God was present in and through Jesus and it was evident in the startling way in which he was able to touch and change the lives of those around him. When we look at what Jesus says and does, we see what God says and does. Jesus lives the great commandment to love God and neighbor without any limits. He expressed his love in specific actions of service, compassion, healing, forgiveness, reconciliation.

It is very important to understand Jesus' special concern for the poor and those on the margins of society. Jesus eats with the poor and sinners. He is a friend of tax gatherers and prostitutes and other unsound members of first century Jewish society. He cures the sick and heals the possessed, outcasts in Jewish society of the first century. All of these people are the "poor" or marginalized. They receive particular attention in the Kingdom because of who God is. God's mercy and compassion for the defenseless assures benefits to the poor in the kingdom. (Catechism #544-45.)

4. Read or invite volunteers to read the three readings from the Advent Lectionary that present specific images of the Messiah:

- Isaiah 35:1-6, 10 (Third Sunday of Advent-A)
- Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11 (Third Sunday of Advent-B),
- Matthew 11:2-11 (Third Sunday of Advent-A)

5. In small groups, ask the participants to review the readings and to identify specific images of the Messiah that surface in the readings. Then, ask them to recall specific stories from the Gospels that illustrate these images. Conclude by asking each group to name additional images of the Messiah found in the Gospels.

6. Invite the small groups to share the images that surfaced in the readings and Gospel stories that illustrate these images. Ask for additional Gospel images they identified. Record the images on newsprint for all to see. After the groups have shared, invite people to add comments and reflections on what they heard.

7. In small groups, ask the participants to discuss how the images of the Messiah relate to their own lives and faith in Jesus Christ.

- How did your personal images of the Messiah (Jesus Christ) compare to the images from the Advent readings and the Gospels, in general? How has your exploration affirmed and/or affected your personal images of Jesus Christ? Will any of your images change?

- What impact do the images of the Messiah from the Advent readings and the Gospels, in general, have on your relationship with Jesus Christ?
- What impact do they have on the ways that you live the Catholic faith?
- How will you pay special attention to the images of the Messiah in the Advent season and throughout the year?

Part 2. Preparing for the Messiah

Distribute the **Handout: Advent Calendar Ideas** and the **Handout: My Advent Calendar**.

Introduce the activity in these or similar words:

Now is the time when we get the chance to develop our plan for preparing for the Messiah during Advent. Each person will each create a personal Advent Calendar.

Explain the following process for calendar-making.

1. Take several minutes to consider ways you can celebrate Advent and prepare for the Messiah. Create you own ideas and/or use the ideas listed on the **Handout: Advent Calendar Ideas**.
2. Discuss ideas with your small groups.
3. Develop 24 ways you are going to prepare for the Messiah.
4. Place each idea chosen into a box on the **Handout: My Advent Calendar**.

Note: While participants are making calendars play some Advent music in the background.

Part 4

Sharing Learning Reflections and Home Application (20-25 minutes)

Advanced Preparation

- Determine what each group will bring back to the large group or to their small group to share as a result of their learning.
- Determine how each group will share their reports or projects so that they “teach” the other groups about the event and theme.

Here are examples of presentations that the different learning groups can share with the larger group:

- Families with Children: Several families can present their Jesse Tree or Advent Calendar.
- Adolescents: Several adolescents can share key Scripture passages incorporated in the Jesse Tree or ideas from their Advent Calendars.
- Adults: Adults can share images of the Messiah, an important Scripture reading from the Advent Lectionary, and/or sing an Advent hymn.

Home Kit

Develop an Advent Home Kit that *extends* and *expands* the learning that has taken place through the intergenerational learning program. It should *engage* families and individuals in living their faith at home through traditions and celebrations, rituals, symbols, prayers, service projects, learning activities, and enrichment activities. Include specific activities on the event that you have selected as a focus for the session. These additional activities can include learning activities about the event, Scripture readings, table rituals, prayers, and so on.

Use a variety of design formats for your activities, such as a prayer card, stand-up card, poster, placemat, newsletter, booklet, magnet, bookmark, and artwork.

Included with this session are the following home activities:

1. Prayers for Every Day of Advent
2. Table Prayers for Advent
3. Table Prayer for the Christmas Seasons
4. Praying the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary
5. Blessing before the Christmas Meal and the Christ Candle
6. Blessing for a Christmas Crèche
7. Spiritual Reflection for the Family: Preparing for the Messiah
8. Popular Gospel Stories: Christmas – “Christmas Presence”
9. An Advent Sharing List for Families

1. Whole Group Sharing and Reflection

The whole group sharing experience provides an opportunity for each age group to share something they have learned with the entire group. Ask people to rejoin intergenerational groups from the All Ages Learning Experience OR ask family members to rejoin their own family and individual adolescent and adult participants to stay with their age groups from the In-Depth Learning Experience.

First, ask the participants to share what they learned in a small group setting or by inviting participants or groups, representing families, teens, and adults, to share projects or reflections with the entire.

[spoken text] Second, present the following information using the words below or your own words:

Think of everything we have done in this session to learn about Advent and preparing for the coming of the Messiah at Christmas. Take a few minutes to reflect on what you have learned in this session:

- What is one thing you learned about Advent and the Messiah that you did not know before?
- What will you look for when you participate in the Advent and Christmas seasons in the parish community?
- Why does Advent mean to you now?

Review the Home Kit for the event containing prayers, rituals, service projects, family enrichment, and learning activities. Guide everyone in developing an individual or family action plan for living at home using the Home Kit, and planning for participation in the sacrament.

2. Reflection—Application Strategies

Prepare strategies and activities to guide individuals and families in *reflecting* on the meaning of their learning and their participation in the Church event and in *applying* their learning to daily living as a Catholic. The goal is to help people apply the beliefs and practices to their daily life, and report or “publish” their learning with others in the parish community.

Reflection and application activities and strategies can be included with the Home Kit. You can also include a time for feedback in your next intergenerational learning program

There are a variety of formats for reflection—application activities. Reflection tools include unfinished sentences, reflection questions, learning journals, and a structured reflection activities. Application tools include action plans, practice plans, “to do” lists, and resolutions.

Art and media strategies can also be used to express reflection and application. Consider activities such as a bumper stickers, picture collages, “recipe for living” cards, posters, photos,

and projects that create and bring back to Sunday Mass or the next intergenerational learning program.

Reflection Strategy Suggestions

- **Advent Journal.** Adolescents through adults, as well as families, can use journals to record their experience of Advent and Christmas – their thoughts, feelings, questions, hopes, dreams, faith practices, etc. Journals or poster-journals can record the actual Lenten practices of individuals and families. Consider a poster-journal designed for the refrigerator so that all family members can record their actions and thoughts, feelings, and learning. Include the journal in the Advent Home Kit.
- **Advent Photo Collage.** Give each family a disposal camera in their Home Kit. Ask individuals and families to take photos of their “in-home” experience of Advent and Christmas. Ask them to prepare a photo collage that presents their experience of Advent with descriptions or captions that explain their actions and commentary on their feelings and/or thoughts about living Lent.

Ask them to bring their photos to Sunday Mass on a designated weekend or to a gathered program during the week. Be sure they put their name on the back of the photo. Develop a gallery or bulletin board of photos (in the church gathering space) as a way to publish people’s learning. *Be sure to take photos of the display for the parish scrapbook.* After the display at church, encourage people to display their photos at home (on the refrigerator).

- **Advent “Recipe for Living” Cards.** Ask individuals and families to create practical strategies for living Advent that they have actually practiced. Distribute 3x5 file cards and ask people to write down one practical strategy on each recipe card. Ask them to return the cards on a particular Sunday during the offertory collection or during the week at gathered programs. Consider creating an Advent or annual parish “cook book” of recipes for living the Catholic faith. Publish the book and distribute it to individuals and families. Include pre-printed file cards in the Home Kit.
- **Advent-Christmas Scrapbook.** Give individuals and families a small scrapbook in their Home Kit. Ask everyone to document their journey through the Advent and Christmas seasons. The scrapbook can be filled with photos, artwork, prayers, reflections, etc. documenting the “in-home” experience (e.g., photos of their times of prayer or involvement in serving others, copies of prayers used during the season, etc). Incorporate storytelling in the next gathered program so that individuals and families can share their scrapbooks and their learning and growth.

Example: Reflection on the Advent Season

What did I see at the Masses during the Advent Season?

- Think of the colors, decorations, and artwork used at Mass during the Advent Season. Think of all the actions at Mass this week.
- What did you see at Mass during Advent?

What did I hear at the Masses during Advent?

- Think of the songs you sang during the Advent Season. Think of the Scripture readings each week of Advent, especially the Gospel. Think of the message of the homily.
- What is Advent teaching you? What are the Lectionary readings teaching you about the Messiah?

How did I pray during Advent?

- Think of the prayers and the petitions at Mass during Advent.
- What do the Advent prayers teach us about the Advent Season and the coming of the Messiah. How can you keep the spirit of these prayers in your life during the Advent season?
- Think of the ways you and your family prayed during Advent. What was the focus of your prayer during Advent?

How did I serve others during the Advent Season – with the parish community, as an individual, with my family?

How did you live the Advent Season – at home and in the parish? How did you prepare for the coming of the Messiah?

- What Advent parish celebrations and programs did you participate in?
- How did you live the Advent season at home – prayer, rituals, service to others, etc.?
- What is one thing you learned about Advent this year? How did you grow closer to Jesus Christ during the Advent Season?

Part 5

Closing Prayer Service (5-10 minutes)

To prepare the closing prayer service use the suggested resources from the opening prayer service. If people made Advent wreaths or Advent calendars, you might want to close with one of the following prayer services.

Advent Wreath Lighting Prayer

Ask every to stand..

Leader: All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

(One person lights the first candle for Advent.)

Leader: Our hope is in Christ, the Light of the World.

All: Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Leader: Make ready the way of the Lord, clear a straight path.

All: Lord, you are the Way, the Truth and the Life. Help us prepare for your coming by following your example of prayer, caring, and service to others.

Leader: We ask this in the name of Jesus, God's Son and our Savior.

All: Amen.

Conclude with a closing song.

Advent Calendar Prayer Service

Gather the participants with their calendars for the closing blessing prayer.

Opening Prayer

Let us pray for God's blessing.

Loving God, You who give us the gift of time, and promise to be with us always.

You have given us this season of Advent that we might prepare to receive more fully the gift of

Jesus who is our Emmanuel – God among us.

Help us to open our hearts and lives.

Bless us this day that we might be filled with your patient love and care.

We ask this through Christ, our Lord.

All Amen.

Reading Mark 13: 33-37

Sharing

Invite the participants to share aloud one idea of something they will do this Advent from their calendar. After each idea, invite the group to respond together: "Emmanuel, be with us." After everyone has had a chance to share, ask participants to hold their calendar in their left hand and hold out their right hand in a gesture of blessing over the calendars of the group.

Closing Blessing

Loving God,

*We ask your blessing on these Advent Calendars.
May they remind us of our call to follow Jesus and may they help us to prepare our hearts and
lives for the celebration of Christmas.
We ask this through Jesus, our Guide and Friend.*

All Amen.