

## CELEBRATING ADVENT

### An Intergenerational Event to Introduce Advent

Purpose

To come together as the family of God to begin preparations for the coming of the Christ Child.

Preparation

Gather a planning group together early in November to make decisions and to share responsibilities. You will need to decide:

- when and where to hold the event
- how to publicize the event
- what shape the event should take
- what tasks need to be done such as getting the tree and setting it up in readiness for the decorating, coordinating the craft tables, acting as host/hostess, organizing the kitchen, setting up and cleaning up, planning the worship in a way that involves participants
- who will be responsible for carrying out the various tasks
- how to cover the costs for the tree, craft supplies, etc.



You can minimize the amount of cleanup by inviting all participants to bring their own plates, cups, and cutlery in a plastic bag. The dirty dishes are then taken home in the bag. Have a few dishes available for people who forget to bring their own.

Most congregations have very creative people who will have good ideas for making Christmas tree decorations at the centers. When the invitation goes out for volunteers or when the coordinator approaches particular people to see if they would be interested, a choice can be given like this: "If you have a good idea you wish to share, please let me know," or "If you would like some suggestions for a good craft idea, here are some possibilities." The coordinator can then ensure that there are a variety of activities available, including some that very young children can do without becoming frustrated. The centers section described below includes some possibilities. **Be sure those leading the centers know the significance of their symbol within the Christian tradition so that this can be shared with the center's participants** (see Unit III Introduction or symbol reference books).



### The Event

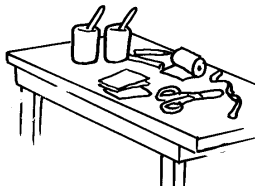
#### Preparation

The organizers prepare the room by setting up a welcome table with name tag supplies, craft tables, and a tree set up securely in a stand. Bring a CD player for appropriate music to play as people gather.

Before the announced starting time, the craftspeople set out their supplies and have samples available to show. There should be one center for every 8–10 people you anticipate, but enough materials so that people are free to go to two or three centers if they choose. In many cases children will want to make two items at a center so that they can make one for the tree and one to take home.

#### Welcome

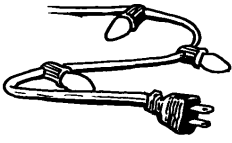
The host/ess greets people at the door and invites them to make a name tag. (See the Preparation section of *Las Posadas* regarding color-coding name tags if you are using this as your closing.) In order to be read easily across the room, write first names in letters at least 1" (2-3cm) tall with medium-size non-toxic felt tip markers. Participants are then directed to go around and look at the various centers before choosing where they wish to work first.



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## The Centers (approximate time 50 minutes)

The Centers Coordinator assists the host/ess in ensuring that people feel welcome and are able to find a place at one of the centers. Some people who come may want simply to observe for awhile, however, and should be allowed to do so. Some of the participants may prefer to string the lights on the tree; supervise an ice-cream-making station, in preparation for the meal; create evergreen garlands for the church; or create an Advent wreath to be used on the Sundays preceding Christmas. The Coordinator circulates among the tables to support the people teaching the crafts, and to invite people to move on to another center when they are finished. Adding the decorations to the tree can be part of the closing worship or if you are doing the “Las Posadas” closing, the tree might be decorated as items are completed.



### Here are some suggested centers:

*Choose what best suits your situation and leadership.*

#### 1) Play Dough Ornaments

*Supplies:* flour, salt and water play dough, rolling pins or large dowels, cookie cutters of various shapes (for example, star, bell, candle), plastic drinking straw, baking sheet.

*Procedure:* Mix 2 cups flour (500 mL) and 1 cup (250 mL) salt together. Slowly add water until dry ingredients are uniformly moistened. Knead for several minutes. Roll out and cut into shapes. Use a plastic drinking straw to make a hole for hanging. Bake at 325°F (160°C) for 20-30 minutes. These ornaments can be painted or left plain. Hang with yarn or ribbon. *(An alternative:* mold a Christmas shape around a paper clip, leaving enough of the clip showing at the top so that you can attach a ribbon for hanging it up later.)

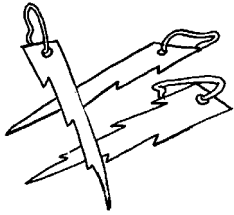


#### 2) Icicles

*Supplies:* clear plastic lids, scissors, hole punch, white glue, flat container for holding white glue, ribbon or wool, glitter, large cookie tray or shallow box for collecting the glitter.

*Procedure:* Cut clear plastic lids into long jagged icicles. Punch a hole at the top of the icicle. Dip the edges of the icicle in white glue. If the glue is too stiff dilute with water. Sprinkle on glitter over the tray or shallow box so that what falls off can be reused. Attach a ribbon or piece of yarn so that the icicle can be hung on the tree.

*(An alternative:* Use Shrink Art plastic available at craft stores.)



#### 3) Chrismons (Christian Symbols)

*Supplies:* 1/2" (1cm) styrofoam or foam core board (available from hobby and office shops) or styrofoam food trays, cutting tools, cardboard tracers of Christian symbols such as the star, dove, cross, candle, fish, butterfly, crown, and Greek letters *alpha* and *Omega* to represent the Christ as the beginning and the end, and *chi rho*, the first two letters of the word “Christ” in Greek.

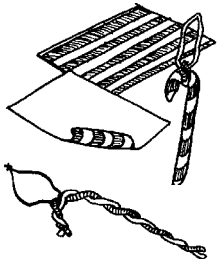
*Procedure:* Copy resource sheets onto card stock. Cut out tracers and trace onto styrofoam or foam core board using a pencil, and cut using scissors, sharp knives, or fret saw.

#### 4) Paper Candy Cane or Shepherd’s Crook Ornaments

*Supplies:* 8 1/2" x 11" (21cm x 28cm) paper – may be recycled if used previously on only one side, crayons or markers

*Procedure:* Cut paper in half to 8 1/2" x 5 1/2" (21cm x 14cm) size. Draw bands of color lengthwise on the sheet. Turn sheet over. Starting at one corner roll up sheet tightly and fasten end with tape. Bend one end to form crook. (Can be taped over bendable straw.)

*Alternative:* Twist red and white pipe cleaners together and bend into candy cane or shepherd’s crook shape.

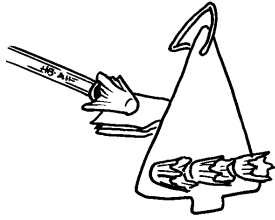


#### 5) Paper Angels

*Supplies:* white cardstock cut in 6 1/2" or 7" (16 - 18cm) circles, white and brown cardstock for heads, small doilies, yarn for hair, scissors, glue, felts, gold or silver pipe cleaners, tape, thread.

*Procedure:* Fold circle in half and then into cone shape for body. Fasten with tape or staples. Cut head shape, draw on face. Draw on hair or add yarn for hair. Fold small doily in half and glue or staple on for wings. Fashion halo from pipe cleaner and attach with tape or staples. Add thread for hanging.





### 6) Paper Christmas Trees

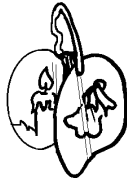
*Supplies:* 4" (10cm) tall paper triangles to represent trees, with or without trunks (see illustration), tissue paper in different colors cut in squares approximately 1" (2.5cm), glue, pencils, one hole punch, and thread, wool or ribbon.

*Procedure:* Place the blunt eraser end of a pencil in the center of a tissue square, bend the tissue up around the pencil and hold in place, dab into dish of glue and attach to the tree to give 3-D look. Punch a hole in the tree top and add ribbon or thread for hanging.

### 7) Pine Cone Trees

*Supplies:* garlands of shiny beads available in stores that sell Christmas decorations, cones, sequins, and glitter.

*Procedure:* Cut the beads apart and glue on to cones as shown. Add glitter.



### 8) Christmas Card Balls

*Supplies:* old Christmas cards, circle tracers, glue, and thread or wool.

*Procedure:* Trace and cut circles from the cards. Take three circles and fold in half vertically on the picture. Glue the plain sides together, inserting the thread or wool between the cards.

### 9) Luminarias

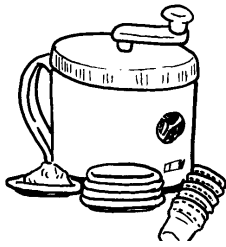
See "Las Posadas" preparation for instructions. These could be made even if you are not using "Las Posadas" as your closing. They can be placed on the steps or walkway to the church for the Christmas Eve service.

### 10) Ice-Cream Making

You can use an old-fashioned ice cream maker, involving ice and salt, or one of the newer ones (such as Donvier) that do not require those ingredients. If using one of these, make sure the container has been stored in the freezer the appropriate amount of time. The following recipe makes a creamy dessert and can be used as a base to which various flavors are added, for example, broken candy canes, chocolate bits, strawberries, etc. Serve as part of your potluck meal.

#### *Basic Vanilla Ice Cream*

Stir together and chill: 1 can sweetened condensed milk, 4 1/2 cups (1 litre) Half-and-half (coffee cream), 2 teaspoons (10 mL) vanilla. Pour into ice cream maker. Follow manufacturer's directions. Fruit or candy bits may be added when the cream mixture becomes firm.



*The host/ess circulates to give a five-minute warning that it is nearly cleanup time. Everyone helps clear the tables, sweep up, and reorganize the room for the potluck dinner. Setting the food tables up in a way that allows people to go down both sides speeds up the process of getting food.*

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### The Dinner (approximate time 45-50 minutes)

When the food is ready and everyone has gathered, the host/ess leads in saying or singing the blessing before food. God Creator can be sung to the tune of Frere Jacques. After one verse in unison, the group might be willing to try it as a round.

God Creator, God Creator,  
We give thanks, We give thanks,  
For our many blessings, For our many blessings.  
Allelu. A-men.



If homemade ice-cream is available, those responsible can help serve it at the end of the meal spooning it into small dishes or mini-cones to ensure everyone gets a taste.

### Gathering and Preparing for Worship

Everyone assists in cleaning up after the meal, taking down the tables and arranging the chairs in a few semi-circular rows for singing and worship. (Or you might choose to move into the sanctuary for worship.) The group will gather as the singing begins. We have made some music suggestions below, but choose whatever suits your congregation. Since this is the beginning of Advent – a time of waiting and expectation (not Christmas) we suggest that you use Advent hymns as much as possible rather than Christmas carols.



#### Music Suggestions:

Hey, Hey, Anybody Listening  
Light One Candle

*All God's Children Sing 91*  
*Rainbow Songbook 29*

Check your hymnal for Advent hymns such as “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” “Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus,” “People Look East,” “When God Is a Child” and others.

*(The song leader will need to balance new songs with some familiar Advent hymns.)*

### Decorating the Tree as a Worship Ritual (or see “Las Posadas”)

A short simple worship can be created around the ritual of decorating the tree. You might choose to invite all those with *angels* to come forward and add them to the tree as a few words are said about the symbolism of these angels. Continue with the other symbols (candy canes, evergreen trees, balls, play dough stars and bells, etc. Icicles are less related to the Christmas story than to the season in which we experience Christmas. Perhaps they could remind us of the many homeless people seeking shelter like Mary and Joseph and the beauty of those who reach out to share with the destitute and refugee. End with speaking about the lights and Jesus’ birth. With prayer and a hymn this may be all that is needed. Or you might choose to experience *Las Posadas* as described on the following resource sheet. If you choose the *Las Posadas* experience you will probably choose to decorate the tree before dinner as the symbols are made.



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## Las Posadas

The following activity is designed for use in the church hall or sanctuary so that everyone can participate in guessing the kind of preparation activities taking place in each household. However, you could eliminate the miming of Christmas preparations and use a series of church school classrooms down a hallway. Or you might make this an outdoor event and visit homes of church members along a street or in a cul-de-sac. This would be especially appropriate if you live in a small town. (This could be done at an event to introduce Advent or at any time during Advent.)



### Preparation

1) Prepare **name tags** with colored corners for dividing people up into “Households” for the mime experience. The number you need will depend on the size of the group you expect to attend. There can be the Greens, the Whites, the Browns, the Blacks, the Roses, the Grays, the Rusts, etc. You will also need a few with a “T” on them to be the first “Travelers” going from house to house. Mary and Joseph will be with the “T” group.

2) Make **large house signs** for each of the households: The Whites, The Browns, The Greens, etc. Write a secret “**Christmas preparation**” activity on cards for each of the households for the mini-drama below. *Suggestions:* a) making and baking Christmas cookies; b) stringing Christmas lights along front of house; c) setting up and decorating the tree; d) wrapping presents; e) cleaning the house; f) tearing bread for and stuffing the turkey; g) writing Christmas cards, stuffing envelopes, sealing and stamping envelopes. Attach these cards to the back of the house signs. Post signs about the edges of the room.

2) Make **luminarias**. In Mexico these are ordinary paper bags filled with sand, in which votive candles are set. These are placed at the doorway of each household. If you will be using these inside, flashlights are recommended, or set candles inside glass jar.

### Luminarias

*Supplies:* paper bags large enough to hold a flashlight (or candle), scissors, hole punch, glitter if desired. Flashlights (ask people to bring one with their name on it when you publicize the event). Thin white paper bags are prettiest, but not essential.

*Procedure:* Turn the top of the bag down a couple of inches and use the paper punch and scissors to create a snowflake style design for the light to shine through. Add some gold glitter if desired. Set these at the doorway of each household.



3) Prepare **something for the children to gather** from the stops on their journey. Some suggestions include: pieces from a nativity set to be assembled at the end of the journey, real straw or pieces of construction paper straw to be placed in the manger at the end of the journey, pieces of a nativity puzzle to be assembled at the end.

4) **Engage a number of people to facilitate the drama:** Mary and Joseph, the leaders of the household groups, the innkeeper. **Set up “stable”** area with a manger as the final gathering place. **Print conversation dialogue on poster board** (what is said at each household visited – see next page) so participants can have a quick reference if needed. Bring **words to hymn chosen** for closing.

### Introduction and Directions

Tonight we are going to act out an Advent custom from Mexico and the American southwest. During the final 8 days of Advent children process through candle-lit streets carrying figures of Mary and Joseph from door to door. You can see the candle lanterns or *luminarias* set about our street. The traveling children ask: “Who will give shelter to these pilgrims who are weary from travel?” This tradition is a ceremonial reenactment of Mary and Joseph’s search for a place to stay on the eve of Jesus’ birth and is known as *Las Posadas* which is Spanish for “the inns.”

For several evenings the little *peregrinos* or travelers are turned away from every house until at last, on Christmas Eve, they are welcomed with the traditional verse, “This is your house believe me. We offer it to you most humbly.” Then they celebrate with foods and with the breaking of a *piñata*. *Las Posadas* is a joyful and meaningful part of the Advent festivities for those children. The processions act out the theme of waiting which is central to Advent.

We are going to do our own adaptation of this ceremony tonight which will help us to see that sometimes we are so busy with preparations that we miss the real celebration of Christmas. This room will become the street on which there are a number of households. If you look around the room you will see from the signs where these homes are. The Browns live in this corner; the Greens are next door, then the Whites, the Browns, the Blacks, the Roses, the Grays, and the Rusts. No one is at home right now, but they will be home soon.



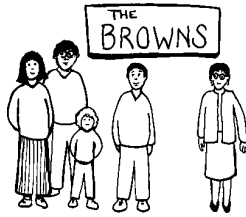


All of these households are very, very busy getting ready for Christmas. They do not have any time for a bunch of refugees looking for a place to spend the night. When the travelers come, they are turned away. This is what will happen. The *travelers* will come to the door, knock and ask: **“Will you give lodging to these weary pilgrims?”**

The *people* in their houses will say, **“Can’t you see we are busy? There is no room for you here.”**

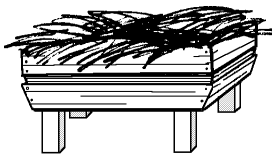
The *pilgrims* will say: **“What are you doing?”**

The *household* will say: **“Can’t you see?”** The household will act out whatever they are doing to get ready for Christmas, and the visitors and the other households will guess. Once they have guessed correctly, the household will say again, **“No room, no room, but you can have this!”** and the visitors will take the gift offered and move on to the next household. The households will act out their role only when the visitors come to their door. Otherwise they will watch the action.



Let’s practice our lines and get an idea of how this will work. We will pretend we are the Browns. Here come the visitors. (*Demonstrate what happens.*)

After visiting all the households, the travelers will come up here where you see the manger. Here we will meet the innkeeper who will say, **“This is your house, believe me. We offer it to you most humbly.”** And then we will come together for a brief prayer and sing a hymn. (You may decide to celebrate also with the breaking of a Mexican *piñata*.)



What we need now are people to live in these houses. In a few moments you will move to your home. On the back of the house signs we have named an activity for your group to act out. Keep it a secret, because you want other people to be able to guess. You will have 3 or 4 minutes to decide how to show your activity. We have asked certain people to lead each of the household groups. I would like them to go to their places now. Are there any questions before you go to your homes?

Look at your name tag. If your tag has a brown corner, you have just become a member of the Brown household! If green, then you are a member of the Green family. If you have a “T” marked on your name tag you will be one of the travelers; Mary and Joseph are your leaders. And now everyone can join your leaders. (*Some people will simply prefer to observe this whole activity, which is fine.*)

### The Activity

- The house groups prepare their mini-drama.
- The travelers led by Mary and Joseph, visit each household in turn.
- The travelers come to the “inn” set up at the front. The innkeeper welcomes the travelers with these words, “This is your house, believe me. I offer it to you most humbly.” The travelers present whatever objects they have collected at each household.
- The weary travelers sit by the manger. All the other players join them to sing “Away in a Manger” which can be found in virtually any collection of Christmas hymns and songs.
- The evening can then end with a brief (1-2 minute) reflection on the experience and a prayer. (Perhaps followed with the breaking of a *piñata*.)



(*If you choose to do this outside visiting several homes, the worship and piñata would occur at the last home [which might be the church]. Luminaries would be lit on the front step of all the homes being visited. “Householders” would become travelers after the group had come to their home.*)

