



ADVENT 2020

**Jesus
and the
Community of
Creation**



**BETHEL
COMMUNITY**

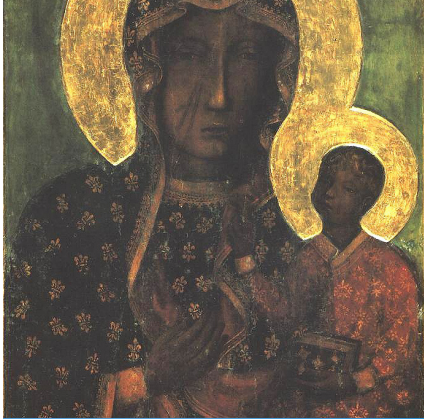
PRAYER and
ADVENTURE BOX GUIDE

Your Advent Adventure Box

Contains:

White candle
Purple cloth
Watercolors
Coloring sheet
Narcissus bulb
Animal crackers
Stargazing guide
Hay
Greeting cards

Introduction



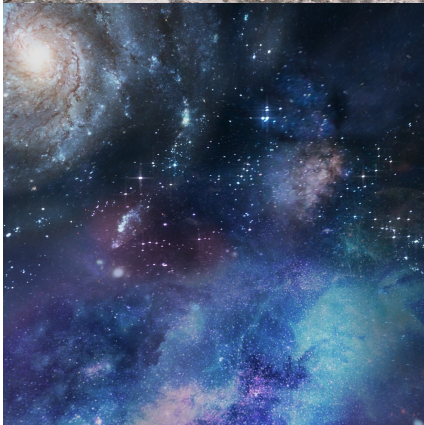
We begin this season drawing near--near to each other, near to the light and warmth as the days get darker and we approach the solstice. Advent means “coming” and we welcome the coming of Jesus in all times and in all places, and particularly this Advent, to all creatures. We imagine the scene of Jesus’ birth, in all its vividness. Each week, we will imagine this scene fresh, considering those present to this event and how it offers us a glimpse of all creation as honored guests at the birth of Emmanuel.



Lighting Advent candles is a tradition that helps us observe the 4 weeks of Advent. You may have some purple and pink candles for Advent at home, but if you don’t, you can use this white pillar candle in the box, placed on a bit of purple cloth (also in the box) to make your own Advent sacred spot at home- a place where you can light the candle, remember the Advent season, and enjoy the light. Each week, in this guide, a prayer is offered for you to use as you take a moment here and there throughout the week to ponder the mystery of Christmas.



In addition to a weekly prayer, there are some other thoughts on the themes and some ideas for activities. Of course, this guide is for you to use however you like.



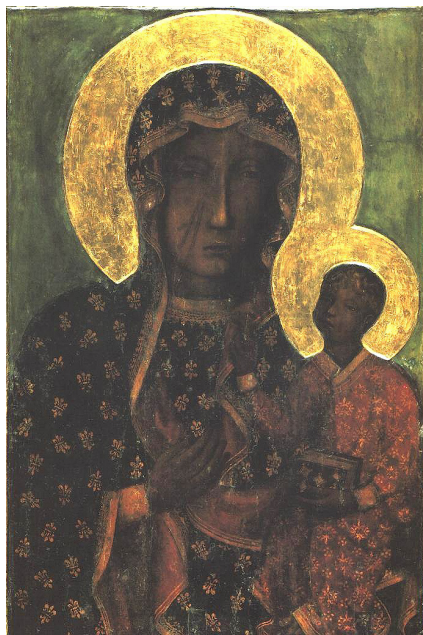
Blessed Advent to you!

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Erina Kim-Eubanks (<https://erinaspeaks.medium.com>)

WEEK 1: Women

Luke 1.26-56



*Black Madonna of
Częstochowa*

Mary was the first to receive the news that the Messiah was to be born as a baby, as her own son. And her own body was Jesus' first home. The status quo would disqualify women from being a part of events of political or religious significance, but this demonstration of honor and recognition of how women care for and nurture the world signals something about how Jesus was coming to bring down power structures and threaten empires.

Jesus did not appear instantly as a grown man in the Holy of Holies and walk out with the priest to be presented to the men in the inner court of the temple. His newborn body was held by women: his mother, helpers who might have assisted his birth, his auntie Elizabeth, Anna, a church lady who prophesied over him. Women received him earthside and he lived his first years in their world. How do we interpret this? How do we take this truth in the story and live in the same honor and recognition of women?

Week 1 Prayer for Candle-lighting:

God of the women, God of the womb,

*As we light this candle, help us to notice the life you grow inside of us
while we wait for the life and light of Jesus to appear in our lives.*

*Give us joy in the waiting. Remind us that we are not alone. **Amen.***

Activities to go further:

- Has a woman in your life brought you close to God? Use the greeting cards in your box to send a little note of love and thanks.
- This week in your box, you have a narcissus bulb. The life and beauty of a bright green stem and leaves, the cluster of star-like flowers with their pungent fragrance, all somehow contained in this bulb. Find a small cup or juice glass and put the gravel inside. Place the bulb pointy side up on top of the gravel and fill with water until it just touches very bottom the bulb. Place in a sunny spot and refill the water as needed. Throughout this advent season, you can watch its growth and anticipate the bloom.
- Read Mary's song, the Magnificat, Luke 1:46-55 aloud.
- Look up organizations that give assistance to women and children in your community, and consider encouraging them with your time, a note of encouragement, or a donation.
- Look up different images of Mary to contemplate. Google "Holy Mother of Czestochowa" or Janet McKenzie's images of Mother Mary, particularly her pieces, "Sanctuary" and "Holy Mother of Comfort and Solace"

WEEK 2: Hay and Unnamed Hosts

Luke 2.1-7



This week, you have a bit of hay in your box, hold it in your hand and lift it to your nose. Take in the smell of what covered the ground where Jesus was born, the bedding and food for many animals. The motes in the air above Jesus as he slept. The dirt that was trod by the animals and the shepherds who came to see. All these particles, the underlay for the scene of Jesus' birth.

Robin Wall Kimmerer says "My ancestors knew that rocks hold the Earth's stories." and also "The rocks are full of intention. A deep presence attracting life." In our creation stories, the Creator took the clay of the ground to form human people; we are from dust and to dust we return. We can imagine this scene of the dirt floor of the nativity, the dust of the rocks of this world, always transforming, never disappearing, and we can acknowledge with growing humility our connection to dirt, dust and hay. These things are the stuff of our past, present and future, suffused with the recognition of the divine. The rock of our salvation, born in the dirt, dust and hay: the underlay of all our lives.

Week 2 Prayer for Candle-lighting:

*God of the manger, the dirt and the hay,
As we light this candle, help us to remember that You lift up the lowly
And turn the ordinary into the sacred.
Help us make room for You in the underlay of our lives,
Even in places we don't expect. **Amen.***

Activities to go further:

- You can put the straw from your box near your advent candles or dining table, a reminder of this week's theme.
- You have a coloring sheet in your box. You can use the watercolors there to color the picture, or make your own picture with the watercolors and paper from home.
- Read the poem "Dusting" by Marilyn Nelson

WEEK 3: Animals

Luke 2.8-20



Jesus was born in a place that was home for animals. We think of it as a stable, but it could be in the innkeeper's home, on the ground floor, a room for living and a place where animals were brought in at night. Our clue is the manger, a feeding trough for animals, where Jesus was laid. From his birth, we have an image of Christ as our food- our Savior as our nourishment, whether in the manger or in the bread and cup. We can

imagine the sounds of this space, the smells. I think of the shining eyes of the cow, reflecting the lamplight and the baby in her feed box.

Think of pets you've known and loved, even if they've already passed on. Imagine them in the presence of the arrival of Emmanuel. Think of the peace that animals bring people when they lay their hand on a cow's neck, or stroke the nose of a donkey. These animals, God's beloved creatures, not to be left out of this scene, give a glimmer of the peace between all things that Jesus brings.

Week 3 Prayer for Candle-Lighting:

God of all creatures, of all that has breath

As we light this candle, help us remember your spark of life in all creation.

Help us to join with the cows and the donkeys, the horses and sheep

*As we worship Jesus together as one living chorus. **Amen.***

Activities to go further:

- Look out a window or go for a walk and notice the creatures around you--birds, dogs and cats, squirrels. Look at each one you see with honor and love.
- You have some animal crackers in your box, you can eat these cookies as a treat any time you want!
- Learn more about an animal species. Consider them as your fellow earthlings, beloved creations of God, just like you.
- Small children will enjoy the books, Room for A Little One by Martin Waddell or Who is Coming to our House? By Joseph Slate.

WEEK 4: Stars and Magi

Matthew 2.1-12



Stars and their energy give us life. These distant sources of heat, energy and light are so far from us, we imagine them remote, but they are linked to our origins and survival. And in God's eye, where we all reside, we are neighbors. Their presence throughout our human history, even at Christ's birth, help our imaginations be present there, even as we see these same stars tonight.

The Magi, from distant lands, who followed the celestial event, whatever it may have been, left behind certainty for uncertainty and had enough curiosity and bravery to follow the light. Young Jesus was visited by these Magi and presented with their gifts, and once again, we see God's story highlights and honors the outsiders and the unlikely gift-givers.

Week 4 Prayer for Candle-Lighting:

*God of the cosmos, the sun, moon, and stars
As we light this candle, we remember that
Your light radiates through all of creation
Leading and guiding us to where we need to go.
Help us have courage, to follow your light
Even to places we have never gone before. **Amen.***

Activities to go further:

- Use the star map in your box to step outside one night and find a constellation. Pay special attention to the information for finding the conjunction on December 21.
- Inspired by the Magi, allow your thoughts and heart to be drawn afar. Is there somewhere in the world you could send a gift? Maybe a way to honor the way they sought God in places away from their homeland? GiveDirectly is a great way to share our resources with people in other parts of the world: www.givedirectly.org
- Try to step outside for a sunrise or sunset this week. Just take a deep breath in and think or say: "The heavens declare the glory of God" and then as you breathe out: "the skies proclaim the work of his hands." (Psalm 19:1)