

FAMILY ADVENT CUSTOMS

by Helen McLoughlin

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We await a Savior,
The Lord Jesus Christ,
Who will reshape the body of our lowliness
After the shape of the body of His splendour.
Temperately, justly, reverently,
Let us live in this world,
Awaiting the blessed hope
And advent of the glory of the great God.
--RESPONSORY IN ADVENT

WE AWAIT A SAVIOR

Advent is the beginning of the new liturgical year. It is a season of spiritual preparation, marked by eager longing for the coming of the Saviour through grace at Christmas, and for His second and final coming. It is also an ideal time to establish in our homes liturgical customs which will restore our children to Christ.[1]

In our family we use these age-old Advent practices to help our children live closer to Christ and His Church during the pre-Christmas season. Time-tested and proven, the customs teach the doctrines of redemption and develop a generosity with God and a coordination of the family's spiritual efforts as effectively now as they did for our forebears. Their strong and living faith will be the heritage of our children if family religious practices, centered in the Liturgy, "the normal school of sanctity for the laity," become established in our homes.

Secularism has invaded our households. The Bishops of the United States have warned us that "the Christian must make his home holy--the Christian must realize the Christian ideal." Father Edgar Schmiedler, O.S.B., in his three excellent pamphlets, "Your Home a Church in Miniature," says of family customs and blessings: "They are a relatively simple, but highly important, means of union between altar and home. They are a media for channeling from one great spiritual reservoir, given into the Church's keeping by Christ, the living and transforming waters of grace from the Saviour's fountain."

Children, who love the beauty and simplicity of family religious practices, make the traditions easy to establish. As a rule it is best to begin with one or two customs and add others in years to come. It is also highly desirable that families develop their own special customs, at least by adapting traditional ones to their personal circumstances. Once established, customs recall to older members of the family long forgotten practices of their own childhood. These have a special appeal because they belonged to our forefathers and link us to the wealth of national customs now fallen into disuse.

ADVENT WREATH

Most popular of the Advent customs handed down to us is the Advent wreath made of evergreens, bound to a circle of wire. German in origin--it was taken, so we are told, from the pagan fire wheel--the wreath represents the cycle of thousands of years from Adam to Christ during which the world awaited the coming of a Redeemer. It also represents the cycle of years since then that we have been awaiting His second and final coming in glory. It bears four candles, equally spaced, three purple ones to be lighted on the "penitential" Sundays, and a rose-colored one for Gaudete, the joyful Sunday in Advent. Candles may be placed inside or outside the wreath.

Any kind of Christmas wreath such as those hung in windows may be used. It may be set on a kitchen or dining room table, on an end table in the living room, or in a child's bedroom. However, it is most appealing when suspended by four purple ribbons from a light fixture in the ceiling.

When our children were small we bought a large, permanently preserved pine wreath and used it year after year. Now that they are going to school they help to make a new one each Advent. Inexpensive and easy to assemble is the wreath we make from a bunch or two of laurel leaves bound to a circle of wire from coat

hangers. The evergreens are secured by fine wire to the circle. Candles and ribbons are added as the wreath is put together. Laurel is practical because it does not shed when suspended over the dining room table. Moreover, laurel is a symbol of victory, and thus reminds us that Christ's coming means victory over sin and death. Loveliest of wreaths and fragrant, too, is one of fresh princess pine. When we use that type, we hang it in the living room and add a single silver star to it each evening in Advent when the candles are lighted for prayers. Stars are cut from metallic paper.

City dwellers may make an attractive wreath of fireproof green paper, while country folks will find a metal barrel hoop ideal as a frame for whatever evergreens are at hand. In our children's classrooms in Corpus Christi School, New York City, Advent greens are sometimes kept fresh in inexpensive plastic rings.

The home ceremony for use of the Advent wreath is simple. It consists of Collects, hymns and prayers proper to the Advent season. We have put it together as follows. On the first Sunday of Advent, our family gathers for the blessing of the wreath by father, who begins:

Father: Our help is in the Name of the Lord.

All answer: Who made heaven and earth.

Father: Let us pray. O God, by whose word all things are sanctified, pour forth Thy blessing upon this wreath, and grant that we who use it may prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ and may receive from Thee abundant graces. Through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

He sprinkles the wreath with holy water. Then Myles, our youngest child, lights the first candle, and the prayer for the first week is said.

Father: Let us pray. Stir up Thy might, we beg Thee, O Lord, and come, so that we may escape through Thy protection and be saved by Thy help from the dangers that threaten us because of our sins. Who livest and reignest for ever and ever.

All: Amen.

During the first week one candle is left burning during the evening meal, at prayers or at bedtime.

Two candles are lighted on the second Sunday and allowed to burn as before. The prayer for the week is:

Father: Let us pray. O Lord, stir up our hearts that we may prepare for Thy only begotten Son, that through His coming we may be made worthy to serve Thee with pure souls. Through the same Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Three candles, including the rose candle, are lighted on Gaudete, the third Sunday, and during that week. The following prayer is said:

Father: Let us pray. We humbly beg Thee, O Lord, to listen to our prayers; and by the grace of Thy coming bring light into our darkened minds. Who livest and reignest for ever and ever.

All: Amen.

All four candles are lighted on the fourth Sunday and allowed to burn as before. The prayer said the fourth week is:

Father: Let us pray. Stir up Thy might, we pray Thee, O Lord, and come; rescue us through Thy great strength so that salvation, which has been hindered by our sins, may be hastened by the grace of Thy gentle mercy. Who livest and reignest for ever and ever.

All: Amen.

At the end of Advent, candles and ribbons are changed to white, evergreens renewed if necessary, and tiny Christmas balls added to decorate the wreath. We hang ours in the entrance hall where it adds a festive note to the house and gives us a chance to explain the wreath to neighbors and tradespeople who have not seen it previously. The wreath, unless it sheds, is kept until Epiphany.

PLUM PUDDING

On the first Sunday of Advent we bring to the dinner table the "Stir-up" or traditional English plum pudding for family and guests to stir. Each makes a wish, as he or she stirs, and then prays the Collect from the Mass of the day:

"Stir up Thy might, we beg Thee, O Lord; and come so that we may escape through Thy protection and be saved by Thy help from the dangers that threaten us because of our sins. Who livest and reignest for ever and ever."

Afterwards the pudding is steamed and put away until the feast of Christmas. Then warmed brandy or rum is added and set ablaze; and the flaming pudding is brought to the dinner table to be served as soon as the flame burns out. Actually the pudding is prepared on the Saturday before "Stir-up" Sunday. Filled with the good things of the world, the pudding is supposed to represent Christ who will bring with Him on His birthday all the good things of heaven. Children love to work on the pudding, and the busy mother finds extra hands a great help in dicing, grating and juicing the fruits.

We use a recipe from "Jubilee," November 1953. The ingredients cost about three dollars and will make five pounds of pudding. Adolph Paganuzzi, chef of a well-known Greenwich Village, New York, pastry shop, reduced his famous recipe to family proportions for "Jubilee." With his kind permission we give it here:

1/2 lb. beef suet, chopped	1/4 lb. diced candied citron
1/2 lb. all-purpose flour, sifted	1/4 lb. diced candied orange peels
1/4 lb. bread crumbs	1/4 lb. diced candied lemon peels
3/4 lb. brown sugar	8 eggs, beaten
2 teaspoons ground cinnamon	2 lemons--grated rind and their juice
1 teaspoon ground allspice	2 oranges--grated rind and their juice
1 teaspoon ground ginger	1/2 pt. Sherry or Port wine
1-1/4 lbs. raisins--any kind	

Into a bowl mix and work together all the ingredients one at a time, in the order in which they are listed above. When they have been well mixed, pour the mixture into a well-greased mold or can. Cover, and seal tight. Steam in large, covered kettle, roaster or similar utensil and let simmer for at least five hours. When done, the pudding can be stored away until Christmas. It may be kept a year and will improve with age. It may be served with any sauce desired, such as fruit, rum, brandy, raisin, vanilla or any other kind. Liquid sauces are better than semi-liquid.

Rum Sauce

1 pt. Sherry wine	1 small stick cinnamon
1/2 lb. brown sugar	Rind of 1/2 orange
2 bay leaves	1/2 pt. rum

Place all the ingredients in a glass jar and let stand together for a few days. Bring to a boil, strain and serve over the pudding.

GIFTS FOR JESUS

On the first Sunday of Advent each child in our family receives an empty manger. An oatmeal box covered with bright paper will do as well. At bedtime the children draw straws for each kind deed performed in honor of Baby Jesus as His birthday surprise. The straws are placed in the child's manger or box daily. It is amazing how much love a child can put into Advent when he is preparing for His Redeemer's coming in grace.

On Christmas each child finds an Infant in his manger, placed on a small table or on a chair beside his bed. Usually it is a tiny doll, beautifully dressed; but one of our children receives a Hummel Infant year after year. This custom, which in no way interferes with the larger manger in the living room, fills the child with a longing in Advent, and gives him an image of his Redeemer as his first happy glance mornings and his last impression at night during the entire Christmas season.

As our youngsters grew older, they added the Hungarian custom of planting a grain of blessed wheat for each Advent sacrifice. They use small flower pots, especially decorated with Christmas symbols. By Christmas the tender green shoots of wheat are growing, each a reminder of some special, and of course secret, offering of love for "Little Jesus" on His birthday. The wheat is placed at the crib and usually lasts until Epiphany.[2]

PRAYERS AND HYMNS

In order to correspond more closely to the mind of Holy Mother Church during this important season, our night prayers consist of the Mass Collect for the day, a psalm or reading from the Advent prophets, and an Advent hymn. Children particularly love psalms, once they have learned that they are the prayers our Lord Himself said when He was a boy on earth. One of the children's favorites is:

O shepherd of Israel, hearken,
O guide of the flock of Joseph!
Rouse your power, and come to save us.
O Lord of hosts, restore us,
if your face shine upon us, then we shall be safe.
O Lord of hosts, how long will you burn with anger
while your people pray?
You have fed them with the bread of tears
and given them tears to drink in ample measure.
You have left us to be fought over by our neighbors,
and our enemies mock us.
O Lord of hosts, restore us,
if your face shine upon us, then we shall be safe.

Another prayer children enjoy is a prophecy from Isaias. It refers to Christ as the Root of Jesse, the thirsty plant, in whose honor we use evergreens during Advent and Christmas. It also gives the genealogy of the Saviour:

A Root shall come forth from the stock of Jesse
And a Flower shall rise out of his root!
And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him--
the spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the spirit of counsel and of fortitude,
the spirit of knowledge and of godliness.
The people that walked in darkness
shall see a great light,

For a Child is born to us
and a Son is given to us.
To Him all power shall be given.
His Name shall be: Wonderful One,
Strong God, Eternal One, Prince of Peace.
He shall sit on the throne of David,
And He will found a new Covenant
which will last for ever and ever.

Isaias also gives us two Advent prayers which are appropriate before grace at meals for this season. Mornings and at noon we use the versicle of Lauds "which is as it were a spur making us conscious of the particular mystery of the season." Before grace the mother prays:

The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord.

All answer: Make straight His paths.

This is also the particular prayer we use in preparing each child for our Lord's coming in First Holy Communion. It is therefore especially dear to the family.

At the evening meal we use the Vespers versicle which is "a sedative, soothing our hearts in spiritual repose." Before grace the father says:

Drop down dew, ye heavens above,
and let the clouds rain the Just One.

All answer: Let the earth be opened and bud forth a Savior.

Here again the versicle is familiar because we sing the words during evening prayers.

Mother Church has wisely provided her children with Advent hymns. Favorites are the deeply moving *Rorate Caeli*, translated "Bedew us, heaven, from above," and "Come, O Come, Emmanuel" (Emmanuel is a Biblical name for the Messiah and means God-with-us.) Our children sing these hymns at school. We have a little pump organ at home which they play. Pump organs can often be picked up in country places for little or no money. Frequently an inquiry will bring to light one covered with dust in a church basement or in the attic of a farm house. Nothing stimulates family hymn singing so much as an organ. It is a happy adjunct to the home that is a church in miniature."

O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL

1. O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.

Refrain:

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee O Israel.

2. O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny
From depth of hell Thy people save
And give them vict'ry o'er the grave.
Refrain.

3. O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer
Our Spirits by Thine Advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And earth's dark shadows put to flight.
Refrain.
4. O come, Thou Key of David, come
And open wide our Heav'nly Home;
Make safe the way that leads on high
And close the path to misery.
Refrain

BEDEW US, HEAVEN (or Rorate Caeli)

Refrain:

Rorate caeli de super,
et nubes pluant justum. (Repeat Refrain)

1. Ne irascaris Domine, ne ultra memineris iniquitatis:
ecce civitas Sancti facta est deserta:
Sion deserta facta est: Jerusalem desolata est:
domus sanctificationis tuae et gloriae tuae,
ubi laudaverunt te patres nostri.
(Repeat Refrain)
2. Peccavimus, et facti sumus tamquam immundus nos,
et cecidimus quasi folium universi:
et iniquitates nostrae quasiventus abstulerunt nos:
abscondisti faciem tuam a nobis,
et allisisti nos in manu iniquitatis nostrae.
(Repeat Refrain)
3. Vide Domine afflictionem populitui,
et mitte quem missurus es:
emitte Agnum dominatorem terrae,
de petra deserti admontem filiae Sion
ut auferat ipse jugum captivitatis nostrae.
(Repeat Refrain)
4. Consolamini, consolamini, popule meus:
cito veniet salus tua: quamoerore consumeris,
quia innovavit te dolor? Salvabo te, noli timere,
ego enim sum Dominus Deus tuus,
Sanctus Israel, Redemptor tuus.
(Repeat Refrain)

English Translation:

Refrain:

Bedew us, heaven, from above;
ye clouds rain down the Just One. (Repeat Refrain)

1. Withhold Thy wrath from us, O Lord,
and remember no more our evil doing.
Lo, the city of the Holy One is made a desert,
Sion a desert is become. Jerusalem waste and desolate:

the house of Thy hallowing presence and of Thy glory,
where of old our fathers sang Thy praises.
(Repeat Refrain)

2. We all have sinned, and are become life unto one unclean.
We have fallen low, as a dying leaf falls earthward;
and our iniquities, as a wind have swept us swiftly far.
Thou has hidden Thy face from us, Thy people;
Thou has broken us by the weight of our own sinning.
(Repeat Refrain)
3. Behold, O Lord, the affliction of Thy people.
Send quickly Him who is to come.
Send forth the Lamb who rules all earthly kingdoms,
from Petra in the desert, to the Mount of the daughter of Sion;
that He may take away the grievous yoke of our subjection.
(Repeat Refrain)
4. Be ye comforted, be ye comforted, O ye My people:
for most speedily comes salvation. Why are ye consumed
with sorrowing, so that your grief has quite transformed you?

I come to save, be no more fearful. For know ye not that I am
your God and Master, Israel's Holy One, your sole Redeemer.
(Repeat Refrain)

ST. NICHOLAS DAY

St. Nicholas' feast day, December 6, is one of the highlights of the Advent season. It is on this eve that our children hang their stockings. From babyhood they learn to love the kind bishop with his mitre, staff and bag of gifts--whose name has become parodied as "Santa Claus" and whose memory is tarnished by commercialism. In addition to the toys received on this feast, the Christ-Child and His angels bring other gifts on Christmas Eve; and the Magi a few more on Epiphany.

Placing less exclusive emphasis on December 25 as the day of presents and also curtailing its gifts somewhat makes it easier to place more emphasis on the religious aspects of that great holy day. Do other children think ours are queer? Not at all. If anything, they are a bit envious of children who receive Yule gifts so early and who enjoy such a happy feast as our traditional St. Nicholas Day party. Having an early gift day also makes it possible for the children to give some of these gifts as Christmas presents to other less fortunate children.

Treats of the St. Nicholas party are the exchange of gifts, genuine Dutch cookies and Bishopwyn (bishop's wine). For children the wine is grape juice. But the grownups who face the high December winds along the Hudson River to pick up their children at our house always welcome the mulled Bishopwyn. Its recipe is from our favorite cook book, "Cooking for Christ" by Florence Berger.

1 bottle of Claret 6 cloves 4 inches stick cinnamon

Break cinnamon into small pieces. Simmer wine and spices for about five minutes. Strain wine. Serve hot.

The Speculatius, a spice cookie from the Netherlands, like all of Mrs. Berger's recipes, is foolproof.

1 cup butter	4 tsp. cinnamon
1 cup lard	1/2 tsp. nutmeg
2 cups brown sugar	1/2 tsp. cloves
1/2 cup sour cream	4-1/2 cups sifted flour
1/2 tsp. soda	1/2 cup chopped nuts

Cream the butter, lard and sugar. Add sour cream alternately with sifted dry ingredients. Stir in the nuts. Knead the dough into rolls. Wrap the rolls in wax paper and chill them in the refrigerator overnight. Roll the dough very thin and cut into shapes. Bake in moderate oven (375 degrees) for 10 to 15 minutes.

The dough may be cut into St. Nicholas shapes, or into the shape of birds, fish or animals. We also like to cut out stocking shapes and ice them in honor of St. Nicholas, patron of school boys.

During the party we light the Advent wreath candle, and the children sing Advent hymns. All classes at Corpus Christi School have wreaths, but some of the children do not have them at home. We have found that parents, enjoying their Bishopwyn, have become interested in the wreath and have integrated the Advent program of school and home as a result of the St. Nicholas Day party.

THE MARY CANDLE

Following closely is the feast of the Immaculate Conception. It is our only daughter's baptismal day, a day of great joy because (she is adopted) her rebirth in Christ is such a wonderful event in her life and ours. On our Lady's altar Sheila arranges a single red rose in a vase and covers it with a blue lace or net to signify the Mystical Rose. On an end table in the living room, she sets up the candle which will be lighted during Christmas. Over the candle goes a white mantle. It is usually made of satin and lace, but crepe paper gathered with ribbon does equally well.

Sometimes we make our own candle by attaching a figure or picture of the Infant to a broad candle. We have also used a lovely "Lady Brett" candle which has a decorated creche and Christ Child cut into the base. Imported from Germany, these candles are available in gift and department stores across the country. Lovely items of high artistic value may also be ordered from: Saint Leo's Shop, Newport Rhode Island (an illustrated brochure will gladly be sent upon request).

Our candle also serves as a basis for giving sex instructions. "Blessed is the fruit of thy womb" becomes a reality to the littlest children who love to learn about the Baby in Mary's immaculate body. Mary was God's throne room for nine months, and her part in our redemption is very great. Only He knows how often the Holy Spirit works upon children's souls as they peek under the mantle to see the Infant whose coming they await with great expectancy. On December 8 we recite the "Magnificat" (text on page 33), and sing hymns at Mary's altar.

Some families have the custom of placing a candle, decorated with a small white or blue ribbon, before a statue or picture of the Blessed Virgin on the feast of her Immaculate Conception. They light the candle during meals and evening prayers. It serves as an eloquent reminder of Mary's eager expectation of the "Light of the World," and helps members of the family keep their own light of grace burning brightly as the best preparation for His coming.

ST. LUCY'S CATS

The feast of St. Lucy, patron of school girls, on December 13, marks the opening of the Christmas season in Sweden, where Leissi Katter or St. Lucy's Cats are a special treat. We bake the yellow buns in the form of cats, but have yet to make them as beautifully as those shown on Mrs. Berger's slides covering her cooking for the entire liturgical year. The recipe is from her cook book, "Cooking for Christ."

1 cake yeast	1/2 cup currants
1 tblsp. sugar	2 tblsp. saffron
1/4 cup warm water	3/4 cup hot water
1 cup milk	1 tblsp. chopped citron
3/4 cup sugar	6 cups flour
4 tblsp. shortening	1 tsp. salt
1/2 cup raisins	1 beaten egg

Add yeast and sugar to warm water. Scald and cool milk. When yeast mixture bubbles add to milk. Beat in shortening, sugar and two cups flour. Cover and let rise. Put saffron in three-fourths cup hot water one hour. Strain and add liquid to dough only for color. Combine fruits, flour and salt. Let rise again. Shape into oval buns with round heads. Add a tail if you wish. Use raisins as eyes. Brush with beaten egg and water and let rise again until it doubles its bulk. Bake in a moderate oven (350 degrees) for 30 minutes.

ADVENT DRAMATIZED

The days of Advent receive their proper significance when children react the mysteries of each day's Gospel. In the Middle Ages, Holy Mother Church taught the people by such mystery plays--plays about the life of Christ. Sometimes we read the Gospel and the children act it out. Other times we tell the Gospel story and let the children use their own words. One of the loveliest of such scenes was staged at Corpus Christi School where our Sheila, as Mary, dramatized our Lady in her home at the coming of Herod's messenger and on the subsequent journey. Scarves, bathrobes, remnants and old lace dresses make excellent costumes.

In this connection there is a delightful hymnal, "The Story of the Redemption for Children." They love the songs. They sing "The Annunciation" set to the music of the Latin hymn "Creator Alme Siderum." Another simple hymn suitable for this season and set to the same music is "The Trip to Bethlehem."

THE ANNUNCIATION

1. One day while Mary knelt in prayer
She saw an angel standing there.
His glory filled the dwelling place.
He said to her, "Hail, full of Grace!"
2. Now Mary feared and bowed her head.
"Oh, do not fear," the angel said,
"For God shall send His Son to thee.
His holy Mother, thou shalt be."
3. Then Mary spoke the blessed word:
"Behold the Handmaid of the Lord.
As thou hast said, so be it done."
The Son of God became her Son.

THE TRIP TO BETHLEHEM

1. St. Joseph brushed the donkey neat
Put Mary in the saddle seat,
Then took his staff of hickory limb,
And started off for Bethlehem.
2. They traveled on for many days
Along the winding dusty ways
But no complaint was heard from them,
A-trav'ling down to Bethlehem.

3. The richer folk would hurry by
In carriages all fine and high,
And proudly look away from the,
A-trav'ling down to Bethlehem.

4. At last, when Joseph halted there,
The inn was full; and ev'rywhere
He heard them say, through ev'ning gloom
So sorry, sir, we have no room.

CHRISTMAS MANGER

Each year our other big Advent project is the building of a manger for the entrance hall. One year the children drew the figures which Daddy glued to plywood and cut with a saw. Another year we carved Nativity figures from Ivory soap. We have also made them of cookie dough using Nativity cookie cutters. The same cutters filled with plaster made lovely white figures for a creche.

An important factor with children is to give them incentive to work and credit for their effort by placing the manger scene where many can admire it. This encourages further creative efforts.[3]

About the time Advent projects are nearing completion, our children prepare banners to go with the Infant in the living room manger. They print their names on bright little cardboard banners and slip the individual banners into lollypop sticks set into plaster bases. These are placed around the crib to show that our children are among those who proclaim Christ their King. This idea may be carried out by using children's photographs, cut out, pasted to cardboard, and made to stand around the crib.

THE ADVENT HOUSE

Most exciting of our family customs is the Advent House[4] with its seven sealed windows concealing symbols of Christ derived from the Old Testament. Beginning December 17th, the little House is hung against the light of a window, and the beautiful "O" antiphons of the Liturgy become our morning prayer. The children can hardly wait to break the seal on each Advent House window. They find within a colorful transparency depicting a symbol of Christ, such as the burning bush, the key of David, the root of Jesse, symbols which grow in richness and meaning year by year.

The antiphons, scriptural texts a few lines long, are so many jewels of inspired poetry. Each prayer ends on the eager cry, "Come!" On December 23rd when the door of the Advent House is opened, children find little King Jesus on His Mother's knee.

"There is a climactic order in these antiphons," Father William J. McGarry, S.J., writes. "In the first, 'O Sapientia,' we take a backward flight into the recesses of eternity to address Wisdom, the Word of God. In the second, 'O Adonai,' we have leaped from eternity to the time of Moses and the Law of Moses (about 1400 B.C.). In the third, 'O Radix Jesse,' we have come to the time when God was preparing the line of David (about 1100 B.C.). In the fourth, 'O Clavis David,' we have come to the year 1000. In the fifth, 'O Oriens' we see that the line of David is elevated so that the peoples may look on a rising star in the east, and hence in the sixth, 'O Rex Gentium,' we know that He is king of all the world of man. This brings us to the evening before the vigil, and before coming to the town limits of Bethlehem, we salute Him with the last Great O, 'O Emmanuel, God-with-us'" (from "He Cometh" by Fr. McGarry).

O Sapientia December 17

O WISDOM
Who issued from the mouth of the Most High
Reaching from beginning to end
Ordering all things mightily yet tenderly--
COME to teach us the way of prudence.

O Adonai December 18

O LORD OF LORDS
And Leader of the house of Israel,
Who appeared to Moses in the bush's flaming fire
And gave to him the Law of Sinai--
COME to redeem us with stretched-out arms.

O Radix Jesse December 19

O ROOT OF JESSE
A Standard to the peoples
Before whom kings are mute,
To whom all nations shall appeal--
COME to deliver us; delay, please, no longer.

O Clavis David December 20

O KEY OF DAVID
And Scepter of the house of Israel,
You open and no man dares shut,
You shut and no man dares open--
COME, deliver from the chains of prison him
who sits in darkness and in the shadow of death.

O Oriens December 21

O RISING DAWN
Radiance of eternal light
And Sun of justice--
COME, enlighten those sitting in darkness
And in the shadow of death.

O Rex Gentium December 22

O KING OF NATIONS
And their desired one,
Cornerstone who binds two into one--
COME and save man
Whom You fashioned from the slime of the earth.

O Emmanuel December 23

O EMMANUEL, God-with-us,
Our King and Lawgiver,
The Awaited of the peoples and their Savior--
COME to save us, O Lord, our God.

TREE DECORATIONS

Making Christmas tree decorations provides one of our family's Advent projects. In the past we obtained from religious goods stores packets of double-faced paper designs. The children made the decorations entirely by themselves. Figures included Nicholas as a Bishop with a bag of toys, the Infant Jesus, Mary, angels, shepherds, stars, and symbols such as the Mystical Rose. Pre-school children love to cut out the designs, punch the holes, and put ornament hangers into each decoration.

A child who can draw is always happy to see his own work displayed on the tree. Children not so talented can cut out the animals of the stable, angels, and the figures of the Advent season, Isaias, John the Baptist and Zachary from old books or calendars. These may be backed with bright colored paper to make attractive ornaments. Our children love symbols. Last year Christ, the Christmas Rose, was represented by a rose (cut from wallpaper) over which they placed twelve silver stars. They also dressed tiny dolls to present Christ's ancestors and hung them on the tree. These included Jesse, David, our Lady, St. Joseph, and Adam and Eve. Clay and paint provided a tiny apple and a serpent to give Adam and Eve real meaning and to dramatize the reason for the Redeemer's coming.[5]

CHRISTMAS COOKING

Christ, the Bread of Angels, has been honored by special "Christmas Bread" in every European country. Most delicious of these are "Brioche" or French Christmas bread, the German "Christstollen" whose criss-cross shape reminds us of the Child in swaddling clothes, and "Melachrino" or Greek spice cake. The latter our children call Hidden Jesus Bread, because of the Infant baked in it. Recipes for all three are from Mrs. Berger's "Cooking for Christ." Her family like ours is large. One half of her recipe is usually sufficient for a small family. Margarine may be used in place of butter.

"Brioche," a very light rich bread, is best mixed on Christmas Eve so the dough can stand before it is baked. Use a very hot oven on Christmas morning to make the dough rise quickly. The crust is crisp and brown, the center soft when the dough is handled lightly.

1 yeast cake	1 tblsp. sugar
1/4 cup warm water	6 slightly beaten eggs
4 cups flour	1 cup butter
1 tsp. salt	1/2 cup milk

Mix yeast with warm water and one cup flour. Cover and set aside to rise. Mix remaining dry ingredients. Work in butter with your fingers. Add eggs. Add milk very slowly. (The dough should be softer than bread dough.) Mix in yeast combination and let rise one to two hours. Punch down and keep in a cold place until ready to use. Then shape in loaves. Place in two 6x10 loaf pans. Put in warm place until dough rises about one third more in size. Brush with beaten egg. Bake in hot oven (450 degrees) until brown. This recipe will make two loaves.

Early Christians brought their bread to the altar at the offertory procession. Some of it was used for the Sacrifice; the rest received a special blessing after the consecration, but was not changed into the Body of Christ. It was taken home as Blessed Bread. Whenever we attend the Byzantine Liturgy at Fordham's Russian Center, we take part in a similar custom.

The mother of the family may use her powers as a member of "the royal priesthood" to which St. Peter refers in his First Epistle. She may sprinkle holy water over the newly-made bread, and pray Holy Mother Church's official blessing:

Mother: Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, Thou the bread of angels, Thou the living bread of eternal life, graciously deign to bless this bread as Thou didst bless the five loaves in the desert that all who partake of it may have health of body and soul. Who livest and reignest for ever and ever. Amen.

Eating blessed bread makes such an impression upon children that no scrap of it is ever wasted "because it is God's special food."

Christstollen needs plenty of room so that the shape of the Child in swaddling clothes will be surely seen in the folds of dough.

1 cake yeast	1 cup shortening
1 tblsp. sugar	1-1/4 cups sugar
1/4 cup lukewarm water	2 eggs
6 cups flour	1 cup raisins
1 tsp. salt	1 cup currants
1/2 tsp. nutmeg	1/2 cup blanched almonds
2 cups scalded milk	1/2 cup chopped citron
	1-1/2 tsp. lemon extract

Dissolve yeast and tblsp. of sugar in warm water. Cover and allow to rise. Cream shortening and sugar. Add eggs and scalded milk cooled to lukewarm. Alternate with flour sifted with salt and nutmeg. Add yeast mixture. Knead until smooth. Add fruits and flavoring. Cover and let dough rise to double its bulk. Knead dough again. Shape dough into ropes about one and one half inches in diameter. For each large stollen make one rope three feet long and two that are two and a half feet long. Braid the dough. Bring the braid to a point at either end. Place the braid on a greased cookie sheet. Bake in a hot oven (400 degrees) for 25 minutes or until brown. This recipe will make two large Stollen.

After we have received the Eucharistic Bread at Christmas Mass, we like a favorite sweet bread or spice cake which Mrs. Berger calls "Melachrino." In Greece it is customary to hide a silver coin deep in its crust; we bake a tiny figure of the Holy Infant in the dough.

3/4 cup butter	1/4 tsp. mace
1-2/3 cups sugar	1-1/4 tsp. cinnamon
3 eggs	1/4 tsp. ground cloves
3/4 cup milk	1-1/2 tsp. baking soda
1-3/4 cups flour	1/3 tsp. salt
	1-1/2 tblsp. lemon juice

Cream butter and sugar. Beat in eggs. Add milk alternately with sifted dry ingredients. Stir in lemon juice. Pour batter into a greased 9x14 loaf pan. Bake in a moderate oven (350 degrees) for 45 minutes. While the cake is still hot, ice with:

2 cups confectioner's sugar
5 or 6 tblsp. water
1/2 tblsp. lemon juice

From the Italians comes a quick dessert for that busiest of days, "Vigilia di Natale," the Vigil of Christmas. It is a "Cassata" or Cream Tart which may be made with store sponge cake to save time.

10 inch sponge cake	1-1/2 cups sugar
1-1/2 cups cottage cheese	2 tsp. almond extract
	2 chopped squares of bitter chocolate

Cut cake into three layers. Beat cottage cheese, sugar, almond extract and chocolate together. Spread this filling between layers. Chill cake in refrigerator. When cake is set, ice with

1 egg white	1 tsp. almond extract
1-1/2 cups confectioner's sugar	1/2 tsp. lemon juice
	Candied fruits

We go to great lengths in Christmas cooking, but there are two shortcuts which we take. One is the use of store cake in the Cassata above and the other the use of prepared mincemeat, and, on occasion, prepared pie crust.

Mincemeat pie at Christmas was originally made in an oblong baking pan to remind us of Christ's birth in a manger, while the richness of its ingredients and the spices remind us of the gifts of the Magi. We use a standard prepared mincemeat and a standard pastry recipe for a two crust pie. A 7x11 cake pan utilizes the dough and leaves enough scraps after the pie is trimmed for a pastry Infant Jesus. This is cut from a Nativity cookie cutter, baked separately and placed on the manger-pie. The gingerbread boy had Baby Jesus for his original model.

As Christmas approaches, the house smells of baking; presents are wrapped; and the wreaths are hung. The children unveil the Christ-Candle and set up their cribs. It is then that their Daddy covers the fireplace mantle with evergreens--Oregon holly when we can afford it--and centers a Madonna and Child with many vigil lights as the focus of the room. A spray of evergreen is placed across the top of every picture in the room; and a piece is wound around a huge white candle placed on the dinner table to symbolize the Light of the world for whom we have made these elaborate preparations. As is the Irish custom, the candle is lighted by the man of the house after the Angelus on Christmas eve.

CHRISTMAS EVE

Various home ceremonies on Christmas Eve are perhaps the easiest of all to establish. Where children are very small they are the surest link between altar and home. If they believe in Santa Claus, this emphasis on Christmas as the Feast of Baby Jesus and His Birthday will focus their thoughts on the Holy Child.

In our house, friends and older members of the family gather in a darkened living room. Through the halls, the children with lighted candles come in a procession carrying the Infant Jesus for the living room crib, while they sing Silent Night. By the time they reach the living room door, their Daddy is ready to light the tree, then the candles at the crib and mantle, and finally the Christ-Candle. Then we all sing:

Silent Night! Holy Night!
All is calm, all is bright,
'Round yon Virgin Mother and Child.
Holy Infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent Night! Holy Night!
Shepherds quake at the sight!
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia.
Christ the Savior is born!
Christ the Savior is born!

Pierce, our oldest child, then reads from the Roman Martyrology:

In the forty-second year of the Empire of Octavian Augustus, in the Sixth Age of the world while all the earth was at peace, Jesus Christ, Eternal God, and Son of the Eternal Father, willed to consecrate the world by His gracious coming; having been conceived of the Holy Ghost, and the nine months since His conception

having now passed (all kneel), He was born as Man of the Virgin Mary at Bethlehem of Juda. (Very solemnly):

THE BIRTHDAY ACCORDING TO THE FLESH OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

After the reading we sing the third verse of "Silent Night":

Silent Night! Holy Night!
Son of God, love's pure light.
Radiant beams from Thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth,
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth!

Father: Our help is in the Name of the Lord

All: who made heaven and earth.

Father: O great mystery and wonderful sign,

All: dumb beasts saw the new born Lord lying in a crib.

Then all present recite the Magnificat, Mary's song with which she answered her cousin Elizabeth when the latter greeted her with the words, "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the Fruit of thy womb."

Father: My soul magnifies the Lord,

All: and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

Because He has regarded the lowliness of His handmaid, for behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed,

Because He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His Name;

And His mercy is from generation to generation toward those who fear Him.

He has shown might with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart.

He has put down the mighty from their thrones and has exalted the lowly.

The hungry He has filled with good things and the rich He has sent empty away.

He has given help to Israel His servant, mindful of His mercy--As He promised our fathers--toward Abraham and his descendants forever.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

The Antiphon is repeated:

All: O great mystery and wonderful sign, dumb beasts saw the new born Lord lying in a crib.

The Magnificat is followed by the holy Gospel according to St. Luke (2:15-20):

Father: And it came to pass, when the angels had departed from them into heaven, that the shepherds were saying to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste, and they found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in the manger. And when they had seen, they understood what had been told them concerning this Child.

And all who heard marvelled at the things told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept in mind all these words, pondering them in her heart.

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, even as it was spoken to them.

All: Praise be to You, O Christ.

Father: The Word was made flesh, alleluia.

All: And dwelt among us, alleluia.

Father: O Lord, hear my prayer.

All: And let my cry come to You.

Father: Let us pray. We beseech Thee, Almighty God, bless this crib which we have prepared in honor of the new birth in the flesh of Thine only-begotten Son, that all who devoutly see in this image the mystery of His Incarnation may be filled with the light of His Glory, who with Thee liveth and reigneth forever.

All: Amen.

Now the Mother prays the Collect from the Missal:

Mother: Let us pray. O God, who dost gladden us with the yearly expectation of our redemption, grant that we, who now joyfully receive Thine only-begotten Son as our Redeemer, may also, without fear, behold Him coming as our judge, our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Son Who liveth and reigneth for ever and ever.

All: Amen.

In conclusion family and friends sing the Adeste Fidelis:

O come all ye faithful,
Joyful and triumphant,
To Jesus, to Jesus in Bethlehem.
Come and behold Him,
Born the King of Angels,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him, Christ our Lord.

BLESSING OF THE TREE

In recent years a growing number of families bless their Christmas trees before lighting them. We like to remind our children of the part a tree played in the sins of our first parents and of the sacred wood of the Tree on which Jesus Christ, whose birthday we are about to celebrate, wrought our redemption.

Father Francis Weiser, S.J., in "The Christmas Book" tells the story of the Christmas tree and children love to hear it. "The Christ tree is completely Christian in origin," Father says, "and historians have never been able to connect it in any way with ancient Germanic or Asiatic mythology. The origin of the Christmas tree goes back to the medieval German mystery plays. One of the most popular 'mysteries' was the Paradise play, representing the creation of man, the sin of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from Paradise. It usually closed with the consoling promise of the coming Savior and with a reference to His incarnation. This made the Paradise play a favorite pageant for Advent, and its closing scenes used to lead directly into the story of Bethlehem.

"These plays were performed either in the open, or the large squares in front of churches, or inside the house of God. The garden of Eden was indicated by a fir tree hung with apples; it represented both the 'Tree of Life' and the 'Tree of discernment of good and evil' which stood in the center of Paradise.

"After the suppression of the mystery plays in churches, the Paradise tree, the only symbolic object of the play, found its way into the homes of the faithful, especially since many plays had interpreted it as a symbol of the coming Savior. Following this symbolism, in the fifteenth century the custom developed of decorating the Paradise tree, already bearing apples, with small white wafers representing the Holy Eucharist; thus, in legendary usage, the tree which had borne the fruit of sin for Adam and Eve, now bore the saving fruit of the Sacrament, symbolized by the wafers. These wafers were later replaced by little pieces of pastry cut in the shape of stars, angels, hearts, flowers, and bells."

In some homes the tree is blessed on Christmas eve and the crib on Christmas morning. The following form may be used for the Blessing of the Christmas Tree:

Father: This is that most worthy Tree in the midst of Paradise
All: on which Jesus by His death overcame death for all.

Father: Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice;
All: let the sea and what fills it resound; let the plains be joyful and all that is in them! All the trees of the forest shall exult before the Lord, for He comes; for He comes to rule the earth. He shall rule the world with justice and the people with His constancy.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

All: This is that most worthy Tree in the midst of Paradise on which Jesus by His death overcame death for all.

Mother: God said: Let the earth bring forth vegetation: seed-bearing plants and all kinds of fruit trees that bear fruit containing their seed. And so it was. The earth brought forth vegetation, every kind of seed-bearing plant and all kinds of trees that bear fruit containing their seed. The Lord God made to grow out of the ground all kinds of trees pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And God saw that it was good.

All: Thanks be to God.

Father: O Lord, hear my prayer.
All: And let my cry come to You.

Father: Let us pray. O Lord Jesus Christ, who by dying on the tree of the Cross didst overcome the death of sin caused by our first parents' eating of the forbidden tree of paradise, grant, we beseech Thee, the abundant graces of Thy Nativity, that we may so live as to be worthy living branches of Thyself, the good and ever green Olive Tree, and in thy strength bear the fruit of good works for eternal life. Who livest and reignest for ever and ever.

All: Amen.

ENDNOTES:

1. A description of such religious customs may be found in the booklet "The Year of the Lord in the Christian Home" by Fr. Francis X. Weiser, S.J., while the workbook "Children of the Church" by the Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary suggests ways and methods of implementing such practices in home and school (both titles may be ordered from: The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota 56321).

2. You may obtain a packet of wheat with instructions by sending a small offering to "Christmas Wheat," Sisters of Social Service, 440 Linwood Ave., Lackawanna, N.Y. 14209.

3. Consult the Christian Family Christmas Catalog available upon request from: Abbey Press, St. Meinrad, Indiana 47577.

4. The same idea worked out as a tower is contained in "The Twelve Days of Christmas Kit" available from: The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota.

5. Outlines of the Jesse Tree figures and further pointers on Christmas decorating are contained in "The Twelve Days of Christmas Kit" available from: The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minn.