

“Prepare for God’s arrival! Make the road straight and smooth, a highway fit for our God...Then God’s bright glory will shine and everyone will see it.” Isaiah 40: 3,5 The Message

The Season of Advent

Preparation, anticipation, getting ready: these are the themes of the season of Advent. One way we prepare is by counting down the days from the 1st Sunday in Advent to Christmas Day. In our congregations we do this with readings and hymns that tell the two great narratives, of waiting for the infant king and waiting for Christ’s coming again; we do this in naves and in our homes by lighting candles each week to illustrate the coming of the Light. A good Advent calendar helps us prepare ourselves for the Lord.

Traditional Advent Calendar

While chocolate is always a lovely gift behind each door, finding a traditional Advent calendar with images and scripture is worth the hunt. Images the Madonna and child, angels, and the wise men following the star have been used for centuries to focus attention on the imminent birth of Jesus. [Museum shops](#) are good sources for this type of calendar. Calendars which also [include scripture](#) serve double duty in creating a short reflection, as well.

Calendars That Engage Online Learning

With much of our life spent plugged in, it only makes sense to look online for Advent calendars. Loyola Press offers a [basic calendar for young children](#) that either be clicked on or printed out, and is also available in Spanish. These squares are simple tasks of kindness and acting in love. For a more complex devotional, Loyola also offers 4 [weekly art history videos](#). Each week offers a brief Christian-based history of art of a liturgically appropriate piece of art. The 3 minute videos are accompanied by a short paragraph of information and in-depth questions for children ages 9 and up. Adults looking for even more depth can click through to the [Ignatian questions](#) based on the same art works. Finally, Loyola offers a week-by-week [Jesse Tree lessons](#). Each day includes a brief description of why the particular image was chosen and links to the scripture.

Click and Pray Online Calendars

Luther Seminary offers a [God Pause Devotional](#). During the Season of Advent the scripture and reflections will feature the theme “Creator of the Stars of Night.” Sign up and receive them daily in your inbox.

[AdventWord](#), created by the Brothers of St John the Evangelist and partnered with the Global Anglican Communion, offers the opportunity to reflect on a word a day and then reflect back to the AdventWord community with a photo you take and the word-of-the-day hashtag. When you sign up on the website you will be sent a short reflection in your inbox by the Brothers. You’ll be sharing your thoughts, images, and prayers with a global community of believers. We wrote about AdventWord [here](#).

And if your church (or children) would like to develop your own calendar, [Advientos](#) has developed a template for creating your own online Advent calendar that you can share with others.

Action-Oriented Advent Calendars

Some people are kinetic learners and pray best while in motion. Sybil Macbeth once again offers her Advent calendars to [pray with color](#). In addition to a variety of calendar templates, Sybil also offers strategies and ideas for praying.

Other ideas include making an Advent paper chain. Make one paper loop for each day of Advent. For each day, write out a prayer, or an activity or reflection. You could use scripture to guide your choices, hymns, or themes such as hope, peace, joy, and love. Pastor Traci Smith has created a low-cost template you can purchase [here](#).

The “Reverse” Advent Calendar

We are used to opening doors and receiving things during Advent. But the stories we associate with the Season are those of preparation for a baby, a baby we know will be born in a stable and who will spend his early years as refugee. What if we used this time of waiting to help those in need? The idea is simple: set out a box or a basket in a place where you gather as a family. It could be at the dinner table near the Advent wreath or on the floor by a creche or by the family Advent calendar. When you light the candles or move the Holy Family or open the day’s door, add to the box. You might organize by a theme: canned goods, or toiletries, or pet food. Decide ahead of time where your donations will go and

when you will drop them off.

Charlotte Hand Greeson has been a Sunday school teacher, youth group leader, and Diocesan youth worker. She shares her passion for formation as a manager, editor, and writer for Building Faith.