

# *Introduction*

*'Twas the night before Christmas...* You've probably heard this Christmas classic a hundred times, but have you ever noticed all the Advent hiding in Clement C. Moore's poem? Start with the children nestled in their beds. Then look at the early Advent Mass readings to see what God says about waking from our sleep. The reindeer leading the sleigh could be those prophets of old, clearing a path and making the rough ways smooth. And there's St. Nicholas himself, dressed in fur, "all tarnished by ashes and soot." It might be a stretch, but I think of St. John the Baptist, his camel hair clothes covered in desert dust and grit. Now, to my knowledge, Mr. Moore didn't have these symbols in mind, but it does remind us to keep searching for God, even where we least expect him. So instead of exhausting ourselves by fighting the rampant consumerism this time of year, let's use our energy to be Advent treasure hunters. Let's stay on the lookout for deeper meanings in our customs and traditions. We won't find spiritual benefits in every holiday clearance sale, but we can find hidden ways to serve God and our neighbor through these days of preparation. This little booklet can help. Use it with your family to see where you will find our Prince of Peace every single day, waiting to be born in your hearts.

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## Date of Destiny

*“Therefore stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come.”*

MATTHEW 24:42

Think of your child’s birthday. Probably the most important day of your life, right? Now think of how you spent that day, before your child was born. Years went by, that magical day came and went, and you had no inkling that someday you’d celebrate it with love, joy, and lots of cake. So what about today? Could this day be a significant date for you someday? Perhaps, in time, you will mark today as the birth of your first grandchild. Perhaps, sadly, it will be a day a loved one dies. But there’s no need to panic. Advent is our time to practice waking up and expecting something big to happen every day—maybe even the Lord’s coming.

**FAMILY PRAYER** Light the first candle of your Advent wreath. (If you don’t have one, try making or coloring one—you can find images online.) Then one person reads the prayer aloud; the rest of the family responds after each line: *We walk in the light of the Lord.*

Lord, thank you for this Advent time together.

Guide us with your light.

Help us spread your light and love each day.

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**ADVENT ACTION** Invite everyone to close their eyes and think of a time they felt God’s presence.

# Hidden Treasure

*When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, "Amen, I say to you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith."*

MATTHEW 8:10

I wonder how Jesus' followers felt when he praised the centurion's faith. *Excuse me, Jesus, did you see that guy? Weren't you just praising the poor in spirit, the meek, and the persecuted—exactly the kind of people guys like him oppress?* We might wonder the same thing today about the bullies, cheaters, swindlers, sinners, and other imperfect people who inhabit our world. What does Jesus see in them? For that matter, what does Jesus see in any of us? Not one of us is perfect. But just as we parents see what's beautiful in our children, Jesus spotted a treasure of faith in the centurion. What treasure will Jesus find hidden in your heart today?

**FAMILY PRAYER** All respond after each line: *Come, Lord Jesus, come!*

Lord, none of us is worthy to have you under our roof.  
Still, Lord, we ask for your presence in our home and in  
our hearts.  
You alone can heal our hearts and give us life.

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**ADVENT ACTION** Start a "100 God moments" project. Keep a notepad in a central location and encourage everyone to jot down (or draw) memories of times they noticed God's presence during Advent.

## Super Smarts

*“Although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike.”* LUKE 10:21

“Who’s your favorite superhero?” My friend’s four-year-old answers my question with his own name, Logan. His dad asks again and Logan gives a more superhero-y sounding name. Later I realize his first answer was pretty smart—Logan is the human name of his superhero friend. No, it’s not a divine revelation from the mouth of babes, but it does remind me of how much we need the fresh perspectives of our kids. We may have heard the words of the Mass a thousand times, know Scripture passages by heart, or think we know certain saints, but here come our kids—to teach us something new about it all. What will your kids teach you this Advent season? Be on the lookout!

**FAMILY PRAYER** All respond after each line: *Your gifts are all we need, Lord.*

Lord God, we thank you for all of your gifts.

Today we ask for the most important gifts of faith, hope,  
and love.

Help us use these gifts to serve others in your name.

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**ADVENT ACTION** Together, learn about some real superheroes—December saints like Francis Xavier, Nicholas, Lucy, Juan Diego, John the Baptist, or Stephen. Look online, or see if your parish has resources to help you.

## Leftover Love

*They all ate and were satisfied. They picked up the fragments left over—seven baskets full.* MATTHEW 15:37

What parent doesn't love the apostles here, picking up all those fragments of bread after Jesus feeds the crowd? But as a mom, I always wonder what happened to the leftovers. Did the apostles pack up the bread scraps to bring along in case they got hungry the next day? Did they share them with the poor? Jesus gave everyone more than enough food to be satisfied, just as he gives us more than we could ever imagine—his body, blood, soul, and divinity—in the Eucharist. What blessings has God given your family this year? What are you doing with all this goodness and grace? Packing it up for later? Or sharing it with others? What do you think God wants you to do?

**FAMILY PRAYER** All respond after each line: *Thank you for your blessings, Lord.*

Generous Father, you have given our family so many blessings.  
Help us be a blessing to each other.  
Help us be a blessing to the world.

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**ADVENT ACTION** You have so many extra things to do right now. Take a moment with your kids to make a list of tasks they can do or help with. But don't call it a to-do list. Instead call it your family's "Be a Blessing" list.

## Time Tracking

*It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes.*

PSALM 118:9

When the college admissions scandal first hit the news earlier this year, every parent I knew was talking about it. I found myself raking in all the sordid details and reading every celebrity tweet. Looking back, I see how much valuable time I wasted on something that didn't even affect me. I'm thinking that a better use of my time would have been to pray or volunteer on behalf of kids who have no one to advocate for them. What about you? Is there anything you're spending too much time on these days? How might you use your time to take refuge in God's love and grace instead?

**FAMILY PRAYER** All respond after each line: *Jesus, we trust in you.*

Jesus, we know you are present in our lives.

Help us see you in the faces of others.

Help us to hear your voice in our prayer.

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**ADVENT ACTION** Talk to your children about today's Psalm verse. Ask what princes or kingdoms we (parents included!) trust in today, and whether that's good for us or not. Talk about ways you can ease away from these princes and kingdoms and turn to the Lord instead.

## While You Wait

*Thus says the Lord GOD: But a very little while, and Lebanon shall be changed into an orchard, and the orchard be regarded as a forest!* ISAIAH 29:17

In a little while...the phrase has different meanings for you and for your kids. You might tell your kids, “In a little while, Christmas break will be here.” But your boss might tell you, “In a little while, we’ll get you some help.” Isaiah never tells us how long “a little while” will be, but these prophecies were recorded about eight hundred years before Jesus’ birth. That’s an awfully long “little while” to speak with such hope. What are you waiting for right now? What has been promised to you “in a little while,” and by whom? More important, what might God be waiting for you to do? What do you need during this “little while” of Advent to get God’s will done?

**FAMILY PRAYER** All respond after each line: *Wait for the Lord with courage!*

Lord, sometimes we can wait patiently.  
But sometimes we aren’t patient at all.  
Help us remember that you, O God, are our strength.  
In you we find patience and peace in our waiting.

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**ADVENT ACTION** Celebrate the feast of St. Nicholas by counting your blessings. Invite your kids to make a list of all they are grateful for, and keep it near your Christmas tree.

## Good Answer

*“The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few.”*

MATTHEW 9:37

“We can pray.” I’ve taught faith formation for years and one thing I’ve learned is that practically every kid in Catholic school or parish religion class knows this will never be a wrong answer to any question about our neighbor. “What can we do for the poor?” “We can pray.” “What can we do for the sick?” “We can pray.” “What can we do for the brokenhearted?” “We can pray...um...at Mass?” Who’s going to argue with that answer? Of course, we need to pray for others. But we also need to serve the poor, the sick, and the brokenhearted. Pope Francis once said, “Prayer and action must always be profoundly united.” Make plans to unite your family prayers to action this week.

**FAMILY PRAYER** All respond after each line: *Bless our family, bless our neighbors, bless us all.*

Jesus, help us put our faith and love into action.

Send us out to do your work.

Give us strength to serve in love and joy.

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**ADVENT ACTION** Before Mass tomorrow, invite everyone to be on the lookout for how God is calling your family to serve others. Perhaps there’s an announcement in the parish bulletin, or something in the homily. At home, make plans for how your family will serve others.