The Story of Christmas Through the Advent Wreath

By Jennifer Gregory Miller

A few years ago I posted about one of my favorite Advent quotes:

This passage from A Right to be Merry has always inspired me during Advent. I love the naming of the Advent candles in the wreath, marking the journey through time with prominent figures of our Advent Liturgy: Isaiah, St. John the Baptist, St. Joseph, and the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In Advent, we gather each Sunday evening in the community room under the big green wreath that swings above our heads on long purple ribbons. There are four tall candles set in the wreath, and each week Mother Abbess lights one more, first sprinkling the wreath and us with holy water and then reciting the day's collect, full of the Church's immense yearning for the coming of the little Redeemer. "Come! Come! Come!" And we stand under the wreath where the Isaias-candle burns, and the St. John Baptist-candle, and the St. Joseph-candle joined at last by the Mary-candle; and we sing: "Veni, veni, Emmanuel." The monastery is on tiptoe with expectation, and the colored ropes and bells and stars that happy-faced nuns will soon be draping and pinning all over the monastery take their meaning from these prayers and these Office chants. (from A Right to be Merry by Mother Mary Francis, P.C.C., Copyright 1973 from Franciscan Herald Press, p. 90.)

Except for the third Sunday of Advent which has the St. Joseph candle, the readings from the Advent Sunday Masses reflect these named candles. These are key figures of the Advent liturgy. And for those who don't have time to do a Jesse tree this is a small way to bring in the Old and New Testament into our Advent prayers.



Revisiting this idea, I decided to incorporate this practice with our family. My oldest son is 5, and I'd like to wait just a bit longer before immersing him into the Jesse Tree. I don't think the Jesse Tree is above his level, but I would rather concentrate on the key figures of the Advent and Nativity story now. From there we further build the Advent Tree.

The four principle figures of the Church's Advent Liturgy are Isaiah the prophet, John the Baptist, Joseph of Nazareth, foster father of Jesus, and the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and this would be reflected on our Advent wreath. Dinnertime is the peg for most of our Advent devotions, especially the Advent wreath. Our wreath is a simple brass ring with candleholders with artificial greenery wrapped around the ring. Taper candles, usually not wider than one inch in diameter is the usual type of candle used.

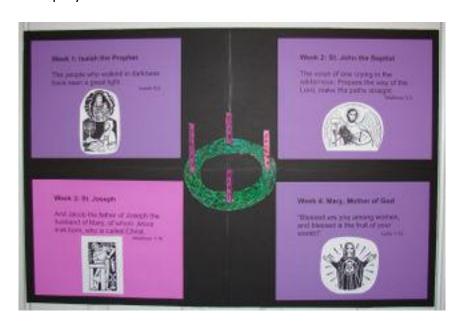


I wanted to designate our candles by the names. I had tried thinking of ways to make symbols or figures to put around the candle, but I was worried about the open flame, and thought the simpler the better. For 70 cents each I bought four unfinished wood napkin rings (about 2 inches in diameter) at A. C. Moore and

champagne gold acrylic paint. After lightly sanding and using tackcloth, I painted the whole ring gold (inside too). When the paint was dry with a paint pen I wrote the name on a napkin ring for each candle: Isaiah, John, Joseph, and Mary.

Drawing from some of the inspiration of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd with the Advent Prophecies and prayer cards, I wanted to tie in words of the liturgy to our candles. Using both the Mass propers and readings and the Liturgy of the Hours, there were a few quotes to illustrate each week. I tried drawing only the liturgy of the designated week, but it's easy to pull in all sorts of quotes especially from Isaiah throughout the 4 weeks. Isaiah 9:2 is not drawn from the liturgy, but is one of the main Advent prophecies used in the Atrium. It made a lingering impression on my son and so it seemed natural to incorporate it in our Advent wreath devotion. He also chose "Blessed is the fruit of your womb" because he worked on that prayer card and has talked about it ever since.





I made a simple poster from black foam board (I chose black to show the darkness before the Light of World comes) that included images of each figure and one quote for each week. I only have a black and white printer, so I kept the images simple, taken from Eye Contact With God Through Pictures: A Clip Art Book of Pictures from The Ade Bethune Collection. The poster will hang right in our Kitchen near our dinner table, and when we light the Advent wreath, it will include the prayer, quote of the week, and sing a verse of "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." Each week a flame to the Advent Wreath candle in the middle of the poster.

This is just a basic, simple idea. It could be expanded to have a quote for each day of the week, use the quote(s) for copywork or memorization. Symbols, artwork (easily found through Web Gallery of Art and other sites) and supplemental reading of each figure could be included. I've included a few passages that I might rotate during the week and books from our shelf that we'll pull out that week. Another challenge would be for your child to read along the Mass readings of the day and find some suitable passages.

First Week: Isaiah the Prophet



Isaiah 9:2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

Isaiah 2:5 O House of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.

Isaiah 30:19 O People in Zion who dwell at Jerusalem; you shall weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when he hears it, he will answer you.

Isaiah 33:22 For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our ruler, the Lord is our king; he will save us.

Isaiah 40:1 Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God. For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our ruler, the Lord is our king; he will save us.

Isaiah 40:3 A voice cries out: In the desert prepare the way of the Lord! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God!

Supplemental Reading: Remembering the Prophets of Sacred Scripture by Marianna Mayer

Second Week: St. John the Baptist

Matthew 3:3, cf Isaiah 40:3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.



Matthew 3:2 Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Matthew 3:4 Now John wore a garment of camel's hair, and a leather girdle around his waist; and his food was locusts and honey.

Matthew 11:11 "Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the Kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

John 1:28 (from 3rd Sunday): "I baptize with water; but there is one among you whom you do not recognize, the one who is coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie."

Third Week: St. Joseph, foster father of Jesus

Matthew 1: 16 And Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

Cf. Matthew 1:19 Joseph was a just man.

Matthew 1:18 When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 1:20 The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit."

Matthew 1:24 When Joseph woke from his sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.

Supplemental Reading: Father and Son: A Nativity Story by Geraldine Mccaughrean



Fourth Week: Mary, Mother of God



Luke 1:28 "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!"

Luke 1:30 "Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus."

Luke 1:38 "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word."

Luke 1:42 "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!"

Isaiah 7:14 Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel (which means, God with us).

Luke 1: 46 My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my savior.

Revelation 12:1 (Mass of Our Lady of Guadalupe) A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.

Supplemental Reading:

<u>Mary Mother of Jesus</u> by Tomie DePaola <u>Mary Mother of Jesus</u> by Mary Joslin Mary by Demi