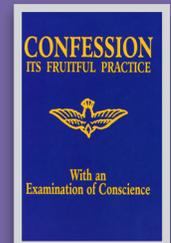
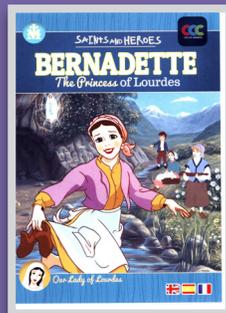
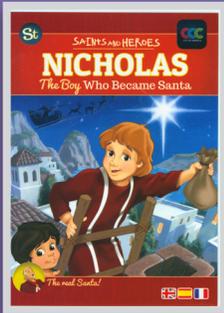
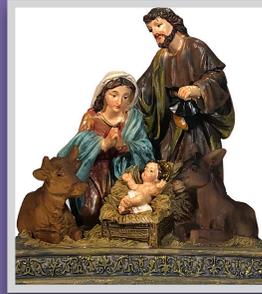


ADVENT ACTIVITIES FOR CATHOLIC HOMESCHOOLERS

by Mary Ellen Barrett



**200 IDEAS, CRAFTS & ACTIVITIES
FOR YOUR ADVENT CALENDAR**



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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
Advent Activities Calendar	5
Four Steps for Enriching Advent	6
Part One – Getting Started.....	8
Part Two – Adding Other Observances	12
Part Three – Recipes.....	17
Part Four – Books and More Books.....	20



Introduction

The Advent Activities for Catholic Homeschoolers was prompted by a request from the Seton Home Study School's magazine staff. They asked if I would expand on an Advent Calendar article I wrote adding more ideas and items for family activities.

I was thrilled! I've wanted to do something like this forever.

I put together pointers for you on getting started, observances and crafts that have become family traditions, and some kid-friendly recipes. There are also dozens of read-a-loud and other books, a list that has grown over the years that I'm happy to share with you.

If you read the original article, you know that making the handcrafted Advent Calendar is a great way to keep your children in the spirit of Advent and prepare for the coming of the Christ Child. It also helps your younger kids count down the days which moderates their expectations and keeps the excitement of the season at a manageable level.

It makes for a much more peaceful and enjoyable season if we can prep a little ahead of time too.

I hope these ideas help in your family's Advent observance, and I would love to see photos of how you have used it!

Mary Ellen Barrett
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The Advent Activities Calendar

Counting down the days of Advent can be difficult for small children.

There is so much excitement involved: feast days, presents, food, and family.

It's all very exciting but can create a lot of anxiety. I've used a few methods over the years to combat this anxious anticipation. Paper chains, purchased Advent calendars, and the Jesse tree have all made appearances in my home with varying degrees of success, but nothing has worked so well as my Advent activity calendar. A large piece of poster board, a package of library pockets, a glue stick, stickers, and a marker are all that is needed.

I ordered the library pockets online and used the glue stick to attach twenty-five of them to the poster board. I date each pocket and decorate it with stickers. Most years I use purple with pink accents, but this year, I couldn't find any, so this has more of a Christmas feel than an Advent one.

It is important to recognize that each year is different and has its own particular flavor. My advice is to not get too caught up in details like purple and pink.



Each week, I evaluate what our week is going to look like and, depending on the activity level, I write out an activity on an index card and stick it in the dated pockets. Some days, it's as simple as baking cookies and delivering them to neighbors.

Other days, it's praying a rosary or going to confession, and stopping for hot cocoa on the way home.

As you read on, you will find about 200 more crafts and ideas for your Advent celebration. I hope in some way, it is a blessing for your family.

Four Steps for Enriching Advent

1. Getting Started

Part One gives you a foundation for your Advent Activities Calendar. Details about the calendar are on page five. You'll want to customize your calendar for your family but these ideas will get your creative juices flowing.

To help you get started, I've chosen 14 days to give you a guide for filling out your calendar. For each of these 14 days I have listed what the Barrett's have done over the years of Advent.



Remember, it's important to not stress out. This is not a to-do list, just ideas to provide some structure.

2. Adding Other Observances

Part Two - Other Observances, include the St. Andrew Novena, a wonderful way to begin Advent and carry us through our Advent journey.



We'll also learn about Ember Days, three days of abstinence and penance in thanksgiving to God for the gifts of nature. Included are accompanying activities for you to consider.

You'll also find a number of crafts geared for small children, including making spoon saints and an Advent Prayer Chain.

To fill in your calendar, there are over two dozen non-liturgical activities to enjoy with family and friends. What about visiting that local shrine or historical site that you've meant to do forever?

3.

Recipes

In **Part Three**, I picked three recipes that have places of honor on our family's Advent Calendar. Speculaas Cookies are associated with St. Nicholas Day, Biscochitos or Mexican Christmas cookies with St. Juan Diego or Our Lady of Guadalupe, and Lussekatter or St. Lucy Buns.

We cherish the memories of our kids making and serving these easy-to-prepare treats. I think you will too.



4.

Books and More Books

Part Four is a list of many armloads of Advent-themed books that our family has read and loved. There are a few special Christmas books at the end of the list too.

Keep in mind, I've been homeschooling a long time so my collection is large, but we still use the library for many of these titles. Put your requests in early!

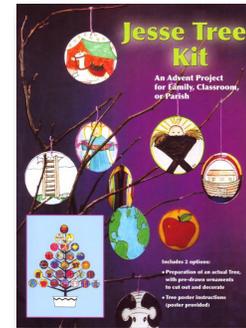


Your Advent Activities Calendar

Part One – Getting Started

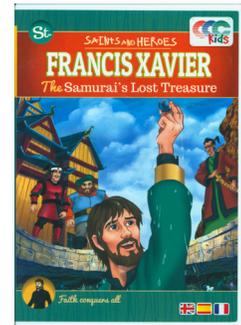
First Sunday of Advent

- Set up the Advent wreaths.
- Set up the crib with a basket of hay beside it for sacrifices and good deeds.
- Set up the Jesse Tree (jewelry tree, small artificial tree).
- Pull out the Advent reading basket.
- Prepare a special family dinner and enjoy it by candlelight.



December 3rd - St. Francis Xavier

- Watch the CCC Video [St. Francis and the Samurai's Lost Treasure](#) with the family.
- Make origami stars to hang in the window.
- Make sushi for dinner.
- Enjoy teriyaki for dinner.



December 4th - St. Barbara (begin a novena to Our Lady of Guadalupe)

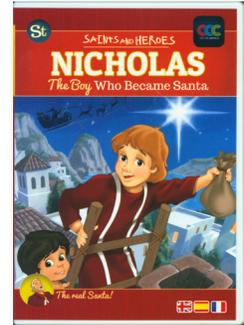
- Make graham cracker houses (patroness of architects).
- *Barbara's Branch* – bring a flowering branch inside to put in a vase (cut an x in the bottom); it should flower by Christmas. Use the blooms to decorate the manger.

December 5th

- Read the [Miracle of St. Nicholas](#).
- Write letters to the child Jesus in heaven and leave for St. Nick to deliver.
- Put out shoes for the feast of St. Nicholas.
- Bake speculaas cookies.

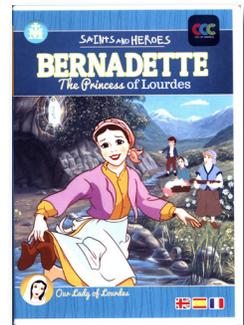
December 6th - St. Nicholas

- Watch the CCC Video [Nicholas: The Boy Who Became Santa](#).
- Deliver the speculaas cookies to neighbors.
- Read *The Baker's Dozen, A Saint Nicholas Tale* (young kids).
- Read *St. Nicholas* by Demi (older kids).
- Make St. Nick ornament (<https://bit.ly/345Xq1d>)
- Color a St. Nick picture.



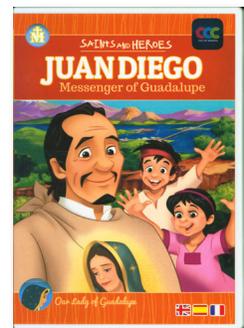
December 8th - Feast of the Immaculate Conception

- Go to Mass for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.
- Make blueberry muffins for breakfast.
- Read *Mary, Mother of Jesus* by Tomie DePaola.
- Bake cinnamon bread (legend tells us that Our Lady who gave forth a sweet smell like cinnamon and aromatic balm).
- Create Our Lady's Parfaits (layered blue jello and whipped cream in clear glasses).
- Watch the CCC video [Bernadette: Princess of Lourdes](#) with the family.
- Make a cupcake rosary (invite friends to share, ask them to wear blue and white).
- Listen to the *Glory Stories St. Bernadette*.
- Watch *The Song of Bernadette* with your family.



December 9th - St. Juan Diego

- Make a tilma out of a brown paper bag.
- Watch the video about the Basilica (<https://bit.ly/2qvYFIz>)
- Read *Our Lady of Guadalupe* by Tomie DePaola.
- Make tacos for dinner.
- Watch the CCC Video [Juan Diego: Messenger of Guadalupe](#) with the family.
- In honor of the Patroness of the Unborn, shop for a baby gift and deliver it to your local pregnancy center.
- Set up an Our Lady of Guadalupe statue, light a candle, and pray for the unborn.
- Listen to the _.



December 10th - Our Lady Queen of the Angels (historic)

- Make paper plate angels.
- Make angel sugar cookies/angel food cake with blueberry sauce.
- Watch the CCC Video [My Secret Friend: A Guardian Angel Story](#).

December 12th - Our Lady of Guadalupe

- Make Mexican hot chocolate.
- Put roses near a statue of Our Lady.
- Make tissue paper roses.
- Make Mexican Christmas cookies, serve with hot cocoa.
- Invite friends for a pinata party, begin with a Hail Mary in Spanish.
- Listen to the [Glory Stories of Our Lady of Guadalupe](#).

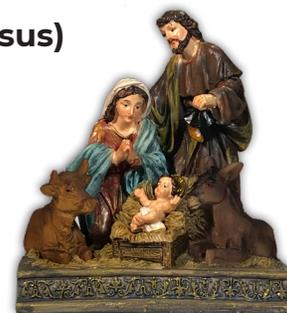


December 13th - St. Lucy

- All meals to be eaten by candlelight.
- White nightgowns for the youngest girl, a wreath on her head serving coffee, and cake for breakfast.
- Plant wheat seed or wheatgrass seed in a small pot with soil and water and tend. It should sprout by Christmas. Use it as a centerpiece. This symbolizes the Bread of Life to come.
- Read *Hanna's Christmas* by Melissa Peterson.
- Read *Lucia Child of Light* by Florence Ekstrand.
- Read *Lucia Morning in Sweden* by Ewa Rydaker.
- Bake Lussekatter (Lucia buns).
- Make star ornaments for the tree.

December 16th - (Begin novena to the Holy Infant Jesus)

- Las Posadas begins, read *The Night of Las Posadas* by Tomie DePaola.
- Use the [children's Nativity set](#) to walk Mary and Joseph around the house looking for a place to stay.
- Set up the Nativity set.



December 17th - O Antiphons begin, ends December 23

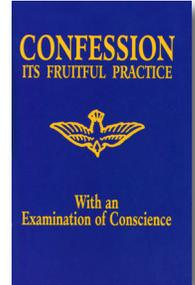
- O Sapientia (Wisdom).
- Make O Antiphons ornaments (<https://michelequigley.com/blog/the-jesse-tree/>)
- Place the appropriate ornament on the tree each day while reciting.

December 22nd - Traditional Day of penance and fasting

- Go to [z](#).
- Have a simple soup supper.

December 24rd - The Vigil of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ

- After midnight enthrone the Infant Jesus in the bed of hay made by sacrifices and good deeds.
- Light the Christ Candle in the Advent wreath.
- Light candles around the Nativity set.
- Read Luke 2:10-14.
- Look at the night sky, imagine what it was like that night when the angels appeared to the shepherds and heaven and nature sang.
- Watch *The Little Drummer Boy*.



Part Two – Adding Other Observances

St. Andrew Novena begins on November 30th and is said fifteen times a day until Christmas Day. Pray five times at breakfast, five at lunch, and five at dinner.

St. Andrew's Novena:

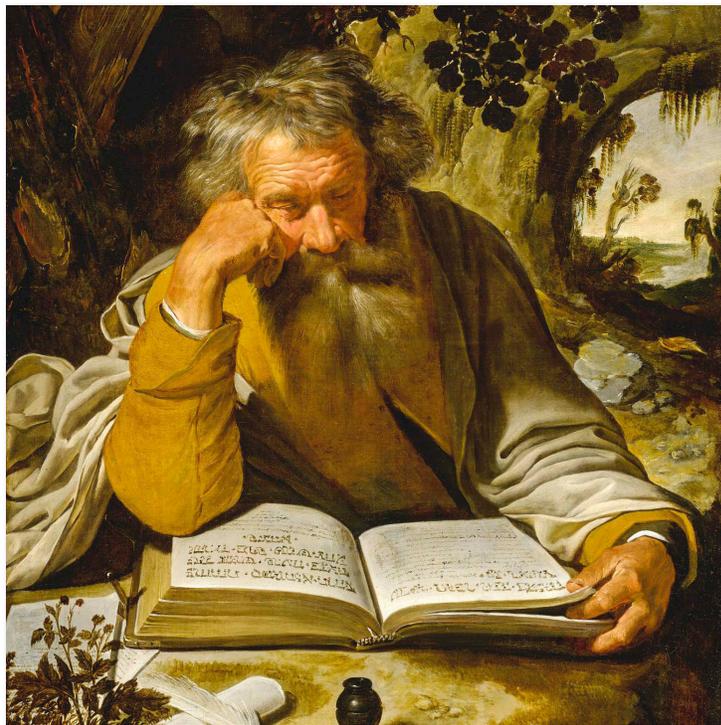
*Hail and blessed be the hour and moment
at which the Son of God was born
of a most pure Virgin at a stable at midnight
in Bethlehem in the piercing cold.
At that hour vouchsafe, I beseech Thee,
to hear my prayers and grant my desires.
(Mention your intentions here)
Through Jesus Christ and His most Blessed Mother.
Amen.*

Chapter Books to consider for family read-aloud

Jotham's Journey, by Arnold Ytreide (intense for young children)

Destination Bethlehem, by Sharon R. Altman

All Creation Waits, by Gail Boss (fits in with nature themes and Ember Days)



Ember Days - December 18, 20, 21

These days are meant to be a time of abstinence and penance in thanksgiving to God for the gift of his creation. We are also meant to pray for the restraint to use His gifts wisely and with concern.

The fasts, known also as “four-season fasts” are a continuation of the practice of quarterly fasting in the Old Testament. Traditionally in the Ember Days, we thank God for the gifts of nature and the natural world.

Activities to consider:

- Make bird feeders with pinecones and either peanut butter or honey. Spread the sticky stuff on a pinecone and dip it in birdseed or sunflower seeds. Tie some twine in a loop around the cone and hang them in your bushes and trees.
- Hollow out oranges and fill the “shells” with birdseed. Punch three holes evenly spaced around and string twine through, tying at the top. Hang.
- String popcorn around the trees for the squirrels and birds.
- Buy a special treat for your pet.
- Take a nature walk and observe how different the world is in winter. Have the kids sketch what they see.
- Feed the ducks at the park.
- Find a living nativity to visit.
- Read *St. Francis Celebrates Christmas* by Mary Caswell Walsh.



Crafts (mostly for small children)

- Make spoon saints – Use wooden ice cream spoons from the craft store and draw faces on them with markers. Then decorate to resemble saints.
- Advent Prayer Chain – Cut white construction paper into three strips lengthwise. Cut one strip of pink, one of yellow or gold, and 20 of purple. Write a prayer intention on each strip. Loop the strips together in a paper chain, purple for week days, pink for Gaudete Sunday, and gold for Christmas day. Each day tear off a loop and pray for the intention.
- Make star ornaments with twigs or popsicle sticks. Paint and decorate.
- Make tissue paper roses or poinsettias.
- Decorate paper Christmas trees with pom-poms, glitter, paint, etc. Mail to family far away.
- Glue scraps of purple tissue paper to three votive holders and pink to another. Put battery powered tea lights in each and set on some greenery. It's the young child's Advent wreath.
- Paint a peg doll Nativity scene.
- Make pretty tags with the poem below, attach to candy canes, and give out to friends.
- Post the poem wherever candy canes are hung.



*On tree or wall or door,
May they carry with them the bright blessing of God.
May all who shall taste them
Experience the joy of God
Upon their tongues and in their hearts.*



Non-liturgical activities to fill in

- Set out a Christmas themed puzzle for the whole family to put together.
- See a local production of *The Nutcracker*.
- Watch one Christmas movie per week (*It's A Wonderful Life*, *Holiday Inn*, *A Christmas Story*), have popcorn and hot cocoa.
- Make Christmas greeting cards and mail them to armed forces serving overseas, your local police precinct, or firehouse. Thank them for their service.
- Gather some friends and practice a few Christmas hymns and secular songs. Visit a local nursing home and sing in the hallways (call first).
- Read Charles Dicken's *A Christmas Carol* together as a family.
- Read/memorize the poem *T'was the Night Before Christmas*.
- Watch some Bass and Rankin Christmas specials (*Rudolf*, *Nestor the Long-Eared Donkey*, etc.).
- Collect all of the greeting cards you receive and put them in a basket. Throughout the year, as a family, pray for all of the senders.
- Babysit for young families so the parents can get out to shop and prepare.
- Attend a parish Christmas concert or Nativity play.
- Build Christmas scenes with Legos or blocks.
- Visit a local shrine or historic site.
- Make paper chains to hang around the house. Make a few for friends and relatives.





- On Christmas Eve, deliver a basket of muffins and jams to neighbors for their Christmas morning.
- Watch *Take Peace: A Corgi Cottage Christmas* (Tasha Tudor).
- Add mulling spices to apple cider and serve warm.
- Paint peg doll angels. Make wings from paper doilies.
- Celebrate the winter solstice on December 21 by setting a small tree in your backyard and adding bird-friendly treats.
- Watch *What Time The Sun Sets*.
- Have a solstice bonfire.
- Decorate sugar cookies.
- Take a ride around town to see the Christmas lights.
- Visit Santa Claus.
- Plant amaryllis bulbs.
- Take a trip to a local nursery to pick out some poinsettias.
- Have an egg nog tasting. Pick your favorite.
- Make a dried fruit garland. Dry apples, oranges, grapefruit in a low (200F) oven for 6-8 hours. String on twine and drape around the windows.

Part Three – Recipes

Speculaas Cookies

Mix in order:

- 1 cup shortening
- 2 cups white sugar
- 4 eggs whole
- 3/4 tsp. salt
- 2 tsp. baking powder
- 4 cups flour
- 4 tsp. cinnamon
- 2 tsp. allspice
- 2 tsp. nutmeg
- 2 tsp. ginger
- 2 tsp. cloves



Turn out onto a floured board. Knead in about one cup additional flour or as much as you need until dough is no longer sticky and is easy to handle.

Put into a plastic bag and refrigerate until chilled and stiff. Then you are ready to roll out and cut the cookies. Cut off a manageable piece and keep the rest of the dough cool until you are ready for more.

For the larger, hand-decorated St. Nicholas cookies, roll the dough to about ¼ inch thickness. Cut out your cookies around paper patterns. Place on a greased baking sheet.

Bake at 350° F. until golden brown. These keep forever in tins in the freezer or for two-three weeks on the shelf.

Biscochitos (Mexican Christmas Cookies)

- 1 cup lard or shortening
- 2/3 cup sugar
- 1 egg
- 2 Tbsp. red wine, brandy or sherry (or sub. orange juice)
- 1 tsp. crushed anise seed
- 3 cups flour
- 2 tsp. baking powder (optional)
- 1/2 tsp. salt (optional)
- 1/2 cup sugar mixed w/ 1 tsp. cinnamon

Preheat oven to 350°.

Beat lard/shortening until light and fluffy. Mix in the 2/3 cup sugar, then the egg. Beat in 2 Tbsp wine/sherry and anise seed. Stir in flour (and salt baking powder if using), adding more wine as needed to form a soft dough. Let stand for 10 minutes.

On a lightly floured surface, roll out your dough 1/4 inch thick and cut into shapes as desired (fleur-de-lis is common shape). Dip the top side of each cookie in the cinnamon-sugar and place on ungreased cookie sheets. Bake for 10 minutes or until slightly browned.



Lussekatter (St. Lucy Buns)

- 3/4 stick butter
- 2 cups whole milk
- 1 tsp. saffron threads, crushed
- 2 packages dry active yeast
- 1 pinch salt
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 2 eggs, well-beaten
- 7-8 cups flour
- raisins to decorate

Directions:

Mix flour, yeast, salt, and sugar in a bowl.

Melt the butter. Add milk and cool it to room temp or slightly warmer (about 100° F). Add saffron to the warm milk. It should turn a golden yellow.

Mix it into flour and add the eggs, mix well with a wooden spoon, cover and let the mixture rest for 1 1/2 hour.

Heat oven to 475°. Cover the baking sheet with nonstick spray.

Take the dough from bowl to lightly flour-dusted table, knead some. It will be sticky, use flour sparingly. Cut dough in half, then cut each half into four pieces, then four pieces again.

Work with the dough bits. Shape each bun to a curly “S”. Decorate with raisins. Have them rest under the towel for about fifteen minutes.

Egg wash the buns.

Bake high in the oven for about eight minutes until golden but not brown.

Remove the buns and let them cool under a towel. Then, keep them in a plastic bag or freeze as soon as possible as they dry out quickly. Yields about 30 buns.





Part Four – Books and More Books

Mary, Mother of Jesus, DePaola

Country Angel Christmas, DePaola

The Lady of Guadalupe, DePaola

The Legend of the Poinsettia, DePaola

The Legend of Old Befana, DePaola

Strega Nona's Christmas, DePaola

The Night of Los Posadas, DePaola

The Legend of Saint Nicholas, Demi

Saint Nicholas and the Nine Gold Coins, Forest

The Baker's Dozen: A Saint Nicholas Tale, Shepard

Nicholas of Myra: Giver of Many Gifts, Yoffie

The Miracle of St. Nicholas, Whelan

Lucia, Saint of Light, Hyde

Lucia Morning in Sweden, Rydaker

Lucy, A Light for Jesus, Yoffie

The Night Before Christmas, Edited by Spirin

The Night Before Christmas, Edited by Brett

The Story of Holly and Ivy, Godden

The Christmas Baby, Bauer

Home for Christmas, Brett

Gingerbread Baby, Brett

Christmas in the Trenches, McCutcheon

The Usborne Advent Nativity Book

The Gift of Christmas, Leeson

Who is Coming to Our House, Slate

The Stable Where Jesus Was Born, Greene

The First Night, Hennessy

Santa and the Christ Child, Bakewell

The Legend of the Candy Cane, Walburg

The Usborne Book of Christmas Poems

The Nativity (pop-up book), Crespi

The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey, Wojciechowski

Jotham's Journey, Ytreide



The Legend of the Christmas Rose, Hooks

Room for a Little One, Waddel

Francis and the Nativity, McCullough

Destination Bethlehem, Altman

Stable in Bethlehem, Hulme

Live Advent at Home, Daily Prayers and Activities for Families, Mathson

The Story of Christmas told from the Gospels, illustrated by Jane R.

The Christmas Story, Sabuda

The Christmas Candle, Collins

Letters from Father Christmas, Tolkien

The Story of Christmas, French

Hanna's Christmas, Peterson

The Shortest Day, Pfeffer

Angela and the Baby Jesus, McCourt



For the Christmas Season:

We Three Kings, Spirin

The Last Straw, Thury

Twelve Days of Christmas, Long

The Twelve Days of Christmas, The Story Behind the Song, Haidle





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