

Smart Martha Presents:

Advent Activities, Prayers, and Stories

Blessing of the Advent Wreath

from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops:

When the blessing of the Advent Wreath is celebrated in the home, it is appropriate that it be blessed by a parent or another member of the family. All make the sign of the cross as the leader says:

Our help is in the name of the Lord.

Response (R/.) Who made heaven and earth.

Then the Scripture, **Isaiah 9:** (lines 1-2 and 5-6) or **Isaiah 63** (lines 16-17 & 19) or **Isaiah 64** (lines 2-7) is read:

Reader: The Word of the Lord.

the leader says:

Lord our God,

we praise you for your Son, Jesus Christ:

he is Emmanuel, the hope of the peoples,

he is the wisdom that teaches and guides us,

he is the Savior of every nation.

Lord God,

let your blessing come upon us

as we light the candles of this wreath.

May the wreath and its light

be a sign of Christ's promise to bring us salvation.

May he come quickly and not delay.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R/. Amen.

The blessing may conclude with a verse from

"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel":

O come, desire of nations, bind

in one the hearts of humankind;

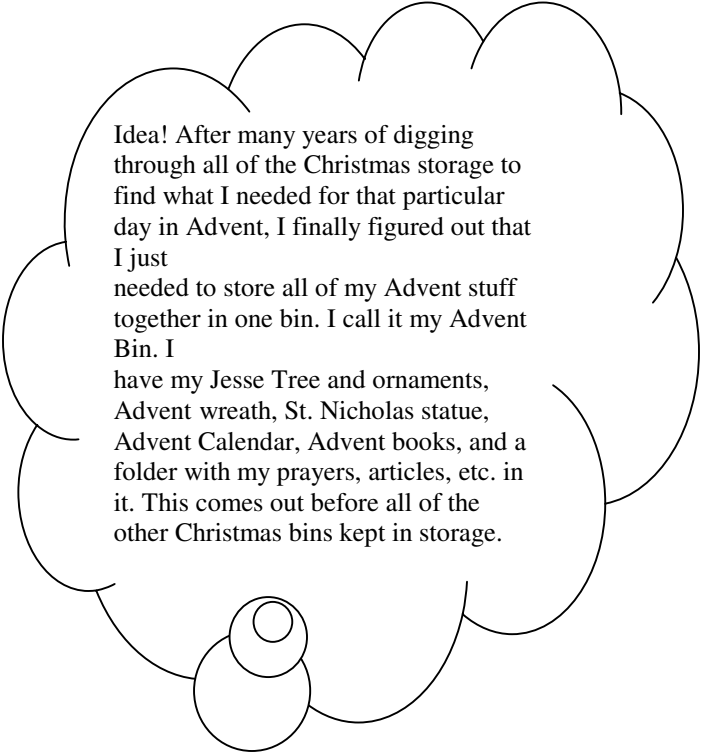
bid ev'ry sad division cease

and be thyself our Prince of peace.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel

shall come to thee, O Israel.

—From "**Catholic Household Blessings & Prayers**"



Idea! After many years of digging through all of the Christmas storage to find what I needed for that particular day in Advent, I finally figured out that I just needed to store all of my Advent stuff together in one bin. I call it my Advent Bin. I

have my Jesse Tree and ornaments, Advent wreath, St. Nicholas statue, Advent Calendar, Advent books, and a folder with my prayers, articles, etc. in it. This comes out before all of the other Christmas bins kept in storage.

Your Advent wreath can be sprinkled with Holy Water if you have some. Also on this day, we light our first candle of the wreath. Many prayers and devotions are available for this. Many parishes hand out publications or include them on their websites and bulletins. Find one that suits your family. Short and simple is better than none at all.

And sometimes less is more. Here is one we will be using this year in our home:

The following are the Advent wreath prayers that change every week. They are prayed at the lighting of each candle **every day** during Advent.

Week One:

The first candle is lit, and the prayer for the first week is said.

Leadert:

Let us pray.

Stir up Thy might, we beg Thee, O Lord,
and come, so that we may escape through Thy protection
and be saved by Thy help from the dangers
that threaten us because of our sins.

Who livest and reignest for ever and ever.

All: Amen.

During the first week one candle is left burning during the evening meal, at prayers or at bedtime.

Week Two:

Two candles are lit on the second Sunday and allowed to burn as before. The prayer for the week is:

Leader: Let us pray.

O Lord, stir up our hearts that we may prepare for Thy only begotten Son,
that through His coming we may be made worthy to serve Thee with pure souls.
Through the same Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Week Three:

Three candles, including the rose candle, are lit on Gaudete, the third Sunday, and during that week. The following prayer is said:

Leader: Let us pray. We humbly beg Thee, O Lord, to listen to our prayers;
and by the grace of Thy coming bring light into our darkened minds.

Who livest and reignest forever and ever.

All: Amen.

Week Four:

All four candles are lit on the fourth Sunday and allowed to burn as before. The prayer said the fourth week is:

Leader: Let us pray.

Stir up Thy might, we pray Thee, O Lord, and come;
rescue us through Thy great strength so that salvation,
which has been hindered by our sins, may be hastened by the grace of Thy gentle mercy.
Who livest and reignest for ever and ever.

All: Amen.

I am planning on cutting these prayers out and putting them in a 5X7 acrylic frame on my table.

Activities for setting up your Crèche

Pick a day to get out your Crèche or Nativity scene. I always keep baby Jesus hidden somewhere, and we will put him in the manger on Christmas Eve. (I also put the Magi with their camels on a shelf on the other side of the room, since they do not arrive at the scene until Epiphany.)

A fun thing to do to remind younger children to prepare for Jesus' coming is to collect straw to go in the manger and stable. Keep a box of straw near the stable, and when your child does some good deed, he gets to put a piece of straw in the manger.(or in your stable.) This is one way we can make baby Jesus very happy and prepare for His coming—and don't we want a soft and warm stable and manger for Him? The more straw the better! Yellow paper cut into strips can work for the straw or I always decorate for fall with a bale of straw, and I use some of this. It gives your Crèche a nice barn smell.

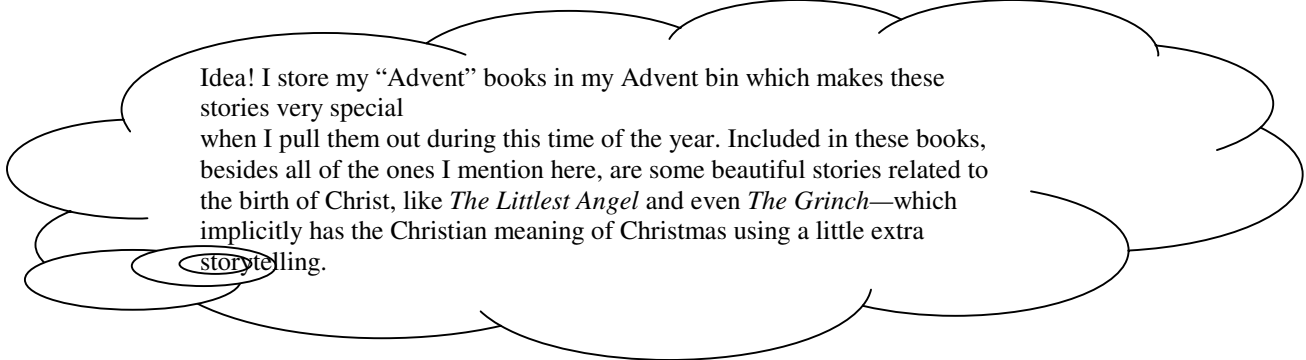
When your Crèche is out and getting full of straw, it might be nice to tell the story of St. Francis

and the first Crèche. St. Bonaventure (d. 1274) in his *Life of St. Francis of Assisi* tells the story the best: _

It happened in the third year before his death, that in order to excite the inhabitants of Grecio to commemorate the nativity of the Infant Jesus with great devotion, [St. Francis] determined to keep it with all possible solemnity; and lest he should be accused of lightness or novelty, he asked and obtained the permission of the sovereign Pontiff. Then he prepared a manger, and brought hay, and an ox and _an ass to the place appointed. The brethren were summoned, the people ran together, the forest resounded with their voices, and that venerable night was made glorious by many and brilliant lights and sonorous psalms of praise. The man of God [St. Francis] stood before the manger, full of devotion and piety, bathed in tears and radiant with joy; the Holy Gospel was chanted by Francis, the Levite of Christ. Then he preached to the people around the nativity of the poor King; and being unable to utter His name for the tenderness of His love, He called Him the Babe of Bethlehem. A certain valiant and veracious soldier, Master John of Grecio, who, for the love of Christ, had left the warfare of this world, and become a dear friend of this holy man, affirmed that he beheld an Infant marvelously beautiful, sleeping in the manger, whom the blessed Father Francis embraced with both his arms, as if he would awake Him from sleep. This vision of the devout soldier is credible, not only by reason of the sanctity of him that saw it, but by reason of the miracles which afterwards confirmed its truth. For example of Francis, if it be considered by the world, is doubtless sufficient to excite all hearts which are negligent in the faith of Christ; and the hay of that manger, being preserved by the people, miraculously cured all diseases of cattle, and many other pestilences; God thus in all things glorifying his servant, and witnessing to the great efficacy of his holy prayers by manifest prodigies and miracles.

There are some children's versions of this story. You will probably find: *A GIFT FROM SAINT FRANCIS: THE FIRST CRÈCHE* by Joanna Cole

Here is a brief Youtube from a church that simply tells the St. Francis Crèche story <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rnuXzj8I3D4> called *The First Crèche (1:30)*



Idea! I store my "Advent" books in my Advent bin which makes these stories very special when I pull them out during this time of the year. Included in these books, besides all of the ones I mention here, are some beautiful stories related to the birth of Christ, like *The Littlest Angel* and even *The Grinch*—which implicitly has the Christian meaning of Christmas using a little extra storytelling.

St. Andrew, November 30 (not always celebrated during Advent)

There are many saints whose feasts days we celebrate throughout Advent. We start with St. Andrew, one of the 12 disciples. He was a fisherman and had a very heroic death on a cross the shape of an x. For this reason, the x-shaped cross is called the St. Andrew cross. It is featured on the flag of Scotland, one of the countries of which he is the patron saint. It would be very appropriate to have fish on this evening. (Or if you are not fish fans—you could have Pepperidge Farm Goldfish floating in your soup.) Serve any dessert with a frosting/whipped crême/chocolate etc. “X” on it.

December 1

If you have never done a Jesse tree, I encourage you to give one a try. It doesn't have to be anything fancy or extravagant. After dinner, we simply read or retell the Bible story of the symbol for the day and hang up an ornament of that symbol on a tree. We use a small Christmas tree, but you can also use a bare branch, or even just a picture of a tree on poster board.

Ideally we talk about how the Old Testament story, which the symbol represents, points to Christ.

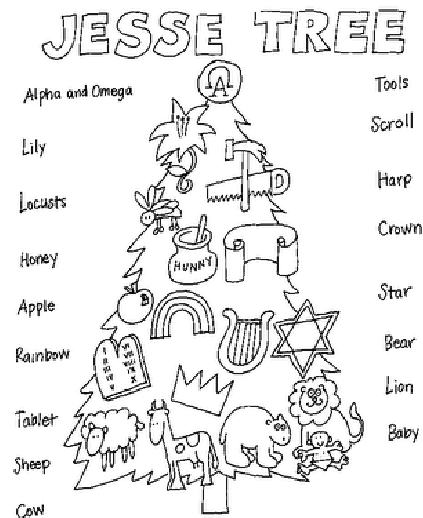
We just say something like: “Oh, it's Noah today. Do you remember the story to Noah? He was saved through water—just like we are saved through the waters of Baptism. God, grant us your grace to always listen to you, and may the grace we received at our baptism, carry us into eternal life. Amen.”

I've included a link to very easy Jesse Tree program to use that is free.

They have provided pictures of the ornaments for you to cut out, along with the Bible verses and readings. If you wanted to be a little more creative, you could have your family draw and color your own symbols, or make them from Sculpey clay, or use other craft materials to represent them.

My Jesse Tree ornaments are pictures I cut out which I shellacked onto balsam wood. I also shellacked the Bible references on the back of them so they are always handy.

<http://www.eriecnd.org/jesstree.htm>



“Service Fridays”

I think it is really important that our children have the opportunity to serve others especially during this time of the year when our kids have the temptation to become greedy and covetous. What's so amazing about working for and serving others isn't so much that we can better appreciate what we have, but that the kids can see that it really is quite satisfying to help others. We are only truly happy when we love and serve others—it's one of the paradoxes of the Christian faith. Concentrating on ourselves makes us miserable after awhile. It's good to let our children experience this lesson for themselves.

For this reason: I have officially established Service Fridays—which sometimes become Service Saturday or Service Mondays. It's just the idea that at least once a week, we find a way that we can help others. It can be as simple as taking a meal to a busy mom, or visiting someone in the nursing home.

This takes a lot of planning on my part, but the time spent is definitely worth it. Perhaps you don't need something every week, but I encourage you to look for at least one service project during the month. It could be taking part in something your parish sponsors or something in the community.

St. Francis Xavier, December 3rd

St. Francis is the Patron Saint of missionaries. His body lies incorruptible in Goa, India where he did mission work. In honor of this saint, you could send a generous donation to a foreign mission like, <http://www.xaviermissionaries.org>, or any of your favorites.

I would be interested in watching the DVD, *Xavier*. We usually watch the children's CCC one called *Francis Xavier and the Samurai's Lost Treasure*.

Here is a brief retelling of his life for kids quoted from the site HolySpiritInteractive.net:

This great missionary was born at Xavier Castle in Spain in 1506. He went to the University of Paris when he was eighteen. Here he met St. Ignatius Loyola, who was about to start the Society of Jesus. St. Ignatius tried to get Francis to join him. At first the happy-go-lucky young man would not think of it. St. Ignatius repeated to him the words of Jesus in the Gospel: "What does it profit a person to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" At last, Francis saw clearly that his place in life was among the Jesuits.

When Francis was thirty-four, St. Ignatius sent him as a missionary to the East Indies. The king of Portugal wanted to give him presents to take along and a servant. Francis refused his kind offer and explained: "The best way to acquire true dignity is to wash one's own clothes and boil one's own pot." During the course of his amazing career in Goa, India, Japan and other lands of the east, St. Francis made thousands of converts. In fact, he baptized so many people that he became too weak to raise his arms. He gathered the little children around him and taught them the Catholic faith. Then he made little lay apostles of them. He invited them to spread the faith they had learned. There was nothing St. Francis wouldn't do to help people. Once he faced a fierce band of raiders, alone, with no weapon but his crucifix. They backed up and did not attack his Christian tribes. The saint also brought many bad-living Christians to repentance. His only "tools" were his gentle, polite ways and his prayers. In the midst of his painful journeys and great labors, the saint was full of a special joy coming from God. St. Francis longed to get into China, into which no foreigner was permitted. At last, the arrangements were made, but the great missionary became ill. He died almost alone in 1552 on an island off the Chinese coast. He was just forty-six-years-old. Francis Xavier was proclaimed a saint by Pope Gregory XV in 1622. He was in the best of company at the canonization ceremony in Rome. Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila, Philip Neri and Isidore the Farmer were also proclaimed saints that day.

Reflection: *Francis' love for Jesus was so strong that he could not rest at the thought of so many people who had never heard the Gospel. What would happen if I were able to share my faith with at least one person in my life?*

Choose Advent Angels or Secret Santas.

We draw names among our immediate family so everyone gets to be an Advent Angel or Secret Santa to that person. This is another way to keep the focus off of ourselves during Advent. The Secret Santa (we use this term) is suppose to pray for his person and do random acts of kindness for him, like put his shoes away or do his chore for him while he is out. We also use this as our gift exchange. Instead of buying a gift for everyone in the family, the Secret Santa buys just one gift for his person and presents it to him on Christmas Eve. We set a gift amount (\$10-\$15) so everyone knows that they need to save up enough money to cover this.

Feast of St. Nicholas, December 5

Since we love this feast day so much and there is so much talk of Santa Claus around, we use both the vigil and the feast day to celebrate this saint.

-We watch the CCC video, *The Boy Who Would Be Santa*, or even the Veggie Tale one, *St. Nicholas: A Story of Joyful Giving*. There is also a promising movie in the making *Nicholas of Myra*. Check out their webpage: www.NicholasofMyra-movie.com

-Explore the St. Nicholas Center's webpage online for some activities, stories, and puzzles:

www.StNicholasCenter.org

-Read *The Baker's Dozen* or other St. Nicholas story.

-Bake some St. Nicholas cookies or have some other Santa Claus-like dessert.

-And put out your shoes in the evening for St. Nicholas and his helpers to fill them with treats, but only if you've been good. St. Nicholas leaves us an occasional letter for the kids encouraging them in their faith.

He also usually leaves gold (chocolate) coins like he does in the story when he gives gold for the girls' dowries. And he also leaves books, or medals, or DVDs or other religious items along with some "fun" items, like Hexbugs and Silly Putty. Many of our Advent books and DVDs have come from Saint Nicholas. In fact, for later elementary and middle school kids, there are many excellent Saint's biographies. Since Juan Diego's feast day is in a couple of days, that could be a great place to start with *Saint Juan Diego and Our Lady of Guadalupe* from the Pauline Encounter the Saints Series.

I've done a terrible thing to my children. I've told them that Santa doesn't bring their gifts on Christmas morning. The gifts actually come from their parents! All our emphasis on Santa or St. Nicholas comes out on this his feast day and disappears. From here on it, it is the baby Jesus. I think that is the way St. Nicholas would want it. Any gift giving that takes place on Jesus' birthday is a way for us to celebrate His birth. We give and receive gifts as a way of giving gifts to the Christ child and being that Christ Child for one another. I don't think there is anything wrong with doing the Santa thing. We just have chosen not to. Is Christmas morning just as fun and exciting? It sure seems to be.

Feast of St. Ambrose, December 7

He was born in Gaul in 340. As a learned man and great speaker, he was elected Bishop of Milan. Because of his preaching and writing, he was proclaimed the first Doctor of the Church. He had the satisfaction of witnessing the conversion and baptism of the great Saint Augustine, whom he baptized in 387. After a life of labor and prayer the Holy Bishop of Milan died in 397.

According to legend, when St. Ambrose was an infant bees swarmed around his mouth. This led his father to proclaim, "When he becomes a man he will be a powerful preacher". His father's words became true---St. Ambrose preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ boldly and powerfully. St. Ambrose is also known as the "Honey-Tongued Doctor," a pun on the saint's name (the word for honey in Latin is ambrosia); He is patron saint of beekeepers and honey makers. His feast day is celebrated December 7th.

Besides relating a few facts about this saint, you could have some kind of "honey" treats or serve _

Ambrosia Salad. Mix together the following: _

- 1 (11 ounce) can mandarin oranges, drained
- 1 (8 ounce) can crushed pineapple, drained
- 3 1/2 cups frozen whipped topping, thawed
- 2 cups shredded coconut
- 2 cups miniature marshmallows
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1 cup maraschino cherries

Chill for 1 hour before serving

Immaculate Conception, December 8th

It's a great Marian Feast day that culminates in a beautiful Mass. It's not that we shouldn't be at Mass the other days of Advent—but we all make it to Mass on this day. Besides Mass, a rosary is also very appropriate to say today.

Serve a wonderful dessert at dinner. Make sure you can discuss with your kids what the feast day is all about. It's surprising how many kids think this is about Jesus' conception. In keeping with our serving others during Advent, we also treat this as a "Be Nice to Pregnant Ladies" day. We try to take food to someone who is pregnant or help by watching her other children for a while.

Juan Diego, December 9th

If you start the short, biography, *Saint Juan Diego and Our Lady of Guadalupe* and read a few chapters every night to your kids, you'll finish up on Our Lady of Guadalupe's feast day. This excellent biography by Josephine Nobisso is one of those Encounter the Saints Series books from Pauline Books and Media.

Make a Piñata



Since we are in the middle of Juan Diego's feast day and Our Lady of Guadalupe's feast day, why not get your piñata ready for Monday. It takes a couple days for one to dry. I simply use a large balloon tied up to our ceiling fan that hangs over our kitchen island. It hangs low enough for is to reach it. With a mixture of flour and water, about the thickness of gravy, I cover strips of newspaper and place them on the balloon. Throughout the day, we apply a couple more coats, and let it hang there over a bowl. In a couple of days, we are ready to pop the balloon, paint it and hang some streamers from the bottom. I've left a hole at the top where the strings are tied. This is where I put in the candy. I usually do not need to close this up as this is the top of the piñata. For the feast day activity, I take the piñata down from the ceiling fan and tie it

hanging to an end of a broom. The kids use a plastic bat or stick to break it, blindfolded. This is not only a messy project, but can also be very dangerous. Maybe that's why it's so much fun!

Our Lady of Guadalupe, December 12

Since my husband and I have such a great devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe (OLG), we really do this feast up right. For the average celebrator, I suggest simply having a Mexican meal, even going out to eat at an authentic Mexican restaurant. You are bound to see an image of OLG there.

Download this great picture of Juan Diego complete with moveable tilma to color from paperdali.com

End your evening with the smashing of the piñata.

Read the children's book, *Our Lady of Guadalupe* by Tomie DePaolo.

This is in most libraries. I have

adapted this into a short play that we do every year—and since we

have been doing it every year, I have the

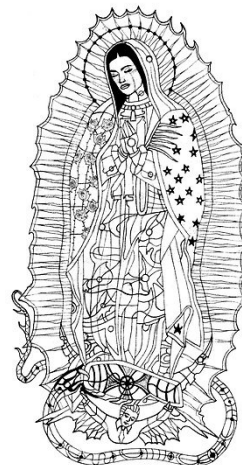
tilma with the image and all the other costumes and script stored in a

bag in my Advent bin. The first year

I did it took a lot of time to prepare, but now, we just whip it out and

perform. Download the play on the Advent page of my website:

www.SmartMartha.com



Here is a prayer to say together.
Our Lady of Guadalupe,
Mystical Rose,
make intercession for holy Church,
protect the sovereign Pontiff,
help all those who invoke you in their necessities,
and since you are the ever Virgin Mary
and Mother of the true God,
obtain for us from your most holy Son
the grace of keeping our faith,
of sweet hope in the midst of the bitterness of life
of burning charity, and the precious gift
of final perseverance. Amen

St. Lucy, Dec. 13

She is one of the earliest saints recorded as having a devotion to her. In Sweden, it is customary on this day to have the oldest female daughter serve a traditional sweet bread with an evergreen wreath on her head with lit candles. Lucy's name means light, after all. This is not the safest way to receive your breakfast and I'll admit that we have tried this a few times. The easiest way is to simply get a nice ring of cinnamon rolls and put in some red birthday candles or short tapers. Put this on a tray. You could also throw some evergreen sprigs around this. And then, light the candles and have your daughter carry this around the house to wake everyone and bring them to breakfast. If you didn't party too much the night before with the feast of OLG, you can make these overnight cinnamon rolls.

<http://allrecipes.com/recipe/overnight-cinnamon-rolls-i/detail.aspx> OR
just get the Pillsbury ones that pop out of the can and arrange into a nice
wreath shape.

You can download coloring pages of St. Lucy from Charlotte of
Waltzing
Matilda, [http://tiredtwang.blogspot.com/2008/12/st-lucy-coloring-
pages.html](http://tiredtwang.blogspot.com/2008/12/st-lucy-coloring-pages.html)



The traditional story of St. Lucy tells us that she was of noble Greek parentage, born in Syracuse, Sicily, and brought up as a Christian by her mother, Eutychia. Although Lucy, like Cecilia, wished to dedicate herself to God, Eutychia arranged for her a marriage with a young pagan. The mother, who suffered from hemorrhage, was persuaded to make a pilgrimage to Catania, to offer prayers at the tomb of St. Agatha. Lucy accompanied her mother, and their prayers for a cure were answered. Then Lucy made known to Eutychia her desire to give her own share of their fortune to the poor and devote herself to God's service. Eutychia, in gratitude for her cure, gave permission. This so angered the young man to whom Lucy had been unwillingly betrothed that he denounced her as a Christian to the governor, Paschius. The persecutions instituted by the Emperor Diocletian were then at their height, and when Lucy steadfastly clung to her faith, she was sentenced to prostitution in a brothel. God rendered her immovable and the officers were not able to carry her off to the place of evil. An attempt was then made to burn her, but boiling oil and pitch had no power to hurt her or break her strong spirit. At last she was put to death by the sword. At Rome in the sixth century Lucy was honored among the other virgin martyrs, and her name was inserted in the Canon of the

Mass. A reference to her sanctity occurs in a letter written by Pope Gregory the Great. In the Middle Ages, she was invoked by persons suffering from eye trouble, perhaps because Lucy (in Italian, Lucia) derives from <lux>, the Latin word for light. The first church writer to give an account of St. Lucy from her <Acts> was the English bishop St. Aldhelm of Sherborne at the end of the seventh century. This saint's relics are venerated at Venice and at Bourges, in France. She is patroness of Syracuse; her emblems are a cord and eyes.

This was taken from "Lives of Saints", Published by John J. Crawley & Co., Inc.

St. John of the Cross, December 14

Born in Spain in 1542, John learned the importance of self-sacrificing love from his parents. His father gave up wealth, status, and comfort when he married a weaver's daughter and was disowned by his noble family. After his father died, his mother kept the destitute family together as they wandered homeless in search of work. These were the examples of sacrifice that John followed with his own great love -- God. When the family finally found work, John still went hungry in the middle of the wealthiest city in Spain. At fourteen, John took a job caring for hospital patients who suffered from incurable diseases and madness. It was out of this poverty and suffering, that John learned to search for beauty and happiness not in the world, but in God.

After John joined the Carmelite order, Saint Teresa of Avila asked him to help her reform movement. John supported her belief that the order should return to its life of prayer. But many Carmelites felt threatened by this reform, and some members of John's own order kidnapped him. **He was locked in a cell six feet by ten feet and beaten three times a week** by the monks. There was only one tiny window high up near the ceiling. Yet in that unbearable dark, cold, and desolation, his love and faith were like fire and light. He had nothing left but God -- and God brought John his greatest joys in that tiny cell.

After nine months, John escaped by unscrewing the lock on his door and creeping past the guard. Taking only the mystical poetry he had written in his cell, he climbed out a window using a rope made of strips of blankets. With no idea where he was, he followed a dog to civilization. He hid from pursuers in a convent infirmary where he read his poetry to the nuns. From then on his life was devoted to sharing and explaining his experience of God's love.

His life of poverty and persecution could have produced a bitter cynic. Instead it gave birth to a compassionate mystic, who lived by the beliefs that "Who has ever seen people persuaded to love God by harshness?" and "Where there is no love, put love -- and you will find love."

John left us many books of practical advice on spiritual growth and prayer that are just as relevant today as they were then. These books include: *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, *Dark Night of the Soul* and *A Spiritual Canticle of the Soul and the Bridegroom Christ*.

PRAYER OF PEACE BY SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS

O blessed Jesus,
Give me stillness of soul in You.
Let Your mighty calmness reign in me.
Rule me, O King of Gentleness,
King of Peace.

Favorite Advent Books to read and discuss together. Collect one a year. And get the rest from the library. This is just a few to get started . . .

Clown of God, by Tomie DePaolo, *The Littlest Angel*, by Charles Tazewell, *Saint Francis and the Christmas Donkey* by Robert Byrd, *The Legend of the Poinsettia* by Tomie dePaola, *Night Tree* by Eve Bunting, *Christmas in the Trenches* by John McCutcheon, *The Gift of the Magi* by O. Henry, *Saint Francis and the Christmas Donkey* by Robert Byrd, *The Night of Las Posadas* by Tomie dePaola, *The Other Wise Man* by Henry Van Dyke, *Room for a Little One: A Christmas Tale* by Martin Waddell, *Good King Wenceslas* by J. M. Neale, *The Last Straw* by Fredrick H. Thury *The Lady of Guadalupe* ,Tomie dePaola,

December 15 or 16th begin a Christmas Novena

It is officially 9 days before Christmas Eve or Christmas. If you have an Infant of Prague devotion and/or statue, there are some Infant of Prague Novenas you could do. Just search for one on the Internet.

This is also the traditional day to start the Posada. This is beautiful custom that families can celebrate with other families or with their parish or even on their own. It can be as elaborate or as simple as you desire.

For a great introduction to this tradition and an actual program to be used, please, please go to this link from the Knights of Columbus.

<http://www.kofc.org/un/en/news/releases/detail/posada.html>

O Antiphons, Saturday, December 17th

This is the day to start the “O Antiphons.” These are best displayed in the verses of the song, O Come Emanuel. You can simply just read or sing one of these verses in conclusion of your dinner. You can also color a picture of the symbol each day and display this on your dinner table. (Go to Domesticchurch.com for pictures and the verses)

Christmas Tree Blessing

For whenever you put up your tree:

BLESSING OF A CHRISTMAS TREE

When the tree has been prepared, the household gathers around it. All make the sign of the cross.

The leader begins:

Blessed be the name of the Lord.

All respond:

Now and for ever.

The leader may use these or similar words to introduce the blessing:

This tree is a blessing to our home. It reminds us of all that is beautiful, all that is filled with the gentleness and the promise of God. It stands in our midst as a tree of light that we might promise such beauty to one another and to our world. It stands like that tree of paradise that God made into the tree of life, the cross of Jesus.

Then the Scripture is read:

Listen to the words of the apostle Paul to Titus: But when the kindness and generous love of God our savior appeared, not because of any righteous deeds we had done but because

of his mercy, he saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the holy Spirit, whom he richly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life. Titus 3:4-7

(The family's Bible may be used for an alternate reading such as Psalm 96:11-13.)

The reader concludes:

The Word of the Lord.

All respond:

Thanks be to God.

After a time of silence, all join in prayers of intercession and in the Lord's Prayer. Then the leader invites:

Let us now pray for God's blessing upon all who gather around this tree.

After a short silence, the leader prays:

Lord our God,

we praise you for the light of creation:

the sun, the moon, and the stars of the night.

We praise you for the light of Israel:

the Law, the prophets, and wisdom of the scriptures.

We praise you for Jesus Christ, your Son:

he is Emmanuel, God-with-us, the Prince of

Peace, who fills us with the wonder of your love.

Lord God, let your blessing come upon us as we illumine this tree.

May the light and cheer it gives be a sign of the joy that fills our hearts.

May all who delight in this tree come to the knowledge and joy of salvation.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R. Amen.

The lights of the tree are then illuminated.

The leader says:

Let us bless the Lord.

All respond, making the sign of the cross:

Thanks be to God.

The blessing concludes with a verse from

"O come, O Come, Emmanuel":

O come, thou dayspring, come and cheer

Our spirits by thine advent here;

Disperse the gloomy clouds of night

And death's dark shadow put to flight.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel

Shall come to thee, O Israel.

From Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers

Candy Cane Legend

Have you heard the Candy Cane Legend? This is just a fun Christmas story to share at dinner. You can also use this story rewritten and make a craft to hand out to visitors or include on gifts or with gift cards. Here is the poem that usually accompanies the card:

Christmas Candy Cane Poem about Jesus

Look at the Candy Cane
What do you see?
Stripes that are red
Like the blood shed for me
White is for my Savior
Who is sinless and pure!
J is for Jesus My Lord, that's for sure!
Turn it around
And a staff you will see
Jesus my shepherd
Was born for Me!

Or you can write up the story yourself to include with a candy cane on a card. I've noticed several books and even a DVD about this story. I've not personally reviewed any, but I'll maybe look for one at the library this year.

Here is a brief retelling:

A candy maker in Indiana wanted to make a candy that would remind people of the true meaning of Christmas; so he made the candy cane to incorporate several symbols for the birth, ministry, and death of Jesus Christ. He began with a stick of pure white, hard candy. White to symbolize the Virgin Birth and the sinless nature of Jesus, and hard to symbolize the Solid Rock, the foundation of the Church, and the firmness of the promises of God.

The candy maker then shaped his cane into the form of a "J" to represent the precious name of Jesus, who came to the earth as Savior. It could also represent the staff of the "Good Shepherd" with which He reaches down to to reclaim the fallen lambs who, like sheep, have gone astray.

Thinking that the candy was somewhat plain, the candy maker stained it with red stripes. He used three small stripes to show the stripes of the scourging Jesus received. The large red stripe was for the blood shed by Christ on the cross so that we could have the promise of eternal life.

Go to Confession

Sometime during Advent, it is great to take the whole family to confession together. I like to get this on my calendar so that we can plan on it and actually do it. We don't make the kids go to confession, but they do have to go to the church with us. If they don't need to go to confession, then they at least can go and pray for those of us who do. We make it a fun evening in that we go to get pizza afterwards.