

## Countdown to Christmas

Advent is 'the final countdown' to Christmas day and many children will have an Advent calendar to help them count the days. It's also a really special time for the church. Here's more about why it's so special, and some Advent activities for children.

The words Advent simply means 'coming' – it's the season when Christians remember that God came to earth to be born as the Christ child, Jesus.

God also promised that Jesus will come again at the end of time to heal all the world's hurts and divisions. Advent remembers this amazing promise, so it's a time of hope, of getting ready, and expectation.

Waiting is hard, but Christmas is worth waiting for – it's a special time, and at its heart is a gift of love from God to the world. Talk about which things about Christmas are hard to wait for and which are worth saving until the day.

### Here's what you might see in church during Advent:-

- Fewer decorations – but there might be greenery instead of flowers. This allows us to recognise that the Christian life isn't all about celebration. It's about hope and faith during times of sadness and challenge, too. There have been many times in history when God's people have longed for God to come and save them, and there are times in our own life when we pray that God would come and help us, too. Those times can feel like a long, dark night. We long for the greenery to turn to flowers, just as we long for our sadness and our hope to turn to joy.
- An Advent wreath with candles on it. One candle is lit each week (usually at the start of the service) – often with a special song or prayer. Children may be asked to light the candles with a long taper.
- Many churches try really hard not to start Christmas too soon, maybe waiting till Christmas Eve to sing the carols. Saving the Christmas carols till Christmas itself means they feel even more special when you do sing them! Advent is a really important time to pray for peace and love to fill the world, so you may hear more of these kinds of prayers in church.

### Advent at home

If your family enjoys chocolate, you might like a Real Advent Calendar ([www.realadvent.co.uk](http://www.realadvent.co.uk)). These calendars have a piece of Belgian Fairtrade chocolate behind every window, plus an illustrated Christmas story booklet that you

can read together as a family. A percentage of each purchase is also donated to a good cause.

There are other Advent calendars which present the Christmas story, like one offered on the Traidcraft website: [www.traidcraftshop.co.uk](http://www.traidcraftshop.co.uk) by Divine chocolates. Both of these calendars are available at Tesco stores too, while stocks last.

If you're holding off on the chocolate, an Advent candle is a lovely way to count down the days – it's marked with the numbers 1 to 25 so you can burn a little each day and still have enough left to light up your Christmas day. You can find them in Christian bookshops and some department stores. There is one available on [www.eden.co.uk](http://www.eden.co.uk) and on the Traidcraft website, [www.traidcraftshop.co.uk](http://www.traidcraftshop.co.uk).

If you believe that simple acts of kindness and creativity can make the world a better place, why not get hold of a *Love Life Live Advent* booklet ([www.liveadvent.net](http://www.liveadvent.net)), it's packed with thoughtful and practical actions that you can do together as a family to help you prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas and to make your corner of the world a better place.