

# Celebrate the Church Seasons

BY SUSIE LLOYD

Happy New Year! Yup—in November. Advent is upon us, and with it comes the start of a new liturgical year. The liturgical year is all about celebrating our glorious redemption by imitating the seasons of Christ’s life on earth.

The Advent season mimics the many long centuries the Jews waited and prepared for the Messiah. It wasn’t exactly fun, I’m sorry to say. The season of Advent is a time of penance and holy anticipation as we prepare our hearts for the coming of the Baby Jesus.

I know the stores put up their tinsel around Halloween and start seriously cranking out the carols after Thanksgiving. But for all the feel of Christmas around us, Christmas is not yet “on.” It’s fine to prepare for Christmas by buying and decorating and baking (it’s a big job!) as long as it doesn’t make you forget that Christmas itself has not yet started.

When it is finally “on,” it’s supposed to last. Think of it as a Big Fat Catholic Wedding with a nice long honeymoon afterward. Christmas is not just one Big Fat Frenetic Day after which the tree is abandoned forlornly on the curb. It’s a whole *season* dedicated to rejoicing that the Savior has come into the world. It begins on Jesus’ birthday, and then the celebration keeps on going—at least until Epiphany (remember the Three Kings?) on January 6. Some traditions celebrate all the way until



Candlemas on February 2. (Personally, my vote goes to the longest honeymoon possible.)

People did Christmas this way for centuries. Many of us still do Easter this way. Grocers can fill a store with chocolate bunny rabbits, and we are still saying, “I came in here for *fish!*” (Besides, bunny rabbits—seriously? Who needs bunny rabbits in Lent when there is healing from sin, sickness, misery, and death to be had!) There is something about Lent and Easter that we respect and want to preserve. I say, let’s reclaim Advent and Christmas in the same way. In fact, let’s just take back the whole liturgical year!

Advent is the perfect time to start. Here are some easy ideas to get your kids thinking about and imitating the life of our Lord.

Make or buy an Advent wreath, a smaller version of the one you

see in church. The purple candles are meant to remind us of penance (okay, work with me here). The pink one marks the halfway point to the joy that is to come on Christmas. Gather the family at the wreath on your table and sing a verse of “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” or recite one of the O Antiphons. If you have younger kids, print the words on purple paper, cut them out, and make a hanging chain.

Talk to your kids about particular ways they can prepare for the Messiah. Ours have always enjoyed writing personal sacrifices on little slips of paper. They place these into a small crib as bedding for the baby Jesus. (True confessions time: I’ve kept a few of the funnier ones, such as “Don’t hurt Gracie,” as well as the more profound ones: “Today I will not ask for anything.”)

Consider having the family fast from TV (or phone or social media). We do this during Advent and Lent, and it goes a long way toward creating quality family time. Plus, if your kids are prone to watching TV reruns, these liturgical seasons provide a biannual cleanse.

Whatever you do, whether it’s one of the above ideas or one of your own, don’t let Advent slip away. Without it, there would be no Christmas.



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