

Art: Teaching Plans, Book One, Grades 1-2-3

Salve Regina Series

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The Church Year – The Christmas Season

THE ADVENT TREE

INTRODUCTION:

The current reform of the liturgy is placing new stress on the unity of the Church year. Just as Holy Week and the Easter Vigil have taken on new significance as a popular preparation for the Resurrection, so has the preparation for Christmas been emphasized by a greater concentration on the seasonal meaning of Advent. Even the feast of the Immaculate Conception gives place to the proper of the season when it falls on a Sunday. The Encyclical, *Mediator Dei* says emphatically: "**The most pressing duty of Christians is to live the liturgical life**, and increase and cherish its supernatural spirit." It is quite clear the Church means us to "do something" about Advent.

Like all other features of the liturgy, Advent is intended to aid in the process of transformation of Christians into "other Christs", to bring us nearer to God, to put new interest and life into our worship. But it has also the special mission of preparing us for the feast of Christmas. It is so planned that by following the masses and office of the season we may be awakened to a new understanding of the threefold coming of Christ: His birth in time, His mystical birth in the hearts of Christians, and His coming as Judge at the end of the world.

We cannot fully understand and appreciate the New Testament unless we grasp the significance of the Old. The spirit of Advent reaches back into the Old Testament -- to the time when Christ had not yet come -- to show how much the world needed a Redeemer and how God prepared it for His coming.

Entering into that spirit we begin to realize how Christ can be born each year to new life in our souls -- and why we celebrate Advent and the promise of a Redeemer which it continually keeps before our minds.

The Advent Tree -- Tree of Hope -- Tree of Jesse -- is more colorful than the Advent wreath and probably has a greater appeal because it is more varied in its applications and meanings. Both could very well be used together. In Advent, then, we make a tree of hope and hang upon it symbols of the promise and of the progress of the world toward the Redeemer to come.

This project is suitable for all grades and can easily be adapted by the teachers so that no two rooms or grades need be doing the same thing at once.

Timetable:

Week before Advent: Set up tree. Decorate base. Illustrate Days of Creation, the *Benedicite*, etc., for classroom borders and panels. Make Advent wreaths for homes. (**JGM Note:** *Benedicite Dominum*, or the Canticle of the Three Young Men is taken from the Old Testament book of Daniel (Dan. 3, 57-88; 56). It is used in the Liturgy of the Hours for Sundays and feast days. A perfect book to use is Pauline Baynes' *The Song of the Three Holy Children*.)

1st week of Advent: Symbols and illustrations for stories told or read: the Great Light, trumpets, apple, Noe's ark, altar of holocaust, **December 8th**, Lily of Israel. Others from the imagery of the Mass and office.

2nd week of Advent: Jonas in the whale, Jacob's ladder, the burning bush, pillar of fire, tables of the Law, **Dec. 10**, Gate of Heaven, House of Gold.

3rd week of Advent: Root of Jesse, crown and sceptre, key of David, temple, star of David, leaping hart, **Dec. 18**, Ark of the Covenant.

4th Week of Advent: Bethlehem with star, Tower of David, sword of Judith, Paschal Lamb, manna, Snowflakes, * The great O Antiphons.

*Sign of the snowflakes: The **WORD of God**: "As the rain and the SNOW come down from heaven and...soak the earth and...make it to spring and give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be... It shall not return to Me void but it do whatever I please and shall prosper in the things for which I send it." (Is. 55: 8-11)

Thus the snowflake and the raindrop are symbols of Christ the Incarnate Word of God. (**JGM Note:** *Rorate Caeli* or Drop Down Dew is very appropriate hymn).

MAKING THE TREE OF HOPE

I. Motivation and Stimulation:

Class discussion of the threefold meaning of Advent and symbolism of the tree of hope. The original beauty and purity' of creation, the sin of Adam, its sad results, the condition of the world without Christ -- barren, empty, unable to save itself and return to God. The Great Promise, how it became clearer little by little as great men and women lived and worked for God and showed something of His character in their actions. How the Advent liturgy gives us pictures of the various aspects of the promised Redeemer and His work. How does all this relate to us and our Advent preparation for Christ's coming into our hearts?

II. Orientation:

This had better precede the day of actual work. The class plans its tree: What can represent the earth in this state of barrenness? Something bleak and bare -- a dead branch? a wooden frame? a spiral of heavy aluminum clothesline wire? (That would have to have a thin pole up the center to support it - but it makes a fine "tree".) How shall we make it stand? possibly set it in a can or a Borden's Cheese tub filled with sand and some plaster or cement to make it firm. Can we invent another way?

What shall we put around the base? Could we cover it with dark paper and paint or paste on designs of the sun and moon and stars - or the days of creation - or symbols of night and day? Perhaps the great men of the Old Testament could stand around the base of this tree of hope. What else can YOU think of?

Prepare the things needed for the actual work, divide the class into groups so that everyone has something to do. Borders of narrow strips of paper illustrating the days of creation or the things mentioned in the *Benedicite* can be free-cut or torn and pasted. Even the *Dies Irae* is appropriate for it used to be sung just before the gospel of the first Sunday of Advent as a sign of the need for the threefold coming of Christ.

III. Creation:

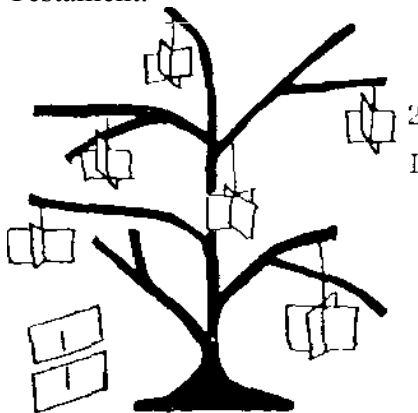
1st to 3rd grades: Set a tree branch in a large can of sand. Decorate the outside of the can with suns, moons, stars, fish, birds, trees, animals, all cut from colored paper. Put the extra ones on strips of paper to make a border around the chalkboard or bulletin board. Days of creation could be done in crayon or cut out and arranged on a large panel. Each row could make a different Day. Third graders might make a painted or chalk mural of creation.

MAKING THE SYMBOLS

First Week of Advent

I. Motivation and Stimulation:

Put the barren tree in a conspicuous place and recall its meaning. Today we begin to make symbols of the great promise and its gradual explanation to the people of the Old Testament.



II. Orientation:

Children: Read the Mass proper (and the office too, if possible), looking for the "picture" words or ideas. List them as you find them. Can you read between the lines? Choose what each of you will make. Be sure to have a symbolic meaning for your design - something which will help us know a little more about the nature of the Redeemer to come.

III. Creation:

1st to 3rd Grades: Use crayons or colored paper cut-outs for the designs. Mount on colored papers of various shapes and sizes. Hang on the tree branches. Use **black thread** to hang. It is inconspicuous.

2nd, 3rd, 4th weeks:

I. Motivation and Stimulation: As in first week.

II. Orientation:

Day by day new symbols will be discussed and placed on the tree. These should be of heavy paper and interesting on both sides -- for they will turn around as they hang. Three-

dimensional devices, paper sculpture, even wood, wire, pipe cleaners, may all be used. Anything that looks "right" and has meaning will be right. Have a box of treasures of all sorts: wire, buttons, yarn, cloth, glitter, sequins, etc. used for making interesting symbols.

III. Creation

Each child makes the symbol of his choice -- either selected from the class list or invented by himself. **But** each must have a **meaning** for the Advent tree. Teacher directs the project so that the particular symbols listed for the week are produced by at least one child. The class selects symbols to be put on the tree. All others are displayed in the room for a while before taking them home. Be sure to keep enough for the Epiphany decorations.

IV. Evaluation:

Discuss the entire project and the particular symbols for the week. The meaning is of equal importance with the design itself. Symbols should be interesting, large in detail (not "fussy" or too minute) and good to look at from both back and front, since they will turn when hung on the tree.

C. Using the Advent Tree:

For teachers and parents Advent is the time to tell the Old Testament Stories. The ceremony of hanging the symbols or placing figures at the base of the tree should be accompanied by stories of what they typify or foretell of the Redeemer. Such discussions might lead to religious and aesthetic experiences in other fields: music, poetry, picture study, etc.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Symbols and meanings:

Each symbol will have a significant meaning regarding the coming Saviour, His character, His mission. Each new symbol makes our hope more evident and our tree more beautiful. Best of all, this Advent preparation is not outdated once Christmas comes. It is most appropriate to keep the Tree of Hope on display during the Christmas season as evidence of the joy our preparation has brought us. It could even be carried in our Candlemas procession as prefiguring the coming of the Light, the Revelation to the Gentiles. Each symbol can also have a personal meaning in our own preparation for His coming, Here are some taken from *The Twelve Days of Christmas Kit*, from Grailville, Loveland, Ohio. Address: Grailville, P.O. Box 86, Cincinnati 211, Ohio.

The Sun: Christ, the Sun of Justice, the Rising Dawn, dispels darkness and brings life and light.

The Tablets of the Law: The Law of Moses as symbolized by the tablets given by God on Mount Sinai was fulfilled in Christ Who brings a law of love.

Key of David: The key is the emblem of authority and power. Christ is the Key of the House of David, Who opens to us the full meaning of the scriptural prophecies, and reopens for all mankind the gate of Heaven.

Root of Jesse: The flower which springs up from the root of Jesse is another figure of Christ. Isaiah prophesied that the Savior would be born from the root of Jesse and that He would sit upon the throne of David. In Christ this is so.

Star of David: The six-pointed star is the emblem of the Royal House of David even to this day. Christ Who is born of the House of David, can truly claim it His.

Jacob's Ladder: In a dream Jacob saw a ladder reaching from earth to Heaven, with angels ascending and descending. Christ is the Ladder reuniting earth to heaven, mankind to God.

Jonas in the Whale: As Jonas was three days in the fish, Christ our redeemer was three days in the earth. What other lessons has Jonas for us personally?

The Crown and Sceptre: The crown and sceptre signify Christ's universal kingship.

The Burning Bush: God appeared to Moses in the form of a burning bush, which burned but was not consumed, a symbol of the Virgin Birth of Christ.

The Apple: The Sin of Adam. "Happy Fault which merited for us so great a Redeemer."

Noe's Ark: A savior, Noe preserved the natural life of all within the Ark; Christ brings supernatural life to mankind and preserves that life within His Mystical Body the Church.

The Ark of the Covenant: In the Old Testament the Ark of God contained the precious gifts of God to His people, the Law of Moses and the Manna of the desert. Mary is the New Testament Ark, carrying the Bread of Life and the Giver of the New Law of grace.

The Altar of Holocaust: The whole burnt offerings of the Jewish sacrifice represent the complete immolation of Christ for our redemption – first on the Cross and now daily in the Mass.

The Paschal Lamb: At the yearly Pasch, the Jews sacrificed a new, unblemished lamb in thanksgiving for all that God had done for them and as an atonement offering for all their sins. Christ, the Lamb of God, is the sacrifice of the New Law, the "Lamb who takes away the sins of the world."

The Pillar of Fire: In the Old Testament, God appeared in a pillar of fire to lead His people through the desert. Christ is our pillar of fire leading us through the desert of life.

Manna: The manna which fell from Heaven and fed the Jews for forty years is given by Christ Himself as a figure of Holy Eucharist, the True Bread from Heaven.

The Seven Great O's:

Having waited all during Advent for the coming of the Great Light, God-with-us, we now turn to the joyful celebration of His nearness. One week and He will be here! On Dec. 17th we begin the O Antiphons (at the Magnificat in the Office). They are a sort of review of all the preparation ideas of Advent.

Dec. 17. O WISDOM, *You came forth from the mouth of the Most High, and reaching from beginning to end You ordered all things mightily and sweetly. Come, and teach us the way of prudence.*

This is an act of praise for creation and for Divine Providence. It has great possibilities in a school room. It could be the basis for a combined Religion-Art-English lesson.

Stimulation:

As part of the Religion class the teacher may engage the pupils in a discussion. Questions: How wise is God? How does His wisdom show in the world? Answers: The days of creation, the things He put into the world for us to discover: nature, science, etc. Beautiful things for us to see and be reminded of His infinite beauty. The love He shows us through others. His providence for us and all His creatures. All these are evidences of His Wisdom reaching from beginning to end.

Creative Expression:

Let every child make his own picture of some way God's Wisdom has been made known to us -- to him. This need not be a formal drawing lesson but an application of the truth learned in Religion. It may be an unsupervised exercise (just as you assign a written task) to be done while another group recites if you like. Any convenient medium: crayons, cut or torn paper, showcard or powder paint and brushes -- according to the age level.

Evaluation:

Display all the pictures and let each child tell what his picture means. This gives a vital "something to talk about" in the oral English or speech period. For variety let some child select the one he likes best and explain why. The class then will discuss both the "speech" and the picture.

The primary teacher should stress **idea** rather than any so-called "correctness of the drawing." In this development level the **result is far less important than the process of making**, especially the efforts to express personal ideas and emotional reactions.

The intermediate teacher should also stress ideas but in addition emphasize some technical point, such as making drawings large and filling up the whole paper or picture space, using NO PENCILS for preliminary drawing, making firm lines and strong colors, etc.

The upper grade teacher might prefer to have the class letter the whole or the first words of the antiphons with perhaps an illuminated capital suggesting the thought in a more abstract way. Older students might also design a series of symbols for the O's and hang them on the Tree of Hope. An "O" mobile of the symbols would be an ideal pre-Christmas decoration. The other O's may be treated similarly, according to the original ideas of both teacher and pupils.

Dec. 18. (Feast of the Expectation) O ADONAI, *and Ruler of the house of Israel, You appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush and on Mt. Sinai gave him Your Law. Come, and with an outstretched arm redeem us.*

Today Our Lady, typified in the burning bush, prepares for the birth of Her Son and

eagerly awaits the Ruler of Israel who will bring the New Law to His people. Talk about these symbols on the Advent Tree, explaining their meaning,

Perhaps, today we might make **sawdust figurines** for the crib -- either at school or at home.

Recipe:

8 cups sawdust

6 cups flour

3 tablespoons salt

Mix and pour in enough boiling water to make a thick modeling dough.

Use pipe cleaners, wire, sticks, etc. making frames to support the larger figures. Turn figures often so they will dry thoroughly. The recipe can be made up as often as desired but it is best not to have any left over from day to day. It spoils quickly when wet.

Older students might use the sawdust mixture to make a relief map of the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem and then follow Mary and Joseph on their journey.

Dec. 19. O ROOT OF JESSE, *You stand for an ensign of mankind; before You kings shall keep silence and to You all nations shall have recourse. Come, save us, and do not delay.*

This would be a good time to begin the large Christmas Calendar for the church entrance. See Vacation suggestions.

Dec. 20. O KEY OF DAVID, *and Sceptre of the house of Israel: You open and no man closes; You close and no man opens. Come and deliver him from the chains of prison who sits in darkness and in the shadow of death.*

Make paper chains and a key to hang on the tree of hope -- always explaining the meaning. If it is Friday or the last day of school before Christmas a sort of "symbol match" could be held with prizes for those who do not miss on identification and meaning. Elaborate pre-Christmas celebrations in school **are not in harmony with the spirit of the Liturgy**. Something simple and centered around the idea of PREPARATION is not out of keeping.

Dec. 21. O RISING DAWN, *Radiance of the Light eternal and Sun of Justice: come and enlighten those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.*

On the feast of St. Thomas, the doubting Apostle, we beg for the coming of the Light. It is also the time of year, in our hemisphere, when the natural light is least, an appropriate day on which to make stars and Christmas ornaments suggesting light.

Dec. 22. O KING OF THE GENTILES *and the Desired of all, You are the corner stone that binds two into one. Come and save man whom You fashioned out of clay.*

Move an Advent Tree to the vestibule of the church, if possible, so the children who come to Mass will not forget it. Hang the crown symbol on the tree. Consider St. Frances Xavier Cabrini and how she worked to extend the Kingdom of the Sacred Heart to the "gentiles" of New York, Chicago, and other cities.

Dec. 23. O EMMANUEL, *Our King and Lawgiver, the expected of nations and their Saviour. Come and save us, O Lord our God.*

Since the children are seldom in school on the 23rd, prepare them beforehand for the sign of the snowflakes -- the likeness of the work of God! **As the rain and the SNOW** come down from heaven and soak the earth and...make it to spring and give seed to the sower and bread to the eater: so shall My word be... It shall not return to Me void but it shall do whatever I please and shall prosper in the things for which I send it (Is. 55: 8-11). Hang "snowflakes" on the Tree of Hope.

NOTE: It is hardly to be expected that any one teacher can carry out all of the suggestions offered. They are multiplied so that a greater variety may be produced from room and from year to year. Inventive teachers will have ideas of their own besides.

Dec. 21. Christmas Eve. Hang the lamb on the Tree of Hope. The hymn for Lauds says:
Lo, the Lamb so long expected
Comes with pardon down from heaven;
Let us haste with tears of sorrow,
One and all to be forgiven.

This is the day for the Christmas confession making ready for the Great. Coming tomorrow.

Today you shall know that the Lord is coming.
And tomorrow you shall see His glory,

We might note here the great desirability of **NOT** celebrating Christmas **before** the actual feast. Commercially, it is true, Christmas is over when the stores close on Dec. 24th. But in the spirit of the liturgy all the pre-Christmas activities should only lead up to the great spiritual climax of the Christmas Mass -- and of course, Holy Communion. The real coming of Jesus, the Savior, into our well-prepared hearts is the very center of Christian Christmas.

Much celebration and school parties **before** Christmas make the actual day a sort of anti-climax. In many places the school party is now held on the feast of the Epiphany. Christmas Day is featured by a procession of children escorting the statue of the Infant to the Crib or manger in the parish church. In other places they take the part of the shepherds and their families going to the stable to offer their birthday greetings, gifts, and prayers to the newborn King. If this is at the "shepherds' Mass" it becomes even more meaningful for the children. Then at Holy Communion time each is encouraged to imagine Our Lady placing Jesus in his arms to hold and speak to for his very own. And, wonderful! he need never give Him back as long as he avoids mortal sin!

VACATION SUGGESTIONS

A VAcation does not cancel out a VOcation. Our call is to the apostolate of education "in season and out of season" as St. Paul says -- which for us means "in school or out of it." Although the children have gone home, the liturgical life of the school should carry over into the parish -- and it is the teacher who gives the impetus.

If the pastor approves, a large Parish Calendar placed at the Church entrance can do much to keep the Liturgical spirit alive, Make it an elaborate affair, and large, so that it has to be noticed, Change some part of it daily but give also a preview of the whole Season.

It might begin with the GREAT O's and lead up to Christmas. Then each of the varied Parish and City activities of the TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS may follow. (Cincinnati is a model city in this regard!) Excellent suggestions for the observance of this Traditional Twelve Days may be found in:

The Twelve Days of Christmas Book, published by Grailville Press.

The Twelve Days of Christmas Kit, Also by Grailville.

The two above and other pamphlets on similar themes may be bought from Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minn.

The Year and Our Children, by Mary Reed Newland, (pub. P. Kennedy, N.Y.) cannot be surpassed for delightful suggestions for the home during this and all the other seasons of the church year.

New Year's Day has three liturgical meanings and formerly there were three masses for the day. We celebrate the octave of Christmas, the Circumcision, and the part of Mary in the Redemption. Remnants of the three ideas are to be found in the composite Mass and office.

Feast of the Holy Name, which comes on the second of January if there is no Sunday between January 1st and the Epiphany, otherwise on that Sunday, was first a Franciscan feast. Cards bearing the Holy' Name are an appropriate community gift on this day. If school is in session, devices honoring the holy Name or research concerning its abbreviations, IHS, etc., will be of interest. Also stories showing the power of this Name.

Jan. 6, The Epiphany Epiphany means something more than the feast of the wise men, it is the manifestation of the Divinity of Christ to man. Posters or three dimensional bulletin arrangements of the threefold subject would help make it clear to the children,

1. He manifested His Divinity to the Wise Men by the miraculous star.
2. He manifested His Divinity to St. John the Baptist by the voice from heaven and the Dove seen at His baptism in the Jordan.
3. He manifested His Divinity to His disciples at the miracle of the wine at the marriage feast of Cana -- at His Mother's request.

For the younger children there is the procession of wise men, in crowns made to order

leading the "gentiles" to the crib. Each gentile with some badge to identify him as a Chinese, African, American, Russian, etc. carries a spiritual gift for the King. If there is to be a party afterwards, each may leave a gift in Mary's basket. When the Kings and gentiles have gone back home, Mary and Joseph (the same two who represent them in the procession) take the gifts and distribute them to the children again as presents from the Baby Jesus to His little friends. If the Pastor or a parish society has provided gifts for all, the wise men might distribute them to the school.

For the children old enough to understand, a group project such as an Epiphany mural would be good. This is really the original feast of the Kingship of Christ, the magi, St. John the Baptist, the wedding couple, Our Lady, and the Saints already commemorated since Christmas belong there around the Infant King. Leave room and as they come add the other saints on their feast days. This will bring out the idea of Divinity manifested historically and liturgically. Keep the mural growing till the second of February when the Christmas season ends officially.

Whatever form this Twelfth Night celebration takes, the religious significance should not be buried under secular revelry such as the boisterous Feast of the Bean as shown in the old Flemish and Dutch paintings. Our celebration should remain one of joy because the Divinity of Christ our King is made manifest to the world.