



Discovering **hope** and **joy** in the Catholic faith.

Advent 2018

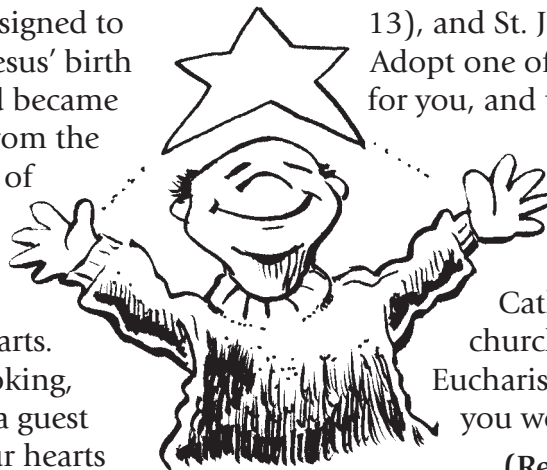
St Mark Church - St James Church

Emporium - Driftwood Pennsylvania

Make the most of Advent

The season of Advent is designed to help us prepare to celebrate Jesus' birth at Christmas. Think of it: God became man, died for our sins, rose from the dead, and now reigns as King of all creation.

Every Christmas is a chance to welcome Jesus as an honored guest into our hearts. Think of all the planning, cooking, and cleaning needed to have a guest over. In Advent we prepare our hearts to welcome the Savior. Below are some suggestions to make the most of your Advent:



13), and St. John of the Cross (December 14). Adopt one of them to be your patron to pray for you, and to protect and encourage you.

Visit the Blessed Sacrament.

The Eucharist is Jesus Christ, present Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1374). All Catholic churches have a tabernacle where the Eucharist is stored. Speak with our Lord as you would a close friend.

(Re)Discover the Mass. At Mass, Heaven comes down to Earth. When we receive the Eucharist, Christ comes into our hearts and nourishes our souls. Aim to attend daily Mass once every week during the Christmas season.

Prioritize prayer.

Spend 15 minutes daily with God. The best way to prepare to welcome the Savior at Christmas is to spend time with him. Set aside 15 minutes in your day for God and protect it. Perhaps read a chapter of Scripture, pray a decade of the Rosary, or just be still in his presence.

Know the story. Read through the accounts of Jesus' birth in Matthew 1:18-2:12 and/or Luke 2:1-20. Place yourself in the scene. Internalizing the Christmas story will give you a better appreciation of the season.

Get to know the Advent saints. One way to know God is to know his friends. There are several saints' feasts that occur this Advent, including: St. Nicholas, the Bishop of Myra (December 6), St. Juan Diego (December 9), St. Lucy (December

Practice penance.

Form an "Advent habit." Advent is a great time to start a holy habit. Maybe it's replacing negative comments with positive ones, or getting up ten minutes earlier to pray. See if you can keep up your "Advent habits" through the Christmas season.

Electronic fasting. Create a space for God and the gifts he wants to give you. Consider limiting the amount of time spent on your electronic devices: no Facebook during the work day, no texting during dinner, or while someone is talking to you (unless it's an emergency), etc.

Make a nightly examination of conscience. This will help you spot any patterns of sin that

are preventing you from connecting with God. Remember to thank God for the good things about the day, too. Close prayer by choosing one sinful habit that you'd like to change and resolve to change it by the end of Advent.

Experience God's mercy. Just as we would clean and decorate the house for Christmas, we need to "clean and decorate" our souls by frequenting the sacrament of Confession. Make a heartfelt Confession to greet the Messiah this Christmas with a joyful heart.

Give alms.

Donate resources. Another way to prepare for the Savior is to help his people. Parishes often have food and clothing drives. Don't forget the basics, like socks, toiletries, and soap. Prayerfully consider donating to your parish whatever you are able, or to charities like Catholic Relief Services (<https://www.crs.org>).

Give your time. This can be anything from volunteering to work at a soup kitchen, to getting a group of friends together and caroling at a nursing home, to making handmade cards for soldiers overseas. Every little bit counts.

Welcome the lonely. To Mother Teresa, feeling unloved was a greater poverty than being hungry (though eating enough is important, too). The holidays are especially difficult for those who are alone. Extend invitations for your holiday gatherings to people who might otherwise be alone or forgotten.

Do acts of random kindness. A little kindness goes a long way. Hold the door for people and smile at them. Don't be afraid to offer a hand when you see someone in need. Jesus said, "*Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me*" (Matthew 25:40).

Practice patience. In this season of waiting, practicing this virtue is a work of mercy and way of giving alms. Practicing patience includes: being polite even when you have to wait, assuming the best about someone until they prove otherwise, being firm yet gentle when correcting someone, and seeing things from the other's point of view. If

all else fails, we can recall how patient God is with our failings and never tires of forgiving us.

Anticipate with joy

Light the Advent wreath at dinner to build anticipation for Jesus' birth. The wreath is an ancient sign of victory, in this case, Christ's victory over sin and death. The three purple candles stand for penance, sorrow, and hope. The rose candle stands for joy. One custom is to exchange the purple and rose candles for white candles during the Christmas season.

Listen to Advent music. Make a playlist of Advent music that helps you connect with the themes of the season: faith in God's promises, waiting with hope, and joyful expectation. Include hymns like, O Come, O Come, Emmanuel and traditional carols like, The Holly and the Ivy.

Set out the Nativity Scene—slowly. The custom of displaying the Nativity Scene was begun by St. Francis of Assisi to illustrate the simplicity of the Incarnation. On the first Sunday of Advent, set out the stable and the empty manger. As the weeks go by, add characters. Wait until Christmas morning to place Jesus in the manger.

Celebrate Advent feast days. Learn about how other cultures celebrate the Advent saints' feasts. Consider adopting a custom or do something special of your own. Remember, attendance at Mass is required for the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception on December 8.

Build your Christmas around the Mass. Finally, at Christmas Mass, after all that waiting and preparing, we are ready to receive the greatest Gift of all: Jesus Christ, truly present in the Eucharist, under the appearances of bread and wine. Sing joyfully in Mass and welcome the King of Kings into your hearts and homes!

And lastly, keep your Advent behaviors going after Christmas. The waiting is over, but don't lose the good habits you acquired over Advent. Cultivate the "Advent attitudes" of waiting and preparing joyfully for the Lord. Every Sunday is a mini "Christmas," when we greet the Messiah under the forms of bread and wine at Mass.