

Chess Valley Parishes

1st Week of Advent

Family Activity: Beginning Advent

Today is the First Sunday of Advent, the beginning of the four weeks we use as Catholics to prepare for Jesus' birth at Christmas.

Why is Advent important? Saint John Henry Newman explained Advent in one of his homilies as: "a time of waiting, a time of joy". And Pope Francis describes Advent as a time of "preparing to welcome - not a fairy-tale character - but the God who calls us, involves us, and before whom a choice is imposed".

When we go on holidays, we prepare by getting our clothes ready, choosing the toys we want to take, packing our suitcases, and maybe choosing presents if we are going to visit family and friends. We get ready for Christmas by planning where we are going to spend it, doing our Christmas shopping, and wrapping presents. But the most important part of Christmas - which we should also prepare for - is the birth of Jesus, and Advent helps us get ready to welcome Him into our hearts and lives.

What can we do as a family? We invite you to make your very own Advent wreath as a way of preparing for Christmas. Advent wreaths are circles made out of leaves, with four candles that are lit over the four weeks of Advent as a symbol of the light that the birth of Jesus brings to all of us. You can light the first candle this week - just once, or each evening as a family.

What we can all do is pray! We invite you to pray this prayer together as a family each time you light the first candle of your Advent wreath:



God of Love,

Your son, Jesus, is Your greatest gift to us. He is a sign of Your love.

Help us walk in Your love during these weeks of Advent.

As we wait for the coming of Jesus at Christmas, help us to prepare together as a family.

Watch over all of us, and help us to grow in our love for You, and for each other.

We pray in the name of Jesus, our Saviour.

Amen.

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2nd Week of Advent

Family Activity: Preparing for the Lord with hope

Today is the Second Sunday of Advent. Our Gospel reading today talks about how we need to “Prepare the way of the Lord”, and our First and Second readings also reflect on being ready for God when He comes.

What does this mean? When we prepare for a special visitor to our homes, we will often clean the house, put on special clothes, and sometimes buy or make something nice - a cake, or biscuits, or other special food. Today’s Readings are about preparing our insides, rather than our outsides - preparing our hearts for Jesus, who will be born on Christmas Day.

What can we do as a family? We invite you to have a conversation as a family about how you can prepare for the birth of Jesus. Think about Mary and Joseph, who travelled to Bethlehem, and about how they would have prepared for that long journey, thinking about the baby who was going to be coming into their lives. And remember that this week, you can light the second candle of your Advent wreath!

What we can all do is pray! We invite you to pray this prayer together as a family each time you light two candles of your Advent wreath. Ask God our Father to bless everyone in your family with hope during this Advent season.

God of Hope,

As we continue our preparations in this second week of Advent,

Bless each of our family with hope and excitement for the coming of Your Son, Jesus, at Christmas.

We remember Mary and Joseph, who made the long journey to Bethlehem.

Help us to prepare as they did, and to remember always what You want of us in each moment.

Amen.



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3rd Week of Advent

Family Activity: Joyfully opening our hearts to Jesus

Today is the Third Sunday of Advent, traditionally known as *Gaudete* or Rejoicing Sunday.

This week, we are invited to consider how this Advent season has helped us “come to realise that so great is Jesus’ love for us that He became one of us, so that we in turn might become one with Him.”

What does this mean? Jesus loved us so much that He chose to be born as a human person. Not a rich and powerful person, but a tiny baby, born in a stable and surrounded by farm animals. God’s love and generosity should fill our hearts with joy - the joy we have when we experience something very special.

What can we do as a family? We encourage you to do small things to joyfully prepare for Christmas. Put up your Christmas crib, if you haven’t already done so. Write Christmas cards to your loved ones. Play Christmas hymns in preparation for the birth of Jesus. And talk about how you can share the joy of Christmas with others.

What we can all do is pray! We invite you to pray this prayer together as a family each time you light three candles of your Advent wreath. Ask God to fill the hearts of all your family with joy as

God of Joy,

Mary was filled with joy when she heard the message of the angel Gabriel.

And you brought *joy to the world* when Your Son Jesus was born as a tiny baby in Bethlehem.



Help us to find joy - happiness - in the small things of our lives as we prepare for Christmas, most especially in being together as a family.

Help us also to share our joy with others, especially those who need it the most.

We ask this in Your name.
Amen.

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4th Week of Advent

Family Activity: Sharing the peace of God with others

Today is the Fourth Sunday of Advent. Christmas is very close now!

As we continue our preparations for this Christmas, we remember that it is often described as a “season of peace and goodwill”, and we reflect on how we can share the peace of God with others - to be, like Saint John the Baptist said, “a witness to testify to the light”.

What does this mean? A *witness* is a person who sees something take place, and who gives testimony – like in court where we have to be truthful. In the context of our Catholic faith, when we witness, we declare our faith in Jesus - not just through our words, but also through our actions. And that means not just talking about the peace and goodwill (kindness) of God, but also acting on His behalf to those around us.

What can we do as a family? We invite you to have a conversation as a family about how you can share the peace and goodwill of God with others as you prepare for Christmas. As you put up your crib (if you haven't already done so), think of what the innkeeper did for Mary and Joseph - he didn't have room in his inn, but he let them stay in his stable. Think of those who are homeless, or refugees. What can you do for them? You might consider buying a hamper or present for a poor family. You can also donate to the Chess Valley Saint Vincent de Paul Society, to the Mill End Food Bank, or to Cafod.

What we can all do is pray! We can always pray for others - even those whose names we don't know. This week, we invite you to pray this prayer together as a family each time you light all four candles of your Advent wreath. Ask God to help your family share His peace and goodwill with others during the Christmas season.

God of Peace,

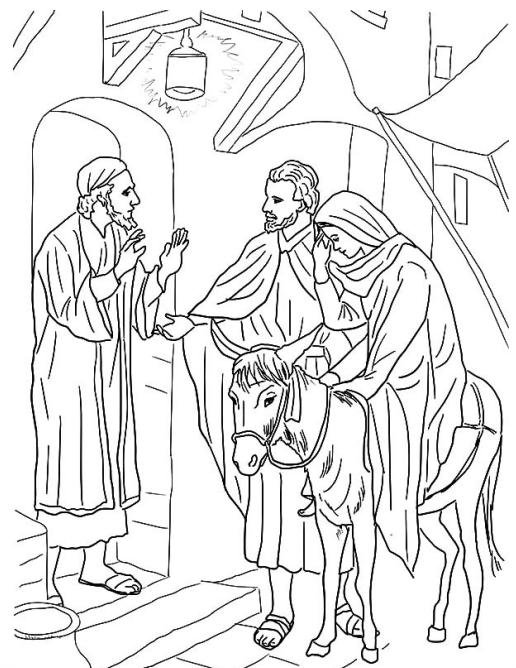
Watch over all our family and friends in these last days before Christmas.

This week when there is so much to do...help us not to be anxious, calm our fears, and grant us the gift of peace.

We can worry so much about ourselves and our own lives... remind us to be concerned for others also, especially those who need us most.

Help us to be Your eyes, and arms, and to bring Your love to those around us as we prepare for the birth of Your Son, Jesus.

Amen.



Chess Valley Parishes
Christmas
Family Activity: Celebrating the birth of Jesus

Today is Christmas Day, when we celebrate that Jesus chose to become a human being, to be born as a tiny baby in Bethlehem, out of His infinite love for each and every one of us.

What does “celebrating the birth of Jesus” mean? To “celebrate” something is to give importance to it, often by planning a gathering, a special meal, or an enjoyable activity.

We celebrate the birth of Jesus because we are grateful that God chose to become human out of love for each and every one of us...and because Jesus chose Mary and Joseph to be His parents, and to have a family like us.

What can we do as a family? We invite you to make celebrating the birth of Jesus part of your Christmas celebrations. You can do this by saying a special prayer before you eat together, or by singing “Happy Birthday” to Jesus during the day..you might even like to put a candle in your Christmas pudding! You can sing carols - special Christmas hymns - together. And of course, the best way to celebrate the birth of Jesus is to come to Mass as a family together.

What we can all do is pray! We offer this prayer for our parish families to pray together on Christmas Day. Ask God, and the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, to watch over your own family, and to help you love and support each other as they did.



God our Father,

Thank you for sending us your Son Jesus.

As we look at the lights on the Christmas tree, remind us of the light Jesus brought to this Earth.

As we sing Christmas songs and carols, remind us of the hope Jesus showed everyone.

As we open our Christmas gifts and presents, remind us that Jesus was - and is - the best gift ever.

Help us to cherish the special time we have with family and friends this Christmas, and to share the light, hope and gift of Jesus to the world.

Amen.