

# ADVENT

-A time of preparation  
for the  
coming of the Lord-



AN ACTIVITY  
BOOKLET  
FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

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# **ADVENT**

November 15 - December 25

## **SECTION I**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The calculation of Advent in the Orthodox Church differs from that in Western Churches. Whereas the season of Advent in the West begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas, or the Sunday nearest the feast of St. Andrew, the Apostle (Nov. 30), the "Christmas Fast," or "Little Lent", as it is called in the Orthodox Church, traditionally begins every year, 40 days before Christmas on Nov. 15.

Our preparation during the season of Advent is, of course, focused on the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh, the Incarnation. In the West, Advent carries with the theme of Christ's coming in the flesh another theme - His Second Coming. The Orthodox Church devotes only one Sunday in Advent to Christ's Second Coming, since this theme is emphasized more heavily during Holy Week. It was during those days in Jerusalem immediately preceding His passion that Christ taught extensively about the final judgment.

Let each of us approach Advent anticipating the coming of the Lord and to allow this anticipation to intensify in us the presence of Christ. For the Lord is already present with us, but the Grace of Advent allows us to experience a more vivid, perhaps new, awareness of this presence. In Advent He reveals Himself to us as "He who comes", the one who desires to be with us. Let our prayer be "Come Lord Jesus", and throughout Advent let this prayer intensify and drive away all thoughts and passions incompatible with the coming of Christ.

## II. SUNDAYS IN ADVENT

There are six Sundays which usually fall during the season of Advent. Each carry with them a theme which helps us to prepare for the coming of the Lord.

The Gospel lesson for the Sixth Sunday before Christmas is the parable of the Good Samaritan. Christ exhorts us through this story to show mercy and compassion toward our neighbor. And who is our neighbor? Everyone is our neighbor and especially those in need.

The Gospel for the Fifth Sunday before Christmas is the parable of the rich fool who determined to tear down his barn and build greater ones in order to store all his crops and goods. But his soul was required of him that night. Christ tells this story in order to warn us against covetousness, and thinking that our life consists in the abundance of material possessions.

The Gospel for the Fourth Sunday before Christmas is the parable of the Rich Young Ruler whom Christ told to sell all that he had and distribute it to the poor, in order to have treasure in heaven and to come and follow Him.

The Gospel for the Third Sunday before Christmas is the story of the woman whom Christ loosed from a spirit of infirmity which had plagued her for 18 years.

The Gospel for the Second Sunday before Christmas is the parable of the Great Supper. Those who were invited to eat bread in the Kingdom of God made excuses for not accepting the invitation - possessions, work, family. They did not inherit the Kingdom of God.

What can we learn from these lessons and how do they prepare us for the celebration of Christmas? First, we must show mercy and compassion toward others even if it costs money. We must bring our tithes into the storehouse of the Kingdom of God, before building our own barns. We must examine our attachment to material things and be prepared to lay aside whatever amount that prevents us from following Christ.

We must acknowledge our own spirit of infirmity and look to the Incarnate Son of God who came to raise the image of God which had fallen in each of us.

And finally, we must not let the cares of this world - possessions, work, family - come before Christ and His Kingdom or we will be shut out.

The Sunday before Christmas is called "The Sunday of the Genealogy of Christ". The Gospel lesson from Matt. 1 brings all those who looked forward to the coming of the Messiah together with us who enjoy the blessings of His coming. The Epistle lesson is from Hebrews 11 which recalls the faith of those who have gone before us, and inspires us to turn the eyes of our hearts toward Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

### III. FASTING AND ALMSGIVING

The proper attitude while fasting is crucial if it is to be of any spiritual benefit to the individual. Mere abstinence from types of food is not enough. Control of overeating is essential no matter what foods are eaten. But even this is not enough in and of itself. Unless an inner fast of the heart accompanies an outward fast, such an observance will be of little or no benefit, in fact it may ultimately be counterproductive if it produces a spirit of legalism or arrogance. The following exhortation from St. John Chrysostom points out that the true nature of fasting involves much more than mere abstention from certain foods:

"Do you fast? Give me proof by what you do!

What do I mean? Well, if you see a poor man,  
take pity on him! If you see a beautiful woman,  
don't dwell on fornication!

Don't fast by the mouth, but also the eye, the  
ear, the feet, the hands--all members of your body.

Let your hands fast by being pure from stealing and  
taking things which others should have.

Let your feet fast by not running to watch things  
you shouldn't.

Let your eyes fast, being taught not to look at  
things they shouldn't, and especially not to stare  
at beautiful women.

Let the ear fast also. The fasting of the ear  
consists in refusing to listen to evil talk and  
rumors.

Let the mouth, too, fast from disgraceful talk."

But fasting, even when observed properly, is not carried out for its own sake. We fast in order to pray. Further, these two should be joined by works of love and compassion, that is, almsgiving. With these three joined to a proper spirit of devotion, one is better able to prepare himself to celebrate the joy of Christmas.

Seasons of preparation such as Advent and Lent include not only the disciplines of prayer and fasting, but also almsgiving. Christ points to these three disciplines as foundational to true spirituality (Matt. 6).

During Advent, there is a strong focus on almsgiving. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the life of St. Nicholas is such an ideal expression and example of charity. His giving spirit seems to permeate the whole season. Almsgiving really is more than just writing a check to the church's special Christmas fund. The word "alms" in the Greek language actually means "a kindness" or "a kind act." In the book of Acts we find St. Tabitha, whom Peter raised from the dead, described as a woman "abounding with deeds of kindness and charity." The word used here for "deeds of kindness" is the same word for "alms" used in Christ's Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6). If we read this passage from Christ's sermon thinking "charitable deeds" rather than "giving money" then we come away with a renewed understanding of what almsgiving is all about. The New King James version translates "alms" as "charitable deeds":

"Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly."  
(Matthew 6:1-4)

This is not to say that a person cannot show pity, mercy or compassion on others by means of giving money. If a person has been blessed financially, then the giving of money may be his or her best way to show mercy on others. All too often, however, those who struggle financially think that they must necessarily be excused from almsgiving since they have no money to give. But certainly anyone can show pity, mercy or compassion on others through acts of kindness.

## IV. ADVENT CALENDAR

### Introduction

The Advent Calendar is designed for a daily family time beginning on November 15, the first day of Advent. Good times to assemble the family may be at breakfast, before dinner, at dinner, or after dinner.

The calendar consists of a theme for that day, a scripture reading, and an explanation of the reading. The themes follow the Bible, beginning with Genesis and ending with the story of the Nativity of our Lord. This is designed to help us follow the genealogy of Jesus Christ and also to hear from many of the Old Testament prophets concerning the human birth of God the Son.

The activities are added to enhance the family time. The main activity which runs through the entire season is the Advent chain, supplemented with others related to specific times or days. (See Activities Appendix) It is important to plan ahead with the activity list. Make sure you have the materials ready so you are not making a mad dash to get set up. This has the potential to be a wonderful opportunity for the family to enjoy a full Advent season - preparing for the Birth of our Lord.

With the Advent calendar is included a special Feast day section. This is an in depth explanation of certain feasts and/or saints. These can be read that evening at dinner or whenever appropriate.

Geared more for the adult and/or older members of the family are the Additional Readings. Incorporated in this section are the special scripture readings and hymns from the Hours of the Nativity and other services leading up to the Feast of the Nativity.

There is an appendix entitled Other Materials which can be coordinated with the Advent Calendar. Several of the books can be directly linked to specific days on the calendar and used effectively as supplemental material.

## FAMILY ADVENT CALENDAR

### **November 15 - Day 1 - Creation - Genesis 1:1-5 (40 days before Christmas)**

We begin with Advent where God begins with creation - making the light. God divided the light from the darkness making day and night. This, too, is an image of the light to come into the world, when God the Son becomes a man.

- Activities:
1. Read Advent information to the family
  2. Plan out the Season together
    - a. what activities
    - b. what services
    - c. special projects
  3. Get ready with Advent materials, books, etc.
  4. Advent chain (see pg. 34)
  5. Creation activity (see pg. 34)

Additional Readings:

Psalm 18 - The Lord who created all is also our strength and our deliverer.

The Lord delivered us through Mary the Mother of God for her womb became the "Spiritual paradise, in which is the divine plant..."

"O Bethlehem, be prepared; Eden is opened to all; O Ephratha, be made ready; for in the cave the tree of life has blossomed forth from the Virgin; for her womb has been shown to be a spiritual paradise, in which is the divine plant, from which having eaten, we will live and not die as Adam did. Christ is born to raise the image that had fallen.

You, O Savior, have bought us from the curse of the Law by Your precious blood. Being nailed to the cross and pierced by a spear, You poured forth immortality to men." (Great Vespers-Sunday of Genealogy)

### **November 16 - Day 2 - Creation - Genesis 1:6-8 (39 days before Christmas)**

God then makes Heaven: "You have stretched out the heavens like a curtain. You lay the beams of Your upper chambers in the waters, You make the clouds Your chariot, You make Your angels spirits, Your ministers a flame of fire." (Psalm 104)

- Activities:
1. Advent chain
  2. Creation activity



Additional Readings:

Psalm 104 - The story of Creation

God, the Creator of all, sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, for our salvation and to guide us by His light.

"O God and Lord of hosts and Author of all creation, Who through the tenderhearted compassion of Your incomparable mercy sent down Your Only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, for the redemption of our race, and by His precious Cross destroyed the handwriting of our sins, and thereby triumphed over the princes and powers of darkness; O Lord, Who love mankind, accept also these thanksgivings and prayers of us sinners and deliver us from every dark and deadly transgression, and from all enemies, both visible and invisible, who seek to do us harm. Nail our flesh with the fear of You, and incline not our hearts to evil words or thoughts, but wound our souls with Your love, that ever looking to You, and guided by Your light and beholding You, the unapproachable and everlasting light, we may ascribe to You unceasing praise and thanksgiving to the Father Who has no beginning, together with Your Only-begotten Son, and Your all holy, good and life giving Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen." (6th Hour of the Nativity)

**November 17 - Day 3 - Creation - Genesis 1:9-13 (38 days before Christmas)**

God made the dry land appear. Now the earth is made up of land and sea. "At your rebuke the waters fled: at the voice of Your thunder they hastened away....You set a boundary that they may not pass over, that they may not return to cover the earth." (Psalm 104)

- Activities:
1. Advent Chain
  2. Creation activity

Additional Readings:

Psalm 113 - Praise the Lord for His works and His mercy.

The Lord who held all creation in His hand humbled Himself to be born of Mary - for our sakes.

"Today is born of the Virgin Him who holds all creation in the hollow of his hand. He whose essence is untouchable is wrapped in swaddling clothes as a babe. The God who from of old established the heavens lies in a manger. He who showered the people with manna in the wilderness feeds on milk from the breasts. And the bridegroom of the Church calls the Magi. And

the Son of the Virgin accepts gifts from them. We worship Your Nativity, O Christ." (9th Hour of the Nativity)

**November 18 - Day 4 - Creation - Genesis 1:14-19 (37 D.B.C.)**

God made the sun, stars, and moon: "He has set a tabernacle for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber. And rejoices like a strong man to run its race. It's rising is from one end of heaven and its circuit to the other end. And there is nothing hidden from its heat." (Psalm 19) (Likened to the Son of God)

- Activities:
1. Advent chain
  2. Creation activity

Additional Readings:

The King of Glory has founded the earth and has come to establish His kingdom in which we dwell in peace and repentance.

The one who adorned the heavens with stars was borne a babe in a manger.

"When the super sensual hosts beheld Your mystery before Your Birth, O Lord, they were struck with surprise; for You who did adorn the heavens with stars was pleased to become like a babe, and lie in a manger for beasts, O You Almighty One in whose grasp are all the regions of the earth; for by Your dispensation Your compassion was made known, O Christ, and Your Great Mercy. Wherefore, glory to You." (3rd Hour of the Nativity)

**November 19 - Day 5 - Creation - Genesis 1:20-23 (36 D.B.C.)**

God made the sea creatures and the birds: "This great and wide sea, in which are innumerable teeming things, living things both small and great." (Psalm 104)

These are the first living things of God's creation, populating both the sea and the sky.

- Activities:
1. Advent chain
  2. Creation activity

Additional Readings:

Psalm 102 - The Lord of Creation hears our prayers.

The Lord who made creation "is seen in the womb of the created one."

"Listen, O heaven, and give ear, O earth. Let the foundations shake, and let trembling fall on all below the earth; for God hath dwelt in a creation of flesh; and he who made creation with a precious hand is seen in the womb of a created one. O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out." (6th Hour of the Nativity)

**November 20 - Day 6 - Creation - Genesis 1:24-31 (35 D.B.C.)**

God made all the animals (lions, bears, snakes, and cattle). He also made man (both male and female) in His Image - to be like Him. He also told man to take care of the rest of creation - to be a King and Queen over the earth.

- Activities
1. Advent chain
  2. Creation activity

Additional Readings:

Psalm 8 - God's glory is revealed in creation

Even though Adam and Eve fell, the Lord appeared on earth to save our race.

"Prepare, O Bethlehem, and let the manger make ready and the cave receive; for truth has come, and shadow has passed. And God has appeared to mankind from the Virgin, taking our likeness and deifying our nature. Wherefore, Adam and Eve are made new, crying, Goodwill has appeared on earth to save our race." (1st Hour of the Nativity)

**November 21 - Day 7 - Creation - Genesis 2:1-7 (34 D.B.C.)**

All that God made is good and man is special to God for he was made from the dust of the earth, and God breathed life into man. And as God the Son became a man, He too breathes life into all of creation.

- Activities:
1. Advent chain
  2. Creation activity
  3. Banner (see pg. 34)

**Special Feast Day: Presentation of Mary in the Temple**

(see Appendix B - pg. 35)

Additional Readings:

Hebrews 9:1-7 - Mary's presentation in the temple shows her to be the tabernacle of the Lord.

Therefore let us praise the Holy, Mother of God and the Nativity of our Lord.

"Behold, the time of our salvation approaches; make you ready, O cave; for it is time for the Virgin to give birth: and you, Bethlehem of Judah, rejoice and be happy; for from you shall shine forth our Lord. Listen, O mountains and hills and the regions about Judah; for Christ comes to save man whom he did create; for he is the Lover of mankind." (Great Vespers, Sunday of Genealogy)

**November 22 - Day 8 - Adam and Eve - Genesis 3 (33 D.B.C.)**

This is the story of the beginning of sin and the faithfulness of God to man. Adam and Eve's sin separated them from the presence of God and thus all men and all creation were out of harmony with the Lord. Thus the need for the Son of God to come in the flesh to save the world and fill all things with joy.

- Activities: 1. Advent chain

Additional Readings:

Romans 3:21-26 - The Lord, who created Adam and Eve, came to save us all.

He saved us by becoming a man in the womb of Mary (the New Eve).

"Rejoice, O Jerusalem, and celebrate all you lovers of Zion; for the temporal bonds with which Adam was condemned have been loosened; paradise has been opened for us, and the serpent has been annihilated, having beheld now that the one deceived by her of old has become a Mother to the Creator. Wherefore, O both the depth, the richness, the wisdom, and the knowledge of God, that the instrument of death which brought death to all flesh, has become the first-fruit of salvation to all the world, because of the Theotokos; for the all-perfect God has been born as a

babe; and by his Birth he has sealed her virginity; by his swaddling clothes he has loosened the chains of our sins; and by his babyhood he has healed the pains and sorrows of Eve. Let all creation, therefore, exchange glad tidings and rejoice; for Christ has come to recall it and to save our souls." (Great Vespers of the Nativity)

**November 23 - Day 9 - Noah - Genesis 6:11; 9:8-13 (32 D.B.C.)**

The world became so full of sin that its only hope was to destroy it by flood and start again. Only Noah and his family were saved along with 2 of every living creature. An Ark was built - 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 3 decks tall. Everyone and everything that boarded the Ark were saved from the flood. And God promised that he would not destroy life ever again by a flood. He sent a rainbow to remind us of this promise and to show His love for man in giving him a new start.

- Activities:
1. Advent chain
  2. Arch book or other story book
  3. The Ark project (see pg. 35)

Additional Readings:

Ephesians 4:17-5:2 - The church (the New Man) is the ark which keeps us from the storms of the world.

Mary is an ark that contained the Son of God.

"The Mosaic Law foretold you by sign in a strange manner, O spotless one. Verily, You are a tabernacle, a divine jar, a strange ark, a shelter, a rod, an everlasting temple, and a gate of God. Wherefore, it teaches us to cry to you, O spotless Virgin, you are more exalted than all creatures." (Matins, Presentation of our Lady)

**November 24 - Day 10 - Abraham and Sarah - Genesis 12:1-7; 17:1-8 (31 D.B.C.)**

Abraham became the father of many nations by believing in and obeying the words of the Lord. God chose Abraham to be the first of the Patriarchs of His people because of his great faith -- so much faith that Abraham left his homeland in obedience to the word of the Lord.

- Activities:
1. Advent chain
  2. Icon packet #26

Special Feast Day: St. Catherine The Great (see Appendix B, pg. 36)

Additional Readings:

Hebrews 11:1-40 - Abraham had great faith (reckoned to him as righteousness). Many would follow his example of faith.

**November 25 - Day 11 - Isaac - Genesis 22:1-17 (30 D.B.C.)**

God blessed Abraham and Sarah with a son, Isaac. They were both old and Isaac was their only son. God asked Abraham to offer his son as a sacrifice. Even knowing that Isaac was his only son, Abraham was prepared to do so. But God, seeing Abraham's faith and love, provided a ram to be sacrificed. And though Abraham didn't have to give up his son, God did sacrifice His son - "God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

John 3:16

- Activities:
1. Advent chain
  2. Icon packet #26

Additional Readings:

Galatians 4:1-7 and 21-31 - God came to redeem those under the law that we might be free in Him.

**November 26 - Day 12 - Jacob - Genesis 28:10-22 (29 D.B.C.)**

Jacob followed the line of the great patriarchs. The son of Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob had a special dream, about a ladder he saw stretching from earth to heaven. God told Jacob he would be the father of many nations - and so he was. Jacobs` 12 sons became the leaders of the Twelve Tribes of Israel - all part of the family tree of Jesus Christ.

- Activities: 1. Advent chain

Additional Readings:

The light of the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) illuminated the world. Now the light of Christ illumines all.

"Verily, the chiefs of the Patriarchs and the fathers before the law did go before, gleaming with faith like the stars, namely Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; for all the Prophets and righteous ones were illuminated by them, since they were shining

lamps, and by the rays of their venerated prophecy illuminated the whole of dark creation.

Rejoice, O Bethlehem, and you, Ephratha, make ready; for the Theotokos shall come to the cave and the manger to give birth in an ineffable manner to God. O what awesome mystery of him who comes before Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Patriarchs, and all the Prophets; and mankind with the angels shall celebrate his Nativity with divine rejoicing." (Matins of Sunday of Genealogy)

**November 27 - Day 6 13 - Joseph - Genesis 37:1-4; 45:1-15 (28 D.B.C.)**

Joseph was loved by his father Jacob, so much so that his other sons became jealous and tried to kill Joseph. But like our Lord, Joseph put aside this attempt and eventually saved his father, all his brothers and their families from starvation and gave them a place of honor in Egypt.

- Activities:
1. Advent chain
  2. Coat of many colors (see pg. 35)
  3. Advent wreath (if Sunday) (see pg. 38)

Additional Readings:

Psalm 46 - No one knew God as a refuge and strength more than Joseph. May we grow in knowing Him as our refuge and strength also!

**November 28 - Day 14 - Moses - Exodus 12:29-36; 14:8-28 (27 D.B.C.)**

After Joseph's death, the Israelites were made slaves by the Egyptians and were treated cruelly for many years. So God called Moses to lead all the Israelites out of the land of Egypt. This great movement out of Egypt back to the land God promised to Israel is called the Exodus - one of the greatest happenings in the Old Testament. The people of God never forgot it. It was a picture of Jesus Christ coming to save us from the slavery of the world.

- Activities:
1. Advent chain
  2. Advent wreath (if Sunday)

Additional Readings:

Psalm 106 - After the Exodus, many lost heart and sinned against God, but God heard their cry and saved them.

A greater salvation comes to us because of the Nativity of Christ.

"Verily, the collection of Mosaic teachings makes plain the divine Nativity of Christ in the flesh to those to whom was preached the grace before the law, having transcended the law by faith. Wherefore, since the nativity was the cause of salvation from corruption, they foretold Your Resurrection to the souls imprisoned in hades, O Lord, glory to You." (Matins of the Sunday of Genealogy)

### **November 29 - Day 15 - Joshua - Joshua 3 (26 D.B.C.)**

Joshua took over after Moses died and was the one to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. God was with Joshua and with the help of the Lord, Joshua conquered many of the people who were living in the land.

- Activities:
1. Advent Chain
  2. Advent wreath (if Sunday)

Additional Readings:

As Joshua won the battle of Jericho, as the walls fell to the ground, so to the Lord has broken the middle wall and opened to us the gates of paradise.

"Come, let us rejoice in the Lord, proclaiming the present mystery; for He has broken the middle wall of partition, and the flaming spear shall turn about, and the cherubim shall admit all to the tree of life. As for me, I shall return to enjoy the bliss of paradise from which I was driven away before, by reason of iniquity; for the likeness of the father, and the Person of His eternity, which it is impossible to change has taken the likeness of a servant, coming from a Mother who has not known wedlock; free from transubstantiation, since he remained as he was, true God, and took what had not been, having become Man for his love of mankind. Wherefore, let us lift our voices to him crying, O You who was born of the Virgin, O God, have mercy on us." (Great Vespers of the Nativity)

### **November 30 - Day 16 - Judges (Samson) - Judges 16:19-31 (25 D.B.C.)**

Living in the Promised Land (Canaan) the Israelites, at times, stopped living by the Commandments of God and at times, were taken over by neighboring people. God would then send a judge (a "savior") to help them follow His Commandments and/or help them regain their land. One of these famous judges (saviors) was Samson.



- Activities:
1. Advent chain
  2. Advent wreath (if Sunday)
  3. Instruments (see pg. 35)

Special Feast Day: St. Andrew (see Appendix B, pg.36)

Additional Readings:

Psalm 67 - God will judge His people uprightly now as He did in the days of Samson.

### **December 1 - Day 17 - Ruth - Ruth 1:15-22 (24 D.B.C.)**

Ruth was not of the Nation of Israel but she was a Moabite woman who married an Israelite. But her husband died and rather than go back to Moab she decided to remain with her new family. This meant going with Naomi, her mother-in-law, back to Bethlehem (Naomi's old home). Here, Ruth worked in the fields gathering grain for herself and Naomi. The owner of the field, Boaz, later married her and they became the parents of Obed who was the father of Jesse who was the father of King David. Because of her faithfulness Ruth became the great grandmother of King David and an adopted ancestor of Christ. This too is our fate as we remain faithful to our Lord.

- Activities:
1. Advent chain
  2. Advent wreath

Additional Readings:

Of the lineage was Mary, chosen by God to bear His Son. Let us all rejoice for we too are sons and daughters of the King.

"Rejoice, O righteous ones, and you heavens be glad. Sing with joy, you mountains, for the Nativity of Christ. The Virgin sits like the cherubim, holding in her bosom God the incarnate Word; the shepherds do glorify Him who was born. The Magi offer presents to the Lord, and the angels give praise, saying, O Lord, hidden from comprehension, glory to You.

The Father has been pleased and satisfied; the Word has become flesh; and the Virgin has given birth to incarnate God. The star declaims, the Magi worship, the shepherds wonder, and creation rejoices.

O virgin Theotokos, O you who has given birth to the Saviour, you have revoked the ancient curse of Eve; for you have become a Mother according to the pleasure of God, carrying in the bosom God the incarnate Word. Verily, the mystery is

inscrutable; but we all glorify it with faith only, crying with you and saying, O incomprehensible Lord, glory to You.

Come, let us praise the Mother of the Saviour, who appeared a Virgin even after birth-giving, crying, Rejoice, O living city of God the King, in whom Christ having dwelt worked salvation. Wherefore, we with Gabriel do praise, and with the shepherds do glorify you, crying, O Theotokos, intercede with him incarnate of you to save us." (Matins of the Nativity)

### **December 2 - Day 18 - Samuel - 1 Samuel 16:1-13 (23 D.B.C.)**

Samuel was a great prophet chosen by God to anoint the first two Kings of Israel (anointing is pouring oil on the head of a person and thus receiving the blessing of God). The first King was Saul who at first was a good King but then became disobedient and refused to listen to Samuel. God then rejected Saul and had Samuel anoint David, the youngest son of Jesse.

- Activities:
1. Advent chain
  2. Advent wreath

Additional Readings:

Psalm 2 - Even today the "kings" of the earth need to serve the Lord with fear and "kiss the Son".

Let us also pray to Samuel the prophet that he may intercede for us.

"Rejoice, O honored Prophets, who did organize well the law of the Lord, and appeared as stable, unshakable pillars of faith; for verily, they become mediators of the New Covenant of Christ. Wherefore, having been translated to heaven, plead you with him to grant safety to the world and to save our souls." (Great Vespers of Genealogy)

### **December 3 - Day 19 - David - 2 Samuel 5:1-5 (22 D.B.C.)**

After King Saul died, David was made King over all Israel. He was a great and powerful King who trusted God and tried to obey Him in everything he did as King. David did make some mistakes but he would always turn to God for forgiveness and guidance. Israel became a strong nation under King David's leadership.

- Activities:
1. Advent chain
  2. Advent wreath

Additional Readings:

Psalm 132 - David vowed to "find a place for the Lord." Today that place is the church where God is worshipped and glorified.

From the seed of David came Mary, the Mother of our Lord.

"And it came to pass that Mary was enrolled with Joseph the old man, in Bethlehem, since she was of the seed of David, and was great with the Lamb, without seed. And when the time for delivery drew near, and they had no place in the village, the cave did appear to the queen as a delightful palace. Verily, Christ shall be born, raising the likeness that fell of old." (Great Vespers of the Genealogy)

**December 4 - Day 20 - Solomon - 1 Kings 3:1-15 (21 D.B.C.)**

After King David died his son Solomon took the throne of Israel and was given great wisdom from God. He also built a beautiful temple in Jerusalem where the people of God worshipped for over 350 years. Today we still see God's beauty in His house and come to His house to worship and adore Him.

Activities:     1. Advent chain  
                  2. Advent wreath

Special Feast Day: St. Barbara (see Appendix B, pg. 36)

Additional Readings:

Proverbs 9:1-12 - God gave Solomon great wisdom and insight into things to come (Body and Blood of Christ)

Psalm 72 - A Psalm of Solomon which proclaims the glory of the Messiah's reign.

**December 5 - Day 21 - The Prophets - Isaiah 42:5-9 (20 D.B.C.)**

The Prophets are a part of the history of God's people for they foretold future events. God spoke to these prophets and gave them words to tell to His people. These prophets would give the kings of Israel direction; they would let the people know when God was angry with them; they would let the Nation of Israel know that they were God's chosen people and encourage them to have faith in the God of their fathers. Many of these prophets told of the coming of Christ as did Isaiah.

- Activities:     1. Advent chain  
                  2. Advent wreath

Additional Readings:

Psalm 111 - In this Psalm God is praised for His faithfulness, His justice, and bringing redemption to His people.

Again, let us pray to the Prophet Isaiah that he may intercede for us.

"Rejoice, O honored Prophets, who did organize well the law of the Lord, and appeared as stable, unshakable pillars of faith; for verily, they became mediators of the New Covenant of Christ. Wherefore, having been translated to heaven, plead you with Him to grant safety to the world and to save our souls." (Great Vespers of the Genealogy)

**December 6 - Day 22 - Elijah - 1 Kings 18:1-24; 36-39 (19 D.B.C.)**

Elijah was one of the great prophets who lived 900 years before Christ. One of the great events in the history of Israel happened because of Elijah. There was a great famine and drought in the land. It had not rained for many years and thus there was very little food. The Nation of Israel began worshipping idols and not the True God. So Elijah proved to them that there was only one true God by challenging the priests of Baal (an idol).

- Activities:     1. Advent chain  
                  2. Advent wreath  
                  3. Bring out Icon of St. Nicholas  
                  4. Prepare a Christmas offering.

Special Feast Day: St. Nicholas (see Appendix B, pg.37)

Additional Readings:

Psalm 91 - Elijah found safety by abiding in the Presence of God - as should we.

Christ came that we might forever be in His presence.

"Today Christ is born in Bethlehem of the Virgin. Today the Beginningless does begin, and the Word becomes incarnate. The powers of heaven rejoice, and earth is glad with mankind. The Magi do offer presents, and the shepherds with wonder declaim. As for us, we shout ceaselessly, crying. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men." (Matins of the Nativity)

**December 7 - Day 23 - Isaiah - Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1-10 (18 D.B.C.)**

Isaiah lived 700 years before Christ and prophesied many things about the Nation of Israel. He knew how corrupt Israel was becoming and proclaimed God's word to them hoping that they would repent. He also saw God's plan to save Israel from their corruption. He said the people one day would turn their swords into plows because there would be peace. This peace would be brought by the coming of the Christ, the Messiah who is also called Immanuel (God with us).

- Activities:
1. Advent chain
  2. Advent wreath

Additional Readings:

Psalm 110 - Isaiah foresaw the coming of the savior, and so too the Psalmist, as he announces the reign of Christ - "a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

We also rejoice with all who have gone before us and most particularly the Prophet Isaiah.

"Come, let us all celebrate the anniversary of their memory, the anniversary of the fathers before the law -Abraham and those with him. Let us honor meetly the tribe of Judah, and praise the youths who were in Babylon, who put down the flames of the furnace; for they foreshadowed the Trinity, and with them Daniel. And holding steadfastly the fore sayings of the Prophet, let us shout with a loud voice with Isaiah, saying, Behold the Virgin shall conceive in the womb and give birth to a son, Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." (Matins of the Forefathers)

**December 8 - Day 24 - Jeremiah - Jeremiah 23:1-6; 31:31-34 (17 D.B.C.)**

After a time, the people of Israel forgot God and again began to live wicked lives. The Lord then sent the prophet Jeremiah to tell them that if they continued in wickedness other nations would conquer them. He also told them that a day would come when God would raise up a new leader "The Lord of Righteousness." That day came 600 years later with the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- Activities:
1. Advent chain
  2. Advent wreath

Additional Readings:

Micah 4:1-7 - Micah describes the reign of "The Lord of Righteousness"

And we seek the aid of the Mother of God to help us fully participate in God's Kingdom.

"The Christ-pleasing people, O Virgin, having deserved to be granted its desire by the coming of God, does seek now with tears your help to worship the glory of his enlivening appearance wherein is the renewal of birth; for it is You who does distribute grace, O pure one". (Matins of the Nativity)

### **December 9 - Day 25 - Daniel - Daniel 6 (16 D.B.C.)**

About 600 years before the birth of Christ, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took over the city of Jerusalem. Daniel was a great prophet in Israel, but was captured and taken to Babylon. There he grew to great fame before the King, and many became jealous of him. The Bible tells us what happened.

- Activities:
1. Advent chain
  2. Advent wreath

Special Feast Day: Conception of Anna, Mother of Mary (see Appendix B, pg. 37)

Additional Readings:

Daniel 2:31-47 - Daniel interprets the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar and in so doing reveals the Divine Kingdom to come as a result of the Nativity of Christ.

Let us extol Daniel as well as all who have gone before us.

"Let us, O believers, extol today all the fathers before the law, Abraham the friend of God, Isaac born after the promise, Jacob with the twelve heads of the tribes, David the most meek, and Daniel the Prophet of desires, honoring with them the three youths who changed the furnace to a dewy place, asking forgiveness of Christ God, glorified in his saints." (Sunday of the Forefathers)

### **December 10 - Day 26 - Nehemiah - Nehemiah 4 (15 D.B.C.)**

The people of Israel remained captives in Babylon for many years and there appeared little hope for them. They all longed to return to their homeland! God, as always, never forgot His people and finally Babylon was conquered by King Cyrus of Persia and the Israelites were allowed to return to Jerusalem, but their city was in ruin.

The situation again looked hopeless because there was so much work to do and the enemies of Israel watched intently. But Nehemiah directed the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem and the people had to work with a tool in one hand and a weapon in the other. God was with them and the walls were rebuilt.

- Activities:
1. Advent chain
  2. Advent wreath

Additional Readings:

Psalm 87 - The walls of the city are rebuilt and we enter it as citizens of Zion - Thanks be to God who became man for our sakes.

We come upon the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers and celebrate their memory and exalt their example.

"As we celebrate today the memory of the forefathers, let us, O believers, praise in faith Christ the Deliverer who magnified them among all nations; the Lord who does strange wonders; for he is precious and mighty, who shows us through them a staff of strength. She is Mary the undefiled Maiden of God who alone knew no man, from whom proceeded Christ the Blossom, budding life for all, the everlasting Bliss and eternal Salvation.

O Master, who did rescue the holy youths from fire and Daniel from the mouths of the lions, and did bless Abraham, Isaac your servant, and Jacob his son, O You who was willing to become, like us, of their seed, that You might save our forefathers who fell of old, and to be crucified and buried in order to crush the bonds of death and raise the dead from eternity, we worship, O Christ, Your eternal kingdom.

The youths of God walking forth amid the flames, rejoicing in the dew of the Spirit as though they were in a garden, did go before and foreshadow therein the mystery of the Trinity and the Incarnation of Christ. And in that they were wise men they quenched by faith the power of fire. And as for Daniel the righteous, he did appear closing the mouths of the lions. Wherefore, by their beseechings we plead with You, O Saviour and Lover of mankind, to deliver us from the everlasting and unquenchable fire, and to make us worthy to receive Your heavenly kingdom.

Your holy youths, O Christ, when they were in the furnace of fire, as though in dew, did go before and foreshadow mystically Your coming from the Virgin, which has illuminated us without burning. And righteous Daniel, wonderful among Prophets, when he went before and explained plainly Your divine Second Coming, did shout, saying, and I saw the thrones placed, and the Judge sat, and the river of fire came

before him. Wherefore, by their beseechings, O Master, deliver us." (Great Vespers of the Forefathers)

**December 11 - Day 27 - Zacharias and Elizabeth - Luke 1:5-17 (14 D.B.C.)**

Zacharias and Elizabeth were an older couple who had no children, but loved God very much and prayed that God would bless them with a child. One day when Zacharias was in the temple an angel of the Lord spoke to him saying "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John." This John would become John the Baptist.

- Activities:
1. Advent Chain
  2. Advent wreath

Additional Readings:

Colossians 3:1-17 - The conception of St. John the Baptist is the beginning of the New Covenant "where there is neither Greek nor Jew..." St. Paul encourages us to walk in that New Covenant.

Zacharias and Elizabeth are in the lineage of our forefathers therefore:

"Let us come together, O lovers of the Fathers, rejoicing in the memory of the Fathers, praising as is meet Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob from whom Christ was seen to come in the flesh for the abundance of his compassion.

Let us laud Adam and Abel, Seth and Enos, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Moses, Job, and Aaron; Eliezar, Joshua, Barak, Samson, Jephtae, David, and Solomon." (Matins of the Forefathers)

**December 12 - Day 28 - St. John the Baptist - Luke 1:57-80 (13 D.B.C.)**

St. John was the cousin of Jesus, born to Zacharias and Elizabeth six months before the birth of Christ. He is called the Forerunner for he came to prepare the way for Christ, and he was called the Baptizer for he had the honor of baptizing Christ in the Jordan. He was the last of the great prophets of Israel who preached, "Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand."

- Activities:
1. Advent Chain
  2. Advent wreath



Additional Readings:

Ephesians 5:8-19 - St. John called people out of the darkness and into the light, so we might "walk as children of the light". Let us be mindful of this as we approach the Feast of the Nativity.

St. John the Baptist, too, was of the lineage of the fathers.

"Come you feast-lovers, let us extol with hymns the assembly of the forefathers, Adam the first father, Enoch, Noah, and Melchizedek, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and those after the law - Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Samuel; and with them Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and the twelve Prophets, with Elijah and Elisha, and all the rest; and Zachariah, the Baptist, and those who preached Christ, the Life and Resurrection of our race." (Sunday of the Forefathers)

**December 13 - Day 29 - The Journey - Luke 2:1-5 (12 D.B.C.)**

Joseph, being of the house and lineage of David, had to travel to Bethlehem to be registered in the census. He packed some clothes, put Mary on a donkey and journeyed to this city - where Christ was to be born.

- Activities:
1. Advent chain
  2. Advent wreath
  3. Biggest Birthday Party (Advent calendar)

Special Feast Day: St. Herman (see Appendix B, pg. 37)

Additional Readings:

Luke 10:38-42; 11:27-28 - St. Luke describes two events. The first relates to our worship of Christ - the true God, and the other of the veneration of Mary, the Mother of God whom Joseph is journeying with to Bethlehem.

As Joseph and Mary travel to be enrolled by Caesar, we are reminded that we are enrolled in the Kingdom of God.

"When Augustus became supreme ruler of earth, the multiplicity of rule among men ceased. And when You became human from the spotless one, the worship of many heathen gods also ceased. Then the cities came under one worldly rule; and the nations believed in one divine supremacy. The nations were enrolled by an order of Caesar; but we believers were enrolled in the name of Your Divinity, O our

incarnate God. Wherefore, great are Your mercies, glory to You." (Great Vespers of the Nativity)

**December 14 - Day 30 - Bethlehem - Micah 5:2-4; Matthew 2:1 (11 D.B.C.)**

As was stated earlier, Bethlehem was the home of Boaz and Ruth, their son Obed, his son Jesse, and Jesse's son David. Joseph was of the house and lineage of David so when a census was taken Joseph had to return to the hometown of his lineage. Micah prophesied this (Micah 5:2-4)

- Activities:
1. Advent chain
  2. Advent wreath
  3. Advent calendar

Additional Readings:

Let us now lift "our minds to Bethlehem" where the Son of God is to be born a man.

"Let us go before, O nations, and celebrate the Nativity of Christ. And lifting our minds to Bethlehem, let us ascend with our consciences, beholding with the thoughts of our hearts, the Virgin approaching, giving birth in the cave to the Lord of all, our God, whose stupendous wonders Joseph did behold, while at the time he thought he was beholding a man wrapped in swaddling clothes, but was assured from his works that he was the true God, granting our souls the Great Mercy.

Let us go before, O nations, and celebrate the Nativity of Christ; and lifting our minds to Bethlehem, let us ascend with our consciences and behold the great Mystery that is in the cave; for Eden has been opened by the coming forth of God from the spotless Virgin, perfect in Divinity and perfect in Humanity. Wherefore, let us shout forth, Holy God, Eternal Father, Holy Mighty, the Incarnate Son, Holy Immortal One, the Comforting Spirit, O Holy Trinity, glory to You.

Listen, O heaven, and give ear, O earth; for behold, the Son, the Word of the Father, comes to be born of a Maiden that has not known man. Wherefore, by the pleasure of him who gave him birth without passion, and by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, O Bethlehem, make ready, and, O Eden, open your gates; for he who is, shall be that which has not been and the Maker of the entire creation shall become the Grantor of Great mercy to the world." (Great Vespers of Genealogy)

**December 15 - Day 31 - The Cave - Luke 2:6-7 (10 D.B.C.)**

The Lord of all is born in a cave! God the Son did not choose the house of a nobleman, nor an elaborate inn. But he took the offering of the earth-a cave-to be born of the Virgin.

"The angels shall offer you praise; the heavens,  
the star; the Magi, gifts; the shepherds, wonder;  
the earth, the cave; the wilderness, the manger;  
and we men, a Virgin Mother." (Great Vespers-  
Christmas Eve)

- Activities:
1. Advent chain
  2. Advent wreath
  3. Advent calendar
  4. Place out Icon of the Nativity (use it to point out objects/people to follow)

Additional Readings:

Hebrews 2:10-18 - The Son of God had to become like us in all things so that he might be a merciful High priest. He did this to the extent that he was born in a cave.

Yes, O Christ, the uncontainable was contained in a cave for our sakes.

"Thou has shone forth from the Virgin, O Christ, supersensual Sun of justice. And a star pointed to You, You uncontainable One, who was contained in a cave. And the Magi were led to Your worship. Wherefore, with them, we magnify You, O Giver of life. Glory to You." (Great Vespers of the Nativity)

"Today the Virgin comes to the cave to give birth in an ineffable manner to the Word before the ages. Rejoice, therefore, O universe, when you hear, and glorify with the angels and shepherds him who shall appear by his own will as a new babe, being God before the ages." (Sunday of the Forefathers)

**December 16 - Day 32 - The Star - Numbers 24:15-19; Matthew 2:2 (9 D.B.C.)**

A light in heaven points to the one who brings light to the whole world - Jesus Christ the Son of God.

"O gladsome light of the Father Immortal, You are the sacred, celestial, and blessed."

- Activities:
1. Advent chain
  2. Advent wreath
  3. Advent calendar
  4. Ornaments (see pg. 35)

Additional Readings:

Luke 2:22-35 - St. Simeon also saw Jesus as the Light of the World when he was presented in the temple ("A light to lighten the Gentiles")

The star was a sign that all of creation would be lighted with the Birth of Jesus.

"When the Lord Jesus was born of the Holy Virgin, the whole creation was lighted, the shepherds keeping watch, the Magi worshipping, the angels praising, and Herod trembling; for the God and Saviour of our souls had appeared in the flesh.

Your kingdom, O Christ God, is a kingdom of all ages; and Your rule is from generation to generation; for You who was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and became Man from Mary the ever-virgin, has caused a light to shine on us by Your presence, O Christ God; O Light of Light, O Radiance of the Father, You have illuminated all creation; and every breath does praise You, O Likeness of the glory of the Father. Wherefore, O everlasting God, who are before eternity, who did shine forth from the Virgin, O God, have mercy on us.

What shall we render to You, O Christ, for that You did appear on earth as a man for our sake? Verily, every individual of the creatures You did create shall offer You thanksgiving. The angels shall tender Your praise; the heavens, the star; the Magi, gifts; the shepherds, wonder; the earth, the cave; the wilderness, the manger; and we men, a virgin Mother. Wherefore, O God before the ages, have mercy on us. (Great Vespers of the Nativity)

**December 17 - Day 33 - The Wisemen (or Magi) - Matthew 2:1-10 (8 D.B.C.)**

The Magi were Kings from the east (the Orient) who travelled many miles to worship the King of Kings. They knew the star to be the sign of the coming savior, thus followed it to the town of Bethlehem where they found the infant Jesus - "who is older than Adam" (Vespers-December 23)

- Activities
1. Advent chain
  2. Advent wreath
  3. Advent calendar

Special Feast Day: Daniel the Prophet (see appendix B)

Additional Readings:

The Magi travelled to the "child King, the new born, whose star has appeared."

"Magnify, O my soul, her who is more honourable and more exalted in glory than the heavenly hosts. I behold a strange and wonderful mystery: the cave a heaven, the Virgin a cherubic throne, and the manger a noble place in which has lain Christ the uncontained God. Let us, therefore, praise and magnify him.

Magnify, O my soul, the God born in flesh from the Virgin.

When, the Magi saw a new and strange star appearing suddenly, moving in a wonderful way, and transcending the stars of heaven in brightness, they were guided by it to Christ, the King born on earth in Bethlehem, for our salvation.

Magnify, O my soul, the King born in a cave.

The Magi said, 'Where is the child King, the new born, whose star has appeared? For we have verily come to worship him'. And Herod, the contender against God, trembled, and began to roar in folly to kill Christ.

Magnify, O my soul, the God worshipped by the Magi.

Herod ascertained from the Magi about the time of the star by whose guidance they were led to Bethlehem to worship with presents Christ who guided them, and so they returned to their country, disregarding Herod, the evil murderer of babes, mocking him." (Matins of the Nativity)

But Herod got his revenge by slaughtering the Holy Innocents (the first martyrs for Christ)

Verily, Herod was overtaken by astonishment when he saw the piety of the Magi. And having been overridden with wrath, he began to inquire of them about the time. He robbed the mothers of their children and ruthlessly reaped the tender bodies of the babes. And the breasts dried up, and the springs of milk failed. Great then was the calamity. Wherefore, being gathered, O believers, in true worship, let us adore the Nativity of Christ. (9th Hour of the Nativity)

### **December 18 - Day 34 - Gifts - Matthew 2:11-12 (7 D.B.C.)**

What is the perfect gift? God the Father giving His only-begotten Son to man. God becomes man in the person of Jesus Christ and the Magi brought gifts to honor the Lord.

"When the Lord Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, the Magi came from the East and worshipped Him as the incarnate God. Eagerly they opened their treasures and offered Him precious gifts - pure gold for He is King of the ages; frankincense in that He is God of all; and as dead for three days, they offered myrrh to the deathless One. Wherefore come all ye nations, let us worship Him who was born to save our souls" (Great Vespers-Christmas Eve)

- Activities:
1. Advent chain
  2. Advent wreath
  3. Advent calendar

#### Additional Readings:

Matthew 10:27-39 - Christ tells us to make our gift our life ("he who loses his life for My sake will find it"), but it is not an easy road to walk.

Gifts were given to the King of Kings. Let us give ourselves as a gift to the Lord who was born to save our souls.

"Today has come about a great and wonderful thing, in that a Virgin gave birth, yet corruption has not entered the womb; the Word is incarnate, yet is not separated from the Father; the angels give glory with the shepherds, and we lift our voices with them crying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace.

Today the Virgin does give birth to the Creator of all; Eden offers the cave; the star tells to those in darkness of Christ the Sun; the Magi with presents worshipped him, enlightened by faith; and the shepherds beheld the wonder, the angels singing and saying, Glory to God in the Highest." (Great Vespers of the Nativity)

### **December 19 - Day 35 - The Animals - Isaiah 65:17-25 (6 D.B.C.)**

God the Son made all creation along with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The Son becoming man in the womb of the Virgin effects all creation. In the presence of the Lord, the animals too sensed a spirit of peace.

- Activities:
1. Advent chain
  2. Advent wreath
  3. Advent calendar

Additional Readings:

Hebrews 2:1-9 - The Son of God becoming man in a cave among the animals, proves to us His humility and His love for us. We, therefore, must not neglect so great a salvation.

As "the time of our salvation approaches" let us remember Christ in the cave with the animals and rejoice with all creation.

"Behold, the time of our salvation approaches; make ready, O cave; for it is time for the Virgin to give birth: and thou, Bethlehem of Judah, rejoice and be happy; for from you shall shine forth our Lord. Listen, O mountains and hills and the regions about Judah; for Christ comes to save man whom He did create; for He is the Lover of mankind. (Vespers of the Genealogy)

**December 20 - Day 36 - The Angels - Luke 1:11-13; 1:26-38 (5 D.B.C.)**

The angels are bodiless powers of heaven who are spoken of many times in the Bible. It was an angel who spoke to Zacharias about the birth of John and an angel who spoke to Mary and Joseph about the birth of Christ Jesus. And it was an angel who brought the news of Jesus' birth to the shepherds.

"The angels surrounded the manger as if it were the throne of the cherubim. They saw the cave as if it were heaven, and they said to the One who was lying there 'glory to God in the highest.'" (Vespers-December 22)

- Activities:
1. Advent chain
  2. Advent wreath
  3. Advent calendar

Additional Readings:

Hebrews 1:1-14 - The angels rejoice and bow down before the Son of God for they know He is in the image of the Father. We also bow in adoration of God the Son who takes away our sins.

The Nativity of God approaches, therefore let us with repentant hearts rejoice with the angels.

"Today all the angels exchange glad tidings and rejoice; and the entire creation exults for the Birth of the Lord Saviour in Bethlehem; for the error of the idols has

passed out completely, and Christ shall reign for ever." (Great Vespers of the Nativity)

**December 21 - Day 37 - Shepherds - Luke 2:8-20 (4 D.B.C.)**

The shepherds while keeping watch over their sheep were visited by an Angel. First they were afraid, but soon realized that they were being greatly honored. The Angel was directing them to worship the new born King - their savior and the savior of all.

- Activities:
1. Advent chain
  2. Advent wreath
  3. Advent calendar

Additional Readings:

The shepherds approached the new born King, as many contemplated what had happened.

"Come, you believers, let us see where Christ was born. Let us follow the star wherever it goes with the Magi, kings of the east; for there angels praise him ceaselessly, and shepherds raise their voices in a worthy song of praise, saying, Glory in the highest to the One born today in a cave from the virgin Theotokos in Bethlehem of Judea.

Why wonder, O Mary; and why are you astonished in your inner self? And she responded, saying, "because I have given birth in time to a Son unbound by time; nor do I comprehend the manner of conception of him that is born. I have known no man; how then give I birth to a son?" For who has yet seen a birth without seed? But since God wills, the order of nature is overcome, as it has been written, Christ has been born of the Virgin in Bethlehem of Judea.

He that all contains not, how was he contained in the womb? And he that is in the bosom of the Father, how shall he be carried in the arms of his Mother? Verily, all this has been fulfilled as he himself knew and willed and was pleased to do; for he that is not carnal has become incarnate by his own choice; and he that is, has turned for our sakes to that which he was not, sharing our creation, yet inseparable from his essence. Verily, Christ has been born with two Natures, desiring to perfect the heavenly world." (Matins of the Nativity)



## **December 22 - Day 38 - The Great Shepherd - Psalm 23 (3 D.B.C.)**

The Bible speaks to two kinds of shepherds - those who care for sheep and those who care for people. Both are pictured as being devoted to caring for their flocks. They lead them to green pastures and quiet waters. They find the lost and bring them home again.

It was to shepherds watching their flocks near Bethlehem that the angel appeared and announced the birth of Jesus. Later, Jesus spoke of himself as the Good Shepherd who was ready to die for his sheep. Yes, Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He was born, he lived, and he died, and rose again for the good of all.

- Activities:
1. Advent chain
  2. Advent wreath
  3. Advent calendar

Additional Reading:

John 10: 1-16 - Jesus describes the Good Shepherd

## **December 23 - Day 39- Joseph and Mary - Matthew 1:18-25 (2 D.B.C.)**

Joseph was of the lineage of King David and took upon himself the responsibility of caring for Mary, the Mother of God and for helping raise Jesus as a young boy. Joseph was a carpenter and surely taught Jesus the trade. It is believed he died when Jesus was quite young, but he undoubtedly carried out the tasks set before him as Christ's earthly father and the husband of Mary.

- Activities:
1. Advent chain
  2. Advent wreath
  3. Advent calendar

Additional Readings:

Matthew 1:1-25 - We read in this account the lineage of our Lord and all the Saints who have gone before.

Joseph was somewhat perplexed over the events surrounding the birth of Jesus.

"As Joseph was going his way to Bethlehem pierced with sadness, you did cry unto him, O Virgin, saying, 'Why frown you and are troubled when you see me great with child, completely ignorant of the terrible mystery that is in me? Drive away from you all dismay, comprehending the strange matter; for God, for his mercy's sake, has descended to earth and has now taken flesh in my womb, and you shall see him

born, as it pleased him, and you shall be filled with joy, and worship him; for he is your Creator, whom the angels praise ceaselessly and glorify, with the Father and the Holy Spirit." (9th Hour of the Nativity)

**December 24 - Day 40 - Mary, the Mother of God - Isaiah 7:10-16; Luke 1:39-56 (1 D.B.C.)**

Mary is counted blessed among all creation for in her dwelt the Son of God and from her He became a man. This was foretold by the prophet Isaiah and came to pass through the Holy Virgin Mary.

"A young virgin bearing in her womb the Savior of all comes into the holy cavern to give birth to God's Word in glory."

- Activities:
1. Advent chain
  2. Advent wreath
  3. Advent calendar

Additional Readings:

Psalm 45 - The Psalmist writes of the glories of the Messiah and His Bride and refers to Mary as "the Queen."

Many who came before the human birth of the Christ-child proclaimed this event and foretold of the Lady who would bear him.

"In truth raise your voice, O Zion, divine city of God, and preach the divine memory of the fathers, honoring with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob him of everlasting memory. For lo! with Judah and Levi we magnify Moses the great, and Aaron the wonderful; and with David we celebrate the memory of Joshua and Samuel, inviting all with divine songs and divine praise to the preparation of the Nativity of Christ, praying to receive his goodness; for he it is that grants the world the Great Mercy.

Come, O Elijah, who did ascend of old the divine fiery chariot, and O Elisha of divine mind, and rejoice together with Ezekiel and Josiah. Exchange glad tidings with them, O venerated rank of the twelve Prophets inspired of God, on the Nativity of the Saviour. And all you righteous ones, sing hymns. And you all-beatified youths who quench the flames of the furnace with the dew of the Spirit, pray for us, pleading with Christ to grant our souls the Great Mercy.

Verily, she has appeared on earth, the Theotokos, who was proclaimed from the ages by the words of the Prophets, and whom the wise Patriarchs and the rank of righteous ones did foretell, with whom the comeliness of women, Sarah, Rebecca

with glorious Anne, and Mary, the sister of Moses, shall exchange glad tidings; and with them shall rejoice the ends of the earth, and all creation; for God shall come to be born in the flesh and grant the world the Great Mercy." (Matins of the Genealogy)

## **December 25 - The Nativity of our Lord - Luke 2:1-20**

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

Today we celebrate the Nativity of Christ, born of Mary, for our salvation. The Son of God as become a man, taking on our lowliness that we might be conformed to the image of His glory. Let us worship Him!

- Activities:
1. Advent chain
  2. Advent wreath
  3. Advent calendar

Additional Readings:

Luke 14:16-24 - Christ tells us in this parable how imperative it is to keep the Kingdom of God first in our lives.

Do you truly comprehend the depth of the incarnation? Do you understand that god became man? Glory be to God.

"Today has been fulfilled a strange mystery; for nature has been renewed and God has become man. Yes, he has remained as he has been, taking unto himself what had not been, nor was he affected by any confusion or division.

O Lord, You have come to Bethlehem, You have dwelt in a cave, and have lain down in a manger, O You whose throne is in heaven. You did condescend to the shepherds, O You who are surrounded by the hosts of angels, in order to save our race, since you are compassionate. Glory to You.

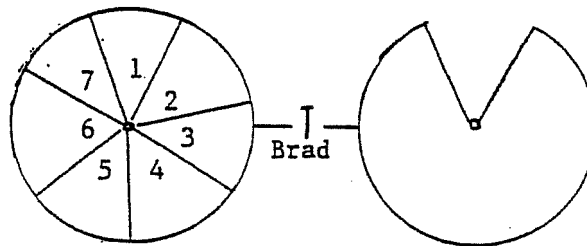
How shall I describe this great mystery? For the Incorporeal has become incarnate; the Word took unto himself the density of the flesh. The Unseen is seen, the Untouchable is touched, the Beginningless begins and the Son of God becomes the Son of Man; yes, Jesus Christ himself who is the same yesterday, today, and unto all ages." (Vespers on Day Following Christmas)

## V. APPENDIX

### A. Activities

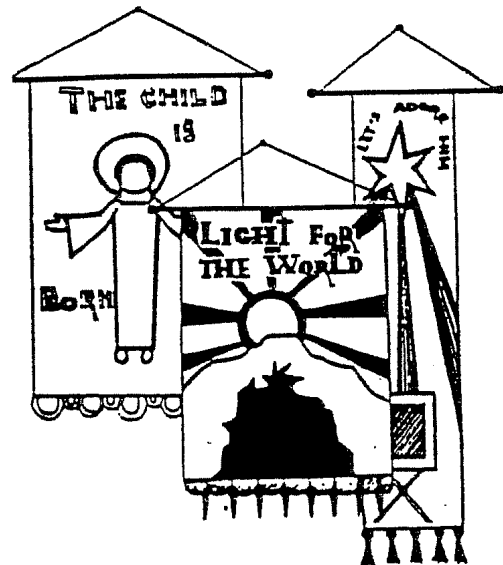
1. Advent chain: This is a simple paper chain made out of paper strips (8" x 1") that are looped together. On each of the colored strips (variety would be nice, perhaps with an emphasis on Christmas colors) write the theme for the day and draw small pictures on it related to the theme (re: Noah-Ark). Add a link for special feast days and you'll have a beautiful chain of at least forty links to place around the tree, doorway, or bookcase.

2. Creation wheel: Cut out two circles at least 10" in diameter. Divide the first into seven equal sections, then cut one section (1/7th) out of the second. In the first write the number 1 - 7 on the lower sections of the divisions, then as each day of creation is read - color in what God made. At the end place the second circle over the first, connected in the middle with a brad so you can rotate it around to each day.



3. Banner: The banners can be as elaborate as you want to make them. They can be made out of burlap, felt, cloth, or just paper. You can color, paint or sew on them using yarn, glitter, sequins, or cotton balls to decorate. Make the banner 1 yard x 1/2 yards and attach a dowel or stick across the top and string or yarn on both ends of the stick. Some suggested themes are:

The Child is Born  
The Light of the World  
Let us Adore Him  
Come O Immanuel  
Prince of Peace



4. The Ark: Cut out a picture of a boat (the Ark) and have the kids go through old magazines, color books, etc. finding pictures of animals they can cut out and glue onto the Ark (the bigger the Ark the better).
5. The Coat of Many Colors: Take a large piece of construction paper and trace over a jacket (of a young boy). Cut it out, then divide it into sections. Have each family member color or paint in a section - encourage some creativity (using different designs and/or materials).
6. Trumpets (Kazoos) and Drums: Use instruments to announce the coming of the Lord.

Trumpet (kazoo): Get a five inch square of wax paper. Attach it with a rubber band around the end of a paper towel tube. Then with decorative paper cover the tube. Add other decorations (ie., yarn, glitter, fringe, etc.). When you hum into the trumpet, the wax paper will vibrate creating your own musical instrument.

Drums: Cover the top of a coffee can with cloth (leather is preferable). Decorate the outside of the can. Use wooden spoons to play.

7. Ornaments: There are many ornaments you can make for the tree. Some suggested materials: wood, paper, cardboard, bread- dough, and color with paint, markers, glitter, sequins, etc. Some suggested shapes: star, angel, pictures of saints, family members, etc.

## B. Special Feast Days

### ***November 21st - Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary***

Joachim and Anna were an old couple that remained devoted to God all their lives, but they had no children. They were looked down on by others for this, but they continually prayed that God would give them a child. Because of their faith and devotion God granted them a baby girl they named Mary. On November 21st at the age of three, Mary was presented in the Temple to the priests. Mary remained in the temple until she was 15.

While in the Temple all the children received the finest education and were taught the ways of the faith. As is written in tradition, Mary was received by Zacharias who would later become the father of the Baptist and Forerunner, John.

Shortly after returning to her parents at the age of 15, Mary was visited by the Angel Gabriel who proclaimed to her the news that she would bear the Son of God in her womb.

### ***November 25th - St. Catherine (311 A.D.)***

Catherine was a young girl of 18 years who lived in the city of Alexandria in Egypt. In this city many debates were held about issues of concern. Catherine, who was of noble birth and well educated, decided to enter these debates in defense of the Christian faith. She challenged all the philosophies of the day and won the debates gaining a reputation as a strong supporter of Christ.

The evil emperor Maximus Daza of Alexandria ordered her banned from the city, and she was later tortured for her belief in the Christian faith. It is said that she was strapped to a spike studded wheel that revolved causing great pain. Catherine never stopped believing in and professing Christ. She finally was martyred for the faith in 311 AD.

### **November 30th - St. Andrew**

St. Andrew was the first apostle to be called by Christ. He was a fisherman and the brother of St. Peter who did his apostolic work in Asia Minor, Greece, and Constantinople.

St. Andrew was truly dynamic in his preaching and love for God. He converted thousands upon thousands of people to the Christian faith, encouraging them to love God and to pursue the virtues of Christ. His preaching was so powerful he would convert entire congregations of people at one time.

St. Andrew was active in establishing churches and clergy. Tradition tells us he ordained more priests and bishops than all the other apostles and established many parishes in Asia Minor and the surrounding regions.

St. Andrew died a martyrs death in Achaia where he converted Maximilla, the wife of the emperor Aegeates. This enraged the emperor and he had St. Andrew crucified upside down. He suffered for three days and finally was taken home to be with the Lord he so faithfully served. He was 80 years old at the time of his death.

### ***December 4th - St. Barbara (3rd Century)***

The life of St. Barbara is sad yet it encourages us to remain faithful to Christ our true God. She was an intelligent and beautiful young woman, and her pagan father, Dioscuros, wanted to make sure she did not hear about the new Christian Faith. He kept her in seclusion, but St. Barbara did learn about and was converted to the Christian faith by a monk from her town.

In those days many were tortured and killed for believing in Christ, so Dioscuros turned her over to the Roman authorities in hopes that she would deny Christ. But she refused, escaping into the mountains pursued by her father and the Roman soldiers. She was eventually captured and beheaded by her own father who later was struck by lightning and died.

St. Barbara is the patron Saint against sudden death and is the patron of artillerymen in the armed forces and all those who engage in hazardous occupations.

### ***December 6th - ST. NICHOLAS***

St. Nicholas was born to wealthy and devout Christian parents in the small town of Myra in Asia Minor (which is now the country of Turkey). He became a priest at an early age and when his parents died he used the wealth he inherited to help the poor. In many ways it is his spirit of giving and caring that is evident at Christmas time. His many works of love and charity earned him the title of "wonderworker". Thus we see in St. Nicholas the real "Santa Claus".

He also was a great defender of the Orthodox faith. He attended the first Ecumenical Council in 325 and defended the teachings of Christ against the Arian heresy. He was tortured and imprisoned for the faith, but continued to remain true to his beliefs.

St. Nicholas was a faithful Archbishop and today is remembered by many churches and institutions as their patron. He is also the patron saint of children, captives, merchants, sailors, scholars, and travelers.

### ***December 9 - The Conception of Mary, the Most Holy Mother of God***

St. Anna was a devout woman who loved God and served Him faithfully. She and her husband Joachim did not have any children for 50 years of their married life, but they continued to pray for one. The Archangel Gabriel appeared to them and told them that Anna would conceive and have a daughter that would be blessed by all generations. Nine months later Anna gave birth to Mary who would become the Mother of God.

### ***December 13 - St. Herman of Alaska***

St. Herman, the Enlightener and Patron Saint of Alaska entered the monastic life at the age of twelve in Sarov, Russia. Here he studied and matured in the company of many great ascetics. He developed a missionary zeal, love for seclusion and the Jesus Prayer, and a desire to practically apply the teachings of the fathers of the church.

He was sent on a mission to Alaska to help start several schools, but these attempts failed. St. Herman, however, remained driven by a Christian love for the salvation of his neighbor.

St. Herman refused to tolerate insults that other missionaries had to endure from the authorities. He also fought for the rights of the local natives who were being mistreated by the explorers and the authorities. This persistence helped establish orthodoxy in Alaska.

### *December 17th - The Holy Prophet Daniel*

Daniel, a young Israelite, was taken off into slavery when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon conquered Jerusalem. Daniel remained devoted to God and was given a gift of discernment. He gained great fame in Babylon when he interpreted the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar when no one else could. For this, he was made a prince in the court of the King.

Daniel continued to remain faithful to God and three times was thrown to the lions for his beliefs, but each time God delivered him. Daniel saw God on His throne with the angels, had insight into future events, and prophesied the time of the coming of the Savior on earth. According to St. Cyril of Alexandria, Daniel lived to a great old age in Babylon, but was beheaded for the true faith.

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## D. The Advent Wreath

Advent wreaths are used in many Christian homes during Advent in anticipation of Christmas, the birth of our Savior. The Advent wreath consists of four candles that are placed, equally spaced, in the wreath itself with a fifth candle that is placed in the center.

There are many symbolic meanings that are associated with the Advent wreath. The wreath being a circle, manifests the unending love of God and eternity. The greens used in making the wreath express eternal life, being that they are ever green. The use of candles during Advent speak of Christ's approach. The traditional act of increasing the number of candles to be used each week tells of the increasingly brighter light of His approach. We start out lighting one candle to pierce the darkness of the world and increase the lighting of candles each week up to the bright light of Christmas, the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ who is the light of the world. It is on Christmas that we light the fifth candle, in addition to the other four.

In the use of four candles for the season of Advent, there has been a specific meaning placed on each candle. The first is called the Prophecy Candle, which images those who spoke God's word hundreds of years before Christ was born; the theme for the first week is Expectation. The second is the Bethlehem Candle which reveals Christ becoming a man, the Incarnation. The theme for the week is Hope. The third candle is the Angels' Candle, which tells us of the final coming of Christ and His actions to save us. The theme is Acceptance. The fourth candle is the Shepherds' Candle. This recalls for us what the shepherds did--they saw, believed, and told all that had happened to them. The theme is Joy. The fifth candle in the middle of the wreath is the Christ Candle. The theme is Christ, the Light of the World. It is to be lit on Christmas Day.

The five candles that make up the wreath are three purple, one rose, and one white. The purple candles manifest the royalty of Christ and represent humility and penitence, which is the attitude with which we should await the Lord's coming. The rose-colored candle expresses the love and faithfulness of God. The free-standing white candle in the center of the wreath reveals the purity and perfection of Christ the Light giver.

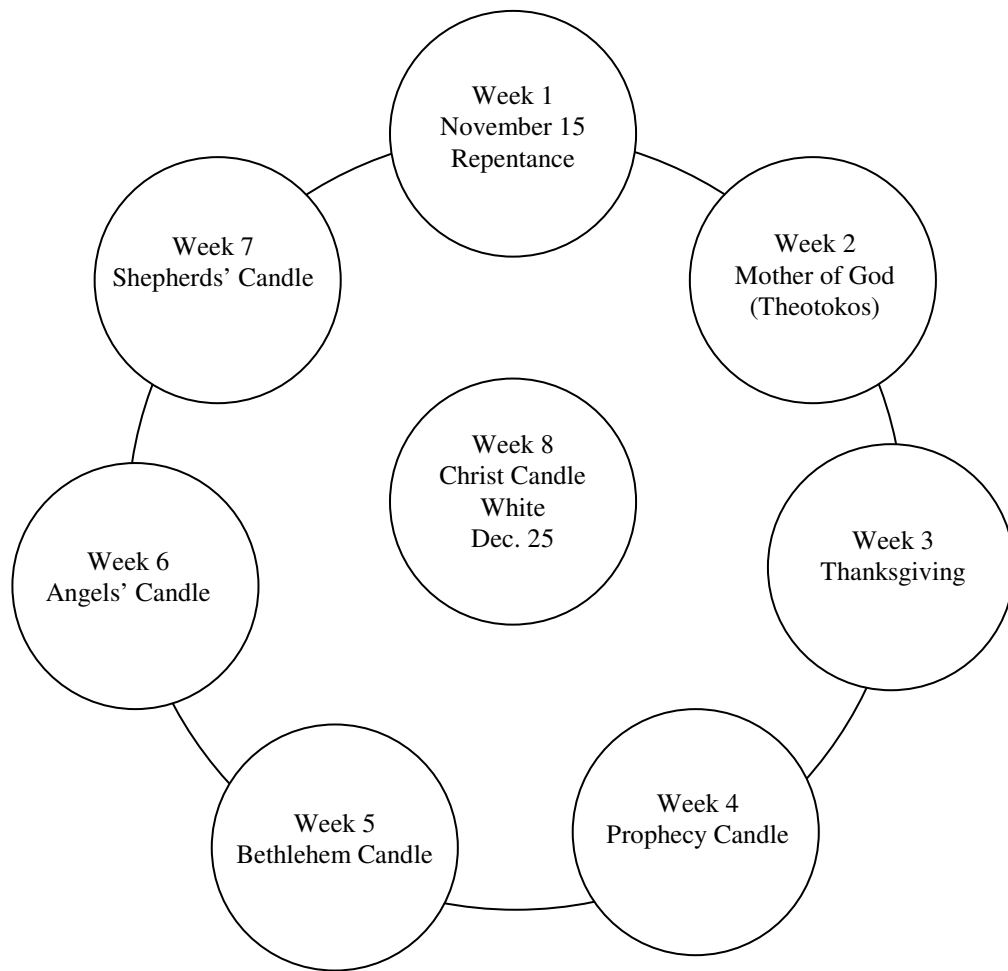
The Advent Wreath should be lit every evening during the family devotions. In making your Advent Wreath, take time to explain its meaning to your children. Don't just try to make do. Use care and creativity in making your wreath, as it should add a new and special meaning to the season of Advent.

This is one of many ways to go about assembling your Advent Wreath.

First, place the three purple and one rose candles, equally spaced from one another, into the center of the wire wreath frame. It is important to get these candles as stable as possible.

Second, start attaching on the lower outside part of the wreath the greens that you have cut. You will need about 15 to 20 eight-inch sprays. Fasten the spray securely to the frame with twine, thread, or twist ties. When you tie the remaining sprays on, make sure to overlap, in order to hide the areas where you have fastened the other sprays. Make certain that all the sprays are tied onto the frame in one direction. Continue working your way up and over the frame to the inside of the wreath, carefully placing the sprays around the candles, so the base of the candles can't be seen. Trim all the sprays that are needed to give the wreath a nice rounded look.

Third, put the white candle into a small candle holder, and place it into the middle of the completed wreath.



## E. Other Materials

### Books and Workbooks

1. Biggest Birthday Party

Department of Christian Education Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese

2. Praise the Lord

Orthodox Christian Education Commission

3. The Season of Christmas (Feasts and Families)

Department of Religious Education Orthodox Church in America

4. The Year of Grace of Our Lord

St. Vladimir's Seminary Press

5. Arch Books (Related Stories)

6. Icon Packet

7. Icon Book

8. Winter Pascha

9. Color Books

## F. Advent Fast Summary

### Categories of Abstinence

- i. meat: beef, pork, lamb, poultry, etc.
- ii. animal products: cheese, milk, butter, eggs, lard, drippings, etc.
- iii. fish with backbones: halibut, sole, red snapper, salmon, tuna, etc.

[Note: Other forms of seafood are permissible, such as shrimp, crab, scallops, octopus, squid, etc.]

- iv. oil and wine (including all alcoholic beverages)

### November 15 to five days before Christmas

Saturday and Sunday

- abstaining from categories i and ii

Monday, Wednesday and Friday

- 1 cooked meal (abstaining from categories i, ii, iii, iv)

Tuesday and Thursday

- 2 cooked meals (abstaining from categories i, ii, and iii)

On the following special days in Advent, one category may be lifted unless it falls on a Saturday or Sunday

November 21 - Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary  
(fish, oil, and wine are permitted on this day)

November 24 - St. Catherine (4th. C)

November 30 - St. Andrew, one of the Twelve Apostles (1st. C.)

December 4 - Ss. Barbara the Great and Juliana who were martyred at Hieropolis in Syria (4th C.); and our venerable Father, St. John of Damascus (8th C.)

December 6 - St. Nicholas the Great Bishop and Wonderworker of Myra (4th C.)

December 9 - The Conception of Anna, Mother of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God.

December 13 - St. Herman the Wonderworker of Alaska (19th C.)

December 17 - The holy Prophet Daniel and the three holy children:  
Shadrach, Meshach and Abaednego (7th B.C.)

The Fast Summary for the Pre-Feast of Christmas (December 20 - December 24)

December 20-24 - 1 meal (abstaining from categories i - iv)  
- unless on a Saturday or Sunday then 2 meals  
(abstaining from categories i - iii)

Note: Although the Christmas Eve meal is ascetical, it is traditionally very elegant.