



Simple practices, such as lighting an Advent wreath, can engage a family in the season.

Simple Observances Allow for Advent Reflection

Greetings!

Each year as November winds down it seems like our family calendar winds up. I have come to realize that a simple family Advent is best for us. Here are some ideas if you, like us, want a simple, meaningful Advent:

The Advent wreath: This classic tradition helps my family honor the season of waiting. Before dinner, we light the candles on the Advent wreath, sing “Come, Lord Jesus,” and pray for a few moments. Sometimes our prayer is silent; at other times, we follow a guide to Advent prayer. Our children lead the prayer. Sometimes we make a wreath, and other times we retrieve our artificial wreath. A friend rolls her candles from beeswax sheets dyed rose and violet, and even as teenagers, her children look forward to this each year. If you commit to crafting, the key to keeping it simple is making sure that you enjoy the process and not only the product.

**Presence is truly a gift.
Emmanuel: God is with us.**

Prayer table or prayer shelf: Incorporate into your home a small table or shelf with elements of the season. You can place a statue of Mary, a holy card, or an empty manger on it to offer a visual cue about the season throughout your day.

The Rosary: The time before a baby is born is one of waiting. As we contemplate the special birth to come, we

might choose the Rosary, a prayer that has been a tool for reflection and meditation on the lives of Jesus and Mary for many years. The family could pray a decade daily or the Rosary weekly. It is okay if children’s bodies are not particularly settled during this, or if teenagers have slumped shoulders or rolled eyes. It is part of your family’s stage of life. God does not expect perfection from us, and we should not expect perfection from our little ones. Your children will learn more from watching you than from being corrected.

Receive the sacrament of reconciliation: Receiving God’s mercy and forgiveness is a great way to get our hearts ready to receive him at Christmas. Afterward, the family goes out for ice cream to remind the children that God is always ready to forgive us, but sometimes we need to celebrate it.

Books: Gather high-quality children’s books from your home library or local library to read together. Some books should be explicitly Christmas- or Advent-themed; I love to read *The Clown of God*, by Tomie dePaola, each Advent, although I have yet to do so without crying. Books that demonstrate the values of generosity, compassion, forgiveness, and understanding could be incorporated. The time dedicated to reading these books will be part of your Advent message: that presence is truly a gift. Emmanuel: God-is-with-us.

In keeping the season simple and reflective, we are reminded that God chose to come to us as a small baby. The simple gift of presence changed the whole world.