



This Guide of suggestions for developing Advent Traditions can be Found on the church website at <https://www.belairnazarene.org/advent-2018/>.

***Choose a night and drive around and look at Christmas lights.**

Along the way, read the following verses:

John 8:12

John 1:1-9

Matthew 5:14-16

Ask the following questions:

- Did you ever think of Jesus' birth as light coming into the world? What do you think that means?
- What does it mean for us to be light in this world as believers of Jesus today?

***Purchase or make an Advent Nativity Calendar.**

This is a calendar containing small numbered flaps, one of which is opened on each day of Advent/Christmas, revealing one piece of the Biblical Christmas Story. Do these as a family each night. Take turns reading the Scripture and/or devotional thought revealed for that day. (*See what some from our church community shared later in this guide for other creative ways to use an Advent Calendar!*)

Here is an example: https://www.amazon.com/Visiting-Manger-Standing-Advent-Calendar/dp/B00K1F8XNK/ref=sr_1_12_sspa?ie=UTF8&qid=1542657297&sr=8-12-spons&keywords=religious+advent+calendar&psc=1

***Wrap up a kid's book that tells the story of Jesus' birth.**

Place the gift under your tree after you decorate it. On Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, open up the present and read the story. Stress that Jesus' birth was a gift then to the world, and it is still a gift for us today, because He can be "born" into our hearts when we believe in Him.

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*Watch the movie "Nativity Story".

(Parents: Here is a review of the movie by Plugged In, so that you can determine if it is appropriate for your child: <http://www.pluggedin.com/movie-reviews/nativitystory>.)

After you watch the movie, utilize this discussion guide to talk about the movie. http://www.lifeway.com/lwc/files/lwcF_PDF_NativityMovie_DiscussionGuide.pdf.

Make a Prayer Garland⁽¹⁾

Cut out 24 green and red construction paper strips. On each strip, write the name of a family member, friend or ministry. Staple the strips as links into one long garland. Hang the garland in your apartment or house as a decoration. Every day in December, have a family member remove one of the paper strips. As a family, pray for the person or ministry whose name is on that strip of paper.

Use Christmas Cards as Prayer Reminders⁽¹⁾

As Christmas cards arrive during December, place them in a basket in a noticeable area. Once a day, pull out one card and pray for that person or family together. Keep the Christmas card basket out all year and pray regularly for other families. You may want to write the person a note signed by your family that says, "We prayed for you today."

Create (or Buy) Your Own Advent Wreath with Candles⁽¹⁾

An Advent wreath is helpful and beautifully symbolic of the season. A basic Advent wreath consists of a circle with four candle holders with one candle in the middle. It may be garnished with holly or pine boughs. The Advent wreath can serve as a perfect teaching moment too. Point out the colors to your children, and talk about what they mean. To learn more about the wreath, check out this link: <http://www.crivoice.org/cyadvent.html#Wreath>.

(1) THESE IDEAS ARE FROM LIFEWAY.COM: (<http://www.lifeway.com/Article/ideas-for-celebrating-advent-as-a-family>)

A 25-Day Scripture Reading Plan

Create/Purchase a journal or notebook and copy the Scriptures of the Christmas story over a 25 day period. Commit to spending ten minutes each day listening to God's voice as you simply copy these texts out of your Bible and write down any thoughts or feelings you have after reading them. A sample journal is available at the Welcome Center. This idea originated from www.swtblessings.com.

BACON Season of Giving/Giving Tree

Give to others by participating in an opportunity from the "Season of Giving" Brochure or from the Giving Tree in the church lobby.

Here are some specific ideas shared by people in our church community:

My Mom started one of our traditions. We had Happy Birthday Cake before opening the Santa gifts. I carried it on with my kids. Now Marge and I do it.

When my kids were little we made gifts for Jesus, usually they colored a picture. When they were teens they were to save money from allowance or their PT jobs. They could buy a gift for the church like Sunday School/VBS supplies or put it in the offering plate designated for Missions.

I started my own tradition a few years ago on FB. I do a daily Advent post with a twist - I do 40 days of Advent Preparation for the 40 days prior to Christmas .Sort of an Advent Lent. The teacher in me moved me teach my FB friends and my hope has been that it touches someone's heart and brings them to Jesus.

CLAIRE COCHRAN

My children are both young, perhaps too young to understand this tradition yet, but I was inspired last year to start a tradition with my children's Advent calendar.

Our Advent calendar is a Velcro Christmas tree that hangs on our wall. Each day we pull out an ornament to put on the tree, but I also made slips of paper with Crisis Care kit and School Pal pack items on it. (You can learn more about these by going to the Welcome Center in the lobby.) Each day we put the items on the slip in a bag so that when Christmas comes we have a school pal pack and a crisis care kit assembled. I hope this will be a way for us to teach the kids about making Christmas about community and giving.

SARA WALKER

When we get together with family on my side, (now there are 26 of us), we always have a birthday party for Jesus after we eat our meal and before opening any gifts. Mom always has a small cake with "Happy Birthday Jesus" written on it. We are all given a small candle (similar to the ones we use at our Christmas Eve). The first person says what he is thankful for and then lights his candle. We go around the circle and each person says what they are thankful for and lights their candle and puts it on a wooden "base" that has holes in it to hold the candles. Then when everyone has had a turn, mom plays the song, "Happy Birthday Jesus". It is always a very emotional and touching time as we reflect on what God has done for us or brought us through during the last year and express our love to each other.

DEB SWORD

During the season our family has always chosen another family or a particular charity to support. When our boys were small they would come with us to give a needy family food and wrapped gifts. We give gift boxes or baskets to neighbors along with a Christmas card that emphasizes Jesus' birth.... This year the grandchildren are helping us to fill gift buckets of supplies needed for older seniors, through Inner County Outreach, a ministry of Aberdeen Bible Church. We like to invite other people who are alone on the holiday or have no family to celebrate with us, to join us on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day celebration. Everything that we do is an opportunity to bless someone else with the true meaning of Christmas and share God's love with them.

EVERETT SMITH

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In Belize, traditionally preparations start late October to early November when we start a "Christmas box" (every week an item for the special Christmas meal is added to the box). The two weeks before Christmas are packed with final preparations of the house and beginning of food prep, attention given to neighbors in need of food, clothing and supplies or help with house and yard work. The elderly are usually taken care of first. The day before Christmas Eve is baking day!!! First the black fruit cake, then the "White" or "light" cake, and then the bread. On Christmas Eve, everything else that's needed for the holiday is picked up and gifts of black and white cakes are delivered to family, friends and those in need. In the evening families go caroling and then head home to bake the ham for Christmas breakfast. On Christmas morning the family has breakfast together and exchanges gifts.

PHILLIPPA JONES

When I was in Bermuda, we would invite people to our home for Christmas - I.e. co-workers, extended family, sometimes people we only knew for a short time to share Christmas dinner, especially those who did not have families, who were estranged from a family or had experienced a recent death of a family member. We would welcome these people in, we would even get a gift for that person so they would feel included too. It was our way of showing love to them, we would gather around the table and share what we were thankful for and then pray. Wow... this brings back so many memories...we were loving like Jesus way back then

LEEANN FITZGERALD

Every year, we would create an Advent Calendar with pockets/doors, and then we would put something in each door to be opened to do for that day. It might be to read a family devotion together, open a gift, have a family NERF battle, or adopt a family with social services. One year, we created a Christmas Story by having each family member pick a Christmas character and dress like them and write and share the story from that character's view point. We visited someone homebound in our church and did our "program". It was very special! We would change it up every year. It has been a challenge logistically to coordinate schedules as the family grew older, but has always been a special way to celebrate family and the Advent story, as well as help others, during the Christmas season.

DENISE JORDAN