

## **Advent, Christmas and Epiphany Rituals from Pax Christi USA**

*(originally prepared by Michelle Balek, OSF and adapted over the years)*

---

### **BLESSING OF THE ADVENT WREATH**

*The Advent Wreath is a traditional ritual that many people, especially families, find meaningful as a way to enter into the season each year. We suggest that as a family/group, you make your own wreath with colored candles and small evergreen branches (or branches and leaves of trees native to the area in which you live). For the rituals listed here, you will also need pieces of thin ribbon to match the color of the candles (3 purple and 1 rose, 3 blue and 1 rose, etc.), incense (if possible) and small dish, small bowl of water and small branch for use in the blessings.*

**Parent/Leader:** God of Life and Love, we gather together eagerly awaiting all the joys of this holy season. These branches and candles remind us of Your unending circle of life and light promised to us in Jesus.

**Child/Participant:** (Dip the branch in the small bowl of water and then gently sprinkle the water from the branch over the wreath.)

**Parent/Leader:** We ask your blessings upon our Advent Wreath and upon each one of us as we wait in hope for Your coming to us in love. May this wreath be a sign too of the circle of God's family throughout our world.

**Child/Participant:** (Raise the dish of lighted incense toward the wreath two or three times, allowing the smoke to rise over the wreath as a blessing and sign of our prayer.)

**Parent/Leader:** As we gather around our Advent Wreath throughout this season, may we keep in our minds and hearts and pray for all those who are lonely, suffering, or mourning. We ask all this in Your holy name, O God.

**All:** Amen.

**All sing together:** Rejoice! Rejoice! O Israel, to you shall come Emmanuel.

---

### **WEEKLY CANDLE-LIGHTING RITUAL**

*Each week of Advent as you gather around the wreath, have one person remove from the wreath the candle to be lit that week and tie a ribbon around it. The ribbon will symbolize some aspect of that week's reflection. After the candle is lit and the prayer is offered, each person holds the candle in turn and shares one thing or someone they wish to remember in special prayer during the week. Then the lighted candle is placed back in the wreath and the ritual closes with the singing of a verse of one of your favorite Christmas hymns ("O Come, O Come,*

*Emmanuel”, “O Come, All Ye Faithful”, etc.) The same procedure is used each week with only the actual prayers or song verses changing. You can vary roles each week too.*

*The candle may burn during the evening meal each day or at some other time the family gathers.*

### **First Week of Advent**

**Parent/Leader:** God of Love, we gather together as Your people. We do not always know to which direction You call us, but we do want to follow You. And so we offer You all that we are.

**Child/Participant 1:** (Raise the dish of lighted incense toward the wreath two or three times, allowing the smoke to rise over the wreath as a sign of offering ourselves and the prayers of our hearts.)

**Child/Participant 2:** (Remove the 1<sup>st</sup> candle from the wreath and tie the corresponding ribbon around it while the leader says...)

**Parent/Leader:** May this ribbon be a symbol to us of standing in confident welcome, of opening our arms wide to others who come into our lives. May we welcome those who are different than us and rejoice in the special gift they are to us.

**Child/Participant 2:** (Light the candle.)

**All:** (The candle is passed from person to person with each an intention or remembering a person they want the group to pray for during the week. The last person to share places the lighted candle back in the wreath.)

**Parent/Leader:** All-welcoming God, You call us to expand our outlook, to really see the people around us every day, including those that we don't often notice. You call us to see the gift of Jesus in each person and to share the gift of Jesus within each of us. You call us to stand in confident welcome, leaving our fears behind. Where our world sows hate, help us to respond with love.

**All:** Amen.

**All:** (Sing together the hymn or carol you have chosen.)

### **Second Week of Advent**

**Parent/Leader:** (Begin by lighting the previous week's candle.) God of Wisdom, there is so much noise in our lives. We get caught up with the busy-ness of our world and do not know to which voice we should listen. There are so many. Help us to recognize Your voice in the voices

of prophets—those who follow Your way today. Help us to become Your word, spoken aloud, for others to hear.

**Child/Participant 1:** (Raise the dish of lighted incense toward the wreath two or three times, allowing the smoke to rise over the wreath as a sign of offering ourselves and the prayers of our hearts.)

**Child/Participant 2:** (Remove the 2<sup>nd</sup> candle from the wreath and tie the corresponding ribbon around it while the leader says...)

**Parent/Leader:** May this ribbon be a symbol for us of Your voice in our world, O God, a voice that often comes through the prophets of our day. This voice calls us to repent, to change our ways, to truly make Your word come alive within and around us.

**Child/Participant 2:** (Light the candle.)

**All:** (The candle is passed from person to person with each an intention or remembering a person they want the group to pray for during the week. The last person to share places the lighted candle back in the wreath.)

**Parent/Leader:** God of surprise, Your word comes to us in ways we least expect. Help us to keep our eyes, ears and hearts open to recognize Your presence and gifts among us. Help us to repent, to change our ways, so that we may become Your voice and share Your gifts with others.

**All:** Amen.

**All:** (Sing together the hymn or carol you have chosen.)

### **Third Week of Advent**

**Parent/Leader:** (Begin by lighting the previous weeks' candles.) Creator God, all of us, no matter the color of our skin or where we live, are part of Your great family. We share in the gifts of our common home which You created for all. Help us to recognize that the way we choose to live affects all of us and the world we live in. Help us to choose to live wisely, simply and compassionately.

**Child/Participant 1:** (Raise the dish of lighted incense toward the wreath two or three times, allowing the smoke to rise over the wreath as a sign of offering ourselves and the prayers of our hearts.)

**Child/Participant 2:** (Remove the 3<sup>rd</sup> candle from the wreath and tie the corresponding ribbon around it while the leader says...)

**Parent/Leader:** May this ribbon be a symbol for us of accepting Your gifts with open hands, not fists closed in greediness. These hands are open to both accept and to share all that we are and all that we have.

**Child/Participant 2:** (Light the candle.)

**All:** (The candle is passed from person to person with each an intention or remembering a person they want the group to pray for during the week. The last person to share places the lighted candle back in the wreath.)

**Parent/Leader:** God of Abundance, You grace us with so much. We want to follow the example of Your generous heart. Help us to recognize all people all over the world as members of our family. Help us learn to share this world with one another, sharing all that we have and all that we are.

**All:** Amen.

**All:** (Sing together the hymn or carol you have chosen.)

### **Fourth Week of Advent**

**Parent/Leader:** (Begin by lighting the previous weeks' candles.) God of Truth, You lay before us the vision of Your reign here on earth, where the lowly are lifted up and the empty are filled. Like Mary, we want to make Your vision possible in our world today. Help us to keep faithful to Your word and vision. Help us to say "YES" to the peace and justice of Jesus and "NO" to the ways we may prevent Your reign from growing.

**Child/Participant 1:** (Raise the dish of lighted incense toward the wreath two or three times, allowing the smoke to rise over the wreath as a sign of offering ourselves and the prayers of our hearts.)

**Child/Participant 2:** (Remove the 4<sup>th</sup> candle from the wreath and tie the corresponding ribbon around it while the leader says...)

**Parent/Leader:** May this ribbon be a symbol of faithful witness to God's vision of a world of true justice and peace. This faithful witness helps us to ask the questions and make changes in the "way things have always been" so that God's way may be done.

**Child/Participant 2:** (Light the candle.)

**All:** (The candle is passed from person to person with each an intention or remembering a person they want the group to pray for during the week. The last person to share places the lighted candle back in the wreath.)

**Parent/Leader:** God of Life, Your vision for our world is one that honors the life and dignity of everyone. As Mary said “Yes” to Your vision and gave birth to Jesus, so may we too say “YES” and continue to let Your Word and Vision—Jesus—take root and grow in us.

**All:** Amen.

**All:** (Sing together the hymn or carol you have chosen.)

### **For Christmas Eve/Morning**

*The Advent Wreath can be a symbol carried over into the Christmas season with a few modifications. This simple ritual can be done either on Christmas Eve or Christmas morning. You will need a large pillar-type candle. Begin this ritual by lighting all of the Advent candles first. The Christmas candle can then be lit during the evening meal or any other time the family gathers each day through Epiphany.*

**Parent/Leader:** (Begin by lighting the four Advent candles.) God of Peace, we gather on this most holy of nights (or mornings) to welcome into our hearts and world Jesus. Our waiting is over. Jesus is among us here today.

**Child/Participant 1:** (Place the large Christmas candle in the center of the wreath and light it from one of the Advent candles.)

**Child/Participant 2:** (Blow out the four Advent candles and gently remove the ribbons from each of them. Remove the Advent candles from the wreath. Place the ribbons on the greenery of the wreath.)

**Parent/Leader:** May this new candle be a symbol of Christ come into our world. We stand in confident welcome. We raise our voices in praise. We accept the gift of Jesus with open hands, ready to share this new life with all. We promise to be faithful witnesses, today and throughout the year, of God’s vision for our world.

**All:** Amen.

**All:** (Sing together the hymn or carol you have chosen.)

---

### **CHRISTMAS TREE RITUALS**

*There are many traditions surrounding the Christmas tree from many different cultures. Perhaps your family/group/church has a special tradition that you use each year. Or perhaps you are looking for meaningful rituals to adopt in creating your own tradition. The following are offered as suggestions, to be used as they are or adapted.*

*These suggestions also are born out of a concern for both an alternative witness to the commercialization of the Christmas season and for recognizing our connection with all God's Creation. If possible, it is suggested that your tree be a live one that can be planted after the season.*

### **Prayer for Welcoming Your Tree**

*Gather around the undecorated tree, joining hands if possible.*

**Parent/Leader:** God of all creation, we thank You for the gift of this tree. We welcome it with its outstretched branches as a symbol of green-growing hope and life offered for us all. As we decorate it and gather around it this season, may we share this hope and life with one another. As we await in joyful hope the coming of Jesus, may this tree remind us to stand tall in solidarity with our sisters and brothers throughout the world. God of all creation, we thank You for the wondrous gift of this tree.

**All:** Amen.

**All:** (Sing together the hymn or carol you have chosen.)

### **A Blessing for Your Decorated Christmas Tree**

*For this ritual, you will need incense and a small dish, a small bowl of water and a small evergreen branch. The blessing takes place after your tree has been decorated.*

**Song:** O Christmas Tree

O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree  
You have a wondrous message  
O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree  
You have a wondrous message  
You do proclaim the Savior's birth  
Good will to all and peace on earth  
O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree  
You have wondrous message

**Parent/Leader:** God of Life and Love, we have gathered together this day to ask Your blessing upon our Christmas tree, symbol of the joy and life promised to us through Jesus. May its twinkling lights and colorful ornaments remind us always of Jesus, the light of the world and our hope.

**Child/Participant 1:** (Dip the branch in the small bowl of water and then gently sprinkle the water from the branch onto the Christmas tree.)

**Child/Participant 2:** (Raise the dish of lighted incense toward the tree two or three times, allowing the smoke to rise over the tree as a blessing and sign of our prayers and dreams for this Christmas season.)

**Parent/Leader:** O God, we want to celebrate this Christmas season as members of Your family. We want this season to be filled with your love and care. We offer now some of our hopes and thoughts for this Christmas.

(Each person is invited to select or point out a favorite ornament on the tree and share a memory or reflection of how it reflects the meaning of Christmas for them.)

**Parent/Leader:** God of Love, be with us as we journey through this season of special joy and hope. May this tree be a sign for us of sharing the true spirit of Christmas not only with our family and friends, but with this our world calls “strangers” and “enemies”, those who are outcast or forgotten. We ask all this in Your holy name, O God.

**All:** Amen.

**Song:** O Christmas Tree

O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree  
You have a wondrous message  
O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree  
You have a wondrous message  
You do proclaim the Savior’s birth  
Good will to all and peace on earth  
O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree  
You have wondrous message

### **A Prayer for Planting Your Tree**

*Gather around the tree as it is lowered into the ground. Each person can help plant the tree by replacing the earth around the tree. Form a circle around the tree.*

**Parent/Leader:** God of all Creation, we gather together as Your people to return to nature this wondrous tree that has graced our home the Christmas season. We know it was only on loan to us, a symbol of the life of Christ come into our lives. We wish to share this life, as we share Christ’s life, with all Your creatures. Bless and protect this tree. May it continue to grow strong and tall. May it be a shelter for birds, shade for the weary in the summer’s heat, and cleansing for the air. May its green-growing hope ever be a part of our lives.

**All:** Amen.

---

## CHRISTMAS CRIB BLESSING

*This ritual can be done either Christmas Eve or Christmas morning. You will need a small evergreen branch and a bowl of water, and a large candle to be used as the Christ candle.*

All gather near the crib and 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

**Reader:** Luke 2:1-14

**Parent/Leader:** God of Love, we rejoice in the birth of Jesus! We know Your love comes to us today and all days through Jesus. It is a love that brings You, O God, to us and everyone.

**Child/Participant 1:** (Carry the baby Jesus figure to the Nativity and place in the manger.)

**Child/Participant 2:** (At the same time as the figure is carried in, light the Christ candle and place it next to the crib in the Nativity.)

**Parent/Leader:** Bless now our humble Christmas crib. May it be a reminder to us these holy days of Your great love for us and how Jesus comes to us in surprising and unexpected ways.

**Child/Participant 1:** (Dip the branch in the small bowl of water and then gently sprinkle the water from the branch onto the Christmas crib.)

**Parent/Leader:** May we always listen to and follow Your call to be the love of Jesus to one another in ways both big and small. Help us to share this love with our family, friends and all who cross our path. Let us now share one way we feel or experience Jesus already in our lives.

(Each person is invited to share.)

**Parent/Leader:** Let us now pass the Christ candle among us, and as we hold the candle, let us share one way we hope to carry this love and peace of Jesus with us and share it with others throughout the year.

(Each person is invited to share.)

**Parent/Leader:** (Place the Christ candle back next to the Christmas crib.) God of Christmas love, we rejoice in this love, Jesus, who brings You close to us. Be with us that we may share this precious gift with all Your family throughout the year. We ask this in Your holy name, O God.

**All:** Amen.

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!

---

## **EPIPHANY HOUSE BLESSING**

*This ritual is modeled after the journey of the Magi—Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar—as they followed the star which led them to the place where Jesus was. You will need a Christ Candle or perhaps the “star” from your tree; incense; a small evergreen branch and bowl of water; and a piece of chalk for marking the doorways with the date of the blessing. The same procedure is used for each room, with only specific blessing prayers changing.*

*All gather at the front door. One has the Christ candle or the star, another has the incense, a third has water for the blessing, and a fourth has the chalk.*

**Reader:** Matthew 2:1-12

**Song:**

We three kings of Orient are  
Bearing gifts we travel afar  
Field and fountain, moor and mountain  
Following yonder star  
  
Oh—oh, star of wonder, star of night  
Star with royal beauty bright  
Westward leading, still proceeding  
Guide us to thy perfect light

**Parent/Leader:** God of Love, the journey of the Magi must have been a long and difficult one. We too are star-gazers and star-watchers, on a journey to find Jesus in our midst. Just as they crossed borders and barriers to seek the Blessed Child, so we will cross too in search of the love, peace and justice of Jesus. We recognize that all space is sacred space because You can be found there. We ask Your blessing here at our front door that we may always be open to the surprise of whomever You may send to us this year. May we welcome all, especially the stranger.

**Child/Participant 1:** (Dip the branch in the small bowl of water and then gently sprinkle the water from the branch over the doorway.)

**Child/Participant 2:** (Raise the dish of lighted incense toward the doorway two or three times, allowing the smoke to rise in the doorway as a blessing and sign of our prayer.)

**Child/Participant 1:** (With the chalk, mark the frame of the door with the following: 20 C + M + B 21. The initials represent the Magi and the numbers at the beginning and end mark the year, i.e. 2021.)

**Parent/Leader:** Let us name those who may enter our home this year and pray for them. (Invite everyone to share the names of people who may visit this year.)

**Parent/Leader:** (After the names have been spoken...) The star shows us where Jesus is. May we be the star of Jesus's love.

(Proceed as a group through each room in your house, using, as appropriate, the language below or adapted as you see fit.)

- Dining Room: Bless this our dining room, a place of gathering and sharing together, a sacred space of nourishing on another.
- Kitchen: Bless this our kitchen. Keep us safe as we prepare daily meals. May it be a cheerful and loving place.
- Living Room: Bless this our living room. Embrace us as we ask our questions and share our stories.
- Bedroom(s): Bless this our bedroom, a place of renewal and rest and sleep. Protect us in the night that we may rise refreshed in Your love.
- Add any other rooms you wish to bless in this journey...

(End where you will keep the Christ candle present throughout the year.)

**All sing together:**

We three kings of Orient are  
Bearing gifts we travel afar  
Field and fountain, moor and mountain  
Following yonder star

Oh—oh, star of wonder, star of night  
Star with royal beauty bright  
Westward leading, still proceeding  
Guide us to thy perfect light