

Advent - A Time of Joyful Preparation

As parents of young children, it is easy to get wrapped up in the secular parts of the Christmas season - shopping for the best deals, choosing thoughtful gifts for loved ones, attending holiday parties, perfectly staging a family photo to add to a Christmas card, baking delicious treats - the festive list could go on and on. However, our challenge as devout Catholic parents is to teach our children a different tradition: one of preparation. The



Church provides us with the beautiful season of Advent to guide us on our journey to Christmas. When the world around us encourages us to speed up and participate in the Christmas season *hullabaloo*, the Church asks us to slow down and patiently spend this season in prayer and gracious waiting for the birth of Christ. As parents, we must model this season of hope by rejoicing in the numerous blessings God has given us and slowing down to intentionally prepare our hearts for the Lord. Make the sacraments a central part of your Christmas preparations by bringing your children to Reconciliation or by spending 30 minutes in Adoration.

Advent offers numerous wonderful traditions that we, as parents, can engage in with our children. Teach your children that this time before Christmas is a time in which we must prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ. Are we ready for Him? Make the connection between decorating our homes with bright lights and colorful ornamental trees to preparing our hearts, where Christ resides in all of us, through prayer and meditation for his birth on Christmas Day. Teach your children about St. Nicholas who sold all of his possessions and gave the money to the poor. As a family, go through your home and have each family member choose one or two items they can give to the poor, modeling the actions of St. Nicholas. Create a family Advent calendar which details simple acts of kindness that you can participate in together each day leading up to Christmas. Display a nativity scene in a prominent place in your home. Hide baby Jesus until Christmas Day when he joyfully arrives in Bethlehem. Have an Advent wreath adorn your kitchen table or wherever you share family meals. Have each member of your family share one thing they are thankful for and one thing they are looking forward to while the

appropriate candle is lit. If your children are older, they can take turns lighting the candle(s) and leading the family in a special Advent prayer. Have reasonable expectations by choosing one or two traditions that you and your children will look forward to year after year.

The Advent season is a beautiful reminder of how we as parents should be forming our children in general. As parents, our whole life with our children

is one of preparations. We are preparing them to live a life for and with Christ. By being given the gift of God's children, we have the enormous task of emboldening them to have a relationship with Christ. It takes a lot of courage to deny the modern temptations of our world; to not get caught up in the race to have our children earn the best grades, make the travel sporting team, or go on the nicest Instagram-worthy vacations. We can't allow ourselves to only wish for our children to be happy and healthy, we need to instead act in a way that models what true happiness and health means - to live a life in relationship with God. As parents, it is our vocation to teach our children about the grace of God and to show them the power of His love. We wish that our children will live the life that the Lord has intended for them: a life that is filled with passion and joy; a life that is always preparing for the coming of the Lord, so that when they are in His presence, their souls are ready. The Advent season is a time which reminds us of the Lord's second coming at the end of time. It's a time in which we reflect on what we wish for our children - a life lived in such a way that when it is the end, they will spend their eternal life in Heaven with the Lord.

My wish for my children and yours this Advent season is that they encounter Christ as we prepare for His miraculous coming on Christmas Day.

"Christmas isn't just a temporal celebration or the memory of a beautiful event; Christmas is more...Christmas is an encounter!" —Pope Francis

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