

## ***Bringing Advent to Life***

Advent, Christians are invited to reflect on the meaning and significance of the Son of God becoming one-of-us in the Palestinian town of Bethlehem just over 2000 years ago. They are also invited to remember Jesus' promise to return again to his world at the end of time, and to review their lives in the light of this promise.

Advent is intended to be a time of reflection, a time to pause and think. But unfortunately, for many people today it is a time of increased busyness. Instead of a being a time to *stop*, it has become for many a time to *shop*. The birth of Jesus – the centre of the Christmas season – easily becomes an afterthought as it buried under purchase receipts, party invitations and wrapping paper. The voices of angels on a hill outside Bethlehem and the cries of a newborn infant in a humble manger are often drowned out by the sound of “Jingle Bells” and “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” blaring from shopping centre speaker systems.

It is barely possible for Christians to windback the secularisation of Christmas in our wider culture, but we *can* have some influence over what takes place in our homes. One way we can take back Advent is to create practice and traditions in our homes that re-centre us on the true reason for the season. There are many wonderful Advent customs that households can adopt to put Christ back into our Christmas preparations. Consider whether you could do try one or more of the following ideas this Advent.

**Set Up and Advent Wreath:** An Advent wreath looks a little like an ordinary Christmas wreath laid on its side. The difference is, the Advent wreath also has candles on it ... four purple or blue candles placed around the edge of the wreath, and a fifth white candle in the middle. One candle is lit during the first week of Advent, two during the second week and so on. On Christmas Eve or Christmas Day the centre candle (the “Christ Candle”) is lit. Bible readings and prayers are often used when the candles are lit.

**Prepare a “Good Deeds” Manger:** Christmas is a time for gift-giving, in response to God's gift of Jesus to the world. Gifts need not be bought – they can be simple acts of goodness and kindness towards others. To encourage gifts of service, set up an empty manger (a shoebox would suffice) in a prominent spot in your home. Next to it, place a little bundle of “straw” – this can be pine needles, or shredded paper. Each evening during this season, spend a minute as a household talking together about the good things you

have tried to do for others during the day (e.g. helping someone with their homework, writing a friendly note to someone who's feeling down, sharing with a brother or sister). For every good deed done, place one "straw" in the manger. On Christmas Eve, you place the Baby Jesus in the manger, on the soft bed you've made for him with your good deeds.

**Christmas Carolling:** Aim to sing Christmas carols in your home each week of Advent. You may even decide to learn a carol together. If you are not musical, sing along to a Christmas Carols CD.

**Make Christmas Decorations and Cards:** Instead of spending money on shop cards and decorations, make your own to give away to others. Block out time as a household to do this together – it can be a great bonding experience for the whole household.

**Christmas Nativity:** Purchase or make a set of nativity scene figures (infant Jesus, Mary, Joseph, shepherds, wise men, animals). Have different figures “arrive” one by one at a designated place in the lead-up to Christmas. As they do so, read related Bible stories. On Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, have the infant Jesus arrive. Celebrate his arrival with by singing “Happy Birthday” to Jesus and sharing a Birthday cake.

Blessings,

*Pastor Greg Priebbenow.*