



R.E. News

Dear R.E. Coordinator/Teacher/Chaplain,

Welcome to the first edition of R.E. news for the academic year 2024-2025.

Inside this edition I have included worksheets, prayer services and much more for the seasons of Advent and Christmas. Please forward any material for future editions to postprimaryre@archdioceseoftuam.org. Please note that the above is my new official email address.

Regarding the John Paul II Awards, if your school is planning to take part, let me know if I can be of any assistance. I am happy to speak to Transition or Fifth year students if you'd like me to.

You may notice there are links within this publication, only accessible with an electronic version of the document. I will send it to the R.E. teachers, once I have your address, email me at the above new email address and I'll get it to you.

Wishing you every blessing as we begin the Season of Advent.

Kind Regards,
Tomás Kenny
Post-Primary Diocesan Advisor

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ADVENT—LITURGICAL NOTES FROM GLENSTAL

Advent

Columba McCann is a priest at Glenstal Abbey, Murroe, Co. Limerick. Columba offers a few suggestions that may be helpful to teachers this time of year.



Let the Advent Wreath Speak for Itself

Columba states that ‘the power of symbols lies in their ambiguity: they question, puzzle and invite reflection and imagination.’ Symbols engage with us at differing levels. If we try to explain symbols too much they do actually lose their meaning. Rather than over-explaining the Advent wreath, maybe let it speak for itself. It might be helpful to place a teaching aid beside the wreath—a stand with a brief explanation for students and teachers to read for themselves.

Notice Mary as a Special Model of Discipleship during Advent

Although Advent, like Christmas, is centred on the figure of Jesus, Advent is also, in a certain sense, a natural season of Mary. She is the model disciple. The coming to birth within her of Christ, through obedience to God’s word and the power of the Holy Spirit, is the story also of what must happen in us. Perhaps these weeks are a time for some additional decoration at the schools Marian shrine in your oratory or elsewhere.

Why not celebrate Advent with an Advent Carol Service

The season of Advent does not exist in the commercial world. Christmas songs begin playing in the shops as soon as Halloween is over. With Christmas shopping, Christmas parties and other such activities in full swing by early December, the ‘Christmas season’ for many people ends on Christmas Day. Within the liturgical year it only begins on Christmas Day, December 25th.

Columba McCann suggests that an advent service is one antidote that can help people regain a better sense of focus. Readings, prayers and songs can strike a chord within the heart, opening up that deep longing for God’s presence and deepening our sense of hope amid the difficulties of life. The temptation can be to have a service of Christmas carols, thus dropping the Advent flavour altogether. As it is important for schools to celebrate Christmas before term ends a compromise would be to ensure that there is a fair amount of Advent material in the service. For example, the first half of the service could have Advent readings, prayers and songs.

A SHORT ADVENT PRAYER SERVICE — WEEK 1 OF ADVENT

Lighting of the candle

ONE PURPLE CANDLE

Reader: We light this candle because, like God's people centuries ago, we look forward with hope to the coming of Christ.

Gospel reading: MATTHEW 24:37-44

Jesus said to his disciples: "As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. In those days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day that Noah entered the ark. They did not know until the flood came and carried them all away. So will it be also at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be out in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left. Therefore, stay awake! For you do not know on which day your Lord will come. Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour of night when the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and not let his house be broken into. So too, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come."

Prayer

Recognizing the violence in my own heart,
 yet trusting in the goodness and mercy of God,
 I seek to practice the nonviolence of Jesus:
 By striving for peace within myself and
 seeking to be a peacemaker in my daily life;
 By refusing to retaliate in the face of provocation and
 violence;
 By living consciously and simply so that
 I do not deprive others of the means to live;
 By actively resisting evil and working
 Non-violently to abolish war and the causes of
 war from my own heart and from the face of the earth.
 God, I trust in your sustaining love and
 believe that you will give me the grace to live out this prayer.



ADVENT PRAYER—WEEK 2

Lighting of the candles

TWO PURPLE CANDLES

Reader: We light these candles because, like God’s people centuries ago, we need a Saviour who will forgive our sins and restore our hearts.

Gospel reading: MATTHEW 3: 1-12

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: “A voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”

John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

“I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

Prayer

Response: Change our hearts, God of peace.

That we learn compassion ...

That we embrace nonviolence ...

That we be forgiving ...

That we may be filled with mercy ...

That we may act with justice ...

That we live in solidarity with all people and the Earth...

That we be bearers of hope ...

That we trust and risk ...

That we be makers of peace



ADVENT PRAYER—WEEK 3

Lighting of the Candles—TWO PURPLE AND ONE PINK CANDLE

Reader: We light these candles because, like God’s people centuries ago, we rejoice in the coming of our saviour.

Gospel Reading: MATTHEW 11:2-11

When John heard in prison of the works of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to him with this question, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?” Jesus said to them in reply, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me.”

As they were going off, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, “What did you go out to the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? Then what did you go out to see? Someone dressed in fine clothing? Those who wear fine clothing are in royal palaces. Then why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: ‘Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way before you.’ 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.

Prayer

Prepare our hearts, O Lord, and remove the sadness that hinders us from knowing the joy and hope which only your presence can give. We lift our hearts and say:

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice. Let your forbearance be known to all, for the Lord is near at hand; have no anxiety about anything, but in all things, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be known to God. Lord, you have blessed your land; you have turned away the captivity of Jacob.”

Response

- Take time this week to live joyfully. Smile and laugh more; be intentional about your thoughts and refocus when necessary; count your blessings and be thankful.
- Name ways you can bring joy to someone who needs encouragement to persevere, and do it!
- Name a social problem that moves you to want to make a difference. Is there a person or group that you can ask to help you get involved?

Watch videos and read transcripts of the testimonies of the peacemakers at the Nonviolence and Just Peace conference, in particular Pietro Ameglio from Mexico, Jesuit Father Francisco de Roux from Colombia, Maria Stephan from the U.S. Institute of Peace, and Lisa Sowle Cahill from Boston College. See: <https://nonviolencejustpeace.net/videos-nonviolence-conference-fishbowl-sessions/>

ADVENT PRAYER—WEEK 4

Lighting the candles **THREE PURPLE, ONE WHITE CANDLE**

We light these candles because, like God's people centuries ago, we trust in the coming of the Messiah.

Gospel reading: **MATTHEW 1: 18-24**

Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly.

Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means "God is with us." When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.

Prayer

Dear God, the harvest is plenty and the laborers are few.

Your people long for peace, they thirst for justice.

Send into our midst women and men

whose hearts can embrace the entire world.

Send into our midst young and old, from all your beloved
tures and races,

Who offer their arms to lift up the lowly and oppressed.

Send into our midst new peacemakers who will walk with the powerless,
as well as those in power

To proclaim your teaching and to witness against hate, greed, fear and strife.

Create us anew as your peacemakers, O God,

And send us your peace.



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ADVENT PRAYER—WEEK 4

Response

Name an opportunity you have in your church or community to be peacemaker.

Sign up for our email listserv, to receive our newsletter and action alerts about issues of peace and justice.

www.maryknollogc.org


Read the response from the organizers of the Nonviolence and Just Peace conference to concerns that their appeal to the Church to recommit to the centrality of Gospel nonviolence is an “embrace of pacifism.” <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/57ec6282e4b0972364deab50>



CLASSROOM ACTIVITY 1

L	O	C	U	S	T	S	S	M	E
R	E	I	E	G	A	S	S	E	M
E	E	O	R	N	I	T	E	S	D
R	R	V	D	I	N	I	N	S	E
T	R	A	I	E	V	I	R	E	H
Y	L	A	P	R	A	E	E	G	C
S	E	E	N	E	C	A	D	A	A
E	R	N	B	I	R	I	L	N	E
C	N	H	O	J	A	P	I	A	R
I	O	V	I	H	I	S	W	S	P

JOHN
PREACHED
WILDERNESS
MESSAGE
REPENT
VOICE
PREPARE
BELT
LOCUSTS
HONEY
SANDALS
RIVER




S	E	Y	H	A	J	I	L	E	A
E	L	W	N	O	H	I	L	S	T
S	E	N	H	A	G	R	E	I	S
S	V	N	A	H	H	E	W	T	S
T	I	O	T	R	S	T	O	P	E
S	T	J	C	I	E	A	E	A	N
E	E	T	R	E	S	W	E	B	T
I	S	A	I	A	H	A	S	E	I
R	H	T	J	O	R	D	A	N	W
P	R	O	P	H	E	T	I	H	A

JOHN WITNESS LIGHT
LEVITES ELIJAH PROPHET
ISAIAH PHARISEES BAPTISE
WATER BETHANY JORDAN



CLASSROOM ACTIVITY 2


S	M	E	S	S	E	N	G	E	R
T	S	L	A	D	N	A	S	E	E
S	T	E	M	S	I	T	P	A	B
U	R	W	N	S	P	E	S	R	O
C	A	F	A	R	N	I	E	E	O
O	P	I	S	T	E	T	R	V	K
L	A	T	A	N	E	D	E	I	A
H	O	N	E	Y	I	R	L	R	T
K	C	A	M	E	L	S	K	I	N
E	R	T	N	E	T	T	I	R	W



RIVER
ISAIAH
MESSENGER
WILDERNESS
BAPTISM
REPENTANCE
CAMELSKIN
LOCUSTS
HONEY
STRAP
SANDALS
SPIRIT

G	A	B	R	H	E	S	U	O	H
A	J	O	S	T	N	O	S	T	A
B	A	R	R	E	N	N	E	M	N
R	C	E	E	R	D	B	D	A	D
I	O	C	J	A	A	I	A	Y	M
E	B	H	O	Z	S	L	V	R	A
L	N	I	I	A	E	U	I	A	I
O	S	L	C	N	G	O	S	M	D
R	E	D	E	N	A	N	G	E	L
D	A	V	I	H	P	E	S	O	J

ANGEL GABRIEL JOSEPH
MARY REJOICE SON
LORD JESUS CHILD
ELIZABETH BARREN HANDMAID



THE JESSE TREE

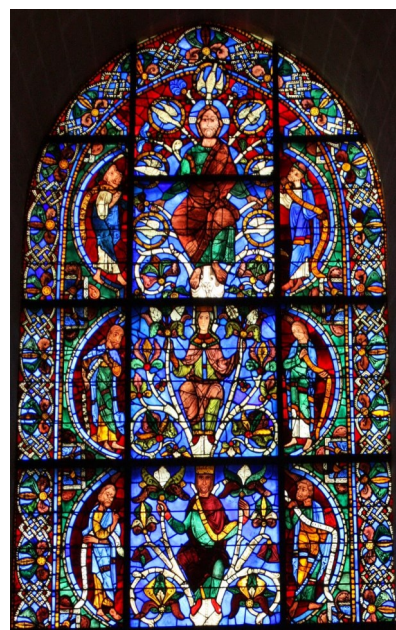
The Jesse tree is a traditional Advent symbol. It is Jesus' family tree!

It tells the Story of God in the Old Testament, and reminds us in Advent of God's faithfulness to us across 4,000 years of history. The branch is a biblical sign of newness out of discouragement, which became a way to talk about the expected Messiah, the One who was to come. It is therefore an appropriate symbol of Jesus the Christ, who is the revelation of the grace and faithfulness of God.

Jesse was the father of the great King David of the Old Testament. He is often looked upon as the first person in the genealogy of Jesus.

In Church art a design developed showing the relationship of Jesus with Jesse and other biblical personages. This design showed a branched tree growing from a reclining figure of Jesse. The various branches had pictures of other Old and New Testament figures who were ancestors of Jesus. At the top of the tree were figures of Mary and Jesus. This design was used mostly in stained glass windows in some of the great medieval cathedrals of Europe. The Cathedral of Chartres (which was dedicated in 1260) has a particularly beautiful Jesse Tree window.

- 1)
- 2)



THE JESSE TREE

Class Exercise

Get the students to download/draw the various Jesse trees symbols. Print/cut them out and write the following inscriptions on the back of the relevant symbol:

- 1) Adam and Eve—God promised them a saviour—Genesis 3:1-24
- 2) Noah—Believed God’s purpose Gen 6:11-22:9;8-17
- 3) Abraham was the father of God’s people—Genesis 15:1-8
- 4) Isaac was Abraham’s Son—Gen 17:17-19:21:1-7
- 5) Jacob dreamed he saw a ladder going up to heaven—Gen 28:10-22
- 6) Joseph gave food to God’s people when there was a famine—Gen. 45:6-20
- 7) Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and gave them God’s commandments— Ex. 14:10-31;20:3-17
- 8) Isaiah prophesised that God would send a saviour to the world-Isaiah 9:5:11:10
- 9) Jesse, the father of King David, was a native of Bethlehem 1 Samuel 16:11-13
- 10) David ruled Israel for forty years and wrote many beautiful psalms 1 Samuel 16:17-23
- 11) Solomon, David’s son was a wise ruler 1 Kings 3:16-28
- 12) Joseph, a descendant of David, was Jesus’ foster father— Matthew 1:18-25
- 13) Mary was the mother of Jesus, the rose is her traditional symbol—Luke 1:26-38
- 14) John the Baptist was Jesus’ cousin. He baptised Jesus—Luke 1:57-80
- 15) Jesus is our saviour, the Light of the World—Luke 2:1-7

The students could also look up these bible references and read the stories.

JESSE TREE ACTIVITY



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES FOR ADVENT/CHRISTMAS

JESUS PRESENTED IN THE TEMPLE

Throughout the season of Christmas we hear stories from Jesus' childhood. The following is the gospel taken from the Feast of the Holy Family—this year this feast is celebrated on the Friday after Christmas Day, 30th December 2016.

Luke 2:22-40

When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord", and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons.")

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."

The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

Questions:

- 1) What was to happen to every first born male of a Jewish family?
- 2) Who was Simeon?
- 3) What did Simeon say to Mary?
- 4) What did this mean?
- 5) Where was the presentation to take place?
- 6) Where did Joseph and Mary return to after the presentation?

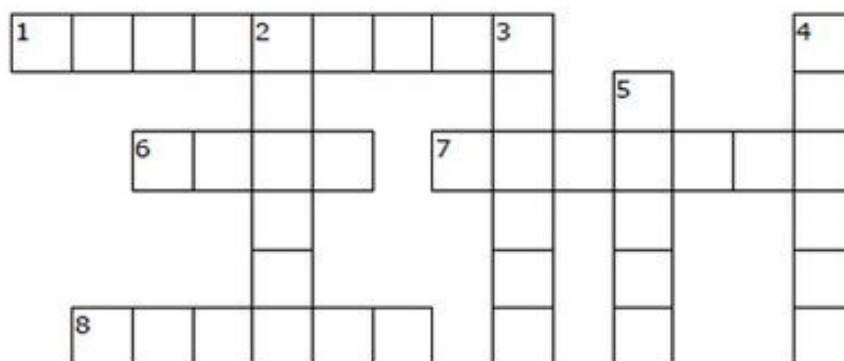
[CLICK HERE](#) to listen to the Song of Simeon also known as the Nunc Dimittis.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES FOR ADVENT/CHRISTMAS

The Boy Jesus in the Temple

After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Luke 2:46 (NIV)

Puzzle is based on Luke 2:41-52



ACROSS

1. People related by kinship, common origin, or marriage.
6. A place where a person or family lives; a residence
7. A father and mother
8. Someone you know, like, and trust

DOWN

2. A building used for religious ceremonies or worship
3. To look carefully in order to find something
4. The ability to judge what is true or right
5. A large meal; A periodic religious festival

PARENTS	RELATIVES	TEMPLE	WISDOM
FRIEND	FEAST	HOME	SEARCH

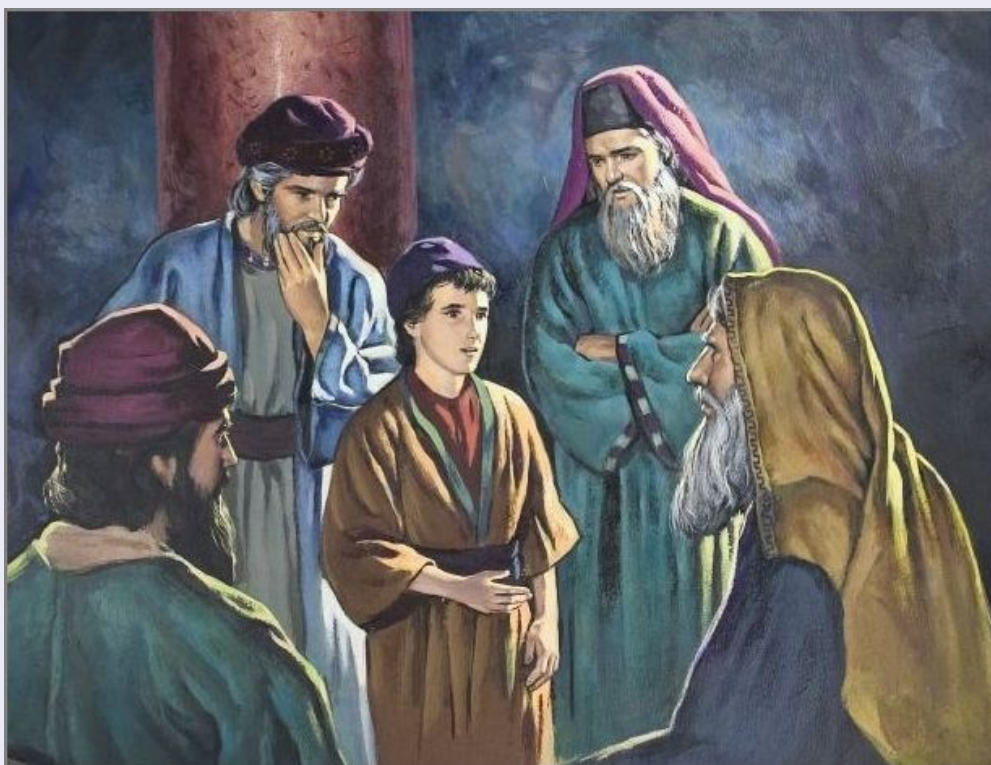
CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES FOR ADVENT/CHRISTMAS

Boy Jesus in the Temple

Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they travelled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.



Read
the scripture above and complete the word-search on the previous page.

FEAST OF ST. CECILIA

Saint Cecilia (Latin: *Sancta Caecilia*) is the patroness of musicians. It is written that as the musicians played at her wedding she "sang in her heart to the Lord". Her feast day is celebrated in the Latin Catholic, Eastern Catholic, Anglican, and Eastern Orthodox churches on November 22. She is one of seven women, excluding the Blessed Virgin, commemorated by name in the Canon of the Mass.

While the details of her story appear to be fictional, her existence and martyrdom are considered a historical fact. She is said to have been beheaded with a sword. An early Roman Christian church, Santa Cecilia, was founded in the fourth century in the Trastevere section of Rome, reputedly on the site of the house in which she lived. A number of musical compositions are dedicated to her, and her feast day, November 22, became the occasion for concerts and musical festivals.



Church of St. Cecilia in Trastevere in Rome



Saint Cecilia

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WEB SERVICES FOR ADVENT/CHRISTMAS

Click on the link to direct you to relevant site:

Xt3 Advent Calendar for 2015— <http://www.xt3.com/advent/>

[CLICK HERE](#) for a Christmas you-tube clip for First Years

[CLICK HERE](#) for a lovely you-tube clip on the Nativity

[CLICK HERE](#) for an excellent power-point on Advent from CAFOD

[CLICK HERE](#) for The Religion Teacher site on Advent Resources

[CLICK HERE](#) for a YouTube play list posted by composer Ian Callanan

[CLICK HERE](#) for Resources from Busted Halo

[CLICK HERE](#) for R.E. Quest on helpful Advent Resources

[CLICK HERE](#) to access the Wingclips site for helpful material for the season

[CLICK HERE](#) to access the Dublin diocesan website resources on Advent

[CLICK HERE](#) to access the Ignatian Spirituality site on Advent

[CLICK HERE](#) to access the National Centre for Liturgy—Advent Evening Prayer



CLASSROOM AVTIVITY



Joy to the World



ADVENT
ANGEL
BETHLEHEM
BIRTH
BLESSINGS
CAMELS
FRANKINCENSE

INFANT
JESUS
JOSEPH
MAGI
MANGER
MARY
MIRACLE

MYRRH
NATIVITY
REJOICE
STABLE
STAR
THREE KINGS
WISE MEN



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CLASSROOM ACTIVITY 8 —THE ANNUNCIATION

Story of the Annunciation

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.



The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Classroom questions:

- 1) In what month of Mary's pregnancy did the angel appear?
- 2) What was the angel's name?
- 3) What did the angel tell Mary?
- 4) What was the name of the town where Mary lived?
- 5) What did Mary say to the angel?
- 6) What was the name of Mary's relative who was also pregnant?

Class Project:

Look at the various images of the annunciation on the web—google images and comment on the imagery in each picture.

ALTERNATE PRAYER SERVICE FOR ADVENT

Expectation and Hope

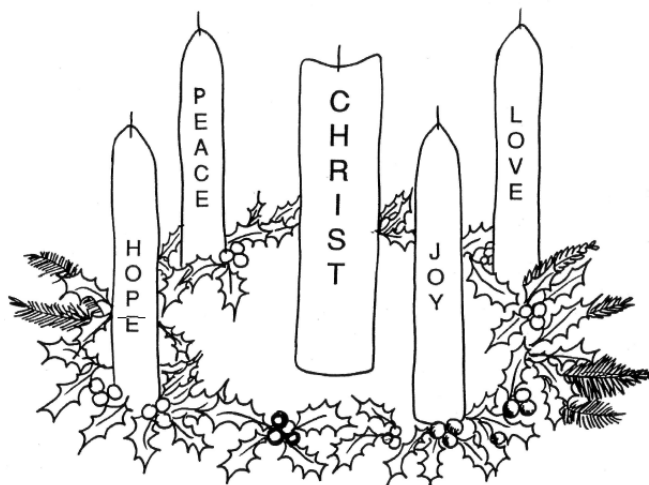
He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.
1 Cor 1:8,9

Restore us, O God
Make your face shine upon us,
That we may be saved.

Uphold us, O God
Embrace us in your arms
That we might be saved

Uplift us, O God
With the promise of your Word
That we might be saved

Heaven and earth may pass away
But your word of truth remains



"At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens." Mark 13:26 - 27

In your time, Creator God
This world was put in place
And in your time
Became beautiful
Through the craftsmanship of your love.
Remind us always
As we look at sunrise
Landscape and tiny child
That at the centre of all things
Is the creative love of God.

And in times of famine
That at the centre of all things
Is the love and mercy of God
Amen



ALTERNATE PRAYER SERVICE FOR ADVENT

In your time, Loving God
 When we had wandered far
 In your perfect time
 You embraced the prodigal
 Within the security of your arms.
 Remind us always
 As we look at pain caused
 And hardship endured
 That at the centre of all things
Is the forgiving love of God.



In your time, Saving God
 You walked upon this earth
 And in your time
 Became one of us
 To show what we could become
 Remind us always
 As we look at our lives
 In comparison with yours
 That at the centre of all things
Is the saving Grace of God

In your time, Mighty God
 You will come in glory
 And in your time
 Gather the harvest
 From one end of this earth to the other
 Remind us always
 In times of plenty
 And in times of famine
 That at the centre of all things

**Is the love and mercy of God
 Amen**



ADVENT/CHRISTMAS IDEAS

Advent can be a time to build magical memories for our children, even without Christmas parties, decorations and lights because it has its own beautiful symbols and traditions. Here are some ideas for how you can establish lasting family traditions and spiritual practices related to Advent and Christmas. Don't feel like you have to do them all – and do bring your own!!

SHOP MORE MINDFULLY – Focus your gift shopping on the people, not the things, and try not to get caught up in the rush to make things “perfect.” Take time to enjoy the season and savour the preparations. Encourage your children to put aside at least a small amount of your gift spending for items to be donated to the poor. Above all, try to see Advent as a special time to *prepare* for Christmas, not to celebrate it - yet.

ADVENT IMAGINATION/ACTIVITY TREE - First sit down and talk about Christmas and what you would all like to do as a family and individually. Some may be very keen to mention hot chocolate, sweets, cakes and presents (*no surprise!*). You may want to make sure to include parish services, singing carols and learning Bible passages together, to keep the Biblical & preparatory focus. You may also want to include old fashioned traditions and lots of crafting and baking. Between you, you will come up with lots of ideas, but choose 24 & do- one for each day of December! Make 24 star shapes and write one of your ideas on each. To do this you could draw around a star shape cookie cutter onto white card, cut them out (if you have time you could laminate them!) and stick a loop of ribbon on the back of each one with sticky tape! Paint a tree branch with a tiny bit of silver glitter paint and hang the activity stars onto it & be ready to choose one for each day in December.

JOURNEY TO BETHLEHEM –Sometime in the early weeks of December, set up your family Nativity scene, but start with just the empty stable with the empty manger in it. Put the figures of Mary, Joseph and the donkey on the other side of the room, and move them closer to the stable each evening, having them “arrive” just before Christmas Eve. Children can take turns moving the figures. If you use real straw in your stable, you can have each child add a stick of straw every day as well. (*Some families encourage that each straw might represent each good deed done.*) On Christmas Eve, as the sun goes down, add the baby Jesus figure to the manger, then the angels and shepherds. Be sure not to add the Three Kings just yet – they are still on their way!!

ADVENT/CHRISTMAS IDEAS

MAKE YOUR CHRISTMAS TREE LIGHTING SPECIAL – Wait at least a little bit into December before putting up your tree – and consider putting it up in stages. After all, if you celebrate Christmas as it is intended, you will have at least 12 days after to keep the tree up, so there is plenty of time to enjoy it. First, just put up the tree, maybe a night or two later, add the lights (but don't turn on yet). Next, add the ornaments. When the tree is complete and your family has time to be together, light the tree and use The Blessing of a Christmas Tree prayer – *“Loving God, bless our Christmas tree, this sign of life and freshness and perseverance in our home. It stands as a reminder that you are born anew in us each day. Bless our family and friends as we celebrate this joyous season. Keep us safe in our travels, kind in our conversations, and gracious in our giving and receiving. We ask you this in confidence, because we know you love us. Amen”*

JOURNEY OF THE THREE KINGS – On Christmas Eve, after the star has appeared over the stable, the Three Kings can begin their journey to meet baby Jesus. Place them across the room, toward the east side of your Nativity scene and move them closer each day, having them arrive on Epiphany (*traditionally January 6th*). As with the Holy Family, children can take turns moving the figures each evening until the Kings arrive.

TAKING DOWN THE TREE AND DECORATIONS – Many families do this after Epiphany is celebrated in church, or wait until the next Sunday, the Baptism of the Lord. In some European traditions, the tree remains until “Little Christmas” on February 2 (*Candlemas Day*) No matter which date you choose, make this a special family time – with everyone helping as they are able. Play the last of the Christmas music – and be sure to serve hot chocolate and cookies afterwards and share the best memories of the season you have just celebrated together!!



Liturgical Calendar for Advent and the Christmas Season, 2024

Sun. Dec. 1st:	First Sunday of Advent
Tues. Dec. 3rd:	St. Francis Xavier
Wed. Dec. 4th:	Saint John Damascene, Priest, Doctor
Fri. Dec. 6th:	St. Nicholas, Bishop
Sat. Dec. 7th:	St. Ambrose Bishop
Sun. Dec. 8th:	Second Sunday of Advent
Sun. Dec. 9th:	The Feast of the Immaculate Conception
Fri. Dec. 13th:	St. Lucy, Virgin and Martyr
Sat. Dec. 14th:	St John of the Cross
Sun. Dec. 15th:	Third Sunday of Advent
Sun. Dec. 22nd:	Fourth Sunday of Advent
Mon. Dec. 23rd:	St. John of Kanty, Priest
Tues. Dec 24th:	Christmas Eve
Wed. Dec. 25th:	The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ
Thurs. Dec. 26th:	St. Stephen, First Martyr
Fri. Dec. 27th:	St. John, apostle and evangelist
Sat. Dec. 28th:	The Holy Innocents, martyrs
Sun. Dec. 29th:	The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph
Wed. Jan. 1st:	Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God
Sun. Jan. 5th:	Second Sunday of Christmas
Mon. Jan. 6th:	Feast of the Epiphany
Sun. Jan. 12th:	Baptism of the Lord

NOTICES

R.E. Teachers' In-service—February 2025

I am looking at two possible dates for a diocesan in-service for R.E. teachers and chaplains. I'm proposing Thursday, February 6th and/or Thursday, February 27th as possibilities? I will keep in touch about this. We could host two in-services to cater for schools north and south of the archdiocese or maybe just host one? I will finalise this and will be in touch. Please feel free to contact me if you have any suggestions regarding timing of in-service or if you have any ideas as to the topics.

Catholic Schools Week 2025

Catholic Schools Week will run from ~Sunday 19th January to Saturday 25th January, 2025. Reflecting on the theme, Alive in Christ, Catholic schools will explore what it means to be fully alive as a human being – living life to the full in Christ. Sensitive to the age appropriateness of the various classes and years, the theme will explore how we exist for one another in Christ, building from the wellbeing of the individual, extending the notion of true wellbeing to others, to our families and communities, and to The Other, in God. The theme will mediate on hope, the true purpose and meaning of human life, and, in the more senior years, on true freedom.

Contact Details:
Tomás Kenny,
Post-Primary Diocesan
Advisor for Religious Education
Diocesan Resource Office, Bishop's
Street, Tuam, Co. Galway H54HW66
Contact: 086 3683778
Email:
postprimaryre@archdioceseoftuam.org