

INTRODUCTION

*to every thing there is a
season, and a time to every
purpose under heaven.*

Ecclesiastes 3:1

I've been a Catholic my whole life. I was born into a Catholic family and baptized as a young baby. One grandmother converted to Catholicism when she married my Irish Catholic grandfather, and my other grandfather converted when he married my Irish Catholic grandmother. As a family, we prayed before meals, went to Sunday Mass, and attended religious education. We marked Advent with a calendar and wreath, celebrated Christmas, observed Ash Wednesday and Lent, and feasted during Easter. Beyond that, the only feast day I knew of was for St. Francis of Assisi on October 4 because it was also my birthday and we would take our pets to receive a special blessing at our local parish. It wasn't until I moved to Brazil after college that I began to learn more about the rhythms of our Church seasons.

I didn't know Portuguese when I first arrived in Brazil, and within the first week, the religious sister who I shared a room with told me that we would be going to a *feita* that night in the city. Ready for some excitement, I was eager to leave our tiny village for the first time and attend a "party." I remember feeling very hungry as we left our village, and I was looking forward to a spread of delicious Brazilian party food. As we approached the city, it became clear to me that eating was not the first planned activity. The "party" was to be held in honor of a Catholic feast day, and that celebration would begin with a two-hour-long Mass with thousands of people in the streets of the city. The only food was the Eucharist (good for my hungry soul but less so for my hungry belly). I had never seen anything like it. Due to the utter shock and my poor language skills, I can't even tell you what feast day it was, but it was the beginning of learning about the richness of the Church seasons and how they can help us develop a rhythm of faithfulness in our own lives.

Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and Ordinary Times impact far more than the color of vestments the priest is wearing for Mass. Living these seasons with intentionality helps ground us in faith and hope in a society that is fast-paced and ever-changing. We experience throughout the year the story of God's love for his people, and we remember the truth of who we are and why we're here.

We remember that there is a time for everything—for sorrow, for joy, for contemplation, for dancing. Then when we encounter the different seasons of our lives, we have practiced drawing closer to God through it all. We do not lose hope or fall to despair when we are in a period of suffering or spiritual drought. We do not take for granted the times of rejoicing. And we learn how to seek God in the ordinary days.

We also learn about the different saints who lived lives of virtue while also having everyday concerns like us. Their lives can inspire us to listen to how God calls each of us individually to follow him, and their witness to truth and goodness can give us courage and confidence to press on, even when all seems lost.

* * *

When I moved to Los Angeles as a young adult, I met big Catholic families who homeschooled their children and observed feast days regularly. It was beautiful, but as a single woman in my late twenties, that lifestyle didn't resonate. My curiosity was piqued, though, and I started paying more attention to the Church calendar. What I found is that living in the rhythm of the Church is not only for homeschooling moms or religious communities, as the internet might have us believe. It is for each of us, in each stage of our lives, and can be adapted to enrich our lives if only we can see how.

Eight years later, I am married with two children. My husband and I both have vibrant careers, and juggling the demands of family life leaves me feeling exhausted with little space for crafting and cooking extravagant meals. However, I see the beauty of the centuries-old traditions and the real benefits of celebrating the feast days set out in the Church calendar. I want both to live them for myself and to teach them to my daughters. I am not an expert on anything. I do not have a degree in theology, and my working memory has worsened with having children, so remembering things about saints and feast days is a bit of a challenge for me. I am one of the regular women in the pews who longs to draw close to God because my life is immeasurably better with rhythms of prayer and spiritual connection.

This book is not meant to be all-encompassing but rather a beautiful introduction to modern ways we can embrace the rhythms of the Church year. You'll find both simple activities and intricate projects to help you live the seasons, celebrate the holy days, and observe the feast days.

Let us link arms in our pursuit toward holiness.

Blessings to you,

 Campbell

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Start Anywhere, Anytime

The Church year begins on the first day of Advent, but you can start living these traditions any time of the year. We hope this book is beautiful enough to be left out on your coffee table to be flipped through for inspiration. We did not include every feast day in these pages, but we did provide a menu of days and seasons for you to consider.

BEGIN WITH WHAT YOU KNOW: Which holidays are you already celebrating? Christmas? Easter? St. Patrick's Day? Starting with what is familiar will help you feel less intimidated by all the options.

START WHERE YOU ARE: What season is it right now? Lent? Summer? Advent? Letting the annual calendar or Church calendar choose where you start eliminates paralysis by analysis.

FIND WHAT YOU LOVE: Who is your favorite saint, and when is their feast day? Maybe this is your Confirmation saint, or maybe it's just a saint whose story has touched you. Add their day to your calendar. You can do this for saints chosen by each member of your household. Alternatively, using this book, choose one new feast day a month to add to your calendar. Beginning with what (or who) inspires you can ensure that this remains fun and creative. Whatever your method for choosing which days, do not—I repeat, do not—try to celebrate every day mentioned in this book. You will find yourself overwhelmed, and that's the last thing we want. Use this book like a menu or a magazine—flip through it and choose what appeals to you.

For each day or season, you'll find a variety of ways to celebrate. Some activities are simple with no supplies needed. Some are more intricate than others and would excite the crafter and maker. Some are specifically for children, and some are for anyone of any age. Some are geared toward older children and adults but can be adapted for younger kids. There is something for everyone at every stage of life.

No matter where you start, be sure to start small with what already easily fits into your pace of life. Let this book be a starting point for inspiration and not a way to feel guilty for not doing enough. Living the Church seasons is an invitation to a deeper relationship with God and his promises for us by entering into the stories and history of our faith in order to more deeply contemplate and connect with God in our everyday lives. It doesn't have to be perfect or picture-worthy. It just has to be for him.



Easily Accessible Supplies


All supplies needed for crafts and meals can be found easily on Amazon or at your local craft and party stores. Some items can be purchased premade from Be A Heart (www.beaheart.com/livingtheseasons).

Some crafts will call for the use of a template. These can be found as a free download on the Be A Heart website: <https://beaheart.com/pages/living-the-seasons>. To use the templates, download and print the templates, choose the pages for the craft you want to make, and cut out the shapes as instructed for the craft.

* * *

This book is nowhere near exhaustive. The Church has canonized thousands of saints throughout the centuries, and creatives have come before us and found genius ways to enliven the seasons of the Church through crafting, baking, celebrating, contemplating, and serving. We strived to make sure you have at least a handful of options for each Church season, a couple of saints or feast days per month of the year, and some essential ideas for deepening your love for God and neighbor as you move through the calendar. If you want to know more about a particular season, saint, or celebration, we've offered a list of additional resources in the appendix of this book. You will also find further reading, ideas, and resources at www.beaheart.com/livingtheseasons.





advent

MEANING: "TO COME TO"

THE FOURTH SUNDAY BEFORE CHRISTMAS
DAY THROUGH CHRISTMAS EVE



ANGE

ADVENT

The Lord is coming, always coming. When you have ears to hear and eyes to see, you will recognize him at any moment of your life. Life is Advent; life is recognizing the coming of the Lord.
—Henri Nouwen

Meaning “to come to,” Advent is a liturgical season that includes the four Sundays prior to Christmas. Advent is my favorite season of the year. It is the beginning of the Church year, but it can be difficult to enter into it because of the many demands placed on us during this time. Over the past few years, I have tried to become very intentional about how I live the Advent season as a time of waiting, preparation, and hope. I was at the end of my pregnancy with my first daughter, Frances, during Advent. The experience helped me connect with the pregnant Mary as she awaited the birth of her son. I wondered how she could have endured riding on a donkey with the aches and pains of the pregnant body, and I shared in the excitement of anticipating the new baby.

I began to wonder about the messages we received with holiday traditions of Santa—that if you’re not “good,” then you don’t receive presents. It seemed to look a lot like the message I had received about God—that if I was “good” and followed the rules, then God would reward me with the things that I wanted in life. As I have grown in my spiritual life, I have come to believe that Advent is actually an opportunity to approach the manger with our failures and faults and still find ourselves loved by Christ.

Advent is a time to prepare ourselves, to orient our hearts to love both Jesus and our neighbor. It is a time to ponder things in our hearts as Mary did and sow peace in the world around us. When I was a child, I would spend days on end handcrafting Christmas cards for family and friends. I remember one year my mom let me use the glue gun to stick hay onto a construction-paper creche. I burned my fingers and damaged the wood kitchen table, but I was so proud of my creations. I handwrote meaningful messages to each person and addressed them carefully.

Now with more responsibilities as an adult, I find the weeks leading up to Christmas can feel completely overwhelming and be filled with more stress than peace and more gift-buying than prayer. Within the Advent season there are a lot of beautiful feast days to celebrate, and we can run the risk of trying to do it all and burning out. We learn from the small baby in the manger that it is less, not more, that allows the Christ child to enter our lives.

If this is your first year celebrating Advent, I suggest starting with the wreath project and skipping the other feasts for this first year. If you’ve had more experience with Advent, then try to build on what has been working well for you. Maybe you deepen your prayer around the wreath with songs or readings. Maybe you add in a feast day or two. Remember, we don’t have to do it all (in life or in this book). Choose what brings you joy.



When you have
eyes to see...



SUNDAYS IN ADVENT

Light an Advent Wreath

The Advent wreath is circular as a symbol of God's unending love and eternal joy. Set out your Advent wreath and candles on your dinner table. At dinnertime starting on the first Sunday of Advent, keep the lights off or dim and light one purple candle.

Before eating, sing a verse from the hymn "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" (pp. 6–7) and pray the following prayer. With each week of Advent, light an additional candle and experience how it becomes brighter and brighter as Christmas approaches. It is Jesus who lights up our lives!

Leader: Come, Lord Jesus, set us free.

All: Come, Lord Jesus, come.

(Light the Advent candle[s] for that week.)

*Thank you, Lord, for this season of Advent
when we prepare for your arrival.*

*Help us to keep our eyes open
to see you when you come to us.*

*Bless this food, which reminds us of the banquet
we will all share with you one day in heaven. Amen.*

Leader: Come, Lord Jesus, set us free.

All: Come, Lord Jesus, come.¹

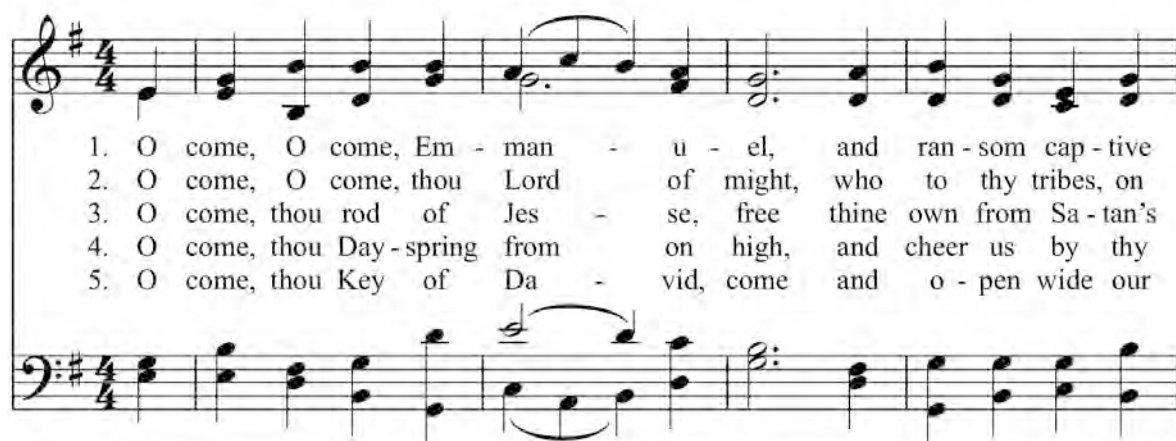




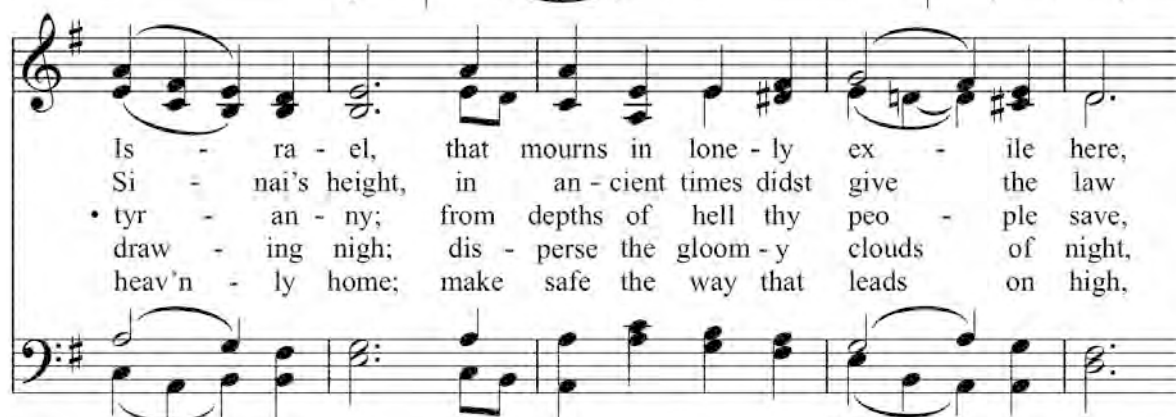
Sing “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

The lyrics of “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” set the tone for the Advent season as we wait for the coming of Jesus Christ. As you sing each verse, notice how the mood of the song changes. We start as captives living in exile, tyranny, and darkness. We end the song celebrating that Emmanuel is opening up his heavenly home to us. In between, we always sing, “Rejoice!” No matter what, we rejoice because we know Jesus is coming.

How does the call to rejoice feel different to you in each week of Advent? How does it feel to rejoice, no matter what is going on in your life right now?




1. O come, O come, Em - man - u - el, and ran - som cap - tive
 2. O come, O come, thou Lord of might, who to thy tribes, on
 3. O come, thou rod of Jes - se, free thine own from Sa - tan's
 4. O come, thou Day - spring from on high, and cheer us by thy
 5. O come, thou Key of Da - vid, come and o - pen wide our



Is - ra - el, that mourns in lone - ly ex - ile here,
 Si - nai's height, in an - cient times didst give the law
 • tyr - an - ny; from depths of hell thy peo - ple save,
 draw - ing nigh; dis - perse the gloom - y clouds of night,
 heav'n - ly home; make safe the way that leads on high,



Refrain
 un - til the Son of God ap - pear.
 in cloud and maj - es - ty and awe.
 • and give them vic - t'ry o'er the grave. Re - joice! Re - joice!
 and death's dark shad - ows put to flight.
 and close the path to mis - er - y.



Em - man - u - el shall come to thee, O Is - ra - el.

WEEK ONE OF ADVENT

THIS WEEK WE FOCUS ON HOPE.

Light one of the purple candles, called the prophecy candle, which symbolizes the prophets who told of Jesus's coming with anticipation.



Make an Advent Banner

- * “Advent Banner” template
- * Cotton canvas, 1 yard
- * Fabric scissors
- * Felt, colors of choice
- * Iron-on hem tape (optional)
- * Felt glue

Cut the cotton canvas to be 4 inches x 1 yard (if you want to hem it, give yourself an extra inch on all sides). Cut out a triangle from each end to make your banner. Hem with iron-on tape (optional). Use the template to cut out the letters from your felt; alternatively, freehand trace 3-inch-tall letters onto the felt. Use the felt glue to glue your letters onto the banner. To make sure it's centered, glue the center letters first (the center is between the O and M on the second *come*) and then move out to either side.

Now you can hang the banner on your tree, on your mantel, or in your kitchen!

Reach Out

Reach out to a friend who you know is going through a difficult time. Listen to them and support them however they might need as a sign of hope that there is light coming.



WEEK TWO OF ADVENT

THIS WEEK WE FOCUS ON PEACE.

Light two of the purple candles. The second purple candle is called the Bethlehem candle, which symbolizes the Holy Family's experience in Bethlehem.



Throw a Baby Shower for Mary

Throwing a baby shower for Mary with your friends is a fun alternative to a Christmas party. Ask guests to bring donations for a pregnancy center in your area as a gift for Mary and baby Jesus.

Create a Virgin (Mary) Mom-osa Bar

- * Sparkling lemonade
- * Orange juice
- * Fresh fruit, especially strawberries

Strawberries grow alongside their white flowers. Because of this, they symbolize fruitful purity and have come to represent the pure, virgin mother who bears the fruit—Christ—in her womb. Add some to your mimosa to honor Mary!

Serve Mini Food

- * Pigs in a blanket (they look like a baby swaddled)
- * Mini pancakes and waffles
- * Mini pizzas
- * Mini quiche





Decorate Swaddle Blankets

- * “Swaddle Stamps” template
- * Blank white muslin swaddle blankets or burp cloths
- * Fabric paint
- * Foam brushes
- * Pieces of scrap cardboard
- * Craft foam with adhesive backing
- * Scissors or X-Acto knife

Prepare a swaddle decorating station. First, make the stamps. Cut your desired shapes from the craft foam using the printed template, then adhere to small pieces of cardboard so you can easily use the stamp. Place larger cardboard pieces under the blankets so that the paint doesn’t stain the table.

Apply fabric paint to the stamps with foam brushes, then decorate the swaddle blankets with the stamps. (Limit the color choices of paint so that they look a little more polished.) Hang on a clothesline to dry. You can donate these to the pregnancy center, too!

Make Space for Prayer

It can be difficult to carve out time for quiet prayer in this season. Give your guests the gift of prayer. You could provide them with a journal and pen or have them bring their own. You can also pass out an Advent reflection if you wish.



WEEK THREE OF ADVENT

GAUDETE SUNDAY

THIS WEEK WE FOCUS ON JOY.

Light two of the purple candles and the pink candle. The pink candle is called the Shepherd's candle, which symbolizes the joy of meeting the Christ child.



Go to Confession

St. John the Baptist encourages us to prepare the way of the Lord by repenting and changing our lives. On Christmas Day, we want Jesus to find our hearts swept clean and ready for him.

Wear Pink

When we wear pink on Gaudete Sunday, we're celebrating a shift in the Advent season from a focus on penance and preparation to one of joy and anticipation. Wear pink to celebrate the coming Christ child!

Make a Christmas Bell Garland

Bells are rung at churches on Christmas Eve at midnight to announce the joy of the Lord. Prepare in anticipation by making and hanging a bell garland.

- * Christmas bells (sometimes called cow bells)
- * Linen ribbon or macrame jute

Every 12 inches along your ribbon or jute, tie on a bell with a knot. Intertwine your bell garland with greenery on your mantel, above a kitchen window, or along a staircase. Alternatively, you could hang a few strung bells on doorknobs around your house.

Visit a Nursing Home

Visit a nursing home in your area and ask if you can spend time with the residents who might not have many visitors. You can bring activities to do or just sit and listen. Ask if you can hold their hand while they talk as physical touch can do wonders for the soul.

