

Fact of FAITH

Advent Calendars

by Fr. Larry Rice, CSP

This week, the Church begins the season of Advent, the first season of a new liturgical year and the time we set aside to prepare for the coming of Christ: both his coming into the world at Christmas and his return in glory at the end of time.

One challenge facing us—and parents especially—is keeping Advent as its own season, while all around us, the world seems steeped in Christmas, which for us doesn't begin until Christmas Eve. With all the shopping, entertaining, and advertising we have to contend with, how do we keep Advent as a time of prayerful preparation for the Lord?

I recommend the traditional Advent calendar. These calendars, which you can find at most bookstores or online, usually feature a series of dated doors or pockets that you open, one per day, usually from the first of December until Christmas day. They come in hundreds of different styles, but the ones I prefer have a scripture verse for each day. Many families make it part of their evening ritual to open the day's calendar entry and say a brief prayer together. It's hard

to imagine a more effective counterpoint to the commercialism of the holiday shopping season than a few moments of quiet prayer at the end of each day.

If your local stores don't carry Advent calendars, there are many available from online retailers. You can also download a free, printable calendar with a prayer or activity suggestion for each day of the season on the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' website. Just go to www.USCCB.org/advent.

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