



Are you looking for the perfect gift for your family this year?

Here's one you can give them every day for the next four weeks, and it's free: Advent. When you mark the days and weeks of Advent together, you give your family opportunities to grow in love, build habits of faith and prayer, and discover signs of God's transforming presence all around you. Is there any more beautiful gift?

This little booklet can get you started. Each day you'll find a short reflection on the day's Mass readings followed by a short prayer to say with your family and an easy activity you can do together. Why not get started now? Ask God to carry your family through this season as you watch and wait for the Word to become flesh. See where God leads you and accept a gift beyond anything any of us can imagine!

Watch Me! Watch Me!

How many times have you heard your kids say this? To be “watchful” is also a definition of being vigilant. And “watch” can mean different things at different times in our lives. Today, your child might beg you to watch her riding her bike, maybe because she needs a little validation. But tomorrow, she might angrily demand, “Stop watching me!” Start this season by reflecting on what it means to be watchful or vigilant right now in your life. How is it different from five or ten years ago? Is there something you need to stop watching and look away from—for your own spiritual and physical health? Give it some prayer today.

Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to stand before the Son of Man.

LUKE 21:36

FAMILY PRAYER

Light a candle on an Advent wreath, if you have one.

Read the prayer aloud and have your family respond after each line:

WE WATCH AND WAIT FOR YOU, JESUS.

Jesus, thank you for this Advent time together.

Guide us with your light.

Give us strength to bring your light to others

as we watch and wait. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

No Advent wreath? No problem. Search YouTube for ideas to make one that works for your family and budget. Whatever you make—even if it’s a paper cutout—it will be right for your family—simply because it’s yours.

Venn Do You See It?

If you've survived fourth grade with your child, chances are you've seen a Venn diagram by now. Those overlapping circles help kids spot similarities and differences between related items. How would this exercise look for the centurion and Jesus' followers in today's gospel? We could put plenty of differences in the outer parts of the circles. The centurion's job, clothing, lifestyle, citizenship, and religious beliefs are night-and-day different from Jesus' ragtag band of followers. But Jesus uncovers another difference, vastly more important. It's the centurion's faith, deeper than that of many "faithful" people. So, we ask ourselves, what do we do about our differences with others? Point them out? Ignore them? Or maybe explore them and learn something new? Let's pray about this today.

"Amen, I say to you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith."

MATTHEW 8:10

FAMILY PRAYER

Read the prayer aloud and have your family respond after each line:
JESUS, HELP US SEE.

Jesus, help us see you in the poor and the hungry.
Help us see you in the lonely and brokenhearted.
Help us see you in everyone we meet. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

Think of one person you will hold in your heart this week, and invite your children to do the same. Keep that person's name or picture near your Advent wreath to remind you to pray for them each day.

All Together Now

Who in their right mind would put a child in the presence of a calf and a young lion? But this is God's kingdom, where we all "browse together," whether friends or enemies, leaders or followers, familiar or unknown to each other, loving or indifferent. It's lovely to imagine heaven this way, where everyone gets along. But Jesus' coming brings God's kingdom into the here and now. Through his life and teachings, Jesus calls us to move beyond daydreaming about heaven and really live it. Today. Who is a "lion" in your life right now? Someone you're avoiding, or who is difficult for you? Maybe even unforgivable? Ask the child Jesus to guide you to a place of peace in your relationship with this person.

*The calf and
the young lion
shall browse
together, with
a little child
to guide them.*

ISAIAH 11:6

FAMILY PRAYER

Read the prayer aloud and have your family respond after each line:

GUIDE US, JESUS.

We are your family, Lord.

Show us how to get along.

Make our home a place of peace. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

Invite your children to imagine Jesus at their own age. Help with questions: What kinds of games might he have played? What kind of friend was Jesus? Did he have chores around the house? Encourage your kids to talk and pray often to the child Jesus.

Bread for You

In a classic episode from the *Seinfeld* TV series, customers at a take-out restaurant must order soup in a particular way. One wrong move and the famous line “No soup for you!” fires across the counter like a lightning bolt. Can you imagine the disciples distributing the bread and fish Jesus has given them and saying to someone in the crowd, “No bread and fish for you”? Me neither. The disciples recognize that people have come here because they’re hungry for something Jesus provides. So it isn’t up to the disciples to decide who gets to eat and who doesn’t. What about us? As Jesus’ disciples, charged with sharing our bread with others, do we ever exclude anyone through our actions? Spend some time talking and praying with your family about this today.

*They all ate
and were
satisfied.*

MATTHEW 15:37

FAMILY PRAYER

Read the prayer aloud and have your family respond after each line:

THANK YOU FOR YOUR GIFTS, LORD.

Thank you, Father, for the gift of our food.

Bless those who don’t have enough to eat.

Show us how to help the hungry. Help us help them. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

As a family, support a food bank during Advent. Find out what items are most needed and, if you can, buy and share them. Or spend time volunteering there. You can also educate your family about poverty in America at povertyusa.org.

Parts Departments

I'm preparing to paint the kitchen, so I've watched hundreds of how-to videos and listened to experts. Yet, I still haven't opened a can of paint. A million little things always seem to get in the way of getting started. That's a lot like being Christ's followers. There's the "listening to his words" part—I can do that. But then comes the "doing" part. There, I fail daily. Often, it's little things that keep me from doing what I know Jesus wants. What about you and your family? Does either part of following Jesus—listening to his words or acting on them—need shoring up for you? Make some plans today and use the season to build on them.

"Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock."

MATTHEW 7:24

FAMILY PRAYER

Read the prayer aloud and have your family respond after each line:

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT.

Lord, bless this house and this family.

Show us how to listen to your words and act on them.

Show us the way to live in your love every day. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

Read the Beatitudes together (Matthew 5:3–12). Explain that being poor in spirit means letting go of what we don't need, like greed or jealousy, and depending completely on God. Brainstorm ways your family can live the Beatitudes.

Give Joy

We don't know a lot about St. Nicholas' life, but we do know that he was the bishop of Myra (in present-day Turkey) in the fourth century. We also have legends, like the one about the bags of gold Nicholas secretly bestowed on a poor father who needed dowries for his three unmarried daughters. Nicholas is said to have tossed the gold through the man's window at night, which some say gives rise to the custom of putting treats in children's shoes on the eve of this feast. Before we get too deep into the season, take time today to think about how you will help your kids find the joy of giving to others. Wondering where to start? Pray about it.

*The lowly
shall again
find joy
in the LORD.
The poorest
rejoice in the
Holy One
of Israel.*

ISAIAH 29:19

FAMILY PRAYER

Read the prayer aloud and have your family respond after each line:

WE LOVE YOU, JESUS.

God of goodness, loving you means sharing your love.

That's not always easy.

Help us to be extra kind to each other today and always. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

Celebrate St. Nicholas Day by brainstorming acts of kindness family members can do this month for each other and for neighbors, teachers, friends, parish priests, catechists, and other people in your life. Make a kindness calendar to schedule your good deeds and then get busy doing them!

See and Be Seen

We talk a lot about what we do for God and for others. That's important. But it's also good to talk and think about all God does for us. Sometimes we need to sit back and just let Jesus be Jesus for us. How? Start by imagining you are part of the crowd in today's gospel. Can you see Jesus gazing at the crowd—at you? Seeing you moves Jesus' heart. Jesus knows what troubles you. He knows about the times you have felt abandoned and lonely. And here he is, with you now. He longs to heal you from your trauma and pain, your tears and suffering. Take today to let Jesus see you. Where does Jesus take you in your meditation?

*At the sight
of the crowds,
his heart
was moved
with pity for
them because
they were
troubled and
abandoned...*

MATTHEW 9:36

FAMILY PRAYER

Read the prayer aloud and have your family respond after each line:

FORGIVE US, LORD.

Lord God, none of us is perfect.

When we mess up, help us admit it.

Help us find your peace, healing, and love. Amen.

ADVENT ACTION

Find out when your parish offers an Advent penance service and make plans to take your family. Even if your kids aren't old enough to receive the Sacrament of Penance (also called Reconciliation), you're setting a wonderful example and helping them prepare.