



A Season to Learn about Hope

Greetings!

It is easy for families to get caught up in endless to-do lists as they try to ensure that Christmas at their home is a magical time, with perfect menus, beautiful tablescapes, and thoughtful gifts.

There isn't anything wrong with a desire for Christmas magic. I remember many moments in my childhood that evoke that type of nostalgia. I want my children to experience joy during the Christmas season. It would be wonderful if they look back and remember the love that prompted the adults in their lives to create a beautiful celebration for them. But I hope that I have also managed to use Advent as an opportunity to educate them to hope.

Advent offers the opportunity to reflect on the world as it might be.

For what is Advent if not an education to hope? We know that the world is filled with suffering of both the everyday and extraordinary varieties. None of us can escape it. In fact, sometimes our attempts to create one perfect day are struggles against the worries and woes of our regular lives. But right there, into the mess that is being human, came the living God, the Lord of life. Jesus—Emmanuel, God with us—

is born to bring about a new possibility: that God will wipe every tear from our eyes and bring about a world grounded in justice, peace, mercy, and forgiveness. How might we prepare for this new world during the season of Advent?

Set up a place of prayer in your home and schedule time daily to gather. An Advent wreath, with its four candles, helps to mark our movement through the season. Light the candles and pray simply, possibly including a song or songs. You could read short, carefully chosen excerpts from the prophets, especially Isaiah, who told of the world that the messiah was coming to bring about. Be sure to include some silent reflection on the candle or candles shining in the darkness.

If your children are older, you might encourage them to plan your Advent prayer by asking them to choose the songs and readings or to think of a specific intention to pray for during your communal prayer time. Encourage them to invite the light of Christ into the darkest places in our world.

You might find that God is inviting you to something new because of the concerns that arise in prayer. If your family frequently prays for those who are hungry, you can become involved at your local food bank or serve dinner at a soup kitchen, for example. It is in the silence that we often experience God's invitation. It is then up to us to respond in love.

Advent offers the opportunity to reflect on the world as it might be and to see in the face of each one among us the small baby born in Bethlehem. Let us honor his presence in each human being as we pray: Come, Lord Jesus!